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Echoing Across the Mediterranean and the Pacific: Cinematic Resonance and Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Contemporary European and East Asian Cinema

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Echoing Across the Mediterranean and the Pacific: 
Cinematic Resonance and Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Contemporary 
European and East Asian Cinema 

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction 
of the requirements for the degree of 

Doctor of Philosophy 

in 

Comparative Literature 

by 

Flannery Ross Wilson 

June 2011 

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I grew interested in this topic after taking a graduate seminar in the fall of 2007, with Dr. Michelle Bloom, on Orientalism and French and Sinophone cinemas. Because of Michelle’s support, I have continued to remain scholarly engaged in the topic of cross-adaptation in East Asian cinema studies. I would also add a word of thanks to my husband, Ryan, my brother Gary, and my mother Karen, who encouraged me to envision myself as a “writer” from an early age. Lastly, I would like to thank my brilliant father, George, for inspiring my original interest in cinema from a very young age, and for filling my head with esoteric, potentially useless knowledge about old films and music that, nevertheless, I will always treasure immensely.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Echoing Across the Mediterranean and the Pacific: Cinematic Resonance and Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Contemporary European and East Asian Cinema

by

Flannery Ross Wilson

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, June 2011
Dr. Michelle Bloom, Chairperson

Inspired and informed by the work of Rey Chow and Shu-mei Shih, among others, this dissertation explores crossovers between East Asian cinema on the one hand and French and Italian cinema on the other. Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang’s 2001 film What Time is it There?, for instance, cites and builds upon François Truffaut’s Les 400 coups throughout. Cross-cultural films such as these have subsequently been referred to as “Sinofrench.” Korean director Park Chan Wook’s film Thirst, which is discussed as an example of “Franco-Korean” cinema, critiques traditional Korean familial structure through its citation of Émile Zola’s 1867 novel Thérèse Raquin. Each chapter of the dissertation therefore focuses on a different incarnation of hybrid cinema. I argue that Chinese, Japanese Korean, and Hong Kong filmmakers create new subgenres of hybrid
film by interacting with, adapting, and “textually reincarnating” French literature and film. On the other hand, I explore the reasons why cinematic interactions between Italy and China are less prevalent and, finally, how these other types of hybrid cinema may inspire Italian filmmakers to proceed in the future.
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Introduction

Wrenching the individual from historical circumstances may be ideological, but no more so than positing the individual as a figment of ideology and a puppet of history. Even if it were true that the self in our postmodern times is irreparably fragmented, that any notion of its unity merely clings to an illusion, surely this doesn’t entitle us to decide that the same is true of all other times and places. (Perez, *The Material Ghost*, 6)

What if we stopped asking whether cinema can be some sort of magic door opening onto absolute time, and instead asked about cinema’s role in the construction of different temporalities in different societies, politics, cultures, classes and so forth. (Berry, *Futures of Chinese Cinema*, 113)

In his 2002 book *The Material Ghost*, Gilberto Perez eloquently describes all cinema as a “space of representation” (17), a space in which the images that appear in front of us are neither reproductions nor illusions of reality. The images on the screen, rather, are constructions that are derived—and yet remain simultaneously distinct—from reality. For Perez, cinema can be thought of as: “a parallel realm that may look recognizably like reality but that nobody could mistake for it” (17). Perez’s definition of cinema is appealing in that it rests neatly between the material and the illusory. Although “cinematic reality” parallels so-called “material reality”, one is never muddled by the other.¹

Realizing the full implications of Perez’s definition of cinema creates tension from the perspective of a comparatist and a “transnationalist,” for many reasons. If we are to think of cinema as a distinct reality that is separate from our own, we cannot argue that cinema
flawlessly reflects history or national discourse. At the same time, we certainly cannot argue that cinema is in no way a construction derived from the reality of history or national discourse. This paradox often rears its head in contemporary film scholarship. No longer eager to divide global cinema by hemisphere, continent, or region, many film scholars embrace the language of postmodernity and the postcolonial to unite common themes within contemporary cinema. Analysis of postcolonial, diaspora, and Third World cinema often goes hand in hand with themes such as: alienation, displacement, and temporal fracture.

In my own analysis of cinema, I seek to find the balance, so to speak, between fragmentation and unity. As Perez points out, the perceived unity of an object (what we are studying) does not imply the unity of the perceiving subject (the person who is studying) (5). I would add that the reverse holds true as well: the perceived unity of one’s own subjectivity does not imply the unity of an object. If we are to discuss “displacement in contemporary Hong Kong cinema,” for example, our analysis cannot rest entirely on viewing Hong Kong as a “fragmented object,” but it also cannot assume that Hong Kong is not a “fragmented space” in any sense of the term. Likewise, although it would be difficult to comprehensively analyze Wong Kar-Wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000) without knowing anything about 1950s Hong Kong, it would be a shame to assume that we would not be able to analyze the film unless we learned perfect Cantonese.

Complex cultural exchanges occur with such frequency between “Eastern” and “Western” cinematic traditions that the dichotomy is becoming increasingly outmoded. The fact alone, that in recent years the term “Sinofrench” cinema has been coined,\(^2\) is a testament to the necessity for a term that describes the cultural fusions, conversations and citations that continue to occur between Chinese and French cinemas. Unfortunately, despite some notable
exceptions,\(^3\) cinematic interactions between Italy and China are relatively uncommon occurrences. While there is currently no widely accepted term for Chinese-Italian cinematic exchange, I have coined the phrase “Sino-Italian” cinema, as the results of collaborative work between Italian and East Asian directors continues to emerge. Besides “Sino-French” and “Sino-Italian,” I will utilize and define the terms “Franco-Japanese” and the “Franco-Korean”\(^4\) as they relate to collaborative cinematic exchange.

Throughout the course of this project, I will devote my discussion to the four types of cinematic exchange listed above, as well as Hong Kong cinema. I have chosen these five subgenres in particular because each plays with and problematizes the East/West dichotomy in a cinematic context. All of the films that I highlight exhibit “hybridity”\(^5\) by way of adaptation. I want to be clear that although I use the word “adaptation” to describe these films, I do not mean to imply that they are regressive or repetitive in any way. My definition of “adaptation” rests on the notion of intertextuality, citation, and translation rather than on homage or backward-looking nostalgia. Adaptation leads to hybridization in the sense that “the old” is fashioned into “the new.” New genres are created through the combination of innovative cinematic language with recognizable visual or diegetic elements. I do not sense any hint of imitation in the films that I will be discussing. On the contrary, these films “reincarnate” the original work by, somewhat paradoxically, carving out a new niche for themselves altogether.

Second Wave director Tsai Ming-liang’s *What Time is it There?* (2001). Although Tsai’s film is not quite an “adaptation” in any strict sense of the word, Tsai combines non-traditional visual elements with “ghostly” citations of François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959). The third chapter introduces the concept of “Franco-Korean” cinema through an analysis of Park Chan-wook’s *Thirst* (2009). Park’s film is a vampire movie, though the story is a loose adaptation of Zola’s 1867 novel *Thérèse Raquin*. The fourth chapter shifts focus a bit, placing contemporary Italian cinema in the context of my overall notion of East-West hybrid cinema. Through my analysis of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Chung Kuo* (1972), as well as Gianfranco Giagni’s *Un cinese a Roma* (2004), I demonstrate that “Sino-Italian” cinema is a burgeoning hybrid genre that is in need of further innovation. Of particular interest to this study are Hong Kong art-house films, specifically, Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000), and *2046* (2004). Chapter 5, therefore, turns specifically to the Hong Kong aesthetic and director Wong Kar-Wai. Wong’s films are usually set in pre- and post-handover Hong Kong; though certain scenes take place in Ankor Wat, Shanghai, and Japan.

All of the afore-mentioned films deal with themes such as “in-between-ness” and displacement. The protagonists of *What Time is it There?*, for example, feel a strong sense of alienation which is visually linked to the surrounding cityscape. In these urban environments—Paris, Taipei, Hiroshima, Hong Kong—buildings, streets, and national monuments become characters themselves, looming largely in the narrative and *mise en scène*. The presence of the cityscape hinges on the threatening and often becomes psychologically damaging to the protagonist in tangible ways. The estranging city environment, for instance, often functions as a roadblock to interpersonal relationships that might have otherwise had the potential to flourish between two characters. Often, these cities
appear eerie because they are depicted as “nondescript,” near-arbitrary spaces. Establishing shots of skylines, which often serve as comfortable reminders of setting, are rarities for these filmmakers, Tsai in particular.

At the same time, every city in these films is recognizable in some definitive way. Themes of sadness, death, and ambivalence are therefore not equivalent to non-place in the films of Suwa, Tsai, Park, or Wong. “Postmodern” aestheticism and cinematic representations of alienation, in other words, must not be conflated with lack of historical context, even in contemporary cinema. The “postmodern” cinema of Tsai, for example, is still very much entrenched in Taiwanese religious and cultural identity. As Yingjin Zhang aptly states: “The local will inevitably find ways to reinscribe itself—by asserting its difference in the face of its predicted disappearance, if not already its pronounced death” (312).

Of course, there are just as many differences between each of these filmmakers as there are similarities. The majority of the filmmakers discussed—Park, Tsai, Suwa, and Wong in particular—employ cinematic devices that are more or less unique to their trademark directorial style. For example, I use the phrase “disjointed connectivity” to describe Tsai’s blend of cinematic methods, as well as the social and psychological state of the protagonists in his films. “Disjointed connectivity” refers to a peculiar cinematic phenomenon: displaced characters that seem to be in a state of isolation and uncertainty while simultaneously being connected to each other through the use of cinematic devices such as parallel cuts. Park allows ghosts to disrupt the narrative and invade the space of “living” characters, while Suwa creates a pathway through which diegetic and non-diegetic space constantly co-mingle.
There has been an exponential growth of articles and books written on Tsai (and the issue of time and space in Chinese cinema more generally) within the last couple of years.7 Jean Ma’s recent book *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (2010), a study on Tsai, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and Wong Kar-Wai, is a milestone in its own right. There is little academic writing to be found on either Suwa’s *H Story* or Giagni’s *Un cinese a Roma*, and I suspect that more work on Park’s *Thirst* will continue to emerge. Despite the proliferation of materials that exist on a few of these films, many gaps, questions, and points of entry remain. Rey Chow, for instance, has famously argued that Marguerite Duras’ screenplay of *Hiroshima mon amour* presents the racial other (the Japanese) “matter-of-factly,” and that public history becomes “meaningless” in comparison to the private history of the French woman (157). But because Suwa’s film did not exist when her article was written, Chow’s analysis could not provide any comparison between *Hiroshima mon amour* and *H Story*. Thus, despite the proliferation of scholarship on Resnais’ film, there is a substantial lack of analysis on Suwa’s re-reading and translation of Resnais, in part because the film is not widely available. This is a shame, since in many ways *H Story* can be seen as a response to Chow’s criticism of Resnais’ film. Instead of focusing exclusively on the French woman’s perspective, Suwa’s film shifts to incorporate a Japanese view of both the Hiroshima tragedy and the difficulty that inevitably comes along with making a film about it.

Both Fran Martin’s and Michelle Bloom’s analyses of Tsai’s *What Time is it There?* are “necessary reading” for those who are interested in the intertextual elements of the film. Contributing to this existing body of work, I have reconfigured Martin’s description of Tsai’s style as “ghostly”, deeming it more aptly in terms of “disjointedly connected”. The film is not “haunted,” in other words, by ghosts in any supernatural sense. Rather, all of the so-
called ghostly apparitions in the film can be explained in terms of Tsai’s desire and ability to move fluidly outside of the diegetic frame. Certainly, as a director, Tsai prefers to play with cinematic time and space in ways that seem to hinge on the postmodern, yet in another sense, he is simultaneously grounded in realism. Although he does not like to use establishing shots, or film skylines, Tsai does incorporate discernable landmarks into *What Time is it There?:* the Montmartre cemetery, the Métro, and the Tuileries garden. How else could I explain my strong association with Shiang-chyi crying on a green chair in front of a pond in the Tuileries garden?

The fact that these landmarks are discernible—even in a fragmented way—suggests to me that Tsai wants to cast Paris in a new, unromantic light. Though Tsai is clearly infatuated with the French New Wave of the late 1950s and early 1960s, his vision of a “disjointed Paris” suggest more than simple nostalgia. Tsai therefore pays homage to earlier French New Wave auteurs such as Truffaut, not by imitating, but by converging his own aesthetics with those of his predecessors.

Thus, although Eastern and Western regions are often juxtaposed in the films that I discuss (i.e. Hiroshima/Nevers, Taipei/Paris) I find it more useful to regard these apparent juxtapositions in terms of “horizontal” influence. My purpose is not to dichotomize “East” and “West,” but rather to rethink the notion of “poles” altogether by way of hybridity. Like Tsai and Truffaut, Suwa pays homage to Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour* with *H story.* Yet by shifting the perspective of the viewer, Suwa adds layers of complexity to the original forty-year old film. Similarly, Park Chan-wook reincarnates Zola’s novel using the cinematic language of the vampire genre. Although Giagni does not reincarnate the work of
his predecessors in this same fashion, he does use intertextual citation (he inserts a scene from a Silvio Soldini film) in order to add interest to the story of his protagonist.

Before continuing on to my discussion of these films, I justify my decision to move away from the cinematic terminology of “the transnational” toward the language of the “hybrid.” My justification for the shift serves as more than a mere formality; on the contrary, I base my analyses in the assumption that such a terminological shift is entirely necessary.

What is “the Transnational” in Cinema Studies?

Although the above question may sound basic, the literature that has been written in response is anything but precise or definitive. “Transnational cinema” is an imperfect term that requires constant retooling and reassessment, especially as it relates to issues of national cinema studies. “National cinema,” as the term stands in recent scholarship, tends to be viewed as a “problematic” category, whereas “transnational cinema” is viewed as more inclusive (mainly because the term is meant to take both global and local factors into account) (Choi 310).

Some of the central problems that continue to arise, and that continue to test the strength of the “national cinema” studies frame, have yet to be resolved. For instance: it is questionable whether or not film narratives position viewers vis a vis any one national discourse. Vitali and Willeman, in *Theorising National Cinema*, ask this very question: do film narratives “position viewers in the historical force-field that is ‘the nation?’” (Vitali and Willeman 7). Secondly, we are still debating whether or not films “reflect” or “stage” national discourse, if at all. Must we assume that these films reflect/stage the dominant ideologies within nations at given times in history? (7) Thirdly, we tend to assume that the
term “national cinema” implies coherence, especially coherence as it relates to reception and production within “legal borders” (Vitali and Willemen 17). Finally, we have yet to clarify the simplest of all concerns: are “national” and “transnational” cinemas related, overlapping, or entirely separate? Because these highly problematic issues continue to arise again and again, the rejection of “national cinemas” as self-contained categories might initially appear advisable, or even necessary.

If, then, cinema scholars are no longer willing to accept “national cinemas” as relatively coherent “bodies of textuality” (Vitali and Willemen 18), it would appear obvious that we need an entirely new modus operandi. One plausible alternative has been to view world cinemas as “situated but universal” (240), locally produced but globally consumed. Since cinema has the capacity to cross national borders in a cultural, psychological, collaborative, and literal sense, we might assume that all cinemas (provided that a body of films is able to be viewed in a country other than the one in which they are produced) can very easily be labeled “trans-national.”

But I would warn against such a conclusion. I worry that an outright rejection of “the national” risks losing an important mode of analysis. As Chris Berry so aptly states in his article entitled: “From National Cinema to Cinema and the National: Chinese-Language Cinema and Hou Hsiao Hsien’s ‘Taiwan Trilogy’” in Theorising National Cinema: “to turn away from the national in the current era is to confuse deconstruction with destruction” (Vitali and Willemen 154). In an effort to move beyond black-and-white thinking and avoid the “national cinemas” paradigm altogether, film scholars invent alternative theoretical frameworks. While these alternative modes of analysis are often useful, they run serious risks. At best, theories that reject “the national” entirely lead toward an impractical
approach, and, at worst, they help destroy any remaining possibility for the grounded discussion of world cinema.

Will Higbee’s article, “Beyond the (Trans) national: Towards a Cinema of Transvergence in Postcolonial and Diasporic Francophone Cinema(s)” exemplifies this type of risky approach. Higbee argues for a move beyond “the national” and “the transnational” to a new mode that he calls a “cinema of transvergence” (79). Adopting Marcus Novak’s concept of “transvergence” and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “rhizome,” Higbee argues that (trans) national, post-colonial, and diasporic cinemas can be better described without reliance on “binaries” or strict categories. But Higbee admits that he is not offering an alternative to the notion of the “trans-national,” only a new “positionality.” My response is: why not offer an alternative approach if the current modes of analysis are not particularly descriptive or helpful? Furthermore, I find many points of contradiction within this type of noncommittal argument. The basic problem lies in the following question: are “the national” and “the transnational” two separate concepts? Either they are distinct concepts or they are not, but they cannot be both. If, as Higbee initially argues, they are separate concepts both on either side of an unhelpful binary, it makes little sense to make statements such as: “it [my study] will also attempt to go ‘beyond’ the (trans) national to evaluate current theorizing around the idea of ‘transnational’ cinema and its potentially problematic relationship to contemporary notions of globalization…” (80) Unless I am misunderstanding his usage of parentheses here, this statement appears to negate the overall point that the binary national/transnational exists. By placing the “trans” in parentheses (as others before him and after him have often done), Higbee implicitly suggests that either the “trans” could be imagined to be in the statement or not, and that whether it is or not is of little importance.
This specific confusion seems to be a wide-scale problem that extends well beyond the confines of Higbee’s article.

In their introduction to *Futures of Chinese Cinemas*, Olivia Khoo and Sean Metzger refer to “the transnational” as a “cognate” of the national: “…this volume argues for an engagement with time and technology that is limited neither to the discourse of the nation nor its cognates (the transnational) and ostensible antecedents (empire)” (13, my emphasis). The use of the words “cognate” in this particular context, and also by the word “antecedent” for that matter, is confusing. Do Khoo and Metzger simply mean to say that the term “transnational” contains the word “national” within it, or that these two words carry the same meaning but come from different origins? I would argue that these two terms are not cognates at all, though they are also not opposites. Secondly, it is somewhat unclear what Khoo and Metzger mean when they say that “empire” is the antecedent of “national discourse”. In fact, this statement seems untrue. Because so much is at stake when we analyze films in terms of national discourse and/or global forces, we must not conflate our terminology, nor must we use vague or ill-defined concepts.

Because I am wary of rejecting one unsatisfactory paradigm in favor of another, I agree with Higbee when he points out that scholars such as Sheldon Lu’ are too quick to elevate “the transnational” in an effort to move away from the “messy business” of national cinema. But Higbee does not seek to explain why national cinema has become such a “messy business.” Does the study of “national cinemas” necessarily entail the study of dominant ideologies or hegemonies? Many of the early film critics that are still read today do not insist that national cinemas, as bodies of textuality, are always temporally and geographically fixed. Kracauer, for instance, in his 1942 book on German cinema: *From
Caligari to Hitler, argued that national cinema does not reflect a “fixed national character,” only that films are prone to reflect: “collective dispositions or tendencies as prevail with a nation at a certain stage of its development” (8). Kracauer thought only that dominant ideological discourse tends to become noticeable in the cinema of a nation when that nation is in crisis.\textsuperscript{11} German Expressionism, for example, could be said to reflect the deep-seated “hopes” and “fears” of the German people in the period immediately following World War (8). But Kracauer never maintained that national cinema always reflects the collective mentality of disposition of a nation.

Thus, the alternative to purely “national” cinema must be some form of “national” cinema that is not so easily defined. Rather than argue that “national cinema” has always existed in some pure form then, it might be simpler to flip the coin and argue that the notion of transnationalism and border-crossing have always been endemic to the cinema. After all, as Higbee points out, even the French pioneers of cinema such as the Lumière Brothers knew that cross-national circulation of their films was important to their success.\textsuperscript{12} However, when we concede that transnational cinema has always existed in some form or another, we must further concede that the term “trans-national” is close to meaningless (Higbee 80, Hayward 1993, 20). We also cannot ascertain that there was a period of time in which national cinemas reigned. It is a fallacy to believe both that “the transnational” has always existed and that “the transnational” must be the new paradigm for studying and thinking about film. For this reason, we cannot suddenly shift the discourse of cinema studies to hide all of the “messy business” of national cinema. Surely it is possible and helpful to shift around outdated discourse when the need arises, but it seems far too quick a move to me to assume that everything is “transnational” now because “the national” has been deemed too messy.
I agree with Chris Berry, who argues that although it is a problematic concept, the idea of “the nation” does continue to “produce meaning” in a powerful way. I also agree that by creating the binary: national=bad/trans=good, we risk losing “historical and cultural specificity” (81). By using broad theoretical apparatuses to create a new, privileged positionality *du jour*, (what Higbee calls “the cinema of transvergence”), critics such as Higbee succeed only in creating a second purposeless binary that continues to lack specificity.

Some film theorists are, oftentimes, too willing to forget that there is a binary in “binaries”: we tend to privilege no fixity, loose ends and fuzziness over clear-cut, oppositional categories, which are perceived as constraining and hegemonic. But we do not stop to point out the irony that is inherent in these methods. Certainly the goal of film studies is to analyze cinema in nuanced, sophisticated terms, but to create another binary altogether is counterproductive. If binaries are “bad” and we want to get away from them, we need not move to the opposite extreme: a land in which there are no fixed conclusions and only open-ended possibilities, which we then call “good.” I worry that this type of analytic move can create an unnecessary amount of confusion.

This project seeks to do work to remedy the less than favorable situation within “transnational cinema studies” by offering a true alternate mode of analysis. Beginning with the premise that the study of national cinemas must not be abandoned entirely but rethought and retooled, I embrace Berry’s notion of “the national.” Like Berry, I do not reject the term outright in favor of “the transnational” because I see the potential for complexity and nuance that it holds. As Berry eloquently states: “the national is no longer confined to the form of the territorial nation-state but multiple, proliferating, contested, and overlapping” (149).
Thus, according to Berry’s model, “the national” can still remain bound to “the transnational” within the context of film studies. According to Berry’s model, the discourse of “the national,” as a means of understanding world cinema, continues to grow insofar as these various cinemas are bound to the discourse of “the transnational.” The increasing possibilities for global collaboration, distribution, and reception do not negate the possibility for diverse national and cultural identities to differentiate themselves.

In the area of Sinophone cinema studies especially, film scholars are hesitant to label Chinese-language cinema as anything but transnational in nature. Christina Klein, in her article *Kung Fu Hustle: Transnational Production and the Global Chinese-Language Film*, prefers the term “global Chinese-language film” over “Chinese blockbuster” (189), arguing that by adding the words “global” and “language” she accounts for cultural diversity. Although I agree with Klein’s statement that “Chinese cinema today is inescapably transnational” (189), I do not find that it follows from this statement that the notion of national cinemas has always been “something of a convenient fiction” (189). She accuses certain Chinese film scholars of clinging to the idea that Hollywood functions as a hegemonic threat in relation to the production and distribution of Chinese-language films. If these accusations are correct, however, they imply that these same film scholars believe that Chinese cinemas reflect some sort of idealized “cultural purity” (191). In my view, it is perfectly sensible to accept that Hollywood plays a large role “behind the curtain” in Chinese cinema production, and is, in this sense, “transnational.” But certainly I can simultaneously believe that national identity still plays a role in the creation and reception of these films without insisting on cultural purity or homogeneity.
Hybrid Versus Transnational: The “New National”?

Though most contemporary film scholars, Sheldon Lu and Yingjin Zhang included, prefer to use the term “transnational” cinema(s), I prefer the term “East-West hybrid cinema”. I will explain why I have found it necessary to shift to this alternate term. In his introduction to the edited volume Chinese Transnational Cinemas, Sheldon Lu proposes that Chinese “national cinema,” as he calls it, can only be seen within “transnational cinema” (3). He argues that all Chinese cinema since its birth (cinema produced in the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong) must now be viewed as “transnational” because recent globalization, consumption, and commercial patterns have all but abolished the notion of national cinema. If we were to draw a diagram of Lu’s definition of “transnational,” we might imagine a small circle labeled “national” being consumed by a larger “transnational” circle. The smaller circle disappears into the larger one, and its whereabouts become unclear.

In his more recent book Screening China, Yingjin Zhang warns against Lu’s transhistorical conception of Chinese cinema (73), and proposes instead that we must view the “problem” of Chinese cinema studies as a negotiation and dialogue between the local and the global (4). Borrowing from Wilson and Dissanayake, Zhang uses the term “glocal” (global + local) to describe the types of urban spaces that Chinese/transnational cinema scholars seek to analyze and define (255). Instead of the “national” being swallowed by the “transnational,” as in Lu’s model, Zhang envisions a new method of “screening” (i.e. projecting, concealing, and scrutinizing) Chinese cinema. We might now imagine a large concept entitled “screening,” enclosing three sub-problems to be analyzed: what is “chineseness,” how do we avoid Eurocentrism in our analyses of Chinese cinema, and, finally, how do we negotiate between the local and the global? (4)
While I find Zhang’s thesis apt in that it manages to clarify issues with previous analytical models such as Lu’s, I am uncomfortable with what his thesis entails: certainly, it is preferable for cinematic analysis to take both post-colonial discourse and visuality into account while simultaneously avoiding “sweeping theorization” and Eurocentrism (Zhang 83). But do film scholars need to disregard the Western cinematic theory that they might otherwise use in order to safely avoid the pitfalls that Zhang warns against? Or, if I need not disregard Western theory but carefully cherry-pick through it, how do I know which theories to avoid so that I will not be labeled Eurocentric? “Western film theory” in itself is not a uniform monolith containing one consistent point of view, in fact quite to the contrary. The problem with Zhang’s model is that, if I unreservedly grant it, I will already be pigeonholed into a Eurocentric position that I did not choose for myself. I prefer to have the option of analyzing an East Asian film text according to whichever theoretical apparatus I see fit while, at the same time, studying the quotidian or sociological aspects behind that film. This leads me to my “hybrid” model:

**East-West Hybrid Cinema**

- National identity, the local, also exile from the local
- Global channels, international distribution, influence of Western literature/cinema
- Other influences: (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese filmmakers)

Alternatively, one might imagine the “East-West Hybrid Cinema” space in the above diagram, containing the other three spaces. It is important to note that, in this diagram,
“nationality,” “European cinematic influence” and “other influences” are interconnected. One category does not gain hierarchy over the other; though I want to make it clear that the category “European cinematic influence” is not equivalent to mimicry or pure, backward-looking nostalgia. The type of cinema that I am defining is never passive; on the contrary, hybrid cinema moves constantly forward, and into territories that cannot be neatly defined by any sort of diagram or model. The purpose of the diagram is therefore only to provide a generalized image for my term “East-West hybrid cinema,” which I will then use as a base for further cinematic analysis.

My decision to shift terminology derives from the inexactness of the word “transnational” as it relates to contemporary cinema trends and the problem of the “glocal” in the context of late capitalism. The prefix “trans-” suggests lateral movements, or crossings, perhaps over borders, boundaries, or even oceans. But if we now live in a “borderless world” (Shih 6) as Shih claims—a world in which film and media have become truly globalized—why would we need a term to describe crossings between nations at all? In other words, if so-called “transnational” cinema knows no borders, then it makes little sense to use a term that implies the very thing that it denies: a crossing of national borders. In order to avoid all of this confusion, therefore, it seems best to avoid the notion of nations altogether while emphasizing the notion of *fusing*. Thus, I suggest “hybrid.” Although representations of nationhood and citizenship are central aspects of hybrid cinema, the term is not defined by its relationship to the national. I also prefer to use my own term because it allows me to avoid choosing a side in the global/local dichotomy. Zhang’s new term “polylocality” manages to avoid the “crossing” imagery that I find misleading, yet it seems to choose the side of the local while remaining overly opaque sounding.
I also resist the term “Sinophone” as coined by Shu-mei Shih. I am uncomfortable with her usage of the term for the following reasons: in her book *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, Shih defines the Sinophone as: “a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness…” (4, my emphasis). For Shih, the Sinophone is always an inexact copy of “Chineseness” as defined and predetermined by those on the Chinese Mainland (i.e. of Han decent, Mandarin-speaking, etc.). It is for this reason, among others, that Shih believes that the Sinophone resists “easy suturing” and encourages “difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity” (5). Yet by willfully excluding Mainland China in her definition of the Sinophone, Shih reaffirms the dichotomy of dominance/minority resistance that she seeks to break free from. By painting China as the dominant empire that must be destabilized by the outlying Chinese diaspora, she manages not only to separate outlying communities further from the Mainland, but also, paradoxically, to reinforce their connection to it. This arbitrary separation is needless and potentially harmful. If we are to assume that the world is now “borderless” (Shih 6), why create a needless border between China proper and the margins or diaspora communities? I would be willing to use the term Sinophone cinema, but only if it were to include Mainland cinema.

While I grant that the term “East-West” might have the unintended consequence of suggesting polarization or dichotomy, it does, nevertheless, describe a precise phenomenon that would be otherwise difficult to characterize. For the sake of the future of world film studies, there is a fundamental question that needs to be answered: why should cinematic analysis preoccupy itself with defining and categorizing ethnic identities to begin with? While Zhang is focused on how to avoid Eurocentrism when analyzing Chinese cinema, Shih
warns us that we must now be careful to avoid “China-centrism” as well. Although both Shih and Zhang provide excellent models for the study of Chinese/Sinophone cinema studies, if I were to take their models literally, the result would be that it would be nearly impossible for me to avoid all possible “centrisms” if I am to attempt to analyze particular Chinese cinema texts. For this reason, I have chosen to present an alternative, hybrid model that includes the Franco-Japanese, the Sino-French, the Franco-Korean, and the Sino-Italian.

**The Franco-Japanese**

Arguably, Suwa Nobuhiro’s *H Story* works on the level of “multidimensional”, East-West hybrid cinema because his original film project failed. Suwa had originally intended to film an exact remake of *Hiroshima mon amour*, but gave up after a short time. As it turns out, the final product is much more interesting: rather than remake Alain Resnais’ film word for word, Suwa decided to turn his project into a comment on the difficult nature of shooting a remake.

In order to argue that *H Story* functions as Franco-Japanese cinema (complicates Resnais’ film and carves out a niche for itself) we must read *Hiroshima* within the context of French “national” cinema. I am therefore troubled by critics who have taken on a “psycho-historical” approach to Resnais’ film without looking at the French nationalist discourse that is embedded within it. In his article on *Hiroshima* in *Trauma and Cinema: Cross Cultural Explorations*, for example, Andrew Slade argues that: “only in recounting do the events become properly historical, that is, given a meaning, truth value, and context” (177). Quite to the contrary, only in recounting do historical events become properly falsified.
I do not mean to say that Resnais’ film is not powerful. The opening scene of
*Hiroshima mon amour*, which was written by Marguerite Duras, depicts the Japanese
metropolis of Hiroshima with a tragic force that remains chilling even by today’s standards.
The 1940s-era documentary footage of Japanese children and women deformed by radiation
from the bombing is interlaced with 1960s-era city shots and diegetic images of two bodies
making love. Yet, eventually, the diegetic images begin to dominate the documentary
footage as a woman’s voice speaks over the images. The woman sounds as if she is reciting
a poem or a monologue, which is interrupted only occasionally, by a man’s voice. However,
the monologue is presented as testimony to what she has witnessed in Hiroshima. She claims
to have seen the film footage of the aftermath of the bombing, the newsreels. Because her
“testimony” is fictional, the historical events surrounding the Hiroshima bombing become
fictionalized as well. The recounting of historical events with fictional characters does not
give those events meaning or “truth value.” On the contrary, cinematic representations of
historical events endow those events with a particular (potentially misleading) perspective.

Why did Resnais and Duras choose Hiroshima, a city that is associated with tragedy
and death, over any other place in the world? Quite simply, Resnais was asked to make a
documentary about the Hiroshima bombing by Argos films (Marie 63). Duras’ answer to
this question, at least in the context of her short synopsis, is slightly more thought-provoking:
this film needs to take place in Hiroshima because the love story between the French woman
(Emanuelle Riva) and the Japanese man (Eiji Okada) would seem “banal” or “commonplace”
in any other location (10). Duras’ comment implies that because her screenplay is set in
Hiroshima, a Japanese city that has come to be imbued with social significance since the end
of World War II, an otherwise simple love story will appear more sophisticated. Duras adds:
“their personal love story…always dominates Hiroshima” (11). Because the French woman “names” herself Nevers and the Japanese man “names” himself Hiroshima in the final scene of the film, their affair can be interpreted as an analogy for the “East” falling in love with the “West” and vice versa. But the story should not be interpreted quite so simply, because the relationship much more unilateral. It is the French woman’s story—her painful memories and subsequent revelation of her past trauma to the Japanese man—that is the primary focus of the film.

Resnais’/Duras’ film attempts to speak to the Hiroshima tragedy by deflecting the events through a love story. Robert Stam insightfully brings up the concept of recusatio, a rhetorical device by which one purports to deny what one actually affirms, in his essay on Hiroshima, mon amour (276). But he does not discuss why the authors choose this “silent” rhetorical device. Why is the bombing of Hiroshima relegated to the background in Resnais’ film, while the French woman’s story dominates?

Hiroshima, mon amour expresses anxiety over the volatile relationships that remain in the post-World War II, and in this sense, the film is inextricably tied to the Cold War period. Beneath this anxiety, the film expresses a desire for reconciliation, or at least an understanding, between Japan and France. Yet the tragic death of Elle’s German lover in Nevers becomes the central focus of the film, seemingly outweighing the tragedy sustained by the Japanese civilians. “Elle” is able to come to terms with her loss though a sort of catharsis, by putting her memories into words, and by revealing her past to the Japanese man. But Hiroshima’s tragedy cannot be resolved through words or catharsis, and “Lui” is never given a chance to play the role of anything but the listener. As Rey Chow has pointed out, there is an inherent balance in this situation, arguing that for Duras: “…realism and
referentiality…remain adequate and appropriate for the representation of yellow people” (157).

Rather than debate the question of racism in Resnais’ film, my first chapter focuses mostly on Suwa Nobuhiro’s *H Story*, a film about shooting a remake of *Hiroshima*. Suwa’s Hiroshima is a conflicted, enclosed space whose inhabitants have become immune to the past in order to face daily life, but whose visitors are often all too aware of their “outsider” status. Those who enter into the “walled-off” space from the “outside” are deemed to have a less biased perspective, but also a more naïve one. *H Story* is a self-reflexive exercise in filmmaking that revisits questions left open by Resnais’ film: how does national perspective affect cinematic representations of tragedy, especially when that tragedy occurs within a nation other than one’s own?

Suwa once commented in an interview: “*Le sujet du film était: ne pas pouvoir parler de Hiroshima*” (the subject of the film was *not* to speak about Hiroshima) (Tesson). Suwa’s comment should not be read to imply that he feels “morally obligated” to tread lightly over the subject of the 1945 bombing. Rather, his comment expresses the central message of the film: speaking about impossibilities seems to almost paradoxically carve out a larger niche in which communication becomes possible.

Commenting on the casting process for *H Story*, Suwa explained: “*On ne pouvait pas prendre des gens qui vivaient à Hiroshima parce que Hiroshima faisait partie de leur vie quotidienne, ils vivaient à l’intérieur de cela et ils ne pouvaient pas en être conscients*” (Tesson). Suwa then notes Robert Kramer’s observation that the Japanese people living in Hiroshima seem to be enclosed within a wall (“*le mur du quotidien*”), and that their enclosure within this wall biases the perspective that they have about their past (Tesson).
Kramer’s observations were apparently influential to Suwa, because as a result, the director decided to look “outside the wall” (“à l’extérieur du mur”) of Hiroshima in order to find his leading actress (Béatrice Dalle). Of course, on the other side of this coin, Suwa was no doubt eager to cast Dalle in the role not only because she was unfamiliar with Hiroshima, but also, perhaps, because her lack of any particular bias toward Hiroshima was a sort of bias in itself.

Resnais’ film is concerned mainly with the French woman’s story. Fairly or unfairly, moreover, the film tends to be viewed as one of the highlights of 1950s-era French national cinema (Lanzoni 213). Suwa’s film, meanwhile, moves beyond French discourse surrounding the Hiroshima tragedy. By incorporating his own perspective as a Hiroshima-born director, and by shifting between subjectivities and perspectives, Suwa provides an “opening” for the film spectator. This opening allows the viewer further access into the void that represents the impossibility of speaking about Hiroshima—and the impossibility of filming a movie about it.

The Sino-French

Tsai Ming-liang’s What Time is it There? (2001) is a film about alienation in the context of present-day city life that describes “our postmodern condition,” by many film scholars’ accounts. Perhaps partially because of Taiwan’s historically volatile relationship with Mainland China and Japan, local Taiwanese cinema has adapted to become more internationally fluent. Convergence, rather than separation, seems to define the Taiwanese Second Wave, as intertextual citation of European auteurs becomes the norm among post-Taiwan New Cinema directors.23
As Bloom notes, *What Time* is, indeed, a “film about a film;” reaching beyond the local in order to find its own, unique niche within the global cinema landscape. Tsai prefers to avoid establishing shots entirely; Paris and Taipei are hardly ever shown from a recognizable perspective; we are shown either interior space, or fragmented exterior city-shots. Throughout the film, Tsai also employs two important methods of time manipulation: 1) the excruciatingly long take with an absolutely still camera, and 2) the division of simultaneous time into parallel yet converging stories between two protagonists. These cinematic techniques combine to create an overall feeling of discomfort for the audience; they serve to fragment time and space while simultaneously lingering on minute details. These techniques also form the basis of “disjointed connectivity.” When time becomes difficult to measure, city space begins to seem arbitrary, ahistorical and empty, miscommunication sets in, and opportunities are lost. “Disjointed connectivity” functions like death in *What Time*; Paris and Taipei are cities as much as they are tombs that metaphorically suffocate the characters that inhabit or visit them. These cities become menacing entities precisely because they have become *near*-arbitrary spaces.

This qualification—“near”—is the key word. While it would not be incorrect to discuss Tsai’s film in terms of postmodernism and death, it is my contention that we need to re-think and re-analyze *What Time* in more tangible language. Thus, although *What Time* is largely “a film about film,” we must not mistakenly conclude that its geographical settings are of little significance. While it is true that Tsai is wary of the alienation that plagues modern life, and does not rely on historical foregrounding, his love of French cinema always manages to shine through in his filmmaking. What is really the purpose of filming in Paris, but then cutting out exterior shots? Tsai did not choose the cityscapes depicted in this film
haphazardly: the protagonists of What Time are affected by both Paris and Taipei in tangible ways—even if these urban environments are difficult to discern upon first glance. Although Hsiao-Kang’s character functions as a “transnational” cinematic voyeur within the film, the spectator perceives that he is trapped in Taipei. Similarly, although Shiang-chyi has enough mobility to travel to Paris, Tsai’s camera appears to imprison her there.

For some reason, while there has been a significant amount of discussion on Tsai’s cinematic depictions of Taipei throughout the span of his directorial career, there has been less discussion on Tsai’s depiction of Paris. Fran Martin has argued that although What Time can be interpreted as a postcolonial ode to European cinema of the past, the film “problematises its own western trajectory” (n.p.) by not privileging or romanticizing Paris over Taipei. In fact, by way of Shiang-chyi’s parallel storyline, Paris is represented as cold, unfriendly, and isolating, perhaps even more so than Taipei. Tsai does not privilege Paris over Taipei in part because, even though he is clearly an ardent fan of European cinema, he does not intend his film to be an exercise in blind nostalgia. This assumption is supported by a 1999 interview conducted by Jean-Pierre Rehm, in which Tsai comments that his aesthetics are a careful balance between western cinematic influences and Chinese tradition. This comment furthermore supports my notion of the Sino-French as a variation of “East-West hybrid” cinema.

Martin has also characterized What Time as a film about ghosts and haunting. Certainly the film is “haunted” on a metaphorical level by the cinema of Tsai’s European predecessors and his Taiwanese contemporaries. But it would be misleading to describe the space in What Time only in terms of the supernatural. Although the film is filled with the themes of supernatural space, ghosts, and resurrection, these phenomena are better described,
within the context of the film, in terms of Song Hwee Lim’s notion of intratextuality, and my notion of disjointed connectivity.

Shiang-chyi’s loneliness and subsequent despair arise as the result of a series of missed opportunities and failed interactions that occur on her visit to Paris. Even though it appears initially that Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang inhabit parallel spaces, their two storylines consistently intersect throughout the film by way of “disjointed connectivity.” Not only do Shiang-chyi’s actions often mirror Hsiao-kang’s and vice versa, but her actions also seem to be connected to his via cause and effect. Hsiao-kang is visually tied to Antoine Doinel (of Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*), and Shiang-chyi is visually tied to Hsiao-kang. I will highlight and discuss the many intersections and points of connectivity that occur between these two characters throughout this chapter. My discussion of Tsai’s film (in the context of his overall oeuvre) is meant to exhibit the complex qualities of Sino-French cinema as a distinct genre of East-West hybrid cinema.

