SYNOPTIQUE

An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies

EDITION 10

2005

SYNOPTIQUE

An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies

Originally Published in 2005

ISSN: 1715-7641
Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, Concordia University
1250 Guy St., Montreal
Quebec, Canada

This full issue has been assembled in 2021 to unify the formatting of the older journal editions.

The cover and individual articles have been reformatted from their original HTML dependent forms. Some reference images have been lost due to the age of the original site.

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GUEST EDITED by OWEN LIVERMORE

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
Faithful readers of Synoptique may remember that at the end of edition 9 we promised changes were on the way. But plans change. Owen Livermore and staff have put together this gem of an edition all in classic Synoptique form. 10 editions. It's a fine round number to turn a corner on. 111 articles. In honour of this little publishing feat, I decided to dig into our archive and present 10 articles from the last nine editions—articles I feel were important to the journal, were particularly good, or which I just happen to like. The real pleasure was to discover how difficult it was to try and pick only one article per edition. Please indulge this lingering look back at how far we've come. Enjoy, and thanks for reading.

Adam Rosadiuk
Editor-in-chief

We want to thank everyone who has contributed, everyone who has pitched in to build this community. These Last 10 Editions Were Brought to You By:

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Thanks.

So long Colin, Lisa, Owen, and Janos.
Good luck. Keep in touch.

The Gongfu of Kung Fu Hustle

Gary Xu

Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle* is a fast-paced slapstick action/comedy, but it is also a study in modernization, exploitation, and redemption. Gary Xu reads *Kung Fu Hustle* through history and the history of film, discovering an indirect, subversive strategy influenced by the tenets of the martial arts.

Gongfu, the Chinese word made known to the West by Bruce Lee as kung fu — Chinese martial arts, originally had two related meanings: talents/skills acquired over a long period of time and the time needed for completing a task. Bruce Lee's gongfu apparently stemmed from the first semantic meaning of this word, referring to both the skills of fighting and the senses of justice and righteousness that require arduous training and careful fostering. The skill aspects of gongfu have been spectacularly displayed on the big screen by Bruce Lee and other masters of kung fu cinema. The second meaning of gongfu – the temporal dimension – can also be found on the big screen, especially in many productions of the Shaw Brothers Studio during the 1970s and 80s. In Chang Cheh's *Shaolin Temple* (1976), for instance, the disciples unknowingly acquire extraordinary martial arts skills through years of repetitive daily labors such as cooking and taking care of Buddhist sutras. The emphasis on temporal duration corresponds to the well known Chinese saying about gongfu: "With enough gongfu (time, patience, and perseverance), you can sand even an iron anvil into a needle." This emphasis, however, has been lost in the increasingly Hollywoodized kung fu cinema. The audience no longer has patience for the slow-paced process of trials and trainings; the films "cut right to the chase" and are filled with spectacular fighting sequences; and the plots and characters are weakened due to the sole focus on spectacles.

Stephen Chow intended to restore the temporal dimension of gongfu in his recent film *Kung Fu Hustle* (2005), whose original Chinese title is *Gongfu*. His intent is made clear in his attention to the process of physical, mental, and moral growth, in his incorporation of elements of Shaw Brothers' cinema, and in his historicity that is based on not only the history of cinema but also a strong sense of historical justice, which, in the film's fable-like setting, points to contemporary China's political and economic situations. Advertising his film as the "ultimate kung fu film" that consummates and concludes the kung fu cinema tradition, Stephen Chow manifests his real gongfu – cinematic craftsmanship (auteur-ship) and social concerns based on deep knowledge of tradition and spirit of renovation.

The first aspect of Chow's gongfu is growth over time. Unlike in many contemporary action films, Chow's heroes are not born overnight. In contemporary action or martial arts films, the temporal duration is usually short – only a segment or a moment of the hero's life is of cinematic importance. In Chow's films, the entire life of the protagonist matters. Chow's heroes must endure a long process of physical tortures and psychological humiliations before turning into shining "needles" or "butterflies." Ah Sing's growth from a good-for-nothing weakling to a Bruce Lee-like superhero gives the film a happy ending. Sing's path, however, is not free of obstacles or pitfalls. As a bullied

child, he spends his piggybank savings on a "Buddha's palm" training manual. Believing that he has mastered the ultimate form of gongfu from the manual, Sing challenges the bullies when they beat on a girl. His heroics, however, incur further humiliations since the manual is a worthless fake. Defeats and failures follow Sing into adulthood. To change his fate, Sing decides to join the evil Axe Gang. His inner goodness, however, prevents him from becoming an evildoer and eventually uplifts him into a superhero. Sing's physical and moral growth gives meaning – belief that perseverance and kindness will prevail – to Stephen Chow's seemingly meaningless "mo lei tou" comedy style – nonsense that comes from nowhere and seems irrelevant to the film's story.

Western critics and audiences consider Chow "lowbrow" because of his dizzying mixture of pop culture and his jokes that mostly focus on the lower part of the human body. It is true that Chow's cinematic language – both the words spoken in his films and the composition of his films – are always mediated, full of puns, allusions, references, and tributes to previous films in particular and to pop culture in general. Some of the references are easily recognizable. As A. O. Scott points out in his review of *Kung Fu Hustle* for the New York Times on April 8, 2005: "The movie snatches tasty morsels of international pop culture, ranging from Looney Tunes to Sergio Leone to '*Airplane!*,' and tosses them into a fast-moving blender." The rest of the references can be difficult to detect, requiring knowledge of the history of cinema. The mixing, however, can be cinematically significant if it is consistent with Stephen Chow's fundamental stance – to laugh at himself as a social underdog is for exposing social injustices to the underprivileged. It is especially interesting when the history of cinema is used by Chow not only for paying tribute but also for criticizing contemporary social problems. Chow's mediated cinematic language thus turns his *mo lei tou* upside down, revealing serious, "highbrow," and tragic sides reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin. To add meaning to the meaningless, to trace the origin of the abrupt and context-less *mo lei tou* – this is the most important aspect of the gongfu in *Kung Fu Hustle*.

Stephen Chow's fascination with the history of cinema begins with Bruce Lee as well as with Chang Cheh, Shaw Brothers' greatest martial arts film director. Chang Cheh's impact on *Kung Fu Hustle* is not only highly visible in the action and in the mise-en-scene, but also more deeply hidden in Stephen Chow's casting. The choice of Dong Zhihua to perform the role of "Doughnut" (the breakfast shop proprietor/spear expert) is significant in itself – Dong was Chang Cheh's preferred actor at the last stage of Chang's creative burst. A Beijing Opera actor who migrated to Hong Kong in the 1980s, Dong performed the lead role in all of Chang's last six films: *Great Shanghai In 1937* (1986), *Laughter In Xi'an* (1987), *Across The River* (1988), *Ninja In Ancient China* (1989), *Hidden Hero* (1993), and *Shen Tong* (1993). Dong was silent for a long period of time before Stephen Chow invited him to appear in *Kung Fu Hustle*. Rejuvenated, Dong shows some truly fantastic moves that combine power with precision and quickness.

Dong Zhihua is important to *Kung Fu Hustle*, but the most important impact of Shaw Brothers' cinema on this film is the site where all the action takes place: Pig Sty Alley. "Zhulongcheng zhai" in Chinese, Pig Sty Alley is not Stephen Chow's invention; instead, it is directly borrowed from a 1973 Shaw Brothers' film *The House Of 72 Tenants* (72 jia fangke). The year 1973 saw Bruce Lee's *Enter The Dragon* (Menglong guojiang) dominating the world's and Hong Kong's cinema markets. Surprisingly, however, *Enter The Dragon* was not that year's box office champion in Hong Kong. It was beat out by *The House Of 72 Tenants*, a situation comedy directed by Chor Yuen. Chor's film also is not an original creation – it is a remake of an eponymous film produced in mainland China in 1963 by Pearl River Studio, which is itself based on a popular 1952 Shanghai play. The play, situated in Shanghai's typical *shikumen* housing complex that usually accommodates numerous low-income households under one roof, is a satire on the corruption of the Nationalist government. In the play, which is set in early 1949— shortly before the Communists drove the Nationalists out of Shanghai— the landlord of the complex conspires to sell his own stepdaughter to a corrupted policeman. The policeman can force the 72 tenants out so that the landlord can sell his house for a hefty profit. The plan, however, is defeated by the tenants, who help the stepdaughter and her real lover escape. Despite its overt leftist ideology, the play is full of funny moments due to its witty use of the Shanghai dialect and its attention to the unexpected in the tight living space. Transplanting the Shanghai play and the mainland film to 1970s' Hong Kong, Chor Yuen created the unforgettable slum "Pig Sty Alley" to replace Shanghai's *shikumen* house. Chor's film is a poignant satire on the bureaucracy of Hong Kong's colonial government and shows tremendous sympathy to the folks struggling on the bottom of the deeply divided society.

Chor's film is a milestone in Hong Kong cinema

history. First of all, its dialogues are predominantly in Cantonese. The Hong Kong cinema of the 1960s and early 70s was dominated by Mandarin films, most of which were produced by Shaw Brothers with the aid of talent emigrating from Shanghai. But, in 1973, it is noted that "…after a year in which no Cantonese pictures were produced, Shaw Brothers, which was still regarded as the king of the Mandarin film studios, took the lead in the revival of Cantonese by making and releasing *The House Of 72 Tenants*." [1] This was the beginning of the revival of Cantonese films in Hong Kong. Before long, Mandarin films faded into obscurity and Cantonese became the only dominant language in the Hong Kong film industry.

The House Of 72 Tenants is thus important to Stephen Chow for several reasons: 1) It revived the Cantonese films that Chow was accustomed to watching when he grew up; 2) It was the best of the situation comedy or neighborhood dramas, a genre from which Chow learned his comic expressions and perfected his *mo lei tou* skills; 3) It focuses on the underprivileged, the socially injured, and the abject, people to whom Stephen Chow pours all his sympathy and from whom Chow finds his laughs; 4) It deliberately preserved the stage-style in the original play and made the film's indoor studio set an aesthetic choice, similar to Hitchcock's theatrical nuances originated from his insistence on shooting in studio sets; 5) It has created a most unforgettable site/sight of urban dwelling in Pig Sty Alley: the pigeonhole-like co-inhabitance, the everyday trifles, the laughter amidst hardships, the unexpected out of banalities and routines, and the extraordinary among the most ordinary.

All these motifs in *The House Of 72 Tenants* are present in *Kung Fu Hustle*. There is the clearly artificial stage setting in the murder scene that opens the film; the attention to the ordinary life in the slum; the most extraordinary growing out of the ordinary; and, of course, the archetypal site of slum life in Pig Sty Alley. Setting this film in prerevolutionary period Shanghai, Stephen Chow also pays tribute to the original Shanghai play, although he does not forget Chor's satire. The unlawfulness of the Axe Gang, as well as the corruption of the police and of the entire city bureaucratic system, makes us wonder if these are well-disguised references to contemporary China's political and economic reality.

In the midst of unprecedented economic boom, China continues to rest its development on two pillars: public construction projects and exports. As part of the push for urbanization, China's real estate constructions are quickly transforming its landscape and social life. Shanghai in particular has become China's window for showcasing urban constructions that embody modernization – it has more than 300 skyscrapers in 2005, compared to only one in 1985. [2] Old *shikumen* slums are being demolished everywhere and replaced by fake *shikumen* structures such as the high scale entertainment district The New World ("Xin tiandi"). Old tenants are driven out of their dwellings by the corrupted bureaucrats, law-enforcement agents, and well-connected powerful real estate companies; they often receive little compensation when their houses are demolished. Gangsters are often hired to violently attack and force out these tenants. [3] I believe, to a great extent, *Kung Fu Hustle* implicitly criticizes this trend of urban demolishment, tenant intimidation, and government corruption. The neat and artificial commercial street at the beginning and the end of the film is stunningly similar to The New World; the Axe Gang members, in their business suits and in their ubiquity and brutality, are reminiscent of today's real estate bosses who profit through bribery and violence; and the slum, juxtaposed with the new streets, is representative of the polarized Chinese city in which the poor have nothing except supports from each other.

I am usually against overtly politicized reading of literary texts and films. Readers and viewers often are so eager to look for political messages in foreign texts that they miss literary, aesthetic, or visual nuances. Censorships also rely on the reductionist reading to force linkages between texts and dissident political implications. In the case of *Kung Fu Hustle*, however, everyone expects it to be lowbrow comedy and fantastic action; no one suspects any political referencing. It is paradoxically at the most unexpected place that Chow hides his political criticism, which is also consistent with his concern over the powerless. The political references and the social satire are made possible by Chow's embedment of motifs from the play and the two films with the title *The House Of 72 Tenants*. One still may insist that Chow is merely paying homage without the intension to satirize the contemporary situation. But the embedment itself is what matters, since it registers and preserves the original's demands for social justice. Because of the demands, history – be it cinema history or social history – is evoked not merely for spectacle's sake, but on behalf of contemporary reality. This is what I mean by "historicity": history restaged in order to make implicit reference to reality, history is not a "mirror" of reality, but a part and parcel of reality – the temporal order does not have to be linear since what happened is what makes the world as it is today.

Justice is what Chow's ultimate gongfu strike is about. Martial arts films such as those by Chang Cheh and King Hu traditionally are known for conveying senses of justice and righteousness. But in recent films, such as *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*, *Hero*, and *House Of Flying Daggers*, the focus shifts away from justice toward melodramatic and universal terms of love and revenge. Historical atrocity committed by the First Emperor of Qin can be rewritten into a tale of the wise leader and personal sacrifices; battles are no longer between good and evil, but between jealous lovers; the distinction between right and wrong is all relative; and the only thing matters is the staging of spectacles based on action and scenery. Stephen Chow returns the kung fu cinema to its fundamental moral basis: right vs. wrong, good vs. evil; in the meantime, he also discards the nationalist baggage (China vs. Japan, Han Chinese vs. Manchu, Chinese vs. white devil, etc.) in previous films. By making justice absolute and universal, Chow further reveals the serious side and contemporary relevance of his filmmaking.

This is Gary Xu's first contribution to Synoptique.

ENDNOTES

1 Stephen Teo, "The 1970s: Movement and Transition," in Poshek Fu and David Desser, eds., *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 95.

2 See Time's special report, "China's New Revolution," (June 27, 2005): 33.

3 There are numerous examples of using violence on residents who are unwilling to leave their houses. Many of cases are documented at this website: http://www.peacehall.com/hot/chaiqian.shtml

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Gary Xu teaches Chinese cinema and literature at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He has written extensively on transnational Chinese cinema and global politics. His recent publications include "Remaking East Asia, Outsourcing Hollywood" (Senses of Cinema, no. 34), "The Pedagogical as the Political: Ideology of Globalization and Zhang Yimou's Not One Less" (The Communication Review, vol. 6, no. 4), and "Flowers of Shanghai: Visualizing Ellipses and (Colonial) Absence" (in Chris Berry, ed., Chinese Film in Focus: 25 New Takes. London: BFI, 2003).

Edited by Owen Livermore.

Corridor Romance: *Wong Kar-wai's Intimate City*

Laurel Wypkema

Laurel Wypkema is the first of two authors investigating the place and importance of Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong Cinema in this special issue of *Synoptique*. Hong Kong as Intimate City and the Cinema of Wong Kar-wai focuses on Kar-wai's unique vision of Hong Kong as a post-new wave filmmaker. Wypkema beautifully articulates Kar-wai's postmodern representation of love and loss in a Hong Kong that is characterized by fragmentation and familiarity. This essay provides a unique insight into Kar-wai's emotionally charged, and experiential, view of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's geopolitical history is fundamentally unique. Colonized for almost 200 years by England, Hong Kong prospered enormously, becoming internationally renown as a wealthy and cosmopolitan region boasting luxury cars, expensive hotels, the English ritual of afternoon tea, contemporary architecture and soaring skyscrapers comprising an exquisite skyline and a unique mix of languages: Cantonese, a dialect from Canton (Guangdong) province not spoken throughout the rest of mainland China and English (obviously, the language of the coloniser). Hong Kong's curious suspension between cultures has continued well past 1997, when the capitalist colony was ceded back to China, which had, in the meantime, become a Communist republic. China's "One Country, Two Systems" policy is in place until the year 2047. Hong Kong's legal system, culture, currency and immigration laws will be replaced by China's. The Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong has continued to thrive financially, though its residents have become increasingly involved in protesting for their democratic right to elect government officials following China's appointment of the deeply unpopular Tung Chee Hwa as their Chief Executive [1].

Hong Kong's cinema – particularly its new wave cinema – cannot be considered outside of its distinctive political and social history. Particularly interesting are the various contrasts and idiosyncrasies evident in the relationship between site of production – the region itself – and film texts produced since the early 1980s, which is the period generally agreed upon as the beginning of Hong Kong's new wave movement. It is precisely the emergence of Hong Kong's unique cultural, political, colonial, postcolonial and arguably *recolonial* identity during this period that has shaped the region's creation of film texts fundamentally in recent history; most notably in the turbulent and uncertain years preceding – and the near-decade following – the 1997 handover.

The emergence of Hong Kong's "modern" new wave cinema in the late 70s and early 80s is discussed critically as a major turning point in the industry's history. In his book, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, local scholar Ackbar Abbas corrects a misunderstanding typical of his Western peers, who until recently maintained the notion that the cinema of Hong Kong was primarily one of kung fu and a hyper-action-melodrama. Contrary to this widespread impression, he says, Hong Kong's new cinema

> …is not essentially a cinema of action or a 'cinema of blazing passions,' which was how

> one popular festival of Hong Kong films was billed in the United States. What is interesting is that it is a cinema that responds to a specific and unprecedented historical situation, what I have called a space of disappearance where 'imperialism' and 'globalism' are imbricated with each other… Dislocations and novel connections typify the new Hong Kong cinema and the images we find in them [2].

I would like to briefly explain the thrust of Hong Kong's cinematic history. Since consideration of this pivotal moment, in what is indeed an articulation of Hong Kong's still-emerging cultural, even perhaps "national" identity depends, in part, on an understanding of what led to the emergence of the new wave. The postmodern depiction of the city in Hong Kong's new wave films emerged after decades of locally-made films were produced there for people outside of its regional boundaries, where Hong Kong was often dressed up to look like elsewhere – usually mainland China – and to emulate the various traditions and cultural specificities of those elsewheres. Prior to the emergence of the People's Republic of China in 1949, two genres typified Hong Kong's cinematic output. As the tiny region sought (unsuccessfully) to contribute propaganda films to the construction of nation-building for the mainland, Confucianminded mainland-style melodramas (*lunli*) and revolutionary films (*minzu*) were produced as a show of patriotic loyalty to mainland China on the eve of Japanese occupation in the 30s and 40s. After the import of Hong Kong films was banned in China in 1952, Hong Kong sought a new market – again outside its local borders – in the various Chinese diasporic communities around the world until the 1970s. It was another step away from mainland ties, and, according to scholar Chu Yingchi, a landmark in the eventual emergence of a certifiable 'Hong Kong society.'

Chu's book *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self,* plots this tendency to market and distribute films abroad – an otherwise unusual tendency for a nation's film industry – or in Hong Kong's case: a "quasi-national" film industry. She argues that the residential history of Hong Kong – an atypical blend of colonization, transience, immigration and exile from elsewhere (most often mainland China, the Philippines, Taiwan and other areas of South and Southeast Asia) directly influenced film production choices in Hong Kong, in turn creating a film industry that pandered to "others" rather than to local Hong Kong audiences. The tendency to produce films for other areas – whether for mainland China or for various Chinese diasporas throughout Southeast Asia and the rest of the world – continued approximately until the last quarter of the 20th century. At the same time, the region became more culturally well-defined, politically stable, economically successful and, significantly, increasingly distanced from identification with mainland China. At the same time, the emergence of Hong Kong's new wave cinema launched a prolific period of filmmaking that has been described as "locally-concerned". This breakthrough led to others – political filmmaking and locally-situated documentary, for example – but perhaps most significantly, the art house film and the frequent depiction of Hong Kong as "home" – whether fondly, nostalgically or problematically – are centrally important during this period. Until the early 1980s, Hong Kong was treated by many as a home away from home; a transient, "meantime" destination. As increasing numbers of people were born – or more often raised – in Hong Kong, though, an indigenous film culture began to take shape. The new wave marks the emergence of a cinema made specifically *for* Hong Kong residents. The cinema of Stanley Kwan, Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Patrick Tam and, slightly later, Wong Kar-wai, depicts Hong Kong as specific place and city with a distinctive culture and people. These films arguably work towards a definition of what it is to live in Hong Kong, call Hong Kong home, and cope with leaving and yearning to come back when a journey abroad is portrayed. In other words, this new cinema began exuberantly showing the spaces of Hong Kong as *home* for the first time. These images became an important part of Hong Kong's cinema, and continue to be so.

