

MASTER'S THESIS

Modernist aesthetics in the films of Wong Kar-wai

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Modernist Aesthetics
in the Films of Wong Kar-wai

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. YEH Emilie YY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of MPhil at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation submitted to this or other institutions for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signature:

Date: December 2014

ABSTRACT

Wong Kar-wai is a premier avant-garde auteur of Hong Kong cinema. In the existing research, postmodernism is considered as a predominant approach to shed light on Wong's aesthetics, poetics and politics. Being the iconoclastic 'poet of time,' Wong Kar-wai is extolled as a leading figure for his postmodernist style of visually unique and emotional resonant film works. Recurring motifs, such as alienation and rejection, time and memory, pursuit and loss, are regarded as representations of cultural and political anxieties of Hong Kong people in the context of 1980s and 1990s. Wong's characteristic exoticism and cosmopolitanism in his films also distinguishes him from other Chinese-language directors.

However, when we expand the scope of the postmodern terrain, we find modernism and its attendant aesthetics are just as relevant and important as postmodernism to the understanding of Wong's oeuvre. This thesis evokes a comparative perspective of modernism proposed by Eugene Lunn as an aesthetic approach, with an illustrative analysis by using David Bordwell's and Kristin Thompson's work on non-Hollywood cinema. This approach emphasizes four major directions of the social and cultural aspects influenced by modernism in art. Using this approach requires researchers to find cinematic representations of modernism in terms of aesthetic self-consciousness, juxtaposition of time, ambiguity and dehumanization within the film.

This research takes Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) as a case study to explore the alternative interpretations beyond postmodernism. The investigation of Wong's uses of modernist approach involves the analysis of his experiments of conventional film techniques and strategic employment of the *mise-en-scene*, camera

angles, lenses, lighting, and music, which constitute his pictorial world. My assertion is that Wong's juxtaposition of time and space creates an elusive and ambiguous fictional world in response to his reflection on the dehumanization of an integral individual subject in the modernized world.

Key Words: Wong Kar-wai, Modernism, Modernity, Film Aesthetic, *Ashes of Time*

Redux

中文提要

王家衛是一位優秀的香港先鋒導演。在以往的研究中，後現代主義通常作為主要的理論和方法，來分析王的電影美學、詩學和政治訴求。他被譽為「時間詩人」，他的電影也具有鮮明的後現代影像和情感特徵。他的作品中經常出現的母體，比如疏離和拒絕，時間和記憶，追求和失去等等，都被認為是反映香港八十和九十年代人們的文化和政治焦慮的最佳代表。王家衛作品中強烈的異域情調和世界性特點，也讓他從其他華語電影導演中脫穎而出，與歐美電影大師齊名。

但是，如果我們能夠擴大後現代主義的研究範疇，我們會發現，現代主義及其所代表的電影美學跟後現代主義壹洋，對我們理解王家衛的作品有著同洋相關性和重要性。本文就將以美國史學家 Eugene Lunn 提出的現代主義美學比較觀作為主要研究理論和方法，結合 David Bordwell 和 Kristin Thompson 的關於非主流電影的觀點作為論述補充。這個研究理論和方法概括了現代藝術作品中的四大特點。運用此方法要求研究者探索電影中所體現出的藝術自覺反思性、對時間並置的處理、對曖昧和不確定性的表現、以及對顛覆對完整人性的現代主義社會和文化思潮。

本文將選取王家衛最具爭議和顛覆性的電影作品《東邪西毒》（導演版，2008）作為案列，嘗試對其電影作品進行後現代主義之外的分析和解讀。對王家衛電影的現代主義研究將包括：他對電影技術的反傳統實驗和精湛地使用場面調度、拍攝角度、鏡頭、燈光、音樂等組成電影的各種手段和技巧。我認為，正是通過對傳統和主流電影的有意識的顛覆和創新，對電影時空的並置和重建，王家衛在他的迷離又曖昧的電影裏，深刻地表達了其對現實社會的現代主義的思考，和揭示了現代社會對人性的否定和現代性在人們生活中無處不在的滲透和侵蝕。

【關鍵詞】王家衛，現代主義，現代性，電影美學，《東邪西毒》
(2008)

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INTRODUCTION

Postmodern Studies on Wong Kar-wai

For more than two decades, Hong Kong-based filmmaker Wong Kar-wai has been appraised as a film auteur with a distinctive postmodernist style. Existing research as a result has been focused on the postmodern aesthetic in Wong's films and postmodernism is also considered as a predominant approach to shed light on Wong's poetics and politics (Abbas, 1997; Bordwell, 2000; Marchetti, 2000; Dissanayake, 2003; Tambling, 2003; Teo, 2005; Brunette, 2005; Luk, 2005; Yeh, 2008). However, postmodernism does not answer all the questions surrounding Wong's film aesthetics and his concern with love, identity and angst, recurring motifs in many of his works. When we expand the scope of the postmodern terrain, we find modernism and its attendant aesthetics are just as relevant and important to the understanding of Wong's oeuvre as postmodernism. Nevertheless, the existing literature pays little attention to the issues of modernity and the relationship between modernist aesthetics and Wong Kar-wai has not been fully addressed. My thesis will address this gap by asking the following questions: Is post-modern perspective the best and the only way to understand Wong Kar-wai's films? Can we find modernist aesthetics in the narrative structure and film styles in Wong's films? How and to what extent can we re-examine Wong Kar-wai's from the modernist perspective, in order to fill the missing block in the studies of Wong Kar-wai?

As Hong Kong Second Wave began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wong Kar-wai, a young filmmaker, made his debut film *As Tears Go By* in 1988. Since then Wong

began to establish his visually unique and emotional resonant style of films, including *Days of Being Wild* (1990), *Ashes of Time* (1994), *Chungking Express* (1994), *Fallen Angels* (1995), *Happy Together* (1997), *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *2046* (2004), *My Blueberry Night* (2008) and *The Grandmaster* (2013). None of these are similar to the mainstream Hong Kong pictures. These films are acclaimed by critics around the globe and established Wong as an iconoclastic figure in Hong Kong cinema.

According to Tony Rayns, Wong not only is a leading figure in contemporary Hong Kong cinema, he also represents a cultural shift in the advent of the new millennium, for his films deal with the anxiety of culture identity during the years of Hong Kong's handover to Mainland China.

Scholars and critics have written widely on Wong Kar-wai's films, predominately taking the perspective of postmodernism. They regarded Wong's subversion of the mainstream convention on narrative structure, characterization, and the audience suspension of disbelief as his articulation of postmodern thoughts. Examples of such articulations are found through Wong's cinematic experiments such as fragmentation of narrative structure, voiceover monologue, hand-held camera, pastiche of genres and music, discontinuity editing, ambiguous shots, and numerous other techniques. As Stephen Teo asserts that 'Wong has come to signify a cool, postmodern sensibility in world cinema,' most of the current studies interpret Wong's film works as loss of memory, rejection and endurance, dream chasing, nostalgia of the past and many others.

What Is There Beyond Postmodernism?

Existing scholarship on Wong Kar-wai's films primarily focuses on the approach of postmodernism. However, this tendency will lead to limitations of other possible

interpretations. Among them, is modernism or modernist aesthetics, which provides an insight into Wong Kar-wai's film works. In current studies, modernist approach is still an under-researched field. Even though some previous studies have shown their attentions in modernism, most of the analyses focus on one or two particular aspects, such as identity and politics, culture, photography, narrative and motifs, editing, sound and music, time and space, etc. A comprehensive analysis of Wong Kar-wai's films from the modernist perspective needs to be explored to fill this gap.

This thesis proposes the modernist aesthetics as an alternative approach to revisiting Wong Kar-wai's films and attempts to contribute to a comprehensive reading on the film works of Wong Kar-wai. Based on the literature review on previous studies, I propose the following research questions: 1. Is Wong Kar-wai indeed a postmodernist artist, or is his cinematic style a manifestation of modernist aesthetics? 2. What are the limitations and restrictions of the dominant postmodernist approach to Wong Kar-wai's films? 3. Beyond the sphere of postmodernism, how and to what extent can we reconsider Wong Kar-wai's films as a representative of modernist aesthetics in terms of narrative structure, film forms and motifs? 4. Can modernist approach lead to a different conclusion on our previous understanding of Wong Kar-wai's works? 5. What contributions will the modernism approach make to the existing literature on Wong Kai-wai? These questions will be my guide to explore the modernist aesthetics and thoughts in my textual analysis.

Research Methods

As stated, the previous research on Wong Kar-wai's film works may have discussed his films from the perspective of modernism; however, most of these analyses focus on one or two particular aspects, such as photography, narrative, sound, editing,

identity and politics, and so on. A systematic philosophy or theory is needed to understand his films. Here I invoke Eugene Lunn's comparative perspectives on Modernism as my primary approach to reexamine Wong Kar-wai's films. Lunn's approach includes social and aesthetic aspects of modernism that emphasize the following four dimensions: aesthetic self-reflectiveness, juxtaposition of time, ambiguity and uncertainty, and denial of integral individual subjects. All of these will demonstrate the inherent modernist sensibility and motifs in the disguise of a postmodernist form and style. This research further suggests that Wong Kar-wai's film works is both a postmodernist and a modernist work of art. It depends on different perspectives because of the inherent complexity in his film works.

Another research method I will use in analyzing *Ashes of Time Redux* come from David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's studies on non-classic Hollywood. I will examine two types of the film system—narrative system and style system—in Wong's films along with Lunn's perspective of modernism. To be specific, film forms such as narrative, *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, editing, and sound will be my research subjects. The analysis will focus on how Wong's experiments with formal techniques to subvert the classic Hollywood principles, just as most modernist film artists did when they consciously challenged the convention of traditional film art. Besides, modernist artistic movement, such as the French Impressionism and Surrealism, German Expressionism, Soviet Montage, Italian Neorealism, and French New Wave will also be illustrations for my argument on modernist aesthetics.

In order to present an explicit textual analysis, I will do a case study that shows the validity of modernism in facilitating a different understanding of Wong Kar-wai's films. My primary text is *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), perceived as the most

enigmatic text in Wong's oeuvre. A brief introduction of the film will be the necessary for us to begin our journey to modernist destination.

***Ashes of Time Redux* (2008)**

Ashes of Time Redux (2008) is the director cut of Wong Kar-wai's 1994 film *Ashes of Time*. In 2008, Wong re-edited and re-released the film under the title *Ashes of Time Redux* that presents a shorter cut. It was a difficult process since the original negatives were in bad shape and the sound needed to be re-recorded. The *Redux* version is at the moment the only good-quality edition available on the market.

Set in ancient times in China, the plot revolves around the heartbroken swordsman Ouyang Feng (starring Leslie Cheung), hiring bounty hunters for those of in need of help. He leaves his love and hometown White Camel Mountain behind. Struggled by his past, Ouyang Feng is portrayed as a fallen swordsman driven by greed and heartless to both friend and foe. He was perpetually being spiteful of love as his own love history was not nearly so beautiful. His bounty hunters came and went as was narrated by Ouyang Feng himself. The film featured a multi-layered storyline that played into the swordsman's internal conflict regarding love and his desire to fight for something nobler than money.

In essence, Ouyang Feng was a loner with little love while the bounty hunters that worked for Ouyang Feng, like Blind Swordsman and another of his best fighters, Hong Qigong, discovered the intangible secret of true love while Ouyang retained his attitude towards his fighters and the precious lessons that they have taught. However, the thread that runs through the entire narrative has clearly the spirit of refusal in the sense that one should reject another before he gets to be rejected in the future. To

illustrate, nearly every character in this story has resorted to being selfish and malignant in order to prevent being rejected by others, be it in love or in comradeship as their individual hardships have moulded their attitude turning them into heartless and cold individuals in order to survive in the uncompromising desert where the story is set. It has many moral implications but is less evident since the main character is Ouyang himself and most of the narration would unquestionably be centered on him.

Among the films of Wong Kar-wai, the most avant-garde Hong Kong film director, *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) stands out most discordantly and merits special attention. Wong's ideas of dystopia imposed on a Wuxia film has led many critics to cite it as one of Wong Kar-wai's most under-appreciated works. Though contrary to his other films which depict invariably the contemporary, urban and under-world, *Ashes of Time Redux* is regarded as a metaphor of modern Hong Kong. Dressed in martial arts costume, his characters are haunted with problems in their enigmatic communication with others, avoidance of their true love and desire, and pursuit of identity, which are all regarded as allegories of problems of modernity. Therefore, I will take *Ashes of Time Redux* as my primary text to investigate how Wong Kar-wai made his most iconoclastic film a modernist film work.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises of five parts in addition to this introduction. Chapter One: Literature Review. In this chapter, I shall review the previous scholarly studies on Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre. Chapter Two focuses on the dominant postmodern approach, which is based on following two tracks: film studies and Chinese studies. Film studies covers scholars' analysis on postmodernist film form and styles, such as the non-linear and incompleteness of the narrative structure, the simultaneity of time, the use

of dialect for defamiliarization, the long take, resistance of and discontinuity editing, voiceover monologues, pastiche of mixed film genres and styles, transcultural film sound, etc. Chinese culture studies draw attention on the cultural, historical, and political analysis of Wong Kar-wai's cinema in the context of the postmodern society of Hong Kong, such as the pre-1997 anxieties, manifestations of the postmodern geopolitics, cultural identity and homosexuality, and many other issues are also mentioned. In Take Two, I will explore the limitations and constrains of the postmodern perspective, arguing that a modernist point of view has already been embodied in previous scholarly work yet unclearly articulated. Then I propose to embark on a close textual analysis on Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) to unravel the modernist sensibility and utility in the film's staging and storytelling. In order to come to a full understanding of Won Kar-wai's film world, we need to travel beyond the remit of postmodern theory and venture into the sphere of film modernism.

