

9. 'JUST BECAUSE': COMEDY, MELODRAMA AND YOUTH VIOLENCE IN *ATTACK THE GAS STATION*

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Attack the Gas Station (*Juyuso süpgyöksagön*, 1999, dir. Kim Sang-jin) is a violent comedy: despite the considerable violence that runs the entire course of the film, the film has been widely appreciated as hysterically funny. In the words of one critic, 'This is the first truly comedy-like South Korean comedy action film that I've seen in a long time'.¹ The plot is this: four young men attack a petrol station, holding its 'president' (*sajang*) and workers hostage. Viewers laugh hard, for example, at radical role reversals: at the petrol station 'president' who offers to relinquish his presidency the moment he is instructed to 'bow down, head down!' because he is the 'president'; or at the dumbfounded response of petrol-station customers who are told that 'today is a cash and full-tank-only day'. This humour aside, there are moments that make us wince – when the violence, some of it misogynistic, is simply too ruthless to laugh away: for example, when the attackers lock a defiant woman in the boot of her car and proceed to hack at the boot (the film ends having left her and another customer locked away); or when, time after time, one of the attackers smashes the painstakingly repaired telephones that he had commanded the 'president' to fix. A box-office success, *Attack the Gas Station* ranked second among domestic films in 1999 (garnering slightly less than one-half of the viewers of history-making *Shiri* [*Swiri*] – 962,000 in Seoul by its eleventh week) and third overall (only slightly overshadowed by the American film *The Mummy*) (see www://koreanfilm.org).

In this chapter, we are broadly interested in the film's popularity, most particularly in its appeal to youth audiences. We wonder how it is that the

film's violence does not somehow manage to detract from its humour. We argue that it is style in the film and the film's style – both the new-generation style of the attackers and its MTV-like aesthetics – in combination with its melodramatic approach to lives and recent history that destined the film for success. On the one hand, the film celebrates 'difference' (i.e. in the style and marginality of the youth attackers) while, on the other hand, the film offers conventional narration of personal histories (i.e. those of the youth) and of social inequalities in South Korea. We assert that it is precisely this combination – the ruse of style, and the comfort of convention – that makes the film appeal. It is the attackers' melodramatic personal histories (portrayed mainly through dreamy flashbacks) that manage somehow to sanitise their considerable violence; plucked are the heart-strings of the viewers who learn about the trials and tribulations of their difficult youths. In the final analysis, *Attack the Gas Station* is a melodramatic comedy with political edge but perhaps little bite. While the attackers' parallel histories do not spur them to meaningful collective action or to 'resistance', it does nonetheless index politics and history. To the so-called 'new generation', the film offers fleeting glimpses of the past, and passing reference to narrative coherence, but with the stylistic veneer of a 'just because' outrageous comedy/spectacle that can (seemingly) do as it pleases to please a youthful audience.

With its combination of new youth style (both the film and its protagonists) and melodrama, *Attack the Gas Station* echoes a number of other recent youth pictures, among them *My Sassy Girl* (*Yöpgijökin günyö*, 2001, dir. Kwak Jae-yong), *Take Care of My Cat* (*Goyangirül but'akhae*, 2001, dir. Jöng Jae-ün) and *Beat* (*Bit'ü*, 1997, dir. Kim Söng-su). All of these films similarly combine melodramatic narration of personal lives with new-generation film aesthetics. We note, however, that *Attack the Gas Station*, like *Beat* and *Take Care of My Cat*, and in contra-distinction to *My Sassy Girl*, is conventional not only for its telling of hard lives (i.e. of social marginalisation), but also for the particular way in which it maps those lives against the socio-historical landscape of South Korea's recent past; of particular note are the films' shared critiques of the class coordinates of educational opportunity in South Korea. (See Grossman and Lee's chapter in this volume for a discussion of a quite different film narration of South Korean schooling in *Memento Mori*.) As Abelman and Curry (2003) argue, *My Sassy Girl* is interesting for the ways in which it refuses to have personal suffering index national, collective or historical trauma – it refuses to map personal trauma on anything other than individual history. Also, similar to the later-released film *Adaptation* (US, 2003), *My Sassy Girl* is consistently self-aware of its melodrama. This filmic meta-commentary serves as an effective social critique of dominant narratives or 'structures of feeling' in South Korea – of how very difficult it is to narrate against the collective and historical melodramatic grain. (See Magnan-Park in this volume for a fascinating discussion of historical narration in *Peppermint Candy* [*Bakhasat'ang*, 2000].) We also

