The Emotional Cinema of Wong Kar-wai

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explain the affective appeal of Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre in terms of emotional marketing. Although his working method and storytelling principles are most atypical of Hong Kong film industry, the director has actively exploited local strategies of genre, stardom, and hybridization throughout his career. Contrary to his well-crafted image of improvisational artist, recurrent stylistic tropes and narrative strategies in Wong's films evidence a conscientious organization. . I argue that Wong Kar-wai deliberately caters to the tastes of a transcultural, multilingual and cinema-savvy spectatorship, and that his films encourage affective investment and repeated viewings.

Keywords

Resumen

La presente tesis busca explicar el atractivo emocional de la obra de Wong Kar-wai. Aunque su forma de trabajar y estrategia de narración son muy atípicas en la industria cinematográfica de Hong Kong, el director ha recurrido con frecuencia a las convenciones del género, star system e hibridismo del cine hongkonés. Los elementos estilísticos y estrategias narrativas de sus películas contradicen la imagen del artista improvisador, difundida por el propio Wong, y en cambio afirman una minuciosa organización del relato. Sostengo que Wong Kar-wai busca satisfacer los gustos de un público cosmopolita, multilingüe e ilustrado, fomenta un compromiso emocional y hace que los espectadores quieran volver a ver sus películas.

Palabras clave

Wong Kar-wai, cine hongkonés, emoción, teoría cognitiva, análisis fílmico

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CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Introduction

When I set off to pursue a PhD degree in Communication, my idea was to examine one of the topics that most fascinated me as a cinephile – the emotional interaction between the film text and the viewer. It is hard to deny that the medium's greatest appeal lies in its ability to elicit emotional responses, however, the role of emotion in film is a highly problematic topic in the academic field. Questions such as why audiences cry or laugh, take sides with particular characters, and enjoy repeated viewings remain largely unexplored by scholars, yet they are ripe for research.

Despite the fact that I did not have an academic background in film studies, Professor Ivan Pintor Iranzo was kind enough to accept my proposal and provide me with guidance every step of the way. The literature he recommended (Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (2007), Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (1982), Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (1986) and *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (1989), among others) prompted me to study film directors from a broad generic, chronological and geographical range: from post-WWII European *auteurs* (Resnais, Hitchcock, Antonioni) to independent American filmmakers (Kubrick, Scorsese, Lynch) to Asian arthouse icons (Akira Kurosawa, Wong Kar-wai). Alas, such a task quickly proved to be unfeasible, and I spent the first year of doctoral studies narrowing the scope of my thesis, which was made all the more difficult by the fact that my extensive reading list kept feeding me new, exciting ideas. Even though I was originally supportive of the psychoanalytic approach, I gradually began to question associational reasoning that compared the pleasures of film viewing to dreaming (Baudry) and voyeurism (Metz). Film analysis is not an exact science – there is always a danger that, instead of rigorously testing the data to either validate or refute the initial hypothesis, one imposes interpretations that best suit his or her theory. What is more, such diverse concepts as Lacanian psychoanalysis, Saussurean linguistics and Althusserian Marxism tend to overlook social and economic practicalities of film production and reception. As an aspiring filmmaker who also comes from a culture heavily influenced by formalism, I am more interested in how films are made to produce specific effects in the audience, not least of which is an emotional response. Contrary to the psychoanalytic-semiotic-marxist paradigm which deems filmic emotion unconscious

or impulsive, the cognitive theory emphasizes rational motivation behind the powerful impact of cinema: each spectator evaluates the formal components, narrative information and other indicators present in the text, and the affective reaction emerges from the totality of connections he or she perceives. After reading the works of David Bordwell, Noël Carroll and Greg Smith, I have found that cognitivists were well-equipped to answer the question: how can films engage individuals across national, cultural, class and gender boundaries?

Among the books that influenced me the most in the early stages of research were *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988), *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1989) and *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (2003). In *Mystifying Movies*, Noël Carroll rejects murky analogies of 'dream screen', the mirror stage and fetishism, while arguing that the film apparatus was designed rationally and can be explained from the cognitive perspective. 'I do not believe that a film theorist can stipulate that movies engage people's psyches on an unconscious level any more than I believe that an astrologist can be allowed to stipulate that our fates are controlled by the stars,' he would write in response to detractors (Carroll 1992: 207). Carroll explains the powerful effect of Hollywood International[1] in terms of narrative and spatio-temporal organization that seeks to engage universal cognitive and perceptual faculties.

In *Making Meaning*, David Bordwell provides both a concise history of film criticism and an alternative method of analysis. He classifies the tools critics use for interpreting films and dissects four types of meaning: referential (the understanding of diegesis and fabula based on prior knowledge of genre conventions and the real world), explicit (moral of the story which can be confirmed by textual cues), implicit (themes that can be supported by textual or extra-textual evidence) and symptomatic (a layer of meaning that operates beneath and, possibly, beyond the intended message, which may reflect the psychological stance of the filmmaker or ideological, economic and political conditions of production and consumption). According to Bordwell, in analysing any film, the critic inevitably constructs a mental 'model' which highlights some hand-picked aspects while ignoring others. This way, interpretation does not produce scientific knowledge, and has fewer virtues than flaws: '[…] contemporary interpretation-centered criticism tends to be

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[1] By 'Hollywood International' Carroll means not only American, but also European and Asian films in the 'classical style', made either for the big screen or television.

conservative and coarse-grained. It tends to play down film form and style. […] It is largely uncontentious and unreflective about its theories and practices' (Bordwell, 1989: 261). Bordwell offers a substitute – historical poetics, which he conceives as 'the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects' (ibid, 266-267). Such criticism would proceed from empirical factors (norms and traditions established in the industry, such as genre conventions and the compositional processes of form and style) to practices of film reception (schemata and heuristics implemented by the spectators to make meaning, and effects generated by films), and would have recourse to perceptual and cognitive research in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and psychology. 'Empirical without being empiricist, emphasizing explanations rather than explications, poetics can enrich criticism by putting cinema's social, psychological, and aesthetic conventions at the center of inquiry' (ibid, 274).

David Bordwell's subsequent treatises, *A Case for Cognitivism* (1989) and *A Case for Cognitivism: Further Reflections* (1990), laid out the foundations for the cognitive theory. Cognitivists approach film viewing as a mental activity: each text provides clues and enigmas, which the audiences decode in accordance with the perceptual data, internalized rules, and prior knowledge of general conventions from art and life. The spectator's hypotheses can be confirmed, delayed, overturned or modified in the process, and his or her affective response will depend on the sum of relations the viewer detects. Although Bordwell relegated emotion to mere interest in the narrative outcome and did not study filmic affect *per se* – '[…] a spectator's comprehension of the films' narrative is theoretically separable from his or her emotional responses' (1985: 30) –, he did acknowledge that '[t]he spectator's emotional response to the film is related to form as well' (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004: 54). In his monograph *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, Greg Smith expanded the notions of form and style as effective tools in cuing emotion. Drawing on neuropsychology and cognitive psychology, he put forward a theoretical framework that transcends the analytics of narrative content and character identification, proposed by his predecessors (Noël Caroll, Ed Tan, Murray Smith, Torben Grodal). Smith posits that emotions can be elicited by a variety of filmic elements, or 'mood-cues': lighting, camerawork, mise-en-scène, sound, music, facial and body information, vocal expression and tone, costume and genre conventions, among others (Smith, 2003: 8, 42, 47). Because emotions are fleeting and stimulus-dependent while

moods, although not as intense, are longer-lasting affective states, an evocation of mood is key to engaging audiences on an emotional level (ibid, 37-43). However, just as none the emotive subsystems is sufficient to cause emotion by itself, so a film must use redundant mood-cues directed at different subsystems of the emotion system: conscious cognition, nonconscious central nervous processing, autonomic nervous system, facial nerves and muscles, vocalization, body posture and skeletal muscles. Smith proposes an associative network model (2003: 76-77), where the more abundant cues provoke the more forceful emotions by activating several input channels at once. While mood-cues orient the spectator toward emotionally salient features and encourage the spectator to re-experience particular emotions, occasional bursts of emotion, in turn, sustain the overall mood, and the cycle continues as long as there are emotional stimuli present. Smith's theory made me reconsider how films can be more effective in manipulating emotional responses, and I finally settled on a single contemporary director who excels at evoking mood – Wong Kar-wai.

'Subtle', 'atmospheric', 'romantic' are some of the epithets most frequently used to describe Wong's oeuvre. Admired by the critics, cinephiles and scholars alike, his films have been ardently discussed in the press, Youtube videos and academic essays, and have reportedly inspired a number of high-profile filmmakers: Tom Tykwer (*Run Lola Run*, 1999), Alejandro González Iñárritu (*Amores perros,* 2000), Sofia Coppola (*Lost in Translation*, 2003), Xavier Dolan (*Heartbeats, 2010*), Abbas Kiarostami (*Certified Copy*, 2010), Matthew Weiner (*Mad Men*, 2007-2015) and Barry Jenkins (*Moonlight*, 2017), among others. Wong Kar-wai was the first Chinese director to win Prix de la mise en scène (1997) and preside over the Cannes Film Festival (2006). He subsequently headed the jury at the 11th Shanghai International Film Festival (2008), the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival (2013), and the 8th Beijing International Film Festival (2018). He has been recognized with numerous honours, including the Order of Arts and Letters: Commander and the National Order of the Legion of Honour: Knight from the French Government (2005 and 2006, respectively), a Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Film Festival of India (2014), Prix Lumière at the heritage film festival in Lyon (2017), and even an honorary degree from Harvard University (2018). With such films as *Chungking Express* (*Chóngqìng sēnlín*, 1994), *Happy Together* (*Chun gwong cha sit*, 1997) and *In the Mood for Love* (*Hua yang nian hua*, 2000), Wong Kar-wai has earned himself a spot on the international arthouse arena, a cult following and the title of

'the coolest film director on the planet' (Lacey, 2001). He may not be the most innovative or technically accomplished filmmaker, 'but he does excite people in a way that almost no one else does, with his sensationally romantic, lurid, beautiful and elegiac love stories […]' (ibid).

Over ten feature films and several short ones, Wong Kar-wai has devised a much-imitated cinematic vocabulary that is rich in symbolism and philosophical underpinnings. At first glance, his oeuvre is inextricably linked to Hong Kong, a city defined by hectic rhythm, cultural ambiguity and unbridled commercialism. Yet upon closer examination, Wong seems to reflect on postmodern environment globally: due to the combination of exotic setting and universal themes – mobility, impermanence, alienation, memory, desire and search for identity – his films feel simultaneously strange and familiar to Western audiences. Perhaps, one of the best justifications of such allure comes from Ang Lee, himself an established international director, who recalls the first time he watched a Wong Kar-wai film. At the 29th Golden Horse Awards, where his debut film *Pushing Hands* (*Tui Shou*, 1992) received nine nominations, people were still talking about the previous year's sensation, *Days of Being Wild* (*A Fei zheng chuan,* 1990): 'This is the filmmaker, this is the *auteur*, this is the beginning of a new era' (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 1). Intrigued, Lee rented a VHS the same night, but he struggled to follow the story while fighting jet lag: 'Half of the time I was asleep, watching it. And I was listening to the music, watching those shots and… I don't know, I was dreaming or I was asleep or I was watching... I just felt it was, like, the most opium-coated film I'd ever seen.' As soon as he got back to New York, Lee rented the film again and watched it diligently, but he 'could never get that feeling back again' (ibid). Ang Lee concludes that Wong Kar-wai's film worked on him, as it probably does on many spectators, at a subconscious level:

I think he enchanted us with the most romantic and beautiful, mystic mood. The ambiguity stimulates so many feelings and imaginations. And the characters talk to themselves […] they're self-centred, but it's so universal. […] Hong Kong that he recreated as impression really crept up into the world's collective consciousness. […] I think he created a mental space for us, in which […] everything [colours, images, themes] collides and compensates each other, feeding off each other. And it's so rich and beautiful that everybody can just take whatever they want from it. (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 1-2)

Wong Kar-wai's typical narratives are composed of strings of encounters, conversations and daily practices which seem to follow Stanley Kubrick's model of a film as 'a progression of moods and feelings' (qtd. in Kagan, 1989: 231). Most of his films tend towards elliptical structures that many a time prove too demanding or boring to mainstream audiences. As David Bordwell has it, 'Wong stands out from his peers by abandoning the kinetics of comedies and action movies in favor of more liquid atmospherics. He dissolves crisp emotions into vaporous moods' (2000: 281). Wong Kar-wai implements a wide array of cinematic-aesthetic and storytelling devices at his disposal to elicit a strong emotional response: set design, lighting and composition, camerawork, a variety of lenses, filters and shutter speeds, genre conventions, character archetypes and narrative situations, rhythm, editing, repetition and intertextual references, music and sound, colour palette, costume, makeup and hairstyle, as well as facial, corporal and vocal expressions of actors. He privileges mood over plot, but contrary to the common claim that Wong Kar-wai he is interested in mood alone, his ultimate objective is to comment on local and global issues: urban alienation, search for identity, impermanence, memory and nostalgia. Wong demands creative and affective investment from his audiences: one must be attentive to the minutiae, non-verbal cues and allusions to understand his films, but the emotions they evoke linger long after the credits roll.

Academics from Ackbar Abbas to David Bordwell to Stephen Teo have tried to pin down the appeal of Wong Kar-wai's films. His poetics (Bordwell, 2000; Brunette, 2005; Bettinson, 2015) and aesthetics (Abbas, 1997; Dissanayake, 2003; Teo, 2005; Song, 2014;), use of music (Martinez, 1997; Yeh, 1999; Carvalho, 2008; Yeh and Hu, 2008), treatment of time and space (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2000; Van de Velde, 2011; Li, 2012) have been scrutinized from multiple perspectives – film and genre theories, auteur studies, national cinema, cultural studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, gender studies –, yet there remains ample scope for further research. I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to the abovementioned and other authors whose works illuminated and inspired me in writing this thesis: scholars of Hong Kong cinema (Rey Chow, Wimal Dissanayake, Vivian Lee, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, Gary Bettinson and Audrey Yue), philosophers and writers (Gilles Deleuze, Svetlana Boym, Friedrich Nietzsche), film critics (Martha Nochimson, Peter Brunette, Jean-Marc Lalanne) and fellow students from across the globe (Haihong Li, Wing-hin Tse, Ludmila Moreira Marcedo de Carvalho). If

the present thesis, too, encourages future scholarship, I will consider my mission accomplished. Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Ivan Pintor Iranzo, whose astute advice and valuable comments have guided me in the right direction, and to the subject of my research, Wong Kar-wai, thanks to whom I have discovered a plethora of cinematic techniques, films, novels and, best of all, Hong Kong, which I hope to visit soon after the completion of this thesis.

1.2. Literary Overview

Wong Kar-wai's ten feature films, which range from martial arts to romantic comedy yet do not belong to any one genre, have come to represent more than those of any other director, transitional Hong Kong. Which is rather peculiar, given that Wong's working method and storytelling principles are most atypical of the local film industry. The critics tend to contrast Wong Kar-wai's arthouse films to Hong Kong mainstream productions, yet upon closer examination, the relationship between them is not conflicting but rather reciprocal: while Hong Kong film industry benefitted from the renewed interest thanks to Wong's success on the international scene, Wong has actively exploited local strategies of genre and stardom. If we look closely, every Wong Kar-wai film, though undeniably innovative, is – to a varying degree – a genre film: *As Tears Go By* (1988) combines gangster film and romance, *Days of Being Wild* (1990) is a period piece, *Ashes of Time* (1994) is simultaneously a martial arts epic and an adaptation; *Chungking Express* (1994) and its companion piece *Fallen Angels* (1995) mix and match romantic comedy, crime drama and film noir, whereas *Happy Together* (1997) and *My Blueberry Nights* (2007) are road-movies; *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and *2046* (2004) draw on the *wenyi* tradition, whereas *The Grandmaster* (2013) is in equal parts *wuxia*, period drama and biopic. We could say that the cinema of Wong Kar-wai is as hybrid as Hong Kong itself, insofar as it draws on heterogeneous sources – from MTV aesthetics to European arthouse classics and world literature. A combination of eclectic references, high and low culture, exotic setting and universal themes is what makes his film style truly idiosyncratic. Throughout his career, Wong Kar-wai has tackled locally relevant issues in a way that resonates even with those unfamiliar with or uninterested in Hong Kong *per se*, though, as I shall discuss later, the viewing experience is greatly enriched by contextual knowledge.

Few Asian filmmakers have spawned so much criticism, debates and theories in the West, as Wong Kar-wai. His films readily lend themselves to various interpretations: they can be viewed as postmodern works (Wong, 1996), creative genre cinema (Bordwell, 2000), *auteur* cinema (Dissayanake, 2003; Brunette, 2005; Carvalho, 2009; Tse, 2013; Nochimson, 2016), adaptations (Yue, 2003; Teo, 2005; Luk, 2005; Yau, 2016), political texts (Abbas, 1997; Stokes and Hoover, 1999; Wong Yui Kuen, 2009), and critique of postcolonial nostalgia (Chu, 2001; Lee, 2009; Wang, 2016). Much of the existing research has focused on Wong Kar-wai's perennial themes and tropes in connection with the director's biography, genre filmmaking and social context of post-Handover Hong Kong. Different approaches many a time resulted in contradictory views: to cite a few, Bordwell warned against treating Wong's films as abstract allegories of Hong Kong's historical situation at the expense of their emotional appeal (Bordwell, 2000: 280), to which Berry and Farquhar protested that, '[t]o abstract these films so resonant with Hong Kong's condition from their origins risks losing sight of their local meaning' (2006: 42); a decade later, Bettinson adopted Bordwell's position while counter-attacking both Abbas' socio-allegorical hermeneutics (2015: 10-14) and Teo's reflectionist criticism (2015: 14-16).

Judging from the critical literature, even average moviegoers tend to express conflicting views on the films of Wong Kar-wai, describing those either in terms of their affective ('lyrical', 'romantic', 'nostalgic', 'atmospheric', 'mood pieces') or intellectual response ('puzzling', 'ambiguous', 'elusive', 'strange'). Judging from newspaper articles, online discussions and film reviews, Wong Kar-wai's aficionados, critics and detractors tend to paint him either as a rebellious figure within commercial industry or as a shrewd manipulator who readily exploits the star system, genre conventions and popular culture; as a genius of improvisation who works without fixed scripts or deadlines or as a hopeless perfectionist who continues editing his films long after the premiere; as an *auteur* in the best tradition of *nouvelle vague* and the standard-bearer of post-Handover Hong Kong cinema or as a mere sensualist who privileges style over substance and capitalizes on the 'exotic'. It is this discrepancy of opinion that makes Wong Kar-wai such an interesting filmmaker to study.

1.3. Scope of Study

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that Wong Kar-wai is an expert in emotional marketing: by making well-calculated narrative and stylistic choices, and imbuing his films with just

the right amount of socio-political undertones, cultural allusions and intra-oeuvral references, he overtly manipulates spectator's feelings. Wong Kar-wai comes from a commercial background – he began his career in television and spent several years scriptwriting genre films before directing *As Tears Go By* – and his works bear an imprint of a dynamic, heterogeneous and action-oriented cinema industry that is Hong Kong. Throughout his oeuvre, Wong Kar-wai successfully exploited generic conventions, stardom, popular culture, nostalgia and intertextuality, but he has always been a visionary in a sense that he focused on appealing to spectators' raw emotions rather than perceptual or cognitive capacities alone. His films are in high regard among intellectuals – critics, academics, cinephiles –, yet they are simple enough for average audiences to digest mainly because of their universal emotional appeal.

Emotional marketing is a no less important tool in the cinema industry than it is in sales: in both sectors, it helps to differentiate one product from the rest, to build a brand and maximize financial gain over time by having the customer – in our case, spectator – repeat the experience (i.e., seek information on a particular director, watch his or her entire filmography and look out for upcoming projects; buy DVDs to re-watch their favourite films and acquire ancillary products, etc.). Although Wong Kar-wai had been accused of privileging style over substance on a number of occasions, he has never renounced the importance of consistent imagery, narrative strategies and techniques. By repeating the same scenarios, visuals and tropes across films, Wong not only applies tested formulas and caters to the preferences of his regular spectatorship, but also enriches the interpretation of each individual film in the light of new connections. Consistent style and storytelling is what makes his films compelling and recognizable across different genres, and produces a strong emotional impact. Ultimately, it would not be wrong to say that Wong Kar-wai's films were *designed* to meet the tastes of transnational, multilingual and media-savvy audiences who appreciate both popular culture and high art, generic conventions and experimental techniques, exotic milieu and resonant themes.

It must be said that a number of narrative and stylistic devices that recur in Wong's films were, in fact, the result of external forces: limited budgets, shooting permits, venue availability and censorship regulations. To give an example, Wong Kar-wai originally planned to film *In the Mood for Love* in Macao, but in order to do so, he needed a shooting permit from the Chinese government, which he could not request due to the lack of

definite script.[2] '[…] if you want to be independent, you have to be flexible,' contends Wong (qtd. in Timberg, 2005: 3). He subverts material restrictions into the source of inspiration and points out that *auteurs* around the world have been doing the same for generations: Luis Bunuel decided to use two actresses for the same character in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (*Ese oscuro objeto del deseo*, 1977) after his first choice suddenly became available, while Godard invented jump cuts to minimize the running time of his typically long films. Wong's own filmography has been shaped by similar circumstances: the story of *2046* would have been very different, if it weren't for Maggie Cheung's limited availability and Leslie Cheung's untimely demise; the set of *Happy Together* was supposed to recreate the 1970s' Buenos Aires, but there was not enough budget for the props; and while the original ending of *Chungking Express* saw Faye and Cop 663 flying off to California together, Wong had to re-write the scene because he could not agree terms for the airport location. Contrary to the cognitive approach which assumes that filmmakers carefully plan every aspect of their work to elicit a particular spectator response, the reality shows that some formal and aesthetic decisions are dictated by necessity and represent instead practical solutions to actual problems.

The not so romantic truth is that lots of those effects are in reality the result of circumstantial consideration: if there is not enough space for camera manoeuvring, replace the regular lens with a wide-angle lens; when candid camera shooting in the streets does not allow lightning, adjust the speed of the camera according to the amount of light available; if the continuity of different shots does not link up right for a sequence, try jump cuts; to solve the problem of colour discontinuity, cover it up by developing the film in black and white... Tricks like that go on forever. (Wong qtd. in Lalanne et al., 1997: 113)

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[2] To avoid abundant violence, sex and hidden political messages, which were custom features of the 1990s' Hong Kong films, ever since the Handover, Chinese officials have demanded to see a script before authorizing any Mainland co-productions. They would then send someone to the filming set to monitor adherence to the script. Considering Wong's improvisational working method, such requirements were hard to meet, and *In the Mood for Love* was eventually filmed in Bangkok.

Indeed, some of Wong Kar-wai's most recognizable stylistic features were conceived through trial and error. Take, for instance, elusive, mood-soaked visuals from any of his films – Wong's exclusive photographer Wing Shya recalls that he was so excited to be on the set of *Days of Being Wild*, he accidentally shot several rolls of unfocused and off-centred pictures: 'I still didn't know how to use the equipment properly, and he [Wong] was actually angry at first because I shot so many blurry pictures. I forgot about the focus because I was so into the person and the scene […]' (qtd. in Zhang, 2017). Those technical errors became Wing's trademark, and he was invited again to shoot on the sets of *Happy Together, In the Mood for Love* and *2046*. The cinematographer of Wong's debut feature, Andrew Lau, reportedly opted for the step-printing effect merely because he had to use long exposure in poorly-lit locations, while Wong's long-time collaborator Christopher Doyle admits that some of his techniques were mistakes: unlike the use of black-and-white in *Happy Together,* which is justified by narrative purposes, random appearance of black-and-white sequences in *Fallen Angels* was a means to compensate for underexposure in post-production.

This thesis aims to broaden the scope of film analysis from an ostensibly text-oriented or spectator-oriented criticism to a contextually sensitive study of Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre that takes into consideration historical, cultural and economic practicalities of film production and marketing.

1.4. Research Questions / Hypothesis

In this study, I argue that emotional marketing as an indispensable ingredient of Wong Kar-Wai's oeuvre: contrary to the *auteur*'s well-crafted image of *l'enfant terrible* who works simultaneously within and *against* the commercial industry, recurrent stylistic tropes and narrative strategies in his films evidence a conscientious organization behind Wong's presumably intuitive methods, and it is these elements that allow him to connect with his viewers, first and foremost, on an emotional level. I propose that Wong Kar-wai's consistent visual style, interconnected stories and recurrent tropes serve to lure the audiences by means of repetition and intertextuality. To test this hypothesis, I shall examine the ways in which Wong Kar-wai uses formal elements – storytelling, set design, cinematography, editing – and commercial stratagems – literary references, episodic format, nostalgia and genre conventions – and how those compare to mainstream

filmmaking techniques. The main objective of this thesis is to provide a sustained analysis of the aforementioned aspects by explaining their repeated and salient use across different works from the standpoint of cognitive and reception theories.

To prove my point, I shall provide answers to the following questions:

Which narrative strategies, formal components and stylistic features are most frequently used in Wong's films and for what purpose?

What is the relationship between Wong Kar-wai and Hong Kong film industry, genre filmmaking, and international arthouse?

To what extent does the emotional appeal of Wong Kar-wai's films depend on the contextual knowledge of their milieu, influences and genre conventions?

Furthermore, I will pursue secondary, but related, questions: 1) whether or not Wong's films target historically specific audiences; 2) in what way does Wong exploit literary and philosophical references; 3) what is the role of nostalgia in the production and marketing of Wong's films; and, finally, 4) whether subsequent viewings lessen or intensify the emotional impact of Wong Kar-wai's films.

The working hypothesis is that Wong Kar-wai crafts and promotes his films in such a way that makes them resonate with transnational, media-savvy and often nostalgia-driven audiences. Wong deliberately applies tested formulas, recycles old scenarios, tropes and imagery to please his regular spectatorship and foster a strong emotional bond that will, most likely, prompt the viewers to get acquainted with his entire filmography and diffuse his works. Specific sub-hypotheses are as follows:

Firstly, I posit that, even though Wong Kar-wai has promoted himself overseas as a *rara avis* in the action-oriented, fast-paced Hong Kong film industry, he employs the same techniques and tactics (i.e., simultaneous filming and editing, experimental camerawork, orientation toward foreign markets) as other local productions. Secondly, although it is true that some of his characteristic features were the result of test and trial, most of them were carefully calculated rather than improvised, and form part of emotional marketing. Thirdly, I propose that, while the films of Wong Kar-wai are often praised by the intellectuals for being cognitively compelling, they are also popular among average moviegoers (particularly, in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, France and Italy), the MTV generation and millennials, for their arresting visuals, unconventional editing, oblique

references and universal themes. Lastly, I wish to address Wong's exploitation of two closely related concepts, nostalgia and intertextuality. In recent years, nostalgia has deeply affected the production, distribution and reception of films: steady box-office figures of remakes, sequels and prequels, spinoffs and reboots, adaptations, live-action versions of cartoons, anime and video games all indicate a substantial public demand for loosely connected, continuous stories with prolonged development of character arcs and familiar scenarios. As I shall discuss in this paper, Wong Kar-wai intentionally activates the feelings of nostalgia by releasing individual films which contribute to an overarching narrative.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

As I have already mentioned, practical circumstances of film production and marketing condition the use of certain conventions, formal and stylistic tropes. I will therefore begin my analysis by placing the oeuvre of Wong Kar-wai in the context of Hong Kong cinema. Wong debuted as a director at a significant time for the local industry:

It was an era of unparalleled inventiveness as filmmakers boldly ventured into untried territories, tinkering with new stories and ways to tell them. Perhaps it was an expression of the confusion, anger, angst, sadness, and self-pitying felt by the people, a potent cocktail of emotions urgently in need of release. As such, Hong Kong films embodied a profound loneliness that manifested itself in a film language of dazzling audacity. (Kar & Bren, 2004: 294)

I will briefly survey Wong Kar-wai's filmography and dedicate some attention to social and economic conditions which impacted Hong Kong film industry on the whole and Wong's oeuvre in particular. I will also discuss some of the director's major influences before addressing narrative strategies, formal components and stylistic features that are most frequently used in his films.

For the most part, my analysis will be guided by the cognitive film theory, particularly Smith's (2003) and Bordwell's (1989b; 2007) models. The mood-cue approach is better suited for assessing individual films rather than genres or film categories, while neoformalist historical poetics relates production-oriented and reception-oriented

analyses. The application of these methods will help me decode formal and stylistic components of the selected works, however, given that the films I discuss require a proper understanding of their socio-cultural context, a purely cognitivist or neoformalist study would be incomplete. On the one hand, cultural idiosyncrasies – such as politics of location, ideologies, historical experiences and gender roles – play an important role in film reception and interpretation, yet they are largely overlooked by the abovementioned theories. On the other hand, reception theory with its primary focus on spectator response tends to downplay the relation between film structure and empirical conditions of film production. In this thesis, I seek to examine the affective function of certain formal and stylistic elements of Wong Kar-wai's films, but such an analysis would be deficient, if had not considered material limitations and requirements that marked a number of narrative and visual aspects of Wong's oeuvre.

1.5.1. Cognitive Theory

In the field of film studies, cognitivism presents itself not as a unified theory, but rather as a research method that draws on a wide range of disciplines – constructivist psychology, anthropology, literary studies, analytic philosophy, neuroscience – to explain mental processes involved in film viewing and interpretation. Cognitive theory emerged in the late 1980s as an opposition to the then dominant psychoanalytical and semiotic paradigms. I have formerly referred to David Bordwell's pioneering works *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1989), *A Case for Cognitivism* (1989) and *A Case for Cognitivism: Further Reflections* (1990), but it would be unfair not to mention other important treaties of the period, which accumulatively promoted the new approach.

Noël Carroll's article 'The Power of Movies', published in the same year as David Bordwell's *Narration in Fiction Film* (1985), already included some of the core ideas that he would later express in *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988). Carroll sought to explain 'what makes the response to movies *so intense for so many*' (1985: 80), especially in comparison with other media – literature, theatre, ballet, opera. Since cinema engages mass audiences across class, gender, cultural, societal and educational boundaries, its power 'must be connected to some fairly generic features of human organisms […]' (ibid, 101) – such as picture recognition and perception of movement – which are less demanding processes than reading, decoding, or inference.

The deployment of pictorial representation is one of the basic features of film that makes it '[…] immediately accessible to untutored audiences in every corner of the world' (ibid, 83). However, while Carroll likens recognition of moving pictures to a reflex, he claims that films are designed to engage not only perceptual capacities, but also cognitive faculties of the audience. A filmmaker controls spectator's attention and interpretation by means of camera positioning and variable framing: the audiences are manipulated into perceiving *relevant* details at the appropriate time, '[…] thereby comprehending, nearly effortlessly, the ongoing action precisely in the way it is meant to be understood' (ibid, 89). Of course, this may not be the case with many contemporary arthouse features and media-savvy filmgoers who are likely to search for implicit and repressed meanings, regardless of the creator's intent (i.e., *Happy Together* as an allegory of the Handover). But Carroll limits his research to mass spectatorship and popular film, which abides by the rules of bracketing, scaling and indexing. He proposes that, aside from directing audience attention, a good filmmaker knows how to control expectations by assertively introducing a set of micro- and macro-questions and answering them in such order that enables the spectators to learn whatever information they need to know in order to follow the action. Carroll calls this mode of narration 'eroteric' and claims that it contributes greatly to the power of films: '[…] an erotetic movie narrative has an extraordinary degree of neatness and intellectually appealing compactness. […] The flow of action approaches an ideal of uncluttered clarity' (ibid, 98). This clarity is reinforced by means of visual narration, such as variable framing or the single shot – not only do they allow the filmmaker to control audience attention, they also '[…] enable him to raise questions *visually* […]' (ibid, 99). Noël Carroll continued discussing the role of visual techniques and narrative comprehension in his subsequent analyses of the emotion-triggering mechanisms in the horror film (1990), point of view editing (1993) and the relation between genre conventions and affective responses (1999).

Late 1990s-early 2000s was the most flourishing period in the development of cognitive film theory, marked by such publications as *Engaging Characters* (1995), *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (1996), *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* (1996), *Moving Pictures*: *A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognitions* (1999) and *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009). In *Engaging Characters*, Murray Smith proposed to replace the somewhat misleading notion of 'identification' with a

three-level 'structure of sympathy' (1995: 5), comprised of recognition, alignment and allegiance. On the stage of recognition, the spectator perceives the character 'as an individuated and continuous human agent' within the narrative (ibid, 82); he separates the main and secondary characters from episodic ones, and due to 'spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access' to specific characters, proceeds to align with those (ibid, 83). Based on the knowledge of the character's mental and emotional states – which can be attained through voiceover and close-up, explicit or implicit point of view, restricted narration – the viewer may form an allegiance, which practically equals a moral approval of character's actions. In Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre, however, we find several exceptions to this rule, the most prominent examples being *Fallen Angels* and *Days of Being Wild.*

Affective response to fictional characters is also actively explored in Ed Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*. The author speaks of 'resonance' and 'enactment': while the former occurs practically unmediated by thought, using the same mechanisms the spectators apply in real life, the latter 'requires a wilful act on the part of the film viewer' (Tan, 1996: 355). Tan affirms that character representation (character structure) and narrative comprehension (thematic structure) are two determinants of the single most important emotion the spectators experience while watching a traditional feature film – interest. Curiosity encourages the audience to pay close attention to filmic cues, assess different scenarios and anticipate the outcome, thus engaging more strongly in the construction of the text. Although '[…] there is always the need to know what happens next […] (ibid, 119), interest levels may vary considerably from one emotional episode to another: whenever their expectations are met, or their hypotheses are confirmed, spectators receive gratification, and their interest grows in proportion to the return on investment. Tan concludes that film-induced emotions are genuine responses to artificial stimuli (ibid, 247-250), and that film viewing is, essentially, a hedonic activity that enables people 'to experience emotion as intensely and abundantly as possible, within the safe margins of a guided fantasy […]' (ibid, 39). A similar thought is expressed in Joseph Anderson's *The Reality of Illusion*: 'A film functions as a surrogate for reality at several levels […] The danger in a thriller is not real; the fear we feel for the character in danger is. The tragedy in a movie's narrative is not real; the empathy and sorrow we feel are' (Anderson 1996: 166). Anderson draws on the Gibsonean ecological theory to explain the interaction between viewers and films. He addresses the role of visual and auditory

capacities in affective responses to particular aspects of film form (the illusion of movement and continuity, perception of depth and colour, point-of-view editing) and content (narrative comprehension, character identification) on the examples of *Casablanca* and *Citizen Kane*.

In *Moving Pictures*, Torben Grodal underlines the primacy of identification and empathy in film reception: when the viewer attempts to understand character goals and motivations, and 'to assess the means and possibilities of implementing these plans […]' (Grodal, 1999: 90), he or she is likely to mentally simulate the character's state and respond empathically. Grodal incorporates identification into his model of narrative 'flow': the spectator follows the current, passing through perception, emotion, cognition and enactment. As in fluid dynamics, the flow moves downstream, unless there are obstacles of either diegetic (i.e., blocking a character's goal) or extradiegetic nature (i.e., a viewer blocking his or her ability for empathy). Going upstream in a river is a difficult task, since one has to fight the current; in film viewing, whenever the spectator is pushed upward, he regresses to the more associative modes, 'lyrical' and 'saturated'. Based on the type of blockage and its emotional effect, film genres are classified into canonical narratives, melodramas, obsessional fictions, horror fictions, comic fictions, schizoid fictions, and metafictions; in the remaining chapters, Grodal analyses conventions and narrative structures specific to each genre.