Chapter Two: Research Methods. The chapter introduces two theoretical methods I will employ in my thesis. One is American scholar Eugene Lunn's comparative perspective on modernism, which suggests four unifying aspects to map out the major directions of the aesthetic form and social perspective in modernism as a whole. The other one is David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's perspective on alternative film form and style to classic Hollywood cinema. It will illustrate my argument on how Wong Kar-wai experiments with various film techniques to represent his thoughts on modernism.

Chapter Three: Aesthetic Self-Consciousness. This chapter discusses how Wong Kar-wai has consciously experiments with conventions of film form and style to represent his subjective aesthetic ideas. Film forms includes cinematography (e.g. altering the

range of tonalities, manipulating the speed of motion, changing perspective relations, mobile frame, canted frame, long take and sequence shot etc.), film sound (voiceover monologue, desynchronization of temporal relations, poetic and lyrical narrative rhythm, pastiche of disparate music genres and styles, etc.), film motif (symbolic character/object/event, etc.) and so on.

Chapter Four: Simultaneity, Ambiguity and Dehumanization. This chapter contains three parts: Part One investigates how Wong Kar-wai breaks down the classic Hollywood cinema's continuity principle to juxtapose the past, present and future, how he parallels different plot development into one unity, and how he makes repetitions and variations of recurring motifs in a cycling narrative structure. Part Two focuses on three aspects: uncertainty, ambiguity and paradox with illustrations of narrative, shots, editing, and sound. Part Three uncovers the most important modernist trait in Wong Kar-wai's film: dehumanization and demise of integrated personality or individual subjects. I will talk about the loneliness, endurance and sadness of his characters, the deconstruction and negation of the integrated humanity presented in the film, the rootlessness and homelessness of his character as urban wanderer, and the dilemma of communication.

Conclusion. In this part, I will draw some conclusion upon my analysis of Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) and make a comparative study between modernist and postmodernist perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review: Postmodern Studies on Wong Kar-wai

In the existing studies on Wong Kar-wai, Wong Kar-wai is extolled as an international renowned film auteur with a distinctive postmodernist style. As Stephen Teo noted that Wong Kar-wai has come to signify a cool, post-modern sensibility in world cinema. Indeed Wong has made himself a transcendent Hong Kong post-modern stylist through the mixture of cinematic and literature influences (Teo, 2005, p.2). In this chapter, I will focus on the postmodern studies on Wong Kar-wai and note the explicit lack of modernist approach in the current literature on Wong Kae-wai.

Take One: Postmodern Wong Kar-wai

When Wong Kar-wai's debut film *As Tears Go By* was released in 1989, he started to draw attention among Chinese and non-Chinese critics. For the past few decades, scholars have endeavored to establish a field of study on Wong's cinema. For instance, Jean-Marc Lalanne, David Martinez, Ackbar Abbas and Jimmy Ngai jointly published *Wong Kar-wai*, a collection of essays and a dialogue with the director (Lalanne, Marinez, Abbas, Ngai, Dis Vior, 1997). Jeremy Tambling's *Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together* (2003) and Wimal Dissanayake's *Ashes of time* (2003) are two monographs on Wong's specific films. *Pictorial World of Wong Kar-wai* (《王家衛的映畫世界》) (Li, 2004) is a collection of thirty film critiques on Wong's films written by local film critics.

Film studies and Chinese cultural studies mark (and in some ways limit) the study of Chinese cinema today (Kraicer, 2005, pp.14-15), and so does the study of Wong Kar-wai's films. The first two book-length monographs in English on Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre to date exemplify this divide. Peter Brunette's *Wong Kar-wai* (2005) approaches the director's films from the perspective of European aesthetics, focusing on Wong's mastery of film techniques as an exemplary of refined art cinema in the international arena (2005, p. 4). Stephen Teo's *Wong Kar-wai: Auteur of Time*, on the other hand, grounds the filmmaker in a Hong Kong cultural and historical context, emphasizing the 'literary and cinematic' influences on his films (2005, p.3).

Stephen Teo largely agrees with Western critics that as a postmodern artist in Western eyes, Wong Kar-wai's films "exceed facile stereotypes of the delicate and exotic East" (Teo, 2005, p. 1). He argues that it is this mixture of cinematic and literary influences that makes Wong a distinctive Hong Kong post-modern stylist. Teo also mentions that Wong's style in all its fragmented post-modern fervor, lends itself to a facile reading of his films. Teo argues:

Insofar as this is a critical study and not merely a retrospective look at Wong's films, it is a history that falls within the perspective of an alternative cinema culture that signals a certain opposition to European high art and Hollywood low art. (Teo, 2005, p. 6)

Many other critics also published book chapters, journal articles on Wong Kar-wai on a variety of topics. The topics range cultural and historical influences (Tsui, 1995; Abbas, 1997; Yue, 2003 & 2005), literary influences (Teo, 2005; Luk, 2005), auteurism (Ngai, 1997; Rayns, 2000; Yang, 2000; Su, 2001; Gleason, Tang and

Giovannetti, 2002; Situ, 2002; Jiang, 2004, Brunette, 2005; Nai, 2008), sound and music (Martinez, 1997; Yeh, 1999, 2008), and time and space (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2000; Siegel, 2001; Chow, 2002; Tong, 2003). Many of these works used postmodern concepts to some degree and some of them position Wong's cinema squarely in the postmodern tenet. What follows will concentrate on the postmodern criticism and the oversight such an approach has created with regard to the form and its manifestations of Wong's film world.

Postmodern Film Narrative and Pastiche of Style

Wong Kar-wai is a postmodern iconoclast and an avid stylist among many other Hong Kong filmmakers and he is always challenging the perceived formula of storytelling and staging. His fragmented, non-linear and parallel narrative structure comes to be the first target of criticism. Peter Brunette makes his critical claims on the creativity of Wong's films in Hong Kong cinema. Brunette positions Wong Kar-wai in an European formal aesthetics and universal political background and he focuses on Wong's postmodernist strategy of assimilating sound and image together in the film narrative. In doing so, Wong creates a mystification of everyday life, or what Brunette sees as cinematically liminal spaces where the 'mood' is at once unspecific and exact (Brunette, 2005, p. 5). Jean-Marc Lalanne celebrates the incompleteness of narrative in Wong's cinema, for which he summarizes as "favoring detail above totality, and the part over the whole", suggesting that fragments and incompleteness is Wong's signature film aesthetics. According to Lalanne, Wong marks a new threshold by presenting the simultaneity of time in this recycling of the images previously appeared (Lalanne, 1997, p. 10).

Thomas Y. T. Luk talks about how language like the Shanghai dialect in *In the Mood for Love* (2000) can evoke ‘a warm nostalgia for a close-knit linguistic community consisting of emigres living in Hong Kong in a bygone era (Luk, 2005, pp.210-19). He compares the symbolic meaning between Liu Yichang’s nostalgia postmodern novel *Tête-Bêche* and Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000). As Luk argues that the use of local dialect and accent can create both intimacy and distance onscreen for the characters in the film as well as offscreen among the audience. Sam Ho (何思穎) analyzes how Wong Kai-wai subverts the traditional editing principles in *Ashes of Time*. Abandoning the continuity editing of Hollywood’s “shot-reverse shot,” Wong Kar-wai uses two shot to create the distances between his characters. His resistance to reaction shot and use of long shots consistently challenges the expectation of audiences. Moreover, Wong’s use of the voiceover monologues as a radical alternative of the ‘reaction shot,’ implicitly uncovers the intricate relations among his characters. These analyses on Wong’s film art intentionally or involuntarily identify him as a postmodern stylist.

Another prominent postmodern trait in Wong Kar-wai’s cinema is his use of pastiche mixing film genres and styles without attending to ideological reflection. According to Fredric Jameson, “pastiche” is, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language in the postmodern age. In postmodern pastiche, by contrast, “modernist styles ... become postmodernist codes” (Jameson, 1991, p.17). It is in this sense that film scholars have come to refer to postmodernist pastiche, as a vivid postmodern icon, when discussing Wong Kar-wai’s films. David Bordwell argues that Wong came out of mass entertainment and

his films are firmly rooted in popular genres. *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* have overt policier and film noir ingredients (Bordwell, 2000, p. 270).

Ackbar Abbas makes the same point that each of Wong's films "starts with the conventions of a popular genre—and deliberately loses its way in the genre" (Abbas, 1997, p. 44). Pan Kuoling suggests that Wong makes a postmodern film through integrating genres of "romance, allegory, psychological, experimental and martial arts" (Pan, 2005, p.120). Li Zhaoxing (李照興) evoked the dance-like editing style in Wong Kar-wai, referring to movements and frequent use of discontinuity editing in films such as *Ashes of Time* (1994) (Li, 2005, pp.99-100). Li identifies two types of dance movements in Wong's film editing. The first one is the 'dancing characters' who are presented through their actions of walking, chasing, fighting and coming in and out of the frame. 'Dancing image' is the other strategy, focusing on the combination and connection of images through 'montage.' Like many postmodern filmmakers, Wong Kar-wai is comfortable with mixing together many disparate kinds of film genres and styles into his distinctive filmmaking process, as exemplified in these critical analyses.

Film music advances Wong's postmodernist pastiche. Many critics have written on Wong's careful arrangement of disparate genres and styles of film music into his "cool" and enchanting soundtrack. Luo Zhanfeng considers film music serves as yet another narrative track in Wong's films. She argues that film music opens up a channel into the interior world of Wong's characters who are mostly lonely people of lost love and memories. She remarks the mixture of the distinctive genres and styles of music, including waltz, tango, Latin jazz, rock and roll, electronic music,

Cantonese pop music and opera, Chinese folk songs, and other original music in other films. When these exotic yet nostalgia music slips into film spaces, the film sound creates a poetic and aesthetic postmodernist atmosphere (Luo, 2005, p.264). Thus the intrinsic connection between film sound and narrative are linked through the fragmented and discontinuous images in a free-flow fashion. David Martinez also considers music as Wong Kar-wai's postmodern approach, which opens up a new emotional dimension in Hong Kong cinema. He argues that the soundtrack functions as an illustration as well as a dialogue between the audience and the characters. The recurrent music temporarily detached characters from reality, making a break in the scene and interrupting continuity of narrative (Martinez, 1997, p.30). In the meantime, Wong often clusters the cyclical music to highlight the repetition, the déjà vu in the narrative. Music not only builds atmosphere but arouses the memory of certain bygone era. It is also tuned with the disclosure of different images of characters in a non-linear, fragmented and discontinuous narrative structure.

Postmodern Identity Politics

Other scholars focus on the cultural and historical analysis of Wong Kar-wai's cinema in the context of Hong Kong's postcolonial history with an astute postmodern sensibility. Gina Marchetti looks at Wong's film *Chungking Express* (1994) from a postmodernist perspective that personal and public identities are shaped through an encounter with American pop culture, British colonialism, and Asian commerce. Marchetti's analysis examines how American commodities create and re-create individual and public identities through the transnational nature of Hong Kong's economy and the personal identity of this film's characters (Marchetti, 2000, pp. 289-

313). can be read as “Treating time as at once unmanageable flux, a stretch of reverie, an instant revelation, and undying memory,” Bordwell says, “the films invite critics to search for allegories of impermanence reflecting Hong Kong’s pre-1997 anxieties” (Bordwell, 2000, pp. 273-274). Bordwell argues that Wong embeds his themes of time within a bedrock formula of popular culture, young people in search of love, which is concerned with the city in history. He also places Wong in the historical context of Hong Kong new wave cinema and popular films.