note that *Attack the Gas Station* must be appreciated in the context of the recent surge of South Korean buddy/gangster films. Although less developed in this chapter – see Chi-Yun Shin in this volume for a sustained discussion of *Friend* (*Ch'in'gu*, 2001, dir. Kwak Kyōng-t'aek)² – the appeal of the hooligan foursome in *Attack the Gas Station* must be appreciated in part as that of male buddies who are loyal to one another and put a premium on friendship-based solidarity. Indeed, beyond the attraction of their hard lives, it is their commitment to one another – epitomised in the film's final scene when they insist on departing in unison, despite considerable personal risk – that appeals to the buddy-film clientele.

AGAINST GRAND NARRATIVE: 'DIFFERENCE' AND 'JUST BECAUSE'

It is not an overstatement to say that 'just because' (*kūnyang*) is critical to any reading of *Attack the Gas Station*. Shortly after establishing shots depicting four 'different'-looking youths who have attacked a petrol station late at night, print flits across the screen to ask: 'Why have they attacked?' 'Just because' and 'because we're bored' (*shimshim haesō*) are the answers we listen in on as the four youths lean against the counter at a convenience store. (See Nelson 2000 on youth and convenience stores in South Korea's contemporary urban landscape; and see also Hwang 1995/1997.) The attack, then, does not conform to standard narrative or plot demands. We submit that *kūnyang* works perfectly to resist coherent narration; resisting cause and effect and the logic of 'History', *kūnyang* speaks metonymically for South Korea in the era of 'posts' (post-authoritarian, post-Cold War, post-International Monetary Fund [IMF]). (See Abelman 1996, 2003; Jager 1996, 2003; and Cho 2002 on the transformation of social and political sensibilities.)

The 1990s, a decade of democratic advances, consumption euphoria and the wane of Cold War politics, signalled considerable social transformation. (See Lett 1998 and Nelson 2000 on changing cultures of consumption in contemporary South Korea.) Implicated in Korea's colonial past (1910–45) and South Korea's decades of development mobilisation and anti-state activism (H. Y. Cho 2000; J. J. Choi 1993; Koo 2001) was a *collective* national subject – namely persons mobilised by collective projects, be they hegemonic or counter-hegemonic (e.g. anti-colonialism, nationalism). The 1990s initiated a publicly aired, deep-seated rejection of this collective logic; emergent were newfangled communities of consumption and boutique civil society movements that engaged issues of personal identity and well-being (e.g. sexuality, the environment). Both 'development' (and 'anti-Communism') and 'anti-state activism' were grand narratives, asking people to subordinate the personal – the indulgent – for the larger good. (See Abelman 1996; Kwon 2000; and Song 2003 on the social critique of the collective subject.) The 1990s offered sudden, if partial, liberation from grand narrative. It is in this sense that we find *kūnyang* so emblematic of changed times.

The rejection of the collective subject and of grand narrative also entails the celebration of 'difference' and the 'individual'. (See H. J. Cho 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Grinker 1998.) Indeed, the 1990s offered a decade of difference, albeit somewhat eclipsed by the IMF Crisis which momentarily asked South Koreans to recall the collective imperative in the face of economic crisis. (See B. K. Kim 2000 and Song 2003 on the IMF Crisis.) The *kūnyang* logics of *Attack the Gas Station* are all the more dramatic (or un-dramatic, we might say) given the film's temporal status as an IMF-era movie. (See Song 2003 and K. H. Kim, forthcoming, on *Happy End* [*Haep'i endū*, 1999], Moon 2002 on *Friend*, and Baek 2003 on four recent blockbusters – as IMF films.) The youths in *Attack the Gas Station* work as visible icons of difference: their fashions, hairstyles, and even bodily comportment. In almost every antic, the youths defy the norms of social convention: Mudaep'o (for the 'staff' he always brandishes – marked in red ink with 'Korean', *taehan'gukin*), the attacker who commands 'head down' throughout the film, for example, flings his lanky body across the screen, while Ttanttara, another attacker who commands the 'president' to sing, is a bleached blond.³ Paragons of an urban cool, each of the four youths makes his own fashion statement. (See Y. S. Chong 1998; H. J. Cho 1995 and 2000a on contemporary youth and their cultural expression.)