In *Moving Viewers*, Carl Plantinga classifies emotion-eliciting mechanisms in mainstream Hollywood films according to their duration: intense but brief emotions, such as surprise and shock versus long-range, compound emotions, such as suspense and anticipation. Similar ideas were formerly expressed by Greg Smith, as part of the discussion on emotion, emotion episode and mood (2003: 39). Plantinga's greatest novelty lies in the distinction of sympathetic and distanced narratives: certain genres (i.e., melodrama) seek to elicit the feelings of sadness, longing and compassion, while others (i.e., drama, thriller) attempt to evoke more detached feelings, such as respect or disdain. Sympathetic narratives prompt an empathic response to characters, particularly when those face hardships – Platinga calls it 'the paradox of negative emotion' (2009: 173). Distanced narratives, typically associated with arthouse but also pervasive in Hollywood cinema, invite the viewer to adopt a 'critical, sometimes humorous, and occasionally cynical perspective' (ibid, 171). We need not look any further in Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre

than *Chungking Express – Fallen Angels* diptych to illustrate the differences between sympathetic and distanced narratives.

Having reviewed the most influential treaties of the cognitive theory, it is safe to say that a number of arguments proposed by the cognitivists resonate with formalism. In fact, the leading proponents of this theory, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, have repeatedly refuted their neoformalist status, despite having strong links to Russian formalist theory. The latter emerged at the turn of the ninetieth century in the field of literary studies. Formalists proposed to examine the text as a self-contained object, eschewing the historical context, biographical allusions, psychoanalytical aspects and particular reader responses. They believed the text to be the only site of meaning, and therefore studied its formal elements – *fabula, syuzhet*, character, setting, imagery, point of view, diction, and literary devices (such as metaphor, repetition, parallelism, foreshadowing, suspense, irony, defamiliarization) – and how these elements work together to convey the meaning and achieve a certain effect. Formalism negates reader's agency and posits that the best literary works have the same impact on readers of all eras. Here lies the crucial difference between the formalist and cognitive theories: 'Comprehending and interpreting a literary text, a painting, a play, or a film constitutes an activity in which the perceiver plays a central role. The text is inert until a reader or listener or spectator does something to and with it' (Bordwell, 1989: 2). At the same time, we should also note that, while cognitivists include the audience in the creative process, they deal with a homogenous, idealized and ahistorical spectatorship. While it stands clear that the meaning of the text and the emotional response to it should be distinct for each reader, depending on his or her race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, personal experience and ideology, idiosyncratic emotional responses lie beyond the scope of the cognitive theory.

A lack of concern for historical and cultural differences has often been quoted as the main drawback of the cognitivist approach (Stam, 2000: 240; 2001: 280; Zizek, 2001: 17). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson sought a viable alternative and introduced the method of neoformalist historical poetics. As the name suggests, it is a formalist approach with emphasis on socio-historical milieu. By applying this methodology to the study of Wong Kar-wai, I could account for the practicalities of film production in the 1990-2010s' Hong Kong and elucidate the particular ways of audience targeting. I could also discuss the interpretation of Wong's films, as neoformalist historical poetics insists that the viewer plays an active role in the construction of text by selecting cues, framing

expectations and constructing all sorts of meaning – even subject matter and abstract ideas (which Bordwell and Thompson also call formal elements) 'become somewhat different from what they might be outside the work,' depending on the spectator's reading (2003: 49). Yet, the focus on history is historical poetics is somewhat problematic: it has more to do with the craft (particular technologies, standards, censorship regulations) than with cultural, ideological and political implications surrounding film production and consumption,[3] which, in turn, constitute the main concern of reception theory. I shall refer to it as well, in order to explain the reason why most of Wong Kar-wai's films are well-received overseas, despite being box-office failures domestically.

1.5.2. Reception Theory

Contrary to other theories – formalism, structuralism, Marxism, psychoanalysis – which argue that the text holds inherent meaning, reception theory proposes that meaning is the result of an interaction between the text and reader in a specific context. What is more, the proponents of reception theory believe that contextual factors – such as socio-historical milieu, ideological beliefs and preconceived notions/prior knowledge – influence reader interpretation in a great degree than textual elements. Unlike cognitivism or neoformalism, reception theory is interested in a heterogeneous audience, although it must also be said that, unlike other varieties of reader-response tradition, it is less concerned with an individual reader than with the socio-historical situation of particular readership.

Like its counterpart formalism, reception theory originated in the field of literary studies. In the late 1960s, literary historian Hans Robert Jauss introduced the term Rezeptionsästhetik ('reception-aesthetics') in his empirical study of interpretive and evaluative responses among readers of different generations (published as *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 1982). Noting that reader responses tended to depend on their cultural background and personal experiences, Jauss concluded that the meaning of a text must then depend on the reader's socio-cultural milieu. Each reader forms a 'horizon of expectations' and his or her interpretation is the product of confirmations, refutations or reformulations of those expectations. In the field of film studies, reception theory was

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[3] Bordwell and Thompson assess the films according to their adherence to historical norms and conventions, and omit many examples that do not fit into their 'hegemonic account of classical narrative' (Cowie, 1998: 178). Cowie notes that such analysis runs the risk of generalisation and undermines the importance of film marketing – for instance, classical Hollywood 'story-film', which Bordwell discusses at length, became a norm mainly because its exhibition and marketing practices proved very profitable (ibid, 180–181).

popularized by Stuart Hall, who posited that every media text has polysemic potential and possesses fluid meaning in different contexts and cultures. In the 1970s, Hall investigated the role of audience positioning and demonstrated that, although the filmmakers encourage the audiences to take up a particular position towards what they see – by means of narrative construction, mise-en-scène, camerawork, editing, genre, soundtrack, etcetera – actual spectators do not respond to positioning in the same way. Due to their social and cultural background, personal experiences and contextual knowledge, they may accept, modify or even oppose the preferred reading that is encoded in the text. Hall put forward the encoding/decoding model of communication, according to which the text's meaning is neither fixed nor determined by the author alone, but is mediated by the viewer. Hall proposed three modes of encoding: 1) dominant, or hegemonic reading – when the spectator shares the text's codes and accepts the connoted meaning; 2) the negotiated reading – when the spectator partly accepts the preferred reading, but modifies it in a way which reflects his or her own position, background and experiences; 3) the oppositional reading – when the spectator understands the text's literal and connotative inflection yet rejects the preferred reading, because it conflicts his or her social position and moral values (Hall, 1993: 101-103).

Hall's model has proven useful in reception studies though somewhat problematic: because viewers can hold multiple positions simultaneously, almost every reading automatically becomes negotiated. As Bordwell rightly maintained in *Making Meaning*, any film may generate idiosyncratic responses: a filmmaker '[…] can construct the film in such a way that certain cues are likely to be salient and certain inferential pathways are marked out' but he cannot anticipate all of the possible semantic fields, heuristic and schemata 'which the perceiver may bring to bear on the film' (1989: 270). By this logic, Hall's trilateral model has been replaced by a scale ranging from dominant to oppositional.

The cinema of Wong Kar-wai, itself a product of a confluence of social factors and artistic influences, seeks to address different sectors of a global audience – festivalgoers, cinephiles, international critics, film essayists, and, above all, a young, multi-national and media savvy public – but it does not pull at the same emotional heartstrings for every target group, since actual spectators interpret the texts in accordance with their personal, social and cultural experiences. Our emotional responses are largely defined by the cultural framework that surrounds us, and when we lack the appropriate background –

'when we are watching films that are remote from us in time and place' – the task of a film scholar is to provide one, in order 'to make the emotive address of films from other cultures […] emotionally accessible to us' (Carroll, 1999: 34). This is why, rather than focusing on the purely aesthetic or technical side of Wong's films, I will also discuss the context of which they speak.

1.6. The cinema of Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong film industry and global arthouse

Wong Kar-wai was born in Shanghai in 1958 and moved to Hong Kong with his parents at the age of five. It is there that he discovered '[…] a universal language based on images' (qtd. in Tirard, 2002: 196): struggling to make friends due to the language barrier, young Kar-wai and his mother spent most days in the cinema that showed anything from Mandarin classics to Hollywood blockbusters to European art films. Wong studied graphic design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, during which time he took a liking to photography. He would later admit that the works of Robert Frank, Richard Avedon and Henri Cartier-Bresson had influenced the visual style of his films. Shortly after graduation, Wong Kar-wai signed up for a television training program at Hong Kong Television Broadcasts Limited. He began his career as production assistant on serial dramas but quickly moved into scriptwriting (a popular soap opera *Don't Look Now*, 1981 was one of the titles he worked on), and subsequently changed to film industry. In 1982, he was hired as junior writer by Alan Tang. Wong recalls that, over the course of the five years, his writing team was regularly assigned action flicks and romantic comedies, which forced him to invent new solutions for the old formulas. At the 7th Hong Kong Film Awards, Wong Kar-wai received a Best Screenplay nomination for his collaboration with Patrick Tam and Eric Tsang on *Final Victory* (Zeoi Hau Sing Lei, 1987, dir. Patrick Tam). Following the film's success, Wong and Tam returned to their original idea, which would serve as a base for his directorial debut:

In those days, the main finance of Hong Kong films was coming from Asian markets. So after A Better Tomorrow [Jing hung bun sik, 1986, dir. John Woo] everybody's trying to make films like A Better Tomorrow. The figures have to be heroic gangsters. Our idea is, try to do the opposite, to write a story about two small time gangsters. The first part is in their teenage years, and then in their twenties, and then in their middle age. But it's very difficult, because it's quite opposite to what people expected. So Patrick managed to make

the second part [Final Victory]. […] When I have the chance to make a film, I think, "Well, I want to do the first part about these two gangsters." And that's As Tears Go By.' (Wong qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 3)

Influenced by popular trends in Asian and Hollywood filmmaking (particularly, by the aforementioned *A Better Tomorrow* and Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, 1973), *As Tears Go By* (*Wangjiao kamen*, 1988) was a success with both local audiences and critics. The film already contained many elements that would later define Wong Kar-wai's signature style: a gloomy, predominantly nocturnal and claustrophobic setting, romantic undertones, pop songs, star actors, abundant close-ups and a few step-printed sequences. His next film, *Days of Being Wild* (*Ah Fei zheng chuan*, 1990), was also sponsored by Alan Tang and targeted at young mainstream audiences, raised on the *Ah Fei* genre.[4] Packed with Cantonese pop stars and released before Christmas, *Days of Being Wild* was expected to be a major box office hit, but average moviegoers did not appreciate its fragmented narrative, frequent voiceovers and languid pace. Wong Kar-wai still recalls an extremely negative reception the film received in Korea: 'The audience was so angry that they just threw cans at the screens, and then just shout, and leave. But somehow, I think it made an impression on a lot of people that it was something very different from what most of the Hong Kong productions were at that time, and afterwards, I think it got appreciated' (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 5). Nonetheless, *Days of Being Wild* appealed to both local and international critics: to cite an instant, Li Cheuk-to considered it 'the most pleasant result in recent years of Hong Kong cinema' from a cultural perspective and 'a marked departure from genre cinema' (1991: 37), while Manohla Dargis praised it as 'the first film in which Mr. Wong's vision took full bloom...' (Dargis, 2004).

Days of Being Wild's dissatisfactory box-office led to the cancellation of the sequel and marked the end of Wong's partnership with Alan Tang. In order to obtain financing for his next project, he joined forces with *As Tears Go By* co-writer Jeffrey Lau and founded Jet Tone, one of the first independent production companies in Hong Kong. Jet Tone

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[4] *Days of Being Wild* was released under the same Chinese title as *Rebel without a Cause* (1955, dir. Nicholas Ray), the film that started a whole genre in Hong Kong in the 1960s (*Social Characters*, 1969, dir. Chan Wan and *Teddy Girls*, 1969, dir. Lung Kong are two of the best known examples). The *Ah Fei* genre re-emerged in the late 1980s in the form of triad film, or gu wak zai ('young gangsters').

would co-produce Wong's first martial arts film, *Ashes of Time* (*Dong xie xi du*, 1994). It took almost two years and HK$47 million to complete, but grossed mere HK$9,023,583 and received mixed reviews from local critics: some reprimanded Wong Kar-wai for making a costly film that did not cater to the mass market in times when the industry was at a low point (Sek qtd. in Tse, 2013: 94-95), while others applauded his experimentation with the *wuxia* genre (Law qtd. in Tse, 2013: 95). Wong Kar-wai justified this striking departure from the *wuxia* genre in one of his early interviews: 'Traditional martial arts films are supposed to excite the senses of the spectator. I wanted my film to instead convey the emotions of the characters' (Wong qtd. in Ciment, 1995: 43, translation mine). Critical reception in the West, however favourable, deemed *Ashes of Time* 'a philosopher's movie' (Van Gelder, 1996) and 'a challenging sell in the international marketplace' (Elley, 1994b). Wong revised the film for foreign distribution in later years, and *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) was consequently recognized as a forerunner of the millennial martial arts epics (Johnson, 2008) and as 'the film during which he shook off genre and abandoned the banalities of mainstream narrative' (Dargis, 2008).

Wong Kar-wai's next feature, *Chungking Express* (*Chóngqìng sēnlín*, 1994), was made in record three months, premiered before *Ashes of Time* and grossed almost on par with the *wuxia* epic (HK $7,678,549). More importantly, it collected a bouquet of awards at the 1995 Hong Kong Film Awards, the FIPRESCI Prize at the Stockholm International Film Festival, and went on to become the first arthouse film from Hong Kong to secure distribution in the United States. American critics were quick to draw comparisons between Wong Kar-wai and cult icons, such as Quentin Tarantino (Anderson, 1994), Jim Jarmush (Thomas, 1996) and Jean-Luc Godard (Ebert, 1996):

When Godard was hot, in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was an audience for this style, but in those days, there were still film societies and repertory theaters to build and nourish such audiences. Many of today's younger filmgoers [...] are not as curious or knowledgeable and may simply be puzzled by Chungking Express instead of challenged. [...] a film like this is largely a cerebral experience: you enjoy it because of what you know about film, not because of what it knows about life. (Ebert, 1996)

Roger Ebert predicted that *Chungking Express* would appeal chiefly to connoisseurs – cinephiles, film theorists and cinema scholars. Indeed, the film elevated Wong Kar-wai to the *auteur* status, but his next opus, *Fallen Angels* (*Duo luo tian shi*, 1995), was a critical backward step, judging by lukewarm reception and scarce awards (at the 15th Hong Kong Film Awards, *Fallen Angels* only won Best Cinematography for Christopher Doyle, Best Original Score for Frankie Chan and Roel Garcia and Best Supporting Actress for Karen Mok). On the other hand, international critics hailed Wong Kar-wai as the successor of *Nouvelle Vague*: 'I felt transported back to the 1960s […] I was watching a film that was not afraid of its audience,' wrote Roger Ebert (1998). The influential Chicago Sun-Times critic professed that Wong Kar-wai would appeal to niche markets – '[...] the kinds of people you see in the Japanese animation section of the video store [...] those who subscribe to more than three film magazines […] art students. It's not for your average moviegoers - unless of course, they want to see something new' (Ebert, 1998). Both *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* exemplify Wong's conscious attempt to attract niche audiences – festivalgoers, film lovers, critics, and, above all, a young, international, media savvy public – through mixing popular culture and contemporary media, MTV aesthetic, rebellious characters and transcultural soundtrack. Following their releases, Wong Kar-wai's trademark techniques became a trend in Asian cinema: many young filmmakers tried to imitate his virtuoso camerawork, step-printing sequences and musical montage. In 1997, Wong commented: 'Too many other directors are 'doing' Wong Kar-Wai these days, so I have to do something different' (qtd. in Rayns, 2000a: 34). His next project, conceived in the midst of the sovereignty talks, would mark a bold departure in both stylistic and narrative terms.

Happy Together (*Chun gwong cha sit*, 1997), praised by the critics as Wong Kar-wai's 'most linear and mature' (Elley, 1997) and 'most fully realized work' (Johnson, 1997), competed for the Palme D'Or and won him Best Director award. Cannes' approval had a significant impact on the circulation of *Happy Together* and Wong's posterior films: Kino International secured theatrical and VHS releases in the United States of both *Happy Together* and *Fallen Angels* shortly after the festival (Klein 1997: 33), whereas *In the Mood for Love, 2046* and *My Blueberry Nights* all premiered at Cannes with pre-sold distribution rights in the West. *Happy Together* also appealed to scholars, whose politico-allegorical readings of the film established Wong Kar-wai as 'Hong Kong's *premier* art-film director' (Provencher, 2016: 489). International success of *Happy Together* allowed

Wong Kar-wai to return to his favourite period, 1960s Hong Kong, in his next project, *In the Mood for Love* (*Hua yang nian hua*, 2000). The film won Cannes' second-most prestigious award, the Grand Prix technique, and Best Actor for Tony Leung. It also garnered much praise from Western critics (Kraicer, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Parkinson, 2000; Anderson, 2001; Rosenbaum, 2001) and further solidified Wong's *auteur* status: *Cahiers du cinéma* ranked *In the Mood for Love* number five on their list of *Ten Best Pictures of 2000*, while *Sight & Sound's* last critics' poll of *The Greatest Films of All Time* placed it before such cult classics as *Mulholland Drive* (2001, dir. David Lynch)*, Psycho* (1960, dir. Alfred Hitchcock), and *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang).

Wong's next project after *In the Mood for Love*, *2046* (idem, 2004), continued exploring the same themes and characters, but as the name suggests, did so in the not-so-oblique political context: because of the references to the final year of Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems' policy, Wong Kar-wai was reportedly denied a permission to shoot and distribute the film in China (Anon., 2004). 'The conceit here is that the hole in the wall becomes 2046 […] a repository for everything that has been repressed, blocked, denied or deferred. By naming it *2046*, though, Wong suggests that the film itself is a giant "hole" into which everyone – including of course, himself – can whisper their secrets' (Rayns, 2005: 22). If the connection between the film's title, room number, science-fiction novel and 'fifty years no change' framework was not obvious enough to unsuspecting viewers throughout the film, the closing credits provide a finishing touch to Wong's political allegory.[5] On the early stages, *2046* was promoted as such (Rayns, 2000a; Taubin, 2005: 27; Brunette, 2005: 132), but already at the press conference in Cannes, where the film premiered worldwide, Wong Kar-wai repudiated any hidden messages: 'I was inspired by the situation in Hong Kong, but it has never been my intention to make films with any political content whatsoever' (qtd. in Brunette, 2005: 103). *2046* was posteriorly granted distribution on the Mainland by the China Film Cooperation, but received mixed criticism both locally and internationally. Wong continued editing 2046 after the festival, and post-Cannes cut gained notably better reviews (Dargis, 2005; Burr, 2005).

By the time Wong Kar-wai had completed 2046, he was already considering foreign productions. In 2006, he began shooting his first English-language film in the United

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[5] *2046* ends with an audio clip of Margaret Thatcher's ominous speech: 'Hong Kong will retain its economic systems and way of life for fifty years after the first of July 1997.'

States, with jazz-pop singer Norah Jones in the lead role and Lawrence Block co-writing the script. *My Blueberry Nights* (2007) took only several months to complete and was ready to compete for the Palme d'Or the following May, but the film came as a disappointment to many critics, who felt that Wong Kar-wai betrayed his staunchest supporters (Brooks, 2007; Newman, 2008). The main argument against the film was that it bordered a shallow self-tribute: 'For some, *My Blueberry Nights* confirmed a lurking suspicion that Wong Kar-wai […] was always an emperor with no clothes. Landing on our shores serving clichés of Americana instead of eye-popping images of urban Asia, the film at its worst came off as self-parody, as if it were exposing a shallowness in his work that had previously been masked by subtitles' (Chan, 2009). In retrospective, however, some scholars suggest that making 'such a simple, non-threatening film' with recycled themes, tropes and aesthetics was part of Wong Kar-wai's strategy 'to introduce himself to those unfamiliar with his work without coming off too artsy […]' (Provencher, 2016: 502).

With his next film after *My Blueberry Nights* and his latest as of now, Wong Kar-wai graduated to full-fledged mainstream status: *The Grandmaster* (*Yīdài Zōngshī*, 2013) is part biopic, part *wuxia*, part period piece and Wong's biggest commercial success up-to-date (US$64 million worldwide). Judging by its largely chronological narration and subtle cinematography, *The Grandmaster* targeted at average moviegoers, yet it also transcended genre limitations without sacrificing any of Wong Kar-wai's signature traits. It won several important awards domestically and internationally: twelve Hong Kong Film Awards, including Best Film and Best Director, two Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards (Best Film and Best Actress), seven Golden Horse awards, Best Director at the 2014 Beijing International Film Festival and two Academy nominations (Best Cinematography and Best Costume Design). In the West, the film received largely positive comments, with several mentions of well-justified intertextuality: '[…] there is the sort of dolorous longing Wong has conveyed beautifully in previous films […] *The Grandmaster* ultimately blends right in with Wong's body of work […]' (Rodriguez, 2013).

Due to consistent aesthetics and motifs, re-usable cast and soundtrack, pervasive milieu and characters, Wong Kar-wai's entire filmography forms an overarching narrative in which each text reads as 'a reflection or extension of the others' (Dissanayake, 2003: 3). Recurrent stylistic and thematic tropes, as well as Wong's frequent application of arthouse

conventions – such as emphasis on mise-en-scène and cinematography, ambivalent mood, fragmentation and open endings – may prompt us to analyse his oeuvre from an *auteurist* perspective. However, in juxtaposing arthouse and commercial cinema, *auteur* approach tends to neglect the empirical conditions of film production and reception. As I am about to show, rather than rebelling against the Hong Kong entertainment industry, Wong Kar-wai adopted the norms of genre and stardom as selling-points, and his most recent projects (*The Grandmaster* martial arts epic and the upcoming *Tong Wars* series) manifest a shift towards the expanding mainland market and transnational mainstream public.

Admittedly, Wong Kar-wai's films have rarely been commercially successful in Hong Kong – *As Tears Go By* and *The Grandmaster* are his only domestic box office hits. But far from being the *enfant terrible* of Hong Kong entertainment industry or the tortured artist, he became a favourite of local actors and critics, while making profit from international acclaim and foreign distribution. As Wong himself puts it, '[l]ooking for revenue and reducing costs […] has always been my way. If you are the kind of director who wants to make your own films, you have to find a space to survive. […] I constantly have to accommodate the overseas market […]' (qtd. in Mak, 1995: 67). In catering to the tastes and demands of different markets, Wong Kar-wai is quite representative of the Hong Kong film industry, which has traditionally relied on international distribution:

[…] Hong Kong film genres have developed in tandem with changes to Hong Kong's political, economic and social environment. […] the popularity of film genres in the 1930s and 1940s – martial arts films, anti-Japanese war films, and social realist Cantonese melodrama – reflected the impact of China's national politics in Hong Kong. The popularity of certain types of films in the 1950s and 1960s – Cantonese opera films and Mandarin Huangmei xi, Cantonese martial arts films, Mandarin historical melodrama, Cantonese melodrama, filmic adaptations of classical Chinese literature, and a certain proportion of other dialects in Hakka and Minnan films – certainly shows a lack of Hong Kong cultural identity in local film genres. (Chu, 2003: 67)

When China banned the import of Hong Kong films circa 1952, local industry sought other markets outside its geographical borders – Chinese diasporic communities in nearby countries and overseas. In a few years' time, exports to Southeast Asia alone accounted

for one-third of total gross sales (Leung and Chan, 1997: 145), and Hong Kong entertainment sector was increasingly focused on quick, inexpensive and lucrative productions. By the late 1970s, Hong Kong film industry dominated the Asian region, and there was a notable surge of independent filmmakers, many of whom studied abroad and returned home to work in television. Directors like Stanley Kwan, Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Patrick Tam, Shu Shuen, Allen Fong combined Western cinematic traditions and Eastern sensibility, experimental techniques and delicate topics. The first Hong Kong New Wave stepped outside of the action-oriented genres to make intimate and political films which enjoyed success at international film festivals and contributed to the revival of local industry from within. Taking a cue from this directors, the Second New Wave, to which Wong Kar-wai belongs, continued exploring the themes of alienation, displacement and fractured identity. Paradoxically, this has proved to be an effective method at attracting global audiences – the new Hong Kong cinema was 'most international […] by being local' (Abbas, 1997: 190). As Gary Bettinson rightly notes (2015: 24), Wong Kar-wai's entry onto the festival market was facilitated by the offbeat Hong Kong productions that preceded his films: *Peking Opera Blues* (*Do ma daan*, 1986, dir. Sally Yeh), *Rouge* (*Yin ji kau*, 1988, dir. Stanley Kwan) and *The Killer* (*Dip huet seung hung*, 1989, dir. John Woo). Screenings in Venice, Locarno, Toronto, New York, London, Stockholm, San Sebastian, Berlin and, above all, Cannes had a significant impact on the circulation of Wong's films and his lightning rise to fame.

However, following the recession of the late 1990s (rapid decline in local attendance, piracy and tough co-production conditions are some of its causes), Hong Kong film industry had to search for new outlets: Japan, South Korea, various European markets (France, Italy, Germany) and 'many other parts of the world (such as Africa and the Middle East) that we tend to overlook' (Teo, 2000). It was a common practice in Hong Kong at the time to release different versions for different markets, and it is an example Wong Kar-wai has followed throughout his career: most of his films exist in two or three cuts, with varying duration (*The Grandmaster*), order (*Ashes of Time*) and sometimes even meaning (*Days of Being Wild, 2046*). Over the last decade, Hong Kong has had little presence at international festivals. The number of local film, excluding those made in co-production with China, has also dropped dramatically: from 400 films a year in the mid-1990s, to only 19 in 2016. At the same time, the mainland market has been experiencing an unprecedented rise – the Chinese box office approached a seven-billion dollar mark in

2016 (Ge, 2017) and the number of local productions skyrocketed to 772. An increasing involvement of top Cantonese filmmakers – Wong Kar-wai, Andrew Lau, John Woo, Wong Jing, Dante Lam – in Chinese co-productions – demonstrates that the future of Hong Kong film industry is now irrevocably tied to that of China.

Already Wong's last film, *The Grandmaster*, catered to mainland audiences and average moviegoers: '[…] I wanted to make a commercial and colourful film that really has a message about […] the golden periods of the development of martial arts in China,' he said in an interview (qtd. in Patten, 2013). In 2016, Wong Kar-wai went even further by signing a deal with Huanxi Media Group, an emerging content provider in the Chinese market, which has greenlighted a number of films and series from Hong Kong. Wong has been reported since to be working on a two-season drama series with an average budget of three million dollars per episode (Nordine, 2016) – by comparison, his most expensive feature film to date cost $38.6 million (*The Grandmaster*). While no further details on the Huanxi collaboration have been revealed so far, last year Wong Kar-wai surprised the fans and critics announcing his involvement with Amazon. The company was the first streaming service to receive Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture for *Manchester by the Sea* (dir. Kenneth Lonergan) and Best Foreign Picture for *The Salesman* (*Forushandeh*, dir. Asghar Farhadi, won) in 2016. Amazon has also gathered several important awards for its original shows: *Transparent* (2015, three Golden Globes), *Mozart in the Jungle* (2016, two Golden Globes), and *Man in the High Castle* (2016, two Emmy Awards), and starting this year, Amazon Studios invest exclusively in shows with global appeal that can generate discussions and drive subscriptions. *Tong Wars*, currently on the stage of principal photography, is indicative of this new direction. It is also symptomatic of Wong Kar-wai's artistic trajectory: contrary to his reputation in the West, Wong does not make films for an elitist circle, but rather caters to a globalized market: film essayists and cinephiles, millennials and festivalgoers, fans of Asian cinema and international critics.

1.7.1. Wong Kar-wai's literary influences and storytelling strategies

As noted in the introductory chapter, cinema's greatest appeal lies in its ability to elicit affective response. I have also stated that the interpretation of filmic text and emotional response to it will be distinct for each viewer, depending on his or her social background, ideology, personal experience, ethnicity and gender. For this reason, in order to explain

the impact of Wong Kar-wai's films, I will be analysing their formal elements and stylistic devices from a combined cognitive and reception theories' standpoint.

First of all, we must agree that cinema, as a relatively young medium, had to borrow its fundamental elements from other media: literature, theatre, music, photography and painting. Hong Kong film industry in particular has fed on novels, comics and popular culture, and Wong Kar-wai is no different in this sense: throughout his career, he has adopted ideas, tropes and narrative strategies from a variety of literary sources. It is no coincidence that the critics often refer to him as the 'poet of time' (Rayns, 1995: 12), 'a kind of Hong Kong Proust' (Timberg, 2005) or 'Asian version of Jack Kerouac' (Fernández-Santos, 2008, translation mine). As I shall discuss in the following subsections (see foregrounding, characterization, intertextuality), many of Wong's formal and stylistic manifestations are of literary origin.

Wong Kar-wai claims to be an avid reader: his love for books arose from the need for communication with older siblings, from whom he was separated at the start of the Cultural Revolution. In the letters, they often mentioned writes Wong did not know at the time: Balzac, Tolstoy, Gorky (qtd. in Brunette, 2005: 114). On their suggestion, he started reading *La Comédie Humaine*, the works of John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway. He subsequently became interested in Japanese authors whose Mandarin translations were widely accessible – Yasunari Kawabata, Osamu Dazai, Riichi Yokomitsu – and modern Chinese writers – Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Lu She and Mu Shiying. By the time Wong Kar-wai started working in television, his reading list had expanded to include Latin American novelists: 'I had begun screenwriting when I was reading *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, yet I had never thought of telling stories with events in a reverse chronology' (qtd. in Yao-The 2017: 50). When Wong was making his debut film *As Tears Go By* (旺角卡门, 1988), Patrick Tam suggested he reads Manuel Puig whose characteristically fragmented novels with multiple points of view would have a profound effect on the aspiring director and his second feature, *Days of Being Wild* (阿飞正传, 1990). Wong's next film, *Ashes of Time* (东邪西毒, 1994), was the first attempt to adapt a literary work, however, the film's relation to Jin Yong's *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (射鵰英雄傳, 1957-1959) 'has often been downplayed or even dismissed' (Yau 2015: 540) due to significant discrepancies between the texts. *Ashes of Time* is set in the same universe as Jin Yong's

wuxia serial but places three minor characters – Ouyang Feng, Huang Yaoshi and Hong Qi – at the centre of narration. The film serves as a sort of prequel to *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, since we encounter these characters in the prior stages of their professional lives, before each earned himself a nickname of 'Evil East,' 'Malicious West' and 'Northern Beggar', respectively. Instead of recounting the events of the original saga, *Ashes of Time* 'varies thoughts, images and ideas initiated in the source text' (Yau, 2015: 550). Similarly, *Happy Together* (春光乍泄, 1997) bears little resemblance to the novel that spawned it (Manuel Puig's *The Buenos Aires Affair*, 1973), while both *In the Mood for Love* (花样年华, 2000) and *2046* (*idem,* 2004) can at best be read as citations of Liu Yichang's *Intersection* (對倒, 1972) and *The Drunkard* (酒徒 ,1963). In all four aforementioned films, Wong Kar-wai takes great liberties with the source, encouraging his audiences to reconsider 'how film and literature can intersect to reproduce the aesthetic resonances and social preoccupations of specific historical contexts' (Deppman 2010: 101). Whether he is working on the original or adapted screenplay, Wong's *modus operandi* is closer to writing methods than to orthodox filmmaking techniques: the Hong Kong director is notorious for shooting without a finished script and relying on lengthy productions; he often alternates between filming, editing and re-shooting until the footage forms a coherent whole, or until he hits the deadline.

In his book-length study *Wong Kar-Wai: Auteur of Time* (2005), Stephen Teo posits that the Wong Kar-wai has a tendency to borrow 'themes, styles and narrative structures from predominantly literary sources' (50) and overall 'shows a love of literature that seems far greater than his love of cinema' (163). Teo likens this Hong Kong *auteur* to Alain Resnais in his ability to appropriate from a wide range of authors, and traces the origin of certain elements of Wong's films – structure, dialogue, characterization – in the texts of Manuel Puig, Julio Cortazar, Jin Yong, Liu Yichang and Haruki Murakami. While comparisons between the abovementioned writers and Wong Kar-wai abound in academic research,[6] there has yet to be a study that takes into consideration the authors who had influenced

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[6] See Teo 2005: 4, 38-44, 152 and Brunette 2005: 114-15; Yue, Audrey (2003), '*In the Mood for Love*: Intersections of Hong Kong Modernity', In Chris Berry (éd.), *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*; London: BFI, pp. 128-136; Luk, Thomas Y. T. (2005), 'Novels into Film: Liu Yichang's *Tête-Bêche* and Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*', In Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (eds.), *Chinese-language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 210-219.

the director in his formative years. Which is why, while addressing the literary nature of his films, I chose to analyse the points of convergence between Wong Kar-wai and Yasunari Kawabata, one of the few Japanese writers credited as his early influence (Yao-teh, 2017: 49). Representative of two societies in crisis – post-war Japan and post-Handover Hong Kong – both artists share a profound preoccupation with transience, alienation and memory, and despite working in different mediums, deploy analogous narrative and stylistic techniques to elicit a strong emotional response.

While Yasunari Kawabata experimented with different genres and styles – from stream-of-consciousness short stories to novels inspired by the classical literature of the late Edo period –, he maintained a firm stance on the conflict between modernity and tradition throughout his career. Kawabata's allusive style is perhaps best captured in *Snow Country* (雪国, 1948), a novel steeped in the distinctly Japanese concepts of haiku and *mono no aware*. Using associative chains and binary oppositions, the haiku poetry works by juxtaposition and implication: the eternal is understood in terms of the fleeting and, paradoxically, the more ephemeral the experience, the more lasting its beauty. This melancholic awareness of the impermanence of life, *mono no aware*, is an indispensable ingredient of Japanese medieval poetry, Kawabata's fiction and, as I shall prove further on, Wong's oeuvre. As for narrative ambiguity and free-associative structure, which Kawabata implemented to 'reflect immediately the inchoate state of a man's thoughts' (qtd. in Miyoshi, 1974: 97), those are closely connected to the ancient Japanese form of collaborative writing called *renga*. Traditionally, three or more poets would take turns composing the verses, where each stanza functioned as a link to the preceding one. The meaning of individual stanzas would shift depending on the adjacent verses – in this sense, contextual discontinuity was a perfect reflection of *mono no aware* with its focus on evanescence. As we shall see in the example of *Snow Country*, Yasunari Kawabata structures his novels rather like *renga*: as a series of vignettes with fragmented chronology, flowing rhythm and abrupt endings. Because he often abandons argument and resolution in favour of evocative mood, Kawabata's works may strike us as inconclusive or vague – they 'do not end so much as expire […]' (Cowley, 2006). It is interesting that Roger Ebert should describe Wong Kar-wai in similar terms: '[his films] capture moods and modes rather than leading to complacent resolutions […]' (Ebert, 1996).

Snow Country was first published as a short story in 1935, but Kawabata kept returning to the same characters throughout his career: six instalments appeared in different magazines over the course of two years, new chapters were added between 1940 and 1946, and finally, all pieces were combined into a single novel in 1948. Thirty-three years after its completion and shortly before his death, Kawabata reduced *Snow Country* to mere nine pages in his *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*. In fact, quite a few of his book-length works, including *Thousand Cranes* and *The Sound of the Mountain*, were conceived as short stories and published by periodical instalment. Kawabata would sometimes release additional chapters in the same or a different magazine, and at other times he would deliberately leave the story incomplete: '[h]e left many a novel unfinished, and finished many a novel at a point that seems no finish at all. More disconcerting, he sometimes resumed work on a novel that the whole world had thought finished' (Seidensticker, 2002: 121). Coincidentally, Wong Kar-wai is notorious for lengthy productions and post-premiere editing. A prime example of it is *In the Mood for Love*: conceived as part of the anthology *Three Stories About Food*, it was to be filmed in a Macanese restaurant called Beijing, where two neighbours share a secret over a meal; but what started as 'a quick lunch […] became a big feast' (Wong qtd. in Kaufman, 2009). Fifteen months of shooting resulted in thirty times the amount of footage required for the final cut; some of it was later used in *2046*, which shares the same protagonist. That film, too, had a long incubation period: the idea struck Wong in 1999 but *2046* took so long to complete that it became a running joke in the local press that the title actually referred to the release date. Contrary to the predictions, *2046* was ready in time for Cannes, even though the screening had to be re-scheduled due to last-minute editing and mixing. Even so, the film appeared incomplete – '[…] perhaps it was never really finished in his mind' (Ebert 2005). After the festival, Wong continued working on special effects and filming additional scenes for what he considers to be 'a final summary' (qtd. in Tsu-wei 2017: 112) of his career.