Jeremy Tambling, in his monograph *Wong Kar-wai’s Happy Together*, draws on a number of texts, films, novels and forms of cultural critique, placing the in these context and other new contexts that has formed its discursive range (2003, p.5). Tambling’s analysis reflects on Hong Kong's past and future by probing masculinity, aggression, identity, and homosexuality, all of which contribute to the manifestations of the postmodern geopolitics. In the book *Wong Kar-wai’s Ashes of Time*, Wimal Dissanayake places the film in its historical context, describing ways in which its production and reception grew out of particular moments in the institutional history of Hong Kong cinema, in Hong Kong cultural history, and in the interplay between this culture and global cultural flows. Dissanayake’s carefully researched study shows its uncanny engagement with the leftist melancholy, not only a reflection of political anxieties of Hong Kong handover in the postmodernist context, but also the larger poetics of globalization (2003, p. 3). He sees the film as a gateway to Wong Kar-Wai’s oeuvre as a whole, repeatedly stressing the ways in which it is both representative of and concretely intertextualized with the director’s other works. And he takes the film, the directorial oeuvre, and the cultural moment he views them as epitomizing an opportunity to explore (as all scholars and critics do) critical and

theoretical issues dear to his own heart: “we have aimed to read *Ashes of Time* in terms of our own particular interests.” Ackbar Abbas in his article “The Erotics of Disappointment” explicitly explains the specific historic context of Hong Kong cinema between 1984 and 1997. Abbas argues that Wong has obsessively returned to the intense negative experience during this period, which becomes the enduring subject of his film—the experience of the speed-dominated culture and the image of disappointment (1997, p.41).

To summarize the current studies on Wong Kar-wai’s films, postmodernism is the dominant approach, which has been leading the direction of Wong Kar-wai’s criticism. However, the emphasis on the postmodernism tends to result in an oversight, leading to omission of other interpretations. One of such oversight is the modernism, including its formal deployment and thoughts, which is equally pronounced in Wong Kar-wai’s works. As we shall see, some of the abovementioned studies have referenced modernism in their analysis of Wong Kar-wai, all be it indirectly. As a matter of fact, a few scholars have noted the limitation of postmodernism and began to explore modernist analysis in their writings on Wong Kar-wai.

Take Two: Modernist Wong Kar-wai

Many European and American critics tend to compare Wong Kar-wai with other renowned filmmakers who have presented distinctive modernist style in their film work. For instance, Tony Rayns positions Wong Kar-wai as Hong Kong’s Alain Resnais and identifies him as the “poet of time” for his metaphorical construction of time and memory (Rayns, 1995, p.12). Wong Kar-wai is also constantly compared to

Jean-Luc Godard due to a similar modernist style in the anti-traditional filmmaking, hand-held camera, and impressive images. As for J. Hoberman, Wong's *Ashes of Time* is a mixture of Akira Kurosawa, Sergio Leone, Sam Peckinpah and King Hu (*The Village Voice*, 1995: 58). In his article *Overseas Reception of Wong Kar-wai's Films*, Li Cheuk-to discussed how film critics in the West evaluate Wong's film works by comparing with Western filmmakers (Li, 2005, p.274). Some scholars claim that *Chungking Express* is homage to John Cassavetes' *Gloria* (1980) and Jacques Demy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). Moreover, Li cited James Quandt's critique on Wong's three films (Li, 2005, pp.275-276). Firstly, *Chungking Express* is like the Chinese version of *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Secondly, Wong and German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder have many similarities in terms of their production crew, baroque image, ironic style, and music tempo, especially the romantic atmosphere in *Days of Being Wild*. Lastly, the framing style in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), such as use of the stairways, symbolic setting and props, and its ambiguous atmosphere in 1960s, all seem to refer to film works of Douglas Sirk.

In Ackbar Abbas' article "The Erotics of Disappointment" he proposes a combination of five elements that every Wong Kar-wai's film returns obsessively to: the lived experience of negative, the incommensurable "speed" the problematic nature of the filmic image, the crisis of narrative, and the city as physical space of psychic desire (Abbas, 1997, p. 40). Then he goes on to a chronicle analysis on each of Wong's films, from *As Tears Go By* to *Falling Angel*. Abbas places Wong's film in what he calls the "negative" historical and political context of Hong Kong before the city's handover from Britain to China. Abbas arrives at the focus of his argument when he juxtaposes the negative, speed, and the image as each of them has their implications

for narrative. He relates with Walter Benjamin's arguments on the crisis of storytelling, which is actually "a crisis in experience and in our ability to communicate experience" (Abbas, 1997, p. 40).

Benjamin went on to study, particularly in the texts of Proust and Kafka, how the demise of traditional story-telling, as a consequence of changing social and cultural conditions, necessitated the invention of new and seemingly aberrant forms of story-telling. He described Kafka stories as fairy-tales for dialecticians. Wong's cinema too, in Hong Kong of the late eighties and the nineties, presents us with its own crisis of story-telling and experience. The readily intelligible stories now come from the standard genres, ... But these stories are criss-crossed and cut up by other more fugitive tales, like so many loose threads (Abbas, 1997, p. 46)

Apparently, Abbas parallels Wong Kar-wai's cinema with the modernist poet and writer, with whom Wong shares the same crisis of story-telling. Following Walter Benjamin, this crisis is the reflection or representation of the enigma of modernity. Without naming modernism directly, Abbas adopts a modernist approach to further argue that out of this crisis of narrative, comes two of the most fascinating effects of Wong's cinema: the boredom and the melancholia (1997, p. 45).

Stephen Teo argues that Wong Kar-wai's unique filmmaking is embedded within his iconoclastic visual skills, such as the literary and poetic dialogue and monologue, and the discontinuity in the narrative structure. Moreover, Teo invokes Foucault's perspective of "effective history" as the critical approach of his book. The "effective

history” is opposed to “traditional history,” which is reflected in the European high art and the Hollywood low art.

Wong’s talent is evidently marked by an eclecticism and heterogeneity that combines not only East and West, the local and the global, the literary and the cinema, but several streams of film traditions and styles by reaching back in to repertoire of old conventions and genres (p. 41)

Teo criticized the normative perception of Wong’s shallowness and argues that Wong merits a critical study because it is a rare talent in the context of Hong Kong film industry. Although Wong’s “avant-garde quality are incompatible with that (Hong Kong) system, the industry cannot do without him” (Teo, 2005, p. 7).

Similarly, David Bordwell positions Wong Kar-wai as an auteur along with those avant-garde directors in the Hong Kong New Wave (Bordwell, 2000, p. 265). He argues that the “fan-aesthete often assumes that Hong Kong disorienting originality arises when haste, poverty, low (or no) taste, and a dash of nuttiness spontaneously fuse.” Experimentation is usually not anarchic messing about but self-conscious craftsmanship. Even the most untraditional Hong Kong New Wave films come down firmly on the side of Hollywood. The New Wave clears a small space for art cinema. While “high art” filmmaking keeps in touch with entertainment, the mainstream gives some room to play. The craft tradition encouraged King Hu, Tsui Hark, John Woo, and other filmmakers to explore various stylistic options for the sake of vividness and expressive force. With the production surge of the early 1990s, new opportunities for renovation arose.

Current studies show that a number of scholars have already touched or discussed Wong's films in a relation to issues of modernity or modernist art. However, their research topics are discursive, fragmented (focusing on disparate units such as the film narrative, identity politics, literary motifs, editing, music, and so on) and lack of cohesion. My thesis will focus on a thorough reading of the film art in Wong Kar-wai's works within the modernist framework.

Is postmodernism the best and the only effective way to unpack Wong Kar-wai's films? Can we find modernism in the form, style and motifs in Wong's films? How and to what extent can the employment of modernist perspective enlighten us of Wong Kar-wai's film art? What discoveries can we find and what contributions will the modernism route make to the existing literature on Wong Kai-wai? In what follows, I present a case study that shows the validity of modernism in facilitating a different understanding of Wong Kar-wai's films. My primary text is *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), perceived as the most enigmatic text in Wong's oeuvre. I will embark on a close textual analysis to unravel the modernist sensibility and utility in the film's staging and storytelling. In order to come to a full understanding of Won Kar-wai's film world, we need to travel beyond the remit of postmodern theory and venture into the sphere of film modernism.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, I will elaborate the research methods for exploring the modernism in Wong Kar-wai's film *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008).

Take One: Comparative Perspective on Modernism

In *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (1982), Eugene Lunn presents a comprehensive and insightful illustration of the relations between Marxism and Modernism. In order to build a firmer understanding of the dynamics between radical politics and explores the art, Lunn explores varieties of European "avant-garde" culture. Lunn introduces a comparative approach which provides an historical analysis of the artistic practices and social movements between 1920s and 1950s. By acknowledging the variance and diversity among different aesthetic practices, Lunn suggests some unifying aspects to map out the major directions of the aesthetic form and social perspective in modernism as a whole.

Lunn distinguishes four essential traits of the aesthetic landscape in modernism: (1) aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness; (2) simultaneity, juxtaposition, or "montage"; (3) paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty; (4) "dehumanization" and the demise of the integrated individual subject or personality. I will elaborate each aspect in the following paragraphs.

1. Aesthetic Self-Consciousness

According to Lunn, modernist artists express their aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness through processes of creating their works. He takes examples of modernist writers, composers and visual artists who have explored the problems within their fields and demonstrated heightened self-consciousness about the media or materials they are working with. In the mind of modernist artists, they usually construct the reality through “the form of an hermetic and aristocratic mystique of creativity” (Lunn, 1982, p. 35). Lunn emphasizes the strong subjectivity in the modernist work, suggesting that human beings have the power of building and rebuilding the wider social world.

2. Simultaneity

Another characteristics of modernist works is the aesthetic forms of simultaneity. Unlike classic literature, modernist art works tend to abolish linear narrative or temporal structure. Instead, they favor the simultaneity and parallelism of aesthetic forms. Lunn argues that the aesthetic order of modernist narrative is based on “synchronicity,” “metaphor,” or “spatial form” (Lunn, 1982, p. 35). According to Lunn, past, present, and future are co-existed in an modernist experiments to explore the new possibilities of presenting a psychological time. Aesthetic forms, such as juxtaposition and montage, are constantly used to create the unity from fragmented materials. Modernist artists believe that the practice of cyclical or mythical recurrence in their works can provide a deeper reality, which is not easily seen/developed in the temporal unfolding of historical events. Lunn suggests that modernist works are intended to complete without apparent causal progression. Sometimes viewers find the works in an open-ended and “continuous present” in which opposite facets of time, space, and characters co-exist.

3. Ambiguity

The third characteristic of modernist aesthetics is ambiguity. For modernists, absoluteness is no longer their subject of work. Lunn wrote, “Modernists view reality as necessarily constructed from relative perspectives, while they seek to exploit aesthetic and ethical richness of ambiguous images, sounds, and authorial points of view” (Lunn, 1982, p. 36). By doing so, modernists challenge the urban experience through their ambiguous treatment of the “mass” in the city and its technology—machine. While modernists are no longer satisfied with an omniscient and reliable narrator, they develop “limited and fallible” point of view in works to explore the ambiguity of the reality. Modernist works consciously challenge the expectations of their audience by offering either open-ended, unsolved problems at the end of the narrative.

4. Dehumanization

Lastly, Lunn proposes that modernist artists write against the classic aesthetic principle of wholeness when building their own characters. More likely, they are favored by the idea of “dehumanization” and the demise of the integrated individual subject or personality (Lunn, 1982, p. 37). According to Lunn, the emphasis of modernist works is on the psychic battlefield of the characters. Modernists believe that their characters suffered from both of their inner and outer world and have difficulties in solving the problems and puzzles in their life. For modernists, such flow of perceptions and sensations of their characters are usually presented through objective images, such as distortion of the human body, abstraction of the image, and dehumanization in visual arts.

To conclude, Eugene Lunn proposes four features as major directions of the aesthetic form and perspective of modernism. These four aspects provide a broad aesthetic framework for Wong Kar-wai's films. Aesthetic self-consciousness, simultaneity, ambiguity, and dehumanization are recurrent in Wong's oeuvre. I will use *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) as a case to present a detailed analysis of these four aspects in the third and fourth chapters.

Take Two: **Alternatives to the Classic Hollywood Cinema**

Drawing inspiration from earlier film theorists such as Noel Burch as well as from art historian E.H. Gombrich, American film scholar David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's wrote their widely respected work *Film Art: An Introduction* in 1979.

According to Bordwell and Thompson, a film form consists of two types of systems: narrative system and style system. "Film form, in its broadest sense, means the total system that the viewer perceives in the film" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2009, p. 57). Film form plays a significant role because it is the overall system of relations that we can perceive among the elements in the film. When Bordwell and Thompson discuss the two formal systems, including elements such as narrative, *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, editing, and sound, they developed various mainstream aesthetic principles from the analysis of the function of forms motivated in Hollywood films. However, they also explained the alternatives to these Hollywood forms, which are usually exploited by modernist film artists who consciously challenge the tradition of film art. In the following part, I will employ Bordwell's and Thompson's alternative

film form as an illustrative research method to analyze the modernist aesthetics in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux*.