Wong Kar-wai is, perhaps, the best known new/second wave Hong Kong filmmaker, worldwide. He is at the peak of critical acclaim following the international success of *In The Mood For Love* (2000) and the greatly anticipated recently released *2046* (2004). As such, he is a filmmaker belonging as much to international cinema as he belongs to Hong Kong's. He is noted for his sensitivity and a melodramatic style often focused upon a Hong Kong that is intimately represented in a fractured, dislocating manner emphasized by a complex visual aesthetic, fragmented temporal thrust, and lush musical score. Despite this fragmentation and small-scale, or perhaps because of it, the city – renown as a thriving and densely-populated metropolis –becomes familiar to both indigenous and foreign viewers in a very particular way, and this is perhaps best described as "Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong". David Bordwell has said of Wong Kar-wai that, in him, "Hong Kong has found its exportable festival filmmaker, the one director no intellectual need be ashamed to like…Critics claim

him as the allegorist of postmodern urban culture" [3]. At the same time, Bordwell anticipates and warns specifically against scholarly study of the director, fearing that this will inevitably overlook the import of Wong's emotionally-wrought humanist films in which, he says, time is treated as

> …an unmanageable flux, a stretch of reverie, an instant revelation, and an undying memory, the films invite critics to search for allegories of impermanence reflecting Hong Kong's pre-1997 anxieties…[but] this Romantic and romantic cinema, however concerned with the city in history, is centrally about being young and in love…To treat these lovelorn films as abstract allegories of Hong Kong's historical situation risks losing sight of Wong Kar-Wai's naked appeal to our feelings about young romance, its characteristic dilemmas, moods and moves [4].

It is with this charge that I take issue. My study of Hong Kong film and concentration on the region's new and postnew wave movements, especially in the films of Wong Kar-Wai, arise precisely out of my understanding of him as a dynamic and emotionally articulate filmmaker. If I study his representations of the city it is because I firmly believe that they are rooted in an understanding of his films as a whole experience.

"Every day we brush past so many other people. People we may never meet or people who may become close friends."
Cop 223, *Chungking Express*

This quote, spoken by He Qiwu (Takeshi Kaneshiro), are the first words heard in Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994). Kaneshiro's voiceover literally gives voice to a series of shots over grimy rooftops and grids of satellite dishes, wires and a hazy twilit sky. These shots are curiously emptied of people, though they are no less densely packed than the ensuing sequence inside Chungking Mansions, where He Qiwu pushes past the roaring, heady nighttime throngs who eat, laugh, shout, steal, shop, loiter and work there.

The "mansions," a real-life duo of huge and thickly populated tenements, house 6,000 low-income renters apiece, an assortment of hostels, fly-by-night travel agencies, fast food stalls and knickknack shops which measure, in some cases, less than 25 square feet. Hong Kong's notoriously overcrowded tenements – just blocks away from its equally quintessential luxury hotels – are in Kowloon, part of Hong Kong's mainland side and separated from Hong Kong Island by a narrow strip of South China Sea.

Chungking Mansions, the thickly populated Island-side markets and Officer 633's (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai) tiny apartment comprise Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong. It is within this tropical and constantly changing urban space that various manifestations of sensuality, intimacy, failed love, lost love, and love of loneliness unfold in *Chungking Express*. These bustling corridors, dank alleyways, food stalls, crowded markets and tiny apartments also typify Wong's *Fallen Angels* (1995), *Happy Together* (1997) – an undeniably "Hong Kong" film, though it takes place in Argentina – *In The Mood For Love* and, to a lesser extent, *Days Of Being Wild* (1991). Considered together, these films present Hong Kong as a place of intimate public spaces. That is: intimacy is possible and flourishes in spite of – indeed, because of – the use of Hong Kong's densely populated urban spaces as private and familiar. Intimate, interior spaces here are represented within typically exterior metropolitan sites: the sway of urban crowds, the glut of city noises and labyrinthine side streets. The inner-city is prone to intimacy; the negotiation of private relationships is located here.

Indeed, Wong Kar-wai's characters in these films share the (often frustrated) pursuit of intimacy within intensely urban spaces. Esther Yau says of Wong's characters that they have "a sense that there is a public world of possible intimate connections, but that one does not quite know how to access it [5].

Considered one of Hong Kong's foremost second wave filmmakers, Wong Kar-wai's films tend to depict in great detail the lives of Hong Kong residents as they struggle with issues of romantic and familial love and the search for personal identity. These recurrent themes of fledgling intimacy, self-discovery, disappointment, and the endless, repetitive thrust of time are inevitably paired with characters who are tangled up in the domestic, local, indigenous and transient aspects of Hong Kong life. In particular, *Chungking Express, Happy Together* and *In The Mood For Love* present these aspects of intimacy as spatial relations between characters and the various site-specific city nooks they inhabit. Wong's films portray a physically and spatially intimate Hong Kong.

These rowdy, steamy spaces so typical to Hong Kong contrast starkly with, and are located literally just below, the region's overwhelming wealth typified by skyscrapers and massive, serpentine sidewalks linking ever more luxurious and modern air-conditioned shopping centres in Central, Hong Kong's business hub. Though

this sanitized, glass and steel metropolis is rarely even glimpsed in the background of Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong (his only pan of the familiar skyline is flipped upside down in *Happy Together*), it is nevertheless *there*, concretely suspended above the crowded street-level population. This architectural contrast is part of a local identity that is very specific to Hong Kong and which originates in myriad political, geographical and social tensions unique to this bustling region. Neil Leach, professor of Architectural Theory at the University of Bath, says:

> Hong Kong is the quintessential site of spatial appropriation. The interstices of the urban fabric are used and re-used with an extraordinary intensity. Stalls appear over night, squatting within the leftover spaces of the urban fabric, and disappear with equal ease. *Interior spaces – home – are created even in the external zones of the public realm.* Public thoroughfares are adopted as the site of ritual events. These spaces – many of them transit spaces – become spaces of transitory identity, as their character changes according to the way in which they have been appropriated (emphasis added) [6].

Wong Kar-Wai's films struggle with issues of representation, sexuality, and culture within a postmodern context. And perhaps ironically, at the historical moment Hong Kong film was finding and portraying a specifically "Hong Kong identity," filmmakers such as Wong Kar-wai have also implicitly understood the transience and ultimately culturally fractured and transnational nature of the space of the city; of *their* city. In fact, it might be argued that Hong Kong residents, as they come to terms with and explore aspects of their identity with their "home" space, must at the same time address their fundamentally shared and shifting politics of location.

Wong Kar-Wai's Hong Kong is not often narratively bound to contemporary Asia specifically. The subtleties of his work can be understood as internationally accessible, while remaining founded on an intimately identifiable cityscape. This, arguably, has everything to do with certain undeniable realities of current Hong Kong culture and its history. In seven of the eight films he has made to date, Wong has portrayed Hong Kong unquestionably as "home" for his characters. The city is a place of unavoidable triad violence in *As Tears Go By*; a place of origin and abandonment, inescapable even after the film's main character travels to Taiwan in *Days Of Being Wild*; a home of frantic movement, clogged public thoroughfares and anonymous chance encounters, each a possibility for potential romantic connection in *Chungking Express*; a home of neighborhood gang violence, thwarted romance and impossibly cramped quarters making the pain of unrequited love that much more physically unbearable in *Fallen Angels*; a home known to us only through nostalgia, memory, painful familial disassociations in *Happy Together*; and, finally, a 1960s Hong Kong is home to lingering but ultimately abandoned romantic possibility and emotional connection in the sumptuous *In The Mood For Love*. These films concentrate repeatedly on lost or failed love, with main characters usually ending up alone, if they don't die first.

These films have in common both a concentration on young and almost exclusively failed love, and the representation of city space as largely anonymous corners, as well as a handful of immediately recognizable spaces that belong unquestionably to Hong Kong: a city that is most often represented by crowded nooks and crannies, idiosyncratic shops, fast food joints and narrow alleyways. Wong's characters exist within a city that is the physical embodiment and postmodern, transnational indication of their various social lives.

In The Mood For Love, for example, provides an almost constant depiction of this sense of intimate space paired with unfulfilled emotional intimacy. This film and others, most notably *Chungking Express, Fallen Angels* and *Happy Together* express these fraught intimate spaces – which are always public city spaces – of Hong Kong (or the small, steamy Hong Kong-esque spaces of Buenos Aires in *Happy Together*) and its residents. These spaces are as recognizable and familiarly comfortable to local residents as they are universally accessible to international audiences. Potential romantic couples in each of these three films, are confronted with – are, indeed, *comforted* by – the ever-present urban public space as potential, sometimes exclusive, site for romantic pursuit.

The thematic link between city space and the search for romantic love and identity in these films serve to remind us that Hong Kong is a region of constant political and cultural change. The region is, at the same time, literally shifting and transforming as architectural booms replace the old with the new. As a consequence, regional and individual identity is often portrayed as ambiguous and resistant of definition. Questions of place, space and identity arise out of the fact that Hong Kong is a place still deeply involved in immigration and emigration which, in turn constantly hampers

the region's ability to concretely define a "national" or "quasi-national" identity. The Hong Kong resident confronts daily the inescapability of the space of the city – a relatively tiny plot of land that is nonetheless home to more than seven million people. Just as identity and identity formation are implicitly linked to Hong Kong's recent history and, subsequently, its people, so does the spectre of the city's cramped quarters and the inevitability of chance meetings and anonymous encounters weigh on character consciousness in Wong Kar-wai's cinema.

Questions of identity and the reality of intimacy are therefore constantly present in the lives of the people of Hong Kong, however indirectly they are felt. These realities are consistently present also in the region's contemporary post-new wave films – which Wong Kar-Wai's oeuvre is a part of. For his characters, intimacy is achieved as much in the public realm as in the private realm, and this can be read as a learned consequence of identification with the small spaces of Hong Kong as the *home spaces* of Hong Kong. Wong's films portray the city as a place where intimacy is, in fact, achieved or sought after *exclusively* in public. This use of city space is both emotionally universal and regionally specific. Small city spaces are used to connote intimate spaces of failed, forlorn and yearning love and tenderness.

Laurel Wypkema previously wrote about HBO in Synoptique 7.

ENDNOTES

1 Tung Chee Hwa resigned (officially due to health problems) in March, 2005. Many Hong Kong people considered him to be incompetent and speculation persists that his resignation had more to do with the demand that he step down as Chief Executive than with physical illness. Donald Tsang, a native Hong Kong resident and devout Roman Catholic, took up the position on June 21.

2 Abbas, 16.

3 Bordwell, 274.

4 Bordwell, 274, 280.

5 Yau, 285-286.

6 Leach, 173.

Laurel Wypkema is working hard for her Master's degree in Film Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. Current interests include the recent cinemas of Hong Kong and Ireland, Chinese folk tale films, movies by Todd Haynes, all things HBO and Channel 4's "Jamie's School Dinners".

Edited by Andrea Ariano.

L'anime en quête d'identité: la saga ghost in the shell

Bruno Dequen

Anime may be the perfect medium to capture what is perhaps the overriding issue of our day, the shifting nature of identity in a constantly changing society. […] In particular, animation's emphasis on metamorphosis can be seen as the ideal artistic vehicle for expressing the postmodern obsession with fluctuating identity.
-Susan Napier [1]

Susan Napier fait ainsi écho à l'intérêt théorique que l'anime suscite depuis quelques années. Perçu comme un simple phénomène économique à ses débuts, l'anime devient progressivement une source d'observation privilégiée pour la recherche sur le postmodernisme. Comme l'écrit Thomas Lamarre : « A host of commentators in Japan have likewise situated anime in relation to the emergence of something new – the postmodern, the post-human, the post-national, non-identitarian politics […]. More recently, Azuma Hiroki situates anime in relation to the postmodern collapse of grand narratives and ideologies. »

Bien sûr, l'influence du courant cyberpunk sur les anime est grandement responsable de sa connexion avec les préoccupations postmodernes. En effet, le genre cyberpunk, dont l'ouvrage le plus célèbre demeure *Neuromancer* de William Gibson, propose des récits d'anticipation dans lesquels, suite aux progrès technologiques, la différence entre humains et machines est sans cesse remise en question. Cette négociation de l'identité humaine face aux progrès technologiques a tout de suite été assimilée aux définitions de l'individu postmoderne. Appartenant à ce courant cyberpunk, le diptyque *Ghost In The Shell* est une oeuvre phare de l'anime. Le premier volet, sorti en 1995, reste l'un des plus gros succès de l'anime en Occident. Sa suite, sortie en 2004, sera sélectionnée en compétition officielle au Festival de Cannes. De plus, ces films sont réputés pour leur abondante exposition de concepts philosophiques.

En tant que récits de science-fiction, ces oeuvres abordent bien sûr de nombreux thèmes liés à la question de l'identité postmoderne. Néanmoins, les thèmes abordés au sein de ces deux récits m'intéressent moins que la façon dont le médium anime parvient à les susciter. Comme le suggère Napier, le médium lui-même serait un véhicule privilégié pour l'exploration et la visualisation de concepts postmodernes. À travers l'analyse de la saga *Ghost In The Shell,* nous explorerons en quoi les spécificités du médium anime peuvent être un judicieux instrument de pensée philosophique.

Ghost In The Shell décrit les aventures du major Kusanagi Motoko, une femme cyborg appartenant à une unité d'élite de la police de Hong Kong. Dans le premier volet, Kusanagi et ses collègues sont à la poursuite d'un pirate informatique surdoué nommé « puppet master », mais le récit laisse plus ou moins de côté l'aspect policier pour se concentrer sur ce qui semble être le véritable sujet du film : la quête d'identité de Kusanagi. Cette dernière réalise progressivement que son cerveau est manipulé par le « puppet master », qui est en fait non pas un humain, mais un programme informatique doué d'intelligence. Kusanagi accepte finalement de « fusionner » avec le « puppet master », et le film se conclut sur son réveil dans le corps d'une jeune fille (son corps ayant été détruit lors du combat

final). *Ghost In The Shell 2 : Innocence* se déroule quelques années après les événements du premier volet. Le personnage principal est cette fois-ci Batou, l'ancien collègue cyborg de Kusanagi. Batou, qui ne s'est jamais remis de la disparition de Kusanagi, doit résoudre une série de crimes perpétrés par des poupées robotiques. Il finira par résoudre l'affaire avec l'aide de Kusanagi qui, devenue une entité immatérielle, a la capacité de pirater les systèmes informatiques et de fusionner avec n'importe quel corps robotique.

Au niveau du récit, la saga *Ghost In The Shell* expose de nombreux thèmes philosophiques. À travers le personnage des cyborgs, la nature de l'identité humaine est questionnée. En effet, seul une partie du cerveau de Kusanagi est d'origine humaine, ce qui provoque chez elle de nombreux questionnements. Tout comme dans *Blade Runner*, influence majeure sur ces deux films, le récit policier est rapidement mis de côté afin de privilégier les questionnements et les errances des personnages principaux, dont une des capacités semble être la mémorisation de citations de textes philosophiques et littéraires (Descartes, Milton…). Cet utilisation abondante des citations s'explique au sein du récit par le fait que, dans l'univers de *Ghost In The Shell*, tout le monde est connecté en permanence sur le Net au moyen de puces insérées dans le cerveau. Ainsi, chaque être humain peut puiser sans limite dans ce réservoir de connaissances universelles et partagées qu'est le Net. Dans le premier opus, le « puppet master » profitait déjà de cette innovation technologique pour pirater le cerveau de certains personnages, ce qui créait un environnement paranoïaque dans lequel chacun pouvait être manipulé à son insu. Ce danger devient omniprésent dans le second volet. Tous les personnages du film sont victimes de piratage à un moment ou à un autre. Lorsqu'ils ne sont pas piratés, ils sont parfois victimes de « bugs », tel ce policier qui use de citations dont il ne comprend pas la signification. L'identité personnelle de chacun est mise en doute, ce qui rejoint certaines définitions de l'individu postmoderne, entre autres celle que propose Stuart Hall lorsqu'il écrit : « [the postmodern subject has] no fixed, essential or permanent [3] identity, […] [he has] different identities at the same time. » . On pense aussi à l'idée du sujet schizophrénique que décrit Fredric Jameson. [4] En effet, le policier humain utilise les citations comme une suite de mots sans signification. Puit de citations inutiles et incomprises, ce personnage n'est capable ni de comprendre, ni de se servir de ces citations philosophiques.

Livia Monnet utilise les théories d'Alison McMahan pour décrire la nouvelle forme de subjectivité à l'oeuvre dans ces films. [5] Elle démontre par exemple que Kunasagi possède les trois caractéristiques de la subjectivité multiforme. Dans un premier temps, sa subjectivité est distribuée dans d'autres personnages du film, à l'image de son double qu'elle aperçoit dans un café. De plus, elle possède cette « networked subjectivity » citée plus haut, qui lui permet de communiquer avec ses collègues directement sur le Net et propulse ainsi sa propre subjectivité au sein d'un réseau plus vaste. Enfin, le film présente une « agentless perception » à travers le Net lui-même, qui est un point de vue non-attribué.

Ainsi, le récit de la saga *Ghost In The Shell* est explicitement source de thématiques postmodernes. Mais cet aspect n'est pas spécifique au médium anime. N'importe quel film ou roman cyberpunk développe de la même façon certains de ces thèmes. Comme nous l'avons suggéré, ce sont les spécificités techniques du médium qui lui permettraient d'occuper une place à part au sein de ces oeuvres.

L'un des concepts les plus employés dans les discussions sur l'anime est « mukokuseki », qui signifie « sans identité nationale ». [6] Ce terme fait référence aux univers présentés dans ces films. Mamoru Oshii, réalisateur des deux *Ghost In The Shell*, déclare ainsi que la force de l'anime est la création d'un « autre monde » qui est complètement détaché de la réalité. Ce concept peut être tout aussi bien applicable au design même des personnages. Une des particularités des personnages anime est en effet la simplicité de leur design. Contrairement à l'animation occidentale qui porte un soin extrême au personnages afin de créer des personnalités distinguables, l'animation japonaise porte son attention sur les décors, et produit des personnages qui se ressemblent tous. De plus, les visages de personnages d'anime possèdent souvent de grands yeux et un teint pâle. Ces caractéristiques physiques sont peu japonaises, et de nombreux artistes abondent dans ce sens en déclarant que les visages mêmes des personnages représentent un rejet de l'identité japonaise, au profit d'une identité « internationale ». De plus, dans *Ghost In The Shell*, Oshii joue sur une autre particularité du dessin japonais, qui est la représentation de personnages féminins nus sans sexe, particularité recyclée d'ailleurs avec ironie par l'artiste d'avant-garde Murakami. À nouveau, cette particularité créé des personnages qui, en plus de leur multinationalité, possèdent un sexe hybride qui empêche toute notion fixe d'identité.

La qualité formelle la plus étudiée en ce qui concerne l'anime est le concept de « flatness ». Ce concept,

dans son sens le plus simple, est la caractérisation typiquement japonaise d'un dessin très 2D. Murakami, dont la pratique artistique est une réflexion sur l'anime, démontre que cette caractéristique est propre à l'art figuratif japonais depuis le début de l'ère Edo. Il définit ainsi cette pratique : « Creation of autonomous aesthetic space within the framework of realistic representation […] is the radical spirit of the Japanese two-dimensional aesthetic. » [7] Cette pratique s'oppose en partie à la tradition occidentale de la représentation réaliste et perspectiviste. Ce type de dessin permet surtout la mise en cause du point de fuite, qui est un élément fondateur de la représentation moderne du monde. Ainsi, l'image dans les anime ressemble souvent à une superposition de surfaces hétérogènes sans centre apparent. Le sujet-spectateur perd alors la stabilité de son point de vue. Sachant que le concept même de sujet moderne est fondé sur la représentation perspectiviste, la pratique du « flatness » détruit ainsi l'idée moderne de sujet unique et homogène. Si Murakami pousse cette platitude à son extrême, la plupart des anime sont en constante négociation entre représentation réaliste et « flatness ». Thomas Looser décrit ainsi les images de *Ghost In The Shell* : « Flat spaces of almost pure vivid green color, in which the principal grounds of location are simply cross-hatched lines, are combined with filmic, almost photo-realistic depictions of bodies and movement in spaces that are perspectival and three-dimensional (with the point of view of a camera, for instance, following a running man while panning past still elements in the foreground and background). » [8] Looser démontre que le film tout entier fonctionne sur cette alternance entre deux représentations. L'esthétique « flat » représente la ville vue à travers le réseau informatique, alors que la représentation classique sert aux visions « réelles » de l'environnement physique. Looser développe ainsi une théorie d'opposition/convergence entre analogique et numérique, le numérique étant associé au « flatness », donc à une représentation postmoderne du monde.