**The Franco-Korean**

This term, “the Franco-Korean,” describes the set of interactions and exchanges that continue to occur between “New Korean Cinema” (South Korean cinema produced after 1992) and French literature, culture and cinema. In the second chapter of this project, I argue that Park Chan-wook’s *Thirst* conceptually adapts and translates Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin* to create this East-West hybrid genre. The Franco-Korean, in the context of both my chapter and Park’s film, can be described as part horror genre, part commercial “blockbuster,” part social critique.
Besides Park, many other South Korean filmmakers have exhibited a direct interest in France and French cinema in recent years. Hong Sang-soo’s 2008 film *Night and Day*, for example, can be best described as a Franco-Korean romantic comedy. Hong’s film tells the story of a Korean artist Sung-Nam (Kim Young-ho) who is living in Paris and falls in love with multiple women. Unlike Park’s film, *Night and Day* is filmed almost entirely in Paris, and the protagonists are Korean expatriates. Hong’s film is thus even more “French” than Park’s, though it is certainly not as cerebral. Director Jang Sun-woo, who is known for his use of “jarring” cinematic techniques in films such as 1997’s *Timeless, Bottomless Bad Movie*, has been compared to Jean Luc-Godard (Raymond). Lee Jae-yong’s 2003 film *Untold Scandal* is, like *Thirst*, an adaptation of an earlier piece of French literature: Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’ epistolary 1782 novel *Les liaisons dangereuses*. Lee shifts the original story from pre-Revolution France to Korea during the Chosun dynasty (the late 19th Century), though he interweaves both French and Korean 19th Century music on the soundtrack. Like Park, Lee transforms the setting in part so that his film will attract a larger Korean audience (Hagopian).

This technique seems to be a common thread in New Korean Cinema. Echoing this idea, Julian Stringer, in his introduction to the book *New Korean Cinema*, observes: “…by utilizing a style that effortlessly mixes indigenous cultural elements with regional and Western influences, recent Korean films respond to the sensibilities of contemporary Koreans” (Shin and Stringer, 56). It would seem, therefore, that many contemporary Korean filmmakers strive for hybridity as a means of attracting audiences. For this reason, the Franco-Korean is difficult to classify in many respects. Yet, even more so than other hybrid
genres that I have discussed, Franco-Korean films are connected by a strong sense of “the national” as it pertains to Korean identity.

There is no real consensus about the definition of “New Korean Cinema,” though Stringer has recently defined this (distinctly South Korean) movement as separate from the New Wave of the 1980s (6). Stringer notes that this cinematic movement gained momentum in the period immediately following the military rule in South Korea, which ended in 1992. This “post-authoritarian” period is distinct for various Korean film scholars because it coincides with a strong media globalization effort on the part of former President Kim Young-sam (53). South Korea’s decision to expand its media into a global context was helped along by the founding of the Film Promotion Fund in 1995, and the Pusan International Film Festival in 1996 (Shin 54). New outlets for cinematic ventures meant that the content of South Korean films would no longer be controlled by the state. Clearly, then, understanding the historical context surrounding the advent of New Korean Cinema is key to understanding the innovative qualities of Park’s films.

In her chapter in New Korean Cinema entitled: “Globalisation and New Korean Cinema,” Jeeyoung Shin observes: “A majority of Korean films, marketed in East Asia, including in Korea, tend to foreground a sense of Asian modernity rooted in hybrid culture” (Shin and Stringer 56). As noted previously, this notion of hybridity is endemic to New Korean Cinema. Many contemporary Korean films, in fact, have been described by film scholars as “hybrid cultural forms” (57). These films are deemed “hybrid” by scholars such as Shin because they distance themselves from Korean national tradition while simultaneously challenging Western cultural hegemony (57).
My notion of Franco-Korean cinema begins with the assumption that New Korean Cinema is a “hybrid cultural form.” But I expand on this assumption by arguing that Park’s brand of Franco-Korean cinema mixes French Naturalism with the Asian extreme horror genre. I argue, furthermore, that the extreme violence in film’s like *Thirst* functions as a form of social critique and therefore cannot be viewed as simply gratuitous. Park’s status as a “commercial filmmaker” (as opposed to an art-house filmmaker) parallel’s Zola’s status, in his day, as a purveyor of *littérature putride*.

**The Sino-Italian**

As mentioned above, Bloom’s term “Sinofrench cinema” describes the plethora of (mostly post-2000) films in which “France” and “China” can be said to “interact” with each other in some way. She defines “interact” loosely, noting that the term can refer to intertextual citations, settings, collaborations between producers, and anything and everything in between (Bloom 2010, n.p.). She adds:

> Such cultural and aesthetic interactions between ‘France’ and ‘China’ occur not only in the realm of the visual arts and architecture, but also in literature, cinema, fashion, and cuisine. Due to the vast scope of Franco-Chinese interactions across these various domains, a comprehensive cross-disciplinary study would require a book-length project.

In other words, there is no shortage of cultural exchange occurring between France and China, and this exchange is occurring in nearly every artistic and aesthetic domain imaginable. Clearly, the cinematic infatuation between France and China has been in the making for some time, and can be traced back at least forty years, one noteworthy example being Jean-Luc Godard’s 1966 film *La Chinoise*. Godard’s film follows a group of pretentious, bourgeois French youngsters who are riding the wave of a brand of Maoist
radicalism that was politically “hip” in Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even today, French television programs seem indefatigably infatuated with Mao’s legacy and his teachings, even if the subsidiaries behind these programs do not necessarily endorse any of these ideas.\textsuperscript{28} Even though most French/Chinese cinematic exchange does not center on Maoist radicalism, France’s intrigue with the late communist leader seems to exemplify a trend that cannot be easily classified as (post) colonialist discourse. Despite France’s colonial legacy in Africa, Southeast Asia and elsewhere, it would seem that there is no shortage of French filmmakers who are willing to lift the veil from lingering taboos and address potentially delicate issues head-on.

What, then, can be said about lingering taboos and (post)-colonial discourse in the Italian film industry? Despite some notable exceptions,\textsuperscript{29} cinematic interactions between Italy and China are relatively uncommon occurrences, and the term “Sino-Italian” cinema has yet to be fully recognized. Although the question of why there is no great abundance of Sino-Italian cinema remains unanswered, the question of how migratory populations are represented in contemporary Italian cinema has become a particularly “hot topic”. Derek Duncan, author of the recent article \textit{Italy’s Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation}, is one such influential voice in the conversation. In the article, Duncan poses a crucial question: “…is the representation of the non-Italian only a pretext for the affirmation of an exclusive Italian identity rather than an opening out to more inclusive articulations of belonging and citizenship?” (Duncan 196). Although Duncan is, of course, unable to answer such a large question within the confines of this short article, he does express a rather bleak opinion, which, if true, would not bode well for the future of migrant
Racist representations of postcolonial minority groups can be seen as far back as Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1962 film *L'Eclisse*, for example. The one thing that is clear about Vittoria (Monica Vitti) is her desire to escape from the outskirts of Rome, or “the metropolis.” As she confides in her friend Marta from Kenya, she feels imprisoned and stifled by the city life, where “tutto è difficile.” Vittoria stares longingly at photographs of Kenya in Marta’s apartment and appears positively euphoric as she performs, decked out in blackface and a grass dress, her interpretation of a Kenyan native dance. One cannot fail to comment upon the orientalist and downright racist nature of this scene. Interpreted on a basic level, Antonioni seems to suggest that Vittoria longs for the “exotic” freedom that she associates with African cultures. On a second level, perhaps Antonioni intends for us to regard the racist comments of the women, and their subsequent naïveté, in light of their own bourgeois and frivolous lifestyle, which he simultaneously critiques. But I am doubtful of this second, more charitable interpretation. Antonioni’s documentary film *Chung Kuo* (or *La Chine*) serves as a testament to the fact that the director was as intrigued by China as he was by Africa. Yet although Antonioni clearly revels in the beauty of China’s landscapes, the film depicts the Chinese people as perpetual, unknowable foreigners.

Within this chapter, I point to Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Last Emperor* as a rare example of Italian and Chinese cinematic exchange, though the extent to which any true “exchange” occurred has been contested. As Millicent Marcus has pointed out, *The Last Emperor* can be interpreted as a comment on Italian rather than on Chinese politics. As Marcus puts it: Bertolucci uses “the Orient” as a “reflecting surface” (62); filming in China,
in other words, allows the director to show his mistrust of large state apparatuses (i.e. Italian fascism in particular) (63). It is for this reason, argues Marcus, that the film must be analyzed in an Italian national context. While I agree with this assessment, Bertolucci’s film must also be viewed as Sino-Italian cinema insofar as it functions as a fundamental example of an Italian director’s attempt at understanding and revealing Chinese history.

The film that I will be focusing on predominantly within this final chapter, *Un cinese a Roma*, is a contemporary example of an Italian film that documents a real life case study of a man forced to live on the peripheries of Rome. While directors such as Antonioni portray the city in an unflattering abstract and alien light, Giagni attempts to provide us with specific sociological realities in Rome. Furthermore, while *L’Eclisse* deals with Vittoria’s fictionalized feelings of alienation and estrangement—i.e. feeling “foreign” in one’s own native city—Giagni’s film deals with screenwriter and actor Li Xiangyang’s real-life struggles as a “foreigner” living in Rome. The question to be answered within this chapter is: does *Un cinese a Roma* fit into my hybrid cinema model (fusing), and if so, does it also function on a trans-national level (crossing borders)? My feeling is that this film does not work on a trans-national level, nor does it quite make it into my definition of hybrid cinema. One of the most basic reasons that I cannot classify Giagni’s film as a hybrid film is because there is little to no reciprocation on the Chinese side. Li Xiangyang and his friends are provided with “cinematic space” in which they are free to express their feelings, but ultimately Giagni’s directorial hand remains apparent throughout. It is, in fact, impossible to tell from watching the film whether or not most of the scenes are scripted if not entirely fictionalized, which merely adds to the overall insincere quality of the film.
Graziella Parati has argued that the language of the “What” and the “Who” is an essential dichotomy to Italian migrant cinema. The characters of migrant cinema must confront issues of “whatness” (their nationality) and “whoness” (who they are as people). While this may sound like an obvious statement, Parati is actually making a deeper point about the traps of postmodern subjectivity. In order to reclaim “uniqueness,” argues Parati, these migrant characters must shift away from the notion of a fragmented postmodern identity (128). Using Parati’s paradigm, I argue that the hierarchy of “the linguistic expert” (i.e. Giagni) and the migrant subject (i.e. Li) is left undisturbed. Although Li is given space within the context of the film to confront both his “whatness” and his “whoness,” a full disruption of this hierarchy does not occur.

**Hong Kong Cinema: East/West Pastiche**

Wong-Kar-wai’s Hong Kong is both a pre- and post-colonial space, as depicted in his two films *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* (which are, themselves, inextricably linked both sequentially and thematically). Wong’s films are situated on a border space between “East” and “West,” grounded in national identity yet brimming with universal appeal. Through his use of intertextuality and citation of European pastiche, Wong, like Tsai, simultaneously builds from and shatters traditional Chinese realism as he creates his own form of neo-realism—a neo-realism that questions the high-low art form divide.

His films are filled with motifs that can be linked to the concept of Hong Kong as a post-colonial space: missed opportunities, alienation, anxiety, suspension, and the disjunction of time. Wong combines images and music in such a way that the viewer is jolted into a new visual and auditory reality, a reality that could be described as approaching the postmodern.
This very idea, that cinematic images have the capacity to free us from our everyday human perceptions and cognitions, is the same idea that fascinates Deleuze. In his *Cinema* books, Deleuze seems to be calling for the very type of cinema that Wong produces, a cinema that exists in a liminal space like Hong Kong itself, the “third border space” between East and West. Ackbar Abbas defines Hong Kong’s perpetual state of limbo as the *déjà disparu* (or that which has “already disappeared”).

Perhaps because places and buildings within urban space have the capacity to disappear and “become erased,” history, as depicted by Wong in *IMFL* and *2046*, is entirely capable of being manipulated. Time seems to circulate in an infinite loop within the connected narratives of these two films. Yet the films are simultaneously grounded in true historical events, and Wong is obsessed with accuracy of detail. The cheongsams that Maggie Cheung wears, the music on the soundtrack, the martial arts serials that Tony Leung’s character writes, are all based in reality. The constant shifts that occur in Wong’s films between time periods—the Hong Kong of the future, present, and past—do not affect Wong’s overall message, however. His films are fundamentally about love, and more specifically, about the never-ending search that one man, Zhou, (Tony Leung) embarks on to recapture his lost soul mate, Su (Maggie Cheung).

Unlike Tsai, Wong directly references Eastern and Southern Asia’s colonial past by inserting documentary footage of Charles de Gaulle’s 1966 visit to Phnom Penh in Cambodia at the conclusion of *IMFL*. The documentary footage that is inserted here along with the sound of the French-speaking reporter is noticeably out of place in relation to the rest of the film. It is as if Wong wants to awaken us from the dreamlike state that we had been previously lulled into by nostalgia-laden images of Hong Kong and illusory romance.
Significantly, it is in this moment that Wong directly points to an intersection between Eastern and Western history; again, convergence as opposed to separation. I argue that Wong’s tendency to represent history in a stubbornly non-chronological fashion reflects both a post-modern vision of urban space and a new brand of Deleuzian aesthetics. In this chapter, I expand on this thought as I explore how the seemingly oxymoronic balance between ahistoricism and realism that is characteristic of Wong’s filmmaking is related to Hong Kong’s constantly evolving, often contradictory, post-colonial identity.

A Metaphor for Hybrid Cinema

Throughout the remainder of this project, I hope to show that hybrid cinema is, itself, not a homogenous concept. At the same time, the five subgenres that I discuss—the Franco-Japanese, the Sino-French, the Franco-Korean, the Sino-Italian, and Hong Kong pastiche or “fusion”—are by no means unrelated to one another. All five chapters are underscored by their overlapping themes: alienation in the context of large urban landscapes, cultural (mis)translation, and, most importantly, their innovative use of adaptation.

The Los Angeles region works as a less-than-perfect metaphor for what I imagine East-West hybrid cinema to be. When one visits Los Angeles, one does not necessarily avoid the central downtown area, nor does one visit the center exclusively. Downtown contains its own worthwhile sites of entertainment, but a first-time visit to Los Angeles would almost surely not feel all-encompassing without a day trip out to the beaches, an afternoon of flânerie in Beverly Hills, or an excursion (however brief) through tourist-laden Hollywood. Similarly, East/West hybrid cinema and, by extension, our analysis of it, does not necessarily possess either a definitive center, or a center to be avoided. As a form of artistic
expression, East-West hybrid cinema dabbles in questions of national identity, manifests external influences as well as intertextual citation, and simultaneously sheds light on the path forward. Los Angeles cannot be labeled a “Western” city by Roland Barthes’ definition, nor can it be labeled “Eastern.” Similarly, because it no longer sounds correct to speak of “Western” cinema, and it is difficult to define “Eastern” cinema, “East-West” hybrid cinema must be imagined to contain every possibility that lies in between.
Chapter 1

Hiroshima as a Silent and Paradoxical Cinematic Space: Confronting the Silence in Nobuhiro Suwa’s H Story

“Pourquoi nier l’évidente nécessité de la mémoire?”
-Marguerite Duras, Hiroshima mon amour

In the synopsis of her screenplay for Hiroshima, mon amour (1959, Alain Resnais), Marguerite Duras offers a rather feeble, if not bizarre, justification for the film’s setting:

Between two people as dissimilar geographically, philosophically, historically, economically, racially, etc. as it is possible to be, Hiroshima will be the common ground (perhaps the only one in the world?) where the universal factors of eroticism, love, and unhappiness will appear in an implacable light (10, emphasis mine).

Why choose Hiroshima, a city that is associated with tragedy and death, over any other place in the world? Duras’ answer to this question, at least in the context of her short synopsis, seems to be: this film needs to take place in Hiroshima because the love story between the French woman (Emanuelle Riva) and the Japanese man (Eiji Okada) would seem “banal” or “commonplace” in any other location (10). Duras’ comment implies that because her screenplay is set in Hiroshima, an East Asian city that has come to be imbued with social significance since the end of World War II, an otherwise simple love story will reach a new level of complexity. Duras adds: “their personal love story…always dominates Hiroshima” (11). Because the French woman is “named” Nevers and the Japanese man is “named” Hiroshima in the final scene of the film, their affair can be interpreted as an analogy for the “East” falling in love with the “West” and vice versa by way of metonymic substitution. Yet
it is the woman’s story—her painful memories and subsequent revelation of her past trauma to the Japanese man—that is the primary focus of the film.

Robert Stam insightfully brings up the concept of *recusatio*, a rhetorical device by which one purports to deny what one actually affirms, in his essay on *Hiroshima, mon amour* (276). Resnais’/Duras’s film manages to speak to the Hiroshima tragedy by, precisely, *not* dealing with it directly. Of course, if it were truly the case that, in Duras’ words, “all one can do is talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima” (9), then there would be no way to analyze this film in tangible terms.

Duras made the choice to allow history to speak through the individual voice of the French woman, “Elle.” Why is the bombing of Hiroshima relegated to the background in Resnais’ film, while the French woman’s story dominates? In response to this question, Stam argues that, by way of metaphor, “the stories mutually strengthen, rather than undercut or sabotage one another” (276-277). But such a simple explanation seems insufficient. I am unconvinced that if Resnais/Duras had chosen to focus more directly on the Hiroshima bombing, the love story would have necessarily been undercut.

Even though Elle’s personal story dominates the narrative of the film, the underlying allegory—the story of the “East” falling in love with the “West” and vice versa—is not diminished as a result. *Hiroshima, mon amour* expresses anxiety over the volatile relationship that remains post-World War II between the “East” and the “West.” In this sense, the film is inextricably tied to the Cold War period. Yet beneath this anxiety, the film expresses a desire for reconciliation, or at least an understanding, between Japan and Western Europe. The tragic death of Elle’s lover in Nevers cannot outweigh the tragedy sustained by the Japanese civilians. Elle is finally able to come to terms with her loss through a sort of
catharsis, by putting her memories into words, and by revealing her past to the Japanese man. Japan’s tragedy, meanwhile, cannot be resolved through words or catharsis because a wound sustained by an entire nation is a more difficult one to heal. Hiroshima, therefore, is depicted cinematically as a conflicted urban space; it is a metaphorically enclosed space whose inhabitants must become immune to the past in order to face daily life, but whose visitors are often all too aware of their “outsider” status. Those who enter into the “walled-off” space from the “outside” are deemed to have a less biased perspective, but also a more naïve one.

Categorizing the film as either racist and/or sexist, rather, seems to be one of the more popular starting points for analysis. Many scholars seem uninterested in discussing the film as it relates to Hiroshima as a socially significant space; others are troubled by the conflict that is inherent to Resnais’ film, though they often miss the larger issue behind this conflict. Deborah Glassman, for example, questions the moral legitimacy of a film that equates nuclear holocaust with personal trauma. Rey Chow, in response to critics such as Glassman, argues that the true scandal of the film lies not in the dominance of the love affair over Hiroshima but rather “the distribution of narrative investments on the very terms that Duras herself uses to legitimate her avant-garde project” (156, emphasis hers). In other words, Chow believes that Duras does not intend to diminish the significance of Hiroshima; on the contrary, she attempts to elevate its significance beyond a “documentary level” by focusing on a personal story. Chow takes issue instead with Duras’ representation of the Japanese man versus that of the French woman. In Chow’s opinion, the Japanese man is portrayed as a synecdoche for the Japanese people en masse while the French woman is portrayed as an individual whose personal history is unearthed. She also points to the descriptive “portraits” at the end of the screenplay, noting specifically Duras’ insistence that the differences
between the two protagonists must be minimized so that the audience will forget that they are watching a “Franco-Japanese film” (157-158).

Throughout her essay “When Whiteness Feminizes…. Some Consequences of Supplementary Logic,” Chow sets aside Glassman’s criticism of the film’s aesthetic project as a whole, critiquing instead the a priori hierarchy inherent in the so-called distribution of narrative investments. Chow contends that Duras’ authorial directions seem to be at odds with the overall message that the film purports to send. This contention does seem plausible, because while Duras highlights the strong cultural differences between her two protagonists, (e.g. “between two people as dissimilar… as it is possible to be”), she simultaneously asserts that the Japanese man should resemble an “‘international’ type” (109). Duras insists that the Japanese man must possess “French” or “Western” features in order for the French woman to believably find him attractive—in other words, he must not appear too “exotic-looking” from the perspective of a European/American film audience. I would expanding on Chow’s contention and note that Duras does appear conflicted in regard to the degree to which she intends to emphasize the cultural differences between her two protagonists. This paradox creates a sort of catch-22 for Duras: if the French woman and the Japanese man are too similar to one another, their love affair risks remaining “commonplace” whereas if they are too different, their affair risks estranging the audience. One must not forget that the film was considered shocking when it was first released in 1959, and that Western audiences would not have been used to filmic depictions of interracial sex, particularly between an unwed couple.

Although Chow’s assertions regarding the racial and gender implications embedded within the subtext of the film are significant, her assertions are couched in larger claims
about the supposed ailing state of white feminism.\textsuperscript{36} While her analysis of \textit{Hiroshima, mon amour} is appropriate in the context of an exposé on modern feminist thought, a more thorough argument needs to be made regarding the notion of Hiroshima itself as a contradictory urban space. To be clear, my usage of the word “contradictory” does not necessarily imply “oxymoronic” (although the film does possess oxymoronic elements), and it certainly does \textit{not} imply “unknowable.”\textsuperscript{37} I am interested instead in exploring how, why, and in what way Hiroshima continues to be portrayed as such a conflicted urban space in a cinematic context.

\textbf{The Question of Narrative}

In order to discuss and analyze a historically motivated work of cinema\textsuperscript{38} such as \textit{Hiroshima mon amour}, it would be an oversight not to mention Hayden White’s famous notion of historiography. In his essay entitled “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” White observes:

\begin{quote}
The content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator. This implies that the form in which historical events present themselves to a prospective narrator is \textit{found} rather than \textit{constructed} (27, my emphasis).
\end{quote}

Throughout the rest of his essay, White argues that the narration of historical events can be presented in a nearly infinite number of ways, depending on how the narrator chooses to “emplot”\textsuperscript{39} them. The narration of history, a.k.a. historiography, is therefore a “vehicle for the transmission of messages” (41). It is the “content” of these messages alone that contain “truth-value,” according to White, not the manner in which they are encoded. In White’s opinion, “truth-value” is not innate to the manner in which a historian chooses to transmit “content,” and therefore, history should be thought of as constructed as opposed to
discovered. Although White does not explicitly define the terms “content” or “truth-value” in this essay, he would presumably agree that we can define historical events based, at least partially, according to when they happened (i.e. chronologically).

Because White’s overall thesis is not particularly controversial when stated in simple language, I leave any past or potential debate of this particular essay to historians. White’s thesis is central to my argument, not because I wish to reinforce or dispute his claims, but rather, because his thesis helps demonstrate my contention that certain film scholars have taken a misguided approach when attempting to analyze Hiroshima, mon amour. Siobhan S. Craig, for example, in her essay: “Tu n’as rien vu à Hiroshima: Desire, Spectatorship and the Vaporized Subject in Hiroshima Mon Amour,” maintains that Resnais’ film “presents the spectator with a crisis of epistemology” (26) such that the spectator is prevented from approaching the film-text in any masterful way. Craig argues, furthermore, that because the French woman’s story is fragmented by flashbacks, we, as spectators, cannot forget that we are watching a film as opposed to “reality.” According to Craig, the French woman’s story is itself symbolic of the “rupture of epistemological categories,” which is, in turn, meant to parallel the destruction caused by the atomic bomb. This symbolic rupture, says Craig, is supposed to lead us to the conclusion that “knowledge” (she places the word in quotes) is not possible (35), at least not within the world of Resnais’ film.

Although it is certainly true that subjectivities appear to be fragmented in Resnais’ film, Craig’s overall conclusions are far too radical. She does not ground her analysis of the film in light of the Hiroshima bombing, and as a result, her analysis becomes overly abstract and general. Not even White would deny that the content of history possesses a truth-value; he argues only that the content of history can be recounted in a variety of ways.
Resnais’ film is one of the many possible “narrating vehicles” through which the story of Hiroshima has been told. The spectator is not inclined to be detached from the diegesis of the film simply because it is broken up by flashbacks. Furthermore, the possibility for knowledge or contextual analysis does not disappear simply because the director employs experimental modes of storytelling; contextual background knowledge is necessary, in fact, in order to successfully analyze a film such as *Hiroshima, mon amour*.

Interestingly, White employs the term *allegoresis* or “allegory” to describe how one should view historical narratives, and his description of the term recalls the notion of *recusatio*: “…rather than regard every historical narrative as mythic or ideological in nature, we should regard it as allegorical, that is, saying one thing and meaning another” (45). Those who narrate history (i.e. historiographers), in other words, shape and transform events into distinct “patterns of meaning” (45). The truth of these events can arise only indirectly, through *allegoresis*, because everything else is merely chronicle. Applying White’s thesis to my own, I would argue that Resnais and Suwa are able to successfully find meaning in the Hiroshima bombing through *allegoresis* or *recusatio*; that is, by “saying one thing and meaning another.” Resnais attains this goal by placing Elle’s story in the forefront, while Suwa attains it by focusing on Dalle’s frustration with her role as Elle and the film project as a whole. The act of transforming events into patterns of meaning—even fragmented patterns of meaning—does not reduce our knowledge of these historical narratives to nil, as Craig suggests. The fact that Resnais was initially asked to make a documentary on the Hiroshima bombing, yet chose to tell the story in a hybrid genre further underlines my contention that Resnais wanted to tell the story, but was only willing to do so if he were given full reign to carve out his own pattern of meaning and leave this unique carving behind.
Commenting Dialectically: Resnais’ Film-Within-A-Film

In a documented conversation that took place between the Cahiers critics in July of 1959, Jacques Rivette notes that Hiroshima, mon amour resembles “a unity of contrasts, a dialectical unity” (Hillier 61, my emphasis). Later in the same conversation, Rivette defines what he means by the term “dialectic” more precisely: “…dialectic—a movement which consists in presenting the thing and at the same time an act of distancing in relation to that thing—in order to be critical—in other words, denying it and affirming it” (Hillier 65). In this conversation, Rivette is describing the same phenomenon that I have previously referred to as both recusatio and allegoresis, only by a different name. While Rivette’s observations echo those of other critics, his thought process reveals a slightly more nuanced idea: Resnais’ obsession with the fragmentation of narrative unity allows him to take a distanced critical stance. Rivette makes a further nuanced yet essential point: even though the narrative of Hiroshima is fragmented and splintered, the pieces that form the overall narrative are capable of being assembled into a coherent or (quasi-coherent) picture, much like a jigsaw puzzle. Although this point might sound trivial, not every critic would agree that there is “unity” to be found in Resnais’ narrative.

Rivette’s use of the term “dialectic” in reference Resnais’ aesthetic style implies more than simply “conflicting” or “working in two separate directions simultaneously.” Rivette proposes that Resnais chooses this dialectical style because it allows him to appear falsely objective. This false objective style tends to make us, the viewers, feel as if we are watching “real world” events, as opposed to events that have been contrived by the director. By having Emanuelle Riva’s character play the role of an actress in the film-within-the-film,
which, not coincidentally deals directly with the Hiroshima bombing and the resulting peace marches, Resnais avoids potential political backlash. Furthermore, because the viewer of Resnais’ film is distanced from the peace-march—the march is only occurring in the film-within-the-film—the viewer is even more apt to fall prey to the illusion that Resnais is not commenting on the Japanese people’s response to the Hiroshima bombing. These dialectical tactics, again, allow Resnais to appear neutral, even if he is not. Why Resnais chooses not to directly broadcast a political stance is a larger issue that relates back to cinematic style, and to the particularly sensitive time period in which the film was released. How he manages to “comment without commenting” on the politically volatile situation in Hiroshima during the Cold War period is a more interesting and fruitful point of departure.

The peace-march scene that Rivette cites is nicely illustrative of Resnais’ indirect style. When Lui finds Elle at the film shoot, she appears sad and thoughtful. Despite Lui’s efforts to convince Elle that he is in love with her, and that she must not return to Paris, she is skeptical about the possibility for any future contact. Instead of responding to the Japanese man’s pleas directly, Elle strokes a white kitten that seems to have appeared out of nowhere, looks up towards the sky and remarks: “On dit qu’il va faire de l’orage avant la nuit.” In the very next shot, the sky covers most of the frame while the heads of the “protesters” appear to pop up from below, into the frame. The signs that they carry are powerfully critical of the West: “Il est regrettable que l’intelligence (sic) politique de l’homme 100 fois moins développée que son intelligence (sic) scientifique nous prive à ce point d’admirer l’homme.”

Despite the powerful messages that they carry, the faces of the extras in the fake peace-march are blank and expressionless, as if they are unaware of the magnitude of their actions. The misspelling of the word “intelligence” further emphasizes the unnatural quality
of this supposed political manifestation. French language and culture, we realize, would
have been relatively unnatural to the Japanese extras that were supposedly taking part in an
“international film about peace.” One extra in particular, a Japanese man who has been
made-up to look as though he has been severely burned, watches the parade pass by with no
readable expression, seemingly unaware of the emotional power that his appearance
emanates. This strong sense of artificiality is confirmed several moments later, when, after
filming the long line of “protesters” for several minutes, the camera pans over, and a large
dolly appears carrying a camera, a director, and his assistants. In case we might have
forgotten for a moment that we are watching the making of a film within the larger film, this
shot is an abrupt reminder.

This entire scene works not only dialectically, as Rivette observed, but on a complex
multitude of levels: 1) at the beginning of Resnais’ film, the documentary footage mixed into
the diegesis created uncertainty about which images are “true” and which images have been
“constructed” by Resnais to appear true. 2) Now, we are faced with a scene that appears
“documentary-like,” though we realize at the same time that it is part of Resnais’ diegesis,
and not true. 3) Not only is this scene not “true;” it is not even meant to be “occurring”
within Renais’ diegesis. This scene is supposedly “occurring” within the diegesis of another
director, who is not really a director at all, but an actor in Resnais’ film. Thus, the Japanese
extras in Resnais’ film are playing extras in the other director’s film, now three times
removed from being actual participants in the peace march. As a result, their appearance is
zombie-like, and they seem, at least within the context of Resnais’ film, to be almost
completely detached from the reality of their situation. This scene is a decisive example of
Resnais’ self-reflexive style of filmmaking.
The scene is highly emotional however; despite these multiple layers of artificiality and zombie-like extras, the scene remains powerful because it functions symbolically and allegorically. The white kitten, for example, can be read as a symbol of innocence and vulnerability, while the looming storm and threatening sky in the next shot suggests that the worst is potentially yet to come. As I mentioned previously, Resnais’ film expresses anxiety, if not outright pessimism, about the state of political relations between Eastern and Western nations. The possibility for a disaster even worse than the Hiroshima bombing looms threateningly in the background, regardless of whether or not the desire for peace remains strong. Resnais’ aesthetic choices ring true with Kramer’s aforementioned observation. By choosing to film the people of Hiroshima through layers of artifice, Resnais suggests that they have become outwardly immune to the weighty moral issues that their existence entails. The ambivalence of Hiroshima’s citizens stems from their position inside the enclosed city space; a position that, unfortunately, does not tend to allow for an unbiased perspective.

Yet, at the same time, Resnais suggests that those who come from “outside the wall” do not necessarily possess an unbiased perspective either. The only person who is outwardly affected emotionally by the sight of the parade is the French woman, though her emotion is not entirely selfless, since it is clearly linked to her own past experiences. As Elle watches the children and other extras pass by, the memories of her miserable life in Nevers during the war come back to haunt her. She is made uncomfortable by the parade not solely because she pities the plight of the citizens of Hiroshima, but because the sight of the marching crowd brings back personal memories of her own experiences in France on D-day. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze characterizes the French woman’s character succinctly in his conversation with Rivette and the other Cahiers critics: “Emanuelle Riva is a modern adult woman because she
is not an adult woman. Quite the contrary, she is very childish, motivated solely by her impulses and not by her ideas” (Hillier 62-63). The notion that Riva’s character is a “modern woman” because she is fickle and selfish is significant, and as we will see, links her closely with Dalle’s character. Resnais’ directorial decision to show Riva’s character getting lost in and subsequently pushed around by the crowd of extras at the end of this scene furthermore suggests that the love story between Elle and Lui is in constant conflict with Hiroshima as a “modern” urban space.

The Japanese man, (a.k.a. “Lui”) meanwhile, is more focused on attempting to convince his lover not to leave than he is on the spectacle that is taking place in front of him. Yet, as Duras clearly indicates in the screenplay directions, Lui has strong opinions about the possibility for peace in Hiroshima. At one point, he comments to Elle: “Ici, à Hiroshima, on ne se moque pas des films sur la paix.” This rather harsh-sounding line inserted into an otherwise innocuous conversation is one of the rare indications, within this film, of the Japanese man’s political convictions. It is important to stress that Lui is not a mere pawn in the life of Elle, and that he clearly feels a strong kinship to his fellow Hiroshima citizens. Even though he was not physically in Hiroshima when the bombing occurred—he was somewhere “on the outside” fighting in the war—his family was there. Duras does not provide us with any more specific information about his experiences during the war. Duras, in my view, wants to keep the Japanese man’s personal history shrouded in a veil of mystery not because, as Chow suggests: “[For Duras] realism and referentiality…remain adequate and appropriate for the representation of yellow people” (157). Rather, as the Cahiers critics suggest, Elle is portrayed as a selfish, “not rational” (Hillier 65) modern woman—not a
particularly flattering portrayal—whereas so little is known about Lui that, as a character, he is much more difficult to parse.

Lui tells his lover over and over again at the beginning of the film: “*Tu n’as rien vu à Hiroshima,*” not because Resnais wishes to warn us that we are about to “share in the epistemological crisis soon to erupt in the film as a whole” (Craig 27), and not because Resnais wants to undercut our desire to feel compassion for the victims of Hiroshima (27). Such interpretations fail to take into account the possibility that the Japanese man *has* been profoundly emotionally affected by the bombing, and that he is no longer able to express these emotions. To read his statement as “emotionless” and “flatly negative,” (27) seems at best obvious, and at worst insensitive. Such overly complex interpretations also fail to pinpoint the beautiful simplicity of Lui’s statement.

In fact, Jean-Luc Godard’s 1959 interpretation of the Japanese man’s statement seems much more correct: “It has to be taken in the simplest sense,” he remarks. “She saw nothing because she wasn’t there. Nor was he…the point of departure is the moment of awareness, or at the very least the *desire to become aware*” (Hillier 64, my emphasis).

As Godard observes, the desire to untangle the historical implications of the Hiroshima bombing is shared by both Elle and Lui, though each of them deals with this desire in different, almost opposite, ways. Elle purports to have seen everything, whereas Lui tells her: no, you have seen nothing. Yet we must be careful to note that he does *not* say that he himself has seen nothing, only that *she* has not; we do not know what he has or has not experienced. If we take Lui’s statement in its simplest sense, as Godard proposes, we can interpret his words by their literal meaning, not only as an overly broad, abstract statement
about spectatorship, even though such an interpretation is possible. The former interpretation leads us on a path towards the desire to know, while the latter leads us around in circles.

**Suwa’s Film-Within-a-Film: A Different Type of Dialectic**

Nobuhiro Suwa’s *H Story* (2001) is a little-known film about the failed process of shooting a remake of *Hiroshima mon amour*. *H Story* is a self-reflexive exercise in filmmaking that, like Resnais’ film, does not comment on the Hiroshima tragedy directly. Yet unlike *Hiroshima*, which is shot from the perspective of the French woman and made with Western audiences in mind, *H Story* exemplifies East-West hybrid cinema, specifically Franco-Japanese cinema. I define this type of cinema, not simply as films co-produced by France and Japan, but more broadly, films in which France and Japan noticeably dialogue, collaborate, or share cross-cultural perspectives. Because this type of cinema is intertextually cites earlier works of French literature and cinema, is circulated globally, and employs an international cast and crew, it is not sufficient to deem it “Japanese” transnational cinema.43

The film plays with the notion that one cannot speak about Hiroshima, even though the memories and images loom constantly in the background. Suwa, in fact, stated in a 2001 interview about the film: “*Le sujet du film était: ne pas pouvoir parler de Hiroshima*” (Tesson). Although Suwa claims that the film expresses the impossibility of speaking about Hiroshima, nearly everyone in the film comments on this frustrating “impossibility” at one point or another, especially the “French actress” (played by Béatrice Dalle). Dalle is a real-life French actress who is playing Emanuelle Riva’s role in the fictional remake of Resnais’ film.
Whereas *Hiroshima mon amour* contains one meta-level: we are “watching a film about people watching the making of a film” (Craig 25) (Riva plays an actress who is in Hiroshima for a movie role) \(^{44}\), *H Story* contains a multitude of meta-levels: we are watching a film, about people making a film, about people watching the making of a film. Thus, by granting us access to the inner thoughts of Dalle’s character as she becomes increasingly trapped by Riva’s role, Suwa provides insight into the difficulties that Resnais likely faced while directing the film initially. As a “translator” of Resnais’ film, Suwa creates an “afterlife” for *Hiroshima mon amour*; a cinematic space in which recognizable narrative moments (i.e. still photos from the original film) intertwine with innovative visual language (i.e. including the clapboard in the shot, blurring the line between fiction and reality).

Hayden White, at the very end of his essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” \(^{45}\) poses the provocative question: “Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?” (25) Perhaps, suggests White, our desire to represent historical events in narrative form is related to our desire to endow those events with meaning, coherence, or “fullness”. As soon as we attempt to “represent” history through means other than chronicles or annals, our shaping of history can no longer be disentangled from our societal morals and attitudes. White’s issue with narrative discourse as it relates to historical representation echoes the issue that plagues Suwa throughout *H Story*. Though Suwa does not directly attempt to represent the Hiroshima tragedy, he does represent the process of making a film with historical fore-groundings. He becomes entangled in issues of morality, the attitudes of his actors, and his own personal feelings about Hiroshima. Interestingly, *H Story* was made after an *actual* failed attempt by Suwa to re-make Resnais’ film—a real failure turned into a
fictional failure. Whether the final product can be deemed “intentional” or not, it certainly tells a story (regardless of whether or not the viewer is familiar with Resnais’ film).

By creating a fictional counterpart of himself, Suwa demonstrates how easy it can be for a director to become stifled artistically when dealing with sensitive material. Once the director realizes that no one working on the film can ever truly know what it was like to have lived through the Hiroshima bombing, he grows increasingly powerless. At the same time, his desire to “experience” the terror firsthand was what prompted Suwa to make the film in the first place. H Story exhibits these conflicting desires; the film manages to capture the internal conflict that artists face when attempting to recreate fictional stories with historical and moral implications.

Yet the film becomes a bit more complex and difficult to parse when we realize that “H Story” also refers to the failed film within the larger film. As a result of this realization, it becomes nearly impossible to separate fact from fiction, or for that matter, to reference Suwa, Dalle, or any of the other participants in the filmmaking process, without running into a significant amount of confusion. For example, we can refer to “Suwa” as he appears in his own film (as an idealized version of himself perhaps), and “Suwa” as the actual director of H Story as he exists beyond the parameters of the fiction that he himself has created. Our vision of Suwa throughout the film is always intentionally obscured: we witness him mostly as a reflection in a mirror, as he converses with Kou Machida (playing the role of the screenwriter) in a pair of scenes. Although these scenes appear to be staged, the conversations between these two men most likely contain elements of truth, based on what we know about the real making of the film.
The final product turns out to be such an odd conflation of reality and fiction, that it would be difficult, and relatively pointless, to speculate about the sincerity of Suwa’s comments to Machida. The first such conversation between Machida and Suwa, for example, is preceded by a shot of a slate (i.e. clapboard). Such a shot would normally remain in a film for editing purposes only. In many cases, however, Suwa chooses to leave the scene marker in, presumably because he wishes to manifest skepticism about dichotomies such as final products versus works-in-progress, and diegetic versus behind-the-scenes footage. Regardless of whether or not his words are contrived or scripted, Suwa’s comments to Machida in this scene are telling. When Machida asks him why he chose to set his film in Hiroshima, Suwa replies:

In a way, Hiroshima is me. And yet, this town has no particular meaning for me. It’s a place where I lived. It was just part of my everyday world. When I thought about making a film here, I had a lot of trouble finding a way in…there was this Hiroshima, mon amour that had been written forty years ago. It was a text for the cinema, a real screenplay that was used to make a film. But…from the moment I encountered this work, I couldn’t get it out of my head…I am so steeped in this film and this text that I can’t avoid them (DVD).