1. Alternatives to Classic Film Narrative

According to Bordwell and Thompson, film narrative is a series of events linked by cause and effect relationship which happens in certain time and space. However, modernist artists, such as German expressionism, French impressionism and surrealism, Soviet montage, and French New Wave, intentionally challenge the classic formal principles in film narrative. They play with causality, time, and film space to achieve the defamiliarization of audiences' expectations. More details will be discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

1.1 Parallelism

If a filmmaker posits a similarity among different formal elements, this is termed as "parallelism" by Bordwell and Thompson (p. 67). For example, in *Chungking Express* (1994), Wong Kar-wai made the story of cop 663 paralleled to that of cop 223, implying an analog of character's interior worlds between the two protagonists. Instead of putting events in a chronological order, the alternative narrative makes use of changing the temporal order, duration, and frequency to reconstruct the story. In many of his film, Wong consciously presents images before the event actually happens, breaking down the chronological temporal order. Take In *Days of Being Wild* (1990) for example, in the beginning of the film, Wong presents a long take of passing through the tropical jungle forest. Then a jump cut directly takes us to Sue's convenience shop in Hong Kong. It is not until the end that we finally know the forest scene actually happens after Yuddy leaves Hong Kong for finding his mother.

1.2. Anticlimatic Pattern of Development

Bordwell and Thompson find that for most of the common pattern of development in the middle portion may delay an expected outcome. A few narratives, however, challenge this principle by deliberately anticlimactic (p. 74). They are mostly open-ended, suggesting an ongoing or uncertainty about the final sequences. *In the Mood for Love* (2000) is a good example that it leaves an open ending for the love affair between two protagonists, which is continued to be developed in Wong Kar-wai's following film *2046* (2004).

1.3. Restricted and Subjective Narration

Bordwell and Thompson suggest that for a few filmmakers, omniscient narration is usually less favored than restricted narration because the latter one can “create curiosity and surprise” (p. 93). In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), the subjective narration of Ouyang Feng confines us to know the relationship among Huang Yaoshi (黃藥師) and Peach Blossom (桃花).

1.4 Ambiguous Voiceover

In alternative cinema, manipulating depth of knowledge and subjectively motivated flashback can increase our identification with the character and expectation of the story development as well as present subjective layers of the character. A film may play on the character/noncharacter distinction by making the source of a narrating voice uncertain (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 100). By doing so, it connects the subjective and objective narration in a manner of ambiguity. In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong uses ambiguous voiceover to create the uncertainty of the plot.

2. Alternatives to Classic Film Style

Bordwell and Thompson examine *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, editing, and sound as four important aspects in the film style system. In this part, I will concentrate on the alternatives to the classic film style in my discussion.

2.1 *Mise-en-scene*. The term is defined as the director's control over what appears in the film frame (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.118). Rather than sticking to the "realism" principle, it is best to examine the functions of *mise-en-scene* in the films we see.

Four aspects of *mise-en-scene* include setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and staging.

2.2 *Setting: Recurrent Color Motifs*

According to Bordwell and Thompson, cinema setting can dynamically enter the narrative action and overwhelm the characters (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 123). In manipulating a shot's setting, the filmmaker may use color as a prop and establish motifs through the recurrence of the prop. In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), every time Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law appears, she always wears the long red dress with red lips, for which the recurrent color comes to signify her image.

2.3 *Highly Stylized Costumes*

Costumes may be also highly stylized to attract audience's attention to their graphic qualities (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 125). Wong Kar-wai uses more than 20 different styles of Chinese Qipao (旗袍) for his character female protagonist in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), which becomes a trademark of Su Li-chen.

2.4 *Lighting: Low-Key Illumination*

For classic Hollywood cinema, filmmakers usually employ “high-key” lighting to create low contrast between brighter and darker areas. The alternative to this lighting technique is “low-key illumination”, which is defined by Bordwell and Thompson as a lighting technique to create stronger contrasts and sharper, darker shadow (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 156). For example, In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong makes use of low-key illumination when depicting Murong Yin/Yang standing in the middle of the desert. The effect case of low-key illumination is chiaroscuro, referring to the extreme dark and light regions within the image. More examples will be discussed in Chapter Three.

2.5 Staging: Manipulating the Depth of Field and Perspective

Bordwell and Thompson identified two types of space: the two-dimension ‘screen space’ and the three-dimension ‘scene space.’ In the screen space, unbalanced shots can also create strong effects (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 149). In *Happy Together* (1997), for instance, the shot of Ho Po-wing and Lai Yiu-fai sitting on the roof of their house.

2.6 Monochromatic Palette

Another alternative to classic *mise-en-scene* can also be the strategy of limited palette to emphasize on only a few colors, especially the use of monochromatic as an extreme case (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 150). An example is *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) in which Wong consciously limits the image into colors of yellow, white, blue, and black.

In terms of scene space, filmmakers may make use of an “aerial perspective” and “size diminution” to create unusual depth of field (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 153). More cases will be illustrated in Chapter three.

3. Cinematography.

3.1 *Manipulating with Tonalities*

Filmmakers control the cinematographic qualities of the shot, which involves in the range of tonalities, the speed of motion, perspective, and framing. Manipulating with techniques of cinematography, filmmakers can achieve various color contrasts. For example, they can choose different color film stocks or alter the tonalities of the stocks (Bordwell & Thompsons, pp.168-69). In many of Wong’s film, he employs color films to shoot the night scene. Other alternative cinematography is to challenge the normal process of the material. Instead, some filmmakers manipulate the “exposure” to for specific effects (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.170). In *Happy Together* (1997) and *2046* (2004), extreme exposure can be found in various shots.

3.2 *Changing the Speed of Motion*

In an alternative cinema, filmmakers enhance the speed of motion by making use of time-lapse cinematography and high-speed cinematography (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.173). In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong experiments with the speed of motion consciously. In the beginning of the film, his use of time-lapse cinematography permits us to see the cloud move in seconds. Meanwhile Wong’s use of high-speed cinematography takes us to see the martial-arts fighting between Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi, suggesting enormous power and lyric rhythm of such fantastic performance.

3.3 *Playing with Depth of Field*

Classic Hollywood cinematography primarily depends on middle-focal-length lens. However, for many modernist filmmakers, they prefer to use wide-angle lens and long-focal-length lens more often than middle-focal-length lens, in order to alter the scene spaces (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.174). In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong uses long-focal-length lens to flatten the space along the camera axis when he shots Huang Yaoshi riding on his horse to pass through the desert. It pushes the background of trees and desert almost to the same plane.

3.4 *Special Effects: Superimposition*

Superimposition is one of the simplest ways for them to create special effects. According to Bordwell and Thompson, superimposition refers to the film technique that makes one image laid over another by either double exposure in the camera or in laboratory printing (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.197). *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) gives us a good example of such alternative cinematography. Wong uses superimposition in several scenes, such as when Huang Yaoshi's dreaming of Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law after being drunk, the scene in which Murong Yin/Yang and Ouyang Feng touch each other's body while fantasizing their own beloved ones, and Ouyang Feng's illusion of seeing his sister-in-law around him at night.

3.5 *Challenging the Principles of Framing*

Bordwell and Thompson raise four aspects to examine the film frame: angle, level, height, and distance, which are also constantly altered and challenged by alternative cinema. High angle and low angle present an abnormal perspective for audience (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 194).

3.6 Canted Frame

According to Bordwell and Thompson, “canted frame” refers to the image in which the onscreen space is unbalanced (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.194). This is rare but heavily used in the film works alternative to classic Hollywood cinema. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai uses canted frame when he shots Murong Yin/Yang waiting for Huang Yaoshi in the desert and the scene when the village girl approaches Ouyang Feng along with her mule.

3.7 Extreme Long Shot and Close-up

Enormous use of extreme long shot and extreme close-up are also the traits of alternative cinema (p. 195). In *Ashes of Time Redux*, extreme close-up is frequently used

3.8 Mobile Framing

Through the mixture of various types of camera movement, such as pan, tilt, tracking shot and crane shot achieve a mobile frame (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 199). To its extreme, a few filmmakers usually combine the long take and mobile frame together to create an uncanny effect.

4. Editing

Editing is the coordination of one shot with the next. According to Bordwell and Thompson, editing involves four dimensions: graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relations between shot A and shot B (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.223). Classic Hollywood films follow the principle of continuity editing, which requires the

organization of time and space follow the development of the narrative. However, many filmmakers have explored other editing possibilities.

4.1 *Single Frame*

Some filmmakers create the graphic discontinuity by juxtaposition or contrast between different images, colors, and characters. “Single frame” is the most extreme examples of alternative rhythmic editing, which means each shot is only one frame long (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 277). Wong Kar-wai uses “single frame” in editing his film *2046* (2004), which he subordinates the space and time presented in each shot to the rhythmic relations among shots.

4.2 *Kuleshov Effect*

In spatial editing, “Kuleshov effect” is used to generate robust cinematic illusions (p. 232) while crosscutting constructs a variety of spaces (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 232). Famous examples are Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* and *2046*.

4.3 *Temporal and Spatial Discontinuity*

Moreover, alternative cinema employs many useful ways for their temporal editing, such as flashback, flash-forward, elliptical editing, punctuation, overlapping editing, etc. (Bordwell & Thompsons, p.233). More examples will be discussed in Chapter four.

For most of the time, alternative films break down by crossing the axis of action, including the shot/reverse-shot and the eye-line match. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong frequently challenges the principles continuity editing by various two shots and ambiguous jump cut.

Montage sequence is also used to fragmentize the temporal continuity. Bordwell and Thompson summarized some alternatives to continuity editing: such as editing on the basis of purely graphic or rhythmic qualities, spatial continuity in ambiguous manner, violating or ignore the 180-degree system. For alternatives, jump cut and nondiegetic insert are other two notable devices of discontinuity editing.

5. Film sound

Film sound is the fourth aspect of the style system, yet it is a powerful technique. It has several fundamental and interactive elements as follows.

Manipulating with rhythm, fidelity, spatial condition, and temporal dimension of film sound helps the alternative cinema distinguished from the classic Hollywood films.

As Bordwell and Thompson pointed out that some filmmakers have altered the weight conventionally assigned to each type of sound: speech, music, and noise (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 275). In most of Wong Kar-wai's films, characters are less willing to communicating with other people. Instead, they usually talk to themselves or present a long monologue. Moreover, music plays a significant role in almost all Wong Kar-wai's films. For example, in *Chungking Express*, the song "California Hotel" not only serves as a recurrent music motifs, the lyrics of the song also symbolizes the interior world of female character Faye. This music is Faye's representation, taking a much heavier weight over her speech.

Many filmmakers explore and make new sounds from old ones. Dry recording and futzing the sound are also effective ways to achieve unusual effects. Filmmakers can reorder and vary the musical motif to attempt to change the scenes, follow patterns of development and suggest implicit meanings (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 279). Wong

Kar-wai in his film *In the Mood for Love* (2000) employs different musical motifs to represent his characters.

Disparities of rhythm in sound and images are made through the contrast of sound and image (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 282). For example, making the source of the sound offscreen and contrast of fast and slow speed of shots. The extremist case is the co-existence of a still picture with lively narrative, music, or sound effects. Change of the fidelity of the sound represents the shift in a psychological state of a character (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 284). Some filmmakers play with the diegetic/nondiegetic distinction of film sound, making it ambiguous for audience to tell the difference. One of the most radical approaches is that the narrator of voice-over does not exist or it changes ambiguously among different characters. In terms of temporal dimension of film sound, alternatives to classic Hollywood cinema can be repeatedly seen through their manipulations of simultaneous/nonsimultaneous sound (Bordwell & Thompsons, p. 295). In the case of diegetic sound, one can either place the sound earlier or later in story than image. In the case of nondiegetic sound, we can identify the ambiguity of the sound, which inspire us to a retrospective awareness. In the following chapter three and chapter four, I will illustrate examples of abovementioned alternative film styles in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux*.

To conclude, David Bordwell's and Kristin Thompson's approach to examine specific film forms and styles provides us an analytic framework for textual analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

Take One: Aesthetic Self-Consciousness

In the previous chapter, I have elaborated on Eugene Lunn's writing on modernist aesthetics. Acknowledging the variance among diverse currents since symbolism and impressionism, Eugene Lunn claims that modernism in the arts represents neither a unified vision nor a uniform aesthetic practice (Lunn, 1984, p. 33). However, in order to contrast the variety of movements, Lunn summarizes four major directions of the aesthetic form and social aspects of modernism as a whole. Lunn's perspective on modernism provides an alternative approach to analyze Wong Kai-wai's film, which will take us to travel beyond the postmodernism sphere in the existing literatures.

Let me emphasize at the beginning that I will not attempt to define Wong Kar-wai as a postmodernist or modernist stylist in this thesis. Moreover, not every aspect of an exclusively modernism needs to be covered. Instead, I will concentrate on distinguishing between the major dimensions of modernism, which are to be analyzed in terms of film form and style in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008). In this chapter, I will focus on the aesthetic self-consciousness embedded within Wong's distinctive formal and style system. Part two will explore how he plays with the simultaneity of time in the narrative.