Les points apportés par Looser sont d'un grand intérêt, mais la représentation de la ville dans la saga *Ghost In The Shell* est un peu plus complexe que cette simple opposition. S'il est vrai que le dessin traditionnel permet de montrer des décors en perspective, le film alterne constamment entre différentes parties de la ville sans jamais relier ces endroits entre eux. Les différents décors sont par ailleurs fortement différents les uns des autres : d'immenses gratte-ciels, un bâtiment du siècle dernier, des quartiers pauvres. Il n'est jamais possible de faire le lien entre ces différents quartiers. Même si la représentation des décors est réaliste, le spectateur demeure désorienté. En fait, la visualisation numérique de la ville permet une meilleure vision du monde représenté que les scènes réelles. C'est d'ailleurs ce qui fait la particularité de *Ghost In The Shell*. Au lieu d'opposer de façon systématique l'homme et la technologie, ces films, tout comme leurs images combinant dessin traditionnel et animation digitale, proposent une vision du progrès technologique qui n'est pas essentiellement négative. Tout comme l'animation digitale permet un travail inédit sur les textures et la luminosité, le Net est perçu comme une technologie qui a besoin d'être apprivoisée et qui peut potentiellement permettre à l'homme une meilleure compréhension du réel. Le sujet postmoderne n'est plus placé en opposition/distinction face au sujet moderne, il devient l'aide indispensable à la pleine maîtrise du monde par le sujet moderne. Loin d'être une oeuvre technophobique (comme la plupart des films de science-fiction occidentaux), *Ghost In The Shell* propose une utilisation positive de la technologie. Le second volet se conclut d'ailleurs sur la victoire positive de Kusanagi, dont la fusion totale avec le Net permet une maîtrise presque totale des événements.

Dans notre citation introductive, Napier évoquait le concept de métamorphose comme spécificité technique essentielle de l'animation. Comme le remarque Daisuke Miyao, le film *Fantasmagories* (1908) d'Émile Cohl, l'un des premiers films d'animation de l'histoire du cinéma en 1908, était d'ailleurs entièrement fondé sur la transformation de formes. [9] Ce film fut l'un des premiers films d'animation distribués au Japon et il provoqua un énorme impact sur le public de l'époque. Selon Miyao, ce film est, entre autres, à l'origine d'une pratique de l'animation axée sur ses vertus métamorphiques, pratique qui est toujours très visible dans l'anime. Si ce processus de métamorphose est visible dans la plupart des premiers films de Disney, la particularité des anime est d'effectuer ces métamorphoses principalement sur des personnages humains (contrairement à Disney qui utilise la métamorphose sur des animaux).

En ce qui concerne le diptyque *Ghost In The Shell*, Livia Monnet propose d'analyser l'utilisation que ces films font de la métamorphose en liant ce concept à celui de « tesseract ». Le tesseract est, selon Monnet, la quatrième dimension d'un objet en trois dimension. Elle propose ainsi l'hypercube comme source d'une théorie sur le tesseract. Le tesseract peut ainsi s'interpréter comme l'état transitoire visible lors d'une transformation. Monnet utilise l'exemple du « morphing ». Dans le passage d'une image à l'autre, Monnet s'attarde sur le moment où l'image initiale n'est plus présente et l'image finale pas encore définie. Comme l'explique Kevin Fisher, «Within any morph between two objects

there is a midpoint at which the morph is minimally recognizable as either "source" or "target" image. It is at the moment of midpoint that, if only just for an instant, the morph lapses from the order of known things. Most important, this lapse (or lack) of formal definition is still figured in full three-dimensional extrusion, and the paradoxical presence of being-withoutthing-ness blinks at us […] like some denuded metasubstance stripped of the overdetermined trappings of symbolic designation and fixity.» [10] Dans *Ghost In The Shell,* Monnet situe le tesseract dans les scènes de camouflage optique. Les personnages ont en effet la possibilité, au moyen d'un camouflage sophistiqué, de devenir invisibles, et ainsi de disparaître dans le décor. La particularité technique de l'anime (moins de 12 images par seconde) permet de voir clairement ce moment de transformation. Ce moment de transition entre deux identités peut être interprété comme la visualisation de l'identité fragmentaire et changeante du sujet postmoderne. Entre les deux stades de la transformation, le personnage est « being-without-thing-ness », sans identité.

Dans *Ghost In The Shell 2*, un autre aspect de métamorphose animée fait son apparition. Il s'agit de la capacité de représentation de ce que, faute de définition, je nommerai les « mouvements anomaliques », c'est-à-dire l'animation de mouvements impossibles et inexistants dans le monde réel. Je fais ici allusion à la dernière partie du film, dans laquelle Kusanagi prend possession du corps d'une poupée afin d'aider son ancien collègue à vaincre une armée de cyborgs. Dans cette scène, la poupée combine une absence totale d'émotions visibles à une série de mouvements qui défient les lois de la physiologie humaine. Selon moi, ces mouvements anomaliques constituent une visualisation possible de ce que Bergson appellerait une rupture du schéma sensori-moteur. Selon Bergson, notre système sensori-moteur est ce qui nous permet d'agir sur le monde qui nous entoure.

Néanmoins, afin de pouvoir agir, notre cerveau sélectionne les éléments de notre perception tout en générant une réponse corporelle appropriée à ces stimuli. Cette opération d'analyse sélective, nous dit Bergson, aurait comme inconvénient de nous éloigner de la « matière », c'est-à-dire de l'ensemble des choses. Afin de s'en rapprocher (et donc de jouir d'une meilleure connaissance du monde), une rupture du schéma sensori-moteur est donc nécessaire, car elle permet une perception accrue des choses. Le paradoxe fondamental réside dans le fait que cette perception attentive a besoin d'un retour du schéma sensori-moteur pour être constructive, puisqu'elle représente une absence totale d'action sur le monde.

Chez Bergson, notre corps est à la fois l'élément indispensable à notre action sur le monde et la barrière qui nous empêche de le comprendre totalement. L'animation permet, dans *Ghost In The Shell* 2, de visualiser un être hybride qui combine en quelque sorte les deux attitudes irréconciliables de Bergson. Pur esprit, Kusanagi est capable de percevoir la totalité du Net. Mais elle a encore besoin d'un corps pour pouvoir agir concrètement sur le monde. Piratant un corps extérieur, elle est d'autant plus efficace que ce corps peut agir sans être dépendant d'un schéma sensori-moteur pré-établi. Pur esprit et pur corps actif, Kusanagi est devenue un nouvel être qui, sans rejeter les principes de la modernité (le corps, donc le soi comme centre d'action et de connaissances), parvient à utiliser la technologie comme moyen de perfection des caractéristiques modernes. Cette courte analyse de la saga *Ghost In The Shell* a permis d'observer en quoi les spécificités du médium anime en faisait un outil d'expression privilégié pour la pensée postmoderne.

Le design des personnages, la combinaison du dessin traditionnel et digital, de même que la capacité de créer des métamorphoses, permettent en effet de mettre en image un univers et des personnages en constante quête d'identité et en perpétuelle transformation. Il n'y a pas d'image ou de concept stable et fixe dans l'anime. Mais, dans le cas de *Ghost In The Shell,* cette ambiguïté n'est pas perçue comme un élément négatif. Peut-être cette vision positive du changement constant et de l'hybridité est-elle une nouvelle définition d'un l'individu (post) moderne.

Bruno Dequen wrote about Team America: World Police in Synoptique 5.

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4 Voir l'utilisation du sujet schizophrène de Lacan par Jameson dans « Postmodernism and the Consumer Society ». In The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Postmodern Culture, edited by Hal Foster. Washington : Ray Press, (1991) pg.118.

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Edited by Bruno Cornellier.

Fans, Copyright, and Subcultural Change: A Review of Sean Leonard's "Progress Against the Law"

Brent Allison

Sean Leonard, a law student at the University of Chicago, wrote an essay, "Progress Against the Law: Fan Distribution, Copyright, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation" to complete a course at M.I.T. entitled, "Ethics and Law on the Electronic Frontier" while a master's student in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Issues surrounding Copyright and digital spaces are ones that scholars and entertainment industry agents alike are keen to explore [1]. Leonard's paper is notable for its far-reaching implications, touching upon subculturallevel power dynamics, producer/consumer collaboration, and a smaller, more obscure, but increasingly significant facet of globalization. The latter is likely to lurk just under the surface of a Japanese animation club meeting near you.

Leonard's main argument critiques the U.S. copyright regime in its tendency to inhibit fledgling new media industries that rely upon royalty-free mass distribution for their initial survival. He grounds the context of his argument in the recent history of Japanese animation, or anime, fandom in the U.S., discussed in a carefully researched method absent in the rest of the literature on animation from Japan. This alone is an important contribution, particularly to fandom researchers such as myself. However, Leonard concluded this history and analysis of anime fandom by arguing the need to reform, if not subvert, some portions of copyright law; not just for the good of the anime industry in the U.S. during its nascent years, but also for the "progress of the arts" [2]. In so doing, his essay fails not only to problematize the notion of this progress, but also to address questions related to cross-cultural media reception, subcultural politics, and political economy outside the bounds of copyright. By dialoging with Leonard's work, this paper will hopefully serve to inspire scholars with the notion that subsequent research may explore on this remarkable trend in globalization.

From the beginnings of a self-aware anime fandom in the U.S. in the mid-1970s, fans have had to rely not just on Japanese media, but Japanese people to obtain and translate this media. Leonard discusses the facts of fan interaction with Japanese American community television, small rental shops located in this community, and even U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan collaborating with citizens of the host nation to acquire anime for distribution in the States [3]. In this sense, persons of Japanese descent were practically no different from a U.S. fan group on another coast in that both peoples had new anime to offer to non-initiates.

Apart from this, Japanese and Japanese Americans are invisible in Leonard's discussion of fandom. This is likely not by Leonard's intent, but by virtue of their relative exclusion from fandom that continues to this day, self-selected or otherwise. Exploring this exclusion apart from "Japan(ese)-as-source" is critical in determining how and why fans identify Japan and Japanese people as Other, and what basis, if any, this serves in their conceptualizations of anime and themselves as connoisseurs. Does the relative absence of Japanese people in everyday anime fandom instigate Orientalism, another marginalizing system of discourse that differs from it, or does it bear no significant effects on fandom's libratory potential? Would the fan insistence on retaining the "true" meaning and spirit of an anime title, often conflated with its "Japaneseness",

remain as persistent today if more Japanese people were part of fandom and viewed this "Japaneseness" much differently?

The introduction of the Commodore Amiga in 1989 allowed small groups of fans to insert English subtitles into anime for distribution in North America, a process known as "fansubbing" [4]. Leonard cites this development as loosening the control of distribution by larger, well-organized groups such as the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization (C/FO) [5]. Relying on technological change to explain greater equity in power relationships lends support to technology-inspired initiative over the constraints of copyright regimes. However, this formula marginalizes culture, its own force for change, as a mere response to technology. It alone cannot explain why fans felt that they were watching "real" anime for the first time when English subtitles were present, as Leonard indicates [6]. Did Catholic parishioners in the pre-Vatican II era feel that their services weren't "real" because they were read in Latin? What might explain the "reality" of subtitled anime for fans as opposed to its presentation in "raw" Japanese? This concern calls for socio-linguistics, cultural and visual anthropology, as well as social psychology to inform explorations of this issue.

Further, power imbalances among participants in a subculture may likely remain or even increase with the introduction of more user-friendly technology. Web technology, for example, can unleash democratizing forces amongst fans to challenge dominant meanings ascribed to anime in weblogs and message boards. This same technology also allows relative behemoths such as AnimeTurnpike.com and AnimeNewsNetwork.com to organize massive amounts of anime-related data and commentary without detailed public input or significant control. Any private volunteer group today would be hard-pressed to exercise C/FO's level of control of fandom in the 1980s, largely since anime fandom itself has grown exponentially since then. Levels approaching that control, however, can be re-enacted, especially in smaller sub-anime fandoms such as series-specific (e.g. *One Piece, Full Metal Alchemist, Honey And Clover*) fan groups, given sufficient knowledge and organizational resources put to use online. In short, the question should not be, "How has technology affected anime fandom?" but rather, "In what ways have significant portions of the fandom adopted available technology, and for what purposes?" Leonard's historical analysis of anime fandom stops at 1993, before fans adopted the Internet on a wide scale, so the web itself would not have come under his scrutiny. Nevertheless, assumptions about the effects of technology on culture and power should be checked and acknowledged rather than taken for granted.

For Leonard, the main anomaly of interest in his study is the rise of an industry that could not have taken place unless copyright laws were flouted rather than upheld; laws made ostensibly for the good of industry itself. Another anomaly of political economy that deserves attention is subcultural collaboration with an industry as opposed to the rise of an industry itself. Most scholars of subculture are familiar with the pattern of cooptation of subcultural symbols by businesses for commercial exploitation [7]. Anime, however, began as a wholly commercial enterprise mostly aimed to sell advertising airtime and toys associated with a title. Yet, a subculture in the U.S. took up anime as a collection of narratives that, when aggregated, symbolized novelty, earnestness, and even spiritual transcendence. Rather than resisting commercialization, Leonard explained, anime fandom embraced it still as a *venue* to spread it far and wide via the market, rather than as an end in itself [8]. An industry in North America, part of it run by fans and part of it not, did coalesce from these efforts. However, one must ponder whether or not fans entirely viewed North American anime licensing as a positive development, given that it would restrict, rather than embolden access to anime for more impoverished fans. Moreover, fans may have certain expectations about how anime should be distributed to others that do not meet the dictates of industry, as Leonard references in his mention of conflicts over anime shown with subtitles versus those dubbed in English [9]. Researchers should pay greater attention to the ways in which fans share common goals, but have very different ideas on how to, or who should, achieve them. To do so requires not only locating points of conflict, but also how fans on all sides ascribe meaning to conflict per their expectations of what fandom, "mainstream" culture, and anime (or any media artifact) itself are and should be.

Leonard makes a contribution long overdue to academic research into anime, namely narrating and contextualizing a fandom within the labyrinthine intricacies of copyright law. This was an important concern before 1993, but is even more critical in a fandom that finds itself, and its distribution of anime, now largely situated online. His essay should serve as a call for not just legal scholars, but also practitioners of cultural studies to reconsider the relationships between Self vs. Other, fan vs. fandom, and cultural consumption vs. production.

ENDNOTES

1 For research in this area, see Kelty, C. "Punt to Culture". *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (3), (2004): pp. 547-559; Merges, R. "A New Dynamism in the Public Domain". University of Chicago Law Review 71 (1) (2004): pp. 183-205.

2 Leonard, S. (2004). *Progress Against the Law: Fan Distribution, Copyright, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation*. Retrieved July 14, 2005 from http://mit.edu/seantek/www/papers : pg. 4

3 IBID: pp. 4, 7, 14

4 IBID: pg. 4

5 IBID: pg. 13

6 IBID: pg. 20

7 Cohen, S. (1980). "Symbols of Trouble". In The Subcultures Reader (1997), Gelder, K. & Thornton, S. (Eds.) Routledge: London & New York: pg. 156.

8 Leonard: pg. 16

9 IBID: pg. 25

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Edited by Owen Livermore

THE WAY OF THE (FEMALE) DIRECTOR: *The Work of Tomoko Matsunashi*

Peter Rist

The 9th Fantasia Film Festival has been and gone in Montreal, and once again, this year's edition was hugely successful with its predominantly young audiences. As a big fan of East Asian cinemas myself, I attended close to 30 screenings as usual, and as with last year's edition, I was struck by an increasing percentage of female (and Asian) audience members. In the past, a strike against the festival was that many of the films shown bordered on the misogynist, and this was reflected in its predominantly male audience occasionally getting "ugly" in cheering crimes against women. There has always been a place for female fans of anime (Japanese animation) at Fantasia, and with Mi-Jeong Lee as one of the three directors of Asian programming, and three other women being listed in the catalogue amongst their twelve "associate" programmers, the prospects look good for the future. [1] Indeed, this year, at least three of the Asian guests were women, including Sandy Kang, the Director of International Marketing for CJ Entertainment, who was representing nine of the Korean films at the festival and two Japanese film directors.

"Torico" came to Montreal to show her 28 minute digital film, *Migakagami* (2004), which, for me, was clearly the best of the five films in the "Japanese Short Films" programme (although the audience picked the anime, *Kakurenbo* (2005) as the "best Asian short film"). *Migakagami* was produced by Hiroki Yamaguchi, who came to Fantasia last year with his feature, Bottled Fool, and, as with that digital work, very good use is made here of a low budget, especially in terms of creating special effects. Like Jean Cocteau's masterpiece of surrealist film, *Orphée* (1949), the protagonist of Torico's film, a young woman, Milco is drawn through a mirror which has turned into liquid. [2] Cleverly, here, the world on the other side moves in reverse, and when Milco tries to return to the normal state of things she is tricked into setting up a mirror opposite her own, which, in turn produces numerous replicants of herself. With creative flourishes such as this, the imaginative young director of *Migakagami* will hopefully find the opportunity to direct feature films in the future.

While it is true that women often find it difficult to break into feature filmmaking everywhere in the world, it seems to me that Japan might be the most resistant of the major filmmaking nations in giving opportunities to women. There are examples of female directors to be found in the horror and "pink" genres of Japanese film, and in the independent sphere of documentary film, but only one Japanese woman has made a real breakthrough as a fiction feature film director on the international scene and that is Naomi Kawase (with *Suzaku*, 1996, and *Shara*, 2003). Perhaps Tomoko Matsunashi will be next. She had submitted a two-part film, *Bitch Matilda* (1998/2005) to Fantasia this year which earned praise from Fantasia associate programmer Michiko Higuchi. But the festival was unable to secure or produce a subtitled version of this, so, as an alternative, Ms. Matsunashi sent a copy of her latest work, *The Way Of The Director* (2005) too late for it to be included in the catalogue. Festival director Pierre Corbeil liked this digital work as much as Michiko Higuchi, so they screened it in one of the TBA slots, and invited the director to visit Montreal. I was among the fortunate few to witness this screening in the company of Matsunashi dressed in the crazy

costume of "Strawberry," a character who appears in a film-within-her-film.

The Way Of The Director is a comic, reflexive film about filmmaking in Japan. Unlike other North American and European films that I have seen that deal with this subject, Tomoko Matsunashi's is highly original in that it takes a feminist stance. Kitagawa, (played by Norio Manta) competes with Saito (Marie Machida) for awards at a film festival, which showcases the work of new directors. Kitagawa is convinced that he is a genius and is equally certain that his competitors are useless. He wins the top prize, and immediately an aspiring actress, Sakurako (played by the director) comes on to him. He assumes that she loves him and exploits her sexually and financially. When she finally tires of his abusiveness, he has to be reminded that he is living in her apartment, when he tries to kick her out! Much later, after he has become a porno movie director out of necessity he encounters Saito again. She had been supported in her career by Araki, the manager of a movie theatre, and gained some notoriety playing the character of "Strawberry," a "green" vigilante who kills people for mistreating strawberries. Saito, who still believes in Kitagawa's self-proclaimed talent travels with him across Japan's northernmost (and, hence, coldest) island, Hokkaido in the middle of winter. Caught in a blizzard, she dies and he eats her flesh in order to survive, but also succumbs to the elements eventually. At the end of the film, Yamamoto (Yoshipiyo Ito), who had become Kitagawa's friend through supporting his career in the porn industry, is able to exploit Kitagawa and Saito's documentary footage and make a highly successful film out of it.

The freshest aspect of *The Way Of The Director* is the honesty with which it depicts male/female relationships inside and outside the film industry. All of the male characters expect women to be subservient to them, and, up to a point, the women go along with this. One of the film's assumptions is that young men get into film as a way of contacting and controlling women, and, it seems to me that this is a universal fact of life which has often gone unrecognised in the West. The degree to which the Japanese male actors (especially Manta) are willing to humiliate themselves through exposing their machismo is both surprising and praiseworthy, as is the frankness of the sexuality throughout *The Way Of The Director*. To some extent, I am reminded here of the brilliant Hong Kong comedian/director Stephen Chow (Chiau Sing-Chi) best known in North America for *Shaolin Soccer* (2002) and *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), who goes further in his own sexual self-humiliation then any comparable Hollywood male star, but, Matsunashi brings a decidedly female perceptive to sexuality in the film business. Perhaps the biggest surprise for me is in how openly and how often I laughed through the duration of the film. It is hilarious.

Tomoko Matsunashi was born in Hiroshima on April 14, 1971. She studied drama at Waseda University, and after graduating she formed an acting troupe, "Chikatento Robakun." After making two medium-length 8mm films, she has managed to direct five digital feature films in eight years, often working with her acting friends. She is a self-taught filmmaker and with *The Way Of The Director* she clearly demonstrates her command of the film medium, using a wide angle lens to exaggerate the hysterical performance of Norio Manta, a hand-held camera to mimic Kitagawa's documentary style and parodying the superhero action film with rapid editing and tacky special effects. She received the Special Jury Prize for her first film, *To Be Or Not To Be* at the Yubari Fantastic Film festival in 1996, and in 1998 she was nominated for the New Director's Award of the Japan Directors' Guild for *Bitch Matilda* (one of the many autobiographical incidents which inspired *The Way Of The Director*). [3] In 2000, she made *Sabu*, Good-bye to Their Youth, an earlier attempt at comically rendering young male personas from a woman's perspective. This film combines left-politics and science fiction to tell the tale of two male slackers/losers who drop out of a provincial high school and become pedlars for a kind of Communist princess. After a "Revolutionary World War" which virtually destroys the Earth, not only does Tokyo seem to return to normalcy, but also the pro/antagonists absurdly settle down to a boring domesticity. This film was shown in theatres in both Osaka and Tokyo and was invited to Lloyd Kaufman's Tromadance Film Festival. Her next feature, *Replicant Joe* (2002) displays higher production values and goes even further in shifting from normalcy to fantasy. Here the title character, Joe, transformed into a cyberpunk, black space-suited robot, extracts revenge on his adversaries, armed with a rocket launcher for an arm, a pathetically small, yet protruding white woollen penis which involuntarily fires a laser ray, and a nuclear self-destruct button.