With these portraits of difference, *Attack the Gas Station* joins many other recent films with its celebration of youth gang culture (e.g. *Beat and Number Three* [*Nōmbō ssūri*, 1997, dir. Song Nūng-han]). Indeed, the film offers its own gang wars, albeit ones that intermittently seem more like an MTV spectacle than anything else. The presentation of the attackers' marginality includes their dress and bodily comportment, and their crude idiom (strings of four-letter words), including many newly coined expressions.⁴ These youths have, the viewer is assured, strayed far from the normative life-course in South Korea: they have left home, left school, and are destined for marginal lives. (See J. A. Choi 2002 on youth beyond home and school.) The film offers a glimpse of the sorts of public spaces that such youths inhabit, featuring an array of contemporary youth spaces: a petrol station, convenience stores (frequented by groups at night), and billiards rooms (*tanggujang*). Also featured are Chinese restaurant delivery men and so-called 'automobile guys' (*p'okjajok*) – the groups that can be considered to be the class and cultural neighbours of marginal youth.⁵ Further, these spaces are offered as alternative spaces to those of mainstream, middle-class, college-bound youth. Juxtaposed with these spaces, home and school are portrayed as cold (i.e. not nurturing) and oppressive spaces; the youths retreat instead to convenience stores, petrol stations, and billiards halls. Against received hierarchies of achievement and success, these youths valorise physical prowess (e.g. of school gang leaders) and calibrate hierarchy according to the ability to fight. They look down on nerds and subservience. In one scene, Kkalch'i, a female part-time worker at the petrol station, looks on as one of the other part-time workers is studying his English vocabulary (in the middle of the attack!); as he mutters 'spe-cu-la-tion' she suddenly becomes agitated,

and shouts in exasperation, 'Uhhhh, it is because of people like YOU that I hate school!' In this way, Kkalch'i intimates her interest in – or even attraction to – the attackers; both she and the non-nerd male part-time worker, Gönppang, can be thought of as a youth audience embedded in the film – an audience of normative, middle-class kids who are at once frightened by, and drawn to, the attackers.⁶ Gang culture is celebrated in the film for its own meritocratic norms and values – ones that are deeply masculinised. We suggest that this film's portrayal of anti-normative youth culture works as a romantic fantasy. There are many instances of this counter-cultural code: 'No Mark' (Nomakü), the boss of the four attackers, is afforded respect and deference: Mudaep'o obeys 'No Mark' and, against great odds, Gönppang becomes 'number one' and begins acting like a tough guy. Loyalty and solidarity, cornerstones of the popular representation of gangster culture, are central to the attackers' drama; in the final scene, for example, 'No Mark' – willing to sacrifice himself – orders the other three attackers to run away. 'No Mark' makes this offer to the accompaniment of melancholic music. When his mates decide to stay with 'No Mark', viewers are made to identify with the gang's deep bonds. The romance of these elements of gang culture works against the relief of normative social life in which class marginality and difference (of all varieties) are punished. *Attack the Gas Station* offers a wonderful portrait of the ways in which South Korean adults gaze at and discipline 'difference'. The attackers are chided: for their appearance ('What the hell is that hair?'); their presumed lack of filial sentiment ('Do you want to bring shame on your parents?'); and their apparent low social standing (a policeman warns them, 'you had better know what will happen when your gang gets caught drunk'). Also, at many points the 'president' reminds the attackers that they have strayed (e.g. that they have forsaken their role as filial sons). The normative gaze is one that any South Korean youth (or person for that matter) could recognise; certainly there is something cathartic about the in-your-face way in which these youths wear and perform their marginality.

The film's violence must be appreciated in relation to this social critique. Although the attack transpires 'just because', the violence is, in fact, entirely socially legible: namely, it is meted out against the grain of South Korea's received structures of hierarchy (e.g. age/generation, gender, class, education). Interestingly, however, its primary targets are those at the apex of petty hierarchies: the petrol station 'president', the head of a high-school gang, and bumbling neighbourhood police. Also targeted are the petty wealthy – the unlucky customers who happen to frequent the petrol station under attack, and who furthermore happen to put on any airs (of superiority) at all. Woe to the customer who, for example, calls Mudaep'o 'ignorant' (*mushik*), a register for him of all that is unjust. The film's rituals of reversal (e.g. Gönppang fleetingly reigns over the gang-lord of his school, and the part-time workers are designated 'president') can be taken as a social critique that exposes the persistent inequalities and injustices of South Korean society into the age of democracy. Among other hierarchies, that of age is radically upset in the film. Older viewers could

only wince at the attackers' use of non-honourific language (*banmal*) in addressing their elders.⁷