According to Lunn, modernist artists often draw attention to the media or materials with which they are working, the very process of creation in their own craft (p. 34). In making a film, certain techniques tend to create a narrative or nonnarrative "formal system." Each filmmaker develops techniques, such as the *mise-en-scene*,

cinematography, editing, and sound in a patterned way as a medium to create his own distinctive style. In the following part, I will analyze how Wong Kar-wai consciously experiments with these film techniques in *Ashes of Time Redux*.

Take One: Cinematography—Writing in Movement with Light

Cinematography depends to a large extent on photography. According to Bordwell and Thompson, cinematographic qualities involve three factors: the photographic aspects of the shot; the framing of the shot; and the duration of the shot (p.185).

Modernist filmmakers often use the camera to regulate light to be registered on the sensitized film. In doing so, they make the evocative or constructive function of cinematographic techniques to write their own understanding of the world. Now, I will analyze how Wong Kar-wai present his aesthetic self-consciousness in *Ashes of Time Redux* through the following three aspects of photography: (1) the photographic image; (2) framing; (3) the long take.

1. Photographic Image

Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* offers a good example of how filmmaker can select the range of tonalities, manipulate the speed of motion, and transform perspective. As a visual artist, Wong has demonstrated heightened self-consciousness of the photographic image in which he views as objects in its own right.

1.1 Altering the Range of Tonalities

The range of tonalities in the image is most crucially affected by the exposure during filmmaking (Bordwell & Thomson, p. 188). Filmmakers can achieve enormous varieties in the look of the film image by manipulating the film stock, lighting factors,

and developing procedures. Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* offers a good example of overexposed and underexposed images.

Wong controls exposure by regulating how much light passes through the camera lens. For example, Wong allows excessive light registered on the film, creating a bright and dazzling image when he shoots the Blind Swordsman looking at the sun. It is as if we are blind swordsman ourselves, gradually losing our sight when time passes. When depicting the desert, Wong overexposes the yellow color to create highly contrasty images. It reinforces the drought and loneliness of the desert. Overexposure is also used for depicting the bamboo birdcage, implying the sharp contrast between the brightness of world outside and darkness of the character's inner world.

1.2 Manipulating the Speed of Motion

Time-lapse and High-speed Cinematography

In filming the action, filmmaker can control (with limits) the pace of the action. They can stage the event in a slow motion or freeze-frame, or even at a designated pace.

This pace depends on photographic power of camera: the control of the depicted speed of movements. The slow-motion scene of violence has actually become a cliché of the modern cinema (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 190).

As we see, the effects of extreme fast- and slow-motion are used notably in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux*, in which he alters the speed of the depicted material very radically. In the beginning scene when Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi are dueling at the canyon, Wong uses time-lapse cinematography to depict the clouds in the sky moving fast in seconds. At the same time, he also uses high-speed cinematography for the fighting scenes between two characters. The effect of

changing the speed of motion not only conveys the enormous power of their Kong Ku, it also suggests that the action happens in a fantasy world not the reality. Same techniques can be found in the scene in which Blind Swordsman and Hong Qi fight bloodily with those bandit horsemen in the desert.

Manipulating the speed of motion through fast- and slow-motion makes the filmmaker depart from the more direct expression of feeling favored by the romantics. Like many of the modernist artists, Wong attempts to create his own reality as a construction or artifice.

1.3 Changing Perspective Relations

The chief variable in controlling of perspective relations in the image is the focal length of the lens. Technically, the focal length refers to the distance from the center of the lens to the point where light rays converge to a point of focus on the film (Bordwell & Thompson, p.191). Rather than following the Hollywood “normal” lens, Wong Kar-wai seeks to create noticeable perspective distortion and

Wide-angle-length Lens

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, rather than stick to the middle-focal-length (“normal”) lens, Wong Kar-wai employs enormous short-focal-length (“wide-angle”) lens and long-focal-length (“telephoto”) lens. In technical terms, 35mm-gauge cinematography uses a lens of less than 35mm in focal length, which is considered as the short-focal-length lens (or “wide-angle”).

Wide-angle lenses distort film space laterally and exaggerate the depth of field. For example, as the camera swivels to follow the village girl while she is approaching Ouyang Feng, the distortion of the girl’s face becomes very evident. It is also because

of the wide-angle-length lens, the village girl appears to be distinctly larger than Ouyang Feng, though she is just slightly closer to the camera. Another example is the shot in which Ouyang Feng is talking with drunken Huang Yaoshi. The lens makes the characters seem further from each other than we would expect in such a relatively small locale. Wide-angle lens exaggerates the distances between foreground and background; it also makes figures moving to or from the camera seem to cover ground more rapidly.

Long-focal-length lens

Opposite to wide-angle lenses, the long-focal lenses (telephoto) flatten the space along the camera axis (Bordwell & Thompson, p.192). Technically, the long-focal-length lens typically ranges from around 75mm to 250mm. Long lens can reduce the depth and volume as if the planes are squashed together. Long-focal-length lens affects subject movement by making a figure moving toward/away from the camera take more time.

Wong Kar-wai relies heavily on telephoto lenses, using it constantly in *Ashes of Time Redux*. In the three stages of the shots depicting Huang Yaoshi riding his horse to cross the vast desert, long-focal-length lens pushes Huang Yaoshi and the trees behind him almost to the same plane. It also makes the figure virtually a two-dimensional backdrop. Like the abstract painting artist, Wong Kar-wai exploits the flattening effects of long-focal-length lens to create solid masses of space. In the shot of Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law standing along the lakeside, the character seems to be blended into the background.

Racking Focus

For modernist artists, visual distortion is usually conveyed through different focal length, which alters the magnification, depth, and scale of things in the image. On the other hand, focal length also determines the lens's depth of field. Depth of field is the range of distances before the lens within which objects can be photographed in sharp focus (Bordwell & Thompson, 1984, p.194).

Since the lens may be refocused at various points, the filmmaker may also adjust perspective relations while filming by racking focus, or pulling focus. This means a shot may begin on an object close to the lens and rack-focus so that something in the distance springs into crisp focus. Note the shot of the first communication between the village girl and Ouyang Feng's. The camera alters its focus when the two characters talk.

Superimposition

Superimposition is another alternative to traditional technique for creating special effects. In order to change the image's perspective relation, filmmakers combine separately photographed planes of action on the same strip of film to create the illusion that the two planes are adjacent (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 197).

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai uses superimposition to create illusions of his characters. One of the most famous examples is the scene when Murong Yin sleeps in Ouyang Feng's place at one night. Superimposition allows Wong to create Murong Yin's illusion of Huang Yaoshi and Ouyang Feng's illusion of his sister-in-law in both of their dreams. It precisely conveys the intensive struggling of their minds who could not be with their beloved ones. Modernist filmmakers commonly use

superimposition via double exposure to depict ghost or to display characters' thoughts (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 197).

2. Framing

Frame is important that it actively defines the image for us. Not only does it imply space outside itself but also a position from which the material in the image is viewed.

Most often, such a position is that of the camera filming the event. We speak of the functions of frame from the aspects such as angle, level, height, and distance.

However, it is the context of the film that will determine the function of the framings.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai often plays with camera movement and creates different frames to surprise audience's experience. Rather than setting the camera at a fixed point, he makes it changing frequently. In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), photographer Christopher Doyle uses a lot hand-held camera and tracking shots. In doing so, the stable and static perspective is transformed into a mobile frame, creating a sense of flowing spaces.

2.1 Canted Frame

Wong Kar-wai consciously films the event from a canted level to convey intense subjective state of mind of his characters. The canted framing in *Ashes of Time Redux* not only indicates the fear, disturbance, and anxiety of the characters; it also creates an uncanny or uncommon emotional atmosphere of the event. Canted framing brings audiences surprise and challenges their expectations.

One example of canted framing can be found in the scene when Murong Yin is waiting for the appearance of Huang Yaoshi. In this shot, Murong Yin is leaning onto the withered tree waiting for the man who never comes. The background space is the

vast yellow desert, however, we can easily figure out that the horizon is not at its normal level but within a 45-degree canted frame. Such framing technique breaks down the traditional aesthetical principle and refreshes audience's experience with an spectacle visual effect. It reflects the unbalanced relationship between Murong Yin's and Huang Yaoshi. Moreover, it also symbolizes the emotional struggling of psychological battlefield of Murong Yin. Another two example are when the Blind Swordsman fighting with the bandit gangsters and Hong Qi's wife finds him in Ouyang Feng's place. In these two scenes, Wong exploits canted frame to create special visual effects.

2.2 Mobile Framing

Mobile frame means that within the confines of the image, the framing of the object changes (Bordwell & Thompson, p.217). The mobile frame thus produces the changes of camera height, distance, angle, or level within the shot.

In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong Kar-wai mobilizes a variety of camera movement, such as panning (panorama), tilting, tracking, crane shot, and hand-held camera, making his distinctive subjective point of view.

For example, when Blind Swordsman's wife Peach Blossom first appears in the film, Wong uses a zoom-in lens to create extreme close-up shots of her face. Such framing reduces the distance between the screen and the viewers. The blurred background and distorted space appropriately set a panic atmosphere for the character. For modernists, distortion of spaces suggests that the wider social world is built and rebuilt by human beings and not "given" and unalterable.

Another example is the scene when Wong uses three different camera movements to

depict how Huang Yaoshi comes all the way to cross the vast desert to visit Ouyang Feng. In the first shot, he uses extreme long shot and fixed camera, filming from the back of Huang riding a horse from the lower right angle of the frame toward to upper right angle. This shot not only indicates that Huang is riding from the East to the West, but also implies the trip was very long that Huang takes more time to cover the onscreen spaces. In the second shot, Wong uses long shot and span his camera to film Huang riding along the back of the highlands. Mobile framing centers Huang in the middle of the image. The third shot uses a medium shot, tracking Huang riding toward the camera. These three shots show difference backgrounds where Huang has passes through all the way to the drought and sandy desert. This serial of shots uses extreme long shot, long shot, and medium shot films the character from his back, side, and foreground, fluidly creating a sense of liquid spaces onscreen.

Take Two: Film Sound—Soul of Wong Kar-wai’s Films

In his highly stylist film works, Wong Kar-wai manipulated sound in various ways. To some extent, sound is the “soul” of Wong Kar-wai’s films that it would be impossible to analyze his films without an awareness of how sound can contribute to the film’s form and style.

1. Internal Diegetic Sound: The Flowing Monologue

Based on its spatial source, film sound can be either diegetic sound or non-diegetic sound. Diegetic sound may be onscreen or offscreen, and internal (“subjective”) or external (“objective”). While nondiegetic sound does not come from the actual space, which means characters cannot hear these sounds in the story (Bordwell &Thompsons,

p. 310).

Like many other modernist filmmakers who concentrated on the internal or psychological dimension of human in their films, Wong Kar-wai uses enormous monologue as internal diegetic sound for his characters, which finally becomes a significant characteristic of his film aesthetics.

In classic Hollywood cinema, film sound mainly depends on the external diegetic sound such as dialogue, speech, and music. However in Wong Kar-wai' films, most characters are trapped in their memories and isolated from each other. Interestingly, instead of having face-to-face communication, they all seem to like murmuring endlessly to himself/herself or pouring out their hearts to others garrulously. It is such an aphasiac world that makes their voices silently. It seems that only through the interior monologues can we be able to know the minds of those lonely people.

Following early modernist filmmakers such as Laurence Olivier (*Hamlet*) and David Lynch (*Dune*), Wong Kar-wai advances a more complex use of internal diegetic sound. Traditionally, when it comes to the character's monologue, there will be a close-up shot of the character simultaneously. In doing so, the audience can easily identify the source of the monologue while they focus on character's facial expressions. Apparently, Wong Kar-wai is not satisfied with this technique. Like Terrence Malic, Wong Kar-wai sometimes inserts a monologue in the film narrative without presenting the source of the sound on the image.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, for example, when Blind Swordsman meets Huang Yaoshi at a tarven, there is a sequence of his interior monologues about his previous plan to kill Huang Yaoshi. Blind Swordsman is the source of the thoughts we hear represented as soliloquies but the words are only in his mind, not in his objective surroundings.

During the sound over sequence, we do not see any of his facial expression. Rather

what we see is Blind Swordsman's hands with the handle of the sword and his lonely back shadow in the narrow and dusky narrow aisle.

The absence of the sound source and the flowing monologue contribute to the emotional rhythm of the film narrative. When the character speaks words as an interior monologue to depict what had happened in the past, the spectator finally realizes that it is the character's recall of his memories. It reveals Blind Swordsman's strong inner struggle and extreme anger under the peaceful guise of his face. Another sequence of such interior diegetic monologue is the scene when Huang Yaoshi meets Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law for the last time. The source of sound over we hear is Huang Yaoshi's monologue, commenting on the love affair between Ouyang Feng and his sister-in-law. However, Wong Kar-wai does not give us any close up of the narrator but to the woman he has mentioned. The only shot of Huang is in a medium shot of Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law who is sitting in front of him. It is as if Huang Yaoshi is an objective surrounding of the woman protagonist.