Matsunashi continues to work as a professional actress in Japanese films and releases her own directorial efforts on DVD through her independent label, Chikatento Robakun. Although a serious film distributor like Women Make Movies in New York City is unlikely to pay attention to any director of tongue-in-cheek "B" movies, there is a distinct lack of genuinely funny,

feminist films out there, and Tomoko Matsunashi's work, which is both distinctively Japanese and universal in appeal, deserves a look. No doubt, as an unpretentious, yet strangely weird genre filmmaker, she will be invited to show her work again next year at Fantasia, but I, for one, hope she gets other opportunities…

This is Peter's first written contribution to Synoptique.

ENDNOTES

1 The three "associate programmers" include the legendary Hiromi Aihara who, since the second or third year of the Fantasia festival has been centrally involved in bringing important Japanese independent and genre films to Montreal, including a number of world premieres. She is certainly one of the most significant people in developing Fantasia's world class reputation.

2 The Japanese director claimed to not be aware of Cocteau's films. She is also not familiar with another experimental French narrative film, René Clair's first film, *Paris Qui Dort* (1923) in which everyone and everything in Paris is frozen in time and place while someone walks the streets as apparently the only living being—not unlike the situation in *Migakagami*.

3 At the question and answer session after the film, she claimed that the film's most negative character, Kitagawa was actually based on her ex-boy friend!!

Peter Rist is a Professor of Film Studies at Concordia University. He has written extensively on East Asian cinemas and recently (in June, 2005) he read papers at academic conferences in Beijing/Shanghai and Tokyo. He is awaiting the publication of four books for which he has written chapters on silent Chinese and Japanese cinema, as well as the work of King Hu and Johnnie To, and he is currently writing a book on South American Cinema.

Edited by Owen Livermore.

American Samurai, Chinese Sheriffs, and Hollywood's Tokyo

Matthew Bolton

Matthew Bolton examines the current mainstream fascination with Asian genre cinema, from the Chinese and Japanese period pieces in popular distribution, through the Hollywood remakes of Japanese horror films, to the Jackie Chan American adventure-comedies, in order to explore the conflicted representation and Orientalist ideology underlying this increased Asian presence in Hollywood.

The Western visitor to Asia who becomes more Eastern than the Easterners is a cultural archetype which continues to have currency in Hollywood films. In Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Part Ii* (2004), for example, David Carradine plays the eponymous Bill, a villainous reimagining of Caine, the mendicant martial artist of Carradine's 1970's television series *Kung Fu*. Caine and Bill alike return from China having mastered both the art of the warrior and an ersatz Eastern philosophy of detachment, enlightenment, and self-determination which owes as much to Stephen Covey as it does to Confucius. In Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005), Bruce Wayne trains in a Himalayan martial arts school to gain the fighting prowess he will apply in Gotham City as Batman. While the titular head of the school is an Asian of indeterminate origin named Ra's Al Ghul (Ken Watanabe), its true leader is a Westerner played by Liam Neeson. But perhaps the character who most clearly fits this Westerner-turned-Easterner archetype is Nathan Algren, Tom Cruise's character in *The Last Samurai* (2003). While the film's imagery is indebted to Kurosawa, its story arc is a retread of James Clavell's *Shogun*: the *bildungsroman* of a man's transformation from *gaijin* to samurai. The Asia of all these films is a locus of trial and mastery, a place where the exceptional Westerner learns skills and values which effectively provide him with a second identity. In these narratives, Asian-ness—one part stoicism and two parts kung fu—is a commodity that an exceptional American may acquire and export.

The last five years have also witnessed the emergence of a film franchise which seems, at first glance, to represent an inversion of this archetype. In *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Shanghai Knights* (2003), as well as in Disney's *Around The World In Eighty Days* (2004), Jackie Chan plays a Chinese man who has traveled West. These films are worth a closer look, not because of the quality of their writing or production—each could be described as a broad, raucous, buddy-movie romp—but because they encode Western preoccupations about the nature of the East and about the fraught legacy of American and European racism and xenophobia. *Shanghai Noon* and *The Last Samurai* make for a particularly interesting comparison, because the films do not, as one might expect, follow parallel *bildungsroman* structures, despite each telling the story of a stranger adapting to a new culture. There is a great contrast between how these films represent a Westerner in the East versus an Easterner in the West, and this contrast is attributable less to the differing conventions of comedy and tragedy than to an underlying Orientalist ideology.

This ideology may likewise inform Hollywood's practice of remaking Japanese films with American actors. Of the recent crop of such remakes, Takashi Shimizu's transformation of his *Ju-On* into the

American *The Grudg*E is perhaps the most interesting, in that it engages in some of the same cross-cultural genre-swapping as *The Last Samurai* and *Shanghai Noon*. In Shimizu's *The Grudge* remake, a group of Westerners-gone-East find themselves doing battle with an undead Japanese family. Perhaps Hollywood cannot be faulted for wanting to cash in on the "J-Horror" boom, but the pattern of remaking these films, and the relationship between Americans and Japanese in *The Grudge*, seems to point to the common presumption that undergirds *The Last Samurai* and *Shanghai Noon*: that while Eastern Culture can be acquired, one has to be born into Western Culture.

By the end of *Shanghai Noon*, Chan's character, Chon Wang, possesses the trappings of (Wild) Western Culture: a sheriff's badge, a trusty partner, and the anglicized name John Wayne. The final scene shows Wang and Roy O'Bannon, Owen Wilson's good-natured former outlaw, galloping down a ridge to bring frontier justice to a gang of train robbers. On the surface, then, Wang's story seems to mirror that of *The Last Samurai*, which ends with Nathan Algren donning vermillion samurai armor to fight alongside his honorable friend and *daimyo*, Ken Watanabe's Katsumoto. Yet Wang's emergence as a Western Hero constitutes not the film's climax, but its coda. In the film's climactic showdown, it is O'Bannon who becomes the Western Hero by finally learning to shoot straight. Wang, on the other hand, fights exclusively with the kung fu skills which he brought with him from China. Cruise's Westerner and Chan's Easterner are ultimately measured in the same scale, judged according to their mastery of Eastern culture as embodied in the martial arts. Thus while Nathan Algren by the end of his story has become a samurai, Wang's claim to heroism remains firmly rooted in his native culture. The narrative of the Easterner in the West is one not of an outsider achieving mastery of the local culture, but of an outsider demonstrating the value of the culture he has brought with him, and therefore being received with tolerance. Wang's sheriff's badge denotes not his mastery of Western culture, but Western culture's acceptance of him.

The mutually-reinforcing ideologies of these two films raise the question of whose fantasy *Shanghai Noon* is meant to serve: an Asian desire for inclusion in Western narratives of the nineteenth-century, or an American desire to possess a history of such inclusion? The film's choice of villain points to the latter. Lo Fong, a villainous Chinese expatriot who runs a brutal mining camp, has kidnapped the Princess Pei Pei out of greed and lust. Fong keeps order through the Gestapo tactic of collective punishment, warning the princess that if she runs away, he will kill one worker every hour until she is found. This willingness to trample on individual rights is central to the film's depiction of Chinese thought. The Forbidden City, in which the film opens, is shown as a place of groveling and prostration. The three imperial guards who initially accompany Wang on his journey are indistinguishable automatons. The American West, in contrast, prizes individuality and personal liberty. Wang's great breakthrough is his realization that he does not need to return the princess to the Forbidden City. Where the film's villain has broken from imperial rule only to set himself up as emperor of a labor camp, Wang and Pei Pei will abandon Eastern autocracy in favor of American egalitarianism. Indeed, the only barrier to their living happily ever after in the American West is a fellow Chinese who has imported to the new world their culture's disregard for individual rights.

Driven by an interventionist or revisionary impulse, *Shanghai Noon* systematically ameliorates the pervasive racism of the American West. By presenting the institutionalized oppression of Chinese workers not as a Western practice, but as an imported Chinese one, it ignores the history of the thousands of Chinese workers who were employed by American companies in the West to build railroads, dig mines, and perform menial labor under appalling conditions. Displacing this institutionalized racism onto a Chinese villain bowdlerizes the Old West, rendering it an enlightened enough milieu to accommodate a Chinese man as citizen and hero. The ordinary Americans of *Shanghai Noon* come across as bumblingly ignorant rather than ignominiously bigoted. While O'Bannon's derogatory reference to Wang as "just a Chinaman" leads to a crisis in their relationship, the outlaw ultimately learns to value his Chinese friend's cultural heritage. "Not everyone is as tolerant as me," O'Bannon warns Wang elsewhere; but, in truth, most characters are *nearly* as tolerant as he is. When the three Imperial Guards hitch a ride in a pioneer couple's covered wagon, the pioneer woman comments to her husband that they don't look like any Indians she's ever seen. "They're not Injuns," the pioneer corrects his wife, "They're Jews." Dropping them off in town, he waves goodbye and calls out a hearty "shalom." Indians, Jews, Chinese—the average American embraces them all in the Old West of *Shanghai Noon*.

A similar charge of historical-revisionism might be made about the Meiji-era Japan of *The Last Samurai,* in which militant feudal warlords are represented both as gentle guardians of a pastoral lifestyle and as

broadminded cultural ambassadors willing to judge their American prisoner-of-war on his individual merits. The film's plot hinges on samurai society being permeable enough to allow Nathan Algren to learn its code and rise through its ranks. As in *Shanghai Noon*'s Old West, the inhabitants of this version of nineteenth-century feudal Japan must be infused with an early twenty-first century multicultural sensitivity for its basic premise to function. If *Shanghai Noon*'s vision of the Old West represents an American fantasy of possessing a more inclusive history, then *The Last Samurai* represents a similar desire in regard to U.S. foreign policy and the "Americanization" of the East. The U.S. military's envoys to Japan, from Commodore Matthew Perry in 1854 to General Douglas MacArthur after the Second World War, had modernizing influences on the country. The U.S. military officer of *The Last Samurai*, in contrast, is constructed instead as a reactionary figure who sides with traditional Japanese culture against the forces of modernization. Where MacArthur outlawed the samurai *katana*, Algren would wield one.

The shared ideology of *Shanghai Noon* and *The Last Samurai* is distinctly Orientalist, in that it treats Asian identity as a collectible fetish. This ideology may be at work not only in screenwriting, but also in the Hollywood boardroom. While there has been a boom in the number of Asian films to be shown in American theaters, an interesting pattern emerges when one considers which Asian films are released and which films are remade. Generally speaking, the Asian films which have been screened in mainstream American theaters have historical settings: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero*, *House Of Flying Daggers*, *Zatoichi*, and the *anime* features of Miyazaki and others. When Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* was remade as *The Magnificent Seven* or his *Yojimbo* as *A Fistful Of Dollars*, the American Western—in big studio and spaghetti phase, respectively—was in its ascendancy. It was fortuitous for the studios that stories set in the bandit-ridden countryside of Warring Statesera Japan carried over so well to the American frontier. Today, the Western genre has entered its postmodern phase. Filmmakers who create a contemporary Western do so with the awareness that they are commenting on a genre whose day has passed. It is at once the audience's familiarity with and relative distance from the generic conventions of the Western which makes it so easy to lampoon. The Japanese or Chinese period piece, on the other hand, is an eminently viable and popular genre. Relocating any of these films to an American setting would be quite the boondoggle. Indeed, these Asian operatic portrayals of the good, the bad, and the ugly may play so well in America precisely because they fill the void left by the demise of the Western.

Another set of films, all set in contemporary Japan and most of them horror movies, have instead been remade with American actors: *The Ring*, *The Grudge*, *Dark Water*, and the romantic-comedy *Shall We Dance*. Other remakes are in the works. On one level, the practice of remaking "J-Horror" movies points to the portability of the genre: everyone likes a good scare. Yet on some level, remaking such films seems to imply that while Asian identity is central to a story set in the mythic or historical past of China or Japan, it is extraneous or distracting in a story set in the present day. *The Ring*, for example, which was shot in the Pacific Northwest, effaces any connection to the Japan of the original *Ringu*. *Dark Water*, too, loses its Asian identity once set against the backdrop of the Manhattan real estate market.

Perhaps the most interesting of these horror remakes is one which retains its Japanese setting: *The Grudge* (2004), Takashi Shimizu's American version of his film *Ju-On* (2000, 2003). Both films (as well as the *Grudge* sequels which Shimizu has directed in Japan) revolve around a house haunted by the undead Saeki family: mother Kayako, son Toshio, and husband Takeo, who murdered the family before killing himself. Anyone who crosses the threshold of the house will be relentlessly pursued by this family of ghouls. Like *Ju-On*, *The Grudge* is set in Tokyo, but in this version all of the major characters are Americans who are working or studying in Japan. Where *The Last Samurai* imported an A-list Hollywood actor into a Japanese samurai movie, *The Grudge* imports B-list actors into a "J-Horror" film, with Sarah Michelle Gellar, Bill Pullman, and William Mapother playing a student, a professor, and a businessman on extended stays in the East.

But the presence of these Americans in Tokyo strains the conventions of the horror genre. Horror movies are built on the juxtaposition of the familiar and the unimaginable. It is this juxtaposition which makes the shower scene in *Psycho,* to go to a *locus classicus* of the genre, so terrifying: everyone has taken a shower, so everyone can relate to Leigh's vulnerability at the moment she is attacked. Both versions of *The Grudge* rely on such unsettling juxtapositions: in a scene indebted to *Psycho,* for example, a woman shampooing feels the fingers of a dead hand laced through her hair. Yet in replacing the Japanese protagonists of the original *Ju-On* with visiting Americans, *The Grudge* risks sacrificing familiarity and therefore undermining the most basic premise of the horror genre. The result is an unstable hybrid, a horror-

tourism film which fulfills a Western desire to play a lead role in the emerging Japanese horror movie craze.

The Grudge strikes an uneasy balance between treating its American characters as *gaijin* (literally "outside people") and insiders: they are "outside" enough to be sold a house which real estate agents know to be haunted and which the local police know was the site of multiple homicides, but "inside" enough to be living settled lives which can be disrupted by the emergence of the horrific. The Japanese homeowner in the original film had a senile mother living with him and a sister working nearby. In other words, he was living a rooted, regular life. In the remake, this same nuclear family—mother, son, daughter-in-law, daughter—has for some reason uprooted itself from America to move to Japan. It strains credulity not only for the whole Williams family to have relocated, but for the elderly American mother to be living in a traditional, *tatami*-matted room just off the kitchen—a room which suited her Japanese counterpart in the original film. Just as easily as the senile mother adapts herself to this non-Western room, so do almost all of the Americans adapt themselves to Japanese language and culture. The Williams' shortlived wife is the only one who seems to struggle with making the cultural transition. Karen (Sarah Michelle Gellar), an exchange student and volunteer social worker, and Peter (Bill Pullman), a college professor at a Japanese university, speak enough Japanese to negotiate all of the interactions required by this film. Even the Williams sister, who is stalked in her workplace, can blurt out enough Japanese to direct security to the proper floor. Simply put, there is no language barrier for these Americans. Their assimilation is aided by the fact that the Japanese police detective, like Katsumoto of *The Last Samurai*, speaks fluent English. This mastery of language is the factor that most decisively allows the Americans to function as horror protagonists and to "replace" the Japanese characters of the original film. It is the badge of their "insider" status.

Another odd development arises from Shimizu's sticking closely to his original script: there are no true cross-cultural relationships in this film. The Americans have all brought their friends and love interests abroad with them—the four members of the Williams family have each other, Karen has her American architect boyfriend, and Peter has his American wife. Where Nathan Algren and Chon Wang traveled alone and therefore found themselves bonding with foreign companions, the Americans of *The Grudge* are wholly insular. The one instance of cross-cultural desire in this film, shown in an extended flashback, is Kayako Saeki's unvoiced obsession with Peter. It is on account of this obsession that her husband kills Kayako, their son, and himself. So in point of fact, the only Japanese with whom the Americans have meaningful relationships are the ghouls who stalk them. Since the Japanese police and security guards prove to be relatively ineffectual, the story essentially becomes a showdown between living Americans and undead Japanese.

The transformation of the character of the visiting social worker, from Megumi Okina's Rika in *Ju-On* to Sarah Michelle Gellar's Karen in *The Grudge*, is striking. Whereas Rika was largely passive, leaving the police work to the professionals, Karen takes on the role of detective herself. She uses the internet to uncover the truth of the original murders, confronts the detectives with her evidence, and ultimately attempts to burn the haunted house to the ground, an action undertaken by a retired police officer in the original film. Where the police officer's attempt ended in failure and death, Karen both torches the ghoul and survives. Rika dies off-screen, but Karen is still alive and kicking at the end of her film. Karen overrides the episodic structure of the original film, which dispatched with each of its victims in turn, by surviving to the end and being the last character on screen. She has therefore outdone both the Japanese character on whom she was based, the Japanese police in both films, and the Japanese ghoul family. In the final scene, Karen enters a room in the morgue to identify the body of her dead boyfriend. Standing over the corpse, she hears from behind her the signature creaking rattle of the undead Kayako Saeki. As the camera pulls back, we see that she is standing back-to-back with the ghoul. The screen goes black, leaving unanswered the question of who will survive this final fight. There is no doubt, however, where this tableau is drawn from: Karen and Kayako are positioned in the back-to-back starting position of the Western gunslingers' showdown. The American heroine will fight her Japanese nemesis not according to the conventions of the Japanese horror film, but according to those of the Western.

Lest there be any doubt that *The Grudge* enacts a specifically American fantasy of inclusion and mastery over an Eastern culture and genre, consider for a moment whether its premise would have any appeal for an American audience were it to be reversed. A Japanese extended family moves to an American city, where they unwittingly purchase a haunted house. Coincidentally, the spirit haunting this particular house is that of an American woman who had an obsession with a Japanese professor. Marshalling a heavily-accented, two-hundred word English vocabulary ("Hello," "Thank you,"

"Where are your parents?") which somehow serves them in every supernatural cross-cultural encounter, and aided by an ineffectual, philosophizing American homicide detective who happens to speak fluent Japanese, members of the family and of the larger expatriate Japanese community unravel the house's mystery and do battle with its ghosts. Could such a film be anything other than a comedy?

The irreversibility of *The Grudge* therefore speaks to the same Orientalist fantasy that informs *The Last Samurai* and *Shanghai Noon*. Where Nathan Algren goes East to find purpose and enlightenment, Chon Wang comes West to make us laugh. If genre is a form of cultural shorthand which encodes complex ideologies through the deployment of familiar conventions, then the manipulation of the Western, Samurai, and Horror Movie conventions in *Shanghai Noon*, *The Last Samurai* and *The Grudge* speaks to a conflicted Western attitude toward the Easterner: a desire at once to accept and to dominate, to learn from and to master, to befriend and to defeat.

This is Matthew Bolton's first submission to Synoptique.

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Edited by Jodi Ramer

The Future of a Luminescent Cloud: *Recent Developments in a Pan-Asian Style*

Matthew Bolton

Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and Hong Sang-soo are three of the most stylistically exciting directors to come out of Asia in recent years. It has been observed that all three have incorporated the rare combination of long take and static camera into their work, a distinctive style that has led to declarations of a pan-Asian Minimalism. James Udden explores the origins of such a style, its connection (or lack thereof) with tradition, and its significantly wideranging execution by three very different directors.

Historically there has been one almost invariable rule: the longer the takes are in a film, the more likely they will include the mobile camera. In fact, it is typical of a film primarily comprised of long takes to have camera movements in at least two thirds of its shots, if not more. Certain long take masters such as Jancso or Angelopoulos sometimes barely keep their camera still for an entire film.

The most notable exception to this rule apparently has occurred in Asia over the last two decades, first evidenced by the films made between 1984 and 1993 by the Taiwanese director, Hou Hsiao-hsien. Over this period Hou's takes not only become longer on average, *at the same time they become more static*. In his first feature-length film as part of the Taiwanese New Cinema, *Boys From Fengkuei* (1984), the average shot length is "only" nineteen seconds per shot, and almost half of those shots contain camera movement. By 1993, with *The Puppetmaster*, the average duration of Hou's shots reaches eighty-three seconds per shot, and yet now only 30% of these have any camera movements. Moreover, almost half of those are just a slight reframing at most; otherwise they are merely an overt camera movement for only a brief portion of an otherwise static long take.