Fig. 1: Kou Machida discussing the film with Suwa (a small piece of his head can be seen in the mirror), and on the right of the frame).
With these remarks, Suwa expresses the deep frustration he feels while attempting to reconcile a fictional text (*Hiroshima mon amour*) with the actual bombing of Hiroshima. At a certain point, Suwa becomes aware that he can no longer disentangle the text from reality. The images of the film invade his thoughts to such an extent that he cannot avoid the urge to reproduce them exactly. It is interesting that Suwa describes his confrontation with Resnais’ film in such negative terms. He likens the experience to an invasion; Duras’ script and Resnais’ images invaded his thoughts and preoccupied his mind to such an extent that avoidance became impossible. Suwa’s feelings of powerlessness and entrapment at the thought of confronting Hiroshima with his movie camera may have led his original film—an exact remake of *Hiroshima mon amour*—toward premature failure.

Suwa hopes that by reproducing Resnais’ original film, he will be able to “experience” the tragedy, however indirectly. Yet the only path “into” the Hiroshima tragedy resembles a hall of mirrors, much like the scene with Machida itself. Clearly, Resnais’ film does not purport to tell the true story of the Hiroshima bombing. Moreover, even if *Hiroshima mon amour* had been a documentary, documentaries do not function as perfect testaments to reality. In his book *The Material Ghost*, Gilberto Perez aptly observes: “…lying or telling the truth is not the province of cameras but of human beings who use them, put them to a purpose” (30). As Perez notes, a camera can only provide an “aura” of truth through the semblance of “visual testimony.” The cinema, paradoxically, is an index of reality only insofar as it is also recognizable as cinema—an icon. Assuming that we agree with this assessment, then it makes little difference how Suwa chooses to represent the Hiroshima tragedy since the experience will always stem from a lie. Perhaps this is why, in his scene with Machida, Suwa does not allow the camera to catch a full-on frontal shot of his
face. He is aware of the fact that he is in the process of telling a lie, both to his audience and to Machida. By obscuring his face, he implicates the camera, rather than himself.

Dalle’s character is similarly frustrated by the task at hand. Her inability to re-create Emanuelle Riva’s role, in combination with her annoyance at Duras’ screenplay, is the central focus of *H Story*. She feels that there is something morally reprehensible about turning the Hiroshima bombing into a cinematic poem, even if there is an artistic purpose behind it. In one of the earlier scenes, Dalle and Umano stand on the banks of the Ota River at night, chatting as they wait for Suwa to call them to their marks and begin shooting the scene. Umano, possibly out of curiosity and possibly out of a simple attempt to make conversation, asks Dalle why she found it difficult to shoot the scene at the café. She responds: “I am tired of doing the same thing. I wanted to do things a bit differently…I thought we would do things more personally…doing the same gestures over and over was a pain… I’m getting stuck here.”

Dalle makes it clear that she is not tired *physically*; rather, her fatigue is caused by some sort of pernicious mental blockade which is much more difficult to put into words. Yet the cause of her frustration is by no means inexplicable: Dalle’s character is uncomfortable and feels stuck in place by the echo of Resnais’ film. She does not approve of Suwa’s insistence that every minute detail of Resnais’ film—even the way that she raises her glass in the café scene—must be re-enacted precisely. She is literally stuck on her “mark,” forced to robotically mimic Riva’s actions and lines from forty years ago, no longer challenged as an actress, and no longer feeling as if she is contributing artistically to the film. In this same scene, when Suwa shouts “Action!” nothing happens for several moments; Dalle and Umano do not appear or enter into the frame because they cannot hear him. This noticeable lack of
movement after the word “action” speaks to the Suwa’s inability to move his film project forward, and to the impossibility for successful communication.

**The Evils and Virtues of “the Remake”**

The frustration that can accompany the attempt to remake a renowned film by a well-known director is by no means isolated to *H Story*. In a “Senses of Cinema” article from 2000, for example, Constantine Santas questions the motives of contemporary director Gus Van Sant, whose 1998 remake of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1962) was a complete bomb at the box office:

> Again one can ask, what was it that he was trying to achieve?...What can an exact copy do for a viewer, especially a viewer to whom the original is so readily available? More specifically, an exact copy of a movie made forty years earlier, even with minor modifications of style does not seem a realistic endeavor. Times change and so do peoples’ outlooks.

Interestingly, Santas’ remarks mirror Dalle’s objections in *H Story*. The article, tellingly titled “The Remake of *Psycho*: Creativity or Cinematic Blasphemy?”, argues that Van Sant’s film is little more than a misguided experiment in filmmaking, shot-by-shot proof that mimicry is not always the sincerest form of flattery. Santas’ question: “what can an exact copy of a film *do for a viewer*?” (my emphasis) raises an important issue; the question seems to imply that these types of filmic endeavors reflect a hint of selfishness on the part of the director. The endeavor reeks of arrogance, in other words, and seems to suggest one of the following possibilities, ranking from the least offensive to the most: 1) Van Sant simply wanted to dabble in a cinematic experiment for his own amusement, and any residual audience satisfaction would be a side benefit, or 2) Van Sant saw himself as the only modern-day director who was willing and capable of such an ambitious project, or, worst of
all, 3) he re-made the film only to steal a piece of Hitchcock’s cinematic legacy and garner attention in his own right. All three of these possible motives seem disingenuous at best. Although it is highly possible that none of these scenarios is entirely accurate, if any one of them were even partially true, it would imply that Van Sant possesses little regard for his viewership.

Suwa’s film, luckily, does not suffer from the same ailments that marred Van Sant’s *Psycho*. Not only does *H Story* question the value of remaking Resnais’ original film; it questions the value of film remakes altogether. We know that Suwa originally intended to create a remake of *Hiroshima mon amour*, but we do not know what his precise motives were; perhaps he wanted to “dabble” in an overly ambitious cinematic experiment of his own. Given the inaccessible nature of the film, it seems likely that Suwa cared little whether or not *H Story* would make money or entertain an audience. In this sense, Suwa and Van Sant may have begun their respective projects with similar motives. But in Van Sant’s *Psycho*, Anne Heche does not express anxiety over her ability to reinterpret the role of Janet Lee because the diegesis of the film does not allow for “asides” or extra-narrational commentary.48 The film’s overall lack of intertextual citation and self-reflexivity, fairly or unfairly, colors Heche’s performance in an unflattering manner. She appears puppet-like and false, as if she is simply “going through the motions.” Adding nothing truly new to the role, Haesch’s performance falls short of Lee’s, consequentially providing fodder for a few unkind film critics.
Although it is unclear whether or not the real Dalle would have felt uncomfortable recreating Emanuelle Riva’s role and starring in the remake, her character in *H Story* is undoubtedly made uncomfortable by the prospect. Dalle’s objections to the film are complex, but understandable. She feels that neither she, nor anyone else involved with the film, can truly know how the original cast members felt because none of them lived through war on a global scale. For her generation, war is simply “not a part of daily life” remarks Dalle to Umano between takes during the filming of the café scene. She adds that although Duras’ original script is full of “pretty little repetitions,” she finds Duras’ poetic rhetoric “more awful than the [Hiroshima war] museum.”

Later in the film, Dalle abruptly abandons Machida at the Hiroshima art museum, leaving a note on his windshield and exiting down the tree-lined road. Although Dalle never explains to Machida why she left him at the museum, it is clear that she is deeply bothered by the artwork itself. The notion that abstract, modernist spirals are being shown in an exhibit about the Hiroshima bombing is offensive to Dalle. Her reaction to the art stems from her overall disgust at the idea that tragedy and death can be transformed into an inconsequential
symbol or icon. Thoedor Adorno observes: “modern art must not deny the existence of what is modern about experience and technology” (50). Dalle is uncomfortable precisely because she feels that both the film and the art in the museum deny the existence of modern experience, as well as the potential horrors of technology. Her desire for concreteness and realism eventually causes Dalle to give Suwa an ultimatum: “either include documentary footage in the film or I quit.” Needless to say, Suwa-the-character never adds documentary footage, because the film shoot comes to an end shortly after Dalle’s ultimatum.

_H Story_, on the other hand, contains large amounts of documentary footage, mostly in color, of a ravaged, post-apocalyptic Hiroshima. The first appearance of the old footage appears immediately after the River Ota scene; it is a panning shot in black- and-white of a devastated Hiroshima in ruins, nearly all of the building have been razed. A modern-day shot of Hiroshima follows the scene at the café, and serves as a sort of bookend to the previous footage. Suwa’s modern-day shot of Hiroshima also pans across the cityscape, which by 2001 has been entirely rebuilt and revitalized. The mountains in the background and the River Ota are the only landmarks that remain recognizable.

The documentary footage that Suwa places towards the end of his film, which is in color, has an interesting story behind it: Lt. Daniel A. McGovern was ordered by Douglas MacArthur to shoot the footage, in an effort to document the effects of the U.S. air raids on Japanese cities. McGovern then assembled a crew including Lt. Herbert Sussan and Harry Mimura^50^, who served as the cameraman. In the short clips of the film that Suwa shows, we see the shadows of industrial equipment burned into the wall, the twisted metal of destroyed buildings, and a clock which is stopped at exactly 8:13. Towards the very end of _H Story_, after the film-shoot has been called off because of Dalle, Suwa inserts footage of citizens
walking among the ruins, some carrying their belongings. Bicyclists whiz past bent traffic lights, and the dead trees stand ominously in the background. Many of the buildings have become skeletons of their former selves; no longer do they provide shelter or basic protection from the outside world. But these are only small clips from the film; other more disturbing parts are never shown.\textsuperscript{51} It is hardly surprising, given the disturbing nature of these images, that after McGovern’s film was returned to the U.S. government, it was declared top secret for thirty years and made inaccessible to the public.\textsuperscript{52}

Besides the effect rendered by the powerful nature of the imagery itself, there is a narrative purpose behind Suwa’s inclusion of McGovern’s footage in \textit{H Story}. Suwa’s story focuses on the impossibility for communication between Dalle and Machida; an extension of Resnais’ “Elle” and “Lui” perhaps, but with real names this time. Even though the film shoot has been called off, the lack of linguistic and cultural understanding between Dalle and Machida (first evidenced in the museum scene) prevents their relationship from progressing. In the final scene of \textit{H Story}, Dalle and Machida sit on a park bench among abandoned ruins that (not coincidentally) immediately bring McGovern’s footage to mind. Though the viewer cannot hear their faraway conversation, it is clear that the couple is in the process of breaking up. When Dalle eventually stands and leaves, the viewer is only able to catch glimpses of her figure when she passes the openings in the ruins.

Despite the failed love story, Suwa’s camera suggests that, in the grander scheme of things, all is not lost. Unlike the Hiroshima of McGovern’s film, which is barren and dead, the Hiroshima that fills Suwa’s final shots—despite the remaining ruins—is green, lush and overgrown. The birds chirping in the background seem to suggest that nature always has the final word over man-made destruction. The last image that we see, a hand coming up over
the camera lens, is a self-reflexive, perhaps even comforting gesture, reminding us that film is an imperfect representation of reality. The idea that filmmakers or spectators can “experience” history through film is a naïve one.

**Life and Afterlife: From Resnais to Suwa**

Film remakes are a specific form of translation. As with the translation of written texts into films, a translation of a film into another film is a difficult task. The director must decide how faithful to the original he or she wishes to be, while simultaneously deciding how to add something new. Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay “The Task of the Translator,” argues that translations should be thought of as the “afterlife” of the original, and that good translations remain true to the original but do not copy it exactly. He states: “…no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in an afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change.”

As a “translator” of *Hiroshima mon amour*, Suwa either knew, or soon came to the conclusion, that a direct translation of Resnais’ original work would not do it justice. Thus, with *H Story*, he creates an “afterlife” for the film. Suwa uses and plays with his perspective as a Hiroshima citizen to adapt Resnais’ vision, and to use Benjamin’s phrase, transforms it back into “something living.” When compared side by side, the two films complement rather than compete with one another. Suwa’s film branches out into a new intertextual dimension by building upon Resnais’ material.

While the newsreel footage at the opening of Resnais’ film is intended to shock, the documentary footage in Suwa’s film is intended to pay tribute to Resnais’ film and expose
previously suppressed material. Although Riva and Dalle’s characters are connected by the emotions that they experience when confronted with the idea of the Hiroshima tragedy, they are bothered for very different, even inverse, reasons. Riva’s character has been psychologically scarred by the death of her German lover during World War II, and must now come to terms with her memories twenty years later in Hiroshima. Dalle, on the other hand, feels that she cannot successfully interpret her role, and is bothered by the fact that she lacks any sort of truly traumatic experience to latch onto. She feels guilty about her privileged place in history.

Unlike Resnais, Suwa was born in Hiroshima and lived there for much of his adult life. For this reason, one might assume that he possesses greater insight into the 1945 tragedy and its prolonged effects on Japanese society. But Suwa’s remark to Machida: “Hiroshima has no particular meaning for me,” suggests otherwise. Suwa’s insights cannot possibly be comparable to those of the Hiroshima citizens who were present when the bomb was dropped. On the other hand, although Resnais was alive during World War II, he was likely in France—not Hiroshima—during those most fateful moments.

Suwa’s hand covering the camera lens in the final scene of H Story implies that actual experience can never be perfectly recreated through film. This final self-reflexive motion suggests that all one can hope to do through film is comment on the artificiality of filmic representation itself. As we have seen, both Resnais and Suwa accomplish this feat in different but similar ways: Resnais uses recusatio, “commenting without commenting” on history by placing Riva’s personal tragedy at the forefront and allowing the opening graphic images to speak for themselves and resound throughout the remainder of the film. In the
aforementioned film-shoot/parade scene, Resnais highlights the absurdity of employing Hiroshima citizens to play the role of themselves in a fake protest.

Suwa has been left with double the task; not only is he haunted by the events of 1945, but he is, moreover, haunted by Resnais’ forty-year old meditation on those events. By blurring the line between finished product and work-in-progress, reality and fiction, Suwa creates an afterlife for Resnais’ work, exposing images that the U.S. military hoped even film scholars would never see.

Addendum

After the recent unnerving earthquake and tsunami on March 11th, 2011 in Japan, I realized that it would be difficult to write about cinematic representations of Hiroshima without a brief acknowledgment of the current situation. In a recent Times article on the earthquake, a journalist writes: “Marooned on the edge of a continent and perched on one of the most seismically active spots on earth, Japan, for all its modern comforts and luxuries, is a country that lives on the brink of disaster.” What does it mean to “live on the brink of disaster”? The phrase invokes an everyday existence in limbo, unrelenting apprehension about the future, and a state of continuous uncertainty—if there was a disaster in the past, then there will almost certainly be one in the future. In a sense, therefore, there is no such thing as “life in the present,” when everyday existence is consumed by worry on the one hand and mourning on the other.

One of the joys of film studies—the comparative, transnational variety anyway—is that it is never sufficient to look only at the past. Although I would love to spend the rest of my life writing about old movies, like the actress in Nobuhiro Suwa’s 2001 film H Story, I would be uncomfortable only re-enacting the past in my work. In order for our film analyses
to remain meaningful, we must be capable of moving along the infinite continuum that extends both forward into the future, and backward into the past. In light of these recent events, Suwa’s film exemplifies the need, more than ever, to continue to confront the “impossibility” of speaking about Japan’s tragedies.
Chapter 2

Moving Outside the Frame: Disjointed Connectivity in Tsai Ming-liang’s *What Time is it There?*

Tsai’s central subject is the loneliness of the human condition, the yearning of solitary souls for some sort of connection, both emotional and sexual. Though deeply invested in his characters, he observes them from a distance, and it’s this omniscience that allows despair and comedy to coexist so inseparably. His characters are invariably profoundly sad and alone but, seen from afar, the absurdity of their existence emerges, the tragicomic truth that, as lonely as they feel, they are always much closer to each other than their limited awareness allows them to recognize. (Rapfogel 26)

**Disjointed Connectivity**

In his introduction to the interview that he conducted with Tsai Ming-liang, Jared Rapfogel succinctly characterizes the themes that run throughout the Taiwanese Cinema director’s oeuvre. It is not Tsai’s interest in portraying loneliness that sets him apart from other directors, argues Rapfogel, but rather, his ability to place himself at an “omniscient distance” from his characters. This distance, as Rapfogel points out, allows him to inject humor into an otherwise tragic tale. Tsai’s distance translates into our distance from his characters, and hence as viewers, we are likely to feel saddened yet simultaneously enlightened by our position as spectators. Rapfogel’s comments seem to implicitly suggest that Tsai’s unique brand of “voyeurism from afar” serves to emphasize the absurdity of his subject’s situations. The subjects’ apparent relative closeness, yet frustrating inability to communicate with one another, makes them appear all the more ridiculous.
Loneliness abounds in all of Tsai’s films, and Tsai’s 2001 film *What Time is it There? (Ni na bian ji dian)* is certainly no exception. Yet unlike Tsai’s earlier films, such as *Rebels of a Neon God (Ch’ing shaonien ne cha)* (1992), *Vive l’Amour (Aiqing wansui)* (1994), and *The River (He liu)* (1997), which take place in and around Taipei, *What Time* is divided between Taipei and Paris. As Michelle E. Bloom points out in her forthcoming article: “The Intertextuality of Tsai Ming-liang’s Sinofrench Film *Face* (2009), *What Time* is also significant in that the film represents Tsai’s first “real” foray into the “Sinofrench” (Bloom forthcoming). Thus, unlike the “Franco-Japanese”, the “Franco-Korean” or the “Sino-Italian”, the “Sinofrench” has received substantial scholarly attention over the past decade. Unlike Bloom, however, I use the term “Sino-French” with a hyphen; as a means to describe this particular genre of the East-West hybrid cinema.

The narrative of *What Time* splits itself quite literally between the “Sino” and the “French”, particularly in terms of language and setting. The plot is divided between a man’s story and a woman’s story existing simultaneously; strangers whose lives intersect for a brief moment when the woman, Shiang-chyi (Chen Shiang-chyi) buys a dual-time zone watch from a man, Hsiao-kang (Lee Kang-sheng). After Shiang-chyi buys the watch, she goes to Paris on a sightseeing trip of indeterminate length (although she never ends up seeing any of the sites) while Hsiao-kang remains in Taipei with his mother, who is grieving over the loss of her husband, his father (Tien Miao).

Although the two characters never meet again within the context of this film, their lives appear to be almost uncannily interconnected, even across a time difference of seven hours and a distance of several thousand miles. Hsiao-kang becomes neurotically obsessed with changing every single clock in Taipei to Paris time, even the enormous clock on the
outside of a large downtown building. He also becomes obsessed with “all things French” (Martin n.p.), including wine and French cinema (François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* in particular). Although it remains unclear why Hsiao-kang has become so enthralled by French things, the most obvious explanation is that he is obsessed with Shiang-chyi, even though he met her only twice. Shiang-chyi, meanwhile, is embroiled in her own set of problems in Paris.

Tsai as a director demonstrates what I call *disjointed connectivity*; and so, in turn, do the protagonists in his film. I coined this phrase while attempting to describe Tsai’s blend of cinematic methods, as well as the social and psychological state of the protagonists in his films. “Disjointed connectivity” refers to an uncanny cinematic phenomenon: displaced characters who seem to be in a state of isolation and uncertainty while simultaneously being connected to each other through the use of cinematic devices such as parallel action. Characters can also, of course, be connected intratextually, or from film to film. Tsai likes to film scenes in small, interior spaces such as hotel rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, and subway stations. He uses this technique when filming Hsiao-kang in Taipei and Shiang-chyi in Paris to suggest that these characters are metaphorically entombed. The scenes in *What Time* that are filmed in these spaces do arguably contribute to an overall sense of a-historicism and placelessness, but not entirely. In *What Time*, Paris—a “globalized” city in many respects—is far from unrecognizable. We are still able to recognize the Tuileries garden, the Métro, and the Montmartre cemetery. We are also easily able to distinguish the contrast in customs and language between Taiwan, France, and even Hong Kong, throughout the film.
In his essay “Remapping Taipei,” Frederic Jameson compares Taiwanese cinema to a recipe composed of equal parts empty space and equal parts modernity. His description allows for the possibility of both missed encounters and fortunate chance meetings within the context of modern cinematic representation. He refers to these missed encounters as “known misunderstandings” which, in turn, create a special type of “aesthetic emotion” in the external spectator (i.e. the film viewer) (114). Jameson further observes:

These occurrences remain disjoined, unknown to each other, their interrelationship, casual or other, being a non-existent fact, event, or phenomenon, save when the gaze of the Author, rising over miniature rooftops, puts them back together and declares them to be the material of storytelling...(my emphasis, 1992, 114)

Jameson is clear to delineate the element of the authorial in his description of cinematic urban spatiality. The film spectator, in other words, views both the space and the characters within that space in a way that they cannot see for themselves. In What Time, Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi are unaware of the occurrences that connect their lives. These perceived connections serve the aesthetic satisfaction of the spectator, and of the Author. Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang are serial amnesiacs who do not remember themselves from previous films in which they played the same characters. Yet although they are different people in every film, traces of their former characters remain.

Throughout What Time, Tsai employs two important methods of temporal manipulation in order to create this paradoxical effect: 1) the absurdly long take with an absolutely still camera, and 2) the division of simultaneous time into parallel yet converging stories between two central protagonists. These cinematic techniques combine to create an overall feeling of discomfort mixed with intrigue for the audience, because they serve to fragment time and space while simultaneously lingering on minute details. When he
employs the first method, Tsai positions the camera in a particular spot—often in a hallway, a bedroom, or peering into a car—to film the “private moments” of his characters. The camera is so static yet so carefully positioned, that it often seems as if we are watching surveillance footage of these characters as they move in and out of the frames of their private worlds. These unfathomably long takes serve to make us, as spectators, feel as if we are observing the lives of the characters in “real time,” when in reality, of course, the film narrative has been divided and carefully manipulated to make us feel this way.

Tsai’s Taipei is not the equivalent of Edward Yang’s Taipei, a city stifled by homogeneity and ill with modernity. As James Tweedie points out in his essay “Morning in the New Metropolis: Taipei and the Globalization of the City Film,” Tsai purposely documents recognizable buildings and public spaces in Taipei such as the Fu Ho Theatre and the Taipei Train Station Skywalk. Tweedie notes: “Tsai’s films become an ongoing attempt to document both the development of the modern city of Taipei…and to collect traces left behind by its decay” (121). The “traces” that Tsai “collects,” therefore, become part of a set—or a common thread—that connects Tsai’s films to one another (Lim 226). This is the same thread that connects, however disjointedly, Tsai’s recurring characters to one another and to themselves.

Fran Martin, in her article: “The European Undead: Tsai Ming-liang’s Temporal Dysphoria” notes that it is Tsai’s overt and self-conscious use of intertextuality and self-reflexivity that allows us to read the film through a global lens (n.p.). She argues that the film, insofar as it functions on both an intertextual and intra-textual level, requires a critical reading that will “move outside the frame,” (Martin) reaching beyond the local in order to find its own, unique niche within the global cinema landscape. She furthermore stresses the
need to view Tsai’s extensive use of European pastiche (François Truffaut in particular) in light of “transcultural citation”:

I think that addressing the complex question of what is signified by such transcultural citation necessitates a “move outside the frame,” as it were, to consider the wider contexts in which *What Time* is produced and consumed: contexts crucially conditioned, as I will argue, by Taiwan’s cultural post-coloniality, and the place of Taiwan cinema within global film networks today. (Martin n.p.)

It is Tsai’s overt and self-conscious use of intertextuality and self-reflexivity, in other words, which allows us to read the film through a global lens. But “moving outside the frame” is merely a preliminary analytical step. It is essential to realize that Tsai’s *What Time* reflects more than the director’s strong ties to both his Taiwanese and European cinematic predecessors, the film exemplifies a turning point, even within Tsai’s own career.

**From Postmodernity Back to Auteurism**

The term “postmodern,” as a way of labeling Tsai’s complex work, is simply too vague. Certainly, it is true that Tsai critiques modern life, but it is not at all clear that *What Time* somehow points to a “utopian imagination” that connotes “emancipatory potential” (Hsu 155). In fact, I would argue quite to the contrary, that *What Time* leaves little room for the emancipation of its characters. While it would not be inherently problematic to rely on Jameson’s theoretical apparatus as a means to describe Tsai’s depiction of Taipei, we must be clear not to conflate the aesthetics of Taiwan New Cinema (as exemplified by Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien) with the aesthetics of Tsai’s cinema, which are not so easily categorized. Lest it appear that little is at stake here, I would argue that we have yet to adequately and accurately situate the film in a meta-cinematic context. Although it is not
wrong to discuss Tsai’s film in terms of postmodernism, we need to re-think and re-analyze *What Time* in more tangible language, and in light of auteur theory, as Song Hwee Lim has argued (230).

In his article entitled: “Positioning Auteur Theory in Chinese Cinemas Studies: Intertextuality, Intratextuality, and Paratextuality in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang,” Lim argues that, despite the continuing influence of post-modernism and post-structuralism on current film theory, it is difficult to argue that the auteur is completely and utterly dead, as a Barthean would have it (225). Barthes in fact states, in his “Death of the Author” essay that: “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). In the case of Tsai’s oeuvre, however, ignoring the auteur might actually limit the cinematic text. Intertextual citation by filmmakers such as Tsai cannot always be interpreted as a confirmation of postmodern, “anti-authorial” aesthetics. Notes Lim:

…to the contrary…intertextuality, by invoking works of previous auteurs, precisely highlights a deliberate attempt at establishing a network of authorial association and, in the process, serves to enhance the status of the belated filmmaker by such association with former masters. (2007, 230)

This observation exhibits why the conceptual “stakes are high” so to speak. If we are precluded, in some *a priori* sense, from relying on auteur theory when analyzing Tsai’s oeuvre, we will have difficulty adequately reading Tsai’s films in terms of *intra*-textuality.

The tendency to rely only on the “text” and “inter-text” stems from the justifiable desire to analyze Tsai’s filmmaking from a complex theoretical standpoint. Jen-Yi Hsu, for instance, argues that in the age of the postmodern, the problematic of historicity and time is replaced with that of space and spatiality (136). Similarly, Bliss Cua Lim, in her book *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, argues that standardized
time “translates” and homogenizes the heterogeneity of space, and that as a result, temporality itself must be critiqued (26). Though Cua Lim’s notion of heterogeneous time and “temporal immiscibility” (33) is certainly applicable to Tsai’s filmmaking, I would argue that it is still possible to analyze Tsai’s idiosyncratic use of space and time in *What Time* without relying heavily on the discourse of postmodernity. In fact, we cannot rely solely on the assumption that postmodernity frees us from history, time, or even authorial intention, when analyzing *What Time*.

Cua Lim’s analysis rests on the assumption that the homogeneity of time can be challenged through cinematic representations of the fantastic or the supernatural. It would, however, be misleading to describe the space in *What Time* only in terms of the supernatural. In other words, though the film is filled with the themes of supernatural space, ghosts, and resurrection, these phenomena are better described, within the context of the film, in terms of Song Hwee Lim’s notion of intratextuality, and my notion of disjointed connectivity.

To clarify, I am not arguing that the themes of ghosts, reincarnation, and the fantastic are not enormously important to the film. Rather, I am arguing that if we read the spatiality of the film only in terms of this particular paradigm, we risk losing an overall grasp of how the film functions on a meta-cinematic or intratextual level. Building on Lim’s contention, I would add that if we say that Tsai’s *What Time* exemplifies our postmodern condition and simply end there; we miss a large part of Tsai’s authorial function.

Moreover, unlike Tu Chao-mei, who has argued that Tsai should be classified as an “accented” or “displaced” filmmaker whose aesthetics reveal his struggle to reconcile space (Tu 2010), I would argue to the contrary that Tsai’s aesthetics reveal his extraordinary capability of controlling the transnational cinematic space in which he is able to move with
ease and fluidity. Tsai has said rather bluntly that he does not aim to please all audiences; on the contrary, he assumes that his audiences will keep up with him. In a “Question and Answer” session after a screening of Rebels of a Neon God in 2010, Tsai commented:

> We have the same audience around the globe. Some people won’t even watch my films; they will see my name on the marquee and turn away…I use the same cast over and over again. This is not entertaining for most people. It is hard to say who likes my films, some PhD students fall asleep and some high school students love them. If you see film as conceptual, then you like my films. I don’t always get a lot of applause at the end of my films. (Q&A, 2010)\(^{64}\)

Fundamentally, Tsai’s *What Time* (more so than his previous films) functions as an inter-web of connections through which the director establishes himself as a “knower of film,” and, in an important sense, as a patriarch. As Lim accurately points out, Tsai wants to establish himself as a brand, as the “surrogate father” of Hsiao Kang, just as François Truffaut was the “surrogate father” of Antoine Doinel (233).

**Tien Miao: The Ghost in the Film Apparatus**

The first scene of the film serves as a kind of prologue to Shiang-chyi’s and Hsiao-kang’s parallel stories. Hsiao-kang’s father, played by Miao Tien, is fixing food in the kitchen; he then walks squarely into the frame and sits at the dining table, facing the camera. A few moments pass, he walks to the doorway, and after a futile attempt to call his son for the meal, he ambles back to the table, lights a cigarette, and then steps outside to finish it. This opening scene endures for a total of three minutes and twenty seconds. The combination of Tsai’s absolutely fixed camera and his unapologetic refusal to cater to audience expectation creates the illusion of stretched-out, slow motion “real time.” The entire scene consists of one static shot that resembles a picture frame with definite boundaries. The
camera does not move in order to track Miao Tien’s movements; on the contrary, Miao Tien’s movements are defined by the boundaries of the frame. When he walks outside, he moves towards the vanishing point of the “picture,” and hence away from our previously unhindered view of his face.

Tsai’s camera defines space in an unconventional way. The father’s movements in this opening scene of *What Time* are not tracked by the camera, but appear instead to be “captured” by it. His decision not to provide a mobile camera in this particular scene creates uncertainty for the transcendental subject, (a category that implies not only the individuals in the audience but also the director himself). This same uncertainty is more or less equivalent to what Rapfogel calls ‘omniscient distance’ (2004, 26), that is, the ability to observe, but only within certain pre-defined bounds.

Miao Tien moves around in a restricted space, yet when he sits at the dining table, he stares past the camera lens at something beyond that space, outside the shot. The only other scene in which Miao Tien appears is in the final scene of the film, and it is debatable whether or not he appears as the father character, since he is, after all, supposed to be dead. These two scenes frame the film, and are therefore isolated from everything in the middle. In this sense, they are “exceptions” because, unlike the other scenes in the film, they remain open-ended. It is impossible to know, in other words, when the opening scene occurs in relation to the rest of the film. Is it a flashback? Does this scene occur towards the end of the father’s life? In fact, it is entirely impossible to say with any certainty that the father is even *alive* in this scene. Since no one interacts with him, he could just as well already be a ghost who is visible only to us. Similarly, it is impossible to say with certainty whether or not Miao
Tien’s character is meant to represent the reincarnation of Hsiao-kang’s dead father in the final scene of the film.

But there are other, less supernatural explanations for the father’s strange relation to space vis-à-vis the other characters in *What Time*. I would suggest that Miao Tien’s character is the only person in the film that is able to escape from the confining boundaries of the central narrative of *What Time*, though not necessarily because he is a ghost. His character dies before the story begins, and he never interacts with any of the other characters. Within this alternative, quasi non-diegetic space, he becomes the surrogate patriarch of the film, a kind of metaphorical stand-in for the director himself. In *What Time*, therefore, as opposed to in Tsai’s previous films, Miao Tien exists in a space “outside the frame.”

Interestingly, Miao Tien died of lymphatic cancer in 2005 at the age of eighty. The last film that he appeared in was Tsai’s *Goodbye Dragon Inn (Bu San)* (2003), which was shot in the Fu Ho Grand Theatre in Taipei just before the site was demolished. In *Goodbye*, Tien plays a movie-goer sitting in the audience of the Fu Ho on its last night of operation. In the fictional world of *Goodbye*, the final film to be shown at the Fu Ho is King Hu’s 1967 martial arts classic film *Dragon Gate Inn (Long men ke san)* — not coincidentally, the first major film to feature a much younger Tien. *Goodbye* therefore functions as a final vehicle of reincarnation for Tien as an *actor*. Here life imitates art: just as the Fu Ho Theatre is preserved on film for all of eternity just before its demise, so is Tien. Similarly, just as *Goodbye* functions as a filmic reincarnation of Hu’s film through *mise-en-abyme*, Tien’s life as an actor seems to have come full circle.

These facts become odder still when read in relation to the final of scene of *What Time*: after fishing out Shiang-chyi’s suitcase from the pond, Miao Tien’s character walks
away from the camera and towards the giant rotating Ferris Wheel just outside the Tuileries garden in Paris. This final shot can be read as both a visual reference to the Buddhist bhavakacra (a.k.a. the Wheel of Life) and also to one of the earliest manifestations of the film apparatus: the Zoetrope.\(^6\) The mysterious nature of this shot reflects the multi-layered thematics of the film itself. On one level, there is an ambiguity in regards to whether or not the father’s spirit has been reincarnated in line with the Buddhist belief. If one were to pursue this line of reasoning, it might follow that the superstitious beliefs of Hsiao-kang’s mother turned out not to be so foolish after all.

Yet on another, perhaps more interesting level, Miao Tien’s character walks towards the film apparatus itself, and thus toward cinematic reincarnation. Why does he rescue the suitcase? If Tien can be interpreted as a stand-in for Tsai, then we might interpret this as a kind gesture on the part of the surrogate father, i.e. the auteur. Through Tien, the auteur is able to step into the frame, perform a good deed for his poor, troubled protagonists without them even being aware, and then walk off into the figurative sunset. The final shot is therefore the ultimate self-reflexive filmic gesture—Tsai’s fond ode to Truffaut—his acknowledgement that film itself is a construct that can be repeated and referenced in an endless cycle (Bloom 323).

**Hsiao-kang: The Watched becomes the Watcher**

Tsai represents both Paris and Taipei not as open spaces full of life and vitality, but rather, as enclosed, deathly spaces in which movement and the possibility for change become highly restricted. In a 2002 interview, Tsai commented on his affinity for filming small confined spaces:
On the one hand, it is a restriction; on the other it is very safe. Maybe I am always in search of a small confined space like this. I very much like to use them in my films. I like to film in hotel rooms, in elevators or on moving staircases. What counts is that the space itself is very clearly divided from the rest of the world. This might have to do with the subconscious. I do not like to have too many eyes focused on me. And I cannot feel safe until I have excluded these eyes. This means I have to create boundaries. In my work I can do this. (Leopold n.p.)

These comments help to explain, at least partially, why Tsai chooses to film interior locations as opposed to exteriors or establishing shots. I contend, in addition, that Tsai’s cinematic manifestation of what he deems “the subconscious” relates back to the phenomenon I previously referred to as “disjointed connectivity.” By creating boundaries, he is, somewhat paradoxically, able to express space freely. Private areas that are separated off from the rest of the world serve as safe havens in which prying eyes can be averted. Although, on the one hand, Tsai’s protagonists are limited by the void and emptiness entailed by urban existence, it is this same void that gives Tsai the freedom to emphasize points of connectivity between these protagonists.

The notion that camera shots are capable of expressing bounded space as well as implied unbounded space (i.e. all that lies outside the frame) is touched upon by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1*, albeit with different terminology. What I have referred to as “disjointed connectivity” as it relates to *What Time*, complements Deleuze’s concept of the “out-of-field” [*hors-champ*]. Deleuze questions the assumption that it is sufficient to distinguish between concrete, closed space and imaginary space, a.k.a. the out-of-field, as it relates to what is shown on the film screen. He also notes that, in film, apparently “closed systems” are never absolutely closed because all space is related to other space by a fine thread that ties all “sets” together and forms an integrated whole (Deleuze 1986, 17). He observes:
In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere...in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist...a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time. Undoubtedly these two aspects of the out-of-field intermingle constantly. (17)

The idea that the “out-of-field” points to more than a simple benign “elsewhere” but, more significantly, to a disturbing presence that exists outside of homogeneous cinematic space and time resounds with what I conceive to be Tsai’s aesthetic project. But I would not necessarily interpret the “presence” that exists in the “out-of-field” as a ghost or spirit, or even as a porthole to the utopian. Unlike Hsu Jen-yi, I do not interpret Tsai’s unconventional representation of space and time as an effort to “re-enchant” the everyday banal, create maneuvering room, or suggest “utopian points of reference” (133). On the contrary, Tsai’s representation of closed-off and confining areas implies a radical Elsewhere in the Deleuzian sense, but there is no room for maneuvering between the closed system and the imaginary space for Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang. The characters are, in a broader sense, confined by the text that they inhabit, and the “disturbing presence” that “haunts” them could well be thought of as the voyeuristic spectator or the omniscient Author.

In a basic literal and metaphorical sense, What Time is a film about ghosts and haunting, as Martin characterizes it (n.p.). I would say, however, that the “ghosts” themselves, when brought to the light of day, are nothing more than traces of intertext and pieces of the overall narrative device. In an intertextual sense, the film is “haunted” by the cinema of Tsai’s European predecessors, the cinema of his Taiwanese contemporaries, and his own cinema. What Time’s narrative deals with ghosts on a literal level, in the sense that it is, fundamentally, a film about death in the context of twentieth-century Taiwan.68
Whether or not we choose to interpret the characters that inhabit spaces “outside the frame” as ghosts or as filmic, metaphorical reincarnations of the father is less important than recognizing this alternative space more generally. After the death of his father, for instance, Hsiao-kang is shown in a series of “suffocating” shots: he rides in the backseat of a car holding ceremonial offerings which then enters into a dark tunnel. In the very next scene, Hsiao-kang and the other funerary participants stand in the cramped, narrow hallway of the temple where they are performing the ceremony associated with the storage of his father’s ashes. In the third of this mini-series of scenes, all related to the death of his father, Hsiao-kang appears in his boxers in the dark apartment that he shares with his mother. He looks frightened and disoriented as he moves carefully through the apartment. The camera remains static.

On the right-hand side of the immobile shot, sits a large, white fish in a glowing tank. The face of the fish somehow, creepily, recalls the father’s blank expression in the opening scene. The whiskers and looming stature of the fish also recall the wise and stately stature of the father. In a later scene, the mother makes a futile attempt to communicate with it through the glass, but the creature inhabits a space that is beyond the reach of the characters in the film.

I would suggest that it is of little importance whether or not we interpret the fish as the filmic, metaphorical reincarnation of the father. What is important about the existence of the fish in general is that, like the father, it occupies “alternative” space — or using Deleuze’s terminology — the “radical Elsewhere.” Unlike Hsiao-kang, the fish is not confined by human concerns or superstitious rituals. As Nanouk Leopold characterizes the fish in her 2002 interview with Tsai: “He is like a silent spectator. Present, but unable to
speak” (Leopold n.p.). The fish, in other words, functions less like a ghost and more like a witness or external spectator. As cinematic voyeurs, we too are silent spectators who watch and witness, yet are unable speak.

Like the fish, Hsiao-kang’s character within the film is also a cinematic voyeur. Unlike the fish, however, he does not inhabit the “out-of-field.” After becoming obsessed with “all things French,” he rents Truffaut’s Les 400 coups/The 400 Blows (1959) at an outdoor market and watches the Zoetrope scene alone in his dark bedroom. Michelle E. Bloom has commented in great detail on this scene in What Time, noting in particular Hsiao-kang’s corpselike position and overall lack of movement as he watches the film. According to Bloom: “Tsai portrays film spectators, exemplified by Hsiao-kang and including us, as passive, sleepy or sleeping, resistant to being woken up by demanding films (like his)” (my emphasis, 18), and of course, like Truffaut’s. Hsiao-kang represents a certain type of film spectator who is simultaneously all-perceiving and passive. As Bloom points out, film spectatorship is not always portrayed as a passive activity; it can just as easily be thought of or portrayed as an engaging and lively activity. It is therefore important to attempt to understand why Tsai portrays film spectatorship in this way and, furthermore, what this portrayal suggests about us as viewers.

Bloom’s assertion that Tsai means to include us, his audience, through his representation of Hsiao-kang is a compelling claim. Tsai creates a parallel between Hsiao-kang and his own audience using his signature static camera. The unmoving shot grants the spectators of Tsai’s film the opportunity to contemplate their relationship to Hsiao-kang during this relatively long scene. If we are inclined to regard film-viewing as a fundamentally narcissistic experience, I would argue that Hsiao-kang’s lack of movement
translates into ours, and that his corpse-like appearance reminds us of our own zombie-like
stance as we stare at the film or television screen. This scene, therefore, works like a
paternalistic, knowing, yet sly wink between Tsai and his audience.