The film's social critique, however, is ambiguous throughout. On the one hand, the film's obvious reversals are cathartic. Here we suggest the film's nostalgic appeal to those reared in times with clear and visible enemies (e.g. the so-called 3-8-6 generation, in their thirties, having attended college in the 1980s, and born in the 1960s). On the other hand, however, because the agents of power in the film are, in fact, so petty, the salience or seriousness of the critique is tempered; instead it all seems absurd and hence works as comedy. Foremost, the 'president' of the petrol station – hardly an apt symbol of South Korea's upper class or for any of the ills from which the youths have suffered – renders the critique hollow. As the 'president' himself proclaims, sighing, 'How pathetic I am! How did I end up becoming the prey of these gangster-kids?' Via phone conversations with his family – we listen in on several rounds of a conversation with his kids about buying ice-cream – the 'president' emerges as nothing more or less than an ordinary father. Although much of the violence is serious and seriously misogynistic, some of it, like its objects, is decidedly petty. Indeed, much of the humour comes from the amateur antics, such as when Mudaep'o yields his stick, only to slam it down on his own foot (standard slapstick) or when he decides to exempt a 'pretty' woman from having to put her head down like everyone else (the sad-faced objections of Kkalch'i in this scene are also humorous). It is hard for viewers to take seriously a delinquent youth who is so amateurish and comical. But, the violence in the film is nonetheless very real. It is this violence and misogyny of the hoodlums – not to mention the film's humour – that interrupts at every turn any seemingly critical project.

If the film's social critique is muted, so is any serious consideration of the real problems of adolescents and adolescent gangs in South Korea. (See J. A. Choi 2002 on high-school drop-outs.) Because in this film, and elsewhere, gang culture – for example, in *Beat, Friend, Number Three, The Gang Class* (*Kkangpae suöp*, 1996, dir. Kim Sang-jin), and *My Wife is a Gangster* (*Jop'ok manura*, 2001, dir. Cho Chin-gyu) – is celebrated under the guise of difference, its lower-class origins and its hypermasculinity are obscured.

MELODRAMATIC SYMPATHY: THE VIOLENCE OF HARD LIVES

Attack the Gas Station features four short flashbacks, one for each attacker. The flashbacks interrupt with their style, sensibility and generic features. While the camera of the film's present is skittish and playful (at several points the camera is canted or features the image upside-down), the flashback scenes are slow and steady. Also the *mise-en-scène* (i.e. costumes, make-up, sets, props, lighting and character gesture) are all much more muted and conventional in the flashbacks. This said, however, the film's present is also melodramatic in its use of deep focus. In parallel, the music of the present is fast paced and youthful while that

of the flashbacks is sad and dark. It is clear that the flashbacks appeal to audience sympathy for these marginal men; each flashback is palpably legible to a South Korean audience. Indeed, these portraits of the dispossessed border on the hackneyed.

Each flashback establishes a turning point: a reason for each of the four youths having veered off the straight and narrow, the normative South Korean path. And each flashback illuminates long-standing ills of South Korean society. This film offers a veritable ethnography from below of the 'school crisis' (*gyosil bunggoe*) that has been widely proclaimed in South Korea in recent years, including school gangs, violence between peers, bribes, and authoritarian and discriminatory teachers.

In the first flashback, Ppaeint'ũ (an artist with long bleached hair, and draped in velveteen shirt, jacket and pants) is at home in what appears to be a middle-class abode. We find his father *violently* smashing canvases over Ppaeint'ũ's head while his mother screams to defend her son. The viewer is to understand that Ppaeint'ũ has defied the normative educational path, opting instead for the unproductive arts. The flashback happens at an apt moment in the film: Ppaeint'ũ is destroying the framed political slogans at the petrol station (one for each recent presidency, they are leaned up against one of the walls). Glancing at them, Ppaeint'ũ curses their Chinese characters (*hanmun*) ('People who use big words should be killed'), signs of book learning (and of elite educational capital). The frames must have reminded him of his father's assault. The flashback ends with his cry, 'I will kill myself'.