From 1995 on, Hou inexplicably abandons this style starting with *Good Men, Good Women*. Still, other directors in East Asia evidently noticed what Hou had done up to 1993 and decided to take it up a notch. The first evidence was the Japanese director, Hirokazu Kore-eda, and his 1995 film, *Mabarosi*, which averaged twenty-five seconds per shot and yet has camera movement in only six percent of them. Lee Kwang-mo's *Springtime In My Hometown* (1999), from South Korea, averages nearly fifty seconds per shot, and yet only two percent of them have any camera movement whatsoever. The most consistent in pursuing this unusual long-take style have been the Malaysian-born Taiwanese director, Tsai Ming-liang, and the South Korean director, Hong Sang-soo. Both directors have even made long take films where literally every single shot is perfectly still. Hong's *The Power Of Kangwon Province* (1998), does not contain a single camera movement despite an average shot length of just over thirtythree seconds per. Tsai's *What Time Is It There?* (2001) averages more than a minute per shot and yet once again there is not even the slightest movement in any of them.

In no other time, or in any other part of the globe, have a set of directors so ardently pursued such a minimalist longtake style as what has occurred in East Asia. In effect, Hou, Tsai and Hong are at the forefront of what can be best described as a pan-Asian style. Yet certain questions arise from this. Is there any larger cultural

meaning behind this, or is this merely a quirky aesthetic phenomenon? Furthermore, what are the limits of this sort of style, and how long can it sustain itself? Some tentative answers can be found in the most recent films available from the three most consistent practitioners of this style: Hou's *Café Lumiere* (2003), Tsai's *The Wayward Cloud* (2004), and Hong's *Woman Is The Future Of Man* (2004). On the surface these three films suggest a wavering from this pan- Asian style. Closer inspection, however, reveals an underlying dynamic and complexity that better captures contemporary Asian cinema than any single term can hope to do.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAN-ASIAN STYLE

Why have Asian directors practiced this most unusual style, and why is this even significant? One might be tempted to chalk this up to culture, but we have to clarify what is meant by culture. If we mean traditional culture, then there is little to suggest why the long take and the static camera would be the result. Existing attempts to define the styles found in East Asian cinema suggest that a mobile camera has traditional roots, not a static one. [1] Within Taiwan often this is explained in terms of the practical limitations of the production situation found there. [2]

Still, even if the origins of this style may be somewhat accidental in Taiwan, what has occurred over the last decade seems a more conscious appropriation by other Asian directors, especially given how literally some have practiced it. This appears to be a part of a larger, *contemporary* cultural phenomenon in East Asia. Despite the greater encroachment of Hollywood, McDonalds and Starbucks, there are many signs that as East Asia becomes more modernized, it also becomes more "Asianized." No where is this more clear than in Asian popular culture, where trends and fads often defy longstanding geopolitical realities. Despite tensions across the Straits of Taiwan, for example, Taiwanese popular music has been the rage in mainland China, while Chinese serial dramas are watched by many Taiwanese. The Japanese may be generally despised throughout Asia, but this has done nothing to stem the popularity of Japanese pop music, clothing styles and animation throughout the region. Most recently there has been a Korean Wave throughout Asia as seen in the regional popularity of its movies, television programs and music. This is evidence of a pan-Asian identity in popular culture: East Asians are now more likely to consume and borrow from each other than from the West. What it may mean politically or ideologically in the long run remains to be seen. [3] This particular pan-Asian style — where the long take is coupled with a static camera – shows how this is occurring even outside of the mainstream. Yet it raises a few questions of its own.

THE LIMITS OF A PAN-ASIAN STYLE?

This brand of Asian filmmaking has been labeled "Asian Minimalism," [4] which may be somewhat of an understatement. What makes this sort of style particularly audacious and risky is how much it reduces one's choices as a filmmaker: not only is editing not often relied upon, one also does not have recourse to camera movement to get from point A to point B. One has to wonder if in some ways those who pursue this particular pan-Asian style often find themselves boxed into a corner – in some cases literally. So how long can this style really sustain itself?

For this reason, it is not surprising that only a handful have managed to maintain this style for a long period of time. After being accused of being too Hou-like with *Mabarosi*, Kore-eda has largely abandoned the static long take ever since. The mainland Chinese director, Jia Zhangke, has openly acknowledged his debt to Hou, and it shows in many of his distanced and static long takes in *Platform* (2001). In his next film, *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), by contrast, the camera is mostly hand-held and hardly ever keeps still. Yet if we look at the most recent films of the three masters of this pan-Asian, minimalist style, the numbers seem to indicate that even they are wavering.

Hou Hsiao-hsien never literally nor consciously pursued the static long take to begin with: as we have seen, he parted ways with this style as early as 1995. Yet his *Café Lumiere* posed a most interesting dilemma for Hou. This film was commissioned by Shochiku in Japan as a homage to Yasijuro Ozu on the hundredth anniversary of his birth. Hou has often been mistakenly compared to Ozu even though their styles are radically different. (For example, Ozu's style is very much based on editing.) Yet Ozu over his career moved the camera less and less, especially in the later stages. [5] Thus, for Hou to do a proper homage to Ozu would seem to suggest that he should revert back to earlier form and revive his own static-camera aesthetic. Yet Hou does nothing of the sort. Although the average shot length of this film is shorter than his most recent films, coming in at "only" sixty-six seconds per shot, there is still camera movement in over three quarters of these shots.

Tsai Ming-liang, on the other hand, has been almost

doggedly persistent in this trend. As already noted, *What Time Is It There?* has an average shot length almost identical to that of *Café Lumiere* — but without the slightest camera movement throughout the entire film. Yet even Tsai seems to have "peaked." His next film, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) has a slightly shorter average shot length at fifty-five seconds per shot, and yet now a little over ten percent of them move. In his most recent film, *The Wayward Cloud*, the average shot length has been reduced to just over a half a minute each, and yet it has camera movement in nearly a quarter of them. Thus, these three films combined suggest a sort of "regression" from a more pure minimalist style in 2001.

Hong Sang-soo's most recent film suggests that he has abandoned the static camera just as Hou did a decade earlier. In his 2002 work, *On The Occasion Of Remembering The Turning Gate*, the average length of each shot is now nearly a minute each, and still only under a quarter of those have any camera movement. By contrast, in his 2004 work, *Woman Is The Future Of Man*, the average shot length has nearly doubled to just over a hundred seconds per shot, yet seemingly at the expense of the static camera: now almost eighty percent of these shots have camera movements, and over two thirds of those are overt in nature, not merely slight reframings. In other words, these numbers suggest that in fact this pan-Asian style may be dying out, and that these directors are slowly losing something that has distinguished them and East Asian cinema from the rest of the world.

The problem is that these numbers are just that: numbers. Such statistics do tell us something, but not everything. They are crude measurements at best, useful as starting points in trying to grasp what is occurring with these films; there is more to be discovered here than how much or how little the camera moves in the midst of long takes. In fact, these numbers may be an apt analogy to how this particular aspect of the pan-Asian style – namely the coupling of the long take with the static camera – may also be a starting point for these filmmakers and nothing more.

Let's start with Tsai Ming-liang and *The Wayward Cloud*. One question comes to mind: why is Tsai still the most persistent in keeping his long takes mostly static? The answer is because, compared to Hou Hsiao-hsien and Hong Sang-soo, Tsai Ming-liang is the most schematic of the three directors. Tsai's films are minimalist in just about every sense of the term: not just minimal editing and minimal camera movement, but also minimal plot, minimal dialogue and even minimal character development. In fact, characters in his films are more like human cogs caught up in an absurdist universe of Tsai's own creation. Almost all of these characters suffer from obsessive compulsive behavior always involving the central motifs in the film. Tsai's uber-motif has always been water in some form, which seems to represent the indelible somatic and sexual reality of human beings. (For this reason, nearly every one of his films features scenes in bathrooms.) Yet often, this central motif interacts with one or two other motifs in the film as well. In *The River* (1997), for example, Kang-sheng seems unable to rid himself of something from the river after posing as a dead body for a film; later he is unable to shake a pain in his neck which gets worse and worse, leading to a chain of events that result in inadvertent incestuous encounter in a bathhouse. In *What Time Is It There*? Kangsheng obsessively resets all clocks and wristwatches to Paris time, yet this leads him to a "twelve o'clock" encounter with a stranger in a bathroom. Meanwhile, his love interest in Paris, after drinking too much coffee, nearly has a lesbian affair with a woman she first meets in a bathroom and who subsequently offers her a glass of hot water.

To wit, there is just no escaping water in Tsai's films, and whatever other motifs happen to be tagging along. While often humorous, these works seem like Kafkaesque worlds one can never escape. And the fact that Tsai persistently conveys this through minimal editing and camera movements makes all the more palpable this sense of being trapped. The pan-Asian style suits Tsai's personal concerns exceptionally well.

The Wayward Cloud is essentially a continuation of all of this. Now water is inexplicably in short supply, but watermelons and water bottles are not. The characters are obsessed with both, and both objects are used for sexual activities, resulting in some of the most comical moments in the film. The absurdity of this cinematic universe is visually abetted by the use of extreme angles throughout. The opening minute and a half shot is a completely static long take of an intersection of two pedestrian underpasses, using a very wide lens, and thus creating a slightly distorted perspective. The few camera movements in the film also serve their purpose: they mostly occur in the absurdist musical numbers appearing from seemingly nowhere, much as had occurred in Tsai's earlier film, *The Hole* (1998). The only novel feature for Tsai is a possible new interest in Taiwan itself, which in his previous films has served merely as a convenient backdrop. Now various local cultural icons appear: dancers engaging in salacious gyrations with a statue of Chiang Kai-shek, the female protagonist working in the National Palace Museum,

and the orgiastic denouement occurring next to a life-sized, cardboard cutout of flight attendants for China Airlines. Aside from this, this is the same Tsai Ming-liang as before.

A much more complicated picture arises with Hou Hsiao-hsien, the most complex of these three directors. One of the reasons he is no longer beholden to the static long take is because style is not his primary concern, but merely a means to other ends. [6] When he speaks of wanting to have a style that "belongs to the East," what he ultimately seems to be referring to is indirectness. [7] His monumental film from 1989, *City Of Sadness*, is a milestone for Asian cinema despite the fact that few people can understand it after a single viewing. Yet Hou likes it less than his other films because he finds it, amazingly enough, "too direct." [8] Given how Hou's own criteria calls for a more poetic and indirect fashion of film narration, we can see why he used the static long take for so long. Both editing and camera movement have typically been used to literally "direct" a viewer's attention – a static long take is one way to resist that. Nevertheless, over time he realized that indirectness could be done in multiple ways: through narrative structure, through the staging of his actors, and even through lighting. The static long take evidently became less and less useful for Hou as time went on.

Café Lumiere shows how indirect Hou can actually be. A single viewing of this film might leave the impression that there is not much to it; a subsequent viewing reveals underlying layers of both feeling and meaning beyond what one first suspected. For whatever reason, Hou has seemingly required a certain amount of distance from his subject matter to convey it successfully on film. In most cases, this distance is historical, and his films of the historical past are usually more compelling than those occurring in the present. Yet *Café Lumiere* could be considered the first Hou film of present-day subject matter that feels like his historical films, perhaps in this case due to a cultural/geographical distance, since this takes place entirely in Japan.

Despite what the above numbers tell us, for many who have seen this film and are familiar with Hou's work, the camerawork in this case *seems* more static than his most recent films. A finer grained breakdown of the numbers accounts for this impression. While just over seventy-five percent of the shots do contain camera movement, less than twenty percent of them have camera movement for more than half of the duration of the shot. Twice as many shots feature overt camera movements, but which take up less than half of the shot's duration. Just over twenty percent of the shots in the film have only the slightest reframing, meaning essentially no change in the shot's composition. [9] Clearly then, these are not the more continuous camera movements found in *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1997) and *Flowers Of Shanghai* (1998); certainly they are not the baroque camera movements of Angelopoulos or Jancso.

Yet *Café Lumiere* is one of the most open-ended narratives Hou has made to date. There are three story lines, all joined in progress, all ending without any clear resolution. Among the usual quotidian details and everyday conversations, subtle hints are dropped as to what these underlying stories really are. As is typical of Hou, we are almost like outsiders who get mere snippets of other people's lives, and we have to put together the missing pieces on our own.

When Yoko, the protagonist of the film, reveals that she is pregnant by her Taiwanese boyfriend, her back is completely to the camera, giving us no visual clues to her state of mind. In the next scene she is sweeping the ancestral tombs, yet the camera is so distanced that there is little indication as to how the rest of her family, including her father, have reacted. In the subsequent scene Yoko, her father and her stepmother eat noodles together, and yet all three have their backs to the camera, still giving us no visual clues as to any of their feelings. Only when the husband and wife are alone do we get any sense at all of how he is taking it: the stepmother complains that he always says nothing when something serious comes up, and yet the father still says nothing. Later scenes indicate that somehow they have accepted their daughter's fate in the intervening ellipses. They visit her Tokyo apartment, and Yoko explains why she will not marry her Taiwanese boyfriend. Once again, aside from ceasing to eat, the father otherwise does not react. The film ends not long thereafter, answering none of the questions raised about her pregnancy.

Such open-endedness is echoed by the other two narrative strands, both also involving Yoko. One concerns her research into a Taiwanese composer from the Japanese era, Jiang Wengye. Once again, we see her snatching up random fragments of his past life, just as we are catching fragments of hers. One is left with an indelible sense of unbridgeable gaps between past and present: a bookstore owner knows nothing of Jiang's past patronage of his shop; a coffee shop Jiang once frequented is now nothing more than an unremarkable office building. Through all of this Yoko is often accompanied in her quest by Hajime, a male friend

whose relationship with her is never clearly defined. For some reason Hajime likes to record the various sounds of different trains in Tokyo, saying at one point that perhaps that this will be part of a research project as well. Yet their ambivalent relationship is summarized in one of the later shots in the film. From one train, the camera pans right to reveal Hajime on an adjacent train recording the sounds. As Hajime's train trails off, the camera pans further right to show Yoko standing by the door, unaware that Hajime just passed. In one brilliantly executed shot, the camera movement suggests, with the greatest subtlety, that whatever unspoken feelings may or may not be there, some unknown fate will keep them apart. For all the seeming quietude, Hou's world is one of flux and changeability. In this case the moving camera helps convey this.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these three directors, however, is Hong Sang-soo. Hong has always displayed an innovative way of handling narrative structure, as exemplified by the he said/she said versions of the same story in *Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors* (2000). He has also displayed a remarkable sophistication in dealing with the vagaries of male/female relationships, making these among the most adult films found anywhere in the world today. Even more striking is the often lingering question as to whether these are Korean themes, or universal ones: do men everywhere really want women to be sexually active virgins? What ultimately do women want in return? *Woman Is The Future Of Man* brings all of this to a whole new level. Two old friends, Munho and Hunjoon, meet again after several years. Munho, a professor of Western Art, complains to Hunjoon, a western trained film director: "Koreans are too fond of sex. They have nothing better to do. There's no real culture." And yet the behavior of both men thereafter implies that they are no different.

One of the pleasures of any Hong film is the parallels drawn between characters, and this is where his stylistic strategies come into play. In the case of this film, camera movements are used for very calculated effect. This is most evident in the two long takes that occur in the restaurant when Hunjoon and Munho eat and talk. The first of these is just over six minutes in length, five and a half of which remains in a completely static framing of the two men eating by the window. The camera pans briefly three times: the first is a pan left from a counter showing a woman in a purple scarf about to leave the restaurant, ending with the two men seated by the window. Later Hunjoon, when alone at the table, asks another young woman working in the restaurant if she would act in his film. She refuses and the camera pans right as she walks to the same counter. The camera then pans left back to Hunjoon, only now that same woman in the purple scarf is outside standing across the street, evidently waiting for a ride. Hunjoon then exchanges furtive, suggestive glances with her.

After a lengthy flashback, a second long take parallels this first one. Being exactly five minutes in length, more than four and a half of those minutes sustain the exact same framing of the two men eating by the window. This time it is Munho who is alone towards the end of the long take, and he asks the same restaurant worker if she would model for him in the nude. Once again, she refuses (using exactly the same words she used with Hunjoon), and a brief pan right follows her as she goes back to the counter. Yet when it pans back to Munho, the young woman in the purple scarf is once again standing across the street. This time Munho exchanges suggestive glances with her until her ride finally appears. Hong Sang-soo may be moving the camera in this ongoing, muted and adult game of hide and seek, but clearly it is part of an ongoing development that has already begun in films where he never moved the camera at all.

The latest films of Hou, Hong and Tsai all suggest that the pan-Asian style, as defined above, may be undergoing a significant transformation. Yet it should be clear that this is no cause for alarm. After all, the prolonged use of static long takes has been but a small part of much more interesting and complex development. The latest works of these three directors are still among the most subtle, complex and dynamic in world cinema today. These three are to be commended for having pushed an unusual stylistic strategy to its seeming limits. Yet they are also to be commended for not restricting themselves to that.

This is James Udden's first contribution to Synoptique.

ENDNOTES

1 See Linda Ehrlich and David Desser eds., *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994). In Chinese the best source for this line of thinking is Lin Nian-tong, *Chinese Film Aesthetics* [Chung kuo tien ying mei hsueh], (Taipei: Yun Chen, 1991)

2 I have often gotten this explanation in informal conversations with members of the Taiwanese

filmmaking community. Most recently, in late May of 2005, I spoke with Wu Nien-jen, who insists that these tendencies are the result of concrete environmental factors in Taiwan itself, most of all the conditions of production.

3 For a recent scholarly discussion of some of these issues see, Timothy J. Craig and Richard King, eds. *Global goes Local : Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu : Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2002)

4 David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 231-233.

5 Once again, a more complete discussion of both Ozu editing and static camera can be found in David Bordwell's, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1994).

6 Hou Hsiao-hsien, interview by Peggy Chiao in *The New New Wave Of Taiwan Cinema: 90's* [Taiwan tianying 90 hsin hisn lang chao] (Taipei: Maitian, 2002): 99-101.

7 Hou Hsiao-hsien, interview by author, June 20, 2001, Sinomovie Company Office, Taipei, Taiwan

8 Hou Hsiao-hsien, interview by Emmanuel Burdeau, in Hou Hsiao-hsien, (Chinese language edition of 1999 work by Cahiers du cinema), (Taipei: Chinese Taipei Film Archive, 2000): 107.

9 As always, it must be noted that these are very fine grained distinctions. There is no precise dividing line between a shot with only slight reframing, one with more overt camera movement but only for part of the shot, and those for the majority of the shot. It is always a judgment call, and these figures have to be taken with a certain margin of error.

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Edited by Owen Livermore.

Fantasia Festival 2005 Report: *You Can Take the Girl out of Fantasia, But Can You Take Fantasia out of the Girl?*

Jodi Ramer

I must begin by declaring my outsider status. Granted, such a declaration is one that any Fantasia-goer would probably be happy to sign his or her name to—this is, after all, the festival for oddballs, freaks, aficionados and iconoclasts. And I would guess that any of said denizens would wear such distinctions as badges of honour, right next to all those little round lapel pins with band names and peace signs and pictures of Optimus Prime or StrongBad. This pride goes beyond cinephilia into the realm of total lifestyle, into sub-sub-subculture affiliations and esoteric expertise, into devoted fandom and carefully cultivated societal alienation, into cosplay and MMPORGs and realms of die-hard specialized engagement that I can't even imagine. And while I am, natch, freaky in my own way, and nerdy enough to be way nerdier than I probably seem (if I do say so myself), I am firmly out of the loop of this whole trip that is called Fantasia.

For one, I study film, I really dig film, but Cinemaniac isn't a label I would own up to. Secondly, I am mystified by this love of "Asian film" declared by so many. I mean, that's a pretty massive and diverse body of work—I don't even know what it could mean to claim it all as an identifiable, cohesive object of devotion. (Saying that a majority of today's stand-out, exciting films are coming out of Asia is another claim altogether, and a highly tenable one.)

Nor could I pledge allegiance to any specific concept of what is very vaguely known as "genre film." In the case of Fantasia, this predominantly means fantasy/horror/exploitation. I have all sorts of dark spooky goth instincts still stirring inside me, left over from my teenage years, but this doesn't mean that I want to expose them to an endless parade of movies that tend to trade in shock for it's own sake, gore and more gore, and—that ole stalwart crowdpleaser—misogyny. Indulging in this sort of fare quickly makes me feel worn-out and tawdry. I don't need this kind of demoralization—whatever else my inner goth may be, she is no whore.

Nonetheless, even for the dubious, Fantasia does manage to spin a web of allure, wonky and inexplicable as it might be. Take the wide-ranging films programmed, which fall under the aforementioned, very broad aegis of genre and Asian films. Many a satisfying filmic experience is to be had, even if one wants to avoid the scary, the geeky, and the gross (and I'm not saying that I wanted to avoid anything per se—even if I'm not officially *into* something, it can be fun to go slumming from time to time). I depended on many a film fan friend to point me in the direction of gems expected and unexpected, and seldom did they point me wrong.