The Skywalk is Falling

In the context of *What Time*, Paris and Taipei are beautiful yet abstract in part
because of Tsai’s dislike of establishing shots. Though as Bloom points out, Tsai does not
erase or eliminate place entirely, he merely minimizes it (2005, 18). Thus, although *What
Time* is fundamentally a self-reflexive, intertextual, and complex transnational film, certain
historical and spatial details tie the film to its Taiwanese landscape. In addition to the Fu Ho
Theatre (which Tsai uses for much of *Goodbye Dragon Inn* and a scene in *What Time*) Tsai
is obsessed with another fated Taipei landmark: the Taipei Train Station Skywalk.

According to Christopher Misch (n.p.), the skywalk was demolished by the Taiwanese
government soon after Tsai filmed *What Time* in order to increase the number of lanes along
a heavily used roadway in downtown Taipei. In addition, the skywalk became extraneous
after the construction of a new underground subway tunnel was built for the Taipei Metro.

In the diegesis of *What Time*, the soon-to-be-torn-down skywalk represents Hsiao-
kang’s place of livelihood, this is where he sells his watches. The eradication of the skywalk,
therefore, means that he will lose his place of business as well as his only source of income.

Tsai directed a short film in 2002 entitled *The Skywalk is Gone* (*Tian qiao bu jian le*) in
which Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi reprise their roles in *What Time*. By 2002, the skywalk
had already been demolished (both in real life and in the world of the film). Now that his
watch stand is gone, Hsiao-kang turns to pornography and prostitution as a means to support
himself. Upon her return from Paris, Shiang-chyi searches for the familiar landmark, but a policeman confirms that a new subway tunnel has, in fact, replaced the walkway. Throughout the short film, Tsai emphasizes the empty space that once contained the skywalk with shots that linger on the void. Misch comments on the symbolism of the absent landmark in the 2002 film: “…Tsai’s motif of the absent skywalk does not only represent the singular destruction of an urban entity, but rather it also symbolizes the unfortunate consequences of a constantly developing urban landscape” (n.p.). The absent skywalk, in other words, points to urban renewal within a disposable society.

In the beginning of What Time, Shiang-chyi returns to purchase the watch from Hsiao-kang. The angle of the shot exposes the construction cranes looming in the background, threatening to overwhelm and take over. The sound of hammering construction workers punctuates their conversation. It is clear that the city of Taipei is in a constant state of incompleteness, or in-betweenness. Later in the film, Hsiao-kang’s violent banging of the supposedly “unbreakable” watch on the metal guardrail of the skywalk suggests that he knows his own fate but is powerless to change it. Although Hsiao-kang’s frustrated banging is intended to be humorous, the movement also expresses the inability he feels to control the urban space that surrounds him or to halt the inevitable passing of time.

Fig. 3: Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang on the skywalk.
The present/absent skywalk also brings to mind and connects with *The 400 Blows*. Hsiao-kang’s stance behind the guardrail connotes imprisonment; his repetitive movements recall a “jail bird” slapping the bars of a prison cell with an object, in an effort to vent frustration and waste time. Like Antoine Doinel, Hsiao-kang’s body language contains a quiet rebellious quality, suggesting that he is not well equipped to thrive in his own environment. But the latter’s imprisonment is metaphorical. In *The 400 Blows*, as Antoine is carted off to jail in the back of the police paddy wagon, he sadly watches the city lights of Paris pass by through the bars of the window. Arguably, Hsiao-kang’s plight throughout *What Time* consists of an effort to connect with Paris by changing all of the clocks he encounters to Paris time. Yet, like Antoine, he is not able to escape from the confining spaces or temporalities that surround him; he is often shown lying awake in bed, sitting or driving in his car, or attempting to turn back the clocks of Taipei seven hours. His livelihood is tied to an area that has already been deemed useless by the Taiwanese government. As a result, Hsiao-kang, feeling worthless and desperate to make ends meet, becomes an underground sex worker. One might imagine a much older Antoine Doinel following in similar footsteps.

The confinement that Hsiao-kang experiences is represented by Tsai’s camera work, which, in turn, parallels and echoes Truffaut’s camera work, such that Hsiao-kang does metaphorically “become Antoine” (Bloom 2005, 20). There are many obvious examples of these parallels, echoes, and continuations throughout the film, though one subtler example seems to have gone unnoticed. In *The 400 Blows*, there is a scene in which Antoine lies in the small cot of his prison cell. For a few moments, a blanket covers his face such that only
his eyes can be seen. In Tsai’s film, as Hsiao-kang is lying in bed, watching The 400 Blows, his face is similarly covered such that only his eyes can be seen. While the shot in Truffaut’s film emphasizes the loneliness and coldness of Antoine’s cell, this parallel shot in Tsai’s film works on multiple levels. On a simple level, the shot emphasizes Hsiao-kang’s loneliness, feelings of grief, and confinement in a coffin-like space. On a more complex level, the image of Hsiao-kang’s eyes peering out from a blanket connects him to Antoine as it simultaneously points to his role as a spectator. Hsiao-kang’s passive role as a spectator in turn connects him to us, the spectators of Tsai’s film, such that the watcher becomes the watched and the cycle of voyeurism continues indefinitely.

**Shiang-chyi: Stranger in a Strange Paris**

Tsai Ming-liang describes Shiang-chyi’s character quite succinctly in the director’s notes for What Time, when he comments: “She is afraid of loneliness, yet she is content with being alone.” Despite the fact that she is “content with being alone,” it is Shiang-chyi’s loneliness that prevails. Her loneliness and subsequent despair arise as the result of a series of missed opportunities and failed interactions that occur on her visit to Paris. Even though it appears initially that Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang inhabit separate spaces — that their lives intersect at one point and then continue on parallel paths — these two storylines continuously intersect by way of “disjointed connectivity.” Not only do Shiang-chyi’s actions often mirror Hsiao-kang’s and vice versa, but her actions also seem to be connected to his via cause and effect. Just as Hsiao-kang seems to be uncannily tied to Antoine Doinel, Shiang-chyi is similarly tied to Hsiao-kang.
Film scholars such as James Tweedie have commented on Tsai’s overall depiction of Taipei as an ambivalent space that is defined equally by its colonial past as it is by its uncertain globalized future. Tweedie, for instance, in his essay “Morning in the New Metropolis: Taipei and the Globalization of the City Film” notes that Tsai attempts to document Taipei’s continuing development, but also its simultaneous deterioration: “No longer a utopian future glimpsed in the present, the Taipei of Tsai Ming-liang has outlived a modernizing era, and now faces a new wave of expansion, eviction, and demolition” (122). Like Tweedie, I also do not see a utopian future inherent in Tsai’s vision of Taipei, and moreover, I suspect that Hsiao-kang’s obsession with turning back every clock in the city points to Tsai’s own fascination with the notion of reversing the flow of time. Hsiao-kang’s character is confined both metaphorically (through Tsai’s use of claustrophobic shots, or shots in which he appears to be corpse-like) and literally (his job has been indirectly eliminated by the municipal government). As the city rapidly changes and evolves, as buildings and transportation systems are torn down so that new, more modern ones can be built, those living and working in Taipei are displaced (i.e. Hsiao-kang and his watch stand), falling into a state of limbo from which it will be difficult to recover.\footnote{74}

In the same sense that Hsiao-kang becomes “linked” with Taipei in the mind of spectator, Shiang-chyi becomes “linked” with Paris. By way of Shiang-chyi’s parallel storyline, Paris is represented as cold, unfriendly, and isolating, perhaps even more so than Taipei. In this sense, the city can certainly be described as “deathly”. Fran Martin notes that Tsai’s Paris represents the land of the dead (n.p.), because it is the site of ghostly interactions, cemeteries (the Montmartre), and resurrections (Miao Tien’s “return”). I would say, more precisely, that Tsai’s Paris represents the land of dead \textit{cinema}. Shiang-chyi’s trip to Paris is
never explained because there is no diegetic reason for her to travel there. Yet Tsai must film her in Paris so that she can interact with the “ghosts” of the French New Wave. The setting, therefore, functions in a certain sense as just another means for Tsai to showcase his penchant for complex intertextuality.

This intertextual interaction begins with the first shot of Shiang-chyi in Paris. Her appearance has changed since she was in Taipei — she has been “westernized” in the sense that she now resembles a film actress from the French New Wave. She has cropped her hair into a short bob, reminiscent specifically of Patricia (Jean Seberg) in Jean-Luc Godard’s 1960 New Wave film *Breathless*, also set in Paris.75 Yet unlike Patricia, who is confident, independent, and fluent in French (even though is American), Shiang-chyi is shy, dependent on others, and unable to speak French. Also, unlike Patricia, Shiang-chyi never seems particularly interested in men or heterosexual pursuits in general, even though it is clear that many men are attracted to her. Her inability to communicate on a meaningful level with others quickly alienates and isolates her. As observant spectators, we might notice that Hsiao-kang’s actions are cleverly edited in order to juxtapose and mirror Shiang-chyi’s, even though he remains thousands of miles away and she remains unaware of the connection.

Fig. 4: Shiang-chyi in *What Time*, Jean Seberg in *Breathless*, both looking pensive.
Not coincidentally, many of Shiang-chyi’s Paris scenes are shot in interior locations, even more so than Hsiao-kang’s Taipei scenes. All of these scenes are tied together by a common theme; namely, they are marked by Shiang-chyi’s incapacity to communicate on a “meaningful” level with the people (men and women) that surround her. In the first such scene, Shiang-chyi sits alone drinking coffee in a café, facing the camera. A man sits at the bar in the foreground, though we can only see the back of his head. The man’s head is positioned such that his line of vision matches up directly with Shiang-chyi’s face—he is staring at her, much like we are. This scene, which unsurprisingly consists of one long take, echoes the scene in which Hsiao-kang watches the 400 Blows. With a single long take, much like in Hsiao-kang’s scene, Tsai highlights the role of the film spectator by allowing us to watch others watching, we observe others observing. The experience of spectatorship suddenly becomes self-reflexive. Although she occasionally looks up from her coffee cup, Shiang-chyi avoids eye contact with the man. She stares out the window for a few moments while she finishes her coffee, then gets up and leaves while the man continues to look in her direction.

Not only do scenes such as this highlight Shiang-chyi’s inability to speak French; her submissive demeanor and avoidance of the western gaze show that she dislikes being regarded as an “exotic” object. In terms of spectatorship, Shiang-chyi represents the inverse of Hsiao-kang; we watch Hsiao-kang watching others, whereas we watch others watching Shiang-chyi. Thus, by refusing to reciprocate the western gaze, she refuses to reciprocate our gaze, and is clearly made uncomfortable by the prospect of being voyeuristically watched.
While Hsiao-kang is shown performing many unsightly bodily functions such as peeing into a bag, having sex with a prostitute, sitting on the toilet, and guzzling down a bottle of wine, Shiang-chyi’s private bodily functions are more hidden from view. Although at one point she is heard vomiting in a bathroom stall, her back is turned away from the camera such that we are distanced from the action. Her vomiting in the Paris bathroom can be read as a symbolic reaction to Hsiao-kang’s wine drinking in the previous scene. The juxtaposition of Hsiao-kang’s consumption of the French wine and Shiang-chyi’s subsequent vomiting underscores the connection between these two characters.

Using a similar technique, Tsai juxtaposes Jean-Pierre Léaud’s body (the actor who famously played Antoine Doinel) with Shiang-chyi’s as they sit on a bench in a cemetery. This scene further serves to deconstruct the image of Paris as a romantic city as it simultaneously shatters the image of the forever-young body of Antoine Doinel. Much like Marcello Mastroianni’s 1987 appearance in Federico Fellini’s Intervista, Léaud’s appearance in Tsai’s film reminds the audience that no one, not even sex symbols, are immune to the effects of aging. Martin points to the cinematic juxtaposition between Léaud and the previous shot in which Shiang-chyi gazes at a stone sculpture of a human figure lying face down for nearly a minute. This particular pairing of shots, Martin claims, combined with the fact that Léaud appears to be the less animated of the two figure in the frame, creates a parallel between Léaud and death in the mind of the spectator (12). I would say, more precisely, that these shots create a parallel between French New Wave cinema as exemplified by Léaud and death. Furthermore, because Hsiao-kang is metaphorically linked to Antoine Doinel in previous scenes, Shiang-chyi’s failure to communicate with Léaud in this scene can be interpreted as another symbolic failure on her part to communicate with Hsiao-kang.
Shiang-chyi could be, in fact, unsuccessfully searching for Hsiao-kang’s phone number in her bag. By offering to replace the lost number, therefore, Léaud is attempting to “fill the gap” of Hsiao-kang’s absence. If one starts to think about the logic of replacing a phone number with another phone number, however, the gesture becomes nonsensical. Léaud’s gesture implicitly assumes that communication is all that is essential, not the actual person being spoken to. He assumes that Shiang-chyi’s loneliness can be remedied by communication with a stranger. In a broader sense, this scene functions on an allegorical level, a meeting between French and Taiwanese cinema. Léaud, the aged “face”77 of French cinema assumes that Shiang-chyi, the protagonist in many of Tsai’s films, wants to communicate with him. But as the painful, awkward silence becomes palpable as the two figures sit on the bench, it is clear that any fruitful communication between the two of them would be unlikely.78

In fact, the only person that Shiang-chyi does finally communicate with in Paris is a woman from Hong Kong, who witnesses her vomiting in the bathroom and takes pity on her by offering her a cup of hot water. By way of this customary gesture, the two women strike up a conversation in the café and end up returning to the Hong Kong woman’s hotel room together. When Shiang-chyi cautiously attempts to make a romantic advance at the woman, however, she is rejected and leaves the next morning in a state of utter embarrassment. The film concludes with a close-up shot of Shiang-chyi’s immensely sad face as she sits alone on a bench in the Tuileries garden.

This “final failure” is important because it emphasizes the unfortunate notion that Shiang-chyi’s series of miscommunications goes well beyond language or cultural barriers. As Bloom succinctly states in her article on Sinofrench film studies: “…speaking the same
national language no more guarantees or even facilitates communication than not speaking or even understanding the same language precludes connection between people” (unpublished). Thus, even though Shiang-chyi is noticeably isolated from the Parisians that surround her, she is more greatly affected, in a profound emotional sense, by the woman from Hong Kong. This final scene furthermore underlines Shiang-chyi’s departure from Hsiao-kang in regard to her “trajectory” as a character. Even though Hsiao-kang is obviously distraught, if not somewhat damaged by the death of his father, he still manages to reconcile with his mother in his final scene of the film (we see him walk into the house and lay down next to her on her bed). Shiang-chyi, meanwhile, is last seen alone, cold, and crying on a park bench in the middle of a city that has done nothing but isolate and alienate her.

More importantly, Shiang-chyi’s set of “failures” in Paris resonate with Jameson’s concept of “synchronous monadic simultaneity,” and my notion of “disjointed connectivity.” These missed opportunities for communication and chance encounters seem, paradoxically, only to isolate the characters from one another more. Notes Jameson:

> Now in modernity, everything that is stunning about these accidents and points of connection, seem, because of their ephemerality, to drive us more deeply into individual isolation. The Providence effect is an aesthetic one.  
> (1992, 115)

These accidental meetings serve as “points of connection” only insofar as they function on an aesthetic level for the spectator. That which the Victorian-era writers may have deemed divine intervention is, in the current era, handed over to the realm of pure aesthetics. Disjointed connectivity, in other words, serves mainly to please the voyeuristic cinephile.
Conclusion

In *What Time*, Tsai proves that it is possible to produce a nostalgic ode to Truffaut (and European film in general) while simultaneously challenging the hackneyed conception of Paris as the ultimate romantic city. Not only does Tsai cite Truffaut and other European film directors, but he also demonstrates respect for the films of his Taiwanese contemporaries such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, as evidenced by his preference for the long take. Tsai’s ability to create a complex cinematic pastiche allows him to resist being classified as an “Eastern auteur” whose only goal is to resurrect the past influential movements of “European cinema.” His related ability to envision and depict abstract urban space aids him in this endeavor.

As we have seen, *What Time* is divided into two distinct storylines, each one following the trajectory of two protagonists who are relative strangers to one another: Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi. Rather than keep them distinct, Tsai allows these two storylines to constantly interconnect and intersect. For the purposes of this chapter, I have labeled this particular phenomenon—the intermittent cinematic juxtapositions between Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi—“disjointed connectivity.” In light of the fragmented nature of Tsai’s narrative, it is not difficult to see why so many films scholars have chosen to discuss Tsai’s films in terms of postmodernity and the “postmodern condition.” Perhaps the discourse of postmodernity is appealing because, in many ways, Tsai’s use of inter and intra-textuality can be read as arrogant and even selfish. By employing these techniques, Tsai seems to implicitly assume that we are following his every move, we have seen all of his movies; “collecting the traces” or “breadcrumbs” that he leaves behind for his audience to find.
But, as Lim argues, there is no need to abandon auteurship entirely in favor of post-modernity, and I would add that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. If, as Lim suggests, we view auteurism as a critical discourse rather than as a filmmaking practice (as Andrew Sarris did) (240), it will become easier to reconcile these two seemingly competing discourses. Moreover, in many ways, the image of the pretentious and arrogant auteur is misleading, and it would be a shame to ignore the analytic possibilities that the framework of auteurism might have to offer. Lim comments: “Knowing who is speaking does make a difference, as it can be an enabling and empowering source of identification and mobilization” (240). This is an important insight not only in terms of Tsai’s filmmaking, but moreover in the analysis of transnational cinema more generally.

Martin and others have deemed that What Time is a film about haunting, ghosts, death, and the supernatural, and in a thematic sense, this is undeniable. But if we are to interpret this film in terms of Tsai’s cinephilia and his penchant for “showing off” his cinematic knowledge, then I would contend that the supernatural aspects begin to fade slightly. Once the Author comes to light, in other words, we no longer need to be afraid of ghosts.
Chapter 3

La Littérature Putride in Contemporary Korean Horror Cinema: Park Chan-wook’s Adaptation of Zola’s Thérèse Raquin

“…we shall note that this writer, the product of a self-infatuated age, the child of a nation more self-infatuated than any other, has clearly seen and dispassionately asserted the natural Wickedness of Man. There is in man, he says, a mysterious force which modern philosophy refuses to take into account; and yet, without this nameless force, without this primeval tendency, a whole host of human actions will remain unexplained and inexplicable. The fascination of these actions lies in the fact that they are evil, dangerous; they have the lure of the abyss. This primitive, irresistible force is man’s natural Perversity, which makes him forever and at once both homicide and suicide, murderer and hangman…” (Baudelaire, Painter of Modern Life, 96).

In this well-known critical essay on Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Baudelaire argues that a poet who demonstrates a penchant for the grotesque, a poet who “loves the horrible” (91), proves the sincerity of his work. For Baudelaire, Poe is exactly this type of poet, for he tells tales that show the “wickedness of man” without any moral meta-commentary. Baudelaire admires Poe’s writing precisely because he does not consider him to be a “moral poet;” that is, there is no hidden lesson to be learned in Poe’s tales about how humans should behave. On the contrary, what we learn from reading Poe is merely that devious behavior exists, and that wickedness is a force that is equal parts mysterious and fascinating. Without these literary descriptions of the Wicked Man, a large portion of human actions would be left unobserved. These anomalous human actions are perhaps less anomalous and more “natural” than one might choose to believe, and as a species, our primitive animal-like behaviors are too often deemed immoral and hence unknowable.
Throughout this project, I have focused on various genres of East-West hybrid cinema to demonstrate how these genres both diverge and converge from one another aesthetically and thematically. In Chapters 1 and 2, I analyze films that are representative of cross-cultural cinematic collaborations between France and Japan, and France and greater China respectively. Both *H Story* and *What Time is it There?* contain themes, modes of representation, and intertextual references that are “attached” to 1950s and 1960s era French cinema. This chapter differs a bit from these previous chapters. Here, I focus on South Korean director Park Chan-wook’s most recent film *Thirst* (2009), which I argue fits into the hybrid cinema category, but with the caveat that this film mixes Korean cinema with French literature. More specifically, *Thirst* represents a combination of the Korean “extreme horror” genre with *La Littérature Putride* of nineteenth century French writer Emile Zola.

The “Franco-Korean” is the most popular, or commercial, of the East-West hybrid cinema genres. Park stands in stark contrast with a filmmaker such as Tsai Ming-liang, though both are internationally recognized filmmakers. While Park has a large fan-base and draws box-office crowds in South Korea, Tsai remains largely unpopular in Taiwan (Ma 9). South Korean film directors often buy their own production companies and write their own scripts in an effort to maintain artistic control of their work (Choi 22). Park, who is not an exception to the rule, bought the rights to Moho Films in 2005, and writes his own scripts. As Jinhee Choi notes, in his book *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*, many South Korean films are difficult to categorize as “commercial” or “art-house”, which is beneficial, financially, for the films themselves (170). This observation helps explain, in part, why Park has managed to find success in both his native country and on the international film festival circuit.
Yet despite the fact that Park is an incredibly popular and critically acclaimed director, his name is still not usually mentioned alongside Tsai or Wong Kar-wai among East-Asian film scholars. Although the reasons that Park has not reached the highest perch on “the art-house cinema ladder” are debatable, one reason (besides his commercial success) stands out: nearly all of Park’s films are disturbingly violent to the point that one begins to wonder if such an amount of violence is necessary. Park ignores all cinematic taboos that, for the most part, still exist in Hollywood and other mainstream media outlets: children are tortured and murdered, young women have sex with much older men, characters kill other characters for no particularly good reason, and the list continues. In a recent interview by Electric Sheep Magazine, Park was asked whether he considered himself to be a “moral filmmaker.” In response to this question, the director responded quite definitively: “I don’t see myself as a moral filmmaker, and I don’t like categorizing myself. I am just very interested in characters who try to take responsibility for the results of their actions.”

Park is best known in Korea and internationally for his “Revenge Trilogy,” comprising of three loosely related films: Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002), Oldboy (2003), and Lady Vengeance (2005). Most recently, Park’s vampire film Thirst became a major international success story, prompting the New York Times to suggest that its readers skip the new Twilight movie in favor of seeing Thirst instead.

Kyu Hyun Kim, author of the critical essay “Korean Horror as Critique in Tell me Something and Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance” recounts the experience that one Korean critic had after sitting through an initial screening of Sympathy. As Kim recounts, this particular critic noticed that when the film was finished, the audience members left with “deathly pale” expressions on their faces, as if “they were the patients who had just undergone particularly
excruciating medical treatments” (111). Kyu Hyun Kim, even though he defends the film on critical merit, nevertheless ascertains: “There is little question in my mind that Sympathy is one of the most frightening and disturbing films ever made in Korea” (110-111).

Why does there seem to be a near universal opinion that Park’s films are ultra-disturbing? The answer cannot be simply because they contain a lot of violence, since many other horror films contain the same amount, or even more, violence. Kyu Hyun Kim argues correctly that the extreme terror and violence in Sympathy (or “abjection” (107) as he puts it) is not gratuitous. He argues, in fact, that this extreme abjection helps the implicit critique, not only of Korea but of modern society as a whole, to function within the film. Furthermore, though the characters in his films often start out as normal people living in realistic environments, their actions become increasingly abnormal over the course of the film. This change in behavior is frightening to the audience. Reality is only slightly distorted such that we are never able to “release” from the grip of the film. We cannot simply reassure ourselves that the events bear no resemblance to “real” life (112). Thirdly, says Kim, unlike filmmakers such as Kurosawa, Park does not allow his characters the opportunity to redeem themselves for their actions. Evil resides in the subject, and revenge does not really “work.” Revenge functions instead like a row of dominoes in the sense that one falling domino (or act of revenge) causes all other dominoes in the row to fall (115).

Kim’s assessment of both 2002’s Sympathy and the Korean horror genre more generally is apt. As of yet, an intricate and in depth analysis of the parallels between Park’s Thirst and Zola’s Thérèse Raquin is lacking. Throughout the course of this chapter, I explore the variety of ways in which Thirst plays with the horror genre as it adapts and builds upon Zola’s Thérèse Raquin. I also suggest that the literary environment surrounding Zola’s
creation of TR has much in common with the current cinematic environment in Korea. I argue finally that Zola and Park, as purveyors of art, share similar “instinctual tendencies” in the sense that they are both undeniably and wickedly imaginative.

**Zola’s Littérature Putride**

Zola’s TR was officially published in 1867, a few years before his famous Rougon-Macquart series had been mapped out. Many film adaptations have been released, perhaps the most famous being Marcel Carné’s 1953 version (by the same name). In Zola’s original story Thérèse is a half Algerian, half French girl who, because of unfortunate circumstances, has been forced to live with and work for her Aunt (Madame Raquin). She has also been forced to marry and care for her sickly stepbrother Camille, whom she despises. When Thérèse meets Camille’s friend Laurent, she is instantly infatuated, and the two of them become lovers. This is where the plot begins to become gruesome: Thérèse and Laurent plot to kill Camille by throwing him off of a boat during a Sunday excursion. After carrying out the plot, however, each lover begins to feel consumed by guilt. Camille’s ghost stands between them and their future happiness as a married couple. While still working for Madame Raquin, who has had a stroke and can no longer speak, they confess to the murder. Although Camille’s mother cannot of course say anything, she stares at Thérèse and Camille as they become increasingly miserable. In the end, the lovers decide to kill themselves by drinking poison, which they do as Madame Raquin watches with an icy glare (Brown 157-59).

The term littérature putride can be attributed to the critic Louis Ulbach, who wrote a scathing review of TR in Le Figaro soon after the novel was published. Some of the novel’s
original success has actually been attributed to Ulbach’s review, which surrounded Zola’s writing with an air of scandal and notoriety (160). Ulbach accused Zola of writing a pornographically “monstrous” novel, and according to Zola’s biographer Frederick Brown, Ulbach viewed the writer as one of those “errant reformers whose means subverted their ends, whose realism aroused lewd thoughts rather than a passion for redressing social wrongs” (161). Ulbach, like Zola, did not like Napoleon III’s empire, but he did not see Zola’s writing as a correct, tasteful, or effective means of subversion. Ulbach also felt that Zola’s only reason for writing such a “lewd” story was to give pleasure to himself; a sort of masturbatory act through the creation of art. Why should the two lovers kill themselves at the end of the story if this act was to serve no “moral purpose” or if they were to have no possibility for redemption?

Zola, angered by Ulbach’s critique, composed a written rebuttal in which he countered that it does not give him pleasure, or “enrich” him as an author to write so-called “putrid” literature (162). Zola explains that he writes his books only to show how circumstances and milieu affect his characters’ actions. He writes: “I don’t know if my novel is immoral, I confess that I never asked myself how chaste or unchaste it should be. What I do know is that smut detected in it by moral men is theirs rather than mine” (162). He goes on to add that “scientific truth” is what he seeks in his descriptions of his characters. Although this statement may sound strange at first, it should be noted that the Naturalist movement was generally concerned with the classification of different types of characters and their various temperaments. Zola in particular viewed his writing as almost zoological in its categorization of humanity; he believed that the observable world should aid literary imagination (162). I would add that Naturalist writing, as an extreme version of Realist
writing, becomes so concerned with human character and circumstance that it does begin to appear distorted—one might imagine observing “reality” through a fish-eyed lens.

Unlike critics like Ulbach who saw Zola’s writing as glorified pornography, other critics of the time such as Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve argued that Zola’s descriptions of people and places were not realistic enough, and that realistic works must not appear distorted at all. Sainte-Beuve expresses his overall opinion of *TR* most succinctly when he comments “Art, reduced to truth pure and simple, seems to me to depart from truth” (Mott 506).83 One might imagine critics such as Sainte-Beuve responding with similar distaste to labeling cinema (particularly horror cinema) as art. Sainte-Beuve’s issue with Zola’s writing style stems from his disapproval of writers who describe people and places relatively realistically but then add in invented details. The critic objects in particular to the opening of *TR*, in which Zola describes (what would have been at the time) a small glass-covered arcade in Paris called the *passage du Pont-Neuf*:

“...les vitres, faites de petits carreux, moirent étrangement les merchandises de reflets verdâtres; au delà, derrière les étalages, les boutiques pleines de ténèbres sont autant de trois lugubres dans lesquels s’agitent des formes bizarres.”84

After reading this description, one might notice that Zola describes colors and lighting with words, much like a painter with brush strokes. The description also conjures up images of the fantastic with the phrase “formes bizarres” and sadness, or even death, with the word “lugubres.” Although Zola paints a careful picture, and clearly likes to pay extreme attention to detail, he does not adhere entirely to realism. Rather than accept a bit of “dramatic license” on the part of the author, Sainte-Beuve questions his accuracy. He responds to Zola’s description of the *passage du Pont-Neuf* by pointing out that the actual passage, with
which he claims to be quite familiar, “doesn’t have that utter blackness and those Rembrandtian hues you lend it” (Brown 160). It is because of this inaccuracy, along with a myriad of others, that Sainte-Beuve finds Zola’s descriptions unfaithful to reality and hence artistically questionable (even though he compares him to a world-renowned painter).

In their responses to Zola’s writing, both Sainte-Beuve and Ulbach level the same sorts of criticisms that some contemporary critics of Park Chan-wook’s cinema do. Like those who questioned Zola, critics of Park question the motivations of an auteur who revels in horrific images that appear realistic yet border on the fantastic. Damon Smith of the *Bright Lights Film Journal* explains what many of these so-called “dissenters” have argued about Park’s films: “Dissenters to the party line on Park…like [Manohla] Darghis, Olaf Möller, and *Reverse Shot* editor Michael Koresky—have leveled the charge of flashy vacuousness, questioning the director’s penchant for aestheticizing images of cruelty and bloodlust.” One might imagine Park responding to these dissenters as Zola did to Ulbach, by countering that it is not the director who is enriched by violent images in film, but the audience. Even if a director happens to find him or herself amused and entertained by his or her own filmmaking, is this not an irrelevant side effect?

Park can be compared to a puppet-master who puts his stories and his protagonists in motion for the violent-hungry, drooling crowd. The subtitle of Smith’s interview with Park is, not coincidentally: “Grand Guignol, Korean Style,” a reference to the Naturalist horror plays that were popular in late nineteenth century France. While comparing Park’s films to the Grand Guignol would support my own definition of Franco-Korean cinema in a broad sense, I do want to be careful to note that the analogy between Park’s cinema and this particular theatrical movement is by no means perfect. Unlike pure “torture porn” or
“splatter films” (which are most analogous to the Grand Guignol) Park’s films do carry a message about revenge, just not necessarily a moral one. It is difficult, perhaps, for those who believe in a divine authority to accept the notion that the individual, not God, has control over order and morality. Brown, noting similar themes in Zola’s writing, observes: “no sooner does la bête humaine rise up than order crumbles” (160). Sainte-Beuve worried similarly that Zola did not allow his audience a “way out” so to speak, and that: “denying them doors and windows to escape from some ‘monster, madman, or martyr to disease,’ makes them panicky…” (160). Perhaps the audience themselves should decide whether or not they wish to “escape,” and not the critic.

In many ways, the critical voices surrounding Zola’s Naturalist writing style were strikingly similar to the critical voices surrounding Park as a filmmaker in the contemporary “transnational” cinematic landscape. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I analyze select scenes in Thirst to demonstrate how Park uses Zola’s Thérèse Raquin to create an entirely new cinematic hybrid form.

**Thirst: Thérèse and Laurent Become Vampires**

“...j’ai tenté d’expliquer l’union étrange qui peut se produire entre deux tempéraments différents, j’ai montré les troubles profonds d’une nature sanguine au contact d’une nature nerveuse...j’ai simplement fait sur deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirugiens font sur des cadavres.” (Zola, Prélude to TR, 2nd Edition, pp. 8-9).

Park Chan-wook’s film Thirst is actually quite long. Thus, it does not become entirely clear that the director is borrowing from Zola until nearly the second half: Father Sang-hyun (Kang-ho Song) is a Roman-Catholic priest who volunteers for a medical experiment to help eradicate a deadly disease, but dies and becomes a vampire when the
experiment goes awry. When Sang-hyun returns to Korea to carry out his life as a vampire, he ends up having an intense affair with the wife of his childhood friend, who is depressed and bored with her own existence. Just like Thérèse, Tae-ju (Ok-bin Kim) lives with and tends to a shop (selling traditional Korean dresses) with her stepmother, Mrs. Ra, and she is married to her brother-in-law, Kang-woo. Tae-ju detests and resents being married to her stepbrother, and often fantasizes about killing him, especially after having fallen in love with Father Hyun. As in Zola’s novel, the two lovers kill the husband, throwing Kang-woo off a fishing boat and drowning him. Unlike in the novel, however, Father Hyun is especially motivated to kill Kang-woo because Tae-ju leads him to believe that her husband has been severely beating her.

Overcome by guilt, the two lovers cannot make love without “seeing” Kang-woo’s goofy snot-nosed face lying in between them in bed (he is often holding a large rock); and they constantly feel water dripping all over them. Traumatized by the death of her son, Mrs. Ra has a stroke and is confined to a wheelchair, and can no longer speak or move. Tae-ju eventually becomes so rattled with guilt that she turns against her lover, admitting that her husband never beat her and blaming Sang-hyun for Kang-woo’s death, all in front of her motionless stepmother. Sang-hyun becomes enraged and snaps Tae-ju’s neck. Though mournful at first, Sang-hyun soon realizes that he can “save” his lover by feeding her his blood and turning her into a vampire, which he does. Mrs. Ra witnesses this entire grisly scene.

Once the two lovers are both vampires, Sang-hyun continues to nourish himself by drinking the blood of those who wish to commit suicide. Tae-ju, on the other hand, feeds her blood cravings by killing innocent people, which she thoroughly enjoys. Sang-hyun, no
longer a “Father” in any sense of the word, is nevertheless sickened by the joy that his lover feels by killing innocent people, and he warns her to stop. Tae-ju does not care to listen to Sang-hyun anymore, and essentially dumps him: “Kill me or save me, you’ll regret it either way…we’re through.” “You’re the only one I have now,” he replies.

Just like “old times,” the family friends: Seung-dae, Young-doo, and his wife Evelyn, come over to the house to play mahjong and to comfort Mrs. Ra over the loss of Kang-woo. Mrs. Ra, still unable to move and horrified by everything that she has witnessed, manages to communicate to her friends, by blinking and spelling out letters, that her son was murdered by Tae-ju and Sang-hyun. Seung-dae and Young-doo attempt to escape, but are both killed by Tae-ju. Sang-hyun, still disgusted by these senseless killings, pretends to kill Evelyn and drink her blood so that Tae-ju will leave her alone. Tae-ju and Sang-hyun set off in a car with Mrs. Ra, wide awake, in the backseat. When Tae-ju realizes that her former lover is attempting to kill both of them by forcing them to be burned by the rising sun, panics and attempts to hide in the trunk and under the car. Sang-hyun thwarts her every effort, and eventually Tae-ju must accept her fate. As the sun rises over the ocean, the two lovers embrace as they burn to death sitting on the hood of the car. Mrs. Ra watches with glee from the backseat. In the final shot of the film, Tae-ju’s shoes fall from her charred body to the sand below.

Park Chan-wook has stated that he did not intend for Tae-ju’s character to function as a feminist comment on contemporary Korean society, and that the theme of imprisonment within a family was taken directly from TR. He claims that Tae-ju is a woman who feels trapped within the boundaries of her household and that, like Thérèse, she cannot bear life with her mother and her husband. Park explains:
…if you look at the terrible actions that Tae-ju takes as a vampire, for example, you have to consider the whole personality of this character who is as innocent as a child in a way. Children can be very cruel, for instance, when they play with small animals or insects. They tear them apart and rip off their wings and so forth. But they don’t realise that what they are doing is cruel. They don’t understand what they are doing but still, to us their actions are violent. It’s in that sort of context that you have to see her actions as a vampire. At the same time, this might come across to the audience as emancipation or liberation for the female character, but it was never intended as such.89

While I agree with Park when he insists that Tae-ju’s situation does not represent any sort of “emancipation” or “liberation,” I would not agree that her actions as a vampire are based solely on unintentional and innocent child-like cruelty. Whether the director cares to admit it or not, Tae-ju’s pent-up anger towards her family appears to be directly related to her subsequent cruelty as a vampire. Furthermore, because we know that her character is modeled after Zola’s Thérèse, I think it would be fair to argue that both female characters suffer from a similar brand of middle-class ennui. This ennui, though arising out of different contexts, causes each of these female characters to go slowly insane, as they grow increasingly resentful of their respective situations.

Fig. 5: Tae-ju, sitting with Sang-hyun (right) and Kang-woo (left).
Both Park’s film and Zola’s novel underscore and critique the aspects of “middle-class society” that are common to both France and Korea, in our contemporary times and historically. In Zola’s novel, this notion of the “stifling middle-class” arises again and again throughout the novel, almost as a means of justifying Thérèse’s contempt for her family, and as an explanation of her murderous temperament and subsequent loathsome actions. The phrase “middle-class” or bourgeois first appears as Zola describes the family gatherings, consisting mainly of playing dominoes and drinking tea, that occur every Thursday night at the Raquin household: “Cette soirée-là tranchait sur les autres, elle avait passé dans les habitudes de la famille comme une orgie bourgeoise d’une gaieté folle” (14). Eager to follow a strict, regimented schedule even during supposed “leisure time,” for Mme. Raquin and Camille this weekly gathering symbolizes order and civilized society. For Thérèse meanwhile, this regimented way of life is equivalent to, if not worse than, death.

As Thérèse professes her love to Laurent, she describes the horrible life that she has been forced into by her adopted family. She tells him that her family has “buried her alive” (on m’a enterré toute vivante) inside the shop. Forced to attend to Camille’s every whim, she feels as if she literally cannot move—in a metaphorical narrow coffin, she struggles to breathe. Zola’s own nightmares of being buried alive undoubtedly inspired him to write this passage (mediated through the voice of Thérèse) (Brown 160): “Ils m’ont étouffée dans leur douceur bourgeoise, et je ne m’explique pas comment il y a encore du sang dans mes veines” (24). She is so stifled by her current life that she cannot understand how there is still blood in her veins. Because she cannot live the life that she desires, Thérèse feels that she is no better off than if she were dead. As a result, her outward motions are mechanical as her internal human emotions boil inside of her: “Thérèse, immobile, paisible comme les autres, regardait
Zola critiques French society through his character Thérèse just as Park critiques Korean patriarchy and authoritarianism through Tae-ju. Zola hated the Napoleons, and struggled to support his family through writing and other odd jobs throughout his lifetime, so it is not surprising that his writing exhibits disgust with the bourgeoisie. Although present in TR, Zola’s most famous work, the Rougon-Macquart saga, deals most with this theme, referred to by Brown as “the hereditary thesis,” which: “operates throughout like a demon, laying hold of individuals, thwarting their attempts to exorcise what entered them at conception, and congratulating itself when the self—the character born of reason, of tutelage, of experience—comes undone” (75). In other words, Zola revels in the imagined downfall of those belonging to the bourgeoisie of late nineteenth century France. This is a group of people that Zola disdains so much, that he is proud of the fact that he portrays them not as individuals but as mere “temperaments.” By claiming that he does not describe individuals in his novels, Zola rhetorically distances his authorial voice from his own.

Park carries out a similar rhetorical sleight of hand. Although the director asserts that Tae-ju is driven by child-like motivations, her hatred of her family and desire for revenge is far from child-like. The deep resentment brewing within Tae-ju is the same resentment that plagues Thérèse. Of course, there are minor differences between the characters. Unlike Thérèse, who is half Algerian, half French, Tae-ju does not come from mixed ancestry. Zola seems to have incorporated this detail about Thérèse’s background as a means to explain her ambivalent attitude towards her French family, as if possessing “mixed blood” helps to explain a fiery temper and a yearning for excitement. Yet Tae-ju shares the same desire to
escape from her banal existence within the patriarchal structure of the traditional Korean family. Park adapts Thérèse for his own purposes, and adds an ingenious flourish of his own; instead of being a person of “mixed blood” like Thérèse, Tae-ju desires to become a “mixed blood” by literally mixing her blood with Sang-hyun’s.

Park’s decision to turn Zola’s story into a vampire movie is ingenious, but it is also intuitive and logical. Zola’s novel is, in many ways, a vampire story waiting to come alive. Thérèse, as she sits at the table playing dominoes in silence with her family’s friends, feels that she is the only human in the room—she describes everyone else as mechanical beasts, “cardboard dolls grimacing around her.” By turning Thérèse’s character into a vampire through Tae-ju, Park plays on the dichotomy that Zola creates between humans and beasts, what it is to “be alive” and what it is to “be dead” (where “being dead” means functioning like a mechanical doll). For Tae-ju, being alive in human form is equivalent to being dead whereas being dead in vampire form allows her to feel alive. Tae-ju goes one step further than Thérèse; she not only sleeps with a man who is not her husband, she eventually shares her blood with him and vice versa. Park therefore adds another layer of complexity onto Zola’s story; the two lovers have two strong yet distinct and often competing urges: the desire for sex and the thirst for blood.