Instead of character arcs and chronologically-arranged chapters, *Snow Country* consists of vignettes interspersed with analepsis and ruminations, and has a flow that feels almost musical 'in the sense of a continual movement generated by surprise and juxtaposition, intensification and relaxation, and the use of various rhythms and tempos' (Miyoshi 1974: 104). Kawabata implements *jo-ha-kyū*, the same rhythmical pattern that governs *renga*, traditional Japanese music and drama. The opening scene of *Snow Country* situates us in

the harsh winter atmosphere of the lovers' reunion, and is followed by a long flashback of the burgeoning affair: the protagonist, Shimamura, is an urban dweller and a self-styled connoisseur of Western ballet, who, ironically, has never been to a real performance – he prefers images from the books to the ballet in the flesh, and just so, is reluctant to commit himself to a relationship with rural geisha Komako. From the onset of the novel, Shimamura is simultaneously drawn to a young woman whom he saw accompanying a sick man on the train to snow country. His newfound interest in Yoko parallels his sudden shift from Japanese dance to occidental ballet, which Shimamura finds all the more alluring for being inaccessible. Kawabata proceeds to illustrate the dynamics of several love triangles (Yoko-Shimamura-Komako, Komako-Yukio-Yoko and Shimamura-Yoko-Yukio) and, instead of highlighting the dramatic conflict, allows the setting and fleeting insights to speak for the characters. Yoko remains intangible and unblemished, serving as a reminder of what Komako might have been like if she had not become a geisha. Yoko also reminds Shimamura of 'an emptiness that made him see Komako's life as beautiful but wasted, even though he himself was the object of her love' (1981: 127). However, Yoko's life is equally wasted: her love for a dying man is as hopeless as Komako's attempts to win Shimamura's heart. The first half of the novel comes to a halt at Yukio's impending death and Shimamura's departure: 'Shimamura suddenly wanted to weep. He had been caught quite off guard, and it struck him afresh that he had said good-by to the woman and was on his way home' (ibid, 87). The second part sees Shimamura return to the onsen town in autumn, only to leave again after he realizes the pointlessness of human endeavours during a visit to the land of Chijimi. As we shall see in the examples of *Chungking Express* (expired pineapple cans), *Ashes of Time* (wine of oblivion) and *Happy Together* (a souvenir lamp), in Wong's films, even ordinary goods can serve as powerful metaphors for interpersonal relations. In Kawabata's novel, Chijimi becomes a telling metaphor for the impermanence of life: an expensive linen mainly used in yukatas and bedding, it requires a painstaking, month-long weaving process that has not changed since the Edo period; once woven, the cloth is repeatedly rinsed in hot water, massaged and then laid out on the snow for natural bleaching; the result is a unique but extremely delicate material. Shimamura cannot help contrasting it to his affair with the geisha: '[…] this love would leave behind it nothing so definite as a piece of Chijimi. […] a good piece of Chijimi, if it has been taken care of, can be worn quite unfaded a half-century and more after weaving' (ibid, 154). After this discovery, Shimamura decides to leave once and for all, but his plans are hindered by a fire incident at the makeshift movie theatre. He arrives

at the scene with Komako and witnesses Yoko fall from the balcony: Komako rushes to the girl, but Shimamura is pushed aside by the crowd, and he remains there, gazing upwards, suddenly overtaken by the vastness of the night sky…

'If the reader finds the last few pages puzzling,' comments the English translator, 'he should remember that everything has already been implicitly suggested' (Kawabata, 1981: ix). Indeed, the final passages encapsulate Shimamura's attitude throughout the book: instead of acting, he passively observes, as if he were watching the action unfold on the ultimate screen that is the universe: '[…] his head fell back, and the Milky Way flowed down inside him with a roar' (175). This sublime image can be read as an amalgam of Shimamura's ideal – a lasting beauty that resists contamination. It is also one of the many cultural allusions that *Snow Country* contains: the Milky Way is tied to the tragic separation of lovers in the Tanabata myth; the room Shimamura rents is named after a flower (96, 129) that has been widely celebrated in haiku poetry for blooming in late winter and falling off intact rather than dropping petals; 'fire for a pillow' (123) is a sexual innuendo; frequently mentioned dragonflies (90, 110) and moths (89) are embodiments of melancholy. James Araki argues that '[t]he value of such imagery turned symbol would vary with the degree of the reader's acquaintance with the Japanese literary tradition. To some, each item would be charged with meanings and associations that would register as kaleidoscopic flashes' (1969: 339).

Because Kawabata reveals his protagonist to be a passive observer in the unfolding of his story, it is quite fitting that introspective musings should account for the better part of the novel: Shimamura's thoughts of Komako (7, 19, 23-25, 57, 61, 87, 112, 127-128, 136, 153-155) and Yoko (7-11, 5, 56, 83, 108, 109, 119, 120, 127, 132, 135, 137, 139, 154) are considerably more frequent than character interactions; overall, commentary and reflection prevail over action. Gerow considers Shimamura 'an exemplary Kawabata hero,' insofar as most of his protagonists, rather than participate in the action, 'confront the world only by treating it as a visual spectacle to be passively enjoyed' (1993: 32). The same holds true for characters in Wong Kar-wai's films, which may be an extension of the socio-historical transformation of the transitional period: akin to post-WWII Europe, where, according to Gilles Deleuze, the traditional perception of reality and its cinematic representation mutated in response to the changes, post-Handover Hong Kong cinema embraced formal experimentation, pervasive motifs of changeless time and dislocated identity, and 'a new race of characters' who 'saw rather than acted' (1989: xi). I will

discuss Wong's penchant for passive characters in one of the following subcategories (see pages 45-46).

Another feature shared by Wong Kar-wai and Yasunari Kawabata is the blending of character and scenery. In Wong's films, the setting becomes a character in its own right, while in Kawabata's novel, two central characters are continuously juxtaposed as embodiments of the materialistic world and natural environment. Shimamura is taken with Komako's 'clean' beauty (18, 32) and struggles to separate his vision of the geisha from the cold, solitary setting of *Yukiguni* (48, 72, 80, 150, 155). The lovers' estrangement is poetically reflected in their surroundings: 'Black though the mountains were, they seemed at that moment brilliant with the color of the snow […] somehow transparent, somehow lonely. The harmony between sky and mountains was lost' (43). The underlying theme of *Snow Country* is the insoluble conflict between nature and civilization, and the alienation of human beings: like mountains, 'more distant each day', and cedars, 'each cut off sharply from the rest' (150), modern individuals are egocentric, divided and lonesome. Kawabata's setting is invested with social and symbolic meanings, and can be read as a deliberate critique of Japan's rapid modernization. Later, we shall see how Wong Kar-wai uses the Hong Kong setting to comment on similar themes (see pages 52-60).

In the opening passages of *Snow Country*, Kawabata establishes the setting of the novel as neither modern, nor pre-Meiji Japan, but a fantasy sustained by cultural memory:

The train, probably no more than three or four worn-out, faded, old-fashioned coaches strung together, was not from the same world as the trains one finds on the main lines. […] Shimamura abandoned himself to the fancy that he had stepped into some unreal conveyance, that he was being borne away in emptiness, cut off from time and place. (Kawabata, 1981: 86)

In like manner, Wong Kar-wai resorts to the metaphor of frozen time in *2046*: the protagonist writes science-fiction novels, in which he portrays himself as a Japanese man aboard a supersonic train; but the distant future he imagines is, paradoxically, trapped in stasis. Tak's journey to the final year of 'one country, two systems' agreement thus demarcates a symbolic 'entry into an ahistorical realm' (Lippit 2002: 156), akin to the

train passage in *Snow Country*. Chow's alter ego claims to be the only person to return from a place where nothing ever changes:

Whenever anyone asked why I left 2046, I gave them some vague answer. In the old days, when people had secrets they didn't want to share, they'd climb a mountain, find a tree and carve a hole in it; and whisper the secret into the hole, then cover it over with mud. That way, nobody else would ever discover it. (*2046*)

One cold Christmas Eve on his inbound journey, Tak recounts this legend to the android, who offers to be 'his tree': she forms a circle with her fingers, but when Tak approaches, moves the hand away and does so repeatedly, until she places it in front of her mouth and he manages to steal a kiss. In a voiceover, Tak acknowledges that he went to 2046 in hopes of finding the woman he once loved, to ask if she loved him back, and he thought the android, 'which looked just like her,' might give him the answer. Tak asks her what Chow once asked Su Lizhen: 'leave with me.' He repeats it like an incantation, but she remains silent, and he eventually comes to the realization that silence is the answer in itself: 'It is simply that she did not love me.' For the protagonist of *2046*, a fictional train journey provides the means of recovery.

At this point we should note that, both in Kawabata's fiction and Wong's filmography, journeys form part of a larger metaphysical focus on escapism. The train motif makes its first appearance in Kawabata's semi-autobiographical short story *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1925), whereas *Snow Country*, the post-war short story *Fist Snow on Fuji* (1958) and his last finished novel, *Beauty and Sadness* (1961), all open with melancholy train scenes. Like Kawabata's Oki, Jirō and Shimamura, many of Wong's characters embark on journeys: Chow pilgrimages to Angkor Wat to seal his secret, Lulu heads to the Philippines, Faye flies to California, Jingwen runs away to Japan, Elizabeth crosses several states before returning to New York, and Lai finally makes it to the Iguazu Falls, albeit alone. In the latter case, the character's journey echoes that of the creator: Wong Kar-wai presumably fled to Argentina to avoid addressing the topic of the Handover in his film, but instead of recreating the atmosphere of 1970s Buenos Aires, he ended up 'remaking Hong Kong' on the opposite side of the world' (qtd. in Feinstein, 1997: 40). Through the figure of Chang, Wong establishes a connection between Hong Kong and Taipei, two cities that share an ambiguous status within Greater China. Unlike Lai, who

saves money to return to his home town and recompense his father, Taiwanese Chang works wherever he goes to pay for future trips. Near the end of the film, he heads to the End of the World, where heartbroken people go to leave their unhappiness behind, while Lai takes a road trip he and Ho had dreamed of: 'I lost my way and wandered around for a while, but I finally reached Iguazu. I felt very sad. I felt like there should be the two of us standing here.' Lai then travels to Hong Kong via Taipei, where he learns of Deng Xiaoping's death and visits Chang's family stand at the night market: 'I finally understood how he could be happy running around so free. It's because he has a place he can always return to'. Taipei is compared to Hong Kong and viewed through the lens of Cross-Strait relations: even though Taiwan has not declared de jure independence, it has followed a separatist course since the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, by which Japan surrendered the island without explicitly assigning its sovereignty to China. Although Beijing expects to restore the 'renegade province' at some point, the people of Taiwan have no more interest in reunification than the citizens of Hong Kong did in 1997. Perhaps, this explains why the film about an ultimately hopeless reunion ends with the protagonist taking a night train in Taipei, while the theme song plays in the background: 'Me and you and you and me / No matter how they toss the dice, it had to be / The only one for me is you, and you for me / So happy together…'

In a similar way, although the coda of Kawabata's novel may appear abrupt and inconclusive to Western audiences, native speakers find in it a great interpretative potential. As Cowley suggests, 'Kawabata's best sentences in Japanese are distinguished by suspensions in the action and by pauses between clauses […] Perhaps it is this sense of something missing that gives his work its presiding ambiguity and vagueness' (Cowley, 2006). In *Snow Country*, the author deliberately omits pertinent information, such as the shared history of Komako, Yukio and Yoko, and prompts the readers to fill in the narrative gaps by paying close attention to every phrase and its surrounding context. It requires an observant eye and imagination to understand Yasunari Kawabata, and to appreciate the cinema of Wong Kar-wai, one must be likewise attentive to form, style and allusions that tend to repeat from film to film. By returning to certain episodes, milieu and characters time after time, the director creates a sort of intertextual puzzle, which are we are invited to solve by joining individual pieces together. Like fiction of Yasunari Kawabata, the films of Wong Kar-wai demand cognitive and emotional investment from their audiences, and reward continuous exploration.

1.7.2. Foregrounding

Continuing the discussion of formal and stylistic elements Wong Kar-wai adopted from literary sources, I will take my cue from David Miall's paper 'Feeling from the Perspective of the Empirical Study of Literature' (2007). Miall poses two fundamental questions: as to whether emotion is a by-product of cognitive appraisal or a subliminal response to specific triggers in the text, and to what extent feeling contributes to our understanding of literary works. He focuses on three specific aspects of text interpretation that 'show the work of feeling' (2007: 385): reader's response to foregrounding, the experience of being transported during reading, and empathic response to fictional characters.

Foregrounding as a concept originated in literature, denoting the phenomenon of linguistic deviation, whereby particular features of the language are purposely made salient to produce a specific effect on the reader. Peter Childs and Roger Fowler define it as '[…] the violation of rules and conventions, by which a poet transcends the normal communicative resources of the language, and awakens the reader, by freeing him from the grooves of cliché expression, to a new perceptivity' (2006: 90). Foregrounding is normally used at crucial moments of the story, prompting the reader to assess not only *what* is said but also *how* it is said. According to Miall, foregrounding invokes feelings that 'may lead to a new context for interpretation' (ibid, 390), and readers typically report that 'the more foregrounding a sentence contains the more feeling it arouses' (ibid, 386). This view resonates with Carroll's suggestion that 'through the manipulation of sound and image, filmmakers often address audiences at a subcognitive, or cognitively impenetrable level,' and therefore, certain affective responses are 'barely mediated by thought' (Carroll, 1999: 22). In cinema, foregrounding implies drawing the spectator's attention to certain elements of the text by narrative, visual, acoustic or stylistic means. As in literature, the foregrounded features in film often perform important formal, narrative, and affective-expressive functions, such as conveying additional story information or authorial reflections, building dramatic tension, and enabling the viewer to predict narrative outcomes.

Foregrounding is one of Wong Kar-wai's strongest points. He frequently plays with parallelism and deviation, and implements a variety of filmic devices for this purpose: camera positioning and movement, distortion through filters and lenses, manipulation of

shutter speed (step-printing and slow-motion), mise-en-scène and mise-en-abyme (mirrors and frames), subjective camera shots, voiceover narration and elliptical editing. Wong also plays with fragmentation and duplication: there are ubiquitous mirrors in *Days of Being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*, reflections and shadows in *Ashes of Time*, multiple mirrors and shiny surfaces in *2046* and in the bar scenes of *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*. In many instances, we can only observe the action indirectly, and sometimes the camera purposely avoids the characters to enhance ambiguity: for example, the cheating spouses from *In the Mood for Love* are either shown from the back or remain outside the frame, which effectively disorients the spectator by the time Su-Lizhen appears rehearsing the confrontation with her husband. Wong Kar-wai admits that he '[…] wanted to treat it like a Hitchcock film, where so much happens outside the frame, and the viewer's imagination creates a kind of suspense' (qtd. in Tobias, 2001). *Vertigo* in particular was 'something [he] always kept returning to' while making *In the Mood for Love* (ibid) – in both films, playacting permeates not only the narrative, but also cinematography: most shots are obscured or refracted, there is a profusion of mirrors, enclosed spaces and visual repetitions, while languid tracking shots lend the action an oneiric quality (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Foregrounding, roleplay and mirrors (*In the Mood for Love*).

1.7.3. Characterization

In Wong Kar-wai films, characterization is given preference over action: '[…] the plot is entirely developed from the characters. I feel that the story isn't important, the characters are important' (Wong qtd. in Teo, 2005: 24). Curiously, he rarely focuses on a single protagonist, preferring to follow by turn multiple characters in the manner of a traditional Chinese novel: 'A main character in one chapter may just hurry away in another chapter. The author will continue by telling another story. I think that this structure is unique to the Chinese novel. Such is life' (Wong qtd. in Bordwell, 2013). Wong's approach to creating characters is very similar to a writer's: he prefers to customize the part for a particular actor rather than cast someone who suits a fixed role; he makes necessary changes to each character while filming, based on his observations and performers' input. For instance, Wong recalls how he collaborated with Rachel Weisz on Sue Lynn's last monologue in *My Blueberry Nights*: 'So we just sit down together and we just co-write the line again. She writes a certain part and I write a certain part and we put it together. […] to me, this is the most satisfying process, because that character becomes so real and so close' (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 12).

Wong's archetypal characters are loners and drifters without clear goals or motivations: they live in the most densely populated cities on earth yet fail to connect with others. Though keenly aware of their social isolation, they find themselves unable to communicate their feelings. 'The subject of every Wong film,' claims *Time* critic Richard Corliss, 'is the combustion of yearning and isolation, the need for closeness within the life sentence of solitude' (Corliss, 2000). It is interesting that Wong Kar-wai himself should describe his films as 'single love stories' (qtd. in Teo 2005: 49) – his characters usually engage in one-sided relationships, where each member chases the absent other, some unattainable ideal, or ghosts of the past. Even the love scenes in Wong's films reinforce this disequilibrium: '[n]othing is more typical of the world of Wong Kar-wai than a sex scene where one of the participants isn't present' (Gross qtd. in Brunette, 2005: 66). In *Ashes of Times*, we find a poignant scene in which two people in bed imagine being with someone else: Wong Kar-wai superimposes the images of Murong Yan lying next to Ouyan Feng with those of his sister-in-law; Murong caresses his body but he imagines the other woman, while she is thinking of Huang Yaoshi. Towards the ending of Happy Together, usually shy and chaste Lai succumbs to having sex with a stranger in the dark of the movie theatre, and the scene is accompanied by a voiceover, in which Lai

acknowledges that he is no different from the selfish and promiscuous Ho: 'Lonely people are all the same.'

Wong Kar-wai's penchant for passive characters and loners justifies the ubiquitous voiceover commentary, which he implements not only to reflect an interior turmoil but also to advance the story. To give an example, *Fallen Angels* consists almost entirely of voice-offs: the opening 'dialogue' between the killer and his assistant is for the greater part an exchange of inner monologues; throughout the film, both characters reveal their secrets to the audience but never to each other; and for the mute who goes by the nickname He Qiwu, the voiceover represents the only means to communicate. The predominance of inner monologue in this film also serves to remind of the character's utter loneliness – after helping the manager record video greetings for his family, He Qiwu contemplates doing the same but quickly dismisses the idea: 'Who would I send tapes to? I really don't want to send them to myself.' This is one of those instances when '[…] the voiceovers do not represent […] a normative view of events; rather, they are as skewed as the events themselves, and a source of comedy or pathos' (Abbas, 2015: 116). Pervasive voice-off can also be viewed as a conscious attempt to engage the audiences both emotionally and intellectually: as Wong Kar-wai himself suggests, a monologue '[…] can be something happening inside a character, an internal communication, an observation; it can be something directed towards the audience, a confession or an excuse that the character wants to make; or it can be a reminder of something which has happened, or even a life. The audience has to decide which is which' (qtd. in Lalanne et al 1997: 96). At times, Wong complicates this task even further by forcing upon his spectators a multi-character perspective. For example, *Days of Being Wild* presents at least four subjective points of view: that of Yuddy, Su Lizhen, Tide and Lulu (we also get glimpses of Rebecca's, Zeb's and even Smirk's perspective, though none of these characters voices her or his thoughts). Plantinga is right to say that '[…] the spectator's allegiances cannot be simply and wholly granted to a particular character, but are shifting and partial' whenever we encounter several sympathetic characters in a single film (2009: 105). I, for one, am torn between Tide and Su Lizhen, though at times my sympathies shift to Lulu and even Zeb. Traditional character identification in *Days of Being Wild* is problematized by the fact that Wong weaves an intricate web of relationships around a not very likable protagonist, using him 'as a point of intersection of other fates' (Bordwell, 2013). For instance, Lulu enters the picture as an involuntary witness of Yuddy's outrage directed at his

stepmother's paramour; she goes through the same stages as Su Lizhen, with the story coming full circle as spellbound Zeb sells the car entrusted to him by Yuddy to provide money for her trip to the Philippines, so that Lulu can search for his best friend and rival in love. Similarly, Tide crosses paths with Su Lizhen after she learns of Lulu; their relationship never transcends platonic love, but has a lasting impression on him; once again, the stories connect near the end of the film as Tide unwittingly helps Yuddy. Even though the latter is supposed to be the protagonist, compelling backstories that Wong invents for each character make us see him rather as 'the first among equals' (Bordwell, 2013). We are asked to '[…] mentally part ways with the protagonist and desire narrative outcomes that differ from the protagonist's goals' (Plantinga, 2009: 105), to negotiate sometimes conflicting goals of several characters.

According to Plantinga, in films which feature multiple perspectives – and most of Wong Kar-wai films fall under this category [7]– , '[…] it is the viewer's sense of a separate self that enables him or her to evaluate and respond to such an array of characters' (ibid). This assertion connects to a broader topic of character identification. An emphatic response does not necessarily involve sharing the character's point of view, values, goals and experiences, or projecting our own onto the screen. What is more, in the works of Wong Kar-wai, identification is often intentionally blocked by narrative or visual means: many of his characters are defied an identity of their own, being reduced to nicknames (Fly in *As Tears Go By*, Peach Blossom in *Ashes of Time*, Blondie and Punkie in *Fallen Angels*, The Black Spider in *2046,* The Razor in *The Grandmaster*), numbers (Cop 663 and Cop 233 in *Chungking Express*, He Qiwu in *Fallen Angels*) or nameless entities (the Agent in *Fallen Angels*). Abundant mirrors, frames and household object are often placed in the foreground, partially concealing the characters, as if to impede us from getting too close. Distancing effect is made tangible in *Fallen Angels* through the use of super wide-angle 9.8 mm lens: Wong recalls that he picked them on the very first day of shooting, and applied them as 'standard lens' for the rest of the film, despite Doyle's warnings (qtd. in Brunette, 2005: 116). Combined with stifling locales, harsh lightning and unnatural

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[7] Only *As Tears Go By* and *The Grandmaster* focus on a single protagonist; *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love* centres around couples; *Chungking Express, Fallen Angels* and *2046* follow parallel stories; *Days of Being Wild, Ashes of Time* and *My Blueberry Nights* link together different subplots through a central character.

colours, extreme distortion of the image prompts the audiences to scrutinize morally ambiguous characters from a safe distance. At the same time, it also makes the characters, who are physically close to each other, appear distant, thus reminding us of their social isolation, '[…] of being near and yet far away' (Teo, 2005: 84). The Killer and his Agent, the Killer and Punkie, He Qiwu and Charlie, He Qiwu and the Agent look for solace in each other's company but fail to get the message across. It seems fitting that a film about miscommunication should feature mostly inner monologues instead of dialogues. Since they relay information about themselves in a voiceover, the audiences are privy to their motifs and objectives, and generally know more about the action than any given character. Carroll suggests that an omnipresent position prevents identification in the strict sense, as the viewers consequently '[…] feel […] very different from what the character may be thought to feel' (1990: 90–91).

Wiley further elaborates on this point by stating that character identification – although it can get very intense – '[…] almost to the point of merging, with very little constraint or regulation' (2003: 178) – is nonetheless a vicarious feeling: '[…] emotions in a movie are, in the first instance, happening to some character in the story. They are only happening to you to the extent that you identify, empathize, sympathize, etc. with that character. […] What we want in sensing a movie character's emotion is pleasure. This is a hedonistically-driven experience, as we normally go to the movies for diversion and immediate gratification. (ibid, 174, 178). The emotional allure of Wong Kar-wai's films does not lie in strong character arcs that involve inner journeys or transformation – '[…] that's not even half of what can be moved in a film, or what moves us. […] Some films, some characters, don't have to move anywhere at all, or very far at all, in order to move us deeply […]' (Martin, 2000). Indeed, we tend to think of emotion in terms of movement – the word 'emotion' comes from Latin 'emovēre', which means 'to move' or 'to displace' – but as Adrian Martin rightly argues, this does not necessarily involve the protagonist's inner or outer journeys: '[…] sometimes it's we who move into the film, as it were, towards a realisation, understanding of feeling, even if the characters themselves precisely never do' (ibid).

1.7.4. Setting

While his plots are always character-driven, Wong's characters are, in turn, determined by the kind of space they inhabit. The director remarked in numerous interviews that

location scouting constitutes the first step in pre-production: '[…] the most important thing about the script is to know the place it takes place in. Because if you know that, then you can decide what the characters do in this space. The space even tells you who the characters are, why they're there, and so on. Everything else just comes bit by bit if you have a place in your mind' (Wong qtd. in Tirard, 2002: 197). The setting is inscribed with socio-cultural identity, and becomes an extension of characters themselves: 'His characters may be loveable or unloveable, plausible or implausible, but they are all expressions of the space of the city itself. The city, which is the real object of love in all Wong Kar-wai films' (McKenzie, 2001). Most of his stories take place in Hong Kong, and even those pictures Wong shot elsewhere – *Ashes of Time, Happy Together, My Blueberry Nights* – are, by his own admission, 'love letters' to the same city (qtd. in Charity, 1998: 74).

Hong Kong embodies the dualities of tradition and modernity, East and West, local and global. Although ninety-eight percent of its population is ethnic Chinese, the Hong Kong Chinese lack the sense of belonging or identification with the mainland: since prehistoric times, when the area was occupied by the ancient Yue tribe, through the Tang settlement during the Song dynasty, to the 'floating world' of fishing villages that once existed in the former Castle Peak Bay, Hong Kong has been the land of transients. A constant flux of people and cultures destabilized the formation of a fixed cultural identity: some academics would even say that, 'in contrast to other colonial cities […] Hong Kong has no precolonial past to speak of' (Abbas, 1997: 2). The countdown of Hong Kong history effectively began in 1841, and in slightly over a hundred years of the British rule, the island has metamorphosed from a cluster of fishing villages into a global metropolis. During this time, Hong Kong witnessed a number of political crises: the Japanese invasion (1941-1945), the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (1949), the Great Leap Forward (late 1950s - early 1960s) and the Cultural Revolution (1960s). After the Great Leap Forward and throughout the Cultural Revolution, when fear and famine drove hundreds of thousands of people from nearby provinces to the flourishing British colony, Hong Kong's economy was sustained by incessant flow of immigrants and capital. Most émigrés, including Wong Kar-wai's family, thought of Hong Kong as 'a temporary spot, no matter how long they stayed' (Abbas 1997: 4). The director's parents belonged to the Shanghainese diaspora, and Wong claims that he made *In the Mood for Love* (*Hua yang nian hua*, 2000) as a testament of that community: '[…] they lived in

their own isolated part of the city [...] the housing problems were such that you'd have two or three families living under the same roof and they'd have to share the kitchen and toilets and even their privacy. I wanted to make a film about those days [...]' (qtd. in Tobias, 2001). While elderly émigrés kept their own dialect, cuisine and lifestyle, younger generations embraced the Hongkongese culture and gradually abandoned their dream of going back to China. By the late 1960s the city had become one of Asian Tigers, and the emergence of local identity had begun to take place. This transition is made evident in *2046* (*idem,* 2004): upon returning from his self-imposed exile, the protagonist moves into the multi-diasporic Oriental Hotel that well depicts Hong Kong at the time when it was already one of the most populated places on earth. By the 1970s', Hong Kong had transformed into a rich cultural pot and financial centre, but as natural disasters and fiscal crises hit the city later that decade, China seized the moment to claim it back from Britain. With local population given no say in the matter, the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 ended the colonial rule, granting Hong Kong half a century of socio-economic autonomy before full reintegration within Communist mainland. No longer British, not yet Chinese, Hong Kong reverted to being 'a port in the most literal sense' (Abbas 1997: 4.

Fig. 2. Hong Kong in the 1960s and 2010s.

Insular both politically and geographically, Hong Kong is a city of unique cultural heritage and hybrid identity. There is a sense of being different from mainland China, manifested in the local dialect and cultural productions: cinema, literature, music, comics, cuisine… Just as Cantonese has been shaped by other languages – English, Hindi, Urdu, French, Mandarin –, popular art forms in Hong Kong have assimilated local and foreign elements. The success of Wong Kar-wai on the international stage is partly attributable to the heterogeneous nature of his films, which reflects the hybridization of Hong Kong culture on the whole. I propose that, while building on local experience, Wong expresses contemporary concerns that resonate with audiences around the world: the Hong Kong of his films is characterised by migration, architectural changes, nostalgia and alienation, but the same issues are all the more relevant in the twenty-first century. As Simon Reynolds rightly notes, the beginning of the third millennium has so far been dominated by the 're-' prefix: revivals, reissues, remakes, re-enactments, recycling… (Reynolds, 2011: xi). Indeed, the commodification of nostalgia is a global phenomenon: these days people buy vintage goods, reproduce old designs using new materials, host period-themed parties, share memories on Facebook and Polaroid-like photographs on Instagram… A desire for all things retro is particularly strong among the younger generations: millennials entering in their thirties – currently the largest consumer group on the planet – seek to reconnect with the films, music, cartoons, video games, toys and other technologies from their childhood that have quickly become obsolete. The speeding up of life in the age of fast capitalism has only fostered the longing for 'the good old days', and nostalgia marketing has been an increasingly popular strategy among the brands which appeal to customers primarily through emotion.

In Hong Kong, nostalgia has been gaining relevance in the past three decades: a rapidly changing cityscape, accompanied by the disappearance of traditional housing and businesses, such as *tong lau* (shop-houses) and *dai pai dong* (outdoor food stalls), as well as dying crafts – the production of neon lights, majhong tiles, paper lanterns and hand-painted ceramics – reinforce the feeling of insecurity over the future among the general population. If we add to it a characteristically postmodern sense of urban alienation, political uncertainty of the 'fifty years no change' transitional period and waning local film production, we can see why the films of Wong Kar-wai should be infused with nostalgia. Most contemporary audiences, regardless of geographical boundaries and personal preferences, can relate with this sentiment, but as someone born in Soviet Crimea

and raised in Ukraine, I can also relate with the sense of loss and displacement that prevails in Hong Kong, where 'the real transition has been complex, subtle and profound […] because the real transition is about identity and not sovereignty' (Yeung, 1998). It must be said that the cinema of Wong Kar-wai has moved me deeply, at least in part, due to the exploration of those topics that are also sensitive in my homeland. When I think about it, there are numerous similarities between the Special Autonomous Region and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea: 1) both have a multi-ethnic population (while Hong Kong is home to Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Indian, Pakistani, Thai, Japanese and several Western ethnic groups, the population of Crimea is made up of Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Pontic Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Belarusians, Italians and Bulgarians); 2) both were colonised and de-colonised under similar circumstances (the Crimean peninsula was annexed by the Tsarist Empire in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War and remained under the colonial rule for 171 years, the British Crown annexed Hong Kong after defeating the Qing dynasty in the First Opium War and governed the island for a total of 152 years); and 3) both faced uncertainty and identity crisis during the transitional period. The history of Crimea has in fact proved to be even more intricate than that of Hong Kong. Located at the juncture of the classical world and the Pontic–Caspian steppe, the peninsula was repeatedly colonised: first by the Greeks, then by the Persians and Romans, later by the Byzantine, Ottoman and Russian Empires. After the Communist Revolution, Crimea was reorganized as an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, and it was not until 1954 that the peninsula was transferred to Soviet Ukraine. The cession of Crimea, though purely symbolic insofar as both the transferor and the transferee would remain within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, served to bolster Russian control over Ukraine. Nobody expected that the latter would form an independent state, retaining Crimea, less than half a century later. In the ensuing years after the fall of the Soviet Union controversies sprang up over the constitutionality of the transfer, but unable to prove otherwise, Russia acknowledged Ukraine's sovereignty over the peninsula in 1997 – the same year Hong Kong was ceded to China. However, the colonial history of Crimea did not end there: on March 16, 2014, one day after a hasty referendum, Crimea was declared independent from Ukraine and reunited with Russia. By logic, if Crimea had been joined to Ukraine by the Communist law that disregarded public opinion, the 2014 referendum was an exercise of peoples' right to self-determination via free expression of will. But given the presence of Russian troops on the peninsula and the limited options (the referendum's available choices were

to join Russian Federation or restore the 1992 Crimean constitution, which granted the peninsula even greater autonomy, analogous to 'one country, two systems' policy), the referendum was condemned as illegitimate by most of the UN members and supranational bodies. Crimea found itself in a peculiar position – Ukrainian *de jure* but Russian *de facto*. The annexation of Crimea involved economic sanctions for Russia, while the peninsula faced serious shortages after the mainland cut supplies and closed down railway lines. Similar to Hong Kong, where in the first two decades of the Chinese rule there have been several cases of incarceration over pro-democracy protests, the Crimean opposition was persecuted by the new pro-Russian authorities. Yet, surprisingly, the majority of population seem happy – like many older Hong Kongers, they turn to the past in search of a coherent identity. To me, nostalgia for the Soviet Union is not so much about the virtues of communism as it is about the disappointing post-Soviet realities: people remember extremely poor housing conditions, economic stagnation and ruthless criminality that followed the split of the country, and they tend to contrast the brutal nineties to 'the age of blossoms' (to borrow the Chinese title of *In the Mood for Love*), when their homeland wielded respect and influence in the rest of the world. Millennials who never really knew the Soviet Union, long for the time when their country was a superpower *on par* with the United States, when life was more orderly, ice cream was cheap, and films were profound. As a film scholar, I cannot help noting that Soviet cinema – which had to be constantly inventive and emotionally engaging despite the tight budgets and strict censorship – puts contemporary Russian productions, replete with special effects but devoid of meaning, to shame. Perhaps, it is the same kind of sentiment that guides Wong Kar-wai in his continuous reinvention of the formerly popular genres: *Ashes of Time* and *The Grandmaster* pay homage to *wuxia pian* (martial arts films), while *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* revisit the classics of *wenyi* (melodrama). The nostalgic appeal of Wong's 1960s' Hong Kong is analysed in great detail in my article 'Beyond Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wong Kar-wai's Melodramas *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*'.

The city of Hong Kong informs the milieu of seven out of ten Wong Kar-wai films. Already in Wong's debut feature, we find nocturnal shots of rundown Mongkok – Triad haunts, poorly-lit majhong parlours, disordered apartments – that convey the perils and precariousness of gangster lifestyle. The dwellings of the protagonist are, quite literally, reflective of his '[…] internal emptiness' (Teo 2005: 25): while staying at Wah's apartment, Ngor struggles to find a glass and when she finally locates one, it has no

bottom. The blending of character and scenery in this and other Wong Kar-wai films stems from a distinctly Eastern sensibility that understands nature and humanity as a harmonious whole. In *As Tears Go By*, Wah's self-harming behaviour is stimulated by the hostile urban habitat, while the soothing presence of Ngor is linked to her island origins. The daytime scenes shot on the said island are filled with light and pastel colours; green hilltops and open spaces of the countryside effectively contrast claustrophobic liminal quarters of Hong Kong (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Hong Kong versus Lantau in *As Tears Go By*.

In *Days of Being Wild*, Wong continues to juxtapose natural and metropolitan environments: the film opens with languid pans of the tropical forest, accompanied by the sound of a Hawaiian guitar; compared to this setting, the city apartments look stifling and over-decorated, reflecting the feeling of entrapment experienced by each character: Yuddy, Lulu, Rebecca and Tide all strive to leave Hong Kong and start afresh in a faraway land. Throughout the film, cinematographer Christopher Doyle juxtaposes abundant green props inside urban dwellings with the lush greenery of the Philippines plantation where the protagonist's biological mother resides (fig. 4); however, when Yuddy arrives there, he encounters an inhospitable, even sepulchral atmosphere. 'In contrast, on the

fringes', suggests Martha Nochimson, 'there is nothing but motion and, in the midst of all the pandemonium, moments of beauty and vitality' (2005: 9).

Fig. 4. Prevalence of green in *Days of Being Wild*. Colours are scientifically proven to alter spectators' emotional state. In all of his films, Wong Kar-wai takes advantage of this phenomenon to elicit a variety of emotions in his viewers. In *Days of Being Wild*, green is used to convey opposing concepts: vitality and apathy, change and monotony, entrapment and freedom.