But festivals are never just about the films. Much of the fun of Fantasia is the large, eager, absolutely gung-ho audiences that it draws, the colorful folk you see loyally lined up—seemingly at all hours and in a state of continual waiting—outside of the Hall building and the De Seve theatre. The atmosphere can be positively carnivalesque. What is it about this sometimes unsavory but oddly dynamic mix of characters from characterville that can add up to such unexpected fun? Whenever I went on down to the site to catch a flick I ended up seeing another, and then another, and then heading out for drinks with some motley crew that I

had heretofore never hung out with, and then having a ridiculously good time and finally strolling home, feeling mellow and still wide awake, at five in the morning on a fine, muggy Montreal morn, rosy-fingered dawn setting the mountain aglow… But who can sleep in a Montreal heat wave, who can eat? What is there to do but watch movies and drink beer?

Yes, Fantasia made a party girl out of me. Sedate and hearth-loving though I am throughout the year, the combination of summer heat and weird folks hepped up on weird movies conspired to bring out my most dissolute self, and I had a helluva swell time. I also fell in with a dangerous crowd, the underappreciated, hardworking, hardpartying backbone of the festival: the projectionists (a.k.a. projos, to those in the know). Maybe it was the humidity, but I felt pretty damn cool tagging along with this group of bad boys. (It should be noted that the projo club isn't a boys' club: many women work as projectionists at Concordia—from whence the Fantasia crew are drawn—and from what I've seen they are smart and lovely every one. Too smart and lovely to bother sticking around Fantasia-land after their long and tedious shifts are over.) Anyway, after many a generously shared beer ticket and much clever and amusing conversation, I resolved to promote the mystique of the projectionist. They work long hours in alienating little rooms, and they get blamed for every mishap that is out of their control. So, thank you projo lads and lasses. I salute you. [Check out Anna Phelan's interview with Fantasia projectionist James Larden.]

But back to the audiences, those singularly enthusiastic Fantasia audiences. A telling anecdote comes from the opening film of the festival, *Ashura* (2005)—an epic, mythical-magical, loving/fighting, sparkly period extravaganza with Kabuki theater and demon-slaying (a film my friend deemed lacking heart, but I'm not exactly sure what heart has to do with it. Though perhaps here's where my neophyte status comes in: are you telling me they can stick all that stuff in a movie and still fit heart in there too?). Anyway, sometime in the first act, the hero defends the heroine from the bad guy who is hunting her down. She has killed our leader, baddy claims. She interjects, saying she doesn't even know who said leader is. "That's what the guilty always say," argues bad-guy. The hero responds, in a fell swoop of irrefutable logic, "So do the innocent!" At which point the audience erupts in whoopingly supportive cheers, as though they had collectively been waiting, for years now, just for this moment: for someone to finally make just such a case—this convincingly, this simply, this forcefully—for the wrongly accused, misunderstood, and much-maligned innocent inside each one of them. The gusto of the response was baffling, and yet contagious. I found myself wishing I could believe like that, that I'd one day have the chance to clap and keep Tinkerbell alive.

A similar hyper-sympathetic reaction came during the first screening of the kinetically awesome teen-girl-friendship flick, *Kamikaze Girls* (2003). One super-cute Japanese schoolgirl (Momoko) is a Rococo devotee, the other (Ichiko) a tough, posturing outlaw-wannabe from an all-girl scooter gang. Both are stuck in the middle of nowhere, and both have their disparate ways of escaping the doldrums: the former malcontently biding her time with pretty costumes and pretty dreams, the latter snarling and spitting and inarticulately railing at the expected order of things. The sweet twist is that Momoko, obsessed with decadence, artifice and delicate femininity, is actually the strong self-contained one, whereas Ichiko is the needy hanger-on, flustered by men, overly-attached to her group identity, and driven to headbutting her could-be pal whenever her overtures of friendship are too roundly rebuffed. Best of all, the film suggests homoeroticism but doesn't go the cop-out lesbian route—it's too easy to get viewers to root for the idea of two hot young chicks getting it on. In terms of trying to undo, and redo, expected modes of representation, a devoted female- friendship narrative is more promising by far.

The two leads, Kyoko Fukada and Anna Tsuchiya—both J-pop princesses, apparently—are both damn adorable, and I was in a bit of a tizzy over all the lacy, frilly, ruffled pinafores and blouses and underskirts: ah, pink satin-ribbon rosette embroidery is my personal favorite too! I didn't really expect the Fantasia audience to be with me on that one, and yet when Momoko found that her white cotton bonnet had moth holes, the discovery elicited such an acute groan of distress from the crowd that I wondered if we weren't all frilly-bonnet wearers at heart. Is not that broken down bonnet a symbol of every glamorous, precious costume artifact that we ever grew out of, or that fell apart at the seams from love and over-use? (How many Halloweens did I think I could wear that homemade Cleopatra costume, anyway? And yet its slide into disrepair broke my young heart…)

And yet, there were times I felt quite the stranger in a strange land. Case in point, the word-of-mouth about *Ghost House* (2004): an amusing crowd-pleaser. This recommendation would seem to indicate comedy, and yet, nary a comic moment was to be found. That is

to say, I did recognize tropes of what could be called humour, flailing gestures and tough guys simpering broadly and demonic gobbling couches and underwear thrown around willy-nilly. I also registered rows of boys (of all cultures and creeds, it should be noted) laughing uproariously—with plenty of knee-slapping thrown in for good measure. But I failed to note anything vaguely resembling *funny*. And it is an alienating feeling to be watching something that moves you only to eye-rolls of annoyed disbelief, when all the signs of engagement and hilarity surround you. I felt like the natives in those apocryphal tales of tribe peoples' inability to understand the information conveyed by moving pictures. It was all incomprehensible shapes and blurs. About half an hour in, when a character in the film suggested that they go and get a drink, my friend and I simultaneously had an eureka moment. Instead of suffering through this we could be having a *drink* somewhere right now, somewhere *away* from *this*!!! And thus, with no regrets, we snuck out. The bold move inspired my friend's canny observation that the nice thing about Fantasia, with its endless offering of diverse films, is that you can always leave…

The worst moment, though, for wanting to shrink away into oblivion, was at *Lloyd Kaufman*'s mini-seminar, *How To Make Your Own Damn Movie*, a condensed presentation of his books and DVD. Kaufman is equal parts winning and grating; he self-consciously trades on the old-school, huckster charm of a carny or Catskills comedian. Kaufman, of course, is the man behind Troma Films, famous for the cult classic *The Toxic Avenger* (1985). I haven't seen a Troma film, and I am comfortable with that. What I was not comfortable with was the long DVD clip riffing parodically on what kind of salacious and outrageous content is best to include in your movie in order to attract investors. Two Z-grade hotties awkwardly act out a fairly explicit "lesbian" sex scene; to make it more awkward, one of the participants (does it make me a culture elitist if I hesitate to use the word "actress"?) is actually on hand—uh…as it were. Isabelle Stephen, official "Tromette" of August 2002, was appearing alongside Lloyd, cheerfully representing as dreambabe to a bunch of misfits and malcontents. These very same misfits and malcontents became disturbingly still and tense as the girl-on-girl sex romp went on. Their collective breath was held; then their collective breath got faster, and more ragged. It was impossible for my friend and I, sitting at the back of the room, not to be aware that before us a sea of pants was likely cresting, and it made us want to flee screaming. I've been at public screenings of porn-oriented material before, and never have I sensed the audience frothing at the mouth so. It makes a girl want to bind her breasts and go undercover.

Not to worry—following this clip was a little something for the ladies. Some behind-the-scenes footage of a nervous but surprisingly game fellow, prolongedly running around Times Square, naked except for a plaster cast on his head. Naked Guy seemed a nice chap, but—terrifyingly—this pasty, red-haired specimen boasted the lumpy rotundity of Rubens' Bacchus, and the genitals of a cherub. I'm still having nightmares. Thanks for nothing, Lloyd Kaufman.

What more to report on the antics of the Fantasians? Just the expected overly-earnest Q&A sessions, which reached a baroque pitch of existential crisis at *Retinal Stigmatics: An Evening With Joe Coleman*. Some poor saps were insistently, rather desperately quizzing Joe on the meaning of life and death, begging him to tell them if he found evidence of a soul—and if not, then *what*?!—in his experiments with human dissection.

All of this came after a presentation—blow-ups of Joe Coleman's very arresting miniature paintings, and clips of his much less arresting performance art, all narrated with a less-than-illuminating We-Human-Beings-Are-A-Cancer-On- The-Earth spiel—which was unfortunately accompanied by a couple of situationist manqués performing a sad and perfunctory *détournement*. Their belabored and almost embarrassed interruptions of the proceedings, in the form of hollered, mostly inarticulate remarks, only managed to elicit a few unimpressed parries by Joe himself, but the jokesters did attract the attention of the Hall security force. I felt for those poor security guards, roaming around the balcony with flashlights to detect the culprits and then, presumably—since I'm assuming they are not armed— having to beg those attention-starved punks to just *please sit still and behave*. All the while I'm sure they are thinking, *I don't get paid enough for this*. But the punks actually did shut up. So, at the risk of undermining the anarchic spirit cultivated by the Fantasia Festival (to quote Mitch Davis' program notes on the Evening with Joe Coleman: "This night is sure to be one of the high points of Fantasia's history. There will be no safe harbour."), I say: thanks for keeping the peace, good security people. Those dudes were really annoying.

But, lest I wrap this up on a harrumphing note, it must be said that though Fantasia has more than its share of disturbed freaks and tiresome geeks and misguided anarchists and overzealous fanboys (well, I suppose it can't be "more than its share" *really,* since Fantasia

happily trades in such characters, and them on it), the general word-of-mouth can steer you to some nerve-mending, heart-swelling cinematic treats. My faves are hardly original, according to Fantasia's 2005 Public Prizes. I'd add *Kamikaze Girls* to the list. But otherwise, *Crying Fists* (2005) is up there for me. *Survive Style 5+* (2004) is a truly interesting, invigorating, and curiously touching film, with art direction and set décor to die for (I'd call it Baroque Eclectic); the first slow-motion fight sequence between the most winsomely beautiful couple this side of Johnny Depp and Vanessa Paradis, Tadanobu Asano and Reika Hashimoto, positively captured my heart—the sight of that little somber-faced pixie-woman in mid-air, green velvet dress a-flying… well, that alone is worth a few uneven narrative strands. And, speaking of the ultra-cool Tadanobu Asano… *The Taste Of Tea* (2004) is just lovely: melancholy and sweet and serenely soulful. The psychedelic/surrealist stylistics are funny and inventive but so perfectly at ease, so perfectly expressive of a singular cinematic vision of the workings of the mind.

Ultimately I find I have more to say about the taxing viewing experiences than the truly edifying ones. Perhaps this is because the films that I liked best have a dreamy quality that is best savored with diffuse, pleasant reflection rather than teased-out observations. Or maybe it is because Fantasia is all about over-stimulation, and over-stimulation makes you numb. But probably it's because much of the thrill of the festival is in complaining. Complaining about the late starts, the mix-ups, the crazy people, the stupid films: complaining that you are sick of the site and the sight of everything Fantasia-related. Everyone does it, anyone you run into. It's an ongoing, predictable, and utterly satisfying riff. We all complain and mock and criticize and rant. It's just the way to let off steam, and that's what a carnival is for. We miss it when it's gone.

And though I'm still recovering, I know I'll soon be counting down until next summer and the return of the mad mad days—and long hot nights—of Fantasia.

Jodi Ramer wrote about Tippi Hedren in Synoptique 7.

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Edited by Owen Livermore

Regard dynamométrique sur Hong Kong

Philippe Tremblay

Dans ce second essai de Synoptique 10 consacré à Wong Kar-Wai, Philippe Tremblay choisit de se concentrer sur *Chungking Express*, afin de tisser de judicieux liens entre la représentation de Hong Kong faite par le cinéaste et les peintures des futuristes italiens du début du siècle. Utilisant l'idée de décadrage comme élément esthétique témoin d'une représentation moderne, l'auteur place ainsi Wong Kar-Wai dans la lignée des artistes de la modernité, dont l'obsession fut toujours de retranscrire artistiquement les multiples changements de la société moderne.

Je pense que les Italiens ont beaucoup de points en commun avec les Chinois.
- Wong Kar-wai

Depuis l'époque où le cinéma cherchait à affirmer à part entière son statut d'art, son réflexe premier fut d'observer les autres arts majeurs et de les intégrer explicitement à la représentation cinématographique. De la simple citation, la réflexion des cinéastes sur le médium évolua vers une inclusion implicite de ces influences artistiques externes. De fait, un grand nombre de cinéastes parviennent, au sein d'une démarche cinématographique, à susciter des élans artistiques qui appartiennent à d'autres disciplines. De par leur parenté picturale, le cinéma et la peinture entretiennent d'incestueuses relations réciproques qui influent sur leurs progénitures respectives.

Chungking Express, troisième enfant de Wong Kar-Wai, témoigne ainsi de l'influence de la peinture sur le cinéma. Il est en effet possible de lier l'esthétique de ce film à l'art pictural moderne, plus précisément à la peinture futuriste italienne. Nous tenterons de prouver comment la modernité urbaine redéfinit la sensibilité subjective de l'artiste, tant chez les peintres modernes que chez Wong Kar-Wai, pour ensuite démontrer de quelle façon les décadrages anamorphiques contribuent également à lier *Chungking Express* et la peinture moderne.

Le contexte socio-historique de réalisation de *Chungking Express* est loin d'être banal, puisque Wong Kar-Wai met ce long métrage en boîte moins de trois ans avant la fin de la tutelle britannique. Depuis le début de la décennie 90, la population de Hong Kong appréhende avec fébrilité l'aboutissement de son ère moderne; elle craint, avec le retrait du soutien britannique, une régression culturelle. C'est précisément sur ce Hong Kong de dernière minute que Wong Kar-Wai jette un regard «novateur [1]» dans *Chungking Express*.

Nous en sommes venus à penser l'existence d'une causalité entre la modernisation d'une société et la pensée artistique qui lui est contemporaine. Nous analyserons donc tout d'abord l'influence qu'ont exercé au cours du dernier siècle le progrès technologique et la modernité urbaine sur la perception visuelle de l'artiste. Placé au centre d'une société en constant changement, tant physique que psychologique, l'artiste moderne est tel un buvard absorbant le trop-plein d'énergie qui s'en dégage. « L'intensification des stimulations nerveuses [2]» est la base de cette nouvelle « psychologie type de l'individu de la métropole [3]», dont la sensibilité est

fondamentalement affectée par un flux ininterrompu d'alternances entre « les stimuli internes et externes [4]». Ainsi, la psychologie perceptive de l'artiste moderne subit un reconditionnement inhérent aux changements sociaux que lui impose la nouvelle urbanité. La part sensible de l'artiste est également sollicitée puisque sa fonction, comme le souligne Robert Motherwell, est désormais d'exprimer « les événements de la réalité comme ils sont ressentis […] par le corps et l'esprit [5]», mais aussi sa capacité à « absorber les chocs de la réalité, interne ou externe, et à affirmer sa propre personne devant de tels chocs [6]». L'artiste moderne serait donc défini en fonction de sa «capacité à exprimer la réalité moderne à partir de son expérience personnelle [7]» et à «enregistrer l'évolution de la vie contemporaine [8]». Fernand Léger convoque également cette sensibilité de l'artiste afin de redéfinir les fondements de l'expression picturale que la « vie moderne exige [9]». Ce nouveau rythme de vie, grandement imposé par l'évolution des moyens « de locomotion et leur vitesse inhérente [10] » et la progression des « moyens de production [11]», incite l'artiste à développer une nouvelle sensibilité visuelle. Cette nouvelle « façon de voir », selon Léger, rend compte de l'assujettissement de la vision sensitive de l'artiste aux nouveaux motifs picturaux qui s'offrent à lui dans la ville moderne.

Nous remarquons donc que les acquis picturaux contemporains de la modernité résultent principalement de deux facteurs. L'aura de la mentalité moderne transcende dorénavant la démarche de l'artiste et le nouvel aspect des objets externes stimule fortement son imaginaire pictural. Ces deux facteurs qui influent sur la sensibilité subjective de l'artiste sont donc autant une nécessité qu'une source d'énergie créatrice pour ce dernier.

Le Hong Kong illustré par Wong Kar-Wai est complètement marqué par cet esprit de modernité. Cette nouvelle sensibilité générée par la « jeunesse chinoise, qui s'est mise à vivre sur un autre rythme [12]» quotidien, génère en effet une nouvelle perception, et donc une nouvelle représentation du microcosme urbain hong kongien. À la veille de la dislocation coloniale, Hong Kong se retrouve en constante mouvance; elle est « un concentré de vibrations, de vertiges et de sensations [13]», une ville « hantée par la vitesse [14]». L'utilisation du quartier Chungking Mansion comme théâtre de l'action n'est pas innocente, puisque, visité quotidiennement par plus de 5000 touristes, tous attirés par le rythme insomniaque qu'insuffle la vie contemporaine de cet arrondissement, il est « l'incarnation même de Hong Kong; il y règne une vitesse et une effervescence permanentes [15]», ce qui permet au cinéaste de saisir « l'énergie et l'instinct [16]» contemporains. Ainsi, il peint Hong Kong «comme personne ne l'avait fait avant lui [17]», c'est-à-dire de façon moderne. Wong Kar-Wai pose un « regard d'une grande pertinence sur l'individu moderne [18]» qui semble balancé dans un univers urbain vacillant entre une sensualité chatoyante et une profonde désincarnation. Il parvient à exprimer cette sensation si urbaine d'être à la fois trop entouré et pourtant seul au monde; il met en images cette «perte de soi dans l'immensité hasardeuse [19]» de la ville qui, « sous cette apparence figée[, laisse] gronde [r] un mouvement fou [20]».

Cette définition que Wong Kar-Wai offre de la vie moderne à Hong Kong n'est pas sans rappeler les visées de l'entreprise futuriste italienne, que Marinetti définit comme l'impérieuse nécessité de « chanter la révolution des capitales modernes [21]». Devant une métropole moderne telle que Hong Kong, Wong Kar-Wai opte donc pour un geste esthétique qui rappelle les réflexions des peintres futuristes italiens tels que Marinetti ou Boccioni quant à la conception de l'art moderne face à ces villes nouvelles et à la représentation de ces nouveaux stimuli qui transposent «l'irruption du mouvement-fou dans la peinture [22]» moderne.

Au XXème siècle, l'idée de vitesse devient dominante dans l'espace culturel, grâce à l'introduction de nouvelles technologies qui permettent non seulement d'accroître la vitesse du mouvement, mais aussi celle de la diffusion de l'information et de la reproduction des images. Il est maintenant possible de produire très rapidement une grande quantité d'images et la prolifération de celles-ci s'est accélérée tout autant que le mouvement à l'intérieur même de ces images. Cette accélération n'est pas naturelle. C'est en fait une aberration de la réalité représentée, une anamorphose qui est pratiquement devenue la norme, perdant ainsi ce qui fait la nature même de l'anamorphose, c'est-à-dire sa qualité de déformation. Non pas que les images (ou leur succession) ne sont pas déformées, car elles le sont, mais le réel s'est adapté à ces images, il est lui-même devenu vitesse (à moins que ce soit le contraire, que ce soit les images qui tentent d'illustrer une réalité qui a changé de cadence…) En ce qui nous concerne, l'important est que l'image accélérée n'est plus anamorphosée puisqu'il n'y a pas de déchirure dans le reflet, comme dirait Bonitzer.

Malgré tout, le cinéma de Wong Kar-Wai comporte des images qui sont proprement anamorphosées, qui viennent témoigner de la nature même de la

représentation, de sa « double direction contradictoire [23]», et qui viennent opérer cette déchirure du reflet. Des images qui vont à la fois « en direction de la chose [24]», par la biais de la figuration ou par une reconnaissance de la part du spectateur de certains codes cinématographiques, mais des images qui vont aussi en « direction de l'absence [de la chose] [25]», par l'utilisation de ce que Jacques Aumont nomme les décadrages. Chez Wong Kar-Wai, ces décadrages anamorphiques ne s'appliquent pas uniquement à l'image. Ils participent également à la composition et à l'illustration de l'univers diégétique.

Appliqués au développement narratif, les décadrages se manifestent d'abord par le détournement de certains codes de genres précis. *Chungking Express* commence en effet comme un polar, un film policier typique de la production de Hong Kong. Mais le récit se détraque rapidement pour laisser place à autre chose, à une tentative de rencontre entre deux personnages perdus dans ce monde moderne empli de vitesse.

Décadrage aussi dans l'utilisation des acteurs. Brigitte Lin, grande star de Hong Kong, porte une perruque blonde et des lunettes fumées, de sorte qu'elle n'est plus du tout reconnaissable. Faye Wong, une chanteuse immensément populaire en Asie, joue ici une jeune fille timide écoutant inlassablement la même chanson pop américaine. L'image de la vedette est ainsi détournée.

Décadrage dans la musique, par l'utilisation d'une rengaine des Cranberries traduite en cantonnais (et chantée par Faye Wong), et par la juxtaposition de différents styles musicaux.