Although sex is often violent and reminiscent of blood sucking within the film, Park is careful to keep these two acts distinct. Sang-hyun kills Tae-ju not only because she betrays him by blaming him for the death of her husband, but also because he senses that she has strayed sexually (which she has, with a family friend). In an effort both to control her and trade sex for blood sucking, Sang-hyun strangles his lover to death as Mrs. Ra looks on, in one particularly gruesome scene. After he has committed the deed, Sang-hyun sobs and
mourns the death of his human lover. It seems clear from his devastated expression that he did not plan to murder her, and that this was a decision that was made in the heat of the moment. After a few minutes however, Sang-hyun comes to the realization that he can re-animate Tae-ju’s lifeless body by forcing her to drink his own blood. Yet this task turns out to be difficult, because each time that he cuts himself to feed her his blood, his wounds heal almost instantaneously.

As voyeurs to this horrifying display, we know that Sang-hyun has been successful when Tae-ju’s lifeless lips begin to suck vigorously on his slit wrist. This moment signifies the shift from sexual lust to blood lust, and Tae-ju has returned to the earth with a different sort of craving. To commemorate her rebirth into a new form of existence, Sang-hyun exclaims: “Happy birthday, Tae-ju!” Adding yet another layer of complexity to the scene’s psychological drama, we realize that Mrs. Ra has witnessed this impossible feat. Because she cannot speak or move, we can only imagine the thoughts swirling around in her brain as she reacts to this ghastly demonstration. Park shoots the violence in the scene in a relatively realistic way, and the fact that Mrs. Ra cannot scream makes the scene all the more frightening and horrific. For an average person, it would be traumatic enough for an entire lifetime to witness the brutal murder by strangulation of your daughter-in-law, after realizing that she and her priest lover had murdered your own son. But it is difficult to imagine how that same average person would react after witnessing the murder victim come back to life as a vampire, when previously you had no idea that such a thing were even possible. Such an experience might well be enough to put you over the edge of sanity for good.

When we, the film spectators, see these close-up shots of Mrs. Ra’s eyes, we project all of this gruesome knowledge and resulting insanity into them. The notion of not knowing,
but only imagining, what is hidden beneath this woman’s eyes engenders the utmost fear in the film spectator. The ingenious aspect of Park’s film is that we become the voyeurs seeing the voyeur who is speechless in the face of horror. This level of complexity was, of course, taken from Zola’s novel. But because *TR* is written in a dramatic theatrical/cinematic style to begin with, film adaptation brings the horrific events to life in a way that no other medium could.

As I mentioned previously, *TR* already contains a multitude of implicit references to vampirism; so many in fact, that it is easy to envision Park pondering Zola’s imagery and building upon these images as he shot the film. When Thérèse beholds Laurent for the first time, for example, she specifically notices his neck: “For an instant her eyes rested on his neck, a neck that was thick and short, fat and powerful” (*Elle arrêta un instant ses regards sur son cou; ce cou était large et court, gros et puissant*). We might wonder why she would look at a body part so seemingly insignificant as a neck, but in the case of Zola’s novel, this passage functions as foreshadowing. When Thérèse sees Laurent she is instantly infatuated by his masculine, strong appearance. Having only had Camille as a frame of reference, Thérèse was unaware that such masculine-looking men even existed. When she beholds Laurent therefore, she feels that she is casting her eyes on an entirely new species of human. Yet it is specifically Laurent’s “powerful” neck that will eventually become infected, cause him to slowly go insane, and prevent him from living happily ever after with Thérèse.

In the novel, Camille bites Laurent on the neck as he is struggling not to drown at the hands of his much stronger aggressor. Despite the fact that the police do not suspect him of murdering Camille, Laurent is plagued by the wound on his neck, which will not heal. The wound is one of the only remnants of the murder victim that remains in the land of the living;
it therefore functions as a reminder to Laurent that he has committed a mortal sin.\textsuperscript{92} Besides the neck wound, the two lovers are also driven to insanity by Camille’s portrait (painted by Laurent), and the more general feeling that Camille’s ghostly presence will not leave them in peace.

Immediately after Laurent murders Camille, he feels overjoyed with relief, as if his entire body has been filled with new life. This passage has much in common with the scene in \textit{Thirst} in which Tae-ju—through the death of her human body—shifts out of her mechanical, boring human life to her gruesome yet exciting life as a vampire. Zola writes that a sudden rush of blood seems to course through Laurent’s veins, and that when the two lovers hold hands it seems to them that: “the blood from one penetrated the chest of the other, passing through their joined fists” (\textit{le sang de l’un allait dans la poitrine de l’autre en passant par leurs poings unis}) (46). This description is metaphorical or course, whereas in Park’s film the blood-mixing is literal. Laurent’s wound festers on his neck in the same way that Sang-hyun’s ugly skin disease appears all over his body whenever he is in need of blood nourishment. Yet in Laurent’s case, the festering wound on his neck is symbolic of his manhood being gnawed away little by little. Zola views the neck as a vital part of the human body—when it is destroyed or mutilated, a person will often die as a result. When Laurent goes to the morgue to identify Camille’s body, for example, he sees the half-smiling corpse of a young woman with a black ring around her neck, permanently marked by the rope that choked her as she hung herself. Moments before the murder, Camille’s neck is described as thin and wrinkled, nearly the exact opposite of Laurent’s thick and powerful neck. As if to add even more ugliness to the description of Camille’s neck, Zola describes his Adam’s apple as “standing out prominently in brick red” (\textit{saillant et d’un rouge brique}) (38), rising
with every snore as he sleeps. Camille’s neck, in other words, is not only feminine looking; it seems to beg Laurent to grasp at it and silence it.

As a result of his murderous actions, Laurent’s own husky neck—the symbol of his manhood—has been irreversibly damaged. The wound on his neck possesses many supernatural powers that are capable of harming Laurent; it feels like the blade of a “cold knife” (le froid du couteau) (57) constantly at his throat. The wound burns him, gnaws at his flesh, and when Thérèse kisses it, the scar seems to poisons her. It is also difficult to satisfactorily hide; when Laurent tries to pull up his shirt collar over it, the wound scrapes against the linen, causing him even further pain. Much akin to the imaginary heartbeat that quickly drives Edgar Allen Poe’s “Tell-Tale Heart” narrator insane, Laurent’s wound is sin incarnate. The scar is a physical manifestation of the guilt that he cannot overcome, and which will, eventually, be the cause of his demise. In Zola’s words:

Sa souffrance la plus aiguë, souffrance physique et morale lui venait de la morsure que Camille avait faite au cou. À certains moments, il s’imaginait que cette cicatrice lui couvrait tout le corps. S’il venait à oublier le passé, une piqûre ardente, qu’il croyait ressentir, rappelait le meurtre à sa chair et son esprit...le morceau de son cou où se trouvait la cicatrice ne lui semblait plus appartenir à son corps; c’était comme de la chair étrangère qu’on aurait collée en cet endroit, comme une chair empoisonnée qui pourrissait ses proper muscles...

For the purposes of Thirst, there is really no need to include the neck wound into the storyline, since Sang-hyun must come to grips with his guilt in a multitude of other ways. Sang-hyun is a complex character with his own share of moral quandaries to sort out. Because he is a (former) Catholic priest, he feels the need for absolution after he commits the murder—a mortal sin according to the Catholic Church. But because Sang-hyun is also a vampire, his urge to drink the blood of the priest who absolves him is in conflict with his
earthly desires to redeem himself in God’s eyes. Thus his competing urges frequently cause him to act in seemingly irrational ways, or in ways that appear to go against his best interests.

Despite these complex motivations, we might still wonder why Park veers from Zola’s storyline and omits the fateful neck wound. Most obviously, Sang-hyun is not bitten on the neck by his murder victim because, as a vampire, it is his role to bite necks. Secondly, during the murder scene, Sang-hyun has more pressing issues to worry about than Laurent did. Most notably, he must commit the murder and face police questioning before the sun rises, otherwise he will die.

We might then ask a more basic question, namely: why does Park turn *TR* into a vampire film in the first place? Although there is no certain answer to this question, it seems that Park shifts Zola’s story over to the world of vampires to emphasize the cinematic and visual style that is already apparent in Zola’s Naturalist style. Park does not simply adapt Zola’s novel, he creates a new genre of his own that could be described as distorted realism, or something close to Zola’s Naturalism, but in the context of contemporary Korean horror cinema. In this sense, we might say that Park creates a new genre of East-West hybrid cinema, what I have named the “Franco-Korean.”

Just as in Zola’s novel, the murder of the husband tears Sang-hyun and Tae-ju apart, but Park changes the circumstances slightly so that the murder fits more perfectly into his own storyline. He also uses black humor throughout the film to add entertainment value and inject his own (by now) recognizable brand of aesthetics into Zola’s story. For instance, during the murder scene on the boat, Sang-hyun wants to stab his victim with a knife so that he can drink his blood, but Tae-ju does not want him to deform the body in case the police ask questions. As Kang-woo is drowning in the water, the fishing line catches on Tae-ju’s
ear, and she screams in pain. Instead of kissing his lover, the moment that Sang-hyun rises to the surface after the deed is done, he cannot help himself and sucks the blood from her ear. His embarrassed expression brings humor into the otherwise ghastly situation. Later, as Tae-ju is recovering in the hospital, her non-Korean speaking friend Evelyn asks Sang-hyun to pray for her to get better. Knowing that the friend cannot understand, he feigns prayer as he professes his love for Tae-ju: “My heart only beats for you. When we meet again, I believe we’ll be happy.” As we know from Zola’s novel, fate is against these two lovers; we know that there is little chance that they will “live happily ever after.”

As in Zola’s novel, Kang-woo’s ghost will not leave the two lovers alone. In Thirst, however, these scenes are meant to be equally horrific and comical. Kang-woo shows up in Tae-ju’s bed, holding the rock that was placed on his stomach, his clown-face grimacing stupidly. He is as annoying in death as he was in life. In this same sequence of events, Park adds yet another flourish of black comedy: Mrs. Ra, who has just had a stroke, lies in a hospital bed (there are a large number of hospital scenes) with her family and friends surrounding her. Kang-woo’s older friend comments: “Mrs. Ra’s stroke should be a warning sign to us. We must watch our cholesterol, not drink so much alcohol, and watch our salt intake.” This scene is amusing because it reinforces the selfish nature of Mrs. Ra’s friends; not only do they seem to care more about their own health than hers, they are also foolishly unable to see what truly caused her to have a stroke in the first place.
Fig. 6: Kang-woo’s ghost ruins the couple’s sex life.

One might wonder: what, if any, are the differences between Zola’s portrayal of morality and Park’s? This is a difficult question to answer because the plot of *Thirst* is much more complex than it is in *TR*. Zola viewed his two protagonists as two puppets “manipulated by guilt,” especially Laurent (Brown 159), while Madame Raquin emerges triumphant over the two lovers who lie dead at her feet, even though she is unable to move in a literal sense. Like rats in a maze, Zola’s protagonists are imprisoned and affected by the unfortunate situation in which they find themselves. As Brown proclaims: “Zola…could hardly conceive drama without a sacrificial victim or a denouement that expunges some character from humankind” (160).

In *Thirst* on the other hand, Sang-hyun is the only semblance of a “moral character”. Though he was once a priest who sacrificed himself to help the sick, as a vampire, he quickly descends into a life that he knows would be deemed immoral by the Catholic Church. He has sex with Tae-ju, helps the terminally ill commit suicide by drinking their blood, and murders Kang-woo in order to be closer to his lover. Park brings sex and violence to a new conceptual level, yet he keeps the two concepts distinct. Sang-hyun is not content with just
sex or just blood-drinking. He must have sex with humans and he must drink blood.

Although he fools himself into the belief that he retains a sense of morality by drinking the blood of people who are already dying, in the end, he does not end up on any true moral high ground over Tae-ju.

As Park explains in an interview, he tries to portray the notion that “love is (fundamentally) selfish.” After scrutinizing the final sequence of the film, the meaning of Park’s statement becomes clear. Sang-hyun kills Tae-ju for selfish reasons, he wants to possess her and control her, and he does not want her to have sex with other men. As a vampire he is also lonely, and he quite simply wants company. Unfortunately for him, Tae-ju gets intense enjoyment out of murdering innocent people and drinking their blood. She calls her lover an “easy blood-drinking coward” because he refuses to treat blood-drinking as a sport. It might therefore appear that Sang-hyun retains the moral high ground because he does not kill for sport. As mentioned previously, he also does not kill Tae-ju’s friend when he has the opportunity. But despite his desire to help people, Sang-hyun is fundamentally motivated by the desire to control Tae-ju. Even though he does not kill innocent people, he also does not save people from death when given the opportunity. Sang-hyun grows increasingly angry not because he cannot convince Tae-ju to stop killing people, but because she refuses to have sex with him anymore.

At the end of the film, however, there is a sequence of shots that complicates the viewers’ assumptions about Sang-hyun as a character. Is he fundamentally moral or not? In the beginning of the sequence, Tae-ju discovers Sang-hyun sucking the blood his wife’s friend Evelyn in a room in her family’s apartment. The film spectator views this from Tae-ju’s perspective. It would seem—and we are led to believe—that Sang-hyun has killed
Evelyn. In the next couple of shots, Tae-ju and Sang-hyun are in a car; Tae-ju’s mute stepmother sits motionless in the backseat. Sang-hyun unexpectedly stops the car, jumps out and enters a campground. He is caught—by the people at the campground and by the camera—apparently raping a woman. The film spectator is thrown into a temporary state of uncertainty. The camera then cuts back to the apartment—to medium shots and close-ups of Tae-ju’s victims. Finally within the sequence, the film spectator sees Evelyn’s corpse sprawled on the floor. But suddenly she moves—she is alive! We must now re-evaluate our initial interpretation of the events, starting from the beginning of the sequence.

Much like Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-kang in Tsai’s What Time is it There?, whose stories are subtly and disjointedly connected via parallel cuts, Sang-hyun is connected back to Evelyn in the mind of the spectator. Our understanding of the plot, and our overall assessment of Sang-hyun’s character, is dependent upon our close attention to this sequence. If we are meant to believe, initially, that Sang-hyun killed Evelyn, then we may also assume that he raped the woman in the campground. But once we realize that Sang-hyun has spared Evelyn’s life—as exemplified in the final portion of the sequence—we are obliged go back to the middle of the sequence and re-evaluate our interpretation of the rape scene. This sequence, therefore, complicates the viewers’ initial perception of the narrative on many levels: Sang-hyun’s character is an embodied critique of blind faith in religious leaders, and more specifically, certain strains of Roman Catholicism in Korea. On a broader level, the sequence—in and of itself—critiques the blind faith of the film spectator who watches film in a passive, unquestioning, linear mode.

Park’s overall moral message is far from clear, and there are several ways to interpret the ending of the film. Based on Park’s commentary, however, it would seem that the film
can be read as a critique of humanity and the notion of love more generally. Love is
equivalent to selfish sexual enjoyment. Because he cannot possess Tae-ju sexually or
spiritually, Sang-hyun kills both of them so that neither of them (but especially her) can have
anything. It is on this point that Park strays from Zola’s moral message: in Thérèse Raquin,
both lovers come to terms with the idea of killing themselves. The ending of Thirst differs
from the ending of TR because Tae-ju does not want to die. She is forced to accept her fate
once she realizes that there is no way to save herself, but fundamentally she does not want to
“be nothing.” Even though Sang-hyun tries to comfort her by saying that they will meet again
in a better place, both of them know that true death is equivalent to nothingness. Even
vampires can die.

The ending of Thirst is, in fact, quite sad because Park presents a nihilistic picture of
the world; a world in which there is no immortality, even for vampires. Referring to Zola’s
brand of realism, literary critic Saint-Beuve’s comment: “Art, reduced to truth, pure and
simple to me seems to depart from truth” can be applied to Park’s filmmaking just as easily.
Thirst is not a film that is “true to life”—much of the film’s details go beyond physical
reality as we know it—but this does not prevent Park from crafting his film to appear
realistic. Surprisingly, art as realism and art as distortion are compatible with one another.
The distortion of reality engenders a special brand of fear in the spectator because it fools the
spectator into believing that these events could be real. There are no clean answers at the end
of this film. Justice—human or divine—is not always meted out to the characters who either
need it or deserve it. Stories that do not possess clear morals are often difficult for critics and
spectators alike to embrace because they are contrary to our desire for a resolution or a
hidden message. Reality does not carry hidden messages and morality is often a relative
concept. Both Zola and Park insist that desire is the force that governs humans like puppets, and desire itself can be a cruel beast.
Chapter 4

Opening the Door to Sino-Italian Cinema Studies, Gianfranco Giagni’s *Un cinese a Roma* and the Representation of Chinese Migrants in Contemporary Italian Cinema

**The Sino-Italian**

On August 6th of 2008, Italy’s Ministry of Cultural Activities (*Il Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*) passed a law that creates a tax incentive for companies to reinvest their profits in Italian film production and distribution.98 The law was passed for apparently benevolent reasons, one of the more important being, to attempt to overcome the direct intervention of the Italian government in the filmmaking process, which had previously held the power to decide which projects would get funded or not. The true benefits of this law remain to be seen, since it is unclear how much actual control of media content the Italian State has relinquished.99 Even if this new law can be interpreted under the most flattering light, the list of stipulations regarding “what constitutes a fundable Italian film” remains large and exclusionary. In order to receive a tax credit from the Ministry, the film must be directed by a “native” Italian, have at least one Italian author, and contain mostly Italian actors speaking the Italian language. While perhaps there is nothing inherently unseemly about such stipulations, I would argue that insofar as the definition of an “Italian film” becomes increasingly laden with self-imposed limitations, the possibility for non-native Italian filmmakers to receive funding to produce films in Italy remains low.100

The concept “Sino-Italian” is inspired partially by Shu-mei Shih’s work on Sinophone cinema, and also by Michelle Bloom’s term “Sinofrench,” which she defines in
terms of cross-cultural connections. My definition of Sino-Italian cinema also stems from the general notion of “hybridity” as it relates to contemporary transnational filmmaking. Michelle Bloom, in her article “Contemporary Franco-Chinese Cinema, Translation, Citation, and Imitation in Dai Sijie’s *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and Tsai Ming-Liang’s *What Time is it There?*” has coined the term “Sinofrench” in order to describe the cultural fusions and conversations that continue to occur in prolific numbers between China and France. Similarly, Sino-Italian cinema describes films in which cross-cultural connections between China and Italy are highlighted. Like the Sino-French, therefore, my definition of Sino-Italian cinema is relatively broad, and can include films that are either marginal or mainstream, made and directed either in “greater China” or in Italy, or both.

There are several issues that I hope to raise, many of them problems that arise when one investigates Sino-Italian cinema by way of example. In the process of researching and studying examples of the Sino-Italian—cinema that I perceive functions in similar ways to the Sino-French—I have come to wonder: what makes a film “hybrid” in the first place? Aren’t both the Sino-French and the Sino-Italian too conceptually vague as they currently stand? Films that appear transnational upon first glance often carry nationalist agendas, and vice versa. It would seem that we need more—not less—precise ways to define transnational, hybrid, and diaspora cinemas. As this research continues, therefore, the concept of “the Sino-Italian” will require further retooling and specification.

Sino-Italian cinema is, in a very literal sense, a more “problematic” category than Sino-French cinema. First of all, there are simply less examples of it. But if there truly is a dearth of artistic exchange, follow-up questions remain: does this lack of exchange stem from political issues, post-colonialist issues, or something else entirely? Is contemporary Italian
cinema still centered on current national interests above all else, which, in turn, creates an imbalance in the exchange? My hope is that, by outlining and analyzing various examples of Sino-Italian cinema, these issues—and the reasons why they are difficult—will become clearer, even if the problems that I see as inherent to the concept of the “Sino-Italian” are not resolved.

As we will see, even well intentioned attempts at cross-cultural understanding can fall short. But rather than point a finger at filmmakers who attempt (and often do not succeed) at bridging cultural gaps, I would urge us to seek out what is lacking in these attempts. Often the missing link, so to speak, can be read as a fundamental inability to shift perspectives. Walter Benjamin’s famous observations about translators also apply to filmmakers. Filmmakers are translators in the sense that they must place images syntactically in order to create a narrative. Benjamin notes: “A real translation is transparent, it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully” (2000, 260). The willingness to surrender one’s original impressions or mode of interpretation in an uncomfortable setting—or to resist interpretation entirely—is hardly a simple task.

Throughout the course of this chapter, I will look first at an example of Sino-Italian cinema that was shot by an Italian director while traveling through China. I will then move to examples of Italian-made films, shot in Italy, and in which the notion of “Chineseness” arises as a thematic constant. Finally, I will shift to examples of films by Chinese directors that deal with Italy or Italian identity in a significant way.
Antonioni’s Chung Kuo and the Awkward Cinematic Gaze

Two of the most prominent examples of Sino-Italian cinema are Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Last Emperor (1986) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s Chung Kuo (1972), which I will discuss at length in a moment. The story behind the making of The Last Emperor is well known because the film ended up winning an Oscar: Bertolucci was granted special access by the Chinese government to shoot his film in the Forbidden City in Beijing. He remains, in fact, the only Western director to have been given permission to film a historical movie in the Forbidden City since the early 1940s. It is difficult to say with absolute certainty why Bertolucci was granted access to the site, but it is likely that the Chinese government under Deng Xiaopeng approved of the Italian director’s communist leanings. Even though Bertolucci’s representation of the Qing Dynasty is hardly one-hundred percent accurate, The Last Emperor exemplifies bi-lateral cinematic exchange between Italy and China, especially in terms of production and distribution. Bertolucci once stated that he wanted to make a film about China: “Because it’s not Italy…the Italian present doesn’t need—or doesn’t want—to be represented onscreen at the moment, at least not by me.”

The same sentiment might just as well have been expressed by director Gianni Amelio, whose 2006 film La stella che non c’è’ (The Missing Star) was released to international film festivals to mixed reviews. The film stars Sergio Castellitto as Vincenzo Buonavolontà (the surname means “goodwill”), a factory technician who travels to China to find and repair a dangerous broken machine that was sold to China after it became obsolete in Italy. He travels the countryside (through Wuhan and up the Yangtze River) with his
reluctant companion and translator Liu Hua (Ling Tai) who shows Vincenzo the harsh “realities” of modern life in rural China and—perhaps unsurprisingly—ends up falling in love with him. On the poster for the film, Vincenzo hugs Liu to his chest as if protecting or shielding her from an unkind world. One relatively positive review of the film notes: “Along the way, the usual trappings of such travelogue styled movies comes into play, such as the learning of culture, ideals, food, and basically, the understanding that the world is without strangers, if only one makes an effort to try and connect.”

The reviewer notes that even though La stella’s storyline is clichéd, the underlying message is well-meaning.

In fact, Amelio’s film was based on a 2002 novel by Ermanno Rea entitled La dismissal (The Dismissal) which is similar in all ways but one: the protagonist, Vincenzo Buonocore (“good heart”) never travels to China. Instead, the former technician, who was laid off from his job at L’Ilva (a steel factory in Naples) meets and falls in love with an Italian woman named Marcella. Italian reviewer Renato Persòli comments that the novel is, in essence, a metaphor for the death of a certain phase of Italian modernity, a time in Italian history in which hard work and social solidarity were encouraged and prized. Rationalizing the nostalgic tone of the novel, Persòli adds: “Muiono con la fabbrica un pezzo di Napoli e l’intero Novecento” (when the factory dies, a piece of Naples—and the entire 19th century—dies with it) (2008). There is a hint, within all of this nostalgia, that Vincenzo longs for a by-gone period in Italy in which the bulk of the industrial labor was done by legal (i.e. native) Italians. Even if this was not Rea’s intent, the story’s nostalgia rings, however faintly, of an anti-immigration sentiment.

Amelio’s film, on the other hand, takes Italy out of the past and into the present (Persòli 2008). The Vincenzo of Amelio’s film, though slightly reminiscent of Marco Polo,
improves significantly on Rea’s Vincenzo. In many ways, the film signifies a step in the right direction; it was, in fact, the first Italian-Singapore co-production in recent cinematic history. As a filmmaker, moreover, Amelio takes the opportunity to escape from the confines of Rea’s novel as he offers his viewership an “inside” look of the complexities of modern China—from the vast country’s unparalleled beauty to its abject poverty. Audiences do not even have to leave their seats.

But herein lies the unfortunate aspect of Amelio’s film. This is the problem that, as we will see, also plagues Antonioni’s Chung Kuo. Certainly, there is something noble (or at least mildly endearing) about the act of “reaching out to strangers.” But the more fundamental issue that critics of Amelio’s film seem to ignore is: why is it presupposed that the state of the world is a world “full of strangers?” Furthermore, why should it be the duty of filmmakers to “reach out” to strangers while the viewer sits passively in his seat? The act of photographing an entire country that is presupposed as “Other” is an act that is ever-so-finely balanced between magnanimous intent on the one hand and vague imperialism on the other. Although such films often require viewers to reflect on their own position vis-à-vis the “strangers” on screen, when the film ends, viewers have been filled with a false sense of accomplishment and are sent on their merry way.

Although Antonioni was originally invited by Zhou Enlai to film in China, when Chung Kuo (1972) was screened by Mao’s inner circle, the film was condemned and subsequently banned. When the Italian filmmaker heard the news, he was heartbroken. In retrospect, it seems that the entire debacle stems from a fundamental misunderstanding. While the Chinese government was under the impression that Antonioni’s film would represent China’s people, places, and customs in an uncritical and “straightforward” way, the
film contained commentary and “odd” photographic angles. At one point, for example, Antonioni films the Nanjing Bridge from underneath. Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, was so insulted by this shot that she denounced the director as anti-Chinese. In the shot that Antonioni uses, a washing line can be seen, which according to Qing, makes the bridge appear unstable, as if it is on the verge of collapse (Hilton 1999).

Fig. 7: A piece of the Nanjing Bridge, as shot by Antonioni’s camera.

One contemporary Chinese critic explains the misunderstanding between the Italian director and Mao’s inner circle as follows: “Of course, the camera has a mystic aspect to it, the lens has its own will. Antonioni was aware that, with his camera eye, he captured very real and profound things—things that were not arranged naturally within the frame” (“My Life” 2007). The problem lies in differing opinions about photography as an art form, the purposes of it, and how one should go about achieving that purpose. Watching the film, it is evident that Antonioni was genuinely intrigued by the medicine, industry, food, religion, and everyday life in China during the Cultural Revolution. Unfortunately, those aspects of
society that Antonioni chose to expose—especially the ways in which he chose to expose them—were taken, altogether, as a one big insult.

Susan Sontag, commenting on the film, notes: “While for us photography is intimately connected with discontinuous ways of seeing …in China it is connected only with continuity” (2001, 170). Continuing her already-contentious claim, Sontag explains that, from a Chinese perspective, photography is not meant to capture incomplete or fractured images. Rather, a photograph should exist in order to “reproduce the real” (Sontag 174). In Mao’s eyes, Sontag concludes, Antonioni was viewed as a thief who stole people’s images and then used them for his own selfish purposes.

Sontag simplifies the issue and even approaches a patronizing tone at points, at one point noting: “The only use the Chinese are allowed to make of their history is didactic: their interest in history is narrow, moralistic, deforming, uncurious. Hence, photography in our sense has no place in their society” (2001, 174). Perhaps when we consider that Sontag wrote this essay in 1976, during Mao’s rule, such generalizations can be overlooked slightly. Nevertheless, she seems to conflate the ruling philosophy of the Chinese government with the mores and beliefs of individuals, suggesting that our notion of photography is opposite to theirs, and that “our” notion is far more sophisticated and subtle. While Sontag is certainly justified in her critique of Mao’s regime, she jumps to some misguided conclusions.

Regardless of Sontag’s commentary, or Antonioni’s own desire for political correctness, Chung Kuo is a remarkably ambitious and interesting film. The first scene of the film is shot in Beijing, in Tiananmen Square. Although Antonioni’s camera reveals the large murals of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin that preside over the square, Antonioni is far more
interested in the everyday lives of the Beijing citizens. The director’s own voice-over sets the scene:

_Piazza Tienanmen. A Pechino. In un giorno di maggio. Abbiamo cominciato il nostro breve viaggio nella Cina d’oggi puntando qui le nostre macchine da prese...per i cinesi, questo grande spazio silenzioso è il centro del mondo. La Porta della Pace Celeste è il cuore di Pechino. E Pechino è il centro economico e rivoluzionario della Cina. È la Cina è il Chung Kuo. Il paese di centro. Il nociolo antico della civiltà del mondo...sono loro, i cinesi, protagonisti di questi nostri appunti filmati. Non pretendiamo di spiegare la Cina. Vogliamo solo cominciare a osservare questo grande reperatorio di volte, di gesti, di abitudini._

Antonioni clarifies that he is not interested in explaining an entire country through cinema; rather, he is interested in filming the bits and pieces that form something larger yet inexplicable. This is typical Antonioni. As one of the most avant-garde directors of his time, Antonioni was known for his interest in the bits and pieces rather than on the “bigger picture” in his cinema. In the final scene of Antonioni’s _L’Eclisse_ (1962), for example, Antonioni’s camera seems to “forget” about the protagonists entirely and focuses instead on empty intersections and forgotten meeting places. In his earlier film _L’Avventura_ (1960), the central mystery of the narrative—the disappearance of Anna (Lea Massari)—is left unresolved intentionally. In the final scene of _Zabriskie Point_ (1970), the icons of mid-century consumerist society—a television, a refrigerator, Wonder Bread, patio furniture—fly through the air in a graceful explosion.

In the same vein, in this scene from _Chung Kuo_, Antonioni explains that he is interested in documenting the gestures, expressions, and faces that he and his film crew encounter while traveling through China. By filming the bits and pieces that make up the whole, the director is true to his cinematic style. In an attempt at modesty, he states that he
does not seek to “explain” China—only to explore it. Clearly, he does not intend to offend anyone—not Mao’s government—and certainly not the subjects of his film.

If anything, in fact, *Chung Kuo* portrays Mao’s communism far too apologetically and naively. The voice-over notes that despite strict food rationing, everyone seems to have enough: “*Gli abitanti di Pechino sembrano poveri ma non miserabili. Senza lusso, senza fame. Quello che ci colpisce è la qualità della loro vita, così lontana della nostra*” (The inhabitants of Beijing seem poor but not miserable. Without luxury, without hunger. What strikes us is the quality of their lives, so far from our own).

The phrase: “*così lontana della nostra*” carries a slightly more ambiguous meaning in Italian than it might if translated directly into English. The word *lontana* literally means “far” but in this case it can also mean “different.” Antonioni is therefore expressing his feelings of foreignness in a country that is “far” in both a literal and a less tangible sense. Furthermore, though the possessive construction *la nostra*—“our”—appears unproblematic at first, the exact meaning becomes more difficult to pinpoint upon deeper reflection. It is unclear to whom exactly the “*la nostra*” refers. Presumably, Antonioni is referring to his fellow Italians, but he might also mean “Westerners” more broadly. Indeed, this starts to get tricky, because if we take him to mean “the lives of Italians,” how do non-Italians fit within the schema?

Regardless of minor semantic issues, Antonioni missteps in far more serious—and seemingly opposite—directions. On the one hand, Antonioni’s film minimizes the ugliness of the Cultural Revolution, almost to a fault. This being said, considering the fact that the Chinese government only allowed him to film in certain areas, Antonioni cannot be blamed for this misrepresentation entirely. On the other hand, *Chung Kuo*, as a final product, was so
insulting to Mao that the film was banned and Antonioni was charged as an anti-Chinese conspirator.

How can such opposing problems possibly coincide? I can only explain it by saying that, in my estimation, although Chung Kuo does showcase Antonioni’s unique talent for capturing small bits of life with his camera, the film feels strained at times. This strained quality most likely stems from the fact that he and his crew were being constantly surveyed and were provided with such limited access. If Sontag is correct in her contention that Mao did not approve of the “oddity” of Antonioni’s photographic angles, then it is easy to see how such an unconventionally shot film might have worried the communist leader.

Although Chung Kuo is more aesthetically interesting than Amelio’s La stella che non c’è, both films make similar blunders. As an audience member, there is no need for me to budge from my seat. If I am disinclined to travel outside of my comfort zone in the first place, I can simply tell myself that I have already seen what there is to see of China, at least for now. This is the problem with most travelogue-style films.

Strangely, however, unlike other travelogue films, the many forms of Mandarin that can be heard throughout Antonioni’s film are left un-translated. There is a benevolent and a not so benevolent way of interpreting this lack of translation: in the benevolent interpretation, we might think that Antonioni does not translate the Mandarin because he wants to allow his protagonists an unmediated voice. Rather than endow their words with meaning, he allows them to stand alone—to speak for themselves. In a less benevolent interpretation, it might appear that Antonioni was too lazy to translate the Mandarin. Or perhaps he assumes that his audience will care only about his own reading of the experience—an experience that is likely to appear unreadable to a large portion of Italian audiences.
However we interpret Antonioni’s artistic choices, there is a lesson to be learned from this cinematic experiment. The film exemplifies the delicate, easily ruptured balance that exists between art and life. One might have hoped that the story behind films such as *Chung Kuo* could have served as a cautionary tale for future Sino-Italian filmmakers. Unfortunately, this was not so.

**Italian Cinema and the Problem of “The National”**

Gianfranco Giagni’s 2004 documentary *Un cinese a Roma*, like *Chung Kuo*, does not manage to move beyond superficial representation of the Chinese. Yet it exemplifies an entirely different type of problem. Despite my belief that defining the parameters of Sino-Italian cinema will continue to be important to cinema scholars, Giagni’s film demonstrates another difficult facet of this task. The film documents the struggles of Li Xiangyang, a friend of Giagni’s, and a Beijing-born actor and screenwriter living in Rome. Although Giagni attempts to reach across cultural barriers, his representation of Li and two other Chinese men living in Rome does not break free from cultural stereotypes. The film testifies to the real-life struggles of Chinese-Italians, but does not fundamentally reach beyond Giagni’s own Italian-centered subject position. Furthermore, the film seems purposefully aimed at educating and enlightening an Italian television audience with little previous knowledge of Chinese culture.

Interestingly, Giagni’s film fits more neatly into Sandra Ponzanesi’s concept of “outlandish cinema” as defined in her article, “Outlandish Cinema, Screening the Other in Italy.” Although she is predominantly interested in cinematic portrayals of Africans in Italian cinema, Ponzanesi defines “outlandish cinema” as, 1) cinema that deviates from the
“mainstream” thematically and stylistically, 2) cinema targeted at a white Italian audience that is not well-equipped to develop tolerance on their own, 3) cinema that creates a feeling of discomfort and forces self-evaluation in that same audience by exhibiting other intolerant Italians (Ponzanesi 2005, 270). In “outlandish cinema,” notes Ponzanesi, “The main characters are peripatetic souls, migrant, nomadic, and transgender subjects who appropriate the metaphor of traveling” (2005, 271). The problem with “outlandish cinema,” concludes Ponzanesi, is that it does not circulate widely in mainstream Italian culture (2005, 278). This same problem holds true for Sino-Italian cinema, which, because of its rarity, is actually in a much more dire state than Italian migrant cinema more generally. Furthermore, the recognition of migrant cinema represents only a small step in a much longer process. Unhinging the preconceived notions of immigrants living in Italy will be an arduous process, especially for filmmakers.

In “real-life” terms, the Chinese population living in Italy faces an even more daunting and uncertain future in many ways. Because of Italy’s post-colonial relationship with Africa and Eastern Europe, the issue of cross-cultural tolerance between these regions is highly publicized and frequently written about by Italian scholars. Italy’s cultural relationship with China, and East Asia more generally, is less concretely defined. The Italian citizenry’s relationship with the Chinese population living in large cities is currently at an impasse. Because locals fear the rise of money laundering and organized crime, Chinese merchants and garment manufacturers living in large cities such as Rome, Milan and Prato are the targets of hate crimes and police raids. Certainly, migrant cinema of all varieties must continue to be recognized and discussed by Italian film scholars, and African-Italian cinema is no exception. But the silence surrounding Italian representations of East Asian
populations is palpable. Meanwhile, the Sino-Italian, as a new genre of hybrid, transnational cinema, is still in the process of emerging.

Many current film scholars, myself included, struggle to envision a future for Italian cinema and Italian cinema studies as it becomes increasingly unfashionable to limit oneself to canons or specific “national cinema(s).” Italian film scholar Millicent Marcus has commented, “…film has come to replace literature as the venue for the enactment of the Italian national self” (2007, 268). Italy’s national identity, in other words, is in a constant process of reconstruction and renewal. In her book *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz*, Marcus looks at films that expose the difficulties of constructing an Italian national identity in the wake of Mussolini’s regime and the Holocaust. She argues that the neo-realist and subsequent realists confronted unresolved social issues by using the movie screen as a “collective sounding board” for Italians to come to terms with their conflicted identities (15). Marcus’s description of Italian cinema as a “collective sounding board” rests on the broader assumption that film has the potential to reflect the collective consciousness of a nation. Furthermore, Marcus’ argument, namely that ruptures of silence in Italian film are manifestations of Freudian mourning (2007, 17), implies that films function like human subjects. I would rather not take either of these assumptions for granted.

Instead of looking insularly, one might take a different approach and ask, how does Italian cinema fit into the broader “picture” of world cinema? How do marginalized, immigrant filmmakers or actors fit into the Italian national story? In an effort to answer these questions, some scholars have shifted their focus away from “canonical” movements (e.g. neo-realism) to Italian migrant cinema. Graziella Parati, who writes on films made by African and Eastern European-Italians, observes that despite the efforts of a few lone
scholars: “...it is still a difficult task to find a consistent body of theoretical work in the Italian context that would help interpret the relationship between migrant and native cultures” (2005, 105). Parati focuses on several examples of African and Eastern European-Italian films—Rachid Benhadj’s *L’albero dei destini* (1997), Saidu Moussa Ba’s *Waalo fendo* (1997), and Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994)—noting that these particular films provide more nuanced representations of their protagonists. In films such as these, argues Parati, Italian immigrant identity is explored from an inside perspective, the space between countries and borders becomes visible, and characters are not objectified or exoticized. In Amelio’s *Lamerica*, for example, the final scene takes place on a boat on the waters between Albania and Italy. Unfortunately, concludes Parati, films that represent Italy from a transnational perspective are not circulated widely enough to have much of an impact on the average Italian household (2005, 141).

The prevalence of anti-African sentiment in Italy is a recognized problem among Italian studies scholars. Chandra Harris, in her article, “*Nero Su Bianco*, The Africanist Presence in Twentieth-Century Italy and Its Cinematic Representations,” notes that Italian Southerners are derogatorily referred to as *marrocchini* (Moroccans) by their Northern compatriots (2001, 284). Pasquale Verdicchino, in “Bound by Distance, Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora,” argues that Northern Italians continue to view the South as a colony (98). In fact, even today, one of the largest racist organizations in Italy is the political party the *Lega Nord* (Northern League). In addition to holding extreme anti-immigration views, the *Lega Nord* seeks separation from the South, which they view as nothing more than a “bridge to Africa” (O’Healy 2007, 39). Aine O’Healy, in her essay,
“Border Traffic, Reimagining the Voyage to Italy” notes that Italy has a relatively weak sense of national identity:

…thanks to late unification, different regional histories of domination by external powers, intractable economic disparities between north and south, and a tradition of strong provincial or regional loyalties over a sense of national belonging. (2007, 39)

In other words, because of an overall lack of national loyalty among the population, Italian media output is carefully manipulated to create a false sense that a unified front exists. It might therefore make sense that Italian filmmakers have been slow to produce transnational films.111

Italian cinema has always been strongly linked to Italian national identity. In the early 1920s, Mussolini proclaimed the cinema to be the regimes’ “most powerful weapon” (Ben-Ghiat 2001, 71). During that same era, screenplay writer Corrado Pavolini urged the Italian film industry to develop their own “national cinematographic consciousness” in order to better compete with Germany and America (2001, 73). As Ruth Ben-Ghiat notes in her book Fascist Modernities, Italy 1922-1945, the early Italian film industry was under immense pressure to keep up with Hollywood so that the capital would continue to flow (2001, 73). In 1927, the Fascist regime passed a law requiring movie theaters to dedicate one-tenth of all programming to Italian productions. Less than ten years later in 1934, the Direzione Generale di Cinematografia was established to give Italian officials newfound veto power in the actual filmmaking process (2001, 90).112 The first incarnations of Italian realism (pre-neo-realism) featured non-professional actors and location shots of identifiable places so that the Italian audience would identify and feel a collective sense of “national resonance” (2001, 76). Though not an example of realism, Giovanni Pastone’s silent film
Cabiria (1914), a film that glorifies colonialism and slavery in the North African Ottoman provinces, is still considered an early Italian cinema masterpiece.\textsuperscript{113}

Derek Duncan, echoing Ben-Ghiat’s arguments, comments that despite the move toward transnationalism (in film studies as a broader category), “Cinema in Italy has been seen as the cultural form in which national identity is most securely located” (2008, 211). Through detailed analyses of the portrayal of Albanian migrants in contemporary Italian cinema,\textsuperscript{114} Duncan seeks to define how ethnic minorities are represented. He asks us to consider, do these particular films propagate a continuation of Fascist-era racialized thinking, thinly disguised as an exploration into the “multicultural”? Or do these films sincerely attempt to invite the Italian viewership to accompany them on a fanciful exploration into the lives of other cultures? These are questions that Duncan is not able to answer fully in the context of this one article, but they are essential. Arriving at a similar but harsher conclusion than Duncan, I argue for the former, more malignant interpretation: despite exceptions to the rule, mainstream “multicultural cinema” in Italy still tends to propagate racialized thinking. While I view Antonioni’s Chung Kuo and Giagni’s Un cinese as examples of Sino-Italian cinema that are relatively sophisticated and well-meaning yet slightly askew, some Sino-Italian films are embarrassingly unsophisticated. In the section that follows, I delineate clear examples of films that can be labeled “Sino-Italian” by any broad definition of the term. Yet because these films are so “backward,” they manage only to question the responsibility of every self-proclaimed cross-cultural filmmaker.
Walking in Reverse

Quite remarkably, one of the more unfortunate examples of “multi-cultural” cinema to be released in Italy in recent years was co-written by Gianfranco Giagni and the subject of Un cinese a Roma himself, Li Xiangyang. The film, Questa notte è ancora nostra (This Night is Still Ours), was directed by Paolo Genovese and Luca Miniero and was released in 2008. In addition to this film, Li served as a co-writer for (and bit-part actor in) Silvio Soldini’s Agata e la tempesta (2004), which I discuss later in the chapter, and Ermanno Olmi’s Cantando dietro paraventi (Singing Behind Screens) (2003). Of course, there are questions that arise once we become aware of these overlapping connections and collaborations between this close-knit group of writers, directors and actors in the Italian film industry. Is this a testament to the scarcity of Italian screenwriters who are willing or able to work on multi-cultural films? These instances of collaboration are certainly not indicative of anything deeper on their own. The problem arises when we begin to recognize the Orientalist nature of the Sino-Italian films that are being produced.