In the second flashback, 'No Mark', the clear leader of the four, is being absurdly punished by a high-school coach; we witness the coach's *violent* discrimination against him for being an orphan and for being unable to pay up on the requisite bribes (offered to coaches). Widely understood in South Korea are the many ways in which the educational system and its actors discriminate against youths from poorer or deviant families. (See Cho 1995 and Seth 2002.) When it is clear that 'No Mark' is about to defy the coach's order, the coach insults him all the more: 'You think baseball is a joke? You should be grateful to me even letting you be on this team. You had better know how many parents kneel before me with envelopes of money [i.e. bribes] begging that their sons be able to join the baseball team.' 'No Mark's' flashback happens just as he is filling up the car fuel tank of a famous baseball player who has just given him a signed ball.

In one of the film's sub-plots (in the present) we see that 'No Mark' has not abandoned the romance of family. In a seemingly uncharacteristic moment he allows the nerd to go home and give his sick mother medicine (i.e. a classical filial plot). Furthermore, he drapes the nerd in his own jacket for the trip – the nerd has promised that he will return (the other attackers tell 'No Mark' that he is crazy to trust him). It is important that 'No Mark's' tattered family photograph is in the pocket of that jacket – a mishap that drives the final scenes of the film. In another scene, 'No Mark' scolds the 'president', 'Don't you care

about your kids? Whether they are well fed or not? What kind of a father are you?'

The third flashback is Tranttara's who is kicked out of his room in a bar (that doubles as his studio) for being behind in the rent; we watch the attackers *violently* smash his instruments. In the final flashback, Mudaep'o is tormented by a high-school teacher who minces no words in telling him that nothing will come of him, that he is destined for a life in the working class; we watch on as the teacher violently commands him to touch his head to the ground. If there is a single corporal signature to *Attack the Gas Station* it is that: 'head to the ground' (knees off the ground, and hands behind the back – a painful pose to hold). Throughout the film, Mudaep'o wields his stick to command 'heads down'. It is only after we watch his flashback that we understand why he so enjoys commanding 'heads down' to his hostages. In the film's final scene, Mudaep'o commands 'heads down' to a large crowd of people, including policemen.

In each flashback, the youth leaves the field (i.e. the metaphorically un-level playing field) – in some cases, quite literally walking off the screen. In the case of 'No Mark', he obeyed the coach's first and second command to run around the playground while the others were playing ball but, at the coach's third order, he exploded in exasperation, 'I won't play baseball any more!' The audience sympathises with the attackers: they have been mistreated for being marginal or different. Bared are naked class prejudice, the ugly workings of patriarchy, narrow-minded systems of value and the violence of family norms. Viewers sympathise because they are acutely aware that there is virtually no legitimate space in South Korea for youths who have been cruelly rejected by their families and schools.

As we have asserted above, we understand that these flashbacks work variously in the film's narrative and scopic economy. On the one hand, they win the audience's sympathy which helps the viewer make narrative and historical sense of the attack (i.e. its rationale); this sympathy, in turn, mitigates the youths' violence. We argue, however, that the attack and its social critique do not entirely make sense either. As reviewed above, the film's predominant comic (and anarchic) mode flies in the face of these neat promises of narrative coherence, reference and meaning. It is important that the flashbacks happen in private – bared only for the viewer; they do not work as points of connection or political alliance among (or beyond) the attackers.

The film's flash-forwards that play across the scene of the end titles, namely the five-/ten-years-on futures of each of the youths, take up where the flashbacks left off: each youth re-enters the field he had longed to join, resolving or sublimating his earlier pain: Ppaeint'ũ takes up an amateur art career; 'No Mark' becomes a baseball player; Tranttara is pictured as a performer at private parties; and Mudaep'o has become an amicable guard at an apartment complex where he is devoted to keeping kids on the straight and narrow. Against the generic blurring of the body of the film and the prevailing comic mood, these

scenes of resolution ring unreal, both to the sensibility of the film, and the likely futures of these youths. Buried in the end titles, however, they do little to mar the film's humour.

