

MASTER'S THESIS

Toward an aesthetics of sensation: a study of backlighting in Shunji Iwai's films

So, Wai Fung

Date of Award:
2019

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Abstract

Shunji Iwai is a significant director of the Japanese New Independent cinema, who is best known for the fascinating visual style he adopted from the 1990s onwards. Rejecting the obsession with Japaneseness in Japanese cinema, Iwai developed a unique style of aestheticism through the use of backlighting, a technique he refined in partnership with cinematographer Noboru Shinoda. In existing academic studies on backlighting, cinematic lighting has generally been understood as a representational element that works to fulfill the needs of narration. Examples of such studies include Sharon A. Russell's (1981) semiotic study on the lighting style of French cinema, Patrick Keating's (2010) discussion of lighting convention in classical Hollywood cinema, and Lara Thompson's (2015) analysis on the use of light as a narrative tool in narrative cinema. By contrast, lighting in Shunji Iwai's films works in a different way. This difference prompts me to review the general conceptualization of cinematic lighting and turn to a materialist perspective, a non-representational attempt to study the sensation of lighting in cinema.

By adopting Deleuze's concepts of cinema and sensation, this project provides an analytical trajectory for studying lighting in cinema. I argue that lighting as an aesthetic materiality renders a new understanding of the film world of Shunji Iwai as something derived from the Deleuzian poetics of sensation. This argument can be a starting point for critically rethinking lighting as a means for producing a circulation of cinematic affects.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abbreviations	vi
Chapter 1. Introduction	
Shunji Iwai and the Japanese New Independent	2
Partnership with Noboru Shinoda and six chosen films	6
Watching through Deleuzian lens – Cinematic light beyond representation	11
Chapter 2. Literature review and methodology	
Light in Japanese film studies	15
Studies of light in Western cinema	19
A material turn in recent film studies	27
Theoretical review	37
Movement in cinema	42
Methodology	45

Chapter 3. Backlighting and perception: Discovery of cinematic figures	46
Chapter 4. Backlighting and the affective space:	
Two kinds of spaces in Shunji Iwai's films	69
Chapter 5. Action under backlighting: Two forces related to sensation	88
Chapter 6. Conclusion	106
Bibliography	111