2. Nonsimultaneous Sound: Desynchronization of Temporal Relations

Another dimension of film sound is time, which is also represented by filmmaker in various ways. Classic Hollywood films commonly use simultaneous sound in story with image, while alternative films manipulate sound to occur either earlier or later in story than the events which we see in the image. In this case, the sound becomes nonsimultaneous (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 313).

As early as 1960s, "sound bridge" has become a commonly used device for modernist filmmakers to make the sound as occurring in the present or future while the image as occurring in the past. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, we can find "sound bridge" in various

scenes. By means of nonsimultaneous sound, the film can give us information about story events without showing them to us. It can also create surprise and make our expectation more uncertain.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, a good example of nonsimultaneous sound is in the scene when Ouyang Feng meets Peach Blossom. The camera centers Peach Blossom standing by her horse in a middle of the creek, crying out for her agony of losing her husband. At the same time, the sound over began to tell us about why Ouyang Feng comes all the way to visit her. The source of this sound is Ouyang Feng. However, this diegetic nonsimultaneous monologue occurs apparently at a later time after Ouyang Feng's visit. It functions as an illustration to film narrative. Later when Peach Blossom leaves the camera, the camera spans to the dark creek filled with dead branches. At this time, the sound over of Ouyang Feng continues to tell us about his misunderstanding of Peach Blossom's name. The above two sequences of nonsimultaneous sound break down Hollywood's synchronization principle that we hear the sound as we see the source produce the sound. Rather, Wong Kar-wai manipulates the film sound through character's narration of earlier events and sound bridge of the flowing creek. Such manipulation changes the story order and blurred the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound. However it does emphasize the importance of the narrator—Ouyang Feng—who is the protagonist of this film. Nonsimultaneous sound thus creates a new experience for the spectators.

3. Character's Lines: Signature Personality

Our scene from *Ashes of Time Redux* points up the importance of how characters' lines may have the possibility of suggesting their latent personalities and innermost activities or psychological struggling.

For instance, when Ouyang Feng blamed Hong Qi for helping the poor girl revenge for her brother, Hong Qi replies, “I just don't want to be a walking dead who only listen to what others say”. His words clearly show a quite distinct personality from Ouyang Feng: Ouyang Feng is mercenary and self-centered but Hong Qi is a sympathetic and kind-hearted man. As Hong Qi says, the happiest moment in his life is when he does not care what others say and enjoys a simple life. Hong Qi's words also reveal the opposite destiny of the two characters.

When Blind Swordsman refuses to drink wine with Huang Yaoshi, he says, “I only want to drink water today. Wine makes a man feel warm but water makes a man feel cold”. With his words, Blind Swordsman not only refuses the wine from Huang Yaoshi, but also refuses their friendship for years. In Chinese culture, good friends like to drink wines to celebrate the reunion. However, for Blind Swordsman whose wife falls in love with his best friend, Blind could not accept such friend any more. His poetic words also reveal his great agony and disappointment with Huang Yaoshi. By the end of the film, Ouyang Feng says, “I do not care what others think about me. I just don't want them to be happier than I”. This simple line reflects his character of being extremely selfish—always rejecting other's love before being rejected only for protecting his dignity. It also forecasts his destiny that he will never have what he really desires and will only take him to the loss of true love.

Analyzing the connotations of characters' lines provides us a unique perspective to understand the motif of this film. It is a story about loss of time, love and memories. The story focuses on rejection and being rejected in love. When Subverts the traditional parody, self-deprecating, and even a bit cumbersome, rambling coarse mentality make Wong's work in seems to exercise the but again cleverness of narrative, to structure the movie time and space, depicted a pure personal sense,

conforms to the modern urban world image world. Visual modeling in image as the main body of the film art added so many long and all rap monologue and narrator (note: the dialogue is not much more special, but don't let you feel burdensome boring (lots of monologue and even into a phrase) - this is our the aphasia of the era of miracle.

4. Film Music

Music is a distinguished feature of Wong Kar-wai's films in which it not only surpasses the traditional function as a background sound only subordinated to the film narrative, but also it suggests an alternative way of presenting the personality and psychological activities of his character. For Wong Kar-wai, through experimenting with various types and genres of music, he has created an aphasia sphere where his characters are alienated from each other and the outside of the world. Since Wong's characters are all trapped in their own space and time and alienated from each other, the desire for communication has become extremely difficult. On one hand, they refuse to know others; on the other hand, they shut the door for others to understand them. Language conveys only the meanings of words, while music is a universal communicative tool that can carry much more senses than it. In Wong's films, music theme parallels with the emotional rhythm of narrative structure. Many scholars and critics analyze how music has contributed to reinforce the Wong's iconoclastic narrative style. They assert that music not only creates another space for Wong Kar-wai films, but also offers rare sensual perspectives to understand the complexity and depths of the film motif.

Ash of Time Redux (2008) is a good example of how Wong Kar-wai matches music motifs with different point of view to build the atmosphere of lingering and endurance,

ambiguity and paradox, loss and memory, anxiety and desires in the romantic entanglement of his characters. To some extent, music plays an alternative role of character's performance in their actions. For Wong Kar-wai, each character has his/her own music that reflects what they think and feel. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, the sound track of Ouyang Feng, namely *Tiandi Guying Ren Wo Xing* (「天地孤影任我行」) consistently appears in different scenes and strengthens the loneliness of the protagonist. The tearing-sounded music *You Ai You Hen* (「又愛又恨」) appropriately reflects how Murong Yin/Yang is severely suffered from being in love with the man who does not love her. When it comes to Peach Blossom, Wong pushes the importance of music to its extreme. Apart from a few lines with Ouyang Feng, Peach Blossom does not have a single word with others in the film. However, every time she appears, there is her representative music *Qingyu Liuzhuan* (「情慾流轉」). From this gentle yet erotic music, we could feel Peach Blossom's longing for her love and her helplessness for comforting herself the sexual desires.

To summarize, film music in Wong Kar-wai's film has its significance in the following three aspects. First, music not only played a special role beyond a background sound, but rather it is intertwined along with the development of the story and the psychological activities of the character. Secondly, the randomness of music deconstructs the meta-narrative. It also removes the pressure of the characters in the moral society and leaves us a wider space to comment on what have done. Thirdly, the fragmentized and mixed genres and styles of music create an uncanny world of alienation and loneliness for human beings in the modern society.

Take Three: Beyond Orientalism—Blending of Chinese and Western Aesthetics

Influenced by French new wave and Hong Kong new wave cinema, Wong Kar-wai also shows his distinctive artistic self-reflectiveness in many of his film works. For Western film critics, Wong Kar-wai is considered as a Chinese Jean-Luc Godard or Alain Resnais. They appraise him for standing out of the majority of Chinese-language filmmakers who have concentrated on the exotic Orientalist images in their films. Instead, Wong pays more attention on the social enigma of the modern society in which his characters are suffered from the conflict between their personal desires and the outside world. However, what seems more fascinating to me is Wong's creative integration of Western and Eastern aesthetic and philosophical elements into his films. In his films, Wong always seeks to explore the film motifs such as love and loss, forget and memory, alienation and communication, through his revisit of traditional Chinese culture and the culture of modern society.

Chinese Aesthetic Meet Western Aesthetic Styles

In Wong Kar-wai's films, it is common to have both Chinese and Western aesthetic paralleled with the main plot. From an Orientalist aesthetic perspective, film music with character's actions presents like a traditional Chinese painting scroll, which is being slowly opened up—they are just like the still image on the paper. For example, in *Ashes of Time Redux*, many fighting scenes have adopted time-lapse cinematography and high-speed cinematography. The slow rhythm of the characters' movements make their bodies seems to be dragged by time, as if the image is the collage of different movements on a Chinese painting scroll. In this case, Wong Kar-wai directs like a Chinese painter, who is freely playing with colorful ink on the film

stock. Moreover, the blurring images he draws are what we see as his unique cinematic imagination. Unlike filmmakers stick to one pattern, Wong's free style of cinematography strengthens the poetics and lyrical effects of the images.

No matter it is Chinese or Western, Wong Kar-wai pushes his aesthetic experiment to the extreme, to show his reflections of the modern world. For example, Wong Kar-wai breaks down the classical Chinese aesthetic principles of harmony and peace. Although *Ashes of Time Redux* is set back in ancient time, Wong Kar-wai does not give us details of exact location and chronological time. For Wong Kar-wai, time and space is less important than human him/herself. To subvert the traditional beauty of the nature, Wong breaks down the classical Chinese aesthetic principles: harmony and peace. This subversion implies the instability and inof the environment which in Wong's interpretation is the metaphor of the metropolitan city in a modern society. For example, in the beginning of the film, Wong gives a span shot of the drought dessert. Given the over exposure and filter technique, the color of the dessert only remains yellow, brown and blue. The sharply contrasted image not only reveals the uncanny environment, it also implies the hidden conflict among those who live in this place. Though the film is set back in ancient China, Wong's characters have the same problems like modern human beings. They are always in the social enigma between the outside world and themselves, seeking the balance in the pursuit of life meaning. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai's characters have split personalities. Shifting between different narrators, *Ashes of Time Redux* offers us multiple perspectives to present how his characters react with the their psychological battlefield and their relationships with the society.

Wong also use particular Chinese solar terms as the connection paragraph between chapters. He creatively uses the Chinese philosophical theory that man is an integral part of nature as a parallel to the film narrative structure. For instance, Wong uses “Spring Awaken” to imply the sixth day of the second lunar month. He extensively applies these terms with their particular meanings to the development of the story. When the subtitle comes to the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, the Chinese culture implications are upcoming trouble and disaster. These Chinese solar terms gives the time and the interconnections of each episode. They also symbolize different stages of the plot development and the characters’ destiny.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai creatively interprets his character’s personality and their destiny in terms of lunar calendar, which is regarded as one of the heritage of wisdom for Chinese people to understand the balance between human and the nature. For example, the narrator says, “On that day, the lunar calendar says ‘Horse moves, fire forces Venus, it is good for West.’” It suggests that Ouyang Feng has determined to going back to the West and fight for what he deserves. Another one “When he left, the wind blew South and he insisted on heading towards North. I remember that it was the 15th day of the month, and the lunar calendar says ‘Mercury is in effect and it is good for going North.’” This interpretation implies the destiny of Hong Qi that he will build his career in the North. When Ouyang Feng introduces Hong Qi, he mentions that number seven (pronounced the same as “Qi” in Hong Qi) will brings end to his life. And that is why he does not like Hong Qi. It also implies Ouyang Feng and Hong Qi will not be friends in the end. Another good example is Ouyang Feng comments on Hong Qi’s fight with the gangsters to help the village girl asks revenge for her brother. Ouyang Feng says: “it is the 15th day of the seventh

month. Rain. According to the almanac, ‘the Rain Star brings trouble. The Star of Talent presides. Time to cleanse. Avoid leaving home. Malignance in the North.’”

Wong Kar-wai is deeply in love with Chinese lunar culture that he would like to explain

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, the spirit of modernist aesthetic is embodied in the traditional Chinese aesthetic forms, which provide an alternative perspective of time and space for the film narrative structure. The fusion of Chinese and Western aesthetic has presented the complexity of the thoughts and emotion of modernist aesthetics which concentrate on the meaning of life and the sense of human in regards to the nature.

Take Four: Fable of Modernism—Allegory and Symbolism

Modernist artists take art as a pure or transparent response to the external reality. For instance, symbolist poets endeavor to show their strong reflections on the nature of poetic language, which is also regarded as the object of their creative work. Unlike romanticists who directly express their feelings, modernists take an implicit way of using symbolic and allegorical way to describe the inner state of their characters.

As for Wong Kar-wai, he does not simply present his reflection of reality in his film. Instead, he employs a metaphorical approach to convey the meaning of the text and context. Wong Kar-wai’s film is no longer the simple embodiment of goodness or badness, or mental state and personality of the characters. But rather, it is a metaphor filled with the modernist contemplation of human consciousness and unconsciousness, such as life and existence, love and friendship, time and memory, reality and dreams, and so on. Wong’s cinematic allegory is deeply rooted in the reality of Hong Kong while it also surpasses it because of its philosophical themes and motifs that arouse

sympathy from its audience all over the world.