WHITHER POLITICS: 'NEW-GENERATION' SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

If not with the narrative coherence and closure of its flash-forward melodramatic resolutions, where does *Attack the Gas Station* leave its viewers? In the penultimate scene described above, the attackers simply drive away, having held the motley crowd (the kid gang, the delivery-boy gang, the police, etc.) hostage to the flick of a lighter. In keeping with the film's 'just because' logic, we have little sense of 'what next'. In that last scene, the work and workings of power are at their most absurd, and there is little logic or rationale to the attack. The petrol station – its stretch of urban concrete – has become more and more stage-like over the course of the film. In a sense, the film's stage has become a literal metaphor for the film itself – a consumer spectacle.⁸ Indeed, at one point, the stretch of concrete literally doubles as the backdrop for 'wannabe' rock stars (one of them actually played by a famous South Korean pop star). In the final scene, we are made acutely aware of the confines of this space. Before we witness the four walk away, off-screen, we have begun to witness the petrol station from the bird's-eye view of 'No Mark' who has been commanding the show from above. In the end, all four attackers ride off in the haze of dawn (an ironic citation of the Western) while the members of the crowd have their 'heads down' fearing an inferno. This penultimate scene teeters on the edge of the film's generic mix of comedy and melodrama. We know that 'No Mark' is biding his time, waiting for Kkalch'i to fetch the weathered photograph of his parents; the film gazes painfully and nostalgically at him – at the look and feeling of his painful past. The absurd comedy and the straight melodrama are at their respective apex in this scene. It is against this tension, that the credit flash-forwards make so little film sense – dissolving the film's tension entirely.

We take this final scene as emblematic of the film's project. The scene is simultaneously absurd and entirely melodramatic: against the back-drop of the hostage scene, we meet the excesses of a family melodrama. The film eclipses with the lighter and a family photograph. Neither has the film managed to subvert conventional socio-historical modes of telling lives, nor has it managed to offer a sustained social critique. Enabled in the film is a masculinist romance of resistance with muted political bite. The narrative of the dispossessed is registered but dissolves in humorous violence precluding any serious attention to alienated youth in contemporary South Korea. Here, by way of a contrast, we can recall the 1988 film *Ch'il-su and Man-su* (*Ch'ilsuwa Mansu*, 1988, dir. Park Kwang-su) in which, instead, the meaningless respite of two billboard painters (they are perched on the scaffolding smoking and enjoying a soft drink) is taken for a social protest. In keeping with 1980s' logic, the social gaze at these workers – a gaze that has posited them as protesters about to throw a Molotov cocktail – politicises them,

making social activists of them. (See Abelmann 1996 on this film.) In *Attack the Gas Station*, however, the petrol station works as no more than an escape. Viewers meet a comical spectacle – one with fleeting overtures to history and resistance – that comes to little. The comfort of the familiar (and the familial) helps, we submit, to anchor, if ironically, the film's stylistic veneer: its 'just because' antics.

We would, however, also like to note that *Attack the Gas Station* is distinguished for the way in which its protagonists speak to family, school and daily life. Unlike standard gang films in which gangs occupy insular social space and act either like Superman or pariahs, those in this film inhabit entirely recognisable social spaces and practices. In this way, the film perhaps effects the identification of its youth viewers. Although its political bite is deflected with its 'just because' logic, comedy and masculinised solidarity (i.e. versus political comradeship), nonetheless, a political sensibility has been communicated. Arguably, this is the film's accomplishment. Further, this speaks perhaps to new ways of speaking of difference: it is for each viewer to decide whether seemingly individual plights have been politicised or whether seemingly social products have been depoliticised.

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NOTES

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1. On the movie's popularity, see www.cinesoul.com, *Chosun ilbo* 10.22 (1999), *Donga ilbo* 12.12 (2000).
2. *Friend*, released in 2001, attracting 2, 579, 950 in Seoul alone, represents the height of the buddy-gangster film in South Korea.
3. 'Ttantara' is a derogatory reference to a musician who performs vernacular music.
4. We note, however, that the attackers are, in fact, not so young; one imagines that they are in their thirties. This raises questions as to the reception of the film. We can query to what extent the attackers are, in fact, understood to be 'young people'. We are grateful to Chung-kang Kim for suggesting this point.
5. We are grateful to Jinsoo Ahn for his observation about the film's disdainful gaze at the delivery boys who are actually truly marginal figures in South Korea's social landscape.
6. *Friend* also offers an interesting instance of inter-class relations in a buddy film. (See Chi-Yun Shin's chapter in this volume.)
7. In an attempt to appeal to non-Korean speakers, the subtitled version of the film offers exaggerated translation of the dialogue, often inserting four-letter words and sexually explicit language where there is none in the original.
8. See David E. James (2003) and Abelmann and Curry (2003) on reflexive structures in recent South Korean film.