The action in *Chungking Express* revolves just around such locations: Chungking Mansions, Mid-level escalators, Midnight Express snack bar and Graham street market. Wong Kar-wai recalls that his intention was to show two sides of the city, namely the day and night of Hong Kong: 'I wanted to make a film about where I live, and where I grew up, and what is very close to me […] I know the streets by heart' (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 5). The setting of *Chungking Express* is an epitome of urban alienation: while the physical distances shorten – in the opening scene of the film, the drug dealer and Cop 223 are

'mere 0.01cm apart' – the characters remain emotionally remote and lonely, even when they are surrounding by crowds. The metropolis provides ample opportunities for chance encounters, but such contacts are as fleeting and superficial as an escalator ride past shops, offices and private residences that constitutes a daily ritual for thousands of people in Hong Kong. The apartment of Cop 663, which faces Mid-level escalators, becomes a substitute for the man himself in the eyes of lovelorn Faye: she breaks in to clean, re-arrange the furniture and leave traces of her presence, such as a childhood portrait and favourite records.

Curiously, the same trope recurs in *Fallen Angels, Happy Together*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, invariably depicting a one-sided, dysfunctional or failed relationship. The only form of physical contact between the Killer and the Agent happens when the latter goes to his favourite bar to sit in his preferred chair or play the songs he recommended on the jukebox, and when she cleans his apartment, sifts through the garbage for clues and masturbates on his bed (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*: love in absence.

The claustrophobic and dark locales in *Fallen Angels*, where the walls threaten to close in on the characters and viewers alike, foreshadow the diminishing of space in *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*. In the former, the capital of Argentina is portrayed not so much as the antipode of Hong Kong but as its mirror image, a multi-ethnic port on the opposite side of the world: 'Buenos Aires looks very much like the Hong Kong of Wong's other films, and in this sense Hong Kong and Buenos Aires are repetitions of each other' (Abbas, 2015: 122-123). Much like the lush Philippine forest in *Days of Being Wild* or the desolate ruins from the epilogue of *In the Mood for Love*, the Iguazu Falls contrast transient spaces otherwise seen throughout *Happy Together*: tango bars, rental apartments, eateries and a variety of vehicles. The couple dreams of a trip to the majestic

waterfall, which they had first glimpsed on a souvenir lamp, but as the film progresses, it transforms from a sublime, exotic setting to a grim, melancholy personification of their turbulent relationship. By the end of *Happy Together,* Lai makes it to the Iguazu Falls alone, while Ho takes his place both physically – by renting his ex-lover's old apartment and wearing his clothes – and metaphorically – we watch him gaze at the lampshade, clean obsessively, and fill the cupboards with cigarettes, thus repeating Lai's symbolic actions (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Literal and metaphorical substitution in *Happy Together*.

Similar scenes happen towards the end of *In the Mood for Love*: first, after Su Lizhen misses Chow at the hotel, and second, when she secretly visits his apartment in Singapore. Like his characters, who seek comfort in the empty apartments of their beloved, Wong Kar-wai himself seems to be clinging onto physical remnants of old Hong Kong. *In the Mood for Love* is replete with images of dim-lit staircases, dilapidated walls, iconic restaurants, classic cabs and communal apartments (fig. 7) – it is the city of Wong's childhood, '[…] a Hong Kong which has been lost' (Wong qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 6).

I address the meticulous restoration of everyday objects and fashions, and the use of soundtrack in my article 'Beyond Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wong Kar-wai's Melodramas *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*' (2018). Here, it will suffice to say that Wong Kar-wai's treatment of the past is closer to the 'stylistic connotation' (Jameson, 1991: 19) than to an accurate historical portrayal, and the film seem to be '[…] less concerned with exploring colonial history than in taking a self-indulgent, backward look at an idealized, lost culture and way of life' (Cook, 2005: 6). Wong Kar-wai's comments serve to reinforce this notion: 'The whole experience of this community is like a dream, it is lost and gone' (*In the Mood for Love,* special feature interview). His childhood home is currently occupied by an Italian restaurant, the basement café where he had written his fist scripts is now a jewellery outlet, and Café de Goldfinch, featured prominently in both melodramas, closed its doors after fifty-three years of service. 'In Hong Kong space becomes an ever-renegotiable commodity within a rapid turnover marketplace,' writes architecture professor Neil Leach (Leach et al, 2004: 109). He describes how soup cafes, kiosks, massage parlours and fortune tellers appear overnight only to be replaced the next morning, while homes get created even in the external zones of the public realm. As their character changes according to the way in which they are used and re-used, temporary spaces 'become spaces of transitory identity' (ibid, 108), and Hong Kong itself becomes a 'space of the *déjà disparu*' (Abbas 1997: 48).
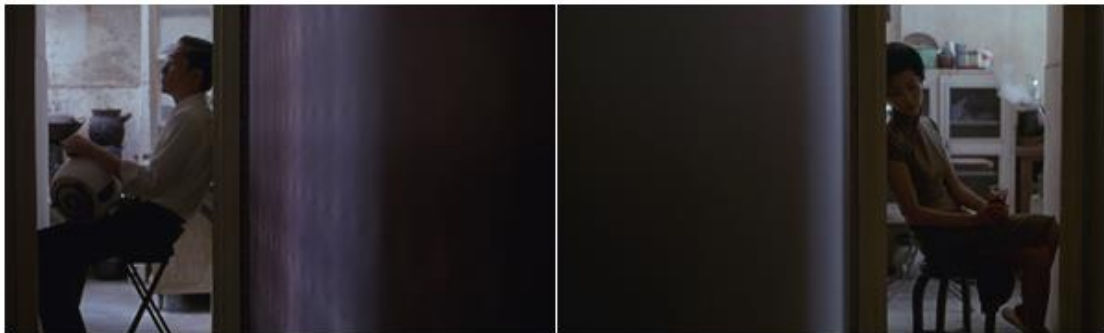

Fig. 7. Stifling locales of 1960s' Hong Kong.

As I discuss elsewhere in the thesis (see page 43), most shots in the film are purposely obscured or refracted, with mirrors, doorways, curtains and household objects getting in the way of the viewers. As Wong explains, he wanted to '[…] create a feeling that the audience becomes one of the neighbors. They always observe these two people' (Wong qtd. in Kaufman, 2001). A constant threat of surveillance hangs over Chow Mo-wan and Su Lizhen as they form a relationship in which both remain alone. The final scene of the film, by contrast, takes place on the vast grounds of Angkor Wat and is shot in a wide

angle; there are no people in the frame except for the protagonist and a nameless Buddhist monk.

Fig. 8. Not only in terms of narrative, but also visually, *2046* is a blend of *In the Mood for Love* (set, costumes, coiffures, period detail) and *Days of Being Wild* (a vivid but mostly dark colour palette with strong prevalence of green, except for the science-fiction segment).

In *2046*, Wong returns to his preferred milieu and time period, 1960s' Hong Kong, with its characteristically confining spaces, commonplace voyeurism and virtual absence of private domain (fig. 8). While discussing the film in my article 'Beyond Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wong Kar-wai's Melodramas *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*', I propose that the protagonist – and, by extension, Wong Kar-wai himself – oscillates between two kinds of nostalgia, described by Svetlana Boym in her seminal work *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), restorative and reflective. A nostalgic of the first type seeks to establish continuity with the past through reconstruction, while a nostalgic of the second type contents himself with contemplating the remnants. The past for the restorative nostalgic is an ageing fresco that has 'to be freshly painted in its 'original image'; the past for the reflective nostalgic is an irrevocable time that can only be preserved in 'shattered fragments of memory' (Boym, 2001: 61). While restorative nostalgia juxtaposes two timelines, reflective nostalgia charts them along the same temporal axis. In my eyes, Boym's categories are somewhat akin to Deleuze's notions of the movement-image and the time-image, which bisect classical and modern cinema: while one method subordinates the narrative to a logical succession of sensory-motor actions, the other breaks down the rational linkage between time and space, and instead fuses the actual and virtual, remembered and imagined, present day and yesteryear. According to the French philosopher, the transformation of filmic language was instigated by the crises of the Second World War:

'Mutation of Europe after the war, mutation of an Americanized Japan, mutation of France in '68: it is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way' (Deleuze, 1989: 19).

Fig. 9. Futuristic setting of *2046*.

Deleuze's terminology of the time-image seems perfectly applicable to Hong Kong Second New Wave and Wong Kar-wai in particular: existential crises of the transitional period had a similar the effect on the local film production as WWII had on the Italian Neo-realism, French *Nouvelle Vague*, German New Cinema and Japanese New Wave. Many theorists (Abbas, 1997; Teo, 2005; Cheung, 2008; Lee, 2009) have noted the correlation between the transfer of sovereignty and the pervasive motifs of changeless time, search for identity, temporal dislocation and fixation on the past, as well as formal experiments with cinematic language (frenetic camera movements, odd angles, manipulations of speed and sound, etc.) that characterize post-1997 films. The Handover marked the beginning of countdown to the year 2046, when 'one country, two systems' policy – the last guarantor of Hong Kong's socio-economic autonomy – expires. The title of Wong's film, of course, alludes to this deadline, and we find additional proofs within

the narrative: the protagonist seeks to rent a room with the same number for purely sentimental reasons, and then starts writing a science-fiction novel *2046* about travelling on supersonic train to a place 'where nothing ever changes.' The distant future Chow imagines is informed by the image of Hong Kong on the verge of disappearance (fig. 9). The citizens of Hong Kong, much like characters of Wong's film, are currently stuck in a place where nothing ever changes, mourning not the golden years, but the 'visions of the future that became obsolete' (Boym, 2001: 13). *2046* captures this prevailing spirit of escapism, but at the same time suggests a way to overcome stagnation of the post-Handover period: rather than attempting to restore the city to its former glory, Wong Kar-wai asks his local audiences to 'reflect on themselves and their history' (Teo 2005: 142) and prepare for a future beyond 2046.

Fig. 10. The splendour of old China versus 1950s' Hong Kong in *The Grandmaster*.

Most of action in *The Grandmaster* is divided between two locales and timelines, 1940s' Foshan and 1950s' Hong Kong. The first third of the film takes place in Southern China: Ip Man's hometown is portrayed as a growing metropolis and the epicentre of martial-arts training, where masters from North and South meet to test each other's skills. The Golden Pavilion is perhaps the most opulent interior I have seen in any Wong Kar-wai film, and this setting is clearly meant to showcase Chinese cultural heritage. Production designer William Chang uses sombre, elegant costumes, while director of photography Philippe Le Sourd accentuates different shades of black and gold, both ceding centre stage

to the set itself. In the second third of the film, which recounts Japanese invasion and Chinese Civil War, the setting changes drastically: plain, poorly furnished rooms and predominantly dark or bleak colours replace gilded furnishings and intricate wooden carvings. As soon as Ip Man arrives to Hong Kong, the sets start to resemble Wong's usual locales: narrow corridors, stairs, deserted streets and cramped dwellings (fig. 10).

In this film, Wong Kar-wai once more adopts the image of train as a metaphor for change, progress and transience (previous examples of this trope include *Days of Being Wild*, *Happy Together, 2046* and, to a lesser extent, *My Blueberry Nights*). A number of key scenes in *The Grandmaster* take place either inside the carriage or at the terminal (and one of the film's most frequently used locations is a full-scale replica of a Manchurian train station). By including this kind of repetitions, Wong Kar-wai reinforces the intertextuality of his films on the visual level. I discuss their importance in the following subcategories, *Cinematography* and *Intertextuality*.

1.7.5. Cinematography

'The first time you see Wong Kar-Wai's movies, you feel you are watching the work of a delicious visual mannerist indifferent to narrative structure....The sheer hedonistic absorption in architectural surfaces, in light sources, in decor of every possible fabric and material, and the absence of overtly literary seriousness in the plots, make you feel trapped in the world of a super-talented hack. Then you go back and take another look, and the movies change, more drastically than any I know of. They seem richer, more intricately organised, more serious...' (Cross, 1996: 8)

It must be said that Wong Kar-wai has often been criticized for privileging style over content. To cite an instance, Paul Fonoroff disparaged *Days of Being Wild* as 'long on style but short on substance' (1998: 123) and Todd McCarthy called the director of *In the Mood for Love* '[…] a brilliant illustrator, someone who can dash off quick sketches with ineffable grace, rather than a filmmaker with anything to say' (2000). Other critics argued that, in Wong's case, form *equals* content: '[h]is depth, and thus the real source of his power, can be found on the surface' (Brunette 2005: xvi). Intricate cinematography is an indispensable ingredient of any Wong Kar-wai film and one of the most effective tools in cuing emotion. As Christopher Doyle writes in one of his filming diaries, he and Wong had sought to engage the viewers predominantly through 'atmospheric' visuals: 'There's no word in English. In Chinese we say 'kong jing'. They are not your conventional

'establishing shots' because they're about atmosphere and metaphor, not space… The only thing they establish is a mood […]' (Doyle, 1998a: 24). Doyle worked on all of Wong's films from *Days of Being Wild* to 2046, and described their collaboration as 'a jam session with solos and everything else' (qtd. in Thomson, 1998: 16), stressing its improvisational nature. Both men believe in the method of trial and error, but they admit that experimentation is sometimes more of a necessity than a deliberate choice: many a time, Wong's crew worked on tight budgets and filmed in real locations, and were forced to adapt to the limits of space and lighting. 'One of the pluses of working with Wong Kar-wai,' reflects Christopher Doyle, 'was never knowing what was going to work and what was not going to work. You had to base people in the space. You respond to the situation, and then how the camera responds to those people in that space, and then the so-called style comes from that' (Doyle qtd. in Goodridge & Griersson, 2012: 28). The type of lenses, lighting, film stock, camera position and movement were pre-determined by the setting. I will analyse these choices from neoformalist perspective.

The choice of film stock and format defines the overall look of the picture: resolution, brightness, saturation, hue and texture. For Doyle, who is used to shooting analogue, each film stock has a distinct personality: 'Fujichrome is a late Edo Period woodblock heroine skirting a brilliantly blue-green wave, delicate but hard-edged, with skin as sacred and white as Mount Fuji backlit by the moon. Kodak is Whistler's old sister, well-placed, straight and no-nonsense, as abrupt as black and white in colour, as functional as a newly built shaker chair' (Doyle, 1998b: 15). We can see how, for example, Doyle uses Fuji F-400T in *Happy Together* to get a grainy texture with intense colours of varying tonality, while *In the Mood for Love* features Kodak Visión 500T 5279 and 800T 5289, which allow for greater clarity and lighter shadows. Both films were shot in the same format, 35 mm, and similar conditions – mainly, in cramped spaces with limited natural lighting, yet they bolster a completely different look due to Doyle's clever use of colours that mirror characters' emotions. *Happy Together* drifts from cold, blue tones of the exteriors to warm, yellow-green interior shots and black-and-white sequences, drained of colour to reflect the misery and desperation felt by the characters (fig. 11). *In the Mood for Love* alternates between warm and cold pastel colours, depending on the narrative situation: room 2046 is tied to red and passion, but the side street scenes are filled with bluish tones, reflective of the characters' loneliness.

Fig. 11. Colour palette of *Happy Together*.

Christopher Doyle believes that 'colour has an emotional rhetoric' (qtd. in Wood, 2005). For his first collaboration with Wong Kar-wai, he immediately decided on the bluish-green colour palette to parallel the look of the tropical forest and reinforce the nocturnal ambience: '[…] I thought the film should have a lot of green and William [Chang Suk-ping] opened the warehouse door and showed me a whole room full of green and tangerine-coloured dresses' (Doyle qtd. in Goodridge & Griersson, 2012: 27). For *Ashes of Time*, he did the opposite: drawing inspiration from the desert backdrop, Doyle used predominantly yellow and orange tones, occasionally contrasting those with the bright blue of the sky and water. In *Chungking Express*, he played on the contrast of blue-green and orange-magenta, while in *Fallen Angels*, there is a constant tension between the cold green and warm yellow – both films derive their colours from Hong Kong's world-famous neon signs. In *2046*, Doyle combines the pastel tones reminiscent of the sixties with oversaturated reds, blues and yellows in the science-fiction segments. For exterior shots, Doyle tends to rely on natural light and diffusion filters, such as Promist and Black Promist, which yield subtle highlight flare and smooth skin tones. For interior shots,

Doyle works with low-key lighting and actual props: the light often comes from the windows, lightbulbs, lamps and neon signs present on the set.

Christopher Doyle always operates his own camera and has implemented handheld cinematography on the majority of Wong Kar-wai's films (*Days of Being Wild, Ashes of Time, Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*). Starting with *Happy Together*, Doyle incorporated tracking and fixed shots but, for the better part of that film, as is also the case with *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, he still used handheld camera to create a sense of intimacy. Handheld cinematography is, at least in part, dictated by the filming locations: most of Wong's sets are narrow and cramped, forcing Doyle to use wide lenses and circle around the actors, while the director watches the performance on a video monitor from the adjacent room. In *Fallen Angels*, Doyle implements super wide-angle 6.8 mm lens that heavily distort the figures, visually amplifying the space and separating the characters. In *Ashes of Time*, on the other hand, wide-angle lens serve to enhance the sheer expanse of the desert and Ouyang Feng's solitude.

Another recurrent element of Wong Kar-wai's films is visual manipulation of time, achieved by means of cinematography and editing. For instance, *In the Mood for Love* features nine exquisite slow motion sequences which were shot, rather than post-produced, at 30 frames per second. Slow motion, or overcranking, is the opposite of step-printing, also known as undercrancking, which most viewers associate with Wong Kar-wai. This results from shooting at a low shutter speed (6-12 frames per second) and posteriorly adding or deleting frames in editing. Although step-printing technique is commonly used in chase scenes and combats to convey speed and movement (as in *Ashes of Time*, for example), in some emblematic sequences of *Chungking Express* (Cop 663 sipping his coffee as the crowds rush past him in a blur) and *Fallen Angels* (He Qiwu sitting in a café with Charlie as other customers come and go), step-printing produces a dreamlike effect. As Doyle explains in his filming diary, here the intention is '[…] to suspend time, to emphasize or prolong the 'relevance' of what is going on' (1998a: 104).

The idea is perhaps best illustrated in the Midnight Express scene: in the foreground, silhouettes rush in a blur, while lovelorn Faye watches Cop 633 sip his coffee. This step-printing sequence prepares the spectator for the realisation, already implied in the preceding scenes, that Cop 663 delays the moment of opening his girlfriend's farewell letter. For months, he had ordered the same dinner from Midnight Express, until the owner

suggested he buys something else – fish and chips is as good as chef's salad. The next time he visited, Cop 663 ventured to order a pizza – the owner was right, his girlfriend preferred the alternative: 'You never gave her a choice. If you had, she might have told you that she didn't like chef's salad.' During the policeman's next visit, it is revealed that the girlfriend has left him – '[s]aid she wanted to try some new dishes.' Wong Kar-wai addresses the political issues of Hong Kong with satire: the protagonist's reluctance to order anything besides chef's salad reflects a common fear of changes; the girlfriend's conformism, perhaps, alludes to the negation of Hong Kong's voice at the negotiating table; the fact that she prefers fish and chips to chef's salad, and then pizza to fish and chips suggests that there must have been other desirable options for the city, apart from the Chinese or British rule. But the choice has been made, and Hong Kong's only hope now lies in the promise of 'changeless time,' which is illustrated in the policeman's new habit of drinking coffee at night – 'Can't change just like that. Have to go slow.'

Curiously, it was not Christopher Doyle but Andrew Lau, chief cinematographer of *As Tears Go By* and the first half of *Chungking Express*, who introduced step-printing in the films of Wong Kar-wai. Lau's creativity lies not so much in appropriating the technique, which was practically synonymous with the gangster genre, for the scenes depicting violence and combats, but rather in applying it for intimate, revelatory moments, such as the couple's first kiss (fig. 12). Andrew Lau went on to become a successful director himself (the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, 2002-2003, *Initial D*, 2004, *Moonlight in Tokyo* and *Confessions of Pain*, both 2006), but we can safely say that it was him who helped establish vibrant colours and dynamic camera movement as Wong Kar-wai trademarks.

Fig. 12. Different application of the step-printing effect across films

(*As Tears Go By, Chungking Express*).

Aside from Lau and Doyle, Wong has worked with Mark Lee Ping, Pung-Leung Kwan, Darius Khondjii and Philippe Le Sourd, and it would be unfair not to speak of their contributions. Mark Lee Ping, who is to Hou Hsiao-Hsien what Christopher Doyle is to

Wong Kar-wai, also prefers to work with analogue and natural lighting, and frequently experiments with different lenses and filters. He is best known for the expressive colour palette, extended takes and sweeping camera movement in such films as *Millennium Mambo* (*Qianxi mànbo*, 2001, dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien), *Norwegian Wood* (*Noruwei no mori*, 2010, dir. Tran Anh Hung) and *The Assassin* (Cìkè Niè Yinniáng, 2015, dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien). Lee Ping assisted Doyle on the set of *Fallen Angels* and took over the shooting of *In the Mood for Love* when the latter was no longer available. His are the long takes of the picturesque, deserted corridors of Angkor Wat. Pung-Leung Kwan, who also assisted in the cinematography of *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, is himself an established documentary director (*Buenos Aires Zero Degree: The Making of Happy Together,* 1999, and *Let the Wind Carry Me*, 2009) and senior lecturer in cinematography at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong. Kwan accompanied Darius Khondjii (best known for *Se7en*, 1995, *Midnight in Paris*, 2011, and *Amour*, 2012) on the journey that started as 'a low-budget/small documentary-like film' and ended up as a star-studded Hollywood co-production, *My Blueberry Nights*: 'We drove day and night, stopping to take pictures of how we would like to see the setting in a film, in a very intuitive fashion' (Khondjii, 2007, translation mine). Like Doyle before him, Khondjii shot on Fuji Eterna and used predominantly natural lighting or props –neon, mirrors, glass – for illuminating the set. For the first twenty minutes of *My Blueberry Nights*, the protagonist is almost always filmed through the window, glass doors and even a display cabinet. The same visual motif repeats throughout the movie, connecting different episodes together, to the extent that every major character has at least one 'window shot' (fig. 13). Another constant is the use of oversaturated colours that accentuate ubiquitous neon signs. Because the film was going to have many night scenes, Khondjii opted for long-focus lens, and most of the shots are close-ups. Similar to *Happy Together, My Blueberry Nights* has deep blacks and a grainy texture, which owes itself to Fuji stock and push processing. Both in terms of visuals and narrative, *My Blueberry Nights* and *Happy Together* can be considered

companion pieces – two road movies shot on different continents, one focalised mainly around female, and the other, male subjectivity.

Fig. 13. Through the looking glass: *Happy Together, My Blueberry Nights* and *2046*.

The last cinematographer to have worked with Wong Kar-wai so far is Philippe Le Sourd (also known for *A Good Year*, 2006, dir. Ridley Scott and *The Beguiled*, 2017, dir. Sofia Coppola). Together, they have made commercials *There Is Only One Sun* (2007) and *Déjà vu* (2012, part III), and Wong's most recent feature film, *The Grandmaster*. Like *My Blueberry Nights* before it, *The Grandmaster* was conceived as a documentary, but eventually morphed into a three-year long filming process. Philippe Le Sourd was assisted by Yiu Fai Lai (director of photography in *Infernal Affairs* and assistant in *2046*), who was already familiar with Wong's improvisational approach, and they kept a journal to remember the position of lights and colours, in case they had to re-shoot scenes at a later point. Le Sourd recalls how Wong ordered to rebuild an entire set (which ended up three times larger and very different from the original due to adding mirrors, windows and corridors) to reshoot Zhang Ziyi's close-ups[8] two years after principal photography was completed: 'We were supposed to do only five close-ups and we ended up doing another scene, and another scene, and then another scene. So you never know with Wong

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[8] Le Sourd is referring to a quick scene of Gong Er at the waiting room that precedes the climatic fight scene on the train platform.

Kar-wai when you start something how you will finish, if you will finish the scene and when you're gonna finish it' (Le Sourd, 2013).

The Grandmaster is Wong Kar-wai's first and, so far, only film to combine digital and analogue photography. Most of it was shot on celluloid – rather symbolically, it was the last Fujifilm roll ever produced (Kennedy, 2014). Those parts of the film that were shot on digital – often in the dark, rain or snow – feature ultra-sharp, high-definition images that preserve every detail. *The Grandmaster* recycles many signature Wong Kar-wai visuals: there are abundant close-ups – particularly, of hands and feet in combat – as well as languid pans and step-printed sequences; characters are often framed or veiled by objects or framed through windows and glass surfaces; overall, the film tends towards shallow depth of field, close shots, and less frequent establishing shots. At the same time, Le Sourd experiments with high- and low-angle shots (mainly, applied for the fight scenes and dramatic close-ups) and often films purposely out of focus (i.e., when we see Gong Er, a stark black figure against white snow, as she exits the temple after taking her vow).
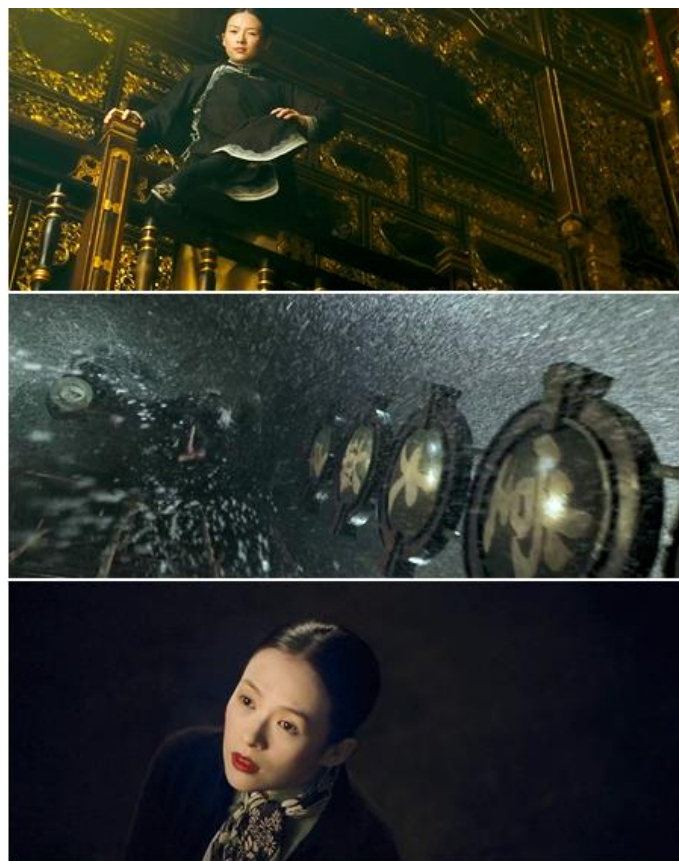

Fig. 14. *The Grandmaster* features plentiful low- and high-angle shots.

The first half of *The Grandmaster* features predominantly austere colours and high contrasts (black and gold, black and white, black and red), while the colour palette of the

second half is reduced almost exclusively to different shades of black. Sombre costumes, opulent interiors and a staggering number of extras give the story epic proportions. For their work on *The Grandmaster*, Phillipe Le Sourd was nominated for the Best Cinematography Academy Award, and William Chang, for Best Production Design.

1.7.6. Editing

Known for working without a script[9] and experimenting on the set, Wong Kar-wai relies heavily on the editing phase. As is a common practice in Hong Kong, it begins parallel to the shooting and continues well past the production stage. Editor William Chang Suk-ping, who has also worked as art director and costume designer on all of his films, is indeed Wong's right hand: together, they decide on the overall visual side of the film and, in the editing room, re-arrange hours of footage in multiple ways, testing different plot order, duration and cutting techniques. Wong and Chang carefully balance what they include and what they omit, sometimes discarding entire plotlines in the process – as is the case with Shirley Kwan's character, completely eliminated from *Happy Together*, or Maggie Cheung's drastically reduced screen time in *2046*. Gary Bettinson aptly calls their strategy 'post-production plotting', whereby the narrative's shape comes into clear focus 'only by methodical trial and error' (Bettinson, 2015: 75).

William Chang claims that his montage is guided by the rhythm: '[…] I always have this Chinese poetry [Tang Shi] in my head, and it gives me a rhythm, a feeling, a mood that I can cut to' (qtd. in Chang, 2012: 124). In between editing Wong Kar-wai's films, Chang also worked with Stanley Kwan (*Lan Yu*, 2001, *Everlasting Regret*, 2005, *Showtime*, 2010), Zhou Sun (*Zhou Yu's Train*, 2002), Xiaolu Xue (*Ocean Heaven*, 2010), Philip Yung (*Port of Call*, 2015) and Xiaogang Feng (*I am not Madame Bovary*, 2016). His personal imprint is most visible in the non-conformist, structurally challenging montage: reluctant to edit 'in a mainstream or commercial style' (qtd. in Chang, 2012: 122), William Chang experiments with the duration of shots, different cuts and transitions, ellipses and colour shifts; he often constructs episodic, parallel or split narratives and disrupts continuity for dramatic effect. Asymmetric editing, minimal dialogue, abundant short takes and close-ups, jump-cuts, step-printing, slow motion and freeze-frames. Chang creates a sublime choreography of motion and stillness, action and inaction which

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[9] What I mean here is that Wong works without a *definite* script, rather than no script at all. As the filmmaker himself attests, he still has a clear story outline and writes two-three scenes prior to each shooting day (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 11).

effectively conveys characters' feelings and provokes emotional responses in the audience.

In Wong's films, time flows differently for everyone: some moments seem to be extended *ad infinitum* (as in the freeze-frames of a hand writing in *2046* and *The Grandmaster*) while others appear frenetic (as are the chase scenes in *Chungking Express* and fight scenes in *Ashes of Time*) and fleeting (as are the last shots of *Fallen Angels*). Chang claims that he manipulates the screen time to transmit the transience of life and relationships: 'It is in this context that one should look at all my "techniques", be they jump-cuts, freeze-frames, opticals, slow motions, or intercutting between black and white and colour' (Chang qtd. in McGrath, 2001: 151). He is continuously inventive and comes up with a different rhythm and set of devices for each film: for example, in *Days of Being Wild*, Chang restructures the plot into three different storylines (Yuddy-Su Lizhen, Su Lizhen-Tide, Tide-Yuddy) that converge in the end, while in *Ashes of Time* he applies an episodic format, and in *2046*, reiterates past and present, reality and fiction in a circular fashion. William Chang's skilful editing accounts for much of the charm of such films as *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*. In the former, parallel and overlapping editing with frequent jump-cuts, cross-cuts, step-printing sequences and visual repetitions produces a pulsating rhythm that mirrors the frantic pace of the metropolis. Because Chang places less emphasis on the narrative coherence[10] than on the overall mood, the montage here is comparable to MTV videos which link images haphazardly to catch up with the beat. Wimal Dissanayake suggests that, contrary to conventional film montage yet similar to MTV, where '[…] editing plays second fiddle to the music and what is of importance is not the content or the sense of what is being seen but the seeing and hearing itself', Wong's film '[…] becomes a medium of complex being seen and hearing' (Dissanayake, 2003: 71). *Chungking Express* share some prominent characteristics of music videos: fast cutting, relentless motion, vivid colours, precise punctuation and frequent repetition. This is particularly evident at the beginning of the film, in the scenes depicting drug-smuggling preparations: incessant short takes and hand-held tracking shots, close-ups of objects, jump-cuts and quick-tempo music enhance a dizzying effect,

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[10] There are some unintended chronological inconsistences: for instance, the only time that the drug dealer and Faye appear in the same shot, the latter carries a plush toy for Cop 663; however, according to the film's timeline, she is not supposed to know him yet, as their story begins where Cop 225's left off.

as spectators try to orient themselves in the confined, hectic setting of Chungking Mansions (fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Frantic preparations inside the Chungking Mansions. Andrew Lau's fluid camerawork and William Chang's upbeat editing lend the criminal scene a humorous touch: the drug dealer recruits Indian residents for a smuggling operation but she has to constantly supervise them, hurry them, shoo them, chase after them. The sequence even features an inside-joke – a mischievous smuggler-to-be toys with a camcorder in a clear allusion to the guerrilla-style shooting of *Chungking Express*: 'We just do it like CNN: just bring the camera and shoot it – without permits, without any licenses. And we even got caught, because we shot in the subway without any license. We had a warning from the airport because we just brought it to the airport and shot it' (Wong qtd. in Schwartz, 2008: 6).

In these early scenes, the camera hardly ever lingers long enough on a person or object to capture it in sharp focus. There is confusion, chaos, exoticism, playfulness, but, most of all, a sense of raw immediacy and untranslatable vigour – in short, the illusion of life. William Chang explains:

The way he [Wong] shot it was very random and free. [...] my impression was that I should cut it in a similarly random fashion, and so I ended up using a lot of jump cuts. [...] I used a lot of slow motion in Chungking Express. It can create a very emotional effect, just as dissolves can as well. I always try to use these techniques to deepen emotion, rather than merely using technique for technique's sake. (qtd. in Chang, 2012: 123-124)

Two devices most actively exploited in the montage of *Chungking Express* are visual parallelism and repetitive soundtrack. The first half of the film draws connections between the drug dealer and Cop 223, and the quickly approaching deadline that has a major significance for both. The policeman is constantly on the phone, trying to reach his ex-girlfriend and classmates who either ignore or do not recall him. The drug dealer is frantically searching for the Indian immigrants who fled her at the airport. William Chang centres on repetitions to illustrate how daily routines may lead to stagnation and loneliness even in the most populated and energetic places on earth. It is only after the policeman's and criminal's stories overlap, on the eve of May 1st, 1994, that characters learn to break the cycle and move on. More striking, however, is the intersection of independent storylines forty-two minutes into the film: characters whom we had only glimpsed in passing during the first part now lead another tale of humdrum existence, heartbreak and chance encounter. Like Cop 223, Cop 663 is struggling to come to terms with his lover's departure and break the everyday monotony. The policeman willingly succumbs to unhealthy rituals – such as talking to household objects and drinking coffee at night – oblivious to the fact that change looms over him in the guise of Faye (fig. 16). She herself is stuck in a monotonous job, which Chang stresses through musical repetition. Throughout the film, *California Dreaming* plays a total of eight times, *Things In Life* by Dennis Brown is used four times, Dinah Washington's *What a Difference a Day Makes*, Michael Galasso's original track *Baroque*, as well as Frankie Chan's and Roel A. García's *Night Snack* are each heard twice. Inherent tendencies to repetition in songs themselves and their parallelism with repeated actions convey the feelings of entrapment and apathy.

Sometimes music works as a sound bridge between different scenes (the second time *What a Difference a Day Makes* is heard, it goes from non-diegetic to onscreen sound to non-diegetic again, connecting the action at Midnight Express and Cop 663's apartment) or as a character leitmotif (*Things In Life* for the drug dealer, *Night Snack* for Cop 223 and Cop 663, *California Dreaming* for Faye). The use of same tracks to accompany the images of regular, mechanical activities reinforces the necessity of change. The

fundamental message of *Chungking Express* is that routines, though they make life more orderly and less complicated, can also make it tedious and all too predictable, ultimately leading to isolation and insensitivity. It is Wong Kar-wai's most optimistic film because it shows characters break the routine and form a connection of some sort.

Fig. 16. Routines and changes, *Chungking Express*.