1. Symbolic Color

Light and shadow are what cinema gives a director as tools. For most of the time, the director uses the camera to control the chemical interaction of light on film stock. He chooses suitable tonal for the film, controls the speed of the action and change its point of view. Many modernist visual artists take color as a recurring theme in their films in which the color arouses and constructs the possibility of breaking down the traditional two-dimension spaces. Color in Wong Kar-wai's film is one of the most important forms, which determine the atmosphere and the development of the plot.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, it is through film techniques of over exposure and filters that Wong creates strong visual effects, imply the connection and communication between human and the nature. Take depiction of the desert for example, Wong constantly changes the light on the film to present this drought and sandy landscape. Sometimes it is quiet like a pool and sometimes it is violent like fire, even sometimes it seems falls asleep in the daylight. The color of the desert is always changing: in the morning it is the orange, at noon it turns red, in the evening it becomes dark yellow. Different color conveys different layers of emotions. The camera takes our focus from far to near while the light of the image always changing. This constant shift of light and shadow appropriately present the life of the nature.

Wong Kar-wai also uses different color to name the location in his film. For instance, the White Camel Mountain implies the sadness and shame of Ouyang Feng's for his hometown. As for the Blind Swordsman, we can see the pink flower in our mind as

we mention his hometown ‘peach blossom’, which could be further interpreted as a hint for his destiny that his life is as short as the peach blossom.

Strengthening the color is one of Wong Kar-wai’s most significant cinematic visual skills. Wong consciously exaggerates the beauty of colors and juxtaposes them together on the image to create unusual pictorial senses. As Bordwell and Thompsons have pointed that choosing the color is as important as choosing the whole tone for the film, Wong Kar-wai makes his every effort to reinforce the importance of color in *Ashes of Time Redux*. In doing so, he emphasizes the relationship between modernist aesthetic and film chromatology. Moreover, he builds allegories that signify the connection between modern culture and highly commercialized communication.

To conclude, Wong uses color as a symbolic object to present the changing emotions of his characters and also creates the metaphorical meaning of these senses.

2. Symbolic Character

In Wong Kar-wai's film, each character has its distinctive symbolic meaning. Sometimes they don't have a real name but just a symbolic one, such as “Blind Swordsman”, “Peach Blossom”, “Village girl”. Their names not only reflect their personality but also imply their fate. Wong Kar-wai gives no details of what they do and where they live. For the audience, they seem always to be moving from one place to another. Rather than trying to reflect the reality as it is, Wong Kar-wai does not care about telling a complete story at all, and neither does he try to create a whole integrated personality for his character. However, all of this characters are symbolic, metaphoric and signifier of the reality.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong's characters have different personalities but they share the same identity as the wanderer in the desert that signifies the modern society of metropolitan Hong Kong. While they are wandering around to find their fate, they also learn that how to love and being loved as well as how to refuse and being refused. Some of the characters in *Ashes of Time Redux* come from the renowned Chinese martial art novel *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, such as Ouyang Feng, Huang Yaoshi, and Hong Qi, while others come from another novel *The Legendary Swordsman* like Murong Yin/Yang. However, no matter where they come from, they are all symbolic figures of the modern man and woman who share more or less the same characteristics. For instance, Ouyang Feng symbolizes those who are cold, selfish and sophisticated while Huang Yaoshi symbolizes those who only enjoys indulgence of love but avoid taking responsibilities. The Blind Swordsman symbolizes those who have fear to face up to the hurt by love and friendship. Murong Yin/Yang symbolizes those who are so crazy about love with split personalities. Moreover, Hong Qi is signifies those who are straight and kind-hearted, which makes him a determined person who insist on doing what he thinks right. Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law symbolizes those who endeavor to seek for pure love and would rather sacrifice anything to hold onto their principles. Peach Blossom symbolizes those who is suffered from the love affair outside the marriage. The village girl signifies those grassroots of the society who have no power to fight against the violence but still believe the justice and morality. Hong Qi's wife symbolizes the traditional Chinese woman with loyalty and strength to share the bitterness of the life. Those gangsters symbolize people who would rather sacrifice other's happiness in order to gain their own wealth.

3. Symbolic Object

The symbolic approach is not only used in making color and characters, but also reflected in Wong's presentation of objects in his films. Indeed, Wong Kar-wai's highly stylish Impressionist image challenges audience visual expectation. He is particularly adept in dealing with objects in the space, which are taken as the representative of the symbols and signifiers of characters emotions. The repressed space conveys Wong's critical comments on the space and human that the space is occupied; human becomes subordinated to the objects.

In *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong pushes the limit to its extreme to establish the symbolic meaning of the object. Now I will analyze how objects are represented as a supplement to symbolic meaning in the film. Take the object of "wind" for example: it indicates the seasonal transition from spring to summer. When the wind is blown from far distance, it passes through the leaves of the tree, then comes over the character's face, and finally rests on their hairs. In Wong's camera, wind is like a creator who gives different appearance of wrinkles on the clothes, hairstyle, and emotional expression of the characters. It gives life to the nature and indicates the feelings of human being. Another example is the "sunlight" in *Ashes of Time Redux*. Wong Kar-wai makes it flowing like water. In the scene of Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi, the sunlight is reflected and refracted by the birdcage and finally settles down onto the ground, the wall and the characters' faces. The variegated shadows of sunlight flow in the air and the in the eyes of the character.

In addition to objects, Wong Kar-wai also employs animal as symbolic meanings in *Ashes of Time Redux*. A first example is the Hong Qi's camel which has accompanied him throughout his journey to the North. The tall and quiet camel symbolizes Hong

Qi's personality of straight, simple and honesty. The camel's appearance resonates with the inner characteristics of Hong Qi that it implies the camel's master (Hong Qi) takes him as his best loyal friend. A second example is the horse of Peach Blossom. In the film, the horse is always by her side wherever she goes. The horse plays a role more than just an animal but a symbolic object who carries the character as well as her pains. A third symbolic animal in *Ashes of Time Redux* is the village girl's mule, which is the only legacy her parents left to her. The mule suggests how lonely and depressed the girl feels. Rather than the camel and horse, the mule is a stubborn animal which is difficult to communicate with human, neither can it show comfort to people. This mule symbolizes the helplessness and weakness of its master: the village girl.

To conclude, in *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai employs many implicit allegories to signify the reality of the modern society. The symbolic color, object and animal is the metaphor filled with the modernist contemplation of human consciousness and unconsciousness, such as life and existence, love and friendship, time and memory, reality and dreams, and so on.

Take Five: Subjectivity: the Reborn Auteur

Modernists acclaim that art is the constructed, man-made works. It exists in terms of an idealized form, not influenced by the outer world. For instance, early symbolist artists declare that even the society and universe are constructed and reconstructed by human beings. Subjectivity is another significant feature of modernist aesthetic and perspective.

Wong is a modernist auteur. If Roland Barthes declared that the author is dead, Wong

Kar-wai replies with an absolutely “No.” Although most of film scholars tend to regard Wong as a postmodernist, he is actually not a complete postmodernism advocate. To some extent, he even resists postmodernism. In fact, Wong Kar-wai employs a modernist strategy in his cinematic world, believing that the “author” has his/her ability to create and construct the artwork. The author is still the very origin of innovative ideas, which cannot be imitated or duplicated by others.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong Kar-wai demonstrates his ambition as a modernist author who presents his film as an artificial artwork against the reality with his strong subjectivity. His purpose is not to persuade the audience to believe the film story. On the contrary, he breaks down the traditional stereotypes and focuses on discussing the topic of modernism in disguise of a martial-arts-like film. What he really creates is a fable or representation of a modernist subject, stimulating its audience to reflect on what they see by themselves. *Ashes of Time Redux* has its own narrative system, independent from any connection with the outer world. It tells a story about the legend of several martial arts heroes and heroines before they became famous. Adapted and recomposed from Jin Yong’s two martial art novels by Wong Kar-wai, the film takes place at an uncertain desert, given no exact year in ancient China. Meanwhile all the characters are also imaginary and unreal. Rather than directly making his audience engaged with the emotions of the characters, Wong Kar-wai uses extensive voice over of different characters. Thus he creates a mysterious narrative isolated from the reality. One can understand the cause and effect of the story only through his/her own reflection and reconstruction based on the fragmented and ambiguous images.

As most of the modernist visual artists, Wong Kar-wai also presents his aesthetic self-consciousness by blending the subjectivity into the film itself. He manipulates with film techniques to create strong subjectivity. For instance, he uses canted frame to create the abnormal images in many scenes, such as when the village girl lies onto the tree waiting for someone to help her revenge, when Hong Qi's wife waiting for her husband in the desert, when Murong Yin/Yang waiting for Huang Yaoshi to show up, and also when Hong Qi waiting for the gangsters to fight, etc. These unbalanced framing makes the characters seem especially lonely and helpless in such a sharp comparison between their bodies and the vast sandy desert. This kind of manipulation is one of the most important techniques Wong Kar-wai uses to focus on the center of the image and to strengthen the subjectivity and emotions of the characters.

In addition to that, Wong Kar-wai is also adept at creating exaggerated or distorted visual images, to appropriately convey the psychological activities of his characters. A good example is the scene that Wong Kar-wai uses extreme wide-angle lens to present the images of his characters and settings on the film. When Hong Qi and his wife are having a conversation, Wong switches his focus on the camel. He does not directly give any detailed depiction of Hong Qi himself. Instead, he concentrates on certain parts of the camel, exaggerating its head, eyes, mouth and nose, making an allegory between the camel and its master Hong Qi. In the eyes of Hong Qi's wife, the camel is the representative of her husband. So even Hong Qi is not facing up to the camera, we can clearly imagine how irritable and angry he is by judging from the facial expression of the camel. In this way, Wong Kar-wai forces us to see the world from a new perspective. In the distorted images includes the camel, the woman and

the man, all of them challenge the expectation of the audience—a sense of defamiliarization that conveys the metaphorical meaning of discomfort in the character's subjective point of view.

In this chapter, I have analyzed how Wong Kar-wai experiments the material of filmmaking through various film techniques in terms of cinematography, framing, sound, as well as his creative blending of Chinese and Western aesthetics, the symbolist allegory, and the subjectivity of the author. By challenging the form and style of the traditional film art, Wong Kar-wai has presented his modernist aesthetic self-reflectiveness that reflects the solitude, alienation, sadness, depression, and many other legacies in the process of the industrialization of the modern society.

CHAPTER FOUR

JUXTAPOSITION, AMBIGUITY, AND DEHUMANIZATION

In this chapter, I will emphasize on three aspects to illustrate how Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* has represented modernist perspective on the simultaneity of time, ambiguity and dehumanization.

Take One: Modernist Simultaneity

As Eugene Lunn states that before modernism, realistic artists in the 19th century followed the classical aesthetical principles to depict historical events according to the chronological orders. However for the modernists, they abandoned the completeness of the unity and the clear distinctions between primary and secondary. Instead, they present the wholeness of the world through the juxtaposition of different perspectives. Specifically speaking, modernist artist collaborates different types of visual, sensual, social and cultural forms to present the completeness of the their work. We can also see the juxtaposition is embedded within many fields of modernist art, such as the metaphorical relationships in modern poetics, the simultaneity of rhythm and tone in modern music, as well as the cross section of different consciousness in modern fictions. Furthermore, some artists push it to the extreme that they employ recurrent and/or mysterious motifs in order to convey a deeper level of modernist ideology.

In the films of Wong Kar-wai, juxtaposition as a technique can be found in the many aspects, like narrative, photography, editing, sound and so on. In film narrative, for example, Wong likes to present the completeness through juxtaposition of different thoughts in the movement. At the same time, use of parallelism also provides

audience multiple storylines from different perspectives. Moreover, the recurrent monologue of the character emphasizes helplessness and depression that does commonly emerge in the everyday life of modern human beings. The parallel of sound and image properly uncovers the split personality of the character.

1. Juxtaposition of Time: Past, Present and Future

In the process of exploring the simultaneity of time, modernist artists regard the transitory and fleeting moment as the essential element of their art. From a modernist perspective, the concepts of grand narrative and meta-narrative have been destructed by the time “present”, which exists as an eternal moment in the space and time. In this case, the duration of time is concentrated into a flash, which has no linear connection with past and future. As for Wong Kar-wai, time never stops flowing and changing. But it is always uncertain and illusory; so it seems that the present could vanish from this world in one second. Like many modernist artist, Wong Kar-wai does not care much about the objective and chronological time and space. However, he endeavors to create the subjective and imaginary time and space beyond the reality world. Sometimes, Wong Kar-wai juxtaposes opposite time and space by exploring the free spirit and soul of his characters.

In *Ashes of Time Redux*, the opening, closing and patterns of development does not follow the classical Hollywood cause and effect principle, such as curiosity, suspense, and surprise. On the contrary, Wong reconstructs the subjective time and space by reversing the chronological order (or temporal order), changing the length of time (temporal duration) and shifting the time frequency (temporal frequency). In this way, he creates a discontinued and disoriented narrative world filled with fragmented pieces. The audiences are trapped in it seek the real causal relationship by themselves. This subversive presentation of the time and place is fulfilled through his juxtaposition,

simultaneity and montage techniques.