The plot of Questa notte adheres to a standard romantic comedy formula, a twenty-something Roman heartthrob named Massimo (Nicolas Vaparidis) meets and falls in love with Jing (Valentina Izumi), a second-generation “Chinese” woman. Though Massimo works for a funeral parlor owned by his father, he is passionate about singing, and dreams of “making it big” with his rock band. When Massimo’s band manager suggests that he find a Chinese singer to join the band and perform a song called “Oriental Eyes” (Occhi Orientali) alongside him, he chooses Jing. Unfortunately, Jing’s “hyper-traditional” (ipertradizionalisti) parents have already promised Jing’s hand in marriage to the nephew of a businessman to whom they are indebted. After much turmoil, and some bad jokes about
Italians attempting to use chopsticks, Jing and Massimo finally, unsurprisingly, come together despite the cultural barriers that stand in their way.

Given that the film was co-produced by Buena Vista International, a subsidiary of Disney,\(^{116}\) it is hardly surprising that the plot is simplistic and the characters stereotypical. Yet, because there is a sinister undercurrent to the film’s message, the film cannot be simply brushed aside and labeled a mediocre, innocuous romantic comedy. The decision to cast a Japanese-Italian actress in the role of Jing does not necessarily imply racism on the part of the filmmakers, though it does speak to a disinterest in accuracy.\(^{117}\) Izumi’s mixed-race features match traditional conceptions of both European and Asian beauty. As a second-generation Chinese-Italian woman, Jing has been thoroughly “italianized;” she relates to, identifies herself as, and favors Italian culture. Jing finds her parents’ traditional customs to be annoying and constricting, and she writhes at the notion of being forced to marry someone she does not love. Because she views herself as a “modern Italian woman,” she finds her parents’ wariness of Massimo to be “racist,” and tells them so in one particularly cringe-worthy scene.

While there is nothing necessarily offensive, inherently, about the clichéd storyline, the sinister thematic aspects lie in the representations of these characters within the film. Like many second-generation children, Jing has no desire to explore her “Chineseness,” and is in fact eager to shed all of her associations with her parents, and hence with China. Yet despite her fiery disposition, Jing is content in her role as an “exotic” object to be consumed by the Italian male gaze. Through her subjectivity, therefore, the film viewer is invited to share this sense that “China” and Chinese masculinity—as if these were monolithic units—represent reactionary values and old-style greed (the Chinese businessman drives a sports car
and wears a fancy suit). “Italy” and Italian masculinity meanwhile, claims the role of modernity, progress, and freedom (as a “rocker,” Massimo’s style is laid back and shabby yet stylish). Lest we suppose that Jing is meant to be viewed by her Italian audience as an independent, modern woman who does not deserve objectification, we might then recall the main tagline from the film, “Il culo non canta ma conta” (the ass doesn’t sing, but it counts).

Fig. 8: Massimo and Jing singing “Occhi Orientali”.

Equally disturbing perhaps, are the Italian critics’ reactions to the film. Although several critics comment on the cultural inaccuracies within the film, none of them take issue with the film’s portrayal of “Chineseness.” One critic states, “L’incontro/scontro di culture e affrontato superficialmente ma senza volgarità” (the meeting/struggle between cultures is confronted superficially but without vulgarity). Another critic remarks that even though the film’s plot is rather banal, “Non abbia l’ambizione di voler descrivere verosimilmente la comunità cinese nella Capitale” (it does not intend to describe realistically the Chinese community in [Rome] the Capital). Although it is certainly true that the filmmakers had no
intent to portray real-life Chinese-Italian communities in Rome, this fact raises many further questions. What does this lack of desire to represent real-life Chinese populations living in Rome suggest about the writers and directors (Giagni in particular), and does this one instance of ignorance suggest something greater about contemporary Italian cinema? We cannot dismiss *Questa notte* as an innocuous example of commercial cinema, and moreover, I propose that these negative and potentially harmful cultural stereotypes constantly reappear within contemporary Italian cinema. In order for multicultural cinema to move toward the Sino-Italian and shed itself of Orientalist tendencies, these background cultural assumptions need to be pushed into the forefront and carefully analyzed.

There is, in fact, a disturbing proliferation of Orientalist films to be found in the “landscape” of contemporary Italian cinema. Although released nearly a decade ago, Carlo Verdone’s *C’era un cinese in coma* (2000) remains a particularly offensive example of this unfortunate trend. Verdone stars as an agent representing comedians who falls into hard times after his best actor is injured in a car accident. In need of a quick replacement, Verdone’s character hires his driver to fill in for the actor at a comedy club. Despite its title, the film has little to do with the Chinese-Italian community; in fact, the title refers to an old racist joke (*una barzalletta*). In the final scene of the film, Verdone recounts the entire joke straight into the camera with all of the relevant “effects”, when impersonating the Chinese man, he shifts his voice to an exaggerated high-pitched squeal, and pulls back his eyes with his fingers. Despite the fact that Verdone recounts the joke in the context of an otherwise bittersweet final scene, the stereotype of the effeminate, difficult-to-understand, obtuse Chinese man remains palpably intact.
Li Xiangyang: Chinese Actor Living in Italy

In an effort to shift the national discourse away from racial and ethnic stereotypes, Gianfranco Giagni produced the documentary *Un cinese a Roma* in 2004. Li, a relatively successful actor and screenwriter, is attempting to find a new apartment because his landlady is planning to sell the building. Unfortunately, Li runs into a significant amount of trouble attempting to find any Italian landlords who are willing to lease to him, simply because he is a “foreigner.” The film highlights the lingering discrimination that continues to exist in modern-day Rome (and Italy in general perhaps), against Chinese immigrants. Even though Li is highly respected by other Chinese-Italians living around Rome, and by certain Chinese Mainland media outlets, he is barely recognized by or even offered basic civil liberties from his Roman compatriots. There is a stark contrast between how Li is viewed by the Chinese immigrant population and how he is viewed by the Italians; Giagni’s film therefore serves as a testament to this contrast in attitudes.

Giagni clearly empathizes with Li, and the film’s audience is meant to emphasize with him as well. By shooting the film predominantly from Li’s perspective, Giagni invites his Italian audience to ponder the existence of the minority “Other” in their own everyday lives. This technique fits with Ponzanesi’s paradigm of “outlandish cinema;” by shifting perspectives, the audience is forced to rethink their own position in relation to Li’s. In this type of thought-provoking cinema, as Ponzanesi observes, “…there are extended amounts of alienation in [the subject’s] attempt to pass as normal” (2005, 271). These moments of alienation should make the audience uncomfortable, and, if nothing else, encourage non-complacency.
Unfortunately, the film does not encourage real action against discrimination on the part of Italian citizens.\textsuperscript{122} Furthermore, because Giagni is an “Italian native” who has chosen to represent the lives of the Chinese population of Rome, the film cannot be said labeled true “migrant cinema” according to Duncan’s definition.\textsuperscript{123} Although it is evident that this film project was originally set in motion because of Giagni’s fascination with Chinese-Italian culture, the synopsis that accompanies the film seems only to reinforce Duncan’s point:

\begin{quote}
Tra le varie comunità quella dei cinesi che vivono in Italia ha fama di essere la più misteriosa…eppure guardando un po’ altre la superficie scopriamo che italiani e cinesi si somigliano più di quanto si immagini…\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

Clearly this synopsis or “tagline” is aimed at the Italian, not the Chinese, community. Even while Giagni purports to delve into the lives of the Chinese population in Rome so that racist stereotypes can be examined,\textsuperscript{125} the implication of the tagline tells a different story. The Chinese communities living in Italy are known for being “mysterious,” but only among those who are not a part of it. The tagline offers hope for those “outsiders” (i.e. the “native Italians”) to the Chinese community, who are, in reality, the “insiders,” since they live in the center of Rome and not on the extreme peripheries. The tagline promises that, with the help of this film, the Italian mainstream can now delve into the mysterious world of Chinese culture and learn, perhaps, that Chinese and Italians are not so different from one another after all. This sentiment assumes, of course, that mainstream Italian viewers will come to the film \textit{with} these preconceived notions about Chinese culture. Again, this speaks to Ponzanesi’s concern that although “outlandish cinema” aims at egalitarianism and inclusiveness, it often does not aim high enough (2005, 278).
Giagni, in an interview about the film, claims that he is one of the first filmmakers to document the Chinese community in Rome, because, “È una delle più misteriose, sconosciute, ed impermeabili comunità straniere in Italia” (It is one of the most mysterious, unknown, and impermeable foreign communities in Italy). It is for this reason that Giagni felt motivated to document the Chinese-Italian community from an insider’s perspective. Moreover, according to the director, Li fits the profile of a Chinese “intellectual,” living his life in a “concrete, influential way” (un modo concreto...influente). It is unclear what Giagni means precisely by this statement. Presumably, Giagni determined that Li would be an interesting subject for a film about Chinese immigrants living in Rome because of Li’s intellectual and artistic leanings. As it turns out, Li is an immensely interesting subject, though my reasoning for stating this differs, perhaps, from Giagni’s. Li Xiangyang stands at the edge of a seemingly bottomless “rabbit hole” that leads down into the depths of racism and discrimination that continue to exist in Italian cinematic discourse.

As it turns out, and as Giagni’s film explains, Li appeared as a bit player in several major Italian films over the course of the last decade. One of the most noteworthy of these films was Agata e la tempesta (2004), which was directed by the well-known and well-respected Italian director Silvio Soldini. Li’s “big scene” in Soldini’s film (Giagni shows a clip of it) lasts for about two minutes, and comes toward the end of the rather lengthy two-hour film. Li plays the role of a stereotypical “Chinese mystic” who is attempting to help Agata (Licia Maglietta) release her pent-up anxiety and prepare her to live “happily ever after” with her younger Italian boyfriend. Agata wants to know, in particular, why her presence seems to cause lights to flicker and computers to malfunction. Li’s character advises...
Agata that she is on the verge of transformation, and that her inner energy is looking for a means of escape:

Tu donna speciale...il punto di grande cambio...come brucco a farfalla. Energia cerca uscita...quando tanta energia, tante uscite...importante lasciare sempre porta aperta...problemi computer, la mia risposta è, le guanti a gomma.127

Although this scene works from a comedic standpoint, and Li plays his small role admirably, his character’s monologue sounds like a pastiche of clichéd fortune cookie lines. Like most Western stereotypical renditions of native Chinese speakers attempting to speak English, Li’s character speaks only in fragments, he omits verbs, articles, and prepositions, and his accent would be considered strong to most Italians. The monologue becomes exponentially more disturbing when we realize that Li likely wrote these lines for himself. Not only has he been cast to fit the role of the Confucian philosopher or “healer,” but moreover, he helped create the role that he embodies. Stemming from the likes of Charlie Chan, Li’s character fits the archetype of the benevolent, emasculated Asian male.128 As an asexual pawn in Agata’s life, Li is used by Agata to obtain what she truly wants, the love of an Italian man.

In the 1970s, Edward Said stated that, “Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient.” According to Said, this same Orientalism shifted from Britain and France to the United States after World War II (Said 2000, 4). I contend that twenty-first century examples of Sino-Italian cinema have established the need to re-examine Orientalism in Italy as we simultaneously continue to examine instances of Orientalism in Britain, France and the U.S. The problem lies not only in the stereotypical images and accompanying insensitive discourse, but perhaps more seriously, in the lack of attention given to these issues by both non-academic and academic
critics of contemporary Italian film.129 More specifically, although there are a large number of academic articles written by Italian film scholars on Silvio Soldini’s films, these articles rarely mention Soldini’s portrayals of ethnic minorities.

One particularly clear example of this trend toward “ethnic minority blindness” can be found in Bernadette Luciano’s article, “Rethinking Identity in the Cinema of Silvio Soldini.”130 Although Luciano does not discuss Agata, she does spend a great deal of time analyzing Soldini’s Pane e tulipani (2000), a quasi-prequel to Agata, starring Licia Maglietta as the idealized, almost fetishized “older” woman. As in Agata, Maglietta becomes the unrelenting object of our gaze in this film. Although Maglietta’s character, Rosalba, is cast as an independent, modern woman, Soldini’s obvious fascination with the actress tends to force her into a more-passive-than-active subject position. Maglietta’s presence in both Pane e tulipani and Agata ring true with director Tsai Ming-liang’s131 observation that, as a director, “It is difficult for me to move my camera away from [my favorite actor’s] face. Every director has a face that they like to look at.”132 Tsai also keenly observed that a director chooses a “favorite face” not solely for the purposes of audience consumption, but also for selfish reasons, particularly in the realm of art-house cinema. This directorial selfishness is unashamedly apparent in Agata, and similarly, I find Luciano’s article on the film to exhibit a one-sided mode of analysis.

Luciano’s article begins on a reasonable enough note, “In Italy,” she states, “national and cultural identities have recently been deeply altered by new migration patterns and by the implications of closer economic and political union in Europe” (2002, 341). There is nothing particularly controversial about this claim because it is not very specific, though her definition of “migrants” is not clearly stated. Luciano continues by summarizing, as I have,
the current skepticism surrounding the notion of national cinema, and the impossibility of locating the nation-state within predefined boundaries (2002, 341).

Yet, Luciano’s argument begins to drift back into the traps that she attempts to avoid. Using Rosi Braidotti’s conceptual framework, she argues that identity can be defined by mobility, one is either a nomad, an exile or a migrant. Luciano argues that Maglietta’s character (Rosalba) falls into the nomad category (2002, 345). Rosalba, according to Luciano, is nomadic because she has the means to travel. She also has the freedom; Rosalba can choose where and when she wants to travel. On the other hand, Luciano argues that Fernando, the character that Rosalba meets and falls in love with in Venice, falls into the migrant category. Fernando is a migrant, she says, because he has been forced to leave his homeland (Iceland) for a crime of passion that he committed. In this sense, Fernando has no choice about where and when he travels. “Ironically,” comments Luciano:

…rather than an embodiment of other cultures, Fernando has appropriated the values of a disappearing Italian culture. Speaking in the literary language of Ariosto...he represents the bygone Italian glory of the Renaissance. (2002, 346)

Luciano’s categorizations, while perhaps fitting in the context of her argument, miss an essential point. Fernando, insofar as he is a “migrant,” embodies Italian culture more than he does Icelandic culture within the context of this film. By most standards, he resembles an archetypical European, Caucasian male, meaning that he could easily be mistaken for an “Italian” if the film did not tell us otherwise. If Fernando can be labeled a “migrant” then he was a safe choice for the role. Fernando’s function within the narrative is to help Rosalba understand and appreciate her own culture more deeply, not Icelandic culture, nor any other for that matter. It is a mistake not to take into account the fact that Soldini’s films were
financed by Italy’s Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali for a reason. The Ministry finances films that it feels will encourage tourism in Italy among Italian natives and foreigners alike. Agata e la tempesta, the film that Li appears in, is no exception to the rule.

For these reasons, Luciano’s conclusion that, “Soldini carefully constructs characters and landscapes which allow us to explore the notion of contemporary identity” (2002, 350) rings falsely. Rather, Soldini constructs people, situations, and places that allow us to explore the notion of Italian identity. If Fernando is a “migrant” in Pane e tulipani, then who is Li’s character in Agata? Is he an exile, a migrant, or a nomad? Based on Luciano’s conception of migration, it appears that Li’s character does not fit into Braidotti’s paradigm at all. Li’s function as a character within Soldini’s film has been ignored, and the notion of “true” migration—i.e. migration that does not justify the existence of other Italians—has been noticeably overlooked.

Li Xiangyang: Chinese subject in an Italian film

As the protagonist and focus of Giagni’s documentary, Li is finally given the opportunity to “play himself” and share his day-to-day routine with an Italian audience. No longer just a bit-part actor in a Soldini film, Li becomes a three-dimensional human being, forced by circumstance to live in the discriminatory society that is modern-day Rome. His first words to the camera, however, are obviously scripted, “Mi chiamo Li Xiangyang. Vengo da Pekino. La Cina. Vivo ora a Roma” (My name is Li Xiangyang. I come from Beijing, China. Now I live in Rome). This brief introduction is followed by a shot of a (presumably) Chinese man singing loudly and operatically in the Piazza Vittorio. The melody he is
singing, *Santa Lucia*, is instantly recognizable to those familiar with traditional Italian melodies or opera singers.

The song *Santa Lucia* was, in fact, one of the first Neopolitan songs to be transcribed from dialect (*napuletano*) into Italian in the mid 19th Century.\(^{134}\) The lyrics of the first verse describe a beautiful, peaceful spot on the Neopolitan Bay in the town of Santa Lucia:

\[
\textit{Sul mare luccica, l’astro d’argento} \\
\textit{Placida è l’onda, prospero è il vento} \\
\textit{Venite all’agile barchetta mia,} \\
\textit{Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia.}^{135}
\]

The song that the Chinese man sings in Piazza Vittorio, however, is sung in Mandarin, though the lyrics are more or less transcribed from the Italian.\(^{136}\) The peaceful calmness of the songs’ original lyrics seem lost in this particular Mandarin version; this man is singing *Santa Lucia* for handouts, attention, or both. Yet he has adopted the song for his own purposes, singing it proudly in his own language, in this sense announcing his refusal to conform to Italian tradition or expectation. He has reclaimed and reinterpreted *Santa Lucia* for the Chinese-Italians living in Rome, simultaneously reemphasizing its original function as a “song of the people.”

In this initial scene, Giagni is clearly if unwittingly attempting to introduce his (mainly Italian) audience to the notion of Chinese-Italian cultural fusion in the most direct way possible. Li speaks directly to the camera in the style of a “confession room” in a reality show; he is the protagonist of this film; the events that unfold are mediated through Li’s perspective. But Giagni’s directorial hand is not entirely invisible. Because he chooses to break up the film into “chapters” or sections labeled with explanatory titles, he seems to assume that for most Italians, this film will serve as a learning, mind-expanding experience.
By documenting Li’s experiences as an everyday citizen struggling to exist in an urban environment that views him as a perpetual outsider, hence placing Li in the center role as “Chinese-Italian subject,” Giagni attempts to cultivate Sino-Italian cinematic fusion. Despite his ambitious intentions, however, the director does not manage to shed the influences of his own Italian subjectivity when presenting Li Xiangyang to his audience. The problem lies, potentially, in the fact that Giagni himself does not fit into the category of “nomadic subject.”

Braidotti’s concept of the “nomadic subject,” though it relies too heavily for my purposes on metaphoric notions of migration, aptly describes the dynamics at work within this documentary. In her introduction to Nomadic Subjects, she explains:

“Though the image of ‘nomadic subjects’ is inspired by the experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior….it is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling. (1994, 5)

Fundamentally, Giagni’s film functions as an exposition of the competing urges to remain nomadic while simultaneously realizing the necessity to conform to socially coded modes of thought and behavior. Although Li wants to be given the same rights as any other Italian citizen—the right to live where he wants, the right to be treated respectfully—he does not desire to be fully Italianized to such an extent that his Chinese identity would be lost.

In one particular scene, for example, Li is conversing with an Italian female friend, who suggests to him that he “deserves something better” than to live with “strangers” in his apartment. Even though his friend is attempting to help Li lead a better life, Li himself does not see his situation in the same negative light. Li views his roommates as thoughtful people with livelihoods, unique identities, and a willingness to share food with him and pool
“non chiamarli stranieri” (don’t call them strangers) he begs her. Li’s refusal to view his Chinese roommates as strangers resonates with Braidotti’s notion of the critical consciousness refusing to conform to conventional modes of thinking. In this case, Li remains a “nomadic subject” by Braidotti’s definition by rejecting the Italian notion that cohabitation with “strangers” or foreigners equates to living in a less than ideal environment. In another sense, by rejecting Italian conventions, Li is reinforcing his own cultural identity. Although his Italian friends view him as a sort of self-sacrificing martyr, Li views himself as an average man who follows the general laws of Daoism, “When there is no more light in the East, look to the West. When the North is black, look to the South.” Li explains that he almost never shows anger because, for him, amenability is an essential quality. While Italians might view his personality as “weak” or passive, Li views his non-combative attitude as a virtue.

Like the street performer singing Santa Lucia, Li adapts himself to Italian culture while simultaneously maintaining his Chinese identity. The lyrics of Santa Lucia, though calming and serene, also express a desire to escape from land and literally sail away. Rather than debark his boat and join his friends on land, the sailor who presumably sings Santa Lucia invites his friends to join him on his boat. The sailor has no desire to be land bound because he finds a life fueled by the wind and the waves more appealing. In a similar sense, Li and the street performer share the same nomadic tendencies both with each other and with the sailor off the shores of Santa Lucia. As the director of this documentary, Giagni does well to highlight Li’s nomadism as it relates to his life philosophy. Unlike many native-born Italians, Li is not tethered to a fixed location, career, or person. Even though he is nearly fifty years old, he is not married, nor does he particularly want to be.
Despite Giagni’s obvious genuine interest in Li’s life, he provides us only with patchy information about the out-of-work actor’s real day-to-day existence. We are led to presume that Li floats between acting jobs and screenwriting gigs, even though we hardly ever see him working in this documentary. Whenever Giagni’s camera follows Li, he is shown browsing in Chinese-owned stores, chatting with friends, wandering the streets, or attempting to find an apartment. Yet it is difficult to believe that Li spends most of his time wandering the streets as a carefree flâneur once the documentary cameras have been shut off. Furthermore, there is something inauthentic and even disturbing about the manner in which Giagni presents his protagonist’s existence.

Fig. 9: Li Xiangyang practicing Tai Chi.

Because the film is constantly broken up into titled “Chapters” by scene changers (dancers dressed in traditional Chinese garb)—hence literally staged—the overall sense of reality is lost. In fact, most of the scenes in the film appear to be staged, if not at least planned in advance. It does not seem likely, for instance, that Li would just happen to encounter his friends wherever he wanders in Rome, nor that Giagni’s camera would just
happen to catch all of the philosophical, thought-provoking conversations about life that Li and his friends engage in throughout the film. Moreover, unfortunately, Li’s other Chinese-Italians “friends” are not particularly likeable people. Lim, supposedly one of Li’s closest friends, comes off as arrogant, pretentious, and disparaging towards Li. Lim harasses Li for not being married, and asks him if he is therefore homosexual. Li, clearly not very amused with this line of questioning responds, “Mi prendi in giro!” (you’re making fun of me). Lim constantly attempts to distinguish and separate himself from Li, making statements to the camera such as, “We don’t think alike even though we are both Oriental,” “he can act like a retarded hippy moralist,” and “I’m managing my existence in a foreign country. So is Li. That is the only thing we have in common.” Sometimes the comments are made directly in front of Li. At one point, for example, Lim’s young Italian wife states matter-of-factly to the camera as Li sits in the room, “Lim just looks Oriental. He doesn’t act it,” as if “acting Oriental” were, first of all, an identifiable mode of behavior, and secondly, that this mode of behavior would be unappealing if her husband exhibited it. One gets the feeling from watching these people speak that they are the ones dealing with a significant amount of insecurity.

Li’s other “featured friend” is an aspiring Chinese-Italian actor who, for lack of other work, hosts traditional Chinese wedding ceremonies in Rome. “It’s not so easy to become an actor,” Li advises his friend, “and you don’t speak [Italian] very well.” In other words, Li knows that if you cannot speak the language well enough—i.e. fit into the mold that the Italians lay out for foreigners to fit into—you cannot be successful. Li knows this because he functions as an example of the “happy medium” (he is the only Chinese-Italian in the film who has enough courage to stand up for himself, but more importantly, knows when to be
quiet). An Italian audience watching this film will not feel threatened by Li because he appears harmless and essentially tells his Chinese-Italian friends to simmer down and stop calling attention to themselves. Although Li is certainly a likeable fellow, he is hardly intent on changing the status quo; he does not act to counter the treatment that he or any other “foreigner” receives as a consequence of his or her so-called Otherness. Giagni is all too keen to show Li explaining his pacifist philosophy as a means to account for his passive demeanor. For this reason, as well as those previously elaborated upon, this film more is more depressing than uplifting, despite Giagni’s best efforts to the contrary.

I return once more to Said, who notes in his Introduction to *Orientalism*:

> In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. (2000, 7, his emphasis)

This notion of “positional superiority” is essential to my analysis and subsequent conclusions regarding Giagni’s documentary. It is clear that certain people in the film, such as Lim’s wife and even Lim himself, are prone to view Chinese-Italians from a Western hegemonic perspective. Giagni lingers on these “characters” for quite a while in an effort, perhaps, to record their snobbery for all to see. Yet, at the same time, Giagni never relinquishes his own positional superiority, (to use Said’s term), which allows him to remain in a different yet equally insidious hegemonic position. By placing himself in the position of the invisible “documenter of reality,” he implicitly promises his viewership an unbiased perspective on Li’s life. Unfortunately, because the majority of scenes within the film appear staged, Giagni never allows his “relative upper hand” to be taken away. Fundamentally, therefore, *Un cinese a Roma* cannot be classified as a truly bilateral Sino-Italian film, and in fact, remains
thoroughly Italian in all the ways that matter most, this is a documentary by an Italian
director, designed for an Italian viewership.

Contemporary examples of Sinoitalian films by Chinese filmmakers, especially those
of the Sixth Generation such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Lou Ye, are telling, but in
an entirely different way. The term “Sixth Generation filmmaker”, in the context of
contemporary Chinese cinema, is used by critics and scholars to refer to a set of directors
who share certain similarities. In general, these are filmmakers who grew up in the 1980s,
experienced the Tiananmen Square incident, and are wary of state censorship. Because the
films by these directors are usually produced without the support of the Chinese government,
they are made quickly and without expensive equipment. It has been noted that the cinematic
style of the Sixth Generation—the preference for handheld cameras, a nonlinear narrative,
and a documentary-like feel—has much in common with Italian neorealism, Antonioni, and
the French New Wave. Jia Zhangke in particular has cited French New Wave director
Robert Bresson as one of his central influences.

Other filmmakers such as Wang Xiaoshuai are more reluctant to cite specific
influences. In 2001, Wang directed a film entitled *Beijing Bicycle* (Shí qī suì de dān chē),
which is thematically similar to Vittorio De Sica’s Italian neo-realist film *Bicycle Thief*. In
both stories, a man from the country comes to the “big city” (in DeSica’s film it is Rome) to
seek work. On the first day of the job, the bike that the man is utterly dependent on, is stolen
by a thief. Both films highlight the unjust disparities that exist between socio-economic
classes in the context of modern urban life.

Interestingly, Wang denies that there is a relationship between his film and DeSica’s,
despite his acknowledgement that DeSica’s film is “very, very famous,” and that some
people who were working for him at the time were worried about “stealing” from it. While it is unclear why Wang did not wish to associate himself with Italian neo-realism in this particular interview, Wang is known for his love of Italy—especially as a tourist destination. In 2006, in fact, Wang traveled to Tuscany to shoot a documentary entitled “Tuscany Dream,” which, according to him, was made to “sell” Italy to potential Chinese tourists. In an interview about the film, an Italian critic asks him if he knows about the large Chinese population living in Tuscany. In response, Wang makes the surprising comment that he would like to meet the Chinese population living in Tuscany for personal reasons, but not for the purposes of the film. He continues (my translation): “…the film is about Italy, not about the Chinese living abroad. Furthermore, you have to understand that within the Chinese emigration phenomenon, Italy is a drop in the bucket. Those that dream of emigrating think of the U.S., Canada, Australia. The Chinese want to come here—to Italy—on vacation.”

In other words, Wang wants to shoot a film in Italy for “export purposes”—he has no particular interest in filming the Chinese-Italian population that permanently resides there. In a sense, therefore, Tuscany Dreams mirrors Antonioni’s Chung Kuo, and perhaps Wang cannot be blamed for his apparent disinterest in Chinese expatriates. Antonioni, after all, was most certainly not interested in seeking out other Italians while he was in China.

Conclusions

The preceding examples—films about Italy that are directed by Chinese filmmakers—are difficult to categorize as perfectly “Sino-Italian,” but not for the same reasons that the stereotypical Italian-made films were. Sixth generation filmmakers like Wang are justified in not wanting to appear as if they are copying from Italian neorealism. In
order to develop a unique cinematic style, they must seek independence from government funding. Moreover, even if contemporary Chinese filmmakers cite the influence of Italian cinema on their work, it is difficult to explain why a film like *Beijing Bicycle* is not simply Sinophone cinema. On the Italian side, how can we differentiate better and worse types of Sino-Italian cinema when so many insensitive examples exist and continue to be produced?

On the one hand, the cross-cultural cinematic exchange that exists between China and Italy is similar in many ways to the exchange that exists between China and France. Because of this similarity, scholars of transnational cinema will certainly have a use for a term to describe this particular phenomenon. On the other hand, the same terminology that can be convenient for descriptive purposes often fails to account for the more superficial variety of “multicultural cinema,” which should, perhaps, be excluded entirely. For instance, although Giagni’s film does not work on a transnational level, it is nevertheless “Sino-Italian” in terms of its subject matter, production, actors, and film crew. Yet Giagni’s film is not exactly “transnational” in the sense that there is little to no reciprocation on the Chinese side—unlike Antonioni, Giagni did not have to get permission to travel to or shoot in China. Li Xiangyang and his friends are provided with “cinematic space” in which they are free to express their feelings of alienation, but ultimately Giagni’s directorial hand remains apparent throughout. My hope is that, despite the particular shortcomings of these films, the possibility for complex, visually sophisticated Sino-Italian cinema will remain real.

But there are many obstacles in the way. The Bossi-Fini Law of 2002, which described immigration as a danger and a “necessary evil” (Blondel and Segatti 2003, 171), concretized the hostility and fear surrounding the issue. On the brighter side, Chinese filmmaker Wang Bing’s *Le Fossé* (The Ditch) (2010) recently garnered attention and acclaim
at the Venice Film Festival. Yet some Italian film critics have dismissed the film, arguing that Bing’s powerful portrayal of Chinese political prisoners in the late 1950s would have been better as a documentary. This same critic wrote that the film festival was *invaso* (invaded) by *film orientali* (Asian films), and that there were as many Chinese people in Bing’s film as there are at *La Grande Muraglia* (The Great Wall). I am afraid that until Italian film critics refrain from describing Chinese filmmakers as “invaders,” misconceptions among the general population will remain prevalent. Most importantly, until the Italian laws and regulations regarding “fundable” filmmaking become more flexible, the unfortunate possibility remains that migrant, hybrid, and transnational cinemas could be relatively voiceless for some time to come.
Chapter 5

Viewing Sinophone Cinema Through a French Theoretical Lens:
Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood For Love*, 2046, and Deleuze’s *Cinema*

It is not an exaggeration . . . to state that Chinese film scholars in the West now have two choices: follow the Orientalist trend and perpetuate a myth that reduces China to rural China, to barren landscape, to exotic rituals, to male impotence or castration, to repressed female sexuality—in short, to all that falls under “primitive passions;” or demystify Western fantasies . . . and redirect attention to other aspects of Chinese cinema. (Zhang 2002, 112)

**Sinophone Cinema and the Asian Art-House Aesthetic**

It would be difficult to begin any discussion of Sinophone cinema without first briefly touching upon an issue that has been a concern to cultural theorists for over two decades: should theoretical analysis and visual studies be focused on and geared toward local realities, global concerns, or both? The complex set of relations that exist in East Asia between local realities and the global context of those realities combines to create an obligatory new *modus operandi* for all Sinophone cinema film scholars. According to Shu-mei Shih (2007), Sinophone visual practices (films, artwork, and so forth) must be situated both locally and globally, because the distribution and reception of these visual art forms are carried out in a global capitalist context. In her book *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, Shih argues that, like “the Francophone” and “the Anglophone,” “the Sinophone” denotes a certain precarious and potentially problematic connection to the “mother-country.” Shih is clearly opposed to what she views as the essentializing and constrictive practice of linking Sinophone studies to “Chinese culture” as such (Shih 2007, 4), even though the term, by its very nature, is inextricably linked to the “mother-country.”
The Sinophone, Shih says, should be thought of as a language-based term as opposed to an ethnicity-based term; this notion should therefore be confined to certain immigrant communities throughout the world, as well as on other locations outside of Mainland China such as Taiwan, Singapore, and British-ruled Hong Kong (2007, 30). Because the field of Sinophone visual studies transforms according to immigrant living conditions and is associated with certain places, Shih calls for a spatially and temporally specific modus operandi. In their book China on Screen: Cinema and Nation, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (2006, 15) argue, somewhat contrarily to Shih, that all Chinese films, whether they are from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the diaspora, and even if they are considered “transnational” in some respects, cannot be discussed without reference to a certain conception of “the national,” a term that the authors rightly recognize as itself problematic. Local cinematic trends and patterns, such as Chinese realism, function within the framework of Chinese national identity. This type of realism is specifically characterized by melodramatic and romantic themes, and has been historically linked to Chinese modernity and nation building. Not until the late twentieth century has this traditional brand of realism been challenged and deconstructed by contemporary Chinese/Sinophone directors (2006, 77).

As Shih rightly notes, we should no longer assume that there must be such things as “purely Chinese cinema texts,” in other words, films that can be analyzed without reference to the Chinese diaspora or the overarching influence of Western cultures. On the other hand, we must heed Berry and Farquhar’s warning not to discredit completely the notion of national identity when discussing a particular cinematic text. It is important to consider the motivation behind certain East Asian directors (like Wong Kar-wai, Tsai Ming-Liang, and Jia Zhangke) who create films that are later exported and admired by Western, particularly
European “art-house,” audiences. Tsai Ming-liang especially, perhaps even more so than Wong Kar-wai, demonstrates his allegiance to French filmmakers (as I discuss at length in Chapter 3). Jia Zhangke’s film *The World* (2004) is centered on the image of the Eiffel Tower as it exists in miniaturized form in a Shanghai theme park.139

Though I have not confronted the notion of “market appeal” directly, certain questions loom in the background, nevertheless: do these directors wish to inaugurate themselves into Western culture, to somehow reach toward “high culture” through their conscious use of the “art-house” aesthetic? Or do these East Asian directors intentionally engage with so-called “Western influences” for the purposes of distribution and marketing concerns—to appeal to consumer-oriented identities functioning within a global capitalist context? I would contend that the artistic integrity of these directors tends to outweigh their desire to appeal to any particular audience. In this chapter, furthermore, I will argue that Wong Kar-wai cites and imitates the European art-house aesthetic only as a means to create his own cinematic niche within the Hong Kong art-house genre.

James Udden (2006, 1) attempts to account for the international appeal of Wong Kar-wai’s directorial style in his article “The Stubborn Persistence of the Local in Wong Kar-wai.” He argues that Wong is somehow both borderless and stubbornly tied to his roots as a Hong Kong filmmaker. I propose that the inherent duality of Wong’s films helps explain their mass popularity both within China and internationally, particularly among the transnational film festival circuit. His films are situated on a border space between East and West, grounded in national identity yet full of export potential. Through his use of intertextuality and citation of European pastiche, Wong simultaneously builds from and shatters Chinese realism as he creates his own form of neo-realism—a neo-realism that
questions the high-low art form divide. Many of his films are filled with similar motifs that can be linked to the idea of Hong Kong as a postcolonial space: missed opportunities, alienation, anxiety, suspension, and the disjunction of time.

**A Case Study: Wong Kar-wai and Deleuze**

As I was working my way through Deleuze’s *Cinema* books, I happened to watch two of Wong Kar-wai’s more recent films, *In the Mood for Love* (*Huayang nianhua*, 2000; heretofore *IMFL*) and *2046* (2004). It struck me that it would be potentially quite fruitful to analyze the Hong Kong cinema of Wong Kar-wai through the French theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze. Both the French writer and the Sinophone filmmaker appear, at the outset, to have striking overlapping ideas and concerns—both welcome the birth of a new form of filmmaking, a kind of neo-realism that calls into question our perception of time as linear and chronological—Deleuze in theory, Wong in practice.

There is a substantial body of scholarship specifically geared towards elucidating, clarifying, and situating Deleuze’s ontology of cinema within a broader theoretical context. The body of work dedicated specifically to engaging Deleuze’s theories with Sinophone or Asian cinemas is, however, small. Although Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli (2000, 2) explore the ways in which Wong Kar-wai, “a model example of the postmodern author,” represents time in his oeuvre, their article does not include any close readings of Wong’s films in relation to Deleuzian notions of cinematic time. Instead, they link Wong Kar-wai’s aesthetics of time and space to “theorists of the postmodern condition” (2000, 2) such as Frederic Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, and Paul Virilio. Jean-Marc Lalanne et al.’s edited volume *Wong Kar-wai* includes detailed discussions of time,
modernity, disappointment, and music in Wong’s earlier films by an assortment of authors including Ackbar Abbas. Janice Tong’s essay on *Chungking Express* directly links Deleuze’s notion of the time-image to Wong’s project in this film. Although Tong notes that Wong’s directorial style seems to perfectly express the Deleuzian time-image (Tong 2003, 51), I believe there is much more to be said on this topic. My aim, throughout this final chapter, is to highlight and reflect upon the specific links that can be found between Deleuze and Wong, particularly in *IMFL* and *2046*.

In order to accomplish this goal, I look mainly at *IMFL* (with a few scenes from *2046*) in relation to the theoretical issues that Deleuze raises about film in terms of movement, space, and time towards the end of *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and throughout *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Deleuze creates a new vocabulary to describe the phenomena he witnesses in various cinematic movements and in the oeuvres of certain well-known directors. It is apparent that Deleuze privileges what he calls the “time-image” over the potentially “less sophisticated” movement-image because the former arises from a crisis within “perception,” “action,” and “affection” images. As he explains in his glossary at the end of *Cinema 1*, these latter terms are adaptations of semiological concepts originally formulated by Charles Sanders Peirce. It is useful to keep in mind that although the movement-image can be divided into these three types of images, the time-image is not defined by such limits. Here are the rough definitions of these terms: (1) perception images: a sort of “ground zero,” what is initially seen or perceived, usually associated with long shots; (2) action images: when space is actualized and affects are realized in “embodied modes of behavior,” usually associated with medium shots; and (3) affection images:
deterritorialized images that focus on expressions of feeling, usually associated with the
close-up.  

Deleuze sees the movement-image as unable to free itself from representation or
subjectivity because time or duration is always psychologically determined by events on the
screen. Because time will always be subordinate to movement within “the regime of
movement-images,” Deleuze believes that this type of cinema fails on a basic level; hence,
the crisis of perception, action and affection images (Trifonova 2004, 135). Deleuze’s
privileging of the time-image can be likened to Wong’s tendency to favor the representation
of bodily movements over dialogue in IMFL and 2046. Like Wong, Deleuze believes that as
the cinematic narrative becomes less and less reliant on what is actually shown by the
camera, as the framing becomes more subjective and as plot devices begin to rely more
heavily on the mental image, film-viewing in general becomes a richer experience.