In the Mood for Love is just the opposite: Chow and Su Lizhen undergo the process of change but never manage to break free of their surroundings. Wong Kar-wai explains the idea behind this film: 'Daily life is always routine - the same corridor, the same staircase, the same office, even the same background music - but we can see these two people change against this unchanging background. The repetitions help us to see the changes' (qtd. in Rayns, 2000b: 17). Not only are the actions repeated, but they are also filmed in a similar fashion: all interactions between Su Lizhen and Chow Mo-wan take place in the same locations (communal flat, staircase, noodles stall, restaurant, taxi, hotel, backstreet), are framed from the same angle and lighted identically. At times, the only indication of a cut from one scene to the next is a different dress worn by the female lead. Here William Chang implements repetition as structural device. Like in *Chungking Express*, he recycles most of the soundtrack to underscore narrative and visual repetitions. In the first half of the film it is the melancholic *Yumeji's Theme,* played whenever Su Lizhen and Chow run into each other on the staircase leading to a noodle stall. The composition becomes a leitmotif not for a single character (as is the abovementioned case of *California Dreaming*, for example), but for a specific place (1960s' Hong Kong) and narrative situation (moments of genuine connection as opposed to the playacting sequences punctuated by Latin boleros). *Yumeji's Theme* creates desired mood among the audience and sets the tone for the poignant denouement by dramatizing the futility of characters' efforts and their loneliness. Once the spectator identifies the connection between image,

motif and melody, he or she surrenders to experiencing a particular emotion by virtue of musical repetition alone.

In the second half of the film, after Chow and Su Lizhen set out to re-enact the affair between their respective spouses, their meetings are accompanied by Nat King Cole's boleros *Aquellos Ojos Verdes, Te Quiero, Dijiste* and *Quizas, Quizas, Quizas*. Given the nature of the topic, William Chang felt that, from this point onwards, the film 'should be very, very subtle, and provide the viewer with less information than usual' (qtd. in Chang, 2012: 126). By selecting short takes, close-ups and visuals that provide only a partial view of the action or focus on small details, Chang evokes a lingering yet perpetually incomplete image in the spectator's mind. Because the protagonists are never shown being intimate, the audiences are still guessing by the end of the film: did the two fall in love with each other or with the romanticized images of their partners, was it a pretence, and did they succumb to passion after all? The deleted scenes, featured on the Criterion Collection's DVD release, answer at least one of these questions[11] but the final cut remains perfectly ambiguous, intended to leave the viewer as frustrated as the main characters. This kind of ellipsis also nourishes active engagement in the creation of meaning. Wong Kar-wai and William Chang seem to be taking their cue from Fei Mu and Ozu Yasujiro: contrary to the classical Hollywood model that implements ellipsis either to condense time or pique the spectator's curiosity, these Asian directors tend to elide informative details and dramatic moments in order to bring the audience into the creative process. The elusive editing of *In the Mood for Love* stands in stark contrast to the fairly linear, coherent narration in *My Blueberry Nights* and *The Grandmaster*, which were made with mainstream audiences in mind.

As is the case with *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*, the editing of *My Blueberry* and *The Grandmaster* is also ruled by repetition on the narrative, visual and acoustic levels. In the former, the story comes full circle as the protagonist returns to New York after taking a trans-country journey. On her way to Ключ, Elizabeth stops by her

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[11] 'The Secret of Room 2046' leaves no doubts as to whether the two consummated their relationship, however, considering that it is typical of Wong Kar-wai to shoot multiple, even contradictory versions of the same scene to extract complex performances, it may have been meant purely for the actors and not for the final cut.

former residence, now marked by the 'For rent' sign. We learn that, for his part, Jeremy, too, let go of the past: he returned the keys to their corresponding owners and got rid of his own set. When they see each other again, he asks if Elizabeth if she recalls their last meeting, when he kissed in her sleep for the first time. Elizabeth claims not to remember, and Jeremy attempts it once more – this time, she responds, and the film ends with the same song it started, performed by the leading actress Norah Jones, alongside the commentary: 'It took me nearly a year to get here. It wasn't so hard to cross that road, after all. It all depends on who's waiting for you on the other side.' Diegetically, the voiceover connects to her earlier statement, which followed Elizabeth's first visit to her old flat: 'I took the longest way to cross that road.' On the intertextual level, however, it reminds those viewers familiar with Wong's oeuvre of Lai's joyless visit to the Iguazu Falls in *Happy Together*. We could say that, overall, *My Blueberry Nights* is a compilation of Wong's signature tropes and themes, such as love in absence, fractured identity and the persistence of memory. Distance as necessary ingredient of attraction, previously explored in *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, is replayed in Elizabeth and Jeremy's romance which blooms while they are thousands of miles apart. The fracturing of identity, powerfully portrayed in *2046* and *In the Mood for Love*, is only hinted at by having the protagonist use different names wherever she goes: 'Elizabeth' in New York, 'Lizzie' in Memphis, 'Betty' and 'Beth' in Nevada. While in Tennessee, she witnesses the bitter end to Arnie's story, who is, ironically, yet another lovelorn cop in Wong's filmography. After the policeman commits suicide, Sue Lynn returns to Earnestine Hazel's, sits in his favourite chair and caresses the bar, as if it held memories of her now dead husband. Before leaving the town, she asks Lizzie to hang Arnie's bills on the wall, 'so that people don't forget him too soon.' Shortly after the incident, Elizabeth herself relocates to Nevada. In one of the postcards addressed to Jeremy, she writes: 'Enclosed is a bill I've created for you, in memory of our time together. I wonder how you remember me: as the girl who liked blueberry pies, or the girl with a broken heart?' The characters in *My Blueberry Nights*, as in most of Wong Kar-wai films, are never quite alive to the moment but are instead chasing memories, rehearsing actions or picturing a perfect scenario. We find much less conventional variations on the theme in *Ashes of Time* and *Fallen Angels*. [12] This could be one of the reasons behind a lukewarm reception of *My Blueberry Nights*

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[12] The protagonist of *Ashes of Time* retreats to the desert after his lover marries his brother; once a year, he is visited by Huang Yaoshi, who is secretly in love with the same woman. On his last visit, Yaoshi delivers a bottle of magic wine she sent Ouyang Feng with the hope that, by erasing memories, at least one of them

in the West: '[…] the same rootless, wandering melancholy that's so captivating in Wong's Hong Kong films feels more contrived here, possibly because, to American audiences, the people and places are more familiar and the imagery less evocative,' wrote a Memphis critic (Herrington, 2008). '*My Blueberry Nights* proved that Wong's self-consciously poetic, stilted dialogue and hip alienation failed to survive being transplanted from a Central food court to an American diner,' quipped another critic (Godfrey, 2015).

A different explanation for the film's lesser stature within Wong's oeuvre could be the use of a more conventional, chronological editing. There are only two quick flashbacks – one of Katya leaving Jeremy's bar and another of Elizabeth hesitating to enter the same bar – and both are clearly enunciated and accompanied by an explanatory voiceover. *My Blueberry Nights* has more instances of shot-reverse shot editing than any other film in Wong's career, however, Chang cleverly stitches the footage together in such a way that characters having a dialogue seldom share the frame, but instead appear in two separate close-ups. Chang uses predominantly close shots in *My Blueberry Nights* and a combination of extreme close-ups and establishing shots in *The Grandmaster*.

The latter film was released in three different versions – the Berlinale cut, Chinese theatrical cut and American cut –, each directed at a different audience. In the States, where *The Grandmaster* was distributed by The Weinstein Company, the film is twenty-two minutes shorter than the original cut but, at the same time, includes explanatory voiceover and title cards. Wong Kar-wai justified the changes in an open letter to *The Huffington Post*: '[…] the luxury of creating a new cut for U.S. audiences was the opportunity to reshape it into something different than what I began with […] To me, the structure of a movie is like a clock or a prized watch – it's about precision and perfect balance' (Wong, 2013). I must admit that I have only seen the American cut, but I have

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would be able to leave the past behind. After her death, Yaoshi tests the drink and it seems to work, for he quickly forgets his promise to marry Murong Yan. But when Feng finally takes a sip near the end of the film, he discovers that magical oblivion is useless: 'The more you try to forget, the better you'll remember.' In *Fallen Angels*, the burden of memory is stressed at every turn: first, the protagonist encodes a farewell message for his partner in a song ('Forget him, and it's like forgetting everything. All sense of direction seems lost, like losing oneself'), then, he finds a surrogate for his affections, who happens to be a woman fixated on making a lasting impression. Punkie wears flashy clothes, exaggerates her every move and even dyes her hair blond in order to be unforgettable. When her affair with the killer is over, she bites him hard to leave a tangible trace of her presence: 'It you don't remember my face, at least you might remember my bite.' He Qiwu has a similar story with Charlie: although she seems to have forgotten all about him, the mute boy claims that he will always remember his first love. The importance of memory is newly reinforced in the last third of the film: after his father's death, He Qiwu becomes obsessed with re-watching his videotape. The images of his father chasing the camera, sleeping or cooking almost come to substitute a physical presence: 'Though I know I'll never taste his steaks again, I'll never forget how they tasted.'

learned from the reviews that the Chinese version had a different pacing and order. One of the commentators, who has watched all three versions, writes the following:

In watching the Chinese cut, I now appreciate the brilliance of Wong placing this climactic fight [between Gong Er and Ma San] long before the film ends; in a conventional action film, this would seem like poor placement, but here it's intended as a fatal moment of destiny whose consequences ripple through the rest of the film, and pours out into a larger awareness of all the knowledge and art that's been lost to history (Lee, 2013).

Although several fight scenes are either missing from (The Razor versus an unexpected visitor, Ip Man versus The Razor) or re-ordered (Gong Er versus Ma San) in the American cut, all of them feature continuity editing, with many quick cuts and abundant close-ups of faces, hands and feet in slow motion. Elsewhere in the film Chang connects the action using shot-reverse shot and frames of different sizes. Interestingly, instead of fades and dissolves, Chang uses photographs and newsreels for transitions. In both cases, continuity and flow are created by inserting the in-between scenes: we are shown a photograph being taken before we see the picture itself or a freeze frame turning to black-and-white; while carefully restored news footage is seamlessly joined to the narrative – for example, reports of the Japanese occupation conclude in a tracking shot of a Japanese flag, whereas celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in Hong Kong are interwoven with images of Ip Man's school). This type of transitions accentuates not only the passage of time but also historicity of the portrayed events – after all, *The Grandmaster* is not so much about kung fu as about Chinese national discourse and heritage. The story is structured around major historical upheavals in twentieth-century China – aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, Communist movement, British rule in Hong Kong – all which affect the characters on a personal level: Ip Man loses both of his children during the war and is separated from his wife in the wake of the Cultural Revolution; Ma Sun collaborates with the invaders and betrays his teacher; Gong Er avenges her father but suffers serious injuries and develops an opium addiction; when she dies of an overdose, Gong Yutian's legacy – the technique of Sixty-four Hands – is lost with her.

Fig. 17. All exterior fight scenes in *The Grandmaster* take place in bad weather.

By comparison with sophisticated transitions in *The Grandmaster*, ubiquitous cross-dissolves in *My Blueberry Nights* seem rather conventional. Yet, they organically complement Darius Khondjii's cinematography – which makes extensive use of glass surfaces and neon signs – by adding to the illusion of seeing through a prism. If *In the Mood for Love* featured fade transitions to convey evasiveness or ephemerality, and *Chungking Express* relied on jump-cuts and freeze-frames to punctuate the movement, William Chang implements dissolve transitions in *My Blueberry Night* to give a sense of flow and condense time. The film has a number of step-printing sequences, however, the effect has less resonance when applied to fight-scenes (first, at Ключ, then, at Earnestine Hazel's), as when it is used for revelatory moments: for instance, when Arnie steps out of the bar minutes before committing suicide, his shadow seems to linger in the doorway due to the use of step-printing. The best implementation of the effect is, perhaps, seen in the last scenes of two women's journey to Las Vegas: already at the destination, Leslie admits that she pretended to lose the bet so that Elizabeth would accompany her on 'a

long ride back.' Their parting, albeit somewhat cliché, is rendered poetically: two cars drive off into the sunset after taking different turns. *The Grandmaster* reserves step-printing technique for key moment in the characters' lives and impressionistic fight scenes in the rain or snow. Wong Kar-wai claims that he wanted to slow down the action to compensate for the simplicity and directness of Wing Chun kung fu style (qtd. in Ebiri, 2013a). Filmed at 500 frames per second, a conventional fight scene becomes a sensuous, dreamy experience, as step-printing allows the audiences to savour each individual movement (fig. 17). All in all, *The Grandmaster* is a spiritual companion piece to *In the Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express*: '[…] there isn't much difference between the stolen glances and caresses of Wong's romantic dramas […] and the delicate footwork and sweeping punches of kung-fu. In his hands, a fight becomes an act of yearning. Soon enough, Gong Er and Ip Man are in love – or at least, in the kind of submerged, impossible love that people share in Wong Kar-wai movies' (Ebiri, 2013b).

1.7.7. Intertextuality

Wong Kar-wai has frequently remarked in the interviews that he considers his works to be like 'different chapters of a long book' or 'different episodes of one movie' (qtd. in Schwartz, 2008:7; Brunette, 2005: 98). Indeed, his oeuvre is laden with intertextual references: from the use of same actors (Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau, Maggie Cheung, Brigitte Lin, Carina Lau, Faye Wong, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Zhang Ziyi), locations (Central and Kowloon in *Days of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, Bangkok alleys disguised as 1960s' Hong Kong and Singapore in *2046* and *In the Mood for Love*), imagery (abundant mirrors and clocks) and musical scores (*Yumeji's Theme* in *My Blueberry Nights* and *In the Mood for Love, Perfidia* in the latter, *Days of Being Wild* and *2046*), to recurrent leitmotifs (expiry dates), to signature filming techniques (step-printing, slow motion) and narrative strategies (episodic, cyclical and symmetrical structures).

Teo suggests that Wong '[…] was clearly enamoured with the practice of serialization right from the very start of his career' (2005: 30), and we can find proof of that in the parallels and repetitions that run throughout his oeuvre: his very first characters, Wah and Fly from *As Tears Go By*, find a continuation of sorts in Tide and Yuddy (*Days of Being Wild*), Ou-yang Feng and Huang Yao-shi (*Ashes of Time*), the Killer and his Agent (*Fallen Angels*), Lai and Po-wing (*Happy Together*); while Ngor evolves into a tragic

female figure destined to reappear as Su Lizhen in *Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*. Chow Mo-wan bridges the former films in the same way as Cop 223 links *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*. Even in his only English-language feature, Wong Kar-wai manages to re-use archetypes, namesakes and doppelgangers in the American setting: Elizabeth recalls Lai from *Happy Together* while Jeremy performs the same function as Faye in *Chungking Express*, Leslie substitutes the gambler from *2046*, and 'Sue Lynn' sounds and acts like a Westernized version of 'Su Lizhen'. Wong Kar-wai is, perhaps, at his most introspective in *2046*, which is one of the reasons why I discuss this film in all of my articles. The director himself has on several occasions referred to *2046* as the 'final summary' of his filmography, where '[e]very character can be seen as a chapter' (qtd. in Tsu-wei, 2004: 112). Aside from the aforementioned Chow Mo-wan and Su Lizhen, the film recycles such characters as Lulu, Yuddy and Ah Ping, as well as alludes to Wong's works that fall outside the Hong Kong trilogy: to cite a few, there is a taxi ride motif, first introduced in *Happy Together*, and repeated shots of the neon hotel sign similar to those in *As Tears Go By* and *Fallen Angels*. The science fiction side of *2046* is later exploited in Wong's *There's Only One Sun* (2007) micro-movie for Philips, reinforcing the idea that even his commercials '[…] can be seen as "afterthoughts," "by-products," or "foreshadowing" of his feature films' (Chen, 2016: 570). For instance, *wkw/tk/1996@7'55''hk.net* (1996) advertisement for a Japanese fashion brand Takeo Kikuchi, shot by Christopher Doyle and starring Karen Mok, bears a strong narrative and visual resemblance to *Fallen Angels*, whereas the Motorola spot (1998) has Faye Wong reprise the role of a lovelorn girl from *Chungking Express*. Bordwell asserts that Wong Kar-wai '[…] enjoys conjuring up one variation after another, multiplying just barely different avatars, and draping in mist the notion of any original text' (Bordwell, 2008). I would go so far as to say that Wong's entire filmography, rather than comprising individual works, represents a single, overarching opus, where each film echoes or prefigures the others (fig. 18).

Fig. 18. The motif of 'hole for secrets', first introduced in *Happy Together*, repeats in *2046, In the Mood for Love* and *The Grandmaster*. In the last two films, it is shot and edited almost identically: Gong Er's vow and Chow's confession both take place on the religious grounds, devoid of human presence. Languid pans of the empty corridors, with a close-up shot of a 'sealed secret' constitute the last scene in both films.

All Wong Kar-wai films, without exception, touch upon the topics of memory, impermanence, alienation, desire and suffering, nostalgia and identity. Because they are often set in the same space or time period, and feature interchangeable characters, similar or parallel narrative situations, it is helpful to approach Wong's films as interlinking episodes with shifting meaning: 'Wong's early films offer useful pointers to the understanding of later films, while his later films enable us to revisit the earlier works with a new eye' (Dissanayake, 2003: 12). Intertextuality plays a key role in Wong's oeuvre, it enriches our understanding of the storylines, characters and their connections, though it should also be noted that intertextual references are not as crucial to the narrative comprehension as to prevent those unfamiliar with sources from enjoying any given individual film. Wong's regular audiences, however, derive a great pleasure from spotting links, repetitions and variations between separate films, and I will argue that the ostensible return of the identical, paradoxically, heightens the difference and innovation. '[…] it is in the distinctive way Wong Kar-wai uses repetition – as a principle of structure – that

we find the crux of his important contribution to contemporary cinema,' suggests Ackbar Abbas (2015: 118).

Repetition takes many forms in Wong's films: it can be structural (cyclical, parallel and episodic stories, fast-paced editing with frequent implementation of jump cuts and alteration between tight and long shots), stylistic (on the levels of set design and cinematography, such as abundance of claustrophobic spaces, mirrors and clocks on the one hand, and off-centre framing, vibrant colour palette, step-printing effect on the other), narrative (the use of same characters, doubles and archetypes, repetitive actions, lines of dialogue and motifs), musical (repetitive use of *Yumeji's Theme*, *Aquellos Ojos Verdes* and *Quizas, Quizas, Quizas* in *In the Mood for Love*, *California Dreaming* in *Chungking Express*). Repetition is, perhaps, the main ingredient of mood, from which the emotional resonance of Wong's oeuvre stems – '[h]is films' basic constructive principle [are] the constant repetitions that create parallels and slight differences, loops of vaguely familiar images and sounds and situations […]' (Bordwell, 2008). This is one of those rare occasions when Bordwell and Abbas align, and I myself agree: from the point of view of a spectator, the only thing more enjoyable than repetition – the pull of which, as we shall see later, can be explained in terms of hedonism, cognitive ease and 'mere exposure effect' – is a delicate mix of repetition and variation that results simultaneously new and familiar.

Fig. 19. The taxi ride scenes in *2046* establish visual continuity within the same film and with Wong's previous works, *In the Mood for Love* and *Happy Together*.

In the cinema of Wong Kar-wai, repetition is embedded in the very mode of creation: as I have previously mentioned, the filmmaker tends to hire the same cast (Tony Leung Chiu-wai starred in seven of his films, Maggie Cheung appeared in five, Leslie Cheung and Carina Lau, in three, Faye Wong, Zhang Ziyi, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Brigitte Lin and

Andy Lau, in two each), and crew (William Chang Suk-ping has worked as production designer, costumer and editor on all but one of Wong's films, while Christopher Doyle shot every Wong Kar-wai film between *Days of Being Wild* and *2046*) who are accustomed to his working methods and lengthy productions. Such repetition is not only stylistically effective, but also practical on a number of levels: it allows Wong to secure foreign funding by hiring bankable stars, reduce production costs, such as transportation and venue hire (whenever he shoots several variations of the same scene or different scenes in the same location), and make the whole filming process much easier by working with people who are already accustomed to his improvisational method.

Fig. 20. Repetition compulsion in *Happy Together* and *2046.* Two dinner scenes between Chow Mo-wan and Bai Ling are framed and illuminated almost identically: at this moment, Zhang Ziyi and Tony Leung are like a reflection of the past, but also like a future premonition in relation to their characters from *The Grandmaster.*

In Wong Kar-wai's film, repetition also prevails on the diegetic level: his characters follow the same patterns and make same mistakes over and over, '[…] as if [they] never learn or never want to learn because they never forget. […] always "starting over" in spite of repeated disappointments […] stubbornly holding on to some faint chance of happiness' (Abbas, 2015: 128). The effect is dramatically amplified when there is parallelism between characters from different films (i.e. the taxi ride scenes in *2046* echo the same motif in *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*, see fig. 19). Sometimes, the same actor plays the same character (Tony Leung in *2046* and *In the Mood for Love*), or a namesake (Takeshi Kaneshiro in *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*), or a different character with similar traits (Zhang Ziyi in *2046* and *The Grandmaster*), but the

performance, narrative situation and cinematography lead the spectators to relate individual films.

As discussed in the previous sections, repetition is also established on the visual level of Wong Kar-wai's films. Among most recurrent motifs are clocks and numbers. Ubiquitous clocks in *Days of Being Wild* seem to serve as remainders of the impermanence: Yuddy and Su Lizhen's short-lived affair starts with a one-minute acquaintance; Tide and Zeb constantly check the time, and all these characters stress the importance of 'this very moment'. Time and date play major significance in the first story of *Chungking Express*: Cop 223 sets an expiration date for his girlfriend to come back, which coincides with his twenty-fifth birthday and the drug dealer's deadline for solving the problem with Indian smugglers; 72 hours before May 1st, their paths cross, and 6 hours after that, the policeman runs into Faye, the protagonist of the second half of the film. Numerical references abound in *2046*: aside from the title, hotel room and science-fiction novel, there are references to the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong (which took place on the Christmas Eve of 1941 – the narration is built around four Christmas celebrations, which Chow spends in the company of Bai Ling, Jingwen, Su Lizhen and Bai Ling again; within the subnarrative, Tak alludes to 1224 and 1225 as the coldest zones on his journey) and anti-British riots (which took place in 1966-1967 – androids in Chow's novel are called CC 1966 and WJW 1967). In *My Blueberry Nights*, the intertitles mark the date and distance from New York: Day 1: NY, Day 57: 1.120 miles since NY, Day 185: 3.906 miles since NY, Day 251: 5.603 miles since NY, Day 300: NY. Sue Lynn asks Elizabeth to hang Arnie's bills on the bar's wall after his death, so that other customers don't forget him too soon, and Jeremy sends the same postcard to all diners in Memphis, hoping that at least one of them will reach his soulmate.

Wong Kar-wai's proclivity for recycling tropes, characters, imagery, sets and music from film to film, creates an exasperating sense of *déjà vu* among the spectators: '[e]ach film is elusive and surprising, not because it is different […] but because it is the same' (Abbas 1997a: 40). Paradoxically, in Wong's hands, repetition is meant to emphasize changes – the more things remain the same, the more striking is the difference: '[…] the eternal return does not bring back "the same", but returning constitutes the only Same of that which becomes. […] Repetition in the eternal return, therefore, consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different' (Deleuze, 1994: 41). Deleuze asserts that repetition does not change the object that is being repeated, but rather, it changes the perspective of the subject contemplating it: 'Does not the paradox of repetition lie in the fact that one can speak of repetition only by virtue of the change or difference that it introduces into the mind which contemplates it?' (ibid, 70).

Fig. 21. Nocturnal wanderings in *Happy Together, The Grandmaster* and *In the Mood for Love*.

The paradox of repetition is addressed in my article 'On Repeat: The Poetics of Eternal Recurrence in *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046*' (2016). When I began writing it, I set off with the premise that people tend to re-visit their favourite texts – films, books, games, songs – for mainly sentimental reasons. Human propensity for repetition has puzzled a great number of philosophers (Nietzsche, 1881; Kierkegaard, 1893; Deleuze, 1968), anthropologists (Garcia, 2005; Tomlinson, 2014; Smith and Hannan, 2017) and psychologists (Freud, 1920; Fenichel, 1946; Zajonc, 1965; Knapp, 1991; Lacan, 1994). Several literary scholars (Riffaterre, 1978; Spacks, 2011) emphasized the importance of re-reading for better understanding of poetry and fiction: the repetition not only reveals connections and interpretations which may have eluded us on the first reading, but also allows us to see the text with new eyes or from a different perspective and produce new interpretations.

Recent consumer research postulates that repeated readings and viewings are, in fact, hedonic experiences 'sought for their rich emotional, cognitive, and sensorial responses' (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Lacher and Mizerski, 1994; Russell and Levy, 2012). Sadly, the phenomenon of repetitive viewing practices has received limited critical attention in the field of film studies. Speaking from experience, I have found repeated viewings to be a very rewarding experience. I have watched every single Wong Kar-wai picture at least twice and returned to several films almost a dozen times. Granted that many of those reruns occurred for strictly academic reasons – I needed to double-check, revise or spot previously unseen details –, there was undeniable pleasure in returning to the familiar sets and characters, reciting memorable lines and humming along to Nat King Cole's boleros. Psychologists explain the appeal of repeated viewings in terms of mere exposure paradigm (Zajonc, 1965), according to which people develop a preference for repeatedly exposed stimuli. It has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts and across cultures that the experience of repetition 'can in and of itself enhance positive affect' (Zajonc, 2001: 224). In the art domain, repetition taps into the audience's memory of previous experience and the expectation of recurrence (Levy, 1996). Communications theorists claim that predictability of emotional arousal accounts for the popularity of reruns and particular TV shows that are easy to anticipate (Tannenbaum, 1985; Gitlin, 1985), while psychologists suggest that repeated viewings produce a sense of cognitive ease, insofar as processing familiar narrative content is less mentally demanding than venturing into new territory (Paulas, 2016). Tannenbaum concludes that deliberate

repeated exposures, rather than feeling redundant, 'are apparently intrinsically rewarding and whet the appetite for more of the same' (1985: 225). In 2012, marketing professors Cristel A. Russell and Sidney J. Levy interviewed twenty-three subjects who had 'reconsumed' books, films or vacation spots, and determined that more often than not people sought out familiar entertainment to recapture a lost feeling or to reflect on their current situation. Our digital age offers unparalleled content access, yet somehow repeated viewings 'provide the same level of stimulation, satisfaction, and pleasure' as novel experiences (Russell and Levy, 2012: 342).

Russell and Levy make a distinction between regressive and progressive, reconstructive and reflective reconsumption. They liken the first type to Kierkegaard's notion of backward repetition, which is motivated by memories of past experiences and a desire to replicate those (Russell and Levy, 2012: 347). While regressive reconsumption is closely linked to nostalgia and past-oriented, progressive reconsumption is forward-looking and can serve therapeutic purposes. The authors compare it to Kierkegaard's notion of genuine repetition and Freud's concept of abreaction (ibid, 347-348). They provide the example of Nelson, a widower who revisited the same sites, hotels and restaurants in Italy he had visited with his family forty years earlier. Russell and Levy posit that this 'sentimental journey' allowed Nelson to re-experience the past and reappraise his current reality (ibid, 348). Next, the scholars discuss reconstructive consumption, which is motivated by a desire to refresh or restore one's memory of the object (Russell and Levy, 2012: 348), and reflective reconsumption, which is prompted by self-reflexivity (ibid, 350). They contrast Ngaio's rewatching of *Battle Star Galactica* – a conscious attempt to correct a previous incomplete experience – and Naomi's repeated viewings of *Message in a Bottle*, which enable a vicarious re-enactment of a failed relationship: '[…] this story allows each reexperience to mine deeper into her own issues, because, even though "you exactly know what's coming up, there's so many layers and every time you rewatch it you find a few new things that you haven't really thought about before" (Russell and Levy, 2012: 350).

Indeed, the content remains unchanged yet certain films affect us in a completely different way after each viewing: 'The movie never changes… But every time you see it, it seems different…,' muses the protagonist of *Twelve Monkeys* while re-watching *Vertigo*. The same holds true for Wong Kar-wai's stories: whenever I return to *In the Mood for Love, 2046, Chungking Express* or *Happy Together*, I rediscover them in a more intimate way,

noticing clues that had previously eluded the gaze, admiring the cinematic complexity and reflecting on their meaning. 'Whether it brings up something forgotten or something previously ignored, the evocation and reevocation of elements […] keep each reexperience fresh and novel, altogether enriching it,' write Russell and Levy (2012: 353), and I completely agree: in my case, each subsequent viewing only enhanced the affective response, leading me to appreciate Wong's films the more often I watched them. There is a pull of repetition beyond their narratives and visuals, in the very fact that many viewers like myself return to these films in search of clarifications and inspiration. By imbuing each of his works with intra-oeuvral references, Wong Kar-wai encourages us to return to familiar places at different times of our lives, to re-discover subtle connections and reveal something new about his films and about us, the spectators.

1.8. Methodology

The methodology applied in this thesis is predominantly qualitative. It is based, first on the compilation of information – which, in my case, is coming from Wong Kar-wai's films, as well as from books, interviews and articles dedicated to the director – followed by a rigorous interpretation of the obtained data. In the past decade, content analysis has become an increasingly popular technique within communication studies, as it allows the researchers to analyse the media in their social, historical, and temporal contexts. Rather than dealing with statics and measurements, as quantitative research does, qualitative methodology is concerned with language, human experiences, opinions and motivations. It seeks in-depth understanding of recurrent patterns, symbols and themes and adopts a holistic perspective to explain the dynamics between different phenomena.

Qualitative work requires prolonged reflection and intimate relationship with the subject matter on the part of researcher, which may sometimes lead to personal biases in the interpretation of data. While taking a subjective perspective is unavoidable, it is imperative to maintain internal coherence throughout the study and insure that such analysis reflects the nature of the phenomenon being investigated. To accomplish the goal of this research, I have found it necessary to apply a multi-dimensional approach that incorporates different theories (cognitivism, neoformalism, reception studies) and additional disciplines (philosophy, comparative literature, cultural studies). A number of arguments in this thesis are informed by the writings on post-colonialism, Hong Kong

culture and cinema of professor Ackbar Abbas, American film theorist David Bordwell, cultural critic Rey Chow and scholar of Asian cinemas Stephen Teo, as well as by the concepts of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (movement-image and time-image) and Russian-American academic Svetlana Boym (restorative and reflective nostalgia). The applied methodology also touches on the dynamics of film production and reception. For this reason, while analysing the oeuvre of Wong Kar-wai, I discuss both practical conditions of its creation, the director's place within Hong Kong entertainment industry and international arthouse circle, as well as the impact of his films on transcultural spectators.

The thesis is structured in the following manner: firstly, I discuss Wong Kar-Wai's trajectory – from working in genre filmmaking to making low-budget independent films to developing online series – in order to understand his methods and target audience; secondly, I survey Wong's major influences and his re-interpretation of literary concepts; thirdly, I proceed to scrutinize recurrent formal and stylistic elements of his films. The conclusions are presented in the form of three academic articles.

CHAPTER II. RESULTS

This being a compilation thesis, implies that the results are presented in the form of published articles. Presenting a thesis by publication has several drawbacks, compared to a conventional PhD process, which provides an opportunity to delve deep into a specific subject and test multiple assumptions throughout a monograph. While writing this thesis, I have encountered several problems related to the publishing process: firstly, I struggled to find thematic call for papers or relevant journals that would be interested in the analyses of Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre, given that the director has not released anything since 2013. Secondly, considering lengthy publishing times, there was a risk of the essays losing their relevance, or expressing mutually contradictory views in retrospective. I recognize now that my interpretations of various sources have changed over the many readings, and some of them may have been deployed in different ways across the essays. Nonetheless, given the topic of my dissertation and current tendencies in the field of film studies, a thesis by publication has proved to be a viable alternative to the traditional monograph format. This format was more appropriate for the purposes of my study and my personality, as it allowed me to plan and execute a research project efficiently from the early stages, to approach a complex phenomenon from different angles, and to test the central hypothesis using various methodologies. Below is a summary of the published articles.

In my first article, 'On Repeat: The Poetics of Eternal Recurrence in *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046*' (2016), I adopt the Deleuzean taxonomy of the movement-image and the time-image for a comparative analysis of *2046*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Vertigo*, three films that share formal and stylistic elements, provoke powerful emotional responses and reward repeated viewings. The French philosopher differentiates three kinds of movement-image: perception-image, action-image, and affection-image. In classic cinema, the perception-image works as a point of view, contrasting subjective vision with objective images; the action-image structures the space surrounding these images; and the affection-image occupies the gap between the two in connecting outer perceptions, inner states and motor responses. Deleuze provides two types of the affection-image: the close-up, in which any face, or an inanimate object (for example, a murder weapon) acquires expressive capacity, and any-space-whatsoever, in which the location becomes a vehicle for affect. Deleuze designates structural closeness of the affection-image to the time-image, but then conceives a forth type of the movement-image that functions as a prelude to the crisis of classical cinema – the relation-image.

According to Deleuze, it was introduced by Hitchcock: the authors cites the close-up of a key in *Notorious* as a prime example of the relation-image, since this single image contains within it a whole set of abstract relations (1986b: 204). The significance of such images lies not in the depicted object, but in its relation to other objects, actions, and plot. Consider the hole for secrets in *2046*, ill-fated necklace in *Vertigo*, or the game of Nim in *Last Year at Marienbad*, which function as symbols. Combined with the perception, affection and action, this type of image forms a 'chain of relations which constitutes the mental image […]' (Deleuze, 1986b: 200). Deleuze suggests that, in using the relation-image, Hitchcock 'brings to completion the whole of cinema by pushing the movement-image to its limit' (1986b: 204). In modern cinema, a new type of image emerges, characterised by the dispersed situation (as contrasted to the local and universal situations of the movement-image), the voyage form (wanderings of Scottie and Madeleine, or those of X and A, and Chow's, in addition to the frequent use of any-space-whatever in the selected films are good examples), deliberately weak links (the string of the events is linked by chance rather than cause-effect logic, as exemplified in *Last Year at Marienbad*), the subversion of clichés and the condemnation of the plot (1989: 210). The time-image undermines the sensory-motor schemata of action and perception – one no longer follows the other, and the affection-image cedes the way to purely optical and sound situations, which are neither motivated nor mediated by action. Modern narratives are governed by the indiscernibility of the actual and virtual, subjective and objective, past and present. Deleuze introduces a new taxonomy of images: opsigns and sonsigns (purely optical and sound situations), mnemosigns (flashbacks), onirosigns (dreamscapes), chronosigns (co-existing timelines) and hyalosigns (mirrors, doppelgangers, simulacra). Acoording to Deleuze, opsigns and sosigns – first indicators of shattered temporality – engage with virtual elements: mnemosigns and onirosigns, which represent a bifurcating time and floating time, respectively, and chronosigns, which represent time in its 'pure state' (1989: 82), as either series or sheets of the past. Deleuze refers to simultaneous points of the present in Resnais' film and extrapolates that chronosign undermines the continuity of past, present and future (1989: 99-100, 155). Hyalosigns, or crystal-images, are of utmost interest for the analysis of *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046*, as this type of image unites 'an actual image and a virtual image to the point where they can no longer be distinguished' (Deleuze, 1989: 334). Deleuze implements mirror as a key metaphor for the hyalosign and cites the closing sequence of *Lady from Shanghai* (1947, dir. Orson Welles), set in the hall of mirrors, as an example

of the closed circuit between the real and the imaginary, the actual and the simulacrum. The crystal-image, in Deleuze's words, is a 'point of indiscernibility', an image pregnant with possibilities that exposes the splitting of time into binary flows: one, looking forward, and the other, directed backwards (1989: 78-83). The hyalosign can therefore be linked to Nietzschean notion of eternal recurrence and Deleuzian interpretation, the return of difference as multiplicity.

This article connects to the aforementioned topic of re-consumption and relies on Zajonc's mere exposure effect (see pp. 85-86), in accordance with which, deliberate repeated exposures to filmic texts should enhance positive affect. I chose to analyse *2046* side-by-side with two films that prefigured it, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (idem, 1958) and Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L´Anneé Dernière à Marienbad*, 1961). This selection was predicated on several factors: first of all, my attention was drawn to the similarities between the films on the level of narrative discourse and aesthetics, production story and reception; secondly, I saw Wong Kar-wai occupying the middle ground between pure avant-garde and commercial arthouse cinema, personified by Resnais and Hitchock, respectively; thirdly, the plots of *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046* revolve around characters who are doomed to repeat themselves and are structured in a circular fashion. Lastly, it seemed to me that all three films require specific cognitive habits, prior knowledge of the director's oeuvre and repeated viewings in order to be fully grasped. In *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046* endings rewrite beginnings: the closing scene echoes the opening down to the musical cues, and such spiral narrative structure invites comparisons with the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence (*The Gay Science*, 1881/2001) and, to a lesser extent, Deleuze's treatise *Difference and Repetition* (1994), both works discussed in detail throughout the essay.