Enfin, évidemment, décadrage dans l'image elle-même. Traditionnellement, en peinture, le décadrage vient dynamiser le cadre en cachant une partie d'un corps ou d'une forme, en suggérant par exemple que le bras d'un personnage se poursuit à l'extérieur du tableau. Ce choix esthétique met en évidence le cadre lui-même, support de représentation, ce qui détruit l'illusion de réalité. Aujourd'hui, ce type de cadrage est devenu si courant qu'il est facilement assimilable par le spectateur. C'est pourquoi nous désirons étendre la notion de décadrage à toute réalité représentée de façon tronquée, déformée. Dans tout art, l'illusion de réel se construit à partir de règles et de codes précis, et c'est lorsque nous allons à l'encontre de ces lois qu'il y a décadrage, que le spectateur est déstabilisé par l'image et qu'il la reconnaît comme ce qu'elle est, une image.

Chez Wong Kar-Wai, étrangement, c'est l'introduction d'un certain réalisme dans des récits codés qui provoque le décadrage. En effet, les points de départ de ses films sont assez conventionnels. La première partie de *Chungking Express* ressemble à un polar et la deuxième à une histoire d'amour. Mais le cinéaste fait dévier ces récits classiques par l'apparition du quotidien. La première partie est très représentative de cet effet. Le film s'ouvre sur des images qui s'enchaînent dans un rythme enlevant, le narrateur en voix off se présente comme un policier, il y a une poursuite, les images sont filmées au ralenti; il y a de nombreux filés, type d'effet courant dans le cinéma de Hong Kong. Ce début ressemble à un film policier à la John Woo. Mais ce récit très codifié est rapidement détourné lorsque le policier passe près de la femme. Il y a ici un arrêt sur image, alors que la voix off annonce que dans 57 heures, notre héros sera amoureux de cette femme. Les premières images dévoilaient avec justesse une certaine vitesse du monde moderne propre à Hong Kong. Puis il y a cet arrêt, un de ces « moments suspendus » comparables à ceux que nous retrouvons en peinture et qui parsèment tout le récit.

La scène dans la chambre d'hôtel en est un autre exemple.Le policier a réussi à amener la femme aux cheveux blonds dans cette chambre, mais il ne s'y passe finalement strictement rien : il mange quatre salades, écoute deux vieux films à la télévision, se brosse les dents et enlève les souliers de la femme. Le parcours de tous les personnages de ce film finit ainsi. Ils dépensent tous énormément d'énergie afin d'arriver à leur but, mais ils n'obtiennent pas ce qu'ils désirent. C'est à ce moment qu'interviennent les « moments suspendus », qui sont les véritables points d'ancrage de l'émotion dans le film, et qui sont souvent caractérisés par des ralentis à l'image, ou du moins par une suspension du rythme, normalement « emporté et fondé sur la vitesse [26]».

Tous ces décadrages anamorphiques proviennent ainsi d'une dichotomie entre vitesse et inertie. Cette dichotomie se retrouve parfois à l'intérieur d'une seule image, deux temporalités ou deux vitesses différentes étant représentées simultanément dans un « voyage immobile [27]» qui suscite ainsi les formes de peintures qui ont « exhibé[es] le processus de juxtaposition d'une pluralité d'instants à l'intérieur d'un même cadre [28]». Ce que Jacques Aumont nomme temps synthétisé.

À la fin du film, il y a cette image de Faye accoudée au bar California dans laquelle elle bouge lentement alors que l'arrière-plan est très mouvant, un effet obtenu grâce à un ralenti à l'image et un montage syncopé,

enlevant ici et là quelques cadres seulement, ce qui a pour effet de saccader le mouvement. Ces jump-cuts apparents sont des cassures nettes du réel, tout comme cette superposition de deux vitesses. Cette image permet de comprendre la situation des personnages par rapport au monde moderne : ils sont déphasés, décadrés, ils ont une vitesse qui leur est propre, allant à l'encontre de celle du monde environnant, ce qui explique leurs constants efforts inutiles pour satisfaire leurs désirs. De là vient le sentiment de mélancolie qui imprègne tous les personnages, qu'ils tentent tous de soulager, en mangeant trente boîtes d'ananas, en parlant à leur savon ou tout simplement en s'arrêtant, en prenant une pause du tumulte urbain.

Ces images au ralenti et syncopées sont à la limite du cinématographique. L'abstraction vers laquelle elles tendent les font basculer dans un registre pictural de l'ordre de la peinture moderne. Nous reconnaissons l'actrice, bien qu'elle soit déformée par le mouvement et l'avant-plan, mais les hommes qui passent derrière elle ne sont que des ombres, des taches. Ces images rappellent le courant du futurisme italien en peinture, dans lequel les artistes voulaient représenter une notion nouvelle dans ce monde moderne : la vitesse, le mouvement, « comme si la peinture […] s'ouvrait à sa quatrième dimension, le Temps [29]». S'il est vrai qu'il est impossible pour le peintre de représenter le temps lui-même à l'intérieur d'un tableau, la modernité lui procure les moyens nécessaires à l'invention des signes constitutifs d'une nouvelle grammaire lui permettant de représenter les traces du temps. L'utilisation du collage (Aumont) permet de représenter plusieurs moments en une seule image. C'est ce que font les futuristes italiens lorsqu'ils peignent un chien qui a douze pattes. « Le temps et l'espace sont morts aujourd'hui [30]», il ne faut plus reproduire un « moment fixe dans le dynamisme universel [31]», mais « la sensation dynamique elle-même [32]». Il faut représenter la vitesse elle-même en déconstruisant les formes – « la peinture ne peut pas exister aujourd'hui sans le Divisionnisme [33]» -, en leur faisant subir des décradages anamorphiques qui vont rendre compte du dynamisme du monde moderne. Il y a dans ces peintures la même dichotomie vitesse / inertie que nous retrouvons dans les films de Wong Kar-Wai, puisqu'elles sont des images immobiles représentant la vitesse. De plus, si nous y retrouvons des éléments figuratifs (*Femme Dans Un Intérieur* de Boccioni, par exemple), ceux-ci sont déformés et placés dans un contexte beaucoup plus près de l'abstraction, tout comme les images de Wong discutées plus haut. Boccioni écrivait justement que « le mouvement et la lumière [, que nous retrouvons abondamment dans le Hong Kong de Wong Kar-Wai,] détruisent la matérialité des corps [34]».

Au-delà de ces qualités formelles communes, ce courant artistique et ce cinéaste présentent des points communs dans les impressions dégagées par leurs oeuvres. L'important pour Boccioni, chef de file des peintres futuristes italiens, était de mettre en image «la sensation dynamique [35]», la dépense d'énergie occasionnée par l'extrême vitesse et le mouvement. Tous les personnages de *Chungking Express* dépensent de l'énergie afin d'arriver à leurs buts, mais le film lui-même « se veut une pure dépense énergétique [36]», « les images de Wong sont une réponse à un espace transformé par la vitesse [37]» et „« en multipliant les angles de prises de vue, les décadrages fébriles, les variations sur la vitesse de défilement, Wong Kar-Wai met au point une syntaxe cinématographique impure […] privilégiant le mouvement, l'état dynamique [38]». Il enregistre lui aussi les changements dans le monde moderne, et ses conséquences sur les individus de cette société.

Comme nous l'avions annoncé, il existe bel et bien un lien entre la peinture moderne et *Chungking Express*. Le dynamisme du Hong Kong moderne, tout comme les théories des futuristes italiens, sont ainsi visibles dans le film de Wong Kar-Wai. La mise en pratique des décadrages anamorphiques rappelle en effet le geste moderne de la peinture; ces décadrages supportent l'expression du « tourbillon de la vie […] fébrile et dynamisée [39]» tant dans l'illustration du récit que dans la composition de l'image.

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3 *Idem.*

4 *Idem.*

5 Robert Motherwell, « The modern painter's world », in Art inTheory 1900-2000, Malden, 2003, p.643.

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7 *Idib.*, p.644.

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30 Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, op. cit., p.148

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35 Idem.

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Edited by Bruno Dequen.

Squalid Infidelities IV: *Chasing the Diegetic Dragon*

Randolph Jordan

When I was writing my MA thesis on sound in the films of David Lynch, my supervisor wondered if there was a way that I could avoid using the terms "diegetic" and "non-diegetic." I felt hostile towards the idea, and decided that I would make no effort to abandon the terminology since it seemed so crucial to my discussion. Readers of this column will know that things haven't changed much; I continue to make liberal use of the terms in my current work. But the issue has returned to my consciousness recently in the form of a thread on the filmsound.org discussion list which is presently debating the usefulness of the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Reactions within the debate are ranging far and wide. There have been hostile assertions that the terms are useless relics of times past, and suggestions have been made that filmmakers don't care about these distinctions and that it is only we academics on the outside who feel the need to impose these ideas on the films from a distance. On the other hand, some have been quick to observe that many key contemporary theorists continue to draw on these terms in their ever-increasingly sophisticated analyses of film sound, suggesting that the terms have not yet outlived their usefulness. To this I would add that innumerable filmmakers seem preoccupied with the idea of the diegesis (whether they use that particular term or not), a fact illustrated by the most common response to the discussion: to offer examples of films in which the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound is blurred, deliberately or otherwise. This desire to illustrate how the diegetic/non-diegetic opposition has been undone is evidence enough that the binary is still very much alive and well. After all, without these two terms, how could the deconstructive nature of these examples be described?

Having said that, I very much agree that the distinction we make between diegetic and non-diegetic sound is often arbitrary and can just as often be called into question with a little thought on the subject. Indeed, there are far more cases of the grey area between these two poles than we might initially think. The existence of such grey areas was precisely the topic of this column's second edition (http://www.synoptique.ca/core/en/articles/squalid2). There I suggested that Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* offers an argument against the idea that there is such a thing as a separation between these two theoretical spheres. Yet his approach to blurring the distinction was based upon a very clear understanding that this distinction does, in fact, exist. Attention to the ways in which Kubrick deliberately calls attention to both the inside and the outside of the diegesis gives me a new way of understanding the film. This is an understanding that could not exist without first determining what is meant by the diegesis, and so the usefulness of the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound is without question in my mind. I believe that Kubrick's film deliberately depends on the conventional knowledge of the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound, and that the particular ways in which he explores this distinction would be lost without this knowledge. And so it is with a great many films that operate according to similar principles.

I think that what people are reacting against is not the specific concept of the diegesis as it relates to film, but rather to the idea of binary oppositions in general. In this day and age we are well beyond simple concepts

like good and evil, gay and straight, night and day, or even male and female. Right? Well…maybe. The fact remains that, as much as we understand and appreciate the vast distance between any two poles, we continue to use these poles as points of reference which help us understand the areas in the middle as often as they might distract us from them. And so reactions against binarisms are often entangled within their enemies in much the same way as Satanism is necessarily a Christian religion. In many cases the idea of a third option is really only a compression of night and day into one pole against which a new opposition is placed. It's a hard cycle to break, and I'm not sure that breaking it would do us any good. I'm certainly not setting out to break it here. Rather, I will seek to further illustrate why I think the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction is useful by way of another filmic example in which a knowledge of this distinction is a necessary factor in understanding the film as a whole.

And this time it's personal, for my example relates to the issue of cinematic representation of musical performance. I grew up on classical piano lessons, but if you've read the last edition of my column (http://www.synoptique.ca/core/en/articles/jordan_squalid3/) you can tell that I'm a huge fan of electrified music, particularly where electric guitars are concerned. I've always been sensitive to the representation of musical performance on film, being one of those types who cringes whenever I see someone supposedly playing an instrument on screen when the actor is clearly untrained (Sean Penn's performance in Woody Allen's *Sweet And Lowdown* being a case in point). This type of sound/image disjunction has always been, for me, a close-second to bad dubbing in terms of intolerability. And yet how many other disjunctions do I let slide, or even enjoy? I have often argued that film should offer us more disjunctions between sound and image than we usually get. But what is a disjunction anyway? One person's dissonance is another person's harmony, and in the world of cinema, where almost all the sound we hear is created after the images are shot, why would we even expect some kind of "natural" connection between what we see and hear? More importantly to me, what is the substance of my personal lack of consistency with regards to what I want and don't want in terms of sound/image relationships in the cinema?

The fact that something as simple as questioning my tolerance for sound/image disjunction can lead to a much greater appreciation of the intricacies of sound's relationship to the moving image is clear in today's example: Sogo Ishii's *Electric Dragon 80,000 V* (2001). There is an obvious nod here to Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* films (1988 and 1992) and the traditions from which they have come, concerned particularly with the blurring of distinctions between human and machine in the context of civilization's increasing distance from the world of ancient nature. *Electric Dragon* removes almost all narrative pretense from the cyberpunk aesthetic and creates a space of pure electrically charged energy passing between its two main characters, each hybrids of the human and the machine, the traditional and the modern, and each engaged with the use of sound reproduction technology in ways that tamper with classic notions of what lies within and without the diegesis. In these respects, the film is a veritable exploration of the tension between binaries and their deconstruction, and it uses the diegetic/non-diegetic binary to explore a whole host of other binaries and the possibilities of their deconstruction.

What I will do here is explore how the film posits the binaries that it sets out to deconstruct by paying particular attention to the way Sogo handles scenes of musical performance in the film. For me, a mis-matched sound/image relationship in representation of musical performance has a schizophonic effect (see the second edition of my column for more info: http://www.synoptique.ca/core/en/articles/squalid2), separating me from the context of the images and sounds that I experience. Sogo is clearly aware of this, and I suggest that he presents us with differing approaches to the handling of such representation within this single film in order to make a point about the themes of binary deconstruction that run throughout. We will find that his attention to the differences between the inside and the outside of the diegesis speak not only to the importance of these categories in and of themselves, but also how they establish the importance of exploring other binaries common to Japanese cinema throughout history as well as the field of Acoustic Ecology from whence the term schizophonia arises.

What Sogo ultimately achieves is a film in which trends in Japanese cyberpunk and electric guitar fetish (of which Takeuchi Tetsuro's *Wild Zero* (2000) is another potent example) are worked into a system of sound/image relationships whereby the binaries of human/machine, tradition/modernity, and original/copy are placed in the context of shifting standards. These shifting standards are exemplified in the way that music floats between the boundaries of the film's diegesis. Attention to the points at which we can recognize diegetic and non-diegetic musical representation are the points by which we can measure the other important

issues at stake here. Of course, we could ignore the idea that there is a boundary demarcating the diegesis, but to do so would imply that we also ignore the ways in which the areas between various other poles are being explored. To my way of thinking, this would entail passing over the very substance of the film's formal, aesthetic and narrative concerns. Here's why.

The film's premise goes something like this: Dragon-Eye Morrison (Tadanobu Asano) was electrocuted as a child while climbing an electrical tower. A doctor explains that this event stimulated the reptilian part of his brain, awakening the sleeping dragon of humanity's prehistoric past which he must now deal with in the context of contemporary urban existence. So, he takes on the role of lost reptile finder, searching out missing pets for lizard keepers throughout the city. One archetypical scene begins with a low-level point of view shot of Morrison scouring the gutters of back alleyways. Shortly after there is a cut to a wooded environment which stands in stark contrast to the previous shot. The point-ofview cuts to a high-angle wide shot, revealing a tiny little park space in the midst of a vast metropolis: a little island of order in a sea of chaos, a co-existence of the traditional within the modern that reflects Dragon-Eye's character. And like the metropolis, he suffers from an excess of primal energy that civilization can only contain to a certain extent. This excess takes the form of electricity, that spark which gave life to the primordial soup at the dawn of life on Earth and which now flows through the veins of the city.

Dragon-Eye sleeps with metal braces constraining his limbs so that he doesn't injure himself with electrical spasms. While awake, he deals with the energy surplus by unleashing it upon his lizard-skin electric guitar; these astounding scenes make Electric Dragon the guitar fetish movie of the century. When he plays the guitar the entire city's power consumption skyrockets and transformers everywhere spark and rattle on the edge of explosion. Indeed, the electric guitar is perhaps the quintessential example of a musical instrument bridging the traditional and the modern, subjecting the form of an age-old design to electrification. In this process of electrification, the guitar no longer needs to be an architecture of sound space within itself. The projection of sound is given over to electrical transmission, making it a sound reproduction technology with schizophonic capabilities. As we'll see, its schizophonic potential is well realized throughout the film.

While Dragon-Eye puts sound out into the world, his nemesis Thunderbolt Buddha (Masatoshi Nagase) takes it in. He wears a metal Buddha mask over one side of his face, an outward expression of his inner conflict which began when he was hit by a bolt of lightening. He stands on rooftops high above the city with satellite dish in hand and earphones strapped on, riding the soundwaves of the city in search of cell phone conversations that will lead him to evildoers whom he then promptly punishes. His ultimate goal, however, is to confront Dragon-Eye and assert his superiority, having received his power from the natural source of lightening rather than from the harnessed electrical circuits of the modern tower. They do finally confront each other, and Thunderbolt Buddha actually compares his own superior voltage to that of Dragon-Eye as an assertion of his confidence in victory. Yet in the end we don't really know if there was a winner or not. The morning finds Dragon-Eye awakening on the rooftop and all that seems to be left of Thunderbolt-Buddha is the scorched remains of his metal face-plate. Yet in the battle's climax, Thunderbolt Buddha's energy was seen transferring to a lightening rod and dissipating into the thunderclouds gathering above. So it seems that their confrontation could be seen as an analogy for the localized harnessing of a power which really exists everywhere and which we can only contain for brief periods at a time.

It is in the representations of Dragon-Eye's guitar playing that the philosophical underpinnings of the film's conclusion can be found. In the first guitar-playing sequence, used to establish Dragon-Eye's electrically charged character and explain how he manages his primitive impulses, the sound of the guitar itself is actually quite distant. Other elements of the soundtrack, like impending feedback, are foregrounded more than his playing. This is indicative of sound reproduction technology's powers to defy the expectations of physics. In general, distortion on guitar suggests loudness, but the reality is that distortion has been removed from its original status as an indicator of amplifier overload and is now an effect that can be applied at very low volume. This creates a disjunction between the sound and its reproduction in space, and suggests the possibility that the sound is not actually diegetic despite the fact that it accompanies the image of Dragon-Eye playing on screen.

So what would be the purpose of suggesting this blur between two sides of the diegesis? I believe it is Sogo's way of calling attention to the problem of establishing polemics as the basis for an understanding of the world, a problem that will be fleshed out as the two main characters come closer and closer to confrontation, only to have the outcome of their battle be ambiguous

at best. The question of whether or not the sound we hear comes from the images we see is rendered dubious in this scene, and this has ramifications for judgements about the problem of an electrified society made by the likes of R. Murray Schafer (as discussed in earlier editions of this column). Much has been made of the idea that the very quiet can be made very loud, epitomized by the intimate breath of a jazz singer crooning a soft ballad into a microphone which fills the space of a large theatre. Yet the very loud can also be made very quiet, like listening to distorted heavy metal at low volumes. There is a distance here, a clear indication that the rules of spatial acoustics are not obeyed when amplification enters the picture. Here, this spatial disorientation is put in the context of the ancient coming alive in the modern, Dragon-Eye's primitive self finding expression through a tool of modernity.

In "Earplugs," guitarist Marc Ribot discusses the bizarre situation whereby amplifier distortion no longer indicates equipment at risk and has turned into an effect that can be turned on and off at will. He sees the overuse of distortion to unnaturally extend the sonic life of a plucked string as tantamount to a "Faustian error," a fight against the natural process of decay that all life must contend with. [1] Dragon-Eye's use of the guitar can be understood in similar terms, whereby the distortion becomes a product of rebirth, a sign of the eternal existence of the past within the present, a desire to defy death through an appeal to the past. In this case, the past is represented by Dragon- Eye's reptilian nature and kinship with electricity, both of which find expression in his guitar-playing. And the difficulty with which the technology has in containing Dragon-Eye's primitive expressions suggests a line between the inside and outside of an electrical circuit, a line that he rides when displaying his simultaneous kinship to both the ancient and the contemporary through his ambiguously diegetic musical performance.

The idea of distortion acting as a symbol of rebirth is most clearly indicated in the second guitar-playing scene, which begins with Dragon-Eye returning home to find his guitar reduced to pieces at the hands of Thunderbolt Buddha. After resurrecting the instrument from its grave and piecing it back together, he starts to play. The sound starts out very quietly, with most of what we hear being the unamplified sound of the guitar itself. This reminds us that the electric guitar can, in fact, make sound in the absence of electricity, much like its traditional acoustic counterpart. Here the sound/image synch is very tight, and I imagine that location sound of the actor playing was used. Then, slowly, amplification comes in as the guitar finds its life once again. The soundtrack grows increasingly separate from the image, ultimately with other instruments coming in that bring it into the non-diegetic sphere. So we have a gradual shift from spatially contextualized unamplified sound to schizophonically removed electrified sound. For Ribot, the extension of the life of a sound through extreme amplification must come with the risks of electrical failure if it is to be justified as a noble pursuit. Ribot wants electrified guitar playing to be grounded in the physical realities of real-world context rather than being subject to representations that ultimately separate the sound from its source. In this scene the suggestion is made that the physical reality of dangerous distortion is linked to the sound's break from the diegesis, a situation that would seem to contradict Ribot.