In IMFL, both Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung’s characters are role-playing even
within the context of the film; their love story is never fully realized because they are
constantly rehearsing for the next “act.” This is an example of how Wong’s films comment
on the very nature of cinema itself. The idea that we, as viewers, can never be sure whether
the action between the two protagonists is occurring in “real time” or is simply a rehearsal is
reminiscent of Deleuze’s idea that film-space cannot and should not ever be fully contained
within the camera frame. Wong’s unconventional use of slow motion, close-ups (particularly
of hands), and musical refrains distinguishes his work from a more traditional style of
filmmaking. As a result, by combining French New Wave and Neo-Realist techniques
(techniques that David Bordwell [1997, 309–409] has defined more generally as “narrative
alternatives to classical filmmaking”), with his own unique style of filmmaking, Wong

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reaches beyond the clichés inherent in the movement-image toward a Deleuzian conception of the time-image.

Deleuze’s reformulation of film analysis into a new mode of viewing the world and as a way of mapping the movement of images in time is no less than remarkable. In his *Cinema* books, Deleuze uses Bergson’s concept of pure perception to redefine the idea of the simulacrum for his own philosophical purposes. For Deleuze, the simulacrum is not an impression or re-creation of life that is secondary or once removed from life, the simulacrum is life. He posits that nothing humans perceive in the world is more than a subjective image. He furthermore posits that there is nothing particularly stable about objects in the world, and that humans stabilize the objects they perceive in order to make sense out of them. When we think, we are maximizing the power of the virtual, because there are only simulations and no “proper images” as Claire Colebrook calls them (2006, 9).

It is easy to see how such a phenomenological view of the world might lend itself well to the study of film. The belief that technology is an invaluable tool for humans is by no means new, but Deleuze views technology as positive for somewhat unconventional reasons. He does not think that a piece of technology like the camera supplements humans, but rather that technology approaches the inhuman: if seeing is a form of technology, then the camera eye allows us access to an alternative way of seeing, time in its pure state, outside the taint of human perception. Consequently, Deleuze entirely rejects the idea that cinema is a manifestation of the human subject. He goes one step farther and calls for a certain type of cinema, one that is powerful enough to shock the film viewer out of a lazy state of mind and toward a world in which human movement does not always map directly onto time. The
powerful cinema of the time-image, as opposed to the cinema of the movement-image, which generally does not move beyond linear movement, executes precisely this move.

What, then, is powerful cinema for Deleuze? In the final chapter of *Cinema 1* entitled “The Crisis of the Action-Image,” Deleuze asks directly: how can cinema move beyond the movement-image, beyond the hackneyed formulas of pre-war Hollywood and toward a rebirth of the image that would do more than parody the old clichés? According to Deleuze:

The new image would . . . not be a bringing to completion of the cinema, but a mutation of it . . . the mental image had not to be content with weaving a set of relations, but had to form a new substance. It had to become truly thought and thinking, even if it had to become “difficult” in order to do this. (1986, 215)

He believes that cinema has already begun to move in this direction, first with the Italian Neo-Realists in 1948, then with the French New Wave in 1958, and finally with the Germans in 1968 (1986, 211). He also credits Hitchcock with being one of the first directors to endorse a move away from the Actor’s Studio method and toward a more neutral style of acting in which the camera is responsible for a significant portion of the explaining. This, for Deleuze, is the essence of the mental image, defined in his glossary as a “pure optical and sound image which breaks the sensory-motor links, overwhelms relations and no longer lets itself be expressed in terms of movement, but opens directly on to time” (1986, 218).

Deleuze gives the example of *Rear Window* (1954) to help demonstrate the term: we are not told through dialogue how Jimmy Stewart’s character broke his leg but instead we are *shown* photos of the racing car and a broken camera in his room. Because the French New Wave often uses similar camera techniques, Deleuze views the movement as “Hitchcocko-Marxian.” As a cinematic trend, in other words, the French New Wave furthers the project
that Hitchcock started, yet branches out even more radically in its use of the mental image. For Deleuze, the mental image fits into the realm of powerful cinema because it allows the audience to envision spaces and temporalities that exist beyond the confines of the screen.

Although his films draw stylistic elements from a multitude of experimental cinematic movements, Wong Kar-wai explicitly acknowledges the influence of the French New Wave on his work. In an interview about *IMFL*, Wong expresses this same idea of limiting the role of dialogue in order to explain the events that occur in the narrative. He claims that he did not want the actors to express themselves verbally, but instead through their bodies, and that this was one of the biggest challenges they faced while making the film. Wong also says that he wanted to place the film-viewer in the position of one of the “neighbors,” meaning that we are never supposed to see anything completely clearly; our vision is always slightly obscured and the actors’ movements are restricted by the space they inhabit. “I think it’s all about suspense,” says Wong, “we learned it from Bresson you know, we can only see a close-up, we cannot see the whole thing. There is so much imagination outside the frame.” This remark is reminiscent of Deleuze’s comment about the notion of a new image that would be centered more on mental operations, what he calls “thought and thinking,” over purely visual cues.

It is clear from the beginning of *IMFL* that Wong prefers to make his “director’s hand more apparent,” (Bordwell 1997, 404) to revise tradition, and to tell a story through inference and clues, rather than by blatantly showing or telling. The spectator must pay close attention to the minor details in order to follow the course of events. Interestingly and somewhat paradoxically, Wong uses a piece of dialogue, *language*, in order to emphasize the importance of non-verbal communication. At one point in the film, Maggie Cheung’s
character states to her boss: “you notice things if you pay attention.” This comment can be understood on three different levels: on the most basic level, she is talking about her boss’ new tie; on a second level, she is acknowledging that her husband is having an affair; and on a third level, Wong is speaking to his audience through Cheungs’ character about the nature of film-viewing. For Wong, a film text is interesting only when it challenges us and compels us to use our sensory perception.

The setting for the film is itself representative of a colonized and hence Western-infused East: British Hong Kong in 1962, in a district composed mostly of Shanghai exiles. The living conditions of these exiles reflect Wong’s own identity as a member of the Chinese diaspora: he moved from Shanghai to Hong Kong with his family at the age of five. In *IMFL*, Su Li-zhen or Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Zhou Mo-wan (Tony Leung) happen to be moving into an apartment building on the same day, she with her husband and he with his wife. This is the first of many so-called “coincidences” that will occur throughout the film and will eventually bring the two protagonists together. The opening scene has a claustrophobic feel to it; the actors are partially hidden behind objects or obscured from view within the crowded, cramped space of the apartment building. The bodies of the moving men further disrupt the space as they continually misplace items and walk directly in between Su and her landlady Mrs. Suen, who are chatting in the hallway. As viewers, we find it difficult to orient ourselves in this chaotic situation. Not only are the boundaries between rooms and hallways barely distinguishable, but the layout of the area in general seems intentionally ambiguous; metonymic, perhaps, for Hong Kong as an ambiguous space itself.

Furthermore, it quickly becomes obvious, as Olivia Khoo (2006, 237) points out, that Wong does not want us to see the faces of Mr. Chan and Mrs. Zhou (the husband and wife of
the protagonists Su and Zhou); instead, we only catch glimpses of the back of their heads and hear their voices. It is not accidental that we never get a clear picture of the two protagonists with their spouses or the spouses, who are having an affair, with each other. Khoo (2006, 239) goes on to suggest that Su and Zhou’s relationship is meticulously planned out: “the contrived ‘coincidences’ and ‘chance’ meetings between Mo-wan and Li-zhen are a rehearsal for some belated reunion or meeting that cannot happen now, or indeed within the frame of the film.”

Khoo’s comment can be expanded upon by observing two things about the relationships that Wong sets up: the cheating spouses are never fully shown in any single shot of the film, and yet we are aware that their affair is actually “occurring” within the overall frame of the film; meanwhile, Su and Zhou constantly appear in shots together, but their affair is never realized within the overall frame of the film. Hence, these two sets of affairs do more than simply parallel or mirror one another; even more interestingly, they are inversely related within the greater context of the cinematic narrative. These are intentional directorial choices, consistent with Wong’s general policy of refusing to spoon-feed his audience and important in terms of the de-personalization of these characters. Because certain basic pieces of visual information are omitted, such as the faces of the cheating spouses, the viewer must conjure up, in a Deleuzian sense, his or her own mental image of them. Deleuze’s (1986, 203) observation on Hitchcock applies to Wong: “He makes relation itself the object of an image.”

At the beginning of Cinema 2: The Time-Image, Deleuze continues his discussion of what he conceives of as a move beyond the dated, pre-World War II movement-image and toward a modern cinema of the time-image. In broad terms, Deleuze believes that film
cannot work the same way after the war because the threat of nuclear annihilation has single-handedly deconstructed the sensory-motor model, i.e. automatic recognition of “concrete” objects through perception (Powell 2007, 23). The same binaries no longer work for the time-image as they did for the action image; the distinctions between the banal and the extreme, and the subjective and the objective become blurry. Hence, a new set of signs needs to be created in order to describe the purely optical and sound model that now takes over; Deleuze refers to these as “opsigns” and “sonsigns,” respectively. As these new visual and auditory cues bombard our senses, and as the distinction between real and imaginary becomes difficult to discern, suddenly, it no longer matters if we are able to discern it (Deleuze 1989, 6–7). Deleuze (1989, 4) describes this type of neo-realism in the following way: “it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it.”

This Deleuzian idea of a floating or suspended action within a dreamlike context perfectly describes Wong’s characteristic usage in IMFL of slow-motion sequences, in which the speed of the film is set in time to a musical refrain. These sequences exemplify Wong’s move toward his own unique brand of neo-realism, a new type of filmmaking that resonates strongly with Deleuze. The refrain, a waltz entitled “Yumeji’s Theme,” was specifically tailored for the film by Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi. Wong has said that he decided to use a waltz for these sequences because he wanted the entire film to conjure up the image of two people dancing (DVD 2002): the first time the refrain occurs, it functions as a foreshadowing of Su and Zhou’s romance, and the sequence does, in fact, resemble a coordinated dance. Remarkably the sequence is actually one long take in which the camera
pans back and forth as Su and Zhou cross each other’s paths, though at the moment they are both “attached” to their respective spouses. The shot begins with a close-up of Su’s hand as she carries a pack of cigarettes, her back to us as she walks through the doorway to the mahjong table. In the next moment, Zhou’s wife walks in (we see only her back); she then greets Su and sits down somewhere out of the frame. Next, Zhou gets up, and we see his face as he makes eye contact with Su and then exits through the same doorway; finally the camera pans back again to show Su nonchalantly touching her husband’s back.

Wong has said that he was inspired by Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) when making this film (Teo 2001, 6), and indeed this sequence evokes the scene in *Vertigo* when Jimmy Stewart’s character sees Kim Novak’s character for the first time—Kim Novak sits at a table with her back to the camera, conversing with her husband, and when she finally turns around both Jimmy Stewart and the film-viewer behold her face for the first time. Bernard Herrmann’s score swells simultaneously with the fetishistic close-up of her profile. In this moment we are the voyeurs; we are meant to fall in love with her in the same moment Jimmy Stewart does. For Zhou and Su in *IMFL*, this is also the first time we really see him seeing *her*; it is a similar moment of infatuation.

In this particular *IMFL* scene (and throughout the film as a whole), the musical score functions much as it does in *Vertigo*. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze comments: “there are perhaps three films which show how we inhabit time, how we move in it, in this form which carries us away, picks us up and enlarges us: Dovzhenko’s *Zvenigora*, Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and Resnais’ *Je t’aime je t’aime*” (82). One might argue that in both Wong’s film and Hitchcock’s, these musical refrains fuse with deliberately slowed-down and prolonged images to create what Deleuze calls “crystal-images.” Deleuze explains his definition of this
phenomenon: in simplified terms, when viewing a “crystal-image,” time appears to split into both present and past, and as the present passes, the past preserves itself (81). D. N.
Rodowick clarifies and expands on Deleuze’s definition: these crystalline images “presuppose a special relationship between perception and memory” (1997, 90), superimpose the actual onto the virtual, and vice versa.

Fig. 10: Falling in love with Maggie Cheung in IMFL (left) and Kim Novak in Vertigo (right).

When we watch the mahjong scene in IMFL, we are carried away by the power of the image as it melds perfectly with the emotional music; the narrative freezes temporarily as this short moment in the lives of these characters appears to become etched in time. Our perception of the events as they are “presently” occurring (the actual) becomes inextricably entangled with our own memories of previous narrative events (the virtual); and the repetitious nature of these musical refrains reinforces the fusion of perception and memory, actual and virtual, in these particular sequences. Suddenly, mundane events such as playing cards, entering and exiting through doorways, or grabbing a pack of cigarettes, seem to take on an entirely new significance. The “crystal-image” is comparable to the famous madeleine scene in Proust’s In Search of Lost Time: when Marcel dips his madeleine into the blossom tea, time seems to split into present and past as memories resurface.
Rey Chow argues that Wong’s use of bodily movements and slow motion in *IMFL* is a way to turn the everyday, ephemeral moment into something more dramatic. She mentions the way Su and Zhou are constantly shown “brushing past each other’s bodies” (*chashen er guo*) in a transitory motion, and how Wong borrows this technique from French New Wave directors of the 1960s: “[Wong] turns such movements into occasions for an alternative experience, that of defamiliarizing the nature of (repetitive, habitual) motion through a manipulation of its cinematic texture and of viewing time” (Chow 2002, 647). In other words, the slow motion sequences in *IMFL* that are accompanied by “Yumeji’s Theme” always mark a temporal fold in the progression of the overall narrative. Though Chow does not explicitly mention Deleuze in this article, the idea that within the time-image the banal becomes significant is pervasive throughout the beginning of *Cinema 2* (Trifonova 2004, 145). For Deleuze, the depiction of daily life in film allows pure optical and sound images, opsigns and sonsigns, to thrive.¹⁵⁰

Another example of an everyday situation turned extraordinary is the scene at the diner in which Su and Zhou realize that they both know about their spouses’ affair. This time, a Spanish Nat King Cole song frames the scene; the song is a reference to Western pop-culture of the time period, and it surrounds the sequence with a nostalgic or sentimental aura. The camera pans from one side of the table to the other, from Su’s profile to Zhou’s profile, as if to suggest that they are mirror images of one another. Zhou’s hand nervously lights a cigarette while Su’s hand nervously stirs her coffee. She looks down sadly as he asks her where she got her purse; he looks down sadly as she asks him where he got his tie. Each has the same ulterior motive for questioning the other: they both want to confirm their suspicions about their cheating spouses. The camera pans jerkily between them in a swift movement
that anticipates the emotional climax, but we do not see their faces at the moment of revelation. What the camera does not show us here is just as important as what it does. Su’s voice (the sonsign)—“I thought I was the only one that knew”—corresponds with the visual image (the opsign)—smoke rising from Zhou’s cigarette. This image combined with the return of the Nat King Cole song in the next shot signals the commencement of Su and Zhou’s love story. But when Su asks: “I wonder how it began?” in reference to the affair between their spouses, she is simultaneously foreshadowing the doomed nature of her own affair with Zhou. The shadow of the other couple, of them, will be a constant presence that hovers over Su and Zhou to the point of suffocation.

Many other film scholars, such as Stephen Teo, Ackbar Abbas (1997b, 55), and Peter Brunette (2005, 98), have commented on the ill-fated nature of this love story. Teo (2001, 2), for example, remarks: “The affair between Cheung and Leung assumes an air of mystique touched by intuitions of fate and lost opportunity.” I would add that this overall mysterious feeling of lost opportunity connects to Cheung and Leung’s subject positions in the ambivalent space of an ever modernizing yet still colonized Hong Kong. I would also add to Teo’s comment that the two protagonists seem to have little control over their own destiny because they are the constant victims of outside forces bearing down on them—e.g. the absence yet omnipresence of their respective spouses, the need to hide from their nosy neighbors, the passage of time, and even the rainy weather. These are the factors that bind them to something beyond their control and make it impossible for their own love to bloom. Even though their spouses are always absent, the never-ending wondering and comparing (mainly by Su) suggests their presence: “We can’t be like them,” “Who made the first move?” “How did it happen?”
The mysterious spousal figures could be said to correspond, in terms of the film frame, to Deleuze’s concept of the out-of-field [hors-champ], which he develops in *Cinema I*: “The out-of-field refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present” (1986, 16). Deleuze cites Bresson as an example of a director who often uses sound to relay information that is never actually shown (15–16). I would further note that, like Bresson, Wong often prefers to deliver plot twists through a mixture of visual images and sound. We know, for instance, that Zhou’s wife and Su’s husband are alone together in Zhou’s apartment because of a particular combination of opsign and sonsign: we see Su’s sad expression as the door is slammed in her face, and in the very next moment we hear Mrs. Zhou say: “It was your wife.” We also know that the “invisible” couple is together in Japan because we see Zhou tearing up a letter and we hear Su’s voice: “I wonder what they are doing right now?”

Other important pieces of plot information remain squarely within the frame. The neighbors are a constant and very real presence, and they are certainly not shy about making nasty comments or involving themselves in other people’s business. The large clock in Su’s office never allows us to forget that time is passing, and the rain always seems to fall when Su and Zhou are outside together. In the end, however, the impossibility of their relationship seems to be reduced to the fact that Su, perhaps for honor’s sake, is unwilling to leave her husband. This is part of the overall ambivalent nature of the film: it is impossible to blame failed love entirely on unfavorable circumstances, when it is the human being who makes the decision to follow a path toward moral restraint. Perhaps this is also why Olivia Khoo fails to see the events in the narrative as a long series of coincidences, but instead as an exercise in pure contrivance. I would argue, in response, that it would be most accurate to view the
failed love affair as a combination of coincidences, unfavorable circumstances, and the personal motivations behind the characters’ decisions.

Perhaps this ambivalence lies in a simple confusion of issues. One issue involves the personal motivations of the characters within the narrative frame, and a completely separate issue involves Wong’s directorial intentions. Even if we cannot definitively say that the characters themselves “contrive” their own situation, there is no doubt that Wong actively contrives and composes the images that we see in order to balance the ones that lie in our imagination, outside the narrative frame. This allows him to achieve a certain desired effect—the kind Deleuze describes in his section on the “the second movement” in *Cinema 2*. Daniel Frampton summarizes this Deleuzian idea in his book *Filmosophy*. Frampton explains that Deleuze derives his notion of the first movement from Eisenstein and Artaud: this is the notion that film images cause the spectator to experience “shock” that provokes thought. The second movement is more complex and involves a movement from thought back to the image again. Whereas a very basic film sequence will lead to clear thought on the part of the spectator,

> a somewhat more irrational sequence will cause the filmgoer to think and receive (a less exact) idea, and the shock of this “new” idea will cause the filmgoer to go back to the images, re-experience them, and see within them a belief or interpretation that caused the idea. (Frampton 2006, 64)

What must be added to Frampton’s comment is that these so-called “irrational sequences” are forms of the time-image. Wong reaches toward these forms by playing with the emotions of his audience; he “shocks” us every now and then out of our preconceived notions of what is either occurring or not occurring within the film narrative. Audrey Yue (2003) posits that many scenes in *IMFL* are defined by the presence of these irrational or “denaturalizing”
sequences and that Wong stretches out and emphasizes the artificiality of everyday activities, such as eating and walking, through his use of non-diegetic space. Yue defines this non-diegetic space as a “third ‘border’ space” (131), which allows the film to situate itself in a sort of limbo between East and West; the Hong Kong that we are witnessing is a Hong Kong in transition. Not only does this idea resonate with Chow’s notion of “the ephemeral as significant,” it also helps explain why Wong is keen on creating transitional, irrational, and at times “shocking” space in an effort to play with our expectations as transnational film-viewers.

One scene in which Wong plays with our expectations this way takes place in Zhou’s new apartment, number 2046. This is the apartment Zhou has rented for himself in order to write his martial arts serials, or wuxia, representative of a so-called “lower” cultural art form for the masses. The prominent features of apartment 2046 are the blood red walls and the blowing curtains. Su sits on the left hand side of the frame facing the camera; she is playing with her chopsticks in a bowl of rice, but not eating anything. On the right hand side and slightly cut off by the frame is the back of a man’s head, the front of which, for the time being, remains unseen. Su has a worried expression on her face as she asks the man whether or not he has a mistress. Although the man says “no,” he eventually admits to it, and she makes a pouting motion. For an instant we wonder: could this finally be the scene in which Su confronts her husband about his affair? But in the very next shot we see that the man is Zhou. Su is merely practicing her reaction so that she will appear genuinely surprised and saddened when she must actually confront her husband. Zhou tells her that she must try it again, that she needs to act even more upset. This time when Su gets her “stand-in husband” to admit to his affair, she becomes truly upset and begins to cry. “I didn’t know it would hurt
so much,” she says. Zhou comforts her by reminding her: “This is only a rehearsal. This isn’t real.”

This scene works in many different ways, but it can be fruitfully analyzed in terms of Deleuze’s theory of the second movement in cinema. Wong is not so much attempting to fool his audience (the entire film is based around uncertainty and optical tricks anyway) as he is attempting to jolt us into a cycle of thought. The process works in this way: (1) the filmgoer is presented with a partially obscured preliminary image. Only one of the characters is identifiable; this is the “inexact idea”; (2) the filmgoer develops his or her own understanding of what is occurring in the scene; (3) a “shock” occurs when the overall image is revealed and the filmgoer realizes that these events are not “real,” even within the context of the film; and (4) the filmgoer must go back to the images and re-evaluate his or her original interpretation of the events. In a Deleuzian sense, then, the second movement from thought back to the image has taken place.\(^{155}\)

In another similar scene, Su and Zhou converse outside their apartment building. Zhou has recently confessed to falling in love with Su, but since she will not leave her husband, he has decided to move to Singapore. Because the camera shoots them from behind bars in an alleyway, we get the feeling that Su and Zhou are figuratively imprisoned by the lack of options that are available to them. The dialogue confirms this feeling: “You’d better not see me again,” she says. A subtle fade indicates that a few moments have passed, and then he says: “I won’t see you again.” A close-up shot shows his hand breaking away from hers in slow-motion; her hand anxiously creeps up her arm, and she clutches herself. In the next shot, we see Su’s face in close-up, reacting sadly on one side of the screen as Zhou’s blurry figure departs into the distance on the other side. Are we actually witnessing the final
moments of their relationship? But then there is darkness (the opsign) as Su cries (the sonsign). She is hugging Zhou as he comforts her, indicating again that the earlier departure was not real. The image of their hands parting repeats itself as if to suggest that this is the pivotal moment of the film, yet paradoxically the moment is not “really occurring” within the narrative; it is an inevitable event that looms in the future for Su and Zhou, but it is an event that the film-viewer will never truly witness.

Fig. 11: Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung: practicing for “the break-up”.

In these scenes, Wong is manipulating time in order to create a self-referential metanarrative that calls into question our initial impressions and natural perceptions. Not only is Wong’s narrative falsified on some level, it is also obscured and stretched out. The brief pockets of temporal distortion along with the musical refrains add to the film’s overall effect as a mood piece. Wong has himself admitted that even though the entire movie runs longer than ninety minutes, the actual storyline can be boiled down to thirty (DVD 2002). Deleuze sees this type of time modification as a kind of falsification, but one that is positive, a form of “pure expression” that does not attempt to represent anything directly. This
rejection of direct representation becomes the basis for a new type of narration that Deleuze describes as a “source of inspiration” (1989, 131).

This is the essence of the time-image: metanarration that questions our natural perception and brings us back to a state of purity again through its denaturalizing process. Deleuze directly links his concept of the “crystal-image” to this new idea of the “powers of the false.” To falsify narration is to move one step beyond crystalline description (the melding of real and virtual) and toward a total annihilation of truth claims (1989, 131).

Laura Marks (1994, 260) argues that the creative application of the “powers of the false” by way of cinematic images has strong political implications, since in this type of cinema: “there is no single point that can be referred to as real or true,” and hence, “there can be no objective record of the past.” Looking at Su and Zhou’s relationship in IMFL in political terms, it becomes somehow emblematic of Shu-mei Shih’s notion of the Sinophone. Because Su and Zhou belong to the Chinese diaspora that inhabited British-ruled Hong Kong during the 1960s, I propose that Wong uses the “powers of the false” to shatter the totality of Chinese-centrism and to create a colorful and diverse cultural landscape. Although Su and Zhou belong to a spatially and temporally defined moment in history, this particular moment resists easy classification, and hence history, for them, cannot be objectively recorded or codified.

The political undertones of IMFL become particularly apparent toward the end of the film, as the cinematic themes reach beyond the scope of personal narratives. Along the same lines, Marks quotes Deleuze as saying: “‘If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet’” (1994, 261). This notion leads us to the section of Cinema 2 in which Deleuze adds a “third movement” to his theory on thought and
cinema, one that could be said to exist simultaneously with the other two: “the identity of concept and image” (1989, 161). What does this third movement entail? One way to state it would be: Deleuze believes that because concepts contain or are associated with cinematographic images and vice versa, something of fundamental significance can be said about humankind’s relation to the world. He then creates a name for the indicator or identity of this relationship, the “action-thought.” In his own words:

Action-thought simultaneously posits the unity of nature and man. . . . cinema does not have the individual as its subject, nor a plot or history as its object; its object is nature, and its subject the masses, the individuation of mass and not that of a person. (1989, 162)

For Deleuze, there is something sublime or even divine contained in this notion of the action-thought and, for that matter, in the nature of effective cinema in general. The action-thought also relates back to the idea of the unhuman camera eye—a powerful technological apparatus with the capacity to record images that are free from the “taint” of the singular subject.

In light of the themes that arise in the final scenes of IMFL, I argue that Wong views cinema in similar ontological terms. Wong would likely agree that cinema should represent something greater than the lives of particular individuals; that it should move toward universality, touch the masses, and unite with nature. The concluding section of the film is separated from the love story by a titled screen that informs us matter-of-factly: “That era is past. Nothing that belonged to it exists anymore.” The film then turns to a moment in history, Charles de Gaulle’s famous 1966 visit to Phnom Penh in Cambodia.156 The documentary footage that is inserted here along with the sound of a French-speaking reporter is noticeably out of place in relation to the rest of the film. It is as if Wong wants to awaken us from the dreamlike state that we had been previously lulled into by nostalgia-laden images of Hong
Kong and illusory romance. It is in this moment that Wong directly points to an intersection between Eastern and Western history (though there are constant references to Western pop culture throughout the film). This is one of the reasons why I believe that *IMFL* is intended for a transnational audience (but especially for French and Chinese audiences) and can be productively analyzed in terms of French theory.157

The coda of the film transcends modern political issues such as strife between nations, and returns our minds to an ancient past in which life was devoted to and controlled by divine powers. Zhou is at the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, recreating the ancient custom of whispering a secret into a hole and then covering it with mud, where it will remain buried for all time. A Buddhist monk watches from the temple stairs as Zhou attempts to rid himself once and for all of his secret love for Su. The camera follows him as he walks through the ornate stone corridors, and another piece by Umebayashi Shigeru plays over the non-diegetic soundtrack. Su and Zhou’s love story has become mythologized and universalized, yet the entire affair might as well have all been a dream since nothing ever came of it. The Chinese title of the film, literally translated as “When Flowers Were in Full Bloom,” is ironic because the flowers died before they could bloom.

As Rey Chow notes (2002, 649), Wong depicts human relationships as impermanent and ephemeral because he sees them as based on a series of performances and reiterations. It is the natural world—all that lies outside human control—that Wong privileges. Chow comments on the concluding sequence of the film: “for Wong the ruins of an exotic land, ravaged for ages by the elements yet standing still erect in the midst of political turmoil, offer the final solace” (649). Following up on Chow’s comment with more focused attention to imagery, we notice that at a certain point during this sequence, the camera seems to move
past Zhou into extended dolly shots of ceilings and exterior shots of the ruins with no one in
the frame. These camera movements suggest a shift from man as earthly subject to man as
objects in a larger world, rising above narratives whose subjects are individuals. The idea
that Wong wants the camera to document the ancient ruins as they exist in their natural state,
outside the current sphere of human politics, resonates with Deleuze’s argument that
cinematographic images are superior to natural perception because they are capable of
representing a pre-human state of the world (Trifonova 2004, 138). In any case, it seems
reasonable to observe that Wong and Deleuze are both interested in hyper-representation—
that is, the set of things that exist beyond mere representations of the human subject.

Wong continues to flesh out his exploration of hyper-representation in 2046, his
science fiction–tinged and highly ambitious follow-up to IMFL. The film opens in a
futuristic city landscape. The animated CGI images of skyscrapers and fast-moving subway
tunnels suggest a location that is remote and impersonal, the epitome of globalization. We
have traveled a far distance from Angkor Wat, a site of ancient ruins and all that lies beyond
the bustling humanity of city-life, to a futuristic city that is the antithesis of natural beauty.
We have now shifted from an ancient, spiritual state to a post-human state; this new city is so
artificial and mechanical that androids often substitute for humans.¹⁵⁸ Yet Wong links 2046
to IMFL by beginning the former where the latter left off: the male voiceover narrator speaks
of unrequited lost love, an ill-fated affair that was clouded by doubt. The voiceover
compares his lost love to the secret that one hides in a hole and then covers with mud so that
it will never be discovered. Any viewer familiar with IMFL will instantly wonder: could this
be the voice of Zhou, still lamenting the loss of Su?¹⁵⁹
But how could this be Zhou? The opening lines of the film are spoken not in Chinese, but in Japanese, a fact that might not be immediately apparent to the untrained Western (or French) ear. And certainly, even if one is entirely familiar with the distinct cadence of the Japanese language, one still might wonder why a Chinese film would begin with a language foreign even to the Chinese audience. As it turns out, Japanese plays an exceedingly important role in the film; it is the language of mystery and sensuality, existing only in a fantasy space on the outskirts of reality. As James Udden (2006, 1) points out, the Japanese voiceover is meant to disorient and alienate the viewer: 2046 is more a place than a time, yet it is a place without any particular spatial orientation or consistent points of reference. Expanding on Udden’s point, it seems that Wong continues his trend here of opting for the Deleuzian “mental image” over spoon-feeding: he gives us points of reference, but does not immediately allow the viewer to “connect the dots” into a coherent map. Although the Japanese voiceover clearly alludes to IMFL, the viewer cannot initially see or recognize the character that is speaking. We must wait for the central narrative to begin before this opening scene can become meaningful.

In fact, the male Japanese voice belongs to Tak, the fictional alter ego of Zhou, created by Zhou within his own story entitled “2046.” Tak’s first speech (it is also the final speech of the film) seems to spring directly out of the mouth of Rod Serling of the Twilight Zone: “Every passenger going to 2046 has the same intention. They want to recapture lost memories . . . because nothing ever changes in 2046. Nobody really knows if that’s true, because nobody’s ever come back . . . except me.” This idea of “capturing lost memories” immediately recalls Proust’s In Search of Lost Time. A Proustian account of memory might hold that memories are retrieved through triggers or cues, which in turn, put into focus
the past events of one’s life. Smell and taste lie within reach in the present, waiting to resurrect shadows of the past (Proust 2004, 47). Although Wong’s account of memory is similar, it is even more radical than Proust’s, partially because his depiction of space-time is much more fluid.

Again, Deleuze’s “crystal of time” (a.k.a. “crystal image”) theory, developed in *Cinema 2*, is helpful to our analysis. Deleuze posits not only that during a cinematic time-crystal, time seems to stop and split into past and present, but furthermore that virtual images become real images in cinema by virtue of the fact that they are inherently related to the real, and vice versa: “In fact, there is no virtual which does not become actual in relation to the actual, the latter becoming virtual through the same relation: it is a place and its obverse which are totally reversible” (1989, 69). The virtual and the real, in other words, rely on each other in order to function in a cinematic narrative. In Wong’s cinematic environment, time is split into past (the 1960s) and future (2046); the past is established as the central narrative while the futuristic sequences constitute the *mise-en-abyme*, or story within a story. In the film, time and space, future and past, become such unstable concepts that they are almost totally interchangeable. Through recurring title-screens, Wong shows us that it is arbitrary whether or not one hour, ten hours, or one hundred hours have gone by: the future/virtual functions by way of the past/real and vice versa.

The arbitrary nature of time, and hence the crisis of narrative in Wong’s films, is noted by Ackbar Abbas, who comments on Wong’s ability to convey a “lived experience of the negative” in his films. Through his rejection of linear plots, Wong creates a “serial structure of repetition”; although the same characters constantly reappear, their stories have no happy conclusions, and their love relationships flounder (Abbas 1997b, 41–55). Although
2046 had not yet been released at the time Abbas wrote this essay, I would expand his argument to include this film; this constantly lived and felt experience of negativity, disappointment, and strange loops of time is an apt way of describing the overall mood of 2046. Because other women constantly trigger the memory of Su Li-Zhen (Maggie Cheung) for Zhou (Tony Leung), Su remains an elusive ghost-figure throughout 2046; time revolves in an infinite loop around the failed love story of IMFL. Zhou will not be able to successfully finish writing his own fictional stories or wuxia as long as he remains a prisoner to his memories. Similarly, Wong cannot reach his own satisfying conclusion to his film, as long as the memory of Su continues to haunt the narrative. In an interview about 2046, Wong has said:

In Mood, Maggie is a real person. In 2046, Maggie is an image, a woman in his memory, which is very subjective . . . she is almost perfect . . . and he always compares the women he meets in his daily life with this image, which is very unfair because it’s impossible . . . because she’s the best . . . it’s in his memory. And so he missed a lot of chances.161

There are two levels to this observation. On the most transparent level, Wong is talking about the bittersweet image of Su that Zhou holds inside his head. On a more subconscious level, this remark could also refer to the idealized celluloid image of Maggie Cheung that seems to preoccupy Wong as a director. Wong seems particularly obsessed with the taxicab scene from IMFL—the scene in which Su and Zhou grasp each other’s hands anxiously, signifying the ephemeral quality of their relationship. In 2046, this same scene is reincarnated not once but twice.162 The first time it occurs, Zhou is with Bai Ling (a high class prostitute made up to resemble Su) in the cab; the second time, it is a direct “quote” from IMFL, a flashback of the actual Su and Zhou alone together in the back of the cab.
These two scenes are visually separated from the rest of the film: Wong shoots them in black and white as if to suggest that there is something untouchable and eternal about these moments. This is more than just a haunting memory in the life of Zhou; Wong has created a timeless scene that will exist forever within the archives of film, a scene no less powerfully enduring than Kim Novak emerging as the ghostly reincarnation of Jimmy Stewart’s lost love.

Yet Wong is aware of the inherent dangers of living too long within a virtual fantasy world of memories. One of the central messages of this film is that in order for Zhou to free himself once and for all from Su’s image, he must come to the realization that 2046 is a fiction, that there is no such thing as a futuristic time-space in which nothing ever changes. In order to begin the healing process, Zhou must mentally remove himself from his fantasy world and continue his journey in the taxicab as a solo passenger (which he indeed does in the final moments of the film). But Wong leaves us with an unsettling conclusion: the film’s closing credits emerge over the same CGI generated skyline that begins the film, giving the viewer the feeling that it is impossible to know whether or not Zhou has truly escaped from his past. It is even less clear where Zhou is headed, if not back toward this static future world of 2046.

A flashback, notes Deleuze, serves as the marker toward a pathway of remembrance, a piece of the story that cannot be told without a divergence from linear chronology: “it is in the present that we make a memory, in order to make use of it in the future when the present will be past” (1989, 52). Thus, a memory is more than just a simple voyage into the past; we attempt to create memories in the present so that they will serve us in the future, when even the present has become a memory. Flashbacks or “recollection-images” are filmic
representations of a character’s present memories, or in Deleuzian terminology, they are actualizations of the virtual (1989, 54). Although these ideas strongly resonate with the central theme of 2046, Deleuze’s relatively straightforward notion of the flashback becomes increasingly more complex when considered in relation to this particular film. Wong’s distaste for narrative chronology forces the viewer to work hard in order to distinguish “recollection-images” from “present images,” the “real” from the “virtual,” and so forth, so much so that it may no longer make sense to refer to such distinctions within the context of the film.

**Wong Kar-wai: A Director in Limbo**

Deleuze and Wong complement each other well, but I would not go so far as to argue that Wong is necessarily indebted to Deleuze, or that somehow Wong’s directorial style flawlessly reflects Deleuzian theory. Clearly, Wong did not intentionally design his scenes or compose his frames so that they could be described in terms of the Deleuzian time-image. Meanwhile, we do know for certain, as Wong himself has confirmed in several interviews, that his style is highly influenced by his European auteur predecessors who include but are by no means limited to: Bresson, Godard (both representatives of the French New Wave), Hitchcock, and Michelangelo Antonioni. Yet Wong is by no means trapped in the past, and as Jean-Marc Lalanne rightly points out, it is not a question of placing his work onto a linear or “Darwinian” mapping of film history (13). To do so would be reductive, and furthermore, we must be cautious not to praise Wong’s work solely because of its close relation to the European art-cinema aesthetic. Wong’s films are worthy of being studied regardless of
whether they can be said to fit into a certain mould or whether are “acceptable” to the European film festival elite.

Why, then, is Wong Kar-wai worth studying? Perhaps he is somehow ahead of his time, ahead of his contemporaries. In response to the question: why does Wong Kar-wai seem to be so ahead of his contemporaries? Lalanne responds:

> Perhaps because his complex work in developing narrative is nothing in comparison with his experimentation with image, one forever short-circuiting the other. As complex and convoluted as his narrative devices are, the _mise-en-scène_ always wins out. (13)

In other words, although Wong is meticulous in his construction of atypical plotlines, he is best when he experiments (he and his cinematographer Christopher Doyle) with shots, camera movements, set design, and costuming—everything that is part of the _mise-en-scène_. Wong combines images and music in such a way that the viewer is jolted into a new visual and auditory reality, a reality that could be described as hinging on the postmodern. This very idea—that cinematic images have the capacity to free us from our everyday human perceptions and cognitions—is the same idea that fascinates Deleuze, not to mention Bresson (Shaviro 1993, 30). Despite the complexity of his narrative devices and imagery, Wong’s films contain universally recognized themes that are appealing to even the casual viewer: unfulfilled love affairs, missed opportunities, and the performative nature of human relationships. But these facts alone hardly account for the totality of Wong’s transnational appeal as a filmmaker; there is an array of other crucial factors that deserve one final glance, especially from a “Sinophone” film studies perspective.

In line with my own argument, Audrey Yue (2003) contends that the Wong Kar-wai aesthetic, as a genre unto itself, defies the stereotypical perception of Hong Kong art-house
cinema, and challenges the high versus low, cult (martial-arts films) versus mass (Hollywood action films) divide. Wong’s films fit comfortably within the paradigm of pure “art-house cinema,” remarks Yue, but when the prefix “Hong Kong” is added to the beginning of the phrase, the paradigm is disrupted. The term “Hong Kong” signifies a distinctive space, a postmodern and postcolonial land that remains perpetually in limbo—Abbas (1997a, 16) defines this limbo as the *déjà disparu* (or that which has “already disappeared”). In her discussion of *IMFL*, Yue (2003, 130, 132) adds: “Hong Kong exists in the film as a space of displacement”, and more generally: “…Hong Kong exists as an effect of two forces, migration and modernity.”

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Shu-mei Shih sees Hong Kong as part of the “Sinophone” because it is external to Mainland China. This is an important point to consider and leads us to the further question: should Wong be defined as a Sinophone film director? I propose that Wong’s films emerge predictably in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries as a direct result of the changing face of the Chinese cinematic realist movement, as described by Berry and Farquhar.\(^{163}\) As realism in Chinese cinema no longer serves to reinforce the state apparatus, it becomes a “mode of address on contemporary issues that nevertheless still deal with the national” (Berry/Farquhar 2006, 107). One of these contemporary issues is the ambivalent nature of Hong Kong—its identity as a liminal space. I would therefore argue that Wong is a Sinophone director as defined by Shih; his films should be spatially and temporally situated, while concurrently being discussed on a local and global level. There is one caveat: like Berry and Farquhar, I am not seeking to classify Sinophone cinema as *only* that cinema which arises outside the borders of Mainland China or in the Chinese diaspora. Wong’s personal connections to Shanghai should not be diminished.
(he was born there after all), and his artistic endeavors as a Sinophone filmmaker cannot be tied solely to his Hong Kong identity.