In my second article, 'Beyond Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wong Kar-wai's Melodramas *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*' (2018), I attempt to situate the oeuvre of Wong Kar-wai in the socio-cultural context of postcolonial Hong Kong. I propose that, while building on local experience, Wong expresses global concerns with nostalgia, alienation and complex national identification. I analyse *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* as prime examples of the *wenyi* genre and *nostalgia films*, and argue that both films elicit a strong emotional response by means of stylistic connotation. In her monograph *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2005), Pam Cook proposes that *nostalgic memory films* present the past 'as a site for complex imaginative encounter, combining fantasy,

emotion and critical judgement, to which the knowledge that it can never be fully retrieved is essential' (Cook, 2005: 11). Cook suggests that, by tapping into the audience's emotions, such films can have a downright political and social impact. The nostalgic allure is a timely topic both in the area of film studies and in our everyday lives. If we look around, we can see that nostalgia is actively exploited by the authorities: the promise of the return to a mythical past is the real reason behind the Crimean referendum, Brexit, Trump's winning motto, the Catalan referendum, and the Hong Kong Independence Movement. Nostalgia is also exploited by the producers of mass culture: retro furniture, vintage clothing and analogue technology are in vogue once more, while cinemas are overtaken by incessant remakes, Disney live action adaptations, Marvel reboots and grandiose period pieces. Re-cycling of narratives triggers affective response from the audiences and grosses impressive amounts at the box office, but nostalgia also reigns the art-house circle, predominantly in the genre of melodrama, which has traditionally appealed to emotions through the use of subjective narration, lavish set design and powerful score. I apply Svetlana Boym's terminology of restorative and reflective nostalgia to discuss how the selected films, on the one hand, seek to establish continuity with the past through meticulous restoration of everyday objects, fashions and quotidian rituals, and, on the other hand, contemplate the 1960s' Hong Kong as an irrevocable time that can only be preserved in fragments. I also discuss how Boym's categories correlate with Deleuze's dichotomy of the movement-image and time-image: while the first mode of filmic representation seeks to recreate history sequentially, the second undermines the cause-effect logic of linear narration by mixing present day and yesteryear, memory and imagination.

In my third article, 'From Arthouse to Amazon: The Evolution of Wong Kar-wai' (2018), I examine Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre in the context of Hong Kong entertainment industry. I argue that, despite his arthouse reputation in the West, Wong Kar-wai adheres to the norms of genre, stardom and marketing established in the local film circuit. Given that his films have rarely been successful domestically, Wong mainly catered to the overseas audiences, and in doing so, deliberately exploited multi-cultural sources, generic conventions and various marketing strategies. Screenings at influential film festivals and critical appraisal have allowed Wong Kar-wai to broaden his audience through the years and finance a number of projects by pre-selling distribution rights to foreign investors. Although the director himself had previously claimed that he would rather make 'small

films' for the niche markets than 'big expensive films' for the masses (Wong qtd. in Ong, 1998), his recent projects manifest interest in the expanding mainland market and transnational mainstream public. I analyse the critical reception of Wong Kar-wai's ten feature films in the West and conclude that Wong Kar-wai is equally interested in building a transcultural and cinema-savvy spectatorship, and in expanding his public to include average mainland audiences and foreign mainstream market.

Protsenko, Victoria (2016). On Repeat: The Poetics of Eternal Recurrence in *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046*. *Cineforum*, vol. 25, pp. 109-137; doi:10.19119/cf.2016.12.25.109.

On Repeat: The Poetics of Eternal Recurrence in *Vertigo,*

Last Year at Marienbad and *2046*

Doing the same thing over and over again yet expecting different results was Einstein's definition of madness. But there are films that affect us in a completely different way every time we watch them, and those discussed in this article, ironically, depict men who are doomed to repeat themselves. Three narratives built on déjà vu that come full circle and prove right Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. Three masterpieces of mise-en-scene that offer us clues through imagery we are too blind to notice on first viewing. In the present article we address *Vertigo* (1958), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and *2046* (2005).

First included in the *Sight & Sound* Critic's poll of ten Greatest Films of All Time in 1982, *Vertigo* topped the list two decades later. However, when premiered in 1958, it received little attention and would be removed from circulation, along with four other Hitchcock thrillers, for almost thirty years. *Vertigo* became unattainable to a point that even James Stewart was denied a copy when he requested one for a retrospective of his work at the Berlin Film Festival. Withdrawn from distribution yet available at underground screenings, *Vertigo* had acquired mythical status among cinephiles and filmmakers alike, ranging from Nouvelle Vague auteurs to Monty Python contributors. Alain Resnais' second feature film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, was particularly influenced by *Vertigo*, as is evident from numerous allusions. Presented at the Venice Film Festival in 1961, it won the Golden Lion but was refused entry to the Cannes the same year because of the creators' opposition to the Algerian War. For the rest of the decade Resnais' and Robbe-Grillet's collaboration, mocked by some and praised by others, in the words of critic James Monaco, represented 'the very model of the modern avant-garde in narrative film'

(53). Fifty-five years later *Last Year at Marienbad* is still baffling audiences, and it had certainly made a lasting impression on Wong Kar-wai, whose latest film is just as puzzling. Premiered at Cannes over a decade ago under disastrous conditions,[13] *2046* left the festival without a single award. It confounded some critics as incomplete, in both technical and hermeneutical sense: '…perhaps it was never really finished in his [Wong's] mind…Watching *2046*, I wonder what it could possibly mean to anyone not familiar with Wong's work,' carped Roger Ebert (726). Others admired the film for combining 'the playfulness and disenchantment of Godard, the visual fantasias of Fellini, the chic existentialism of Antonioni, and Bergman's brooding uncertainties' (Burr). *2046* received wider recognition after being voted Best Foreign Language Film by the New York Film Critics Circle and taking home the European Film Award for Best Non-European Film together with San Sebastian's Best Foreign Language Film.

The trajectory from controversy to acclaim that all three films followed matches their most striking similarity, a central narrative loop. Opposed to the orthodox linear plots, it curves back upon itself – like a serpent eating its own tail – and by the end takes us to where it all began. In *Vertigo*, the story starts off with an accident from which the protagonist barely escapes with his life. For the rest of the film Scottie is being tormented with slight variations of the same scenario as he watches, first Madeleine and then Judy transformed into Madeleine, repeat the fate of his unlucky colleague from the prologue.

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[13] Reportedly, Wong was still editing some 20 percent of the reels on the eve of the premiere and delivered the film to the auditorium minutes before the screening. This is hardly unsurprising, if one recalls what happened to Kar-wai's previous film: when asked to present *In the Mood for Love* at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival, Wong agreed even though it wasn't ready: '…because it would never have been completed otherwise… We were still working on the subtitles the morning before the screening. The version we showed there was the pre-mix version, so it was presented in mono' (Wong).

Last Year at Marienbad begins and ends with languid pans that sweep through space and time alike: 'I walk on, once again, down these corridors, through these halls, these galleries, in this structure of another century…where corridors succeed endless corridors…' The voice belongs to the narrator, yet as the speech continues, it is revealed to be part of a dialogue in a performance. A placard on the wall reads 'Rosmer', perhaps encouraging us to recall Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, a play set in a mansion not very different from the setting of the film, the protagonist of which is trying to persuade a woman to marry him.[14] The spectators are hotel guests, impeccably dressed and perfectly still; amongst them we encounter the main characters, X and A. Their affair ensues, as if triggered by the show, when X approaches A to sway her into leaving together. Effects precede causes, time becomes elastic and emotions overrule reason as the two begin retracing their steps to determine the past and decide their future. Ultimately, through fragmentation and repetitions, Resnais achieves the same goal as Hitchcock does when juxtaposing intellectual montage with the anti-logic of narration. Kar-wai, who admits picking up the circular structure from Argentinian novelists Julio Cortazar and Manuel Puig (Reynaud 37), builds the narration of his film around four Christmas Eves that the protagonist spends in different company and locations. Chronologically, the events correspond to Chow's meeting with Lulu, who doesn't seem to recognize him (a deliberate nod to Resnais?), his first date with Bai Ling, his dinner with Jingwen and,

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[14] Just like in *Last Year at Marienbad*, the events of *Rosmersholm* take place one year after the meaningful event. In this case, it is the suicide of Beata, for which her husband, Rosmer, and her friend, Rebecca, blame themselves. The two fall in love, and Rosmer proposes to Rebecca but she cannot accept because she feels guilty about the past. When Rosmer's brother-in-law, Professor Kroll, comes between the lovers they choose to commit suicide the same way Beata did. The play ends with Rosmer and Rebecca jumping into the mill-race together.

finally, his parting with Su Lizhen's mysterious namesake. As we watch Chow adjusting his personality to each lover, the disrupted chronology of *2046* becomes a perfect fit for a continuous meditation on the 'what if' scenario. Temporal displacement, chronophobia and evocation of the past are main fixations of this multi-layered opus that offers varied readings for every plotline and even the title.[15]

Vertigo, Last Year at Marienbad and *2046* signalise recurring patterns in the narrative, aesthetics and technique that make of their directors true auteurs. As it were, Hitchcock was a primary example of sole authorship for the critics of *Cahiers du cinéma* who developed the auteur theory. According to Truffaut, what makes Hitchcock films unmistakably his is a distinctive visual style and personal expression (314). Hitchcock was known for constructing stories around certain images which haunted his imagination, so instead of starting from the plot, he used it to accommodate separate envisioned scenes. The goal of eliciting a profound response by strictly visual means constituted Hitchcock's pursuit of 'pure cinema': he wanted the spectators to feel alongside the characters, to inhabit the dreamscapes he constructed and actively participate in the creation of meaning. His experiments with mental images reach their peak in the 1950s. By then, film conventions have already been challenged by the Italian neorealists, and Hitchcock placed himself at the crossroads of the two cinemas, 'the classical that he perfects and the modern that he prepares' (Deleuze, *Cinema I. The Movement-Image* xii). In the same period Hitchcock formed a team with the cinematographer Robert Burks (who shot every Hitchcock film from *Strangers on a Train* to *Marnie*, with the exception of *Psycho*), the editor George Tomasini (responsible for every picture from *To Catch a Thief* to *Marnie*)

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[15] '*2046*' stands for a futuristic destination, a science-fiction novel, a hotel room number, and a political reference to the fiftieth anniversary of the retrocession of Hong Kong to China (to which the British agreed under the condition that the city should remain unchanged for half a century).

and the composer Bernard Herrmann (who created music for nine films, starting with *The Trouble with Harry* and ending with *Torn Curtain*). These long-time collaborators helped the director refine his trademark technique of subjective narration, and coincidentally, aligned themselves with Hitchcock during the production of *Vertigo*. Relying greatly on the perceptual subjectivity, *Vertigo* is probably the closest of Hitchcock's films to the cinema of thought envisaged by Deleuze, 'no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses...' (Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* 4). Increased use of opsigns and sonsigns, rhythmic editing, long passages without dialogue and the protagonist who is 'prey to vision, pursued by it or pursuing it' – all these characteristics fit Deleuze's descriptions of modern cinema and time-image (*Cinema 2: The Time-Image* 3).

Apart from the distinctive visual style, what makes Hitchcock an auteur par excellence is a remarkable consistency of topics. Intentionally or not, many of his classics deal with traumas (*Under the Capricorn, Spellbound, Psycho, Marnie*), subjectivity (*Rebecca, Rear Window, Psycho*) and false or mistaken identities (*North by Northwest, To Catch a Thief, Torn Curtain*), however, in *Vertigo* the notions of obsession, repressed feelings and play-acting take on a new meaning. At its most basic level, *Vertigo* strikes us as a critique of the 1950s sexual politics that prompted women to do everything in their power to keep the men around; but it also mocks men who go to great lengths to transform their women into some fixed image. [16]Just as Scottie exercised control over his paramour, so did

[16] Hitchcock did the same on numerous occasions with his leading ladies: Samuel Taylor described Marnie as 'Hitchcock doing *Vertigo* with Tippi Hedren' (qtd. in Thomas 36) and the director himself acknowledged having maniacal control over Eva Marie Saint's appearance in his next film after *Vertigo*: 'I watched every hair on her head… I supervised the choice of her wardrobe in every detail – just like Stewart did with Novak' (qtd. in Thomas 36).

Hitchcock and Harry Cohn, back then the president of Columbia Pictures, over Kim Novak. A working-class girl from Chicago who shot to fame thanks to her looks,[17] Novak often played women pretending to be someone else to please the men: *Pushover*, *The Legend of Lylah Clare, Jeanne Eagles* and *Kiss Me, Stupid* are merely a few examples. The sensation of being trapped inside the character didn't leave Novak throughout the filming of *Vertigo*,[18] but the resulting image – restrained, unattainable, too-good-for-spoiling Madeleine – had become a trademark Hitchcockian heroine.

At a deeper level, *Vertigo* is about filmmaking itself: with Scottie in our stead and Gavin as his own stand-in, Hitchcock creates an ideal woman he's been searching for in the likes of Madeleine Caroll, Grace Kelly, Marlene Dietrich and Vera Miles. What remains off-screen is a story with many twists: it took three years and six screenwriters to get the script done,[19] there were delays in filming (nearly a year passed between the recast of

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[17] Recalling her first screen test, Kim Novak confesses that, when Harry Cohn complained she couldn't act, producer Jerry Wald parried: 'Don't listen to her, just look' (qtd. in Tibbetts and Welsh 20).

[18] Novak thought the grey suit 'very confining', black pumps made her feel as if she was being pulled down, and the wig with a false front constantly reminded her that she was not being herself (Novak, Interview). She tried to tussle with Hitchcock who listened carefully to her complaints yet concluded: 'You will wear the grey suit, and you will wear the black shoes. Thank you for discussing it with me, but I am the director.' Instead of fighting any further, Novak found a way to turn the problem to her advantage: 'He wants me to feel that discomfort as Madeleine. And, of course, she should feel that way because she's actually Judy, playing the part of somebody, so that edge of discomfort will help me' (Novak, Interview by Richard Rushfield).

[1919] The plot originates from the French novel *D'Entre les Morts (From Among the Dead)* by Thomas Narcejac and Pierre Boileau, which Hitchcock acquired for the adaptation even before it got translated to English. He hired Maxwell Anderson to write the script but was so displeased with the first draft *Darkling, I Listen* that he told the producer to burn it. Hitchcock then approached his former colleague Angus MacPhail, who refused to commit to the project citing his alcohol addiction. Next Hitchcock hired Alec

Vera Miles, holidays of the leading couple, Hitchcock's hospitalizations and the beginning of shooting) as well as mishaps on the post-production stage,[20] and lastly, the picture failed at the box office. Hitchcock blamed *poor commercial success on Stewart, presuming that the 49-year old actor did not convince the audiences as a love interest of someone half his age (Munn 237). Vertigo saw the end of their partnership*[21] *and Hitchcock reverted to the approved thriller formulas that had never failed him before.*

Alain Resnais, whose career in cinema (77 years) was even longer than Hitchcock's (68 years), by his own admission, never thought of one film in relation to another (Halpern, Franklin and Goldstein 18), *yet most of his pictures tackle the same issue: memory that is partly real and partly fantasy*. His very first narrative feature, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, earned Resnais appraisal from critics and audiences worldwide, and he hadn't ceased to amaze ever since. The French Syndicate of Film Critics has awarded Resnais for Best Film eight times (which covers all his fiction films, from *Hiroshima Mon Amour* to

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Coppel yet he got disappointed again. He attempted to persuade his first choice, Anderson – still under contract with Paramount, – to revise the latest version. Anderson pulled out, but Hitchcock soon discovered San Francisco-based writer Samuel Taylor. Instructed not to read the novel or any of the previous drafts, Taylor, together with Morrie Reardon (ironically, a retired detective from San Francisco) who was hired to advise on the locations, constructed the narrative around Hitchcock's vision of separate scenes (Auiler 34-40).

[20] Such as the musicians' strike that prevented Bernard Herrmann from conducting the score himself. The soundtrack would be completed overseas, but the recording in London stopped abruptly, as local musicians quit in support of their American colleagues. The remaining score had to be hastily recorded in Vienna.

[21] Stewart had previously starred in *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1955) and was supposed to lead in *North by Northwest*, but Hitchcock deliberately delayed the production until after Stewart started working on *Bell, Book and Candle (alongside Kim Novak again) and* substituted him with Cary Grant.

Coeurs), out of nine films made by him since the inauguration of César Awards eight have been nominated for Best Director and seven for Best Film (Resnais has won in both categories twice).

As is the case with Hitchcock and Wong, Resnais owns a considerable continuity between his films, at least in part, to recurrent collaborations.[22] The star of *Last Year at Marienbad*, Delphine Seyrig, was spotted by Resnais in a Broadway production of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. He then approached her to offer the part of Georgette Cuvelier in the action flick that, sadly, never got made.[23] The two met again in France a year later, just in time for the *Last Year at Marienbad* auditions. Robbe-Grillet, still under the spell of *Vertigo*, 'imagined someone less perceiving, more sensual, an actress like Kim Novak…,' (qtd. in Armes 27) but Resnais insisted on his first choice.[24] When they began filming *Last Year at Marienbad*, Resnais complemented Robbe-Grillet's script (which already included shot-by-shot descriptions and recommendations for the framing and editing) with his own 'sketches'[25] and a chronological chart that served as visual aid to the actors, costumers, production designer and set decorator. Resnais consulted all three documents regularly, blocking many traveling shots himself (Jeck 7). He aimed to control 'everything about the story he was going to tell, but also the story he wouldn't tell: that

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[22] For example, Sacha Vierny has worked as his cameraman for over forty years, and Jacques Saulnier was production designer for every Resnais film starting with *Last Year at Marienbad*, excluding only *Je t'aime, Je t'aime*.

[23] Seyrig would portray the arch-enemy of the protagonist Harry Dickson.

[24] Pleased with Seyrig's performance, Resnais invited her to play the lead in his next feature, *Muriel, or the Time of Return* (1963), which won Seyrig Volpi Cup for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival.

[25] Passionate about the comics, Resnais always storyboarded his films.

of the characters… their lives before the film and, to a certain point, their future after the film' (Halpern, Franklin and Goldstein 13).

Kar-Wai's style of directing could hardly be further removed from Resnais' and Hitchcock's careful planning.[26] When asked to describe their collaborations, Tony Leung Chiu-Wai – who starred in seven films by Wong – confessed that normally they don't even have a script: 'You can play the character one way, then play him a different way the next day. Or maybe, after three months' shooting, he'll tell you, 'This is not the character we want'…' Proclaimed by *Sight and Sound* 'the Innovator of the Nineties' (Li), Kar-Wai started his career as a contributing screenwriter at TVB.[27] Ironically, he was notorious among the colleagues for never completing a script, asserting that 'directors always wanted to change what was originally written' anyway (Wong). When Wong shot his debut film, *As Tears Go By*, he has been already working through improvisation: revising the storyline and discarding hours of footage to accommodate new images that occurred to him during the filming. It seems that with Kar-wai, only one thing is constant – the crew. William Chang – editor, production designer and costumer all in one – and cinematographer Christopher Doyle are Wong's long-time collaborators, and the majority of his actors seem to migrate from one film to another playing the same characters or different characters with similar names, or similar characters under different

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[26] Hitchcock storyboarded everything and could spend days filming certain scenes – such as Madeleine's visit to the Palace of the Legion of Honor – until he got the lighting right. Similarly, Resnais knew exactly what he wanted to do, how and why. Marguerite Duras, who wrote the script of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, would later comment: 'Before working with him, I couldn't imagine that a filmmaker could be so 'alone'. Resnais works like a novelist' (qtd. in Halpern, Franklin and Goldstein 13).

[27] TVB (Television Broadcasts Limited) is Hong Kong's premier TV channel and one of the largest commercial Chinese programme producers worldwide.

names. Their re-appearance contributes to the feeling that Wong, quoting Ed Howard, 'hardly seems to be making individual films so much as releasing fragments of one larger film that encompasses his entire career thus far…' (Howard and Bellamy). Resulting in a compendium work, *2046* is haunted by Kar-wai's previous films just as its protagonist is haunted by the secret from the ending of *In the Mood for Love*.

Continuity is therefore established on the narrative level of the addressed films, but it is also evident on the intertextual level, when we analyse *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046* in relation to other films by the same *auteur* and in relation to one another. Moreover, this peculiar circularity invites philosophical references, particularly to Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence expressed in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In Part III of the latter, under section 'On the Vision and the Riddle', Zarathustra describes a vision he had in which he ascended a mountain carrying the spirit of gravity on his back. When they halted at the gateway marked 'Moment', there were two paths departing in opposite directions:

> *From this gateway, Moment, a long, eternal lane leads backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever can walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before? …And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things — must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this long dreadful lane — must we not eternally return?* (Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* 270).

Rather than re-invent the wheel, what Nietzsche does here is draw inspiration from the millennia-old product of human thought, the notion of cyclical time. Observing the phases of the moon, motion of the stars and seasonal patterns, already Ancient Egyptians, later Hindu and Greeks, contemplated the idea of time as a circle that extends infinitely backward and forward. It was not until the Age of Enlightenment that Christianity established linear temporality. The interpretation of history as cycles of Dark and Golden Ages resurfaced in the academic world in the XIX century, and around the same time, in art, romanticism brought back the idea of past being a series of replications. Henrich Heine, considered the last of the Romantic poets in Germany, wrote almost half a century before Nietzsche: 'Time is infinite, but the things in time, the concrete bodies are finite...' (qtd. in Kaufmann 318). He thus concluded that: 'all configurations that have previously existed on this earth must yet meet, attract, repulse, kiss, and corrupt each other again...' (qtd. in Kaufmann 318). Another prominent German, philosopher Hegel, claimed even before Heine that 'changes in the world of nature – infinitely varied as these might be – reflect nothing more than an eternally repeated cycle. In nature there is nothing new under the sun…' (23).

The circularity described by Hegel, Heine and Nietzsche splits history in fragments and undermines the cause-effect logic of the linear progression of past, present, and future. Without an end or beginning, cyclical temporality counters Christian dogmas that 'interpret all happiness as a reward, all unhappiness as punishment' (Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* 595). When present suffering cannot be justified by past sins and future reward doesn't depend on actual repentance, the meaning of separate events becomes a matter of interpretation. Fitting the pieces of one's life story together requires the will to power: 'To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'…' (Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* 251). For Nietzsche, will is a

liberator, but it is also a prisoner of memory: 'Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy' (*The Portable Nietzsche* 595). Breaking the grip of the past is both the promise and peril of eternal return, which Pierre Klossowski sees as 'a new version of fatality – that of the vicious circle, which suppresses every goal and meaning, since the beginning and the end always merge with each other' (30). Nietzsche pictures life as an eternity in which history repeats itself: 'This life as you now live and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sign…' (*The Gay Science* 194). The problem is, whatever we choose, it is the same choice we have already made and there is little chance of choosing differently, since our decisions are predilected by fixed behavioural patterns that are, in turn, based on what we had experienced time after time. Even given the chance to start over, we would deliberately follow the path that leads to the same failure, implies Nietzsche. Unwittingly acting out traumatic experiences over and over again seems to be the ultimate fate of Scottie, X and Chow.

The plot of *Vertigo*, sarcastically summed up by Hitchcock as 'boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy meets girl again, boy loses girl again,' (qtd. in Samadder) oscillates between the fear and the lure of repetition. For the duration of the film Scottie is afraid of falling and tempted to let go, and it is this force that binds him together with self-destructive Madeleine. Her apparent suicide – a replay of the prologue scene – sends him on the voyage into the past. Scottie is granted a second chance with Judy, but neglects it in his frenzy to duplicate his former lover. 'I have to go back into the past. Once more, just one last time', he tells Judy as he brings her back to San Juan Bautista, but instead of breaking the pattern he only succeeds in repeating it. In the final frames of the film Scottie appears

cured of his vertigo, yet he is 'stuck there on the edge, empty-armed, empty-eyed, gazing down on an emptiness that goes on forever' (Cumbow).

The protagonists of *Last Year at Marienbad* are playing out the conversations and actions that supposedly had taken place before. X follows Scottie-like pattern of a man who rediscovers his lost love and attempts to adjust the woman in his present to the image – possibly fantasised – of the woman from his past. X keeps telling A the same story, but whenever he alters some details, his recount produces a similar effect as Madeleine's necklace worn by Judy – however small, these changes make us question the authenticity of it all. Did the two meet last year at Marienbad? Doesn't A recognize X? Or does she pretend because she is willing to forget? Or could it be that X is trying to convince A of something they both know had never happened? To confuse the audiences even further, Resnais once commented that as the co-writer of *Last Year at Marienbad* he did not believe the story of X, but as the director, he did (Jeck 11). Multiple interpretations are equally plausible for this open film that offers everyone a choice.[28]

2046 is the story of yet another man whose present is fully dominated by the past he's trying to revive. 'He remembers those vanished years. As though looking through a dusty window-pane, the past is something he could see, but not touch... If only he could break through the glass and bring it back' – the epigraph to *In the Mood for Love* applies just as

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[28] The diversity of readings is best exemplified in the garden scene during which X and A discuss a statue of a couple. X claims that the man embraces the woman protectively, A argues that the woman urges the man onward. X then suggests an explanation that could account for both: 'They've just come to the edge of a cliff. He holds her back to keep her from the edge, while she points to the sea stretching out to the horizon.' Then M appears and clarifies that the man is Charles III and the woman is his wife, depicted at the moment of the trial for treason. However, M's affirmation is made up of pseudohistorical allusions and so represents yet another possibility, not the ultimate truth.

well to *2046*. In fact, Kar-Wai envisioned the two as a single film, but during the production of the first one it became apparent that he would need to split them into different chapters and approach *2046* as 'the continuation of one character.'[29] The development of this character, Mr Chow, takes a sinister turn as he becomes obsessed – very much like Scottie in the second half of *Vertigo* – with re-enacting his affair with Mrs Chan. Kar-Wai himself had remarked on the similarities between Chow and Scottie: '…the face of Tony Leung is so sympathetic… It's the same in Vertigo. Everybody thinks James Stewart is a nice guy, so nobody thinks that his character is actually very sick' (qtd. in Chute). Chow's attitude change finds its reflection in the vulgar stories he writes to make a living, so very different from the martial art novels he had been working on with Su Lizhen**.** Only after moving into The Oriental Hotel, does Chow get inspired to write something of his calibre. He begins a novel in which he renders people from real life into characters travelling on a futuristic train to a place where lost memories can be recaptured. Although none of the fictional characters corresponds to Chow himself, this entire story-within-a-story mirrors the doomed affair from *In the Mood for Love* that casts a shadow over Chow's present.

Numerous links connect *Vertigo* to *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046* – from obsessive reconstruction of the past at the core of each story to the music score reminiscent of opera – but the essential similarity here is the perfection of form. Just like the plot of *Vertigo* was of less importance to Hitchcock than 'the overall visual impact on the screen' (qtd. in Truffaut, 248) – note that almost thirty minutes of screen time, from Madeleine's appearance at Ernie's until her suicide attempt at the bay, rely on 'pure cinema'

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[29] Wong recalls: '… we were shooting both films back-to-back at the same time, which became extremely difficult, because the other story takes place 50 years into the future. It was like falling in love with two different people at the same time…Somehow, we spent 15 months on these films.'

techniques[30] – in Resnais's film form precedes content. *Last Year at Marienbad*, to quote Robbe-Grillet, is addressed exclusively to the 'faculties of sight, hearing, feeling' (17). The narrative hinges upon the perception of the characters and that of the spectators, and the two Alans play with both shamelessly. *2046* savours details and fragments of memory, and Kar-wai conveys the longing of his characters through trademark slow-motion shots.[31] A closer look at these three films allows us to confirm that their cinematic style is ruled by repetition and variation. The idea of eternal recurrence is reinforced through persisting visual cues which, although they may not be registered consciously upon the first viewing, contribute greatly to the narrative.

The notions of regress, history repeating itself and double identities resonate in the leading motif of *Vertigo*: from vortices in the opening titles to Herrmann's soundtrack, from Madeleine's coiled bun – that mimics Carlotta's chignon – to Judy's curly bangs, from hilly landscapes of San Francisco to a 360-degree kiss of the protagonists – spiral is omnipresent in the film. It epitomises the conflicting concepts of fall and recovery, of

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[30] We don't hear Madeleine speak until the minute 46 which is, ironically, after Scottie had undressed her. Hitchcock was renowned for including extended scenes without dialogue to let 'pure cinema' shine through. He often watched the first cuts without sound to make certain the spectators could follow the story solely through the visuals: 'If it's a good movie, the sound could go off and the audience would still have a perfectly clear idea of what is going on,' he explained (qtd. in Armstrong et al. 229). When creating *Last Year at Marienbad*, Resnais had in mind the style of silent cinema, not dissimilar to Hitchcock's early films – hence the makeup and exaggerated poses – and Kar-Wai attempted to mimic *Vertigo*'s iconography while creating both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*.

[31] Wong justifies the use of slow-motion sequences by stating that: 'We tried to create the film from our memories. And in our memories, everything moves much slower.'

self-preservation and attraction to danger, of infinity and hollowness.[32] Bergsonian 'spiralling into the past' probably best defines what Scottie experiences when he kisses Judy and the background of the Empire Hotel changes for a brief moment to the stables of San Juan Bautista, where he last kissed Madeleine:

> *Everything forms a circle, but the loop never closes, the revolution carries us ever deeper into reminiscence. Shadows follow shadows, illusions follow illusions, not like the walls that slide away or mirrors that reflect to infinity, but by a kind of movement more worrisome still because it is without a gap or break and possesses both the softness of a circle and the knife edge of a straight line* (Rohmer 172).

At its heart, spiral is a void, and just such a symbol appears in both the opening and closing shots of Kar-Wai's *2046*. It represents a train rushing through the tunnel to the year 2046, but it is also linked to a hole through which Chow spies on the occupants of the adjacent room and, more importantly, to a hole for burying secrets, the image first introduced in the ending of *In the Mood for Love* and repeated three times throughout *2046*. Paired with asymmetrical shots where either mirrors, drapes or doors obstruct the view, this motif creates the illusion of prying. Wong explains: 'I wanted to treat it like a Hitchcock film, where so much happens outside the frame, and the viewer's imagination

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[32] Spiral, one of the most enigmatic sacred symbols, dates back some 24,000 years. It can be found in practically every ancient culture around the globe, from petroglyphs in South-eastern Alaska to monoliths in Western Europe. Universally accepted as a symbol of time, it also connotes female energy, spiritual journey, labyrinth, the slow reveal of things that are hidden, and people coming back to the same point in their life, but with a better understanding – all the motifs writ large in the plot of *Vertigo*.

creates a kind of suspense. *Vertigo*, especially, is something I always kept returning to in making the film.'[33] Further parallels between the two films find their reflection on the narrative level.

Very similar to Madeleine, Su Lizhen – or rather, Chow's romanticized version of her – becomes the main fetish of *2046*. Chow's conduct echoes Scottie's pointless wanderings in the second half of *Vertigo*: a year after Madeleine's suicide he goes back to the old haunts, searching for a woman who is no longer there, who in fact, never existed. In the flower shop, at the restaurant, in the streets of San Francisco he keeps mistaking strangers for Madeleine. Even after he encounters Judy and takes her out for dinner – to Ernie's, naturally – Scottie can't help staring longingly at a woman across the hall whose clothes and appearance resemble Madeleine's, while the woman across the table is aching to make him see her, Judy from Salina, Kansas, for what she really is. The actions of both Scottie and Chow fall under Giorgio Agamben's definition of melancholia – 'a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed appears as lost' (20). Chow's drive to use other women as substitutes for the lost love object is most apparent in the repeated cab scenes. During their ride with Bai Ling, Chow reaches out his hand to touch her, exactly as he once did with Su Lizhen.[34] But the moment Bai Ling gives in,

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[33] The quote refers to *In the Mood for Love*, but considering the film's narrative and stylistic linkages to 2046, and the fact that the two were being shot simultaneously, it fits both.

[34] The cab scene establishes another connection to *Vertigo*: there is a moment in Hitchcock's film when, having persuaded Judy to dye her hair, Scottie invites her to sit by the fire in an obvious attempt to re-enact his first tête-à-tête with Madeleine. The way he tosses her a cushion, his commentary and the longing look on his face reveal Scottie's intentions, yet Judy cannot let her feelings show because she is not supposed to know that all of this had happened before. Judy to Wong's Scottie, Bai Ling is Chow's pass into the past, both literally – since she occupies the room 2046 – and figuratively.

she shatters Chow's fantasy. He clearly enjoys chasing inaccessible women: Su Lizhen is married, Lulu is mourning over her dead lover, Jingwen is craving for another man, and Black Spider, like himself, is chained to the past. With each of them Chow tries to start over and repeats the same failure, notwithstanding he prefers this torment to a possibility of successful relationship with Bai Ling. 'I once had a happy ending in my grasp, but I let it slip away', the voiceover declares as we are shown a flashback of him and Su Lizhen in the rear of a taxi. In the final minutes of the film Chow appears in a cab alone, framed in a two-shot that lacks one of the participants, and we comprehend that, in spite of claiming to have abandoned 2046, he still lives in the past.

Like *Vertigo* and *2046*, *Last Year at Marienbad*'s cinematography is built around recurring patterns. Mirrors, frescoes and corridors double as trompe-l'œils: they reflect, fracture and multiply the reality. Every detail hints at some meaning, and 'each spectator can find his own solution, but it won't be the same for everyone' (Lachambreverte). Gaston Bounoure, for one, suggested a purely mathematical reading of the story: X, A and M are components of an equation, with A and M being constants whilst X is a variable that can represent any value (67). The formula fits in with a triangle-shaped game that re-appears throughout the film. Based on Nim, it contains a plenitude of outcomes from the beginning: the cards (or matchsticks, or petals, or pieces of a torn up letter, as we see later in the film) are arranged in the pyramid shape; each player has *several choices, only limited by the rule that he must take cards from one pile at a time; each move he makes reduces other possibilities.*[35] *The winning strategy is to think of paired multiples, leaving*

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[35] Here is another parallel with the plot structure: binary addition without carry works in such way that the value 'A xor B' is true when an odd number of parameters (either A or B) is true but not both. Similarly, the events in *Last Year at Marienbad* only start to make sense when you accept certain readings while

an even or zero number of cards in every column after each move, yet the starting arrangement is a losing combination for the player who commences the game. The mysterious M seems to be aware of this disadvantage – he makes the first move only once and even then wins, proving the old saying 'lucky at cards, unlucky in love': X takes the last piece and loses, but eventually he leaves with A.

We could read *Last Year at Marienbad*'s version of Nim as related to Nietzsche's 'great dice game of existence' in which 'every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more so: it would be realized an infinite number of times' (Tonnerre 125). In the cosmological doctrine of eternal recurrence, the outcome is determined even before the game begins, and there are only two ways to play – to gamble or leave it to chance. In his reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze proposes that the gambler (M, in our case) is a bad player: he calculates odds and rolls the dice, distributing his chances over many throws. He has a finality, a particular combination in mind and relies on the mechanical laws. On the other hand, the player (X) who affirms chance necessity in a single cast, gets back 'one fatal number which reunites all the fragments of chance' (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 26). Accepting any possible outcome, accepting the endless repetition of a dice-throw that comes to reproduce itself is the ultimate expression of amor fati. Deleuze defines the eternal return as 'a divine game', in which all possible outcomes affirm themselves simultaneously: '…such a game entails the repetition of the necessarily winning move, since it wins by embracing all possible combinations and rules in the system of its own return' (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 116).

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discarding the others. All of the suggested endings – X forces A, M shoots A, X leaves with A – are plausible but they are mutually exclusive.