As Tony Rayns says that Wong Kar-wai is a poet standing out of time. Actually, as the author of *Ashes of Time Redux*, Wong often likes to play with his audience by challenging what we perceive as common knowledge. Ouyang Feng says, “Many years later, I have a nickname, called ‘West poison’.” We are confused with time right from the beginning of the film. Normally, when we say “many years later”, it means the narrator does not live in the future. However, no one can predict his future when he/she is still in the past. Therefore, the distinctions of past, present, and future suddenly disappeared. At this moment, Wong Kar-wai takes us to see the whole life of Ouyang Feng from a crystal of time, which has the past, present, and the future.

By juxtaposing different time and space, Wong Kar-wai dissolves the boundaries of ancient, contemporary, and future time. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, the motifs of the film is the social enigma of a modernist contemporary society, such as lost and love, forget and memory, alienation and communication, etc. However, he establishes the story in ancient times and makes the character as ancient people who have the same problem like modern men do. The binary oppositions of ancient and contemporary have disappeared. The necessary connection between “signifier” and “signified” turn into randomly multiple relationships. While Wong Kar-wai subverts our traditional idea of the linear history, he constructs the modernist idea of completeness or unity of time by combining pieces of fragments of time and space together. *Ashes of Time Redux* parallels multiple storylines around different people with their love, friendship, and family, presenting a complex relationship.

Solar terms are not only to be remarked as the indicator of time, Wong Kar-wai also uses them in subtitles and voice-over to connect episodes of the plot. From “Spring Awaken” to “Summer Solstice”, and then the fall of autumn, and finally “Insects

Awaken”, all of these seem to be in accordance with the chronological time order. In fact, if we think twice, this is not the case. First of all, Wong Kar-wai only focuses on one character in each chapter. Moreover, we notice that there is no direct cause and effect or chronological relationship between different chapters. There will be no difference if we put Murong Yin/Yang after Hong Qi. Secondly, subtitles and voice-over between chapters play a significant role of indicating the thoughts, feelings, or the fate of a certain character. They are not only the time marks. For example, “Spring Awaken” implies that everything has been recovered from its hibernation. The erotic senses of animals and humans awaken. During the season of “Insects Awaken,” Murong Yin/Yang deeply falls in love with Huang Yaoshi. Her love is so crazy that she had a nervous breakdown and finally got split personality. Coincidentally, the Blind Swordsman shows up on the day of “Summer Solstice” when he begins to lose his sight, he becomes very sensitive to the sunlight. During his fight with horse gangs on Summer Solstice day, the bright and dazzling sunlight not only affects his sight seriously, it reflects the psychological activities of Blind Swordsman as well. Last but not the least, confusing with time order is another commonly used techniques in Wong Kar-wai’s films. In this way, the story becomes complicated and confusing, which produces defamiliarization of the visual expectation. For example, it is not until the end of the film that Wong Kar-wai begins to depict the most important female character—Ouyang Feng’s lover—his sister-in-law. We have finally understood how the name of “magic wine” comes from in the beginning of the film and why Huang Yaoshi visits Ouyang Feng every year in springtime.

Opposition to the linear movement of time, modernist artists attempt to step back and reexamine the time and people in the stable and objective reality. Wong Kar-wai is the one who does so. He observes every character in his film. He cares about their

mental activities and life state.

2. Juxtaposition of the Plot: Circuit Narrative Structure

Before modernist movement, art and literature followed the classic narrative structure that the author depicts the story or describe subject one by one, according to a chronological order. In modern art, however, it is usually difficult to find a clear distinction between cause and effect with the development of the story. In fact, they are usually concealed within an open-ended narrative structure or an ongoing present. Modernist artists like to juxtapose different characters with their experiences from the past, present, and the future or from their inner or outer world. In this way, modernists dismiss the differences among characters and position them on a flat surface.

Wong Kar-wai's films are influenced by modernist movement, especially the French New Wave, such as prototype of the image, rhythm of the narrative and the style of the film form. To subvert the traditional "linear" narrative structure, Wong employs a "circuit narrative structure, which juxtaposes fragments or pieces of the narrative from different time and space. This "circuit" narrative structure displays the subject from multiple point of views and presents the complicated states of mind of the character.

In this circuit narrative structure, *Ashes of Time Redux* tells more than one story: Huang Yaoshi leads a befuddled life as if he is drunk or in a dream; Murong Yin/Yang becomes split personality in her love with Huang Yaoshi; the poor village girl insists on waiting for someone to revenge for her brother; the Blind Swordsman dies in the fight with horse gangster on his way to see his wife in hometown; the kind-hearted Hong Qi tries to live a simple and happy life as a swordsman; Ouyang Feng misses his beloved woman in the dessert and left for the White Camel Mountain in the end. Wong Kar-wai's film presents the reality from a highly abstract means. In *Ashes*

of *Time Redux*, he intentionally juxtaposes the above fragments of the film story at different time in the past or future. Therefore, he creates the modernist simultaneity of time, which opposes to the traditional perception of diachronic linear time.

The circuit narrative structure in *Ashes of Time Redux* establishes a flat surface for presenting multiple point of view. Standing from an aerial point of view, Wong Kar-wai constantly changes the POV of his camera, looking at his narrative subjects from different time and spaces. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, rather than offering the single perspective, Wong Kar-wai centers Ouyang Feng on this flat narrative surface while juxtaposes other characters to offer different alternative perspectives.

Additionally Wong Kar-wai makes his film an open system by juxtaposes different relationships between characters, providing a variety of alternative possibilities for the audience. For male relationship, Wong parallels the following ones: Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi, Huang Yaoshi and Blind Swordsman, Ouyang Feng and Hong Qi, Blind Swordsman and Hong Qi, and so on. For male and female relationship, Wong juxtaposes Ouyang Feng and his beloved woman (sister-in-law), Huang Yaoshi and Peach Blossom, Huang Yaoshi and Murong Yin/Yang, Blind Swordsman and his wife Peach Blossom, Blind Swordsman/Hong Qi and the village girl, Hong Qi and his wife, etc. As for between female characters, Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law is his love of life and is also being loved by Huang Yaoshi. Peach Blossom is the wife of Blind Swordsman but she also falls in love with Huang Yaoshi. While Peach Blossom often reminds Huang Yaoshi to remember Ouyang Feng's sister-in-law, Murong Yin/Yang carries a blind love with Huang. The kind-hearted village girl reminds Ouyang Feng and Blind Swordsman of their beloved ones. In such complex relationships among different characters, one cannot find a single relationship as a main story line and other as its subordination. Instead, each relationship is independent from others and

thus consists of a multiple perspective of communication.

Take Two: Dehumanization

In the previous paragraphs, I have analyzed how Wong Kar-wai as a modernist filmmaker explores the paradoxical many-sidedness of the world in his film *Ashes of Time Redux*. As Eugene Lunn proposes, the fourth significant characteristic of modernist aesthetics is embedded within the individual subject or personality. In the following part, I will examine the interior world of characters in terms of individuals' personalities and psychological activities.

In his review of romantic and realist literatures, Eugene Lunn emphasizes that narrators or playwrights of the nineteenth century are likely to create their characters with highly integrated personality features and develop them in a consistent discourse of social interaction (Lunn, p. 37). The priority is to focus on the orderly formation and transformation of the characters' personalities through dramatic dialogue, description of conduct or psychic states.

Rather than taking romantic and realist perspective of regarding the character as a coherent, definable and well-structured entity, modernist artists and writers choose the opposite way, making the individual trapped in the psychic battlefield, or an insoluble puzzle or even dragged into a flow of perceptions and sensations. As Eugene Lunn point up that the character is no longer an integrated human being but a distorted body restrained from the objective surroundings and events. Now I will examine how Wong Kar-wai strives to shape his characters as distorted and dehumanized modern man/woman by analyzing the traits of their interior world through film form and style.

1. Loneliness, Endurance

Loneliness creates emotional tensions. In Wong Kar-wai's films, his character is always a lonely entity living on his/her own planet. Such solitude could never be understood or satisfied in real life. Therefore, their vitality and humanity are always being repressed and unreleased, which increase the emotional tensions of the story development.

One good example in *Ashes of Time Redux* is from the scene where Peach Blossom lies on the horse back in the creek. Wong Kar-wai uses various lighting techniques to present the loneliness of Peach Blossom, who is longing for love yet strives to repress her sexual passion. When Wong employs soft lighting to blur the edges of Peach Blossom's surrounding objects, setting up the ground for presenting the tenderness and gentleness of Peach Blossom's emotional world. In the meantime, Wong uses underlighting to reflect the light onto the face of Peach Blossom. The flickering light shining under the darkness symbolizes the exuberant sensual world of Peach Blossom. In order to enhance the loneliness and sadness of the character, Wong Kar-wai uses low-key illumination to produce a strong contrast between the foreground and background settings.

Another distinctive feature of the character's psychological battlefield is endurance, which is embodied within the hidden melancholy. Most characters in *Ashes of Time Redux* endure such melancholy through their lives. Ouyang Feng is used to be a conceited and rebellious man. However, life is suddenly changed when his beloved woman unexpectedly marries his brother. Ouyang Feng does not do anything but only chooses to escape away and hides himself in a desert that no one knows. For years, all he can do is endure the sorrow of lost love. Behind this endurance, is one's complete incapability after his ideals and love collapse.

2.Deconstruction and Negation of the Integrated Humanity

In modernist painting, human body is violently distorted by expressionism, decomposed and geometrically resynthesized by cubism, and disappears entirely in nonfigurative abstract art (Lunn, p.37). In *Ashes of Time Redux*, there are several scenes that depict human bodies, which have all reflected the tendency of such distorting in modernist aesthetics. In the following, we shall see repeatedly that how Wong Kar-wai exerts film forms to present the crisis of integrated individuality.

One famous example is from a series of close-up shots of Peach Blossom's body. Deep in the dark forest, there is a creek where a school of fish seems to be frozen in the water. The camera starts to focus on the black horse's back where lies Blind Swordsman's wife Peach Blossom. In this scene, Wong Kar-wai does not give us any complete image of the woman's body. Instead, what we see are a series of close-up shots on different parts of her body. The frame mobiles from her flawless and bright leg to her tensed bare foot, and then her beautiful arms holding across the horse neck. The strong contrast of the textures between the smooth and delicate female body and the shining horsehair creates an extremely striking feeling that the character is struggling fiercely with her own sexual desire. Close-up shots of her messy hair and moving lips also interact with the background music. It is through these close-up shots that Wong Kar-wai violently distorts the integrated Peach Blossom's body and thus creates a mixture feeling of sexuality, missing and loneliness.

When depicting the village girl who wants to revenge for her brother, Wong Kar-wai uses the same techniques to fragmentize her body image. The POV is from the back of the girl, focusing only on her basket filled with eggs. The basket is all she has for negotiating with Ouyang Feng. But as she speaks to Ouyang Feng, we could not see any face expressions but only a small portion of her body with her voice-over.

However, it is through this zoom-in shot of the egg basket that we immediately realize the poor girl and her interior struggle and fears.

The character Murong Yin/Yang sets up a good example of the split personality.

Murong Yin is suffered .

3.Rootlessness and Homelessness

Another remarkable feature of Wong Kar-wai's films is embodied in the rootlessness and homelessness of his characters. This is one of the vital essences that Wong Kar-wai shares with many French New Wave filmmakers. Wong creates his characters as urban individuals who live a drifting life in a modern city. The character in his films, as Eugene Lunn describes, are not only isolated from their family and the society, but also confined to sequences of severely objective events.

Ashes of Time Redux is not exceptional. Even though characters do not live in a modern city, they share exactly the same sense of rootlessness and homelessness with those contemporary metropolitan individuals. The desert is the analogue to the modern city, where everyone is isolated from others and suffered from his or her own insoluble puzzles. Ouyang Feng lives in seclusion in a desert far way from his hometown White Camel Mountain. Blind Swordsman has been drifting around since he leaves his wife Peach Blossom. Hong Qi runs away from home to fulfill a true swordsman's ideal. All of them lead a wandering life, searching for their root.

Film narration does not provide audience necessary information about its characters' social relationships. They seem to be born homeless without any contact with the outside world: their families, friends or their professional work. If ever introduced, their work only serves as an identifiable label for the character but no detailed description will be addressed. For example, in the beginning of the film, Ouyang Feng

introduced himself as a business agent who helps ordinary people find professional killers. We do not know anything about Ouyang Feng's family but this introduction of his business serves as the nexus that bonds other characters and relationships together. Anonymous characters in Wong Kar-wai's films are no longer the supporting roles of protagonists. In fact, they are the focus of his lens. With their symbolic names, like Blind Swordsman and Peach Blossom, Wong Kar-wai presents the life of those who are drifting outside the center of this world. Everyone seems to be homeless and rootless. This is what Wong Kar-wai portrays as a "modern man": existing in everywhere of the society but wandering away from the center.

4. Rejections and Negation: Communication Dilemma