In his *Cinema* books, Deleuze seems to be calling for the very type of cinema that Wong produces, a cinema that exists in a liminal space like Hong Kong itself, the “third border space” between East and West. It is in a similar border space that the cinema of the time-image thrives. Rodowick (1997, 17) describes Deleuze’s concept of the time-image as an abundance of infinite possibilities; it is: “a ceaseless opening of time—a space of becoming—where unforeseen and unpredictable events may occur.” My final point of inquiry, therefore, is one that cannot be answered within the confines of this project, but is worth contemplating nevertheless. How can we use Wong Kar-wai to reconsider Deleuze? Wong and Deleuze complement each other on a variety of subtle levels, as we have seen. But Deleuze and Wong also complement each other on a much broader level: as long as filmmakers such as Wong retain the desire to create films that will appeal commercially to local and global audiences, Sinophone film studies will increasingly rely on an assortment of theoretical apparatuses. One of those possible apparatuses, out of an enormous body of other possible apparatuses, is that of Gilles Deleuze, a French critical theorist. Perhaps we should reconsider our use of Deleuze, by including more discussions of Asian cinemas alongside his theories, in addition to discussing his work alongside European cinema. At this point, only a small number of critics have attempted to map Deleuze onto Wong and vice versa, and even fewer of those have done so with an eye to close reading. This being said, by no means am I suggesting that Sinophone film scholars should feel they must adopt Deleuze’s theories, or any other Western film theory for that matter, in order to analyze Wong Kar-wai’s films in a meaningful way. I have intended to show that it is possible to apply this particular theory to
these particular films in a careful and deliberate way, perhaps because of overlapping thematic strands that exist between the two multilayered texts, but also, to some extent, because of a lucky coincidence.
Conclusion

Each chapter of my dissertation is devoted to the analysis of films that are, in effect, sites of cultural translation, adaptation, and exchange between “greater China” (Taiwan and the mainland), South Korea, Japan on the one hand; France and Italy on the other. Within the broader framework of East-West hybrid cinema, a variety of subgenres are highlighted and discussed: the Sino-French, the Sino-Italian, the Franco-Japanese, the Franco-Korean, and Hong Kong pastiche. All of the films that I discuss (within these subgenres) insist on active viewership—that is, they encourage the spectator not to be passive, and to be aware of the cultural exchange that is taking place within the diegesis or narrative of the film itself. Often the characters speak multiple languages, and in this sense, the films are as “translingual” as well. Rather than argue that these films somehow create their own “subgenres,” I would say, more accurately, that my work on these films can be thought of as a model for detecting possibilities for viewing, reading, and interpreting transnational and intertextual currents in contemporary film more generally. I have attempted to show that these four brands of fusion cinema exhibit the qualities of “cinematic hybridity” through their use of adaptation, or—perhaps more accurately—through textual “reincarnation.” My discussion of adaptation in East-West hybrid cinema, in other words, has relied heavily on the notion of intertextuality, citation, and translation rather than on homage or backward-looking nostalgia.

In each chapter, a different form of textual reincarnation was examined. In Chapter 1, I examined Nobuhiro Suwa’s H Story (a Franco-Japanese cinematic conjugation), a film that adapts and builds from Alain Resnais’ Hiroshima mon amour in an effort to shift between
French and Japanese perspectives on the Hiroshima tragedy. In Chapter 2, I argued that Tsai Ming-liang’s *What Time is it There?* (a Sino-French conjugation) cites and reinvents French New Wave director François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*. In Chapter 3, I discussed South Korean director Park Chan-wook’s *Thirst* (a Franco-Korean conjugation), which critiques patriarchy in contemporary Korean society by adapting Emile Zola’s novel *Thérèse Raquin*. 

I note that Chinese, Japanese and Korean filmmakers create new genres of hybrid film by interacting with, but never imitating, French culture. In Chapter 4, I explored the reasons why cinematic interactions between Italy and China are less prevalent and ended with the hope that other types of hybrid cinema will inspire Italian filmmakers in the coming years. 

Chapter 5 represents the possibility for complication and messiness within my hybrid model; the chapter presents a way to look past the otherwise “neat” subgenres of Chapters 1-4. The Hong Kong cinema of Wong Kar-wai contains references to French New Wave cinema (Bresson), Spanish-American music (Nat King Cole singing Latin American pop tunes), and Hitchcock (*Vertigo*). These references, in combination, form a complex pastiche of multicultural filmmaking that can be read through the “lens” of Deleuzian aesthetics.

I do not expect to define “East-West hybrid cinema”—or to label its many variations—in inflexible ways. These five subgenres might very well be called into question as perfectly accurate or appropriate categories, and the notion of categorization itself may, initially, “feel” inadequate. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties that may arise as a result of semantic descriptions, there is still a need describe and analyze different varieties of hybrid cinema, because they are not all the same. We must, first of all, establish that these hyphenated terms are to be read as markers for types of hybrid cinema. The hyphen should be interpreted as an equal sign—an arrow pointing in both directions—not as restrictive or
divisive. As Hamid Naficy observes: “Read as a sign of hybridized, multiple or constructed identity, the hyphen can become liberating because it can be performed and signified upon” (116). If we agree, at the outset, that these hyphenated terms are to describe relationships, possibilities, and fluid interchangeability, then they should not be assumed to reflect rigid or inflexible bodies of textuality.

There are, of course, similarities between the cross-cultural cinematic exchanges of China and Italy; China and France; Japan and France; and South Korea and France. Most of the exchanges I have discussed involved financial and artistic collaboration between production companies, and an agreement for international distribution with the hope of reaching a transnational audience. But there are also many dissimilarities between these four types of cinematic exchange: the Franco-Korean film is inspired by a piece of nineteenth century French literature, while the Sino-French film is inspired by François Truffaut, an auteur of the French New Wave movement. The Franco-Japanese film re-tells the story of a historical tragedy, while a few examples of Sino-Italian films appear disturbingly xenophobic. Because each exchange contains its own unique set of considerations, scholars of transnational cinema will certainly need separate terms to describe them. As we saw in the fourth chapter, the same terminology that is convenient for descriptive purposes often fails to account for the more superficial variety of “multicultural cinema,” which should, perhaps, be excluded entirely from my notion of East-West hybrid cinema. But rather than focus predominantly on the particulars of terminology, which can be a tedious task, I have sought to dedicate this project to the close study of films. These are all films that I see as exemplary in some way of cinematic hybridity, while each of the four types therein represents an entirely separate “cross-current” or conjugation. This study is not meant to be
all-encompassing or “complete” but rather, it is meant as a starting point that will lead to more research, refinement, and thought.

Though I do not discuss this film in my chapters, Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* (vol. 1, 2003), an American film that consciously integrates Japanese visual language into its plot, works as an example of East-West hybrid cinema. In an interview about the film, Tarantino stated that if one were to attempt to find *Kill Bill* in a video store, it would be labeled as part of the “revenge” genre. Yet, within the revenge genre, *Kill Bill* contains countless layers of subgenres: the kung-fu movie, the Japanese samurai movie, the spaghetti western, manga, anime, and the Italian Giallo, to name a few. In the film, Lucy Liu (a Chinese-American actress) plays O-Ren-Ishi, the Chinese-Japanese-American leader of the Tokyo Yakuza gang. In one particularly noteworthy scene, one of the gang members ridicules her mixed race heritage and she quickly decapitates him as a warning to the others. She speaks both Japanese and English—she uses Japanese when she is being polite and when she is on the verge of death and English when she is warning her fellow Japanese gang-members never to speak negatively of her heritage. Thus, in this sense, the viewer must actively engage in Tarantino’s use of intertext—the cinephiles in the audience will likely notice it more—and, furthermore, the viewer is must be aware of the linguistic and cultural exchanges, as they play out within the film.

This is the phenomenon that I have described as hybrid cinema. As I explain in my introduction (p. 4), the films that I discuss contain elements that help to form and inspire the creation of new genres. All of the films that I highlight and analyze exhibit “hybridity”, by way of adaptation in some form. My definition of “adaptation” relies on the notion of intertextuality, citation, and translation. New subgenres genres are created through the
combination of innovative cinematic language with recognizable visual, aural, and diegetic elements. These films “reincarnate” the original work by carving out a new niche for themselves altogether. Within this notion of reincarnation, the most important aspect is the idea of transforming or innovating the recognizable or the familiar (something that already exists)—using the cinematic “specters” of the past to bring new life to contemporary cinema.165

As I argue in my introduction (p. 11), although I do not endorse the notion of national cinemas as coherent bodies of textuality, I also do not call for an outright rejection of “the national” either, for fear of losing an important mode of analysis. I therefore propose a revised framework (in part as a response to the non-specificity of the term “transnationalism”) that I call “East-West hybrid cinema.” Within this larger framework, I outline more specific cross-cultural channels of exchange: the Franco-Japanese, the Sino-French, the Franco-Korean, and the Sino-Italian.

I use terms such as: intertextuality, adaptation, the remake, translation, self-reflexivity, and reincarnation throughout my dissertation to describe this phenomenon that I call East-West hybridity. The film H story, which I discuss in Chapter 1, provides a new perspective on a film from the French New Wave period: Resnais’ Hiroshima mon amour. Although Tsai Ming-liang’s What Time is it There? seems to contain a similar premise, Suwa’s and Tsai’s cinematic techniques differ in important ways. In Tsai’s film, for example, scenes from Truffaut’s the 400 Blows are shown and inserted directly into the narrative—they intrude into the characters’ space. At one point, for example Hsiao-Kang lies in bed and watches the Zoetrope scene from the 400 Blows. Later, Antoine’s milk-
stealing scene in the *400 Blows* is inserted directly into the film without an explanation, framing, or justification, either before or after.

In *H Story*, on the other hand, stills from Resnais’ film are inserted at clear marking points throughout the film. We see, for example, a still photo of Emanuelle Riva in Resnais’ original film, standing on the porch outside the hotel room. This photo appears at the very beginning of Suwa’s film, immediately preceding the scene in which Beatrice Dalle must reenact the exact same scene in *H Story*. Inserting this film still here has a quite specific effect: it serves as a dedication to Resnais’ film, and to Emanuelle Riva’s performance as the original “Elle”. In the context of *H story*, the stills from *Hiroshima mon amour* suggest Suwa’s reverence for Resnais—they also serve as acknowledgements of the difficult and often inferior task of filming re-enactments or remakes.

Yet, as I argue in my chapter, Suwa takes on the role of a “translator” of *Hiroshima mon amour* because he either knew, or eventually concluded, that a direct translation of Resnais’ original work would not do it justice. *H Story*, insofar as it creates an “afterlife” for *Hiroshima mon amour*, is also a textual reincarnation—combining innovative cinematic language with familiar visual elements. Suwa uses and plays with his perspective as a Hiroshima citizen to adapt Resnais’ vision and create a stand-alone film of his own. As I describe in my chapter, (pp. 49-50) in the final scene of *H Story*, Suwa’s hand covers the camera lens, and the screen becomes entirely white (as opposed to the typical fade out to black). The white screen suggests continuity and life, while the directors’ hand in the frame functions as an acknowledgment of the artificiality of filmic representation.

How, then, does Tsai’s use of intertextuality differ from Suwa’s or Park’s? I argue that Tsai’s use of intertextual citation and self-reflexivity, the act of moving outside the
diegetic frame, allows the spectator to read the *What Time is it There?* through a global lens. *What Time* exemplifies a turning point, even within Tsai’s own career, because it is the first of his films that can be described as “Sino-French.” I argue, furthermore, that although the film is filled with themes pertaining to the supernatural, ghosts, and resurrection, these phenomena can be explained, within the context of the film, in terms of Song Hwee Lim’s notion of intratextuality, and my notion of disjointed connectivity. The references to ghosts, in other words, can all be read as references to other films and to other filmmakers (pg 59). The lives of Tsai’s characters are connected to one another in a “disjointed” fashion meaning, for example, that sometimes they don’t recognize one another, or they seem to recognize each other, but only vaguely. Both Shiang-chyi and Hsiao-Kang appear and reappear in Tsai’s oeuvre, as does Truffaut’s favorite actor, Jean-Pierre Léaud.

Park Chan-wook’s film *Thirst* contains *familiar* elements in the sense that the film spectator can read it as a horror film—it has the appropriate or expected iconography: the crucifix, vampires, blood, ghosts, etc. *Thirst* is, of course, also *familiar* to those of us who have read Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*. Park, as well as Tsai and Nobuhiro Suwa, are all extremely self-aware filmmakers who like to show off. In Park’s film, the conventions of the horror genre are combined with recognizable plot threads from Zola’s novel. The result is an odd Frankenstein of a film that, somewhat paradoxically, cannot be accurately described as either a horror film or an adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*.

In relation to this, *Thirst* contains recognizable or what Gérard Genette might call “hypertextual” elements of Zola’s novel. Taken from Zola, for example, is the stepmother character and, in particular, her judgmental, all-seeing eyes that witness the demise of the two lovers at the end. The feeble stepbrother character is taken from the novel as well. As a
filmmaker, Park’s style can be described as Naturalist, or fashioned after French Grand Guignol theater. Certainly the film’s themes—religion and morality, vampire love, bourgeois ennui, and revenge—can be recognized and appreciated by an international audience. Yet the subtleties of Park’s critique of Catholicism, authoritarianism, and patriarchy can also be understood from within the context of modern-day Korea. In this sense, the film does contain both French and Korean elements, and those elements combine to create another example of East-West hybrid cinema.

While there is a large body of scholarship on Chinese-French conjugations in cinema, there is much less written on Chinese-Italian exchange. Although an anthology on the representation of migrants in Italian cinema was recently published (From Extraterrone to Extracomunitario: New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema edited by Grace Russo Bullaro), the volume does not contain any essays specifically on Chinese-Italian filmmaking. In the context of my chapter, I define Sino-Italian cinema rather broadly as films in which cross-cultural connections between China and Italy are highlighted. I began with the question: is contemporary Italian cinema still centered on current national interests above all else, which, in turn, creates an imbalance in the exchange?

Toward the end of the chapter (p. 125) I discuss Gianfranco Giagni’s documentary film Un cinese a Roma as an example of a film with Sino-Italian elements. Giagni, like the other filmmakers I have discussed, uses intertextual citation, for instance, inserting a clip of a Silvio Soldini film, Agata e la tempesta, to showcase the comedic talents of his protagonist, Li Xiangyang. Li plays the role of a stereotypical “Chinese mystic” who is attempting to help Agata (Licia Maglietta) release her stress. The scene is already disturbingly stereotypical within the context of Soldini’s film, but even within Giagni’s film, it is
somewhat disheartening when we see that Li cannot even rent an apartment in Rome. As a Sino-Italian film, *Un cinese* does exhibit familiar diegetic elements, but the cinematic language is unsophisticated and lacks innovation (as a documentary it does not encourage the audience to think differently about Chinese-Italians or to change their behavior towards them).

Wong Kar-wai’s films are, perhaps, the most rich of all of the aforementioned subgenres in both an “inter” and “hyper” textual sense. Furthermore, among all studies on Wong’s art-house aesthetic—substantial, in-depth analyses and close-readings of scenes from *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* are, at this time, still lacking. Ackbar Abbas, one of the more well-known scholars of Hong Kong cinema, writes about Wong Kar-wai’s tendency to represent time disjunctively as this relates to Hong Kong as a disjointed, indefinable space. But as film scholars continue to attempt to define Hong Kong cinema as it relates to Hong Kong as a modern urban landscape, Abbas’s theoretical framework (written in 1997) will need updating. Although Hong Kong is still in a continual cycle of destruction and renewal, the city can no longer be defined solely in terms of post-colonialism, loss and disappearance. Wong’s brand of Hong Kong cinema, which can be thought of as a textual “pastiche” of sorts, will, in coming years, require a substantial amount of re-thinking, re-definition, and elaboration.

My research, therefore, is far from over. Shu-mei Shih states in her introduction to *Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* that one of the Sinophone’s favorite modes is intertextuality, and that this sort of intertextuality is meant to construct new identities and cultures. This is how I view the many conjugations and cross-cultural exchanges that I have noted and discuss in this project. I would argue, therefore, that Shih’s thesis could be
generalized to encompass more cinematic traditions (such as Mainland Chinese) but that these various cinematic conjugations can also be specified more precisely. Why do I use East Asian cinema and Western European cinema specifically? “Transnationalism” was initially proposed by Chinese cinema scholars as a model for discussing the effects of globalization and internationalization of Chinese cinemas, beginning in the late 1990s with Sheldon Lu. I am therefore interested in continuing that work and refining the theoretical work that has already been done. In a sense, even though the East-West binary is misleading, looking at cinema through this lens also, almost paradoxically, proves that the internationalization of world cinema has already occurred. Though, unlike certain theorists who might say that the Hollywoodization of world cinema is a bad thing, I do not view these interactions in a negative light. On the contrary, the increased ability for collaboration, travel, and shared funding allows for more interesting films to be produced.

Filmmaker Arvin Chen, for example (who recently directed *Au Revoir Taipei*), was born in California, but his film was fully funded by the Taiwanese government, and was shot in Taipei. Is *Au Revoir Taipei* therefore a Taiwanese movie? Or is it a Taiwanese-American-French movie? It almost does not matter how we classify it, since the film is interesting on its own. Yet, at the same time, there are elements from French New Wave, Hollywood, and Taiwanese film all wrapped into the story. Films such as *Taipei* demonstrate the importance of finding new ways to describe cinema that is not quite national, not quite “inter” or “trans” national. Because of the elements of the national that can be recognized and discussed in films like *Taipei*, I would insist that it is too early to declare the study of national cinema—as the notion relates to East-West hybrid cinema—entirely dead. As Jinhee Choi suggests in his essay “National Cinema: The Very Idea,” we must not assume that non-Hollywood films
reflect the “essence” of their national origins; we can only presuppose a flexible, probabilistic relationship between the two (Choi 319). Adopting a “relational approach” (319) to the study of national cinemas allows us the freedom to investigate the relationship between nation and text because it accounts for fluidity.

The aim of this project has been, essentially, to redefine the notion of contemporary transnational cinema by highlighting crossovers between East Asian and Western European cinemas while focusing on the important work of several recent filmmakers such as Tsai Ming-liang, Suwa Nobuhiro, Park Chan-wook, and Wong Kar-wai. I have used terms such as “hybrid”, “East-West hybrid”, and “fusion” to describe this (relatively recent) phenomenon in cinema. The hybridity of the films and filmmakers that I have been discussing can be better understood through knowledge of culture and national origins. Yet East-West hybrid cinema can contain two seemingly contradictory themes: representations of nationhood, belonging, and citizenship on the one hand, migration, displacement, and exile on the other.

Fundamentally, it is not the terminology that is particularly important or interesting, but rather, the films themselves. It is easy to forget, when writing about cinema, that one’s appreciation for movies as works of art can (and often should) be separated from the theoretical analyses that go along with it. We seem to forget sometimes that filmmakers are cinephiles themselves, and with a much larger fan-base to please. Hybrid cinema highlights convergences, cross-overs and influences, reincarnates the “ghosts” of cinemas past, and weaves it all into something entirely new.

Resonating with this sentiment, Gilberto Perez eloquently remarks: “…if all that interested me about art, about film, were what is wrong with it, I would not be spending
much time with film or with art. It is because I like film…that I have written this book. And I have mostly written about films that I like” (19-20). Though these remarks may sound obvious, I believe that we are all too often distracted with the task of figuring out “what is wrong with film”, as we move farther and farther away from the view that artistic criticism can be an end unto itself. East-West hybrid cinema is a vast concept; it can be used to refer to an enormous range of contemporary transnational cinema, good cinema or bad cinema, art house films or popular films. Despite my contention that East-West hybrid cinema is poised to redefine the notion of “national” cinema, and perhaps even cast a shadow of doubt on transnationalism, I would remain wary of conflating criticism with theory. Avoiding this common trap first and foremost is the best way to avoid forgetting, down the line, why we chose to write about cinema in the first place.
Endnotes

1 Theodor Adorno similarly observed that works of art can be thought of as “after-images” or replicas of life; it is by virtue of its separation from the world that art reaches a “higher order” of being (6).
2 See Bloom’s 2005 article: “Contemporary Franco-Chinese Cinema: Translation, Citation and Imitation in Dai Sijie’s Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress and Tsai Ming-liang’s What Time is it There?”
3 Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Last Emperor, Agostino Ferrente’s L’orchestra di Piazza Vittorio, and, most recently, Un cinese a Roma by Gianfranco Giagni.
4 The orderings of the nations within each of the terms are based on a combination of convention and semantic flow. “Franco-Japanese,” for example, could just as easily be written as “japanese-french.” Likewise “Franco-Korean” is the equivalent of “korean-french.”
5 The term “hybrid” has many connotations, especially within the realm of postcolonial studies. Homi Babha and Hamid Naficy have used the term to describe cultural fusion, heterogeneity, and rupture. For Babha and Naficy, the hyphen used in hybrid terms denotes “horizontality” or the possibility for multiple identities. My usage of the term, as I will explain, is slightly different from Babha and Naficy’s.
6 “After-life” in the Benjaminian sense, as expanded upon in “Task of the Translator.”
7 Michelle E. Bloom’s 2005 article “Contemporary Franco-Chinese Cinema: Translation, Citation and Imitation in Dai Sijie’s Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress and Tsai Ming-liang’s What Time is it There?” served as my introduction to Tsai, and to the idea of Sinofrench cinema more generally.
8 A term that, Higbee acknowledges, Novak uses to describe architecture, not film.
10 Tom O’Reagan in Hayward (2000: 91), as quoted by Higbee (81).
11 In his case, the rise of the Nazis, pre-World War II.
12 The Lumière Brothers went on tour around the world—to London, New York, Bombay, and Buenos Aires—with their films.
14 The term “Chinese” is itself problematic, and perhaps “Sinophone” (not as defined by Shu-meI Shih) is more accurate. I will discuss this debate later on.
15 In Zhang’s newest book, he goes one step farther and calls for the term “polylocality” to take the place of “transnationality” in Chinese cinema studies.
16 A Deleuzian analysis of a cinematic text, for example, would be entirely different from a Bordwellian analysis, and both might be equally controversial.
17 Although I am tempted to use the term “sino-hybrid” cinema, the prefix “sino-” excludes my extended discussion of Japan in Chapter 2.
18 It is not even entirely clear by its very definition that the “Francophone” does not include France, as Shih suggests. “The Anglophone” seems to obviously include the U.S. and England.
19 Furthermore, the usage of the hyphen denotes equality, as opposed to the slash, which tends to denote dichotomy.
20 http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/hstory.shtml

The wall of everyday life.

Such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The title is likely a play on Truffaut’s Day for Night (1973).


Bloom explains that these terms are not self-evident in themselves, and she goes on to carefully define each one. “Metropolitan France,” she explains, is historically defined as France proper, and does not include “overseas France,” i.e. France’s colonies in Africa, etc. While she is careful to define “China” rather broadly—“Greater China” would include the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora—“China” in the context of her article refers predominantly to the mainland (4-6).

While in Paris in 2009, I stumbled upon two television documentaries on Mao in the span of three days.

Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Last Emperor, Agostino Ferrente’s L’orchestra di Piazza Vittorio, and, most recently, Un cinese a Roma by Gianfranco Giagni.

Duncan reached a similar conclusion in his conference presentation: Architectures of the Interior: Desiring the Metropole and the Migrant Imaginary at the “Metropolitan Desires” conference held at Manchester Metropolitan University, (8 Sept. 2009).

My conclusion is debatable, however. Both Duncan and Robin Pickering-Iazzi view the scene as racist, and I intend to carry the discussion further.

The person who is fluent in the native language of the film, in this case, Italian.

“For many reasons…the West has understood this law only too well: all its cities are concentric; but also, in accord with the very movement of Western metaphysics, for which every center is the site of truth, the center of our cities is always full: a marked site, it is here that the values of civilization are gathered and condensed…to go downtown or to the center-city is to encounter the social ‘truth,’ to participate in the proud plenitude of ‘reality’” (Barthes, Empire of Signs 30).

Chapter 1

For simplicity’s sake, I will hereby refer to Resnais'/Duras’ film as Resnais’ film, even though I believe that both were equal contributors.

From Chow, 153.

Chow is particularly critical of Toril Moi (author of Sexual/Textual Politics, 1985), whom she too easily pigeonholes as an apologist for French feminist post-structuralism.

Stam uses the term “oxymoronic” (276) and Craig talks about the impossibility of “knowledge” as it relates to the film (27).

Fictional, but set in a historical time period, a type of docu-drama perhaps.

Meaning to interpret them or place them in a specific genre such as comedy or tragedy, etc.

Although White’s writing style is lucid, it is still unclear to me how White suggests that historians should operate, if narration is merely a “vehicle.” Although his thesis appears valid, it fails, in my opinion, to offer a reasonable alternative.
Though, admittedly, his aforementioned essay does not attempt to deal with film analysis as it relates to the question of historical narrative.

Duras did not write this into the screenplay.

I am not meaning to suggest that Hiroshima is somehow a “lesser” film, only that it carries a more nationalistic message in many ways.

In Resnais’ film, Riva plays an actress who is in Hiroshima to act in a film about “peace.” In one scene, we witness the making of this film.

From The Content of Form.

The real Kou Machida is a writer who was originally selected by Suwa to play the role of the Japanese man in H Story. In fact, Suwa had originally wanted to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amour, not a pseudo-documentary about the failed effort to create a remake of Hiroshima, mon amore


Defined by me as commentary with the film about the film itself.

She cites the war between Yugoslavia and Israel as the worst war that she has lived through and remembers.

Mimura was the cameraman for Akira Kurosawa’s first film, Shanshiru Sugata (1943) (Mitchell).

The original film contains footage of the wounded and the dying, for instance (Mitchell).


Times magazine, March 1, 2011.

Chapter 2

In the same article, Bloom argues that Tsai carries over the intertextuality of What Time to his newer film Visage (2009), but to a much greater extreme.

They do, however, meet again in Tsai’s 2004 short film The Skywalk is Gone.

Fran Martin notes that the building stands opposite the Far Eastern Department Store, which also happens to be flying the French flag. The Far Eastern group is a powerful retail force in Taiwan, and, according to www.chinaretailnews.com, the company plans to open twenty-five more department stores in Mainland China over the course of the next five years.

Although Jameson is referring to Taiwan New Cinema in this essay, I would argue that this portion of his analysis complements Tsai’s filmmaking as well.

As evidenced in Yang’s New Cinema film Taipei Story/Qing mei zhu ma (1986).

As Lim (2009: 237) notes, Tsai’s films also work on a ‘paratextual’ level, meaning that his literal signature appears at the end of some of his films.
This trend continues to an even more dramatic degree in Tsai’s newest film *Face/Visage* (2009) (Bloom forthcoming JCC article).

Andrea Bachner, for instance, observes: ‘If there is something that can be (il) legitimately called a “postmodern condition,” both Tsai’s life and his films embody some of it in their own oblique ways’ (2004: 62). Similarly, Hsu Jen-Yi observes that ‘in Tsai’s films, nostalgia has to do…with our postmodern condition’ (2007: 155).

Lim is referring to Roland Barthes well-known ‘Death of the Author’ essay, which argued that textual analyses should not rely on author intention or biographical background (see Barthes 1977).

The theme of the supernatural is present not only in *What Time*; it also figures heavily in *Goodbye Dragon Inn*.

As translated from the Mandarin by an interpreter.

Tsai has been quoted as saying: ‘The director is not God. This I have understood from the beginning’ (see DVD commentary).

Thrown into the pond, we assume, by a child or vandal while she is asleep.

The Zoetrope is also referenced earlier in *What Time*, intertextually, when Hsiao-kang watches the famous scene in *The 400 Blows* in which Antoine rides the anti-gravity machine (Bloom 2005: 319).

For some reason, there has been little discussion of Tsai’s representation of confined filmic space in relation to modern Taiwanese religious practices, particularly Taiwanese death rituals. In his essay on the subject, “Identity and Social Change in Taiwanese Religion”, Robert P. Weller notes: “Most Taiwanese religious ritual involves spirits of the dead in one form or another” (Rubinstein 341). Weller adds that gods are believed to be spirits of dead men and women who were not able to pass into another realm because they lacked a younger generation of ancestors to mourn their passing. In the Taiwanese strain of the Buddhist religion, when an older loved one dies, it is customary for the younger generation to perform rituals for several days, if not weeks, until the soul of the dead has passed on to a “happy place.” These rituals consist of bowing, chanting and offerings of incense. After the body has been frozen for several days, it is cremated and the ashes are sent to be stored in a receptacle inside of a multi-level temple. Those who remain behind in the land of the living are the unlucky ones, forced to practice these repetitive rituals.

Interestingly, the apartment in *What Time* was Hsiao-kang’s real home, and the fish, named Fatty, really belonged to Hsiao-kang (Director’s Notes, DVD). Fatty also appeared in Tsai’s 1997 film *The River*.

This point is made partially to show the distinction between Tsai’s representation of passive spectatorship and Dai Sijie’s active and awake spectators in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2000).

See Metz, Christian in ‘References’ for an elaboration of this concept.

In *The Skywalk is Gone*.

From the DVD materials.

Tsai’s representation of Taipei/Taiwan might be said to reflect his own attitude, particularly in regards to the ‘sad state’ of the Taiwanese film industry at that time. Tsai was more or less forced to look to French producers to finance many of his later films (see Bloom forthcoming NC article).
And also Mia Farrow, whose hair was famously cropped by Vidal Sassoon for her starring role in Roman Polanski’s 1968 film *Rosemary’s Baby* (which was set in New York City).

Mastroianni plays himself, and his appearance is meant to underscore his aging body and his fading status as a sex symbol. In one incredibly touching scene in the film, Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg gather with friends at her mansion to watch the famous Trevi fountain scene from *La dolce vita* (Fellini, 1959) and reminisce.

The title of Tsai’s new film, *Face* (2009) arguably refers to that of Léaud’s.

Tsai has said that while making *Face* (2009) he was most excited about shooting the scene in which Hsiao-kang and Jean-Pierre Léaud finally meet.

Chapter 3

http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2010/01/24/thirst-interview-with-park-chan-wook/


Hereto forth *TR*.

Louis Freeman Mott, *Sainte-Beuve*.

“The shop fronts, formed of small panes of glass, streak the goods with a peculiar greenish reflex. Beyond, behind the display in the windows, the dim interiors resemble a number of lugubrious cavities animated by fantastic forms” (Project Gutenberg).

Of the *New York Times*.

The film’s screenplay was co-written by Seo-Gyeong Jeong.

Sang-hyun, hereto forth.

Evelyn does not speak much because she does not understand Korean.

From Electric Sheep Interview.

“It had become one of the customs of the family, who regarded it in the light of a middle-class orgy full of giddy gaiety.”

Zola’s decision to describe Thérèse as half-Algerian has been read as racist, though I believe that his authorial decisions must be read in the context of his era.

The wound can be interpreted as a manifestation of Laurent’s damaged soul. He has committed a mortal sin, and can now only be punished by divine justice. Zola once stated that he wanted to write a story that invoked divine, as opposed to human, justice. Divine justice, he felt, was much more powerful (Project Gutenberg Epilogue).

In Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), an unnamed first-person narrator tells of how he murders and dismembers an old man because of his “vulture eye.” When the police arrive, he almost immediately confesses to the crime. He is driven mad by the perceived sound of the man’s beating heart under the floorboards—a psychological manifestation of his guilt.

“his keenest suffering, both physical and moral, came from the bite Camille had given him in the neck. At certain moments, he imagined that this scar covered the whole of his body. If he came to forget the past, he all at once fancied he felt a burning puncture, that recalled the murder both to his frame and mind...the part of his neck where the scar appeared, seemed to him to no longer belong to his body; it was like foreign flesh that had been stuck in this place, a piece of poisoned meat that was rotting his own muscles.” (123)

Electric Sheep.
In a discussion with students about the film (1/15/2011), for example, some stated that they believed that San-hyun was not selfish and killed Tae-ju to protect Mrs. Ra. His statement that love and his characters are predominantly selfish.

Chapter 4


98 Berlusconi is listed as a board member/chair of the Ministry.

99 In addition to these new laws, the history of Italian television in Italy has arguably played a role in the current state of the Italian film industry. In her 2002 book, After Fellini, National Cinema in the Postmodern Age, Millicent Marcus points out that the deregulation of TV airwaves in 1976 sent Italy on a “television binge” and away from the cinema. As a result, claims Marcus, film lost some of its cultural prestige (10).

100 The term “hybrid” is close in meaning to “transnational” in this case, though the former term is meant to imply cross-cultural and intertextual layering within certain films.

101 Though it should be noted that there is not much cinematic exchange at all between Italy and other countries in recent years (Brunetta 280).

102 See “The Task of the Translator”.

103 “Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, on a day in May. We begin our brief voyage in modern China, pointing our cameras here…for the Chinese people, this enormous, silent space is the center of the world. The Gate of Heavenly Peace is the heart of Beijing. And Beijing is the economic and revolutionary center of China. And China is ‘Chung Kuo’: the central country. The ancient heart of world civilization…it is they, the Chinese people, who are the protagonists of our cinematic notes. We don’t pretend to explain China; we want only to begin observing this great repertoire of expressions, gestures, and customs” (my translation).

104 Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia in Africa, Albania in Eastern Europe. African and Eastern European immigrants are still very much discriminated against in Italy. Nigerians are presented by the media mainly as prostitute traffickers. Illegal labor camps for Roma were found in the outskirts of Naples just a few years ago.

105 See Donatio, “Chinese Remake the ‘Made in Italy’ Fashion Label.”

106 See Marcus, 2008.

107 Such as Rosellini’s Paisà (1946) and Roberto Benigni’s La vita è bella (1998)

108 For instance, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, and the early Bertolucci and Pasolini.

109 One of the only examples that she gives of a transnational Italian film is Armando Manni’s Elvis and Merilijn (1998), set in Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Italy.

110 Prior to this, the Italian government only controlled films post-production.

111 The film is shot beautifully, so there are, of course, aesthetic reasons for this as well. But it should also be noted that Gabriele d’Annunzio, an ultra-nationalist, produced the film.

112 Francesco Munzi’s Saimir (2004) is one of Duncan’s central examples.

113 Both films can be classified as Sino-Italian in some respects. Olmi’s is set on a pirate ship in feudal-era China, and features Chinese and Japanese actors whose voices have been dubbed over in Italian.

114 Buena Vista International was eliminated as a stand-alone arm of Disney in 2007, though the company continues to distribute DVDs.
Similar criticisms have been aimed at Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) because two of the main actors, Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh, had to learn to speak Mandarin (the predominant language of Mainland China and Taiwan) for the film. So, in this sense, inaccurate casting decisions cannot always be avoided.

Not academic critics per se, but pop culture critics writing reviews and articles on the Internet.

The joke is as follows, a policeman (*carabiniere*) hits a car driven by a Chinese man, who subsequently hits his head on the steering wheel and becomes unresponsive. The Chinese man goes into a coma (thus, *c’era un cinese in coma*). The policeman takes him to the hospital and, at his bedside, pleads with the unresponsive man, “please cinè (this, I believe, is a racist term for a Chinese man), tell them that I didn’t mean to hit you, otherwise they are going to arrest me!” The Chinese man’s only response is, “Suguy mojo aye.” The policeman, frustrated, exclaims, “I still don’t understand what you are saying. Please, tell them I didn’t mean to do it!” The Chinese man only manages to repeat the same phrase again, then dies. In a panic, the policeman runs to a Chinese restaurant and asks the cook to translate “suguy mojo aye.” The cook responds, “Suguy mojo aye? *Silano flase davvelo* (Italian equivalent of “vely stlange phlase”). It means, get your feet off my oxygen tank!”

In one scene, we see a Chinese TV crew following Li around the streets of Rome and filming his life.

Agostino Ferrente’s *L’Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* (2006), for example, carries a much stronger anti-discrimination message, and focuses on a much larger set of Italian immigrants.

Meaning that the film would be actually produced and directed by the Chinese immigrants living in Italy.

Among the various communities, the Chinese living in Rome are known for being the most mysterious. But, looking past the superficial, we discover that Italians and Chinese resemble each other more than what could have been imagined.”

You special lady…at the point of great change…like caterpillar to butterfly. Energy looks for exit…when so much energy, so many exits…important to leave door always open…for computer problems, my answer is, rubber gloves.

In March 2010, an academic volume entitled *From Terrrone to Extracomunitario, New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema*. Ed. Grace Russo Bullaro, was released by Troubador Italian Studies.

Although Luciano is not the only Italian film scholar guilty of this type of “blindness,” I am using her article because I feel that it demonstrates my point well.

A Taiwanese director, born in Malaysia, who creates films that can be described as Sinofrench.

From a Q & A at a USC film screening, January 2010.

See R. Braidotti. It should be noted, however, that Braidotti’s framework is based in feminist theory; thus she uses the figure of the post-colonial migrant in an almost metaphorical sense.
The song has been performed most notably by Enrico Caruso, Mario Lanza, and Elvis Presley.

“On the shimmering sea, sky of silver, calm are the waves, thriving is the wind. Come all to my agile boat. Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia.”

I am not sure how closely they match, but the “Santa Lucia” part remains the same.

i.e. “Li Tries to Find an Apartment,” “Li and his Friend Lim are Very Different,” etc.

www.cinefile.biz/?p=20948

Chapter 5

This theme park is named “The World” because it contains miniatures of famous buildings and monuments from around the globe.

IMFL’s Chinese title is Huayang nianhua or literally “When Flowers Were in Full Bloom.” Both IMFL and 2046 are part of a loose trilogy by Wong that includes the 1991 film Days of Being Wild.

This includes (but is by no means limited to) D. N. Rodowick’s book Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine (1997), Steven Shaviro’s The Cinematic Body (1993), Patricia Pisters’s The Matrix of Visual Culture (2003), David Martin-Jones’ Deleuze, Cinema, and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts (2006), Anna Powell’s Deleuze, Altered States and Film (2007), and Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack’s edited volume Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema (2008).

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914): philosopher, logician, semiotist.

Rodowick 1997: 57–68. I have given only very rough sketches of these terms, because they are not central to my argument.

Perhaps I am simplifying Deleuze here in the interest of comprehensibility, but this is his general line of thought as I have come to understand and interpret it.

Robert Bresson was a French film director who became well-known during the New Wave movement. Bresson’s better known films include: Pickpocket (1959), Au Hasard Balthazar (1966), and Lancelot du Lac (1974).

This interview is part of the bonus materials on disc 2 of the Criterion DVD. It was conducted by Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret on May 21, 2001 during the Cannes Film Festival. In references below, I refer to this as “DVD 2002.”

Bordwell uses this phrase to describe the unpolished yet innovative quality of Godard’s Breathless (1959), though I think his remarks apply well to Wong’s film in this case.

See Trifonova 2004, 142. This thought is reminiscent of Theodor Adorno’s famous comment: “writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” In a similar way to Deleuze, Adorno believed that after such a manifestation of human suffering and tragedy, a new categorical imperative had to be created in order to speak about truth and meaning (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/).

The song is undoubtedly named as such because it originally appears on the soundtrack of Japanese independent filmmaker Seijun Suzuki’s film Yumeji (1991).

Deleuze specifically mentions Japanese director Yujishirō Ozu as an example of someone who uses this idea in his films: life and nature is ordinary; it is man who creates chaos and the appearance of disorder (1989, 15).
The article is from the online film article archive “Senses of Cinema” and is entitled “Wong Kar-wai’s In the Mood for Love: Like a Transfigured Ritual in Time.”

The image of clocks is one that reappears over and over again in Wong’s films. In Days of Being Wild, for example, clocks loom menacingly on walls and register the passing minutes of love affairs.

For this same idea of “third space,” see other, similar writings by Yue (2005) in Asian Migrations: Sojourning, Displacement, Homecoming, and Other Travels.

This is the basis, of course, for the sequel by the same name, which I will discuss further.

Film theorist Stefan Sharff, author of The Elements of Cinema, uses the term “slow disclosure” to express the same type of cinematic structure.

This event is famous because it was during this visit that de Gaulle made a speech calling for the U.S. to withdraw its troops from Vietnam. The speech caused negative sentiment in the U.S. since the war itself was partially rooted in French colonialism in Southeast Asia.

Not to mention the fact that the film, identified by Olivia Khoo as “Hong Kong art cinema” (2006, 235), was intended for the international film festival circuit (DVD 2002).

These scenes in 2046 are highly reminiscent of Ridley Scott’s sci-fi classic Bladerunner (1982).

In the chapter on Wong Kar-wai in Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance, Ackbar Abbas (1997a) specifically defines this phenomenon—the linking and repeating of characters in Wong’s films—as “metonymic substitution.”

This revised translation of the French title À la recherche du temps perdu suggests more than just passive “remembrance,” but an active search to locate something that has slipped away; this connects to the Japanese man’s search for his lost love in 2046.

In an interview on the bonus materials of the 2005 DVD release.

In fact, the taxicab scene originally occurs in Wong’s earlier film Happy Together (1997) but with two men; Ho (Leslie Cheung) sleeps on Lai’s shoulder (Tony Leung) in the backseat.

They note that, until recent times, Chinese realism was often linked to modernity and nation building. Berry and Farquhar also characterize Chinese realism as romantic and melodramatic (2006, 77).

Conclusion

See Youtube interview “Quentin Tarantino: Kill Bill.”

See Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx (1994) for the theoretical origins of this term.


I contacted one of the contributors (Alberto Zambenedetti) about the book, and he agreed that there is a lack of current research on the representation of China and the Chinese population in contemporary Italian cinema. I therefore wanted to find out why there is so little research on the subject, and if this was indicative of a larger issue.

The film was released to theaters in 2010, and is currently available on DVD only in Asia.
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