In all three of the analysed films, circularity is achieved on the visual and narrative levels by means of repetition, quotation and imagery. Instead of following a linear development, these stories form a circuit where past conditions the present and future. Endings rewrite beginnings, the closing scene echoes the opening down to the musical cues and so reinforces the notion of eternal return. This final replay gives the audiences a fuller sense of a vicious circle and prompts the feeling of déjà vu. 'The movie never changes… But every time you see it, it seems different…' (*Twelve Monkeys*) realizes James Cole while watching *Vertigo*, but the same holds true for both *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046*: instead of losing their initial appeal, with each successive viewing they offer us clues that had previously eluded the gaze, and we end up appreciating these films the more often that we watch them. Curiously, we choose to see them anew not so much to unravel the mysteries of the plot, but rather to recapture a lost feeling that has led us to engage with these stories in the first place. *Vertigo*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *2046* encourage us to re-discover subtle details and re-experience their brilliance, but they also invite us to return to the familiar places at different times, revealing something new about them and about us.

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Beyond Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wong Kar-wai's Melodramas

In the Mood for Love and *2046*

'The one charm of the past', wrote Oscar Wilde, 'is that it is the past' (72). Factual or imagined, the past is actively exploited by the producers of mass culture: retro furniture, vintage clothing and analogue technology are in vogue once more. Nostalgia marketing extends to the cinema industry: Hollywood is overtaken by incessant remakes, Disney live action adaptations, Marvel reboots, re-imaginings of the classics and grandiose period pieces. Re-cycling of narratives and visuals triggers affective response from the audiences and grosses impressive amounts at the box office. Nostalgia also reigns the art-house circle, predominantly melodramas. As a genre that appeals to the emotions through the use of subjective narration, lavish set design and powerful score, melodrama provides the ideal structures for the cinematic construction of pastness.

A prototypical melodrama revolves around loss, unrequited love, self-sacrifice or pre-destiny, and prioritizes mise-en-scène, gestures and music over action. It is a genre best suited for delivering personal stories set against the backdrop of a changing society, which is certainly the case with *wenyi pian* – a Chinese equivalent of melodrama. We can trace its origins to *wenming xi*, a theatrical tradition which was popular in Shanghai between 1913-1915, and *yuanyang hu ie pai*, or Mandarin Duck and Butterfly, an early twentieth-century literary school that has shaped not only the Shanghainese publishing industry but also local film audience (Teo 2006: 204-205; Zhang 13-14). *Wenming xi* drew on Shakespearean plots and Western staging techniques, and relied heavily on improvisation: 'The majority of the plays performed during this period were not yet literary dramas […] More often than not there only existed outlines of scenes […] the actor was expected to improvise the details of the action and the dialogues' (Eberstein 12). A number of 'civilized plays' were adapted for cinema in the 1920s', prompting the creation of a 'progressive melodrama' genre, which was exemplified by such films as *The Goddess* (*Shen nü*, Wu Yonggang, 1934), *Daybreak* (*Tianming*, Sun Yu, 1934) and *Crossroads* (*Shizi jietou*, Shen Xiling, 1937). That same decade, several novels by the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers were turned into films: Zhang Shichuan's *The Spirit of the Jade Pear* (*Yu Li Hun*, 1924), based on the novel of the same name by Xu Zhenya, and *Lonely Orchid* (*Kong gu lan,* 1926), based on the novel by Bao Tianxiao, stand out as major box-office hits. As reflected in their intricate plot and excessive sentimentality,

these melodramas were characterized by Western influences, but they also exposed Confucian ethics. Screen adaptations of Butterfly novels dominated the industry in 1930-1940s Shanghai and 1950-1960s Hong Kong. The new genre was named *wenyi* – an abbreviation for *wenxue yu yishu* ('arts and letters') –, connoting the origin of these films in literary works.

A typical *wenyi* picture of the time told a forlorn love affair: the protagonists, restrained by social and familial norms, had to renounce their feelings for the sake of propriety. The often cited *Spring in a Small Town* (*Xiaocheng zhi chun*, Fei Mu, 1948) about a young woman who chooses loyalty to her sick husband over reignited love for an old friend of theirs, is regarded as the finest example of melodrama in pre-Communist China (see Wang; Daruvala; Yeh 2006: 8-10; Teo 2006: 206-207). Nonetheless, after the Cultural Revolution erupted, chaste love stories as this one lost their appeal for the general public. The macho warrior superseded the romantic hero, the chivalrous woman replaced the noble heroine (Teo 2006: 209), and the cinema industry – now relocated to Hong Kong – concentrated on the martial arts productions that mirrored the off-screen violence. *Wuxia pian* ('films of chivalrous combat') and crime thrillers responded to the political, social and economic changes in the city in the late '60s – mid '90s. However, at the turn of the century, *wenyi pian* experienced a revival – Teo cites *Tempting Heart* (*Xin dong*, Sylvia Chang, 1999), *Fly Me to Polaris* (*Xing yuan*, Jingle Ma, 1999), *Anna Magdalena* (*On na ma dut lin na*, Yee Chung-man, 1998) and *In the Mood for Love* (*Fa yeung nin wa*, Wong Kar-wai, 2000) as 'examples of the union of literature, art, music […] and romance' (Teo 2006: 209). The oeuvre of Wong Kar-wai, the first Chinese filmmaker to receive the Best Director Award at Cannes, is particularly interesting to the scholars of Chinese melodrama. Kar-wai's biggest success to date, *In the Mood for Love*, and its sequel, *2046* (idem, 2004), both set in the 1960s' Hong Kong – the period when *wenyi* was at the peak of its popularity – revisit the classics of the genre. Nonetheless, while their sumptuous mise-en-scène, archetypal characters and moral lessons evoke the Second Golden Age of Chinese cinema, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* imbue the traditional *wenyi* with socio-political sensibilities of postcolonial Hong Kong. This essay explores how these two films appropriate both Chinese and Western melodramatic conventions – such as subjective narration, non-linear chronology, extensive use of music and props – in order to portray nostalgia.

It is important to define the meaning and the use of term 'nostalgia' in the first place. Though not acknowledged scientifically until the seventeenth century, the symptoms of nostalgia were described much earlier than 1688, the year Johannes Hofer submitted *Dissertatio Medica de Nostalgia*. In the time of Ancient Greece and Rome, when nostalgic longing was a privilege of the intellectual class (Klibansky et al.), Ovid wrote profoundly sentimental *Epistulae ex ponto* and *Tristia* while in exile at Tomis, Vergil mourned Troy's destruction in *Aeneid* and Homer created one of the major epic poems of antiquity, *The Odyssey*. Akin to Ulysses, who ached 'merely to see the hearth-smoke rising upward from his own island' (Homer I.57ff.), Hofer's patients were susceptible to the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to homeland (Hofer 381). Mainly Swiss mercenaries, they experienced anxiety, lack of appetite, insomnia and depression, and were prescribed colon cleansing, bloodletting and opium ingestions (Adelman & Barkan 250). For over a century following Hofer's publication, French and British physicians reported numerous cases among their soldiers and sailors. Nostalgic outbursts significantly delayed the imperial expansion: instead of dying for their country on the battlefield, militaries were dying from their desire of returning to it (Goodman). The French army in the Napoleonic Wars (Battesti 134), the Russian army in the War of the Polish Succession (Lowenthal 11) and the crew of James Cook's first voyage (Banks 329) were all plagued by nostalgia.

In times when most people hardly ever travelled farther than a few days' walk from their village, homesickness was a prerogative of the nobility, military and mariners. But by the turn of the eighteenth century, with progress providing new means for travelling, nostalgia had reached epidemic proportions, affecting peasants, refugees, poets and philosophers alike: 'The new scenario of nostalgia was neither battlefield nor hospital ward but misty vistas with reflective ponds, passing clouds and ruins of the Middle Ages or antiquity' (Boym 26). Particularly sensitive in this respect were the Romantics, who celebrated the past in its incompleteness, thus giving birth to the culture of commemoration. Encapsulated in the curio cabinets, albums and writings, the past became heritage. Urban memorials and provincial museums sprang up like mushrooms, and 'for the first time in history, old monuments were restored in their original image' (Boym 29). The restoration of architectural heritage in Germany, France, Italy, Portugal and England all stemmed from the newly acquired sense of national identity.

Rapid socio-cultural changes and historical upheavals that followed in the late nineteenth-mid twentieth century intensified nationalistic identification. Nostalgia was labelled 'immigrant psychosis' (Frost 802) and 'failure of adaptation' (Starobinski 101), but the focus of longing shifted from space to time: dislocation alone did not cause homesickness, it was the fast-paced life and linear temporality of the industrial society that made individuals prone to nostalgia (Fritzsche). Understanding time as an irreversible passage led to realizing that the past was forever lost, and it made the nostalgic even more fixated on the vanishing sites, traditions and crafts. Nostalgia remained closely associated with heritage throughout the twentieth century, when public debates drew attention to the disappearance of entire districts in the aftermath of urban development and the two world wars. Historic preservation engulfed Europe, where during the European Architectural Heritage Year twenty-three countries participated in '*A Future for Our Past*' restoration campaign, and the United States, where the *National Historic Preservation Act* was signed in 1966. Although historic preservation was neglected in Hong Kong until the early 2000s, it is only fitting that in a city where one finds a Buddhist temple next to a skyscraper and a jewellery shop, nostalgia should be embedded in local identity.

Raised in the shadow of Shanghai, the cosmopolitan, money-driven Hong Kong came of age at the time of the Great Leap Forward. Fear and famine drove over 142,000 people from Shanghai, Chaoshan, Guangdong, Siyi and Ningbo to the flourishing British colony. Wealthy émigrés brought in their business, creating jobs and developing the industry, but the flow of illegal refugees that continued in the wake of the Cultural Revolution caused shortages of land and water. Rich or poor, most immigrants thought of Hong Kong as a space of transit rather than a place to settle in (Abbas 1997: 4). *In the Mood for Love* is a testament of this expatriates' society: '[…] they lived in their own isolated part of the city [...] the housing problems were such that you'd have two or three families living under the same roof and they'd have to share the kitchen and toilets and even their privacy. I wanted to make a film about those days [...]' (Tobias). While elderly émigrés kept their own dialect, cuisine and lifestyle, younger generations embraced Western music, fashion and cinema. Those émigrés who profited under the British rule gradually abandoned their dream of going back to China. By the late 1960s Hong Kong had become one of Asian Tigers, and the emergence of local identity had begun to take place. This transition is made evident in *2046*: upon returning from his self-imposed exile, the protagonist moves

into the multi-diasporic Oriental Hotel that well depicts Hong Kong at the end of the sixties, when it was one of the most populated places on earth.

By the 1970s Hong Kong had transformed into a financial centre, but as natural disasters and fiscal crises hit the city, China seized the moment to discuss the 'unfair treaties' under which it had been annexed. With Hong Kong given no say in the matter, the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 ended 155 years of the colonial rule, granting the city half a century of the unchanged capitalist system. The deadline is year 2046, and it is easy to see the irony behind the title of Wong's film. Although he claims that: 'It was never my intention to make a film about politics' (Fernstein), the leitmotifs of changeless time, search for identity and fixation on the past resonate with existential crises of the transitional period. Chow is determined to rent the room 2046 because it holds emotional significance to him[36] and he gets attached to women who occupy this space: Lulu, Bai Ling and Jingwen. Teo reads Chow's involvement with mainland women as an allegory of Hong Kong's relationship with China (Teo 2005: 149), but Wong's explanation is more prosaic: 'the number 2046 brings up the past, a memorable affair [...] he has been trying to re-live ever since. It casts a shadow over everything and dooms all his relationships.'[1] Chow even writes science-fiction novels, titled *2046* and *2047*, in which the characters, based on people from his life, are travelling on a futuristic train to a rather temporal than spatial destination – year 2046, a place where nothing ever changes. The whole premise can be read two ways, as a nostalgic attempt 'to revisit time like space' (Boym 12) and as scepticism over Xiaoping's promise of 'wushinian bubian.'[2] Although the protagonist of this metanarrative is supposed to represent Jingwen's Japanese boyfriend, the spectators do not fail to read him as the alter ego of Chow.[3] Looking back on his losses helps Chow ease anxiety over the future, in the same way as lapsing into collective nostalgia prepares the natives of Hong Kong for the return to China. They mourn both a vanishing present and a future loss that awaits the city upon the transfer of sovereignty. No longer British, not yet Chinese, Hong Kong has reverted to being 'a port in the most literal sense' (Abbas 1997: 4).

The themes of homesickness, temporal dislocation and evocation of the past, so common in Kar-Wai's filmography, are entwined with postcolonial quest for identity. We could compare post-Handover tendencies in Hong Kong cinema to the replacement of

movement-image with time-image in the post-World War II Europe. As theorized by Deleuze, a movement-image subordinates the narrative to a logical succession of sensory-motor actions while a time-image presents non-linear narration with often disjointed visuals and sounds. One method strives to recreate the story sequentially, the other, to fuse the actual and virtual, remembered and imagined, present day and yesteryear. The difference between movement-image and time-image is alike Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia: a nostalgic of the first type seeks to establish continuity with the past through reconstruction, while a nostalgic of the second type contents himself with contemplating the remnants. The past for the restorative nostalgic is an ageing fresco that has 'to be freshly painted in its 'original image'; the past for the reflective nostalgic is an irrevocable time that can only be preserved in 'shattered fragments of memory' (Boym 61). While restorative nostalgia juxtaposes two timelines, reflective nostalgia charts them along the same temporal axis.

2046 features time in a loop: past and future, memories and fantasies, reality and fiction blend together imperceptibly. Jumping from one timeline to another, the narrative heightens a tragic awareness of the passage of time: '[…] the altered order changes the significance. And you learn more because of this order' (Fernstein). Elliptical chronology of *2046* is well-suited to represent the endless meditation on the 'what if' scenario: after all, Wong's characters are nostalgic not for the irredeemable past, but for the future they could have had, if they had made a different choice. Regretful of missed opportunities, they find themselves in the wrong time and place. The circumstances are uncannily familiar: 'Hong Kong in the 1960s was surviving on […] 'borrowed time', a pre-97 condition that produced a certain syndrome of fear and insecurity causing citizens to drift and wander […]' (Teo 2005: 142). Wong's characters, too, are restless, and so they embark on journeys to other countries: Chow leaves for Singapore in the aftermath of his affair with Su, and she follows, but they miss each other.[4] Lulu returns from the Philippines after having searched in vain for 'legless bird' Yuddy, and Jingwen eventually runs away to Japan to marry her boyfriend. Bai Ling, who was hoping to spend Christmas 1967 with Dabao in Singapore, ends up there alone after breaking up with Chow. Like Bai Ling and Chow before her, the Black Spider settles down in Singapore to escape the past. When Chow offers her to return to Hong Kong together, she decides to stay. Their farewell – ironically, filmed in the same location where Chow and Su parted ways – concludes with a sexually charged kiss that vindicates *In the Mood for Love's* lack of

physical intimacy. It makes Chow realise that his feelings for this woman had been directed at another Su Lizhen, that he had been looking for 'the repetition of the unrepeatable' (Boym xvii).

2046 is full of allusions to *In the Mood for Love*. The two were shot practically side-by-side within fifteen months and could have ended up as a single film. The protagonists of *In the Mood for Love* reappear in *2046* but they are changed: Chow shares many personality traits with the solitary wanderers of the 1960s Hong Kong cinema, and Su is reduced to 'a shadow from the past' (*Interview: Wong Kar-wai on 2046*). Tony Leung recalls the confusion on the filming set: '[…] on the first day, Kar-wai told me that he wanted me to play the same character again, but […] as a dark, cynical playboy [...]. I was trying to create a new Mr. Chow, but things kept reminding me of *In the Mood for Love*. The scenes, the room number, everything' (Keefe). Indeed, *2046* explores the same milieu and situations. Repetitive actions, leitmotifs and mise-en-scène point at the intertextuality of *2046* and *In the Mood for Love* in relation to each other and to Wong's previous films. Within the diegesis, this kind of self-referentiality conveys the 'hopelessness of ever recapturing, modifying, or getting rid of the past' (Brunette 105).

Wong's treatment of the past in these films is essentially postmodern: 'stylistic connotation' (Jameson 19) of the 1960s Hong Kong and its cultural artifacts 'renders nostalgia visually irresistible' (Carvalho 2009: 156). From coiffures to cabs to cuisine, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* make the past alluring through quotidian objects and rituals (Chow 646). 'The whole experience of this community is like a dream, it is lost and gone,'[5] laments Wong. His childhood home is currently occupied by an Italian restaurant, the basement café where he had written his fist scripts is now a jewellery outlet, and Café de Goldfinch, featured prominently in both films, closed its doors after fifty-three years of service. High rental prices, fleeting fashions and everchanging urban landscape mean that Hong Kong becomes a 'space of the *déjà disparu*' (Abbas 1997: 48) at the same speed it evolves. On his quest to 'preserve from perishing' (Lalanne 88) the remnants of his favourite era, Wong borrowed quotations from period novels and hired radio announcers from the 1960s to record the music (Chow 646). The importance of soundtrack in Kar-wai's oeuvre cannot be overstated, and his innovative use of songs is particularly relevant to our analysis, since melodrama, by definition, is a blending of music and action. The soundtrack of *In the Mood for Love* ranges from instrumental music (Shigeru Umebayashi's rendition of the existing score, *Yumeji's Theme*) to boleros

(*Aquellos Ojos Verdes, Te Quiero, Dijiste* and *Quizás, Quizás, Quizás*), and the soundtrack of *2046* adds opera to the mix (Bellini's *Norma* and *Il Pirata*). In both films, Spanish-language songs suggest the hedonistic nightlife that dominated Hong Kong in the sixties, and serve to comment on the narrative as much through their lyrics as through hidden connotations.

Aquellos Ojos Verdes was the first bolero to be recognized internationally. It was written by Nilo Menéndez, an aspiring Cuban pianist, and his friend, poet and singer Adolfo Utrera, in 1929. Menéndez claimed that the song was dedicated to Adolfo's sister, Conchita, but she returned to Cuba soon after their meeting in New York, and the two have never met again (Román 20). The only legacy of their romance was made famous by Xavier Cugat, a Catalan musician raised in Havana, whose renditions of *Siboney* and *Perfidia* appear in *2046*. However, for *In the Mood for Love* Wong chose Nat King Cole's version, released in 1959, which was immensely popular on the radio, alongside Connie Francis's cover of *Siboney,* recorded in 1960. *Siboney*, composed by Ernesto Lecuona for one of his stage works, became an instant classic and lost much of its original context (Jacobson 32), which, I argue, is crucial to understanding the song's function in *2046*. It was created in 1929, while Lecuona was on his second year of recitals abroad. Lecuona was feeling nostalgic and spilled his longing into a song dedicated to homeland (Román 13). To this day, Hispanics refer to Cuba as 'Ciboney', honouring the indigenous people of Cuba. The first tribe to arrive there, more than 5,000 years ago, and the most populous at the time of the Spanish conquest, the Ciboney people became nearly extinct by the end of the sixteenth century (Simons 67). Their disappearance is a cautionary tale of colonization, yet, to the people of Hong Kong, the opposite process is no less dreadful. As the city approaches the fifty-year mark of reintegration, it experiences strong identification with Shanghai, whose past may predict Hong Kong's future.[6] Abbas remarks that '[b]oth cities were essentially created by Western colonialism in the aftermath of the Opium Wars […] the two cities seemed to have been linked at birth, which makes it possible sometimes to read what is tacit in the history of one city in the history of the other' (Abbas 2000: 773). Notably, one of the few pop songs in Mandarin from *In the Mood for Love*, *Hua Yang De Nianhua* ('*Age of Blossoms*'),[7] is a lament for the golden days of old Shanghai.[8] The singer, Zhou Xuan, was also a legendary actress and the incarnation of the 1930s' era of splendour.

It is important to address here Wong's nostalgia for his native city: having moved to Hong Kong at the age of five, what he remembers best of the sixties is the Shanghainese community of Tsim Sha Tsui. 'In those days, the Shanghainese in Hong Kong didn't get along very well with the local people. In the '30s and '40s, Shanghai was so modern that even '50s Hong Kong seemed rather primitive to them. At first the exiles lived by themselves and tried to build a small Shanghai with their own music and cinemas' (Fuller 96). The meticulous restoration of everyday objects, practices and fashions of the 1930s Shanghai disguised as the 1960s Hong Kong in Wong's films 'easily produces the effect of retrospection and hence – since the past is made to appear so beautiful and elusive – of nostalgia […]' (Chow 651). In fact, when *In the Mood for Love* was released in China, 'almost every viewer saw it as a story that happened in former Shanghai. […] details like women's elegant cheongsams, men's cigarettes, the sound of footsteps in incommodious aisles, and songs from radio programs […] all made this film seem like an old Shanghai drama that took place in Hong Kong' (Cui 38).

Costume design in both films is of equal importance as the soundtrack to the portrayal of the era. Created by William Chang, Wong's most frequent collaborator,[9] it features a wide array of cheongsam dresses. So called in Western fashion after the Cantonese term, cheongsam is better known in Mainland China as 'qipao'. As the name suggests,[10] it must have originated during the Qing Dynasty. Originally being rectangular-shaped and wide-sleeved, the robe left nothing uncovered except for hands and face. Donning form-fitting garments was contrary to Chinese etiquette, and it was not until the 1920s that qipao began to get tight. Calendars of that decade featuring qipao-clad girls playing golf, dancing and sipping Coca-Cola popularized body-hugging designs. Following the May Thirtieth Movement, women in China started wearing qipao in their pursuit of gender equality (Clark). Contrasted to the rural two-piece outfit, it came to represent urban lifestyle in the 1930s, and during the Second Sino-Japanese war cheongsam attained the status of national dress. That was mostly thanks to the first lady of China, Madam Chiang, who masterfully combined modern qipao with Western coats while abroad, and wore plain, soft-hued models back home. In its new rank, qipao was incorporated in the Miss Hong Kong beauty pageant.[11] The winner of the 1966 edition also wore a cheongsam to the Miss Universe of the same year to represent Chinese ethnicity.

While mainland China stayed isolated from the rest of the world, Hong Kong engaged in a beneficial fashion exchange with the West. By the 1950s, qipao had adopted an

hourglass shape but many recognizable elements – diagonal construction, mandarin collar and frog fastenings – remained intact. Western women were fascinated by it, even Hollywood stars Grace Kelly and Elisabeth Taylor appeared wearing cheongsam-inspired dresses. Meanwhile in Hong Kong, ladies were pairing qipaos with Western accessories: cardigans, jackets, stockings, heels and furs (Xie qtd. in Yang 2007: 35). Brocades, embroidery and slits were reserved for particularly bold women – prostitutes from Wan Chai and Tsim Sha Tsui. Lavish cheongsams we see on Bai Ling and Lulu were preceded by iconic designs of Phyllis Dalton in *The World of Suzie Wong* (Richard Quine, 1960). Familiar with the film and a real-life Suzie,[12] Wong likely drew inspiration for Bai Ling from this Hollywood melodrama: the protagonist is a call-girl who falls in love with a resident artist and offers herself free of charge. In contrast to Bai Ling's sensual qipaos, dresses worn by Su Lizhen were a popular daily wear around the same decade. Middle-class women used cotton fabrics, while better-off ladies ordered customised cheongsams with laces, plaids and prints (Clark 2000). Form-fitting qipaos were harder to make, as a tailor had to take twenty-four body measurements to draft the pattern, then sew the collar and buttons by hand, trim the dress and lastly, carefully iron the fabric to give it shape. This painstaking process is portrayed in Wong's short film *The Hand* (*Eros*, 2004), made between the shootings of *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*.

Costly in making and uncomfortable to move in, cheongsam became associated with city vanity and fell under the taboo during the Cultural Revolution. Mao's 1966 campaign urging people to destroy the 'Four Olds' resulted in burning flamboyant garments as symbols of feudalistic culture. It took another twenty years for qipao to restore the status of a national dress (Finnane 268), but ever since China reopened its market, cheongsam sparked the interest of elite Western designers: Ungaro, Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Oscar de la Renta, Christian Lacroix, Prada, John Galliano, Tom Ford and Louis Vuitton. 'Qipao fever' reached its peak in the early 2000s, mainly due to the releases of *In the Mood for Love*, *2046* and *Lust, Caution* (*Sè, Jiè,* Ang Lee, 2007). Nowadays there are qipao tours[13] and clubs,[14] and both Chinese and Western celebrities occasionally don cheongsam in its original or modified form.[15] Qipaos from *In the Mood for Love* not only cleverly match the surroundings,[16] they also establish continuity between different scenes and between Wong's pictures. In the viewer's eyes, Su and cheongsam are inseparable, and so we perceive Bai Ling – clad in the same fashion, walking in similar locations – as her doppelganger. Other characters wearing qipao in *2046* – Lulu and Su Lizhen from

Singapore – prepare us for the realization that all women in Chow's life are in fact simulacra of the same woman, and cheongsam itself is tinged with mourning over lost love.

Loss is the principal ingredient of longing, and nostalgia thrives on this tragic awareness. The desired object is 'lost to the past' (Jankélévitch 290) and it is this temporal irretrievability that makes the object desirable in the first place. The pain of loss comes together with the acceptance of the impossible return: '[…] reflective nostalgia takes pleasure in the misty remoteness of the past and cultivates the bittersweet pangs of poignancy… The reflective nostalgic understands deep down that loss is irrecoverable' (Boym xxviii). When Chow seeks to rent the room 2046, or writes his fiction, or seduces Bai Ling, he indulges in longing for something that can never be attained. There is sadness *and* pleasure in this longing, and so it relies on the frustration rather than fulfilment of Chow's wish. He remembers 'in order to be unhappy' (Barthes 217), not to learn from past mistakes, and by re-living his loss in the present, proves that 2046 is a destination desirable only from afar.

The epilogue to *In the Mood for Love* illustrates that loss triggers nostalgia: 'He remembers those vanished years. As though looking through a dusty window-pane, the past is something he could see, but not touch. If only he could break through the glass and bring it back.'[17] Wong is nostalgic about the world that had been reduced to remnants. It is no coincidence that the last scene of the film is set against the backdrop of the ancient Buddhist ruin. Ruins remind not only of the bygone times and the present that never came to be, but also of the future, when the onlookers themselves will be history. Once the transition is complete, Hong Kong of today will become another ruin. But instead of trying to restore the city to how it was before, 'Wong is really telling his Hong Kong audience that they should take the opportunity of changeless time to reflect on themselves and their history in order to prepare themselves for the great changes that are to come after 2046' (Teo 2005: 142). In the closing scene of *2046*, Chow leaves Bai Ling because, despite the obvious allure of the old Hong Kong she symbolizes, he needs to end their game of borrowing each other's time. And so, he gets on a taxi 'headed for a drowsy future through the unfathomable night...'[18] The last shot of the film mirrors the first, only this time, the same hole for burying secrets has a sinister aspect. In the tradition of *wenyi pian* and in contrast with Hollywood melodramas, there is no happy ending. 'Some years back I had a happy ending in my grasp… But I let it slip away,' confesses Chow when he

is unable to finish his novel on a high note, as Jingwen requested. It seems that Hong Kong, too, lost confidence in the future back in 1984, as the city lost its place at the negotiating table. Twenty years after the Handover that had affected them not only politically and economically, but also psychologically, the citizens of Hong Kong feel like 'an endangered community' (Loud qtd. in Tam). The new government is more of a replica of the old colonial system, but without the freedom of speech, and so many locals see Hong Kong independence as 'the only way out for future' (ibid.). Wong Kar-wai captures the prevailing spirit of escapism through the metaphor of travelling 'forward in time and backwards in space' (Yue 226). Nostalgic not so much for their golden years as for the 'visions of the future that became obsolete' (Boym 13), Wong's characters, much like Hong Kong citizens, are stuck in a place where nothing ever changes. It is a society in crisis, unsure of its identity or destiny. While resonating with the collective fears, Wong's film really offers to overcome stagnation of the post-Handover period by moving to the next stage, toward a future beyond 2046.

Notes

[1] Quote from the *Interviews with Wong Kar-wai and the Cast* special feature of *2046* on DVD.

[2] 五十年不變 means 'remain unchanged for fifty years'.

[3] Many of Tak's quotes refer to In the Mood for Love: 'That day, six years ago [in 1962], a rainbow appeared in my heart. It's still there, like a flame burning inside me. But what are your real feelings for me? Are they like a rainbow after the rain? Or did that rainbow fade away long ago?'

[4] The alternative ending of *In the Mood for Love* contains a brief re-encounter of the protagonists in Cambodia: Su accompanies her husband on a business trip and Chow is on his way to Vietnam. Come find me if you are going there, he says. As they part ways, Chow cannot help asking: 'Did you ever call me?' Su replies: 'I don't remember'. As she disappears into the passage, Chow follows her with a sad gaze. The next shot reveals a young monk on the upper gallery. He watches Chow deposit a heart-shaped trinket inside a hole in the wall, cup his hands around it and whisper. *The Secret Reunion in Angkor Wat* thus connects the protagonists' last meeting to the omnipresent 'whispered secrets' leitmotif of *2046* and Chow's dramatic transformation.

[5] Quote from the special feature interview of *In The Mood for Love* on DVD.

[6] In the decade following the Handover, films and television programmes set in the 1930s Shanghai were extremely popular among the Hong Kong audiences (Lee 1999: 219).

[7] This song also provided the title under which *In the Mood for Love* circulated in the domestic distribution.

[8] The diegetic use of *Hua Yang De Nianhua* in the sequence that portrays the protagonists, separated by the wall, listening to the same radio programme, heightens 'the complicated play of proximity, distance and connectedness' (Tse 43). The song subsides as the telephone rings in Su Lizhen's office. Chow asks: 'If there is an extra ticket, will you come with me?' The following scene, accompanied by Nat King Cole's *Quizás, Quizás, Quizás,* depicts Chow leaving the room 2046 and Su arriving there minutes too late. They miss each other for the second time in Singapore, when she secretly comes to his hotel, but does not find the courage to meet Chow in person. As Su takes her leave, *Quizás, Quizás, Quizás* ensues again.

[9] William Chang Suk Ping has worked as production designer, costumer and editor on all of Wong's feature films.

[10] Qipao 旗袍 can be translated as 'banner gown', alluding to the Eight Banners of the Qing Dynasty (Yang 20).

[11] Maggie Cheung was discovered during one of such contests when she was only 18. Surprisingly, she came second (Lau).

[12] Wong comments: 'After I first came to Hong Kong from Shanghai, I was living in Tsim Sha Tsui, an area frequented by girls who were generally known as Suzie Wong – girls who worked in the bars entertaining sailors arriving on those battleships.' (Lalanne 84).

[13] Offered by Newman Tours, this guided walk explores the origins of qipao and its changing status between visits to the Shanghai Museum, Jinjiang Hotel, Cathay Theatre and one the most respected tailors in the city.

[14] Wang Weiyu opened Shanghai Cheongsam Salon in 2007, where she teaches women how to select the right dress, walk, dance and sit wearing a qipao (Trouillaud).

[15] Nicole Kidman, Jessica Chastain, Celine Dion and Madonna are merely a few examples.

[16] Floral patterns of the two dresses Su wears in the beginning and in the end of *In the Mood for Love* replicate the curtains; at other times, geometric patterns complement the interiors; and in the deleted hotel scene – the consummation of the affair Wong chose not to show – one can catch a glimpse of a red qipao that appeared on the film's posters.

[17] The line comes from Liu Yichnag's short story *Intersection*, set in the 1970s Hong Kong.

[18] The epilogue to *2046* is borrowed from Liu Yichang's *The Drunkard* (1963), the first stream-of-consciousness novel in Chinese literature.

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From Arthouse to Amazon: The Evolution of Wong Kar-wai

In the five years since *The Grandmaster* (2013) was released, international media has largely fed speculation over Wong Kar-wai's next project: a Gucci biopic, a Chinese web series, an adaptation of Jin Yuchen's novel *Blossoms…* The only confirmed project so far is, ironically, the least expected – online series *Tong Wars* for Amazon Studios. Although the news may strike many of his devotees as odd – after all, Wong himself repeatedly claimed that he would rather make 'small films he can be happy with' than 'big expensive films' for the mass audiences (qtd. in Ong, 1998) –, venturing into mainstream territory is the next logical step in his career.

Wong Kar-wai's ten feature films, which range from martial arts to romantic comedy yet do not belong to any one genre, have come to represent more than those of any other director, transitional Hong Kong. Which is rather peculiar, given that Wong's working method and storytelling principles are most atypical of the local film industry. The critics tend to contrast his subtle, atmospheric films to Hong Kong mainstream productions, yet upon closer examination, the relationship between Wong Kar-wai and local film industry is not conflicting but rather reciprocal. Let us consider Wong's filmography so far. His debut film *As Tears Go By* drew on both Hong Kong (John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*, 1986) and Hollywood (Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, 1973) influences. Wong's idiosyncratic style emerged with *Days of Being Wild*, but for all its artistry, the film pandered to the mass market, and it must be added that, after 'the disastrous midnight premiere' (qtd. in Bordwell, 2008), Wong tried to save the box office by adding an ambiguous prologue with Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Andy Lau, two popular actors whose early, albeit episodic, appearance would attract more viewers. *Ashes of Time* was a daring experiment with *wuxia* and adaptation, but we should also note that following a lukewarm domestic reception, Wong Kar-wai attempted to lure overseas moviegoers by adding explosive fight scenes. All films that followed, though undeniably innovative in their use of camera techniques, narrative structures and editing, drew on generic conventions: romantic comedy and gangster film (*Chungking Express*), film noir and crime drama (*Fallen Angels*), road-movie (*Happy Together* and *My Blueberry Nights*), *wenyi* (*In the Mood for Love* and *2046*) and *wuxia* (*The Grandmaster*). On all of his films, Wong has worked with Cantonese (Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau, Tony Leung Chiu-wai), pan-Asian

(Faye Wong, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Takuya Kimura) and even American (Norah Jones) actor-singers and pop idols. While his improvisational approach sets Wong Kar-wai apart from the time-pressed, money-driven Hong Kong film industry, his frequent stylistic choices – musical montage, off-centre framing, experiments with exposure and focal lengths, bold colour palette – originate in commercial cinema. One could even say that Wong's merit lies not in developing original techniques, but in re-working popular strategies to create a style that is at the same time hybrid and idiosyncratic, sumptuous and profound, intellectually compelling yet commercially viable.

Given that Wong Kar-wai has never been commercially successful in his home territory – *As Tears Go By* and *The Grandmaster* are his only box office hits – he had to pander to international audiences: 'If you are the kind of director who wants to make your own films, you have to find a space to survive. […] I constantly have to accommodate the overseas market […]' (Wong qtd. in Mak, 1995: 67). Wong's own production company, Jet Tone, has traditionally made profit by pre-selling distribution rights and releasing different international versions, fine-art collectibles and ancillary products, such as the tenth anniversary DVD box of *Happy Together*, all 2046 copies of which included a model of the Iguazu Falls lamp and a pair of boxers, or a limited collection of T-shirts adorned with *My Burberry Nights* prints, which were sold in the United States at $95 apiece.