This contradiction is of great importance. Dragon-Eye's playing is schizophonic while being grounded in the physical realities of electrical overload. When he plays, the city bursts. His source of power becomes the entire grid of the metropolis, so it makes sense that his sound should embody qualities of schizophonic transcendence that would allow it to encompass the entire metropolitan area. Ribot's argument is based on the localization of a single amplifier as the source of the sound. For Dragon-Eye, the city itself is his amplifier, and urban space becomes his stage. And so the diegesis expands from Dragon-Eye's immediate environment to cover a much larger space that he becomes a part of through the transcendental capabilities of his electrified self-expression. This idea amounts to an overrepresentation of Dragon-Eye's guitar sound that is much in keeping with Schafer's beliefs about the way sound operates in urban space. In turn, the over-represented soundspace is what Thunderbolt Buddha taps into, and so his connection to Dragon-Eye becomes clear: one puts the sound out, the other takes it in. It is a circle of production and consumption in which the two poles ultimately serve to contextualize one another, rendering the ambiguous result of their conflict a function of their reciprocal relationship.

The circle of commodified production and consumption is one of the problems that critics of postmodernity like Frederic Jameson and R. Murray Schafer decry, arguing that context should be about more than just the commodification made possible by technologies of reproduction. But there is a way that ELECTRIC DRAGON suggests something deeper than simple commodification culture: each of these characters has a tie to history that lives along side them in the present, and their relationship to each other is

symbolic of the circle of life and death that none of us can escape but which ultimately ensures that there is no death, only renewal. Ultimately, this idea of history living alongside the present is an extension of the boundary of the diegesis that presents itself during these scenes of musical performance. It's not so much that the two sides collapse into each other, but that they live alongside one another. They are distinct, and yet they operate together, just as the two characters do. The ancient dragon that is awakened in the contemporary world gets chased through this world and on out the other side, dragging behind it a thread that binds the inside and outside together. This is perhaps the best way to understand the poles of diegetic and non-diegetic sound: any flight between the two poles ultimately serves to bring them closer together while keeping the lines that separate them apparent. Sogo uses this threading strategy as the foundation for exploring the ways in which the ancient and the contemporary, the natural and the technological, function in similar fashion. Sogo seems to suggest that we needn't do away with the binary of the inside and the outside of the diegesis. Rather, examining their relationship can teach us about their dependence upon one another, just as sound and image are dependent upon one another in the cinema while remaining always, and necessarily, distinct.

ENDNOTES

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Edited by Owen Livermore.

Eternal Sunshine Of A Spotless Miike: A Review of Izo

Andrea Ariano

Just when I had the fleeting suspicion that Takashi Miike would become as predictable as J-Horror (see 2003's *One Missed Call*), he almost literally smacks me upside the head with *IZO* (2004). Though many reviewers have deemed the film inscrutable, I believe it is the actual experience of the film that is difficult to express. Yet if I had to describe the film in one word, it would be "Izo." After seeing this movie, the name Izo should be a verb.

Since I must provide a premise for the film, I must first establish that the character of Izo Okada is the embodiment, the essence, and the epitome of violent revenge. After opening with stock footage of a sex education film (complete with moving diagrams depicting male ejaculation), the film cuts to the year 1865 where Izo endures a torturous execution and is grotesquely crucified at 28 years-of-age for servicing the anti-shogun rebel Hanpeita Takeuchi. Thereafter, Izo rematerializes in present-day Japan with one vow: to avenge his death on various planes of existence.

Meanwhile, gods and government officials alike brace for the coming of Izo, anticipating the rivers of blood that will be spilled throughout the film. True to his vow, Izo kills everyone in his path from the average Tokyo Joe Businessman to every physical manifestation of a Jungian archetype imaginable. Throughout Izo's rampage, he kills his mother, innocent children, wise gods, school girls, Buddha, the embodiment of Shinto even Mother Nature itself. At least, this is what *seems* to happen: archetypal character representations in *IZO* are seldom explained outright.

Among many of the films highly anticipated cameos, Beat Takashi (Takeshi Kitano) makes a brief appearance as the Prime Minister awaiting Izo's wrath in a boardroom among other officials. As Izo transcends space and time, these gods and government officials ponder the meaning of Izo's vengeance: they state that he is irrational and unpredictable; a blemish to be expelled from Japan's perfect system.

Though Miike seems to be complicating the audience's pursuit of relevance and significance in Izo, since Izo is characterized as "irrationality" itself, I would like to investigate the use and importance of violence coursing through the film. I could begin by discussing the film's grotesque nature or the monstrous phallic symbolism of a female character that draws a sword from her bloody vagina. However, the most intriguing aspect of Miike's *IZO* is the frequent shift in tone between violence and humor. Or rather, it is the particular combination of hyperbolic bloodand- gut wrenching violence with odd and absurd humor which creates many of the film's unexpected moments. I should specify here that Izo's vengeance goes to lengths that are beyond the stretches of the imagination. Every time Izo leaves one scene drenched in blood, he literally opens the door to a new setting for crass destruction. This violence is often punctuated unsettlingly by a folk song that seems non-diagetic until Kazuki Tomokawa- a real-life star who is the Japanese equivalent of Bob Dylan- emerges from the background singing with his guitar in hand. Though the timing of Tomokawa's sporadic appearances are oddly humorous, his music remains poetic and almost angelic since the lyrics often contradict Izo's violent rampage.

The most unique aspect regarding Miike's use of violence and humor is the fact that Izo is both literally and figuratively bound to a search for truth in a world of exaggerated fantasy. Miike personifies violence, through Izo's character, in order to make claims about humanity's cosmic relationship to anger, strife, and violence. As the violence and absurdity escalate, Izo becomes a demon among gods, and even the female personification of his soul cannot save him. Izo remains indestructible, yet always mutable. Thus, violence is merely a stage within a shifting and cyclical human existence (hence the stock footage of the male reproductive system and the sporadic stock footage of WWII). The message is that stock footage of one war will merely be replaced by the digital images of a new one: Izo's war against universal archetypes is as experiential as any other artist struggling to express the meaning behind senseless acts of violence. Miike is constantly challenging how viewers experience violence in his films. Yet, of all Miike's films, *IZO* is the most ambitious in its representation of violence and cinema, or perhaps, violence in cinema. The film's genre references range from documentary, to Japanese art house cinema, to b-horror film, to classic samurai films; and these are complemented by a barrage of cameos. Ultimately, Miike's non-linear narrative, which has a variety of formalistic styles, seems to be strongly influenced by the experimental pink films of Koji Wakamatsu (*Ecstasy Of The Angels*, 1972).

With all the twists and tangles of symbolism and themes within this film, Miike truly is a master of violent irony. On a very literal level, *IZO* is a typical revenge film, though unlike others in the sub-genre, Izo takes his roaring rampage of revenge to a subconscious level. Izo is Japan's nightmare: he is the imperfect violent stain on Japan's history, a stain that refuses to disappear. Because those in power in the film see Izo as a return of something that must be repressed in order for society to work, the demon still retains the qualities of humanity. Daring to fight the gods for the right to be a monster, to experience and express the absurdity of waiting for karma, judgment, death and renewal, Izo is the explosive passion and anger of all human strife and injustice.

Miike could very easily be regarded as a senseless and irresponsible ultraviolent filmmaker, and it is very plausible that *IZO* will be another stain on Miike's violent reputation for those who have an aversion to his filmmaking. However, this film will likely be just as much a frustrating and fascinating experience for those who are intrigued by Miike's affinity for ultraviolence. I believe that Miike's various representations of violence are far more responsible, mythical, and tangible than they might at first seem.

Ultimately, Miike's film investigates not only violence but also the forces of emotion, energy, and the human spirit. Perhaps *IZO* is a film about the myth of the eternal return. Miike might only wish to remind us of the absurdity of violence that is part of the human condition since in Buddhism "the only possibility of escaping from time, of breaking the iron circle of existence, is to abolish the human condition and win Nirvana." [1] In the end, Izo never attains nirvana as he never escapes karma. Miike remains trapped in the iron circle of human existence since he is a vulture for violence. The same could be said of Takashi Miike fans since they too are vultures for Miike's various renditions of violence, something which makes *IZO* an intriguing film. *IZO* is an experimental/folk version of violence that leaves viewers affected and pensive. It is a truly experiential film that must be seen to be believed. I dare you; I double dare you to get "Izo-ed."

Andrea wrote about Lemony Snicket's: A Series Of Unfortunate Events in Synoptique 7.

ENDNOTES

1 Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1954. 116.

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Edited by Laurel Wypkema

+ SPLINTERS (IX) Asian Cinema

In this edition:

Appleseed, Ashura, Crying Fist, Ghost House, Gozu, Howl's Moving Castle, House Of Flying Daggers, Ju-On: The Grudge 2, Kamikaze Girls, Kung Fu Hustle, Low Life, Otakus In Love, Please Teach Me English, Survive Style 5+, Three… Extremes, Vital

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***Appleseed* (Shinji Aramaki, 2004)**

Quelle déception! Annoncé comme l'événement anime de ce début d'année, *Appleseed* est un double échec. Adapté d'un manga écrit il y a presque vingt ans, le récit est une ébauche simpliste de thèmes explorés depuis avec plus de succès dans *Ghost In The Shell*. Sur le plan technique, l'utilisation de la capture de mouvement, au lieu de permettre une meilleure animation des visages, ne sert qu'à imiter au plus près des chorégraphies déjà vues dans *The Matrix*. Il est triste de voir que le film des frères Wachowski, qui a su si bien utiliser les innovations de l'anime afin de produire des scènes innovatrices, est devenu source d'inspiration pour les animateurs japonais. Pensant innover, ce film regarde en fait en arrière.
-Bruno Dequen

***Ashura* (Yojiro Takita, 2005)**

Ashura is big, splendid, fantastical, sparkly, goth, kabuki-informed, myth-inspired, sword-fight driven, period extravaganza, at turns emotionally over-wrought and knowingly, comically cheesy. But of course it all comes down to *Love*. The star-crossed lovers are that and then some; what's worse, they're demon-crossed. This is one of those films wherein the virgin—so troubled and pure, so gamine and sportive—can lick the blood from her about-tobe- lover's wound, and yet seem no less virginal. When, post-coitus, she transforms into a fearsome uber-demongoddess, she becomes determined to have her demon-slayer boyfriend killed for, well, for popping her cherry, basically. Will true cosmic love prevail?
-Jodi Ramer

***Crying Fist* (Ryoo Seung-wan, 2005)**

Young man vs. old boy. Simple and efficient narrative tells separate stories of two very different boxers (played by Ryoo Seung-bum and Choi Min-sik) before they clash in the ring. Boxing isn't really a popular sport in Korea, and the two boxers aren't fighting for huge fame, which makes their struggle all the more intimate. The outcome of the fight doesn't matter here, to the point where it could have been excluded; the carefully realized personal struggle and emotional investment in character is more than enough to satisfy the viewer.
-Owen Livermore

***Crying Fist* (Ryoo Seung-wan, 2005)**

A stirring, gritty tribute to the indomitable human spirit in the form of two down-on-their-luck boxers. I was biting my lip waiting to see the outcome of the final fight. But either way it might have gone would have been okay by me. I guess that indicates that a film has won your trust. And though I have tired of messy,

frenetic hand-held camera as stylistic shorthand for keepin' it real, *Crying Fist* ultimately convinced me that when it works, it still works.
-Jodi Ramer

Ghost House **(Kim Sang-jin, 2004)**

Wish the program notes had indicated the film was a comedy. I was expecting to be terrorized—and I was, but not in the way I imagined. This movie is silliness times a million, and belaboured to the point of unwatchability. I heard some meager rewards come at the end, but I had to check myself out after twenty minutes. For hardcore Fantasia addicts only.
-Lys Woods

Ghost House **(Kim Sang-jin, 2004)**

After reading the program notes, I wasn't ready for *Ghost House* to be a comedy; I was even less prepared for it to be, to my mind, no kind of comedy at all. That is to say, I did recognize tropes of what could be called humour, flailing gestures and tough guys simpering broadly and gobbling demonic couches and underwear thrown around willy-nilly. But I failed to note anything vaguely resembling funny. (For the sake of disclosure, I should note that I snuck out after a painful half hour or so. And yet I stand by my assessment. Not funny. Really lame and not funny.)
-Jodi Ramer

Gozu **(Takashi Miike, 2003)**

Eat your heart out, David Lynch
-Andrea Ariano

Howl's Moving Castle **(Hayao Miyazaki, 2005)**

Bien qu'il ne possède ni l'originalité, ni la profondeur thématique des dernières oeuvres de l'animateur japonais, je ne peux m'empêcher d'adorer ce film. Miyazaki est le seul animateur capable de me faire ressentir à nouveau ce sentiment de peur, d'émerveillement et de fascination que j'éprouvais lorsque, enfant, je passais mes nuits à rêver que je volais. Comme je l'avais remarqué avec *My Neighbor Totoro*, personne ne comprend mieux la complexité de l'imagination enfantine que Miyazaki.
-Bruno Dequen

House Of Flying Daggers **(Zhang Yimou, 2004)**

Zhang Yimou's *House Of Flying Daggers* has the requisite martial pyro-technics, cardboard cut-out romance and a visual palette that dazzles. But Ziyi Zhang's Echo Dance sequence near the beginning of the film inwhich she demonstrates her background in professional dance and a preternatural ability to move and pose on the court floor is the only reason this film needs to be watched.
-Friedrich Mayr

Ju-On: The Grudge 2 **(Takashi Shimizu, 2003)**

If recent Japanese cinema has taught us one thing it's that the Ghostbusters could get rich in Asia. And poor Takashi Shimizu; by the time 2006 rolls around he'll have made seven versions of the same damn *Ju-On/ Grudge* film, between various Asian and Hollywood versions. In this sequel to the Japanese theatrical edition, Shimizu breaks up the linear narrative, adds new characters and mines some genuine scares from the form, but essentially it's the usual ghost-curse stuff with pasty spirits, wacky stains and an unnerving soundtrack. Stick two forks in the subgenre and call Ray, Peter and Igon in the morning.
-Dave Alexander

Kamikaze Girls **(Nakashima Tetsuya, 2003)**

Is it any wonder that the world is fascinated by the passions and preoccupations of the Japanese schoolgirl?
-Jodi Ramer

Kamikaze Girls **(Nakashima Tetsuya, 2003)**

It's hard to believe that an anachronistic, rococo obsessed, boutique shopping, bonnet bearing teen who turns stubbornly away at the prospect of attempting any feat which might require the extension of manual energy would prove to be the symbol of the young independent woman, but in this film it works. *Kamikaze Girls* seems to acutely be aware of its audience prompting members to receptively oooohhh and aaahhhh at the meticulous embroidery work of the protagonist, then cheer and applaud at the brightly brisk action sequences with the bike gang or the Baby boutique owner. I think my enjoyment of the film was only amplified by the colourful 700 others who shared the film at the July 14th Fantasia screening. (honest : there were girls present dressed up as characters from the film….and when the film let out into the foyer of Concordia University, I felt a slight twinge of jealousy)
-Lisa Fotheringham

***Kung Fu Hustle* (Stephen Chow, 2004)**

Stephen Chow, the kung fool master of CG-injected fantastic realism, follows the bombastic *Shaolin Soccer* with a period gangster tale that inevitably, gleefully disintegrates into a physics-smashing series of over-the-top chop-socky fisticuffs and epic slapstick. Unlikely heroes stand up to the Yakuza and their super villains, a needless romantic subplot blooms, singing and dancing just sort of happen, gravity loses ground to sight/fight/flight gags, and subtlety goes down for the count. Few contemporary filmmakers so joyfully push the limits of cinema's technological capabilities and genre conventions like writer-director-star Chow. Watch *Kung Fu Hustle* with a seatbelt and a smile.
-Dave Alexander

***Low Life* (Im Kwon-taek, 2004)**

Basically a revisiting of *Casino*, transplanted to Korea in the tumultuous decades post WWII. Despite many energetic and bracing scenes, the epic nature of the story—the sort-of rise and sort-of fall of a thug known to operate with a code of decency, set against the historical fluxes that alternately help and hinder him—suffers from the biopic syndrome of too much too glancingly touched upon. Uninspiring and somewhat stuffy.
-Jodi Ramer

***Otakus In Love* (Matsuo Suzuki, 2004)**

Visual imagination keeps this manga fare engaging. And the hipsters can take note: This is how we will be dressing in five years. Genre-manga follows its own logic and at a certain point you give in and just enjoy the fact that the Japanese are just so much cooler than us. They have gone all baroque and outrageous. By comparison, the measly epic aspirations of North American comic-book films seem deadly dull and stodgy. Best of all, take special note of the foaming ink-pot pre-code sex scene, then take your loved one out for some serious cosplay.
-Lys Woods

***Otakus In Love* (Matsuo Suzuki, 2004)**

Charmingly unhinged Japanese youths subject each other to their respective manga-based obsessions all the while sussing the other out as a potential sweetheart. The road is rocky—literally rock-laden, what with the anguished, artist-wannabe hero's misbegotten rocks-as-manga sculptural pieces, and ultimately his rock-art-inspired cosplay. The way is also rather too long. But though it failed to move me much, the film makes clear that quirky Japanese losers are cuter and cooler than their American counterparts could ever be.
-Jodi Ramer

***Otakus In Love* (Matsuo Suzuki, 2004)**

Why can't Hollywood romantic comedies feature glitter, flying, and cosplay in such a provocative way as their Eastern counterparts? OK, maybe *Otakus In Love* didn't have as much flying and glitter as some of the others (which might be cause for my restless and anxious nature about seventy minutes into the film), but the success of cosplay in mediating the romantic relationship is enough to make the dandy that lies within many of us proud. While *Otakus In Love* was certainly not the most engaging piece programmed at the Fantasia Festival, the glimpse into the crevasses of manga culture were presented with a good amount of humour and had my friends and I talking "cosplay" for the remainder of the evening. Also…I must admit…I've never seen an ink carafe look so sexy.
-Lisa Fotheringham

***Please Teach Me English* (Kim Sang-su, 2003)**

A remarkably winning little number that is giddy and goofy in all the right ways. The ingénue is pretty but bespeckled. A common trope to be sure, however, unlike many an American teen-nerd-girl-gets-makeover genre flick, wherein the path from geek to chic is an insultingly short one ("ugly duckling" takes off glasses and lets down hair and VOILA! she's a stunner), this gal is truly an awkward dork—all the while that I was growing to love her I also wanted to smack some self-possession into her.
-Jodi Ramer

***Please Teach Me English* (Kim Sang-su, 2003)**

See this film for the lead actress, Na-yeong Lee. Her facial expressions and awkward demeanour are fantastic. The film is quirky and amusing, but evolves from the issue of the ever prevalent Anglicization of the globalized social fabric. The chosen English names of the male and female leads are Elvis and Candy. Need I say more?
-Lisa Fotheringham

***Survive Style 5+* (Gen Sekiguchi, 2004)**

Comparisons with Quentin Tarantino are unavoidable, but sort of moot. Japanese director Gen Sekiguchi's *Survival Style 5+* is more indebted to the insouciantly distilled prose and deadpan weirdness of Haruki Murakami (and the pop art visual antics of Seijun Suzuki) than to any patented Tarantino riffs. A former music video director, Sekiguchi is not only a slick visualist but manages, at moments, a compulsive emotional resonance that took Tarantino years to find. The various story strands are uneven, but in the best of them something complicated and slow burning creeps in: equal parts romantic despair, deep-rooted alienation, and the naïve but correct belief in glamour as a cure — the title begins to make sense.
-Lys Woods

***Survive Style 5+* (Gen Sekiguchi, 2004)**

Shopping list for hip, amusing yet totally messed-up film:
A bunch of sets that look like a rainbow threw up all over it
1 Man who thinks he's a bird
1/2 dozen small diversions in the story have no real purpose
1 Tadanobu Asano
1 Sonny Chiba
1 Vinnie Jones as bipolar hitman
1 Cake performing Gloria Gaynor disco hit "I Will Survive"
-Owen Livermore

***Three… Extremes* (2004)**

Dumplings (Fruit Chan)
inside, wrapped with utmost care
A red, crunchy death
Poisoned squirming souls
A rich woman licks her lips

Cut (Park Chanwook)
Oblivious, the successful man walks into the darkness. He strains, tethered to the elegant orchestrated nightmare. Untied, slipping in blood he discovers he has lost something…

Box (Takashi Miike)
Snow drifts over time
Dream of silent jealousy
Suffocating warmth
-Owen Livermore

***Vital* (Shinya Tsukamoto, 2004)**

With *Vital*, the madman behind *Testuo* (1988) continues to move his neurotic obsessions with fractured personal relationships, repressed sexuality, and identity-destroying body horror away from the hyper-kinetic and into a quieter, more controlled realm. It's a no less disturbing landscape, though, when an amnesiac medical student thoroughly dissecting a corpse makes a horrifying connection between his autopsy and the accident that took both his memory and lover. A dramatic art film with a horror premise, *Vital* quickly transcends genre as it descends into some darkly dramatic, and ultimately surreal territory. Long live the new New Flesh!
-Dave Alexander