As numerous sources attest, the Hong Kong film industry on the whole has traditionally relied on international distribution (Leung and Chan, 1997; Teo, 2000; Chu, 2003). Between the Japanese occupation (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949), the British colony served as a base for the production of Mandarin features and propaganda films. With the emergence of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Hong Kong not only replaced Shanghai as 'Hollywood of the East', but, as Stephen Teo reminds us, '[…] gained *de facto* status as a national cinema, even though Mandarin cinema developed as a parallel cinema to the Cantonese feature industry' (Teo, 2000). When China banned the import of Hong Kong films circa 1952, the local industry sought other markets outside its borders – Chinese diasporic communities in nearby countries and overseas. In a few years' time, exports to Southeast Asia alone accounted for one-third of total gross sales (Leung and Chan, 1997: 145), and Hong Kong film industry became focused on quick, inexpensive and lucrative productions. Two means of ensuring stable box-office revenues were tested genres and star marketing, but this strategy somewhat

backfired in the 1970s', when Hong Kong cinema became practically synonymous with the kung fu genre in the West: '[…] for a long time in the public mind, Hong Kong appeared to produce nothing else' (Teo, 2000). This tendency continued well into the late 1970s, when the directors of the first New Wave – Stanley Kwan, Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Patrick Tam – started producing films that catered primarily to local audiences. The second New Wave generation, to which Wong Kar-wai belongs, continued exploring local themes, but this, paradoxically, has proved to be effective at attracting global audiences – as Ackbar Abbas suggests, the new Hong Kong cinema was most international by being local (1997: 190). Following the recession of the late 1990s', *local film industry had to search for new outlets, such as* Japan, South Korea, Europe, the Middle East and, as of lately, the expanding mainland market. In catering to the tastes and demands of different markets, Wong Kar-wai is quite representative of Hong Kong: he exploits *heterogeneous* sources – *from Buddhist school of thought to MTV aesthetics* to world literature – and mixes high and low culture, exotic milieu and universal themes to reach wider sectors of a global audience. Take, for instance, the transnational soundtrack which encompasses a wide range of styles (pop, bolero, tango, rumba, opera, techno, instrumental) and artists (from Nat King Cole to The Mamas and the Papas to Massive Attack).

Granting that Wong Kar-wai's *success* largely depends on international distribution and critical appraisal, the role of film festivals cannot be understated. As Gary Bettinson rightly notes (2015: 24), Wong's entry onto the festival market was facilitated by the offbeat Hong Kong productions like *Peking Opera Blues* (*Do ma daan*,1986, dir. Sally Yeh), *Rouge* (*Yin ji kau*, 1988, dir. Stanley Kwan) and *The Killer* (*Dip huet seung hung*, 1989, dir. John Woo). Screenings in Venice, Locarno, Toronto, New York, London, Stockholm, San Sebastian, Berlin and, above all, Cannes had a significant impact on the circulation of Wong's films and production of his subsequent projects. Wong Kar-wai owes much of his lightning rise to fame to the Cannes Film Festival: already his debut feature, selected for the Director's Fortnight, invited comparisons with Martin Scorsese and *nouvelle vague*, while *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love* won him the Best Director award and Grand Prix technique, further solidifying Wong's status of a transnational *auteur*.

In addition to critical appraisal and festival success, Wong Kar-wai has gained a loyal international following: his films have been ardently discussed in academic essays,

Youtube videos and forums. A quick search on Amazon returns over a dozen titles – in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Greek – dedicated to his oeuvre, and the Hong Kong Film Critics Society's only anthology to single out a local director is *The Film World of Wong Kar-wai* (2004). Wong's oeuvre has invited a body of criticism of great complexity, however, few studies discuss his filmography in its entirety. By investigating international reception of his ten feature films, we hope to trace Wong Kar-wai's evolution, from being an arthouse icon to joining Amazon.

Wong Kar-wai began his career as a production assistant on serial dramas. Following a training at Hong Kong Television Broadcast Limited, he was hired by Alan Tang to write scripts for several films ranging from action to romantic comedy. Thanks to Tang's connections, Wong was able to make his directorial debut, *As Tears Go By* (*Wangjiao kamen*, 1988). Influenced by popular trends in Hong Kong and Hollywood filmmaking yet innovative in its treatment of the gangster genre, the film was a success with both local audiences and critics. It grossed HK$11,532,283 domestically, remaining Wong's highest-grossing film until the release of *The Grandmaster*, and won the Best Art Direction and Best Supporting Actor (Jacky Cheung) at the 8th Hong Kong Film Awards. Although not available in the West for another decade, *As Tears Go By* got reassessed following the success of Wong's later films: the critics now note the 'techniques and themes that would later become a part of his signature style' (McMillin, 2004), 'the first "Wong Kar-wai moment" (Hendrix, 2008) and 'a new vision not yet in perfect focus' (Lee, 2008). Indeed, the inclusion of romantic elements and pop songs (the telephone booth scene is a good example of both) made *As Tears Go By* stand out from a sea of action-packed and gratuitously violent Triad films: 'Wong took the over-the-top tradition of 1980s Hong Kong cinema and ran with it, adding fresh doses of formal fanfare without diluting the commercial appeal of genre conventions […]' (Ho, 2013).

The commercial success of his debut film allowed Wong Kar-wai to 'do something more personal after that' (qtd. in Brunette, 2005: xvii) – a mood piece set in the 1960s Hong. With *Days of Being Wild* (*A Fei zheng chuan*, 1990), Wong sought to carve his own path within the confines of commercial industry: packed with Cantonese pop stars and released before Christmas, the film targeted young mainstream audiences, but average moviegoers did not appreciate its fragmented narrative, frequent voiceovers and languid pace. The dismal box-office led to the cancellation of the sequel and marked the end of Wong Kar-wai's collaboration with Alan Tang. Nonetheless, *Days of Being Wild* delighted the

critics: to cite an instant, Li Cheuk-to considered it 'the most pleasant result in recent years of Hong Kong cinema' from a cultural perspective – compared to *As Tears Go By*, 'which still showed signs of being a commercial, entertainment film,' Wong's second feature was a marked departure from genre cinema (1991: 37). *Days of Being Wild* won five Hong Kong Film Awards, including Best Film, Best Director and Best Actor, and took home Best Director award at the Golden Horse Film Festival. In retrospective, international critics praised *Days of Being Wild* as 'the first film in which Mr. Wong's vision took full bloom...' (Dargis, 2004) and 'one of the peaks of Hong Kong filmmaking' (Wilmington, 2005). Western reviewers (Burr, 2005a; Nochimson, 2010: 349) now unanimously agree that Wong's idiosyncratic style has already manifested itself in his second feature.

The box-office failure of *Days of Being Wild* made it hard for Wong Kar-wai to obtain financing for his next project: after In-Gear aborted production of the sequel, the director joined forces with *As Tears Go By* co-writer Jeffrey Lau and founded Jet Tone, one of the first independent production companies in Hong Kong. Jet Tone would co-produce, alongside Block 2 Pictures and Scholar Films Company, Wong's first martial arts film, *Ashes of Time* (*Dong xie xi du*, 1994). Based on Jin Yong's *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, the film took almost two years and HK$47 million to complete, and grossed mere HK$9,023,583: the audiences expected a fast-paced wuxia flick, but were served instead an elusive story with multiple narrators, ambiguous flashbacks and impressionistic fight scenes. *Ashes of Time* received mixed reviews from local critics: some reprimanded Wong Kar-wai for making a costly film that did not cater to the mass market in times when the industry was at a low point (Sek qtd. in Tse, 2013: 94-95), while others applauded his experimentation with the *wuxia* genre (Law qtd. in Tse, 2013: 95) and compared him to Godard and Resnais (Toh, 1995). *Ashes of Time* won several major prizes at the 1995 Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards (Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Actor for Leslie Cheung) and at the Hong Kong Film Awards (Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design). Critical reception in the West was largely favourable, but deemed *Ashes of Time* 'a challenging sell in the international marketplace' (Elley, 1994b). Wong Kar-wai revised the film for foreign distribution in later years: in 2003, he set to perform digital restoration and re-record the soundtrack using better preserved copies from France, and *Ashes of Time Redux* premiered at Cannes in 2008. The new version was greeted as 'the film during which he shook off genre and abandoned the banalities of mainstream narrative' (Dargis, 2008). Wesley Morris, who has also seen

the original, wrote of the re-release: 'Ashes of Time was always more a work of philosophy than pure entertainment, and a decade and a half later it still is' (2008). The critic noted that, even reordered, the story 'remains secondary to Wong's sensibility' (ibid). Narrative incoherence was remarked upon by a number of American reviewers: 'Wong Kar-Wai's 1994 epic, remodelled and reissued, looks spectacular, but trying to follow its storyline is a test' (Quinn, 2008); 'Wong Kar-Wai doesn't supply much of a plot with a narrative engine to pull us through' (Ebert, 2008). Some praised *Ashes of Time*, overlooking its narrative complexities, as a forerunner of the millennial martial arts epics: 'Six years before Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Wo long cang hu, 2000, dir. Ang Lee), Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai was a pioneer in the genre of stylish, star-loaded, and festival-ready *wuxia* filmmaking' (Johnson, 2008). Overshadowed by the highly acclaimed *Chungking Express* at the time of its initial release, and now outshined by *The Grandmaster*, *Ashes of Time* remains Wong Kar-wai's most underrated work.

Wong's next feature after *Ashes of Time*, made in record three months, premiered before and grossed almost on par with the *wuxia* epic, HK $7,678,549. Although Wong Kar-wai made it 'like a student film' (qtd. in Ong, 1998) – without any permits or rehearsals, and on a very low budget – *Chungking Express* (*Chóngqìng sēnlín*, 1994) ended up collecting a bouquet of awards at the 1995 Hong Kong Film Awards (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor for Tony Leung Chiu-Wai, Best Editing and a joint nomination for Best Cinematography). The critics applauded Wong's pastiche of popular genres, the ingenious narrative and stylistic choices. *Chungking Express* premiered worldwide at the prestigious arthouse festival in Locarno, and was subsequently screened in Toronto, New York, Chicago, London and Stockholm. At the Stockholm International Film Festival, *Chungking Express* was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize and caught the eye of Quentin Tarantino: 'When I saw *Chungking Express* I felt that touch of kinship or camaraderie, whatever an artist feels when he recognizes another artist's song' (Lacher, 1996: 1). In a later interview, Tarantino confessed that *Chungking Express* made him cry with joy: '[...] tears started falling, about three different times during the movie. I was like, why am I crying? And it's because my feelings for this movie run so deep – I'm crying not about the movie, I'm crying because I'm just so happy to love a movie this much' (2005). Tarantino secured the U.S. distribution rights under his Rolling Thunder label, and in March 1996 *Chungking Express* became the first arthouse film from Hong Kong to hit American screens. The film grossed only $600,200 but garnered ecstatic reviews from

local critics, who were quick to draw parallels with Quentin Tarantino (Anderson, 1994), Jim Jarmush (Thomas, 1996) and *nouvelle vague* (Romney, 1995; Teo, 1997: 196). 'Like Tarantino Wong Kar-wai seems to be very cinema-savvy, tossing unusual combinations into his cinema mishmash,' wrote Jeffrey Anderson. 'Like *Pulp Fiction* before it, *Chungking Express* is unlike almost any film I have ever seen, and yet it is like almost every film I have ever seen' (Anderson, 1994). The mix of cosmopolitan pop culture and Hollywood references, hand-held camerawork and frequent jump-cuts led to comparisons with Jean-Luc Godard. Derek Elley felt it was '[…] like watching an early Godard movie set in contemporary Hong Kong [...]' (Elley, 1994a) and Tony Rayns commented that *Chungking Express* reminded him '[…] what Godard movies were once like: fast, hand-held, funny and very, very catchy' (Rayns, 1995). Roger Ebert defined *Chungking Express* as 'the kind of movie you'll relate to if you love film itself' (Ebert, 1996). 'When Godard was hot, in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was an audience for this style,' wrote Ebert. 'Many of today's younger filmgoers, fed only by the narrow selections at video stores, are not as curious or knowledgeable and may simply be puzzled by *Chungking Express* instead of challenged' (ibid).

By relating his name to cult icons and niche cinéphile market, the critics elevated Wong Kar-wai himself to the *auteur* status. The propagators of the *auteur* theory have always contrasted arthouse cinema and commercial industry: *Cahiers du Cinéma's* ideal of *auteur* is the kind of director who is not constrained by genre conventions or profitmaking imperatives, and displays thematic and stylistic consistency throughout his oeuvre. Wong Kar-wai fits this definition inasmuch as he seems to be making not different films, but 'different episodes of one movie' (Ngai and Wong, 1997: 98). His milieu and themes are remarkably constant: while seven out of ten Wong Kar-wai films take place in Hong Kong, the motifs of longing, memory and impermanence permeate his narratives in the form of expired pineapple cans, magic wine, ticking clocks and futuristic train rides. His peculiar visual style is equally self-referential: shallow focus, off-centre framing, bold colours, slow motion and step printing are indispensable elements of 'the Wong Kar-wai look'. Yet, despite his avant-garde reputation in the West, Wong has often relied on generic conventions and bankable cast to pre-sell distribution rights and obtain foreign funding, and we should not overlook social and economic practicalities of the production and reception of his films. At the time of the *Chungking Express* release, arthouse was gaining relevance as an alternative commercial strategy and, because the circulation of

arthouse films relies as much on critics' reviews as on word-of-mouth recommendations of loyal audiences, Wong Kar-wai has already started implementing various marketing strategies to build regular spectatorship. One of such stratagems is releasing multiple cuts: arguing that 'the unknown is very attractive for the audience' (qtd. in Ying, 2015: 167), Wong frequently mentions deleted scenes and alternative endings during the promotion of re-releases, prompting his fans to acquire DVDs of different regions for comparisons (Lee and Lee, 2017: xiii).

While *Chungking Express* catapulted Wong Kar-wai to international fame, his next film, *Fallen Angels* (*Duo luo tian shi*, 1995), was a backward step in the view of many critics (Klady, 1995; Kraicer, 1995). 'It's hard to get a handle on precisely what's gone wrong with *Fallen Angels*. It has the strengths of a Wong Kar-wai film, but they are skewed, out of balance. Sometimes its screenplay is upstaged by the score: more often it is overshadowed by the cinematography. The effects, the virtuosic filmmaking call attention to themselves, instead of drawing us to feel more deeply into the story,' wrote Shelly Kraicer. 'It still could be the best HK movie of the year. And it has scenes that will likely be talked about and techniques that will be imitated in less interesting movies. But we'll have to wait for Wong Kar-wai's next project to see him create something really new' (Kraicer, 1995). Stylistic exuberance, thinly defined characters and excessive similarities between *Fallen Angels* and *Chungking Express* (Teo 2005: 84; Brunette, 2005: 60) were some of the reasons why the former received fewer, briefer and less exciting reviews than Wong's previous works. Most critics dismissed *Fallen Angels* for privileging form over content (Abbas, 1997: 71; Guthmann, 1998) – though some argued that the film's style *is* its substance (Tsui, 1995: 94) – and it was the first Wong Kar-wai picture to be deprived of major awards: at the 15th Annual Hong Kong Film Awards, *Fallen Angels* won Best Cinematography (Christopher Doyle), Best Original Score and Best Supporting Actress (Karen Mok Man-Wai), and at the 2nd Annual Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards it was simply mentioned as 'Recommended Film.' *Fallen Angels* did not take home any awards from the 1995 Toronto Film Festival, where it premiered internationally, however, several critics hailed Wong as the successor of *Nouvelle Vague*: 'I felt transported back to the 1960s […] I was watching a film that was not afraid of its audience,' wrote Roger Ebert (1998). The influential Chicago Sun-Times critic professed that Wong Kar-wai would appeal to niche markets – '[...] the kinds of people you see in the Japanese animation section of the video store [...] those who subscribe to more than three film

magazines […] art students. It's not for your average moviegoers - unless of course, they want to see something new.' (Ebert, 1998). Klady expressed similar thoughts in his review: 'Wong is unquestionably a fierce talent. [...] What he needs now is a more accessible yarn to break out of his rarefied status and reach a wider audience' (Klady, 1995). *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* exemplify Wong's conscious attempt to attract niche audiences: festivalgoers, cinephiles, film theorists, but, above all, a young, international and increasingly media sophisticated public.

Following the releases of *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, Wong Kar-wai's trademark techniques – experimental cinematography, fast-paced editing, step-printing sequences and musical montage – became a trend in Asian cinema. In 1997, Wong commented: 'Too many other directors are 'doing' Wong Kar-Wai these days, so I have to do something different' (qtd. in Rayns, 2000: 34). His following project marked a clear departure in both stylistic and narrative terms, and earned Wong a secure place in the international arthouse circle. Conceived in the midst of sovereignty talks and produced in collaboration with French and Italian investors, and Jet Tone's Japanese and Korean partners, *Happy Together* (*Chun gwong cha sit*, 1997) premiered domestically one month before the Handover and grossed HK $8,600,141 – a decent number, given its subject matter and Category III rating. Local critics reviewed the film primarily within queer diaspora framework, noting that Wong's depiction of homosexuality contravened mainstream standards of the time (Reynaud, 1997: 76). At the 16th Hong Kong Film Awards, *Happy Together* won only in the category Best Actor (Tony Leung), but in Cannes, the film competed for the Palme D'Or and won Best Director, making Wong Kar-wai the first Hong Kong filmmaker to receive this prestigious award. Cannes' approval had a significant impact on the circulation of *Happy Together* and Wong's subsequent films: Kino International secured theatrical and VHS releases in the United States of both *Happy Together* and *Fallen Angels* shortly after the festival, whereas *In the Mood for Love, 2046* and *My Blueberry Nights* all had pre-sale distribution rights in the West and premiered at Cannes. The film's reception in the West was overall ecstatic: 'Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-Wai [...] is the hippest name in Asian cinema right now, and in *Happy Together* […] makes us reconsider how stories can be told on film' (Guthman, 1997). International reviewers called *Happy Together* Wong's 'most linear and mature' (Elley, 1997) and 'most fully realized work' (Johnson, 1997). Aside from critical appraisal, *Happy Together* received attention from critics (Holden, 1997; Elley, 1997; Johnson, 1997) and academics: numerous politico-allegorical readings of the film

boosted Wong Kar-wai's social relevance and established him as 'Hong Kong's *premier* art-film director' (Provencher, 2016: 489).

International success of *Happy Together* allowed Wong to return to his favourite time period, 1960s Hong Kong, in his next project, *In the Mood for Love* (*Hua yang nian hua*, 2000). The film, which was reportedly completed on the morning of its Cannes premiere (Brunette, 2005: xvii), won the festival's second-most prestigious award, the Grand Prix technique, and Best Actor for Tony Leung. The film further solidified Wong's *auteur* status and garnered much praise from Western critics (Kraicer, 2000; Parkinson, 2000; Rosenbaum, 2001): to cite a couple, Mitchell described it as 'the most breathtakingly gorgeous film of the year, dizzy with a nose-against-the-glass romantic spirit that has been missing from the cinema forever [...]' (Mitchell, 2000), while Anderson claimed that In the Mood for Love 'render[s] all other movies plain and ordinary' (Anderson, 2001). Negative comments were rare and restricted to accusations of privileging style over substance: 'Perhaps no film at the festival had as many lovely compositions as Wong's *In the Mood for Love*, but that is all it has. [...] Wong is looking increasingly like a brilliant illustrator, someone who can dash off quick sketches with ineffable grace, rather than a filmmaker with anything to say' (McCarthy, 2000). Most critics agreed that Wong's stylistic choices were well justified: 'If *Fallen Angels* and *Happy Together* are the master's mannerist exercises in stylistic refinement and intensification, *In the Mood for Love* is a departure; a heartaching, eye-bewitching masterwork that stakes out new ground' (Kraicer, 2000). *In the Mood for Love* remains Wong's most internationally acclaimed film to date: it won Best Non-European Film at the European Film Awards, César Award for Best Foreign Film, Best Foreign Film at the National Society of Film Critics Awards, Best Foreign Film and Best Cinematography at the New York Film Critics Circle Awards, and the Douglas Sirk Award at the Hamburg Film Festival. *Cahiers du cinéma* ranked it number five on their list of *Ten Best Pictures of 2000*, while *Sight & Sound's* last critics' poll of *The Greatest Films of All Time* placed *In the Mood for Love* before such cult classics as *Mulholland Drive* (2001, dir. David Lynch)*, Psycho* (1960, dir. Alfred Hitchcock), and *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang).

Wong Kar-wai's subsequent project, *2046* (idem, 2004), continued exploring the themes and characters of *In the Mood for Love*: 'One day when I was shooting *In the Mood for Love* in Bangkok [...] I realised the room number was like 3-0-something and I said why

don't we put it as 2046? [...] Then the structure of *2046* began to change [...] and the character played by Tony became the link between the two films' (Wong qtd. in Salisbury, 2004). As the name suggests, the film was built around Deng Xiaoping's promise of 'no change for fifty years' and meant to attract the attention of cultural critics. In the works since December 1999, *2046* was Wong's most ambitious and longest-running project – it became a running joke in the local press that the title actually referred to the release date. *2046* was ready – or nearly ready – in time for the 57th Cannes Film Festival: due to last-minute subtitling and music coordination, the screening had to be postponed twice, but even so the film 'turned out to be... well, not quite finished' (Child, 2007). The initial reception was tepid at best, and Wong Kar-wai continued modifying *2046* after the festival: completing special-effects, arranging re-takes and revising the order. The international cut, released later same year, gained notably better reviews: Dargis called Wong 'one of the few filmmakers working in commercial cinema who refuse to be enslaved by traditional storytelling' (Dargis, 2005), whereas Burr compared him to the great directors of post-WWII Europe and remarked on the film's intertextuality with *Days of Being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*: '*2046* takes characters, themes, and even lines of dialogue from those two earlier films and stirs them into a new and mind-altering cocktail [...]' (Burr, 2005b). Indeed, the protagonist of *2046* and the motif of burying secrets come straight out of *In the Mood for Love*, while the character of Lulu and mentions of 'legless bird' Yuddy connect the film to *Days of Being Wild*. In purely visual terms, *2046* also alludes to *Happy Together* (the taxi ride motif), *As Tears Go By* (repeated shots of the neon hotel sign) and Wong's short film *The Hand* (the mysterious glove of Gong Li's character). Wong himself acknowledged *2046* to be a sort of midcareer retrospective: 'To me, *2046* is a final summary. Every character can be seen as a chapter' (qtd. in Tsu-wei, 2004: 112). *2046* was a commercial failure in Hong Kong (Teo 2005: 153), but won several important awards, including Best Film, Best Actor (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Best Actress (Zhang Ziyi), at the Hong Kong Film Awards, Best Non-European Film at the European Film Awards and Best Foreign Film at the 2005 New York Film Critics Circle Awards.

By the time Wong Kar-wai had completed his most introspective opus, he was a prominent figure in the festival circuit and sought wider distribution. He had long considered foreign productions, even Hollywood (qtd. in Kaganski, 1997), and in 2006 began shooting his first English-language film in the United States. Wong co-wrote the script with Lawrence Block and casted jazz-pop singer Norah Jones in the lead role. Shot

on location in only seven weeks, *My Blueberry Nights* (2007) was ready to compete for the Palme d'Or the following May, but the film came as a disappointment to many critics: 'Tradition has it that the Cannes' opening night film is […] either cheered to the rafters or booed to oblivion or sprayed with a turbulent cocktail of the two. *My Blueberry Nights*, by contrast, wrapped up with a discreet shuffle towards the exit door […] that seemed the most damning verdict of them all' (Brooks, 2007). A number of critics felt that, by heading into a mainstream direction, Wong Kar-wai betrayed his staunchest supporters - the very people who assisted in building his brand: 'After establishing a solid arthouse reputation with his Hong Kong films [...] the prospect of new worlds to conquer must have been appealing,' wrote Kim Newman. *The Empire* critic disparaged 'trite' narrative and 'clunky dialogue,' concluding that '[i]t's difficult to see why the great director and very talented performers worked so hard to deliver such thin material' (Newman, 2008). The main argument against the film was that *My Blueberry Nights* bordered self-tribute: a character-driven plot with similar arcs, oversaturated colour palette, soundtrack, the use of step-printing and slow motion effects, motifs of alienation, escapism, time and longing were all seemingly transplanted from Wong's earlier films: 'The disappointment here doesn't have much to do with Wong doing America […], but with Wong doing Wong, and not up to his own standard' (Orange, 2008: 71). The film recycles *Yumeji's Theme* – this time performed on a harmonica – as well as many character types and situations: Jeremy performs the same function as Faye in *Chungking Express*, Leslie is similar to the Black Spider gambler from *2046*, 'Sue Lynn' is a Westernized version of 'Su Lizhen', whereas Elizabeth's solitary journey brings to mind several scenes from *Happy Together*, *Fallen Angels* and *In the Mood for Love*. 'For some, *My Blueberry Nights* confirmed a lurking suspicion that Wong Kar-wai […] was always an emperor with no clothes,' wrote Andrew Chan. 'Landing on our shores serving clichés of Americana instead of eye-popping images of urban Asia, the film at its worst came off as self-parody, as if it were exposing a shallowness in his work that had previously been masked by subtitles' (Chan, 2009). Some critics (Fox, 2008; Tobias, 2008) viewed intra-oeuvre references in a positive light, claiming that, despite the location change, *My Blueberry Nights* fits neatly into Wong's universe: 'For this director [...] geographical coordinates are […] indices of atmosphere and mood. Whether the rain-spattered alleys and narrow apartment house corridors [...] are faithful historical re-creations is beyond irrelevant. Or at least it has been to Mr. Wong's fervent European and North American admirers, who have elevated his couture fetish, his melancholy sensuality and his flair for arresting visual compositions

into elements of a major cinematic style' (Tobias, 2008). *My Blueberry Nights* got a limited theatrical release in the United States via The Weinstein Company but performed rather badly by Hollywood standards – $21 million on a $10 million budget. The film met with a lukewarm reception and a stream of food puns: 'You taste *My Blueberry Nights* with your retinas. […] gorgeous to behold and easy to swallow' (Emerson, 2008); 'It's beautiful to look at, but there's little there to savor' (Rodriguez, 2008); 'Slice the pie how you will, it's still half-baked' (Kaufman, 2008). In Hong Kong, the film grossed $867,275 and invited criticism of self-indulgence (Lam, 2008: 107; Sakura qtd. in Wong, 2008: 60). Wong Kar-wai continued revising the film for almost a year, and the new version appeared to the critics '[…] surprisingly potent, like a half-remembered dream, or a youthful affair that refuses to be forgotten' (Sandhu, 2008). *My Blueberry Nights* was a success in Europe, where it screened at several festivals (Hamburg Film Festival, Valladolid International Film Festival, Munich Asia Filmfest) and was nominated in the category Best Foreign Film (Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain). In retrospective, critics agree that recycling old themes and aesthetics in 'such a simple, non-threatening film' was part of Wong's scheme 'to introduce himself to those unfamiliar with his work without coming off too artsy […]' (Provencher, 2016: 502).

Reaching out to wider audiences, however, was not a new strategy for Wong Kar-wai: as mentioned earlier, the director has been exploiting generic conventions, popular culture and the star system since *As Tears Go By*. Via his production company, Wong has also developed a large portfolio of commercials, many of which re-use the cast, themes and visual tropes from his feature films: Wong's first TV commercial, *wkw/tk/1996@7'55"hk.net* (1996) for a fashion brand Takeo Kikuchi, bears a strong resemblance to *Fallen Angels* – it was also shot by Christopher Doyle and starred Karen Mok against Tadanobu Asano as secret lovers hired to kill each other, whereas the Motorola spot (1998) with Faye Wong plays into *Chungking Express*, and *There's Only One Sun* micro-movie for Philips (2007) exploits the science fiction side of *2046*. Among Wong's latest advertising works is a lavish two-part whiskey spot *Déjà vu* (2012), which premiered at the 65th edition of the Cannes Festival and has once again proved that Wong Kar-wai's commercials are not only evocative and visually stunning, but also perform 'self-referential / intratextual, intertextual and paratextual functions […] and can be seen as "afterthoughts," "by-products," or "foreshadowing" of his feature films' (Chen, 2016: 570).

With his next film after *My Blueberry Nights* and his latest as of now, Wong Kar-wai graduated to full-fledged mainstream status: *The Grandmaster* (*Yīdài Zōngshī*, 2013) is a tribute to Hong Kong's long-standing kung fu tradition and Wong's biggest commercial success (US$64 million worldwide). Part biopic, part *wuxia*, part period piece, it nonetheless transcends all three categories in framing Ip Man's story within a broader social context: in slightly over two hours of screen time, the film encompasses two decades of Chinese history between the Japanese invasion, civil war and Communist Revolution. Wong Kar-wai portrays kung fu as cultural legacy while exploring his signature themes, making *The Grandmaster* 'unlike anything else in his oeuvre […] yet stylistically representative of its entirety' (Kohn, 2013). The film opened the Berlin International Film Festival and received generally favourable reviews: '[…] fans of the great Hong Kong auteur […] largely won't be disappointed. The bizarre Norah Jones misfire of *My Blueberry Nights* six years ago […] has been consigned to the memory hole, and *The Grandmaster* brings Wong back to a gorgeous, heavily stylized Chinese period piece wrapped in nostalgia and melancholy […]' (O'Hehir, 2013). However, as evidenced by the largely chronological narration and more subtle cinematography compared to his previous films, *The Grandmaster* catered not as much to Wong's regular spectatorship as to average moviegoers worldwide: 'With *Grandmaster*, I wanted to make a commercial and colourful film that really has a message about […] the golden periods of the development of martial arts in China' (qtd. in Patten, 2013). Domestically, the film appealed to the mass market and critics alike: *The Grandmaster* won twelve Hong Kong Film Awards, including Best Film and Best Director, two Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards (Best Film and Best Actress), seven Golden Horse awards (including Best Actress, Best Cinematography and Audience Choice Award) and Best Director at the 2014 Beijing International Film Festival. Most importantly though, *The Grandmaster* was an official submission of Hong Kong to the Oscars and got nominated by the Academy for *Best Cinematography* (Philippe Le Sourd) and *Best Costume Design* (William Chang Suk Ping). In the States, where *The Grandmaster* was distributed by The Weinstein Company and promoted by Martin Scorsese and Samuel L. Jackson, the film incorporated additional voiceover and explanatory title cards. The decision to release the film in three different versions, each 'speak[ing] to a different audience' (Wong qtd. in Mottram, 2014) had been criticised by some as gratuitous marketing: Dargis lamented that 'the American distributor didn't have enough faith in the audience to release the original' but conceded that '[e]ven in its altered form, *The Grandmaster* is one of the truly

galvanizing cinematic experiences of the year' (Dargis, 2013); Ebiri preferred the international cut yet granted that '[…] seeing *The Grandmaster* theatrically, in any version, should be a sacrament for any true film lover […]' (Ebiri, 2013). The film received largely positive comments, with several mentions of well-justified intertextuality: '[…] there is the sort of dolorous longing Wong has conveyed beautifully in previous films […] *The Grandmaster* ultimately blends right in with Wong's body of work […]' (Rodriguez, 2013).

Having summarized international critical response to Wong Kar-wai's ten feature films, we can return to his upcoming project, online series *Tong Wars*. Thus far, we have mentioned that Wong has traditionally relied on transnational moviegoers and foreign investors. Thanks to a growing international reputation, he was able to hire pan-Asian stars for lengthy productions, premiere at prestigious festivals and attract cultural commentators. But with cinema theatres currently dominated by the blockbusters, remakes and sequels, independent filmmakers like Wong Kar-wai must seek alternative marketplaces, the small screen being one of key outlets. In 2016, Wong signed a deal with an emerging content provider in the Chinese film market, Huanxi Media Group, which wagers on world-renowned local directors to deliver quality content for a wide audience. He is reported to be working on a two-season drama series with an average budget of three million dollars per episode (Nordine, 2016) – by comparison, Wong's most expensive feature film to date, *The Grandmaster,* cost $38.6 million. While no further details on the Huanxi collaboration have been revealed so far, last year it was announced that Wong Kar-wai will be developing a web series for Amazon. 'The thing that attracted me to this project was the first opportunity to tell the story of the first Chinese-American experience in the most authentic and proper way,' commented Wong (qtd. in Kohn, 2017). The series will follow three generations of Chinese immigrants between 1905 and 1971, a turbulent period in San Francisco's Chinatown during which different clans – *tongs* – fought over control of opium, prostitution, and gambling. Written and produced by a two-times Oscar nominee Paul Attanasio, the series will appropriate many elements of Wong's feature films, such as ambiguous temporality, character archetypes and situations (the character of Vicky Sun immediately brings to mind the image of Rebecca from *Days of Being Wild*, while Johnny Young combines the characteristics of Yuddy and Wah, and Lo Mo recalls both the female gangster from *Chungking Express* and the killer's agent from *Fallen Angels*). The filming is scheduled to take place between July

2018 and January 2019, and we can expect the first season – comprised of ten episodes, each an hour long – by the end of next year.

Wong Kar-wai is the latest to join the ranks of Amazon's high-profile independent filmmakers: in the past few years, Matthew Weiner, Jill Soloway, Todd Haynes, Jim Jarmusch, Woody Allen and Kenneth Lonergan have directed films and series for the online giant. In 2016, Amazon became the first streaming service to receive Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture for *Manchester by the Sea* (dir. Kenneth Lonergan) and Best Foreign Picture for *The Salesman* (*Forushandeh*, dir. Asghar Farhadi, won). The company also gathered several awards for its original shows: *Transparent* (2015, three Golden Globes), *Mozart in the Jungle* (2016, two Golden Globes), and *Man in the High Castle* (2016, two Emmy Awards). Starting 2018, Amazon Studios invest exclusively in shows with global appeal that can generate discussions and drive subscriptions, and *Tong Wars* – 'a prime example of a period piece that blends the epic history of Chinese immigration to the U.S. with a crime potboiler' (Littleton and Holloway, 2017) – is indicative of this new direction. It is also symptomatic of Wong Kar-wai's artistic trajectory: contrary to his reputation in the West, Wong does not make films for an elitist circle, but rather caters to a globalized market: film essayists and cinephiles, millennials and festivalgoers, fans of Asian cinema and international critics. Wong Kar-wai continuously tests the limits of both commercial and independent filmmaking in mixing high and low culture, and evidently targets a cosmopolitan, multi-lingual and cinema-savvy public.

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CONCLUSIONS

In the *Introductory chapter*, I have established that Wong Kar-wai's films, frequently described by the critics as 'subtle' and 'atmospheric' mood pieces, work by engaging the audiences, first and foremost, on an emotional level. By drawing on the cognitivist, neoformalist and reception studies' theoretical frameworks, I sought to explain why Wong's films appeal to a global audience even though they often fail to attract average moviegoers in Hong Kong. I believe that Wong Kar-wai's success on the international arena is partly attributable to a clever exploitation of emotional marketing: in combining experimental style and conventional strategies, high art and popular culture, literary concepts and MTV aesthetics, the director ponders to a multi-cultural, heterogeneous, media-savvy spectatorship.

In catering to the preferences of his regular viewers, Wong often applies tested formulas and recycles old scenarios, tropes and imagery. On the one hand, consistent style and storytelling ensure that his films are equally compelling and recognizable across different genres. On the other hand, such intertextuality serves to evoke a sense of nostalgia among the audiences familiar with his previous works, and prompts those unfamiliar to look for the missing pieces of the puzzle that is the cinematic universe of Wong Kar-wai. What is more, the understanding of each individual film is greatly enriched by repeated viewings and in relation to other works by the same director.

My first task was to situate Wong's oeuvre in the socio-cultural context of postcolonial Hong Kong. I arrived at the conclusion that, although the critics tend to contrast Wong Kar-wai's works to action-oriented mainstream productions from Hong Kong, the relation between the director and local film industry is rather reciprocal: while the sector on the whole benefitted from renewed interest thanks to Wong's success on the international arthouse scene, Wong has actively exploited generic conventions, stardom, popular culture, as well as local filmmaking and marketing strategies.

Throughout this thesis, I have analysed formal and stylistic elements which are saliently and repeatedly used in Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre: fragmented narration, foregrounding, highly aestheticized set design, experimental cinematography, and, finally, arcane references to other films, literary works and philosophical concepts. I argued that only a small portion of these techniques were fruits of experimentation, the majority being deliberate, well-calculated choices rather than impromptu decisions as Wong himself would have us believe.

I would like to conclude by saying that the films of Wong Kar-wai are presumably popular among niche markets yet they also appeal to and can be enjoyed by mainstream audiences. While it is true that Wong's typically loose, disjointed narratives and oblique references may pose some cognitive challenges, sensuous visuals, eclectic music and universal themes are aimed at the spectators' perception and feelings. Viewers relate to what makes them feel – relatable characters and emblematic setting, intricate cinematography and dramatic soundtrack, appropriate pacing and tone which collectively set the mood. The filmmaker seeks to build a longer-lasting emotional connection with his audience, so that they wish to return to their favourite texts, promote the Wong Kar-wai brand, and continue to follow his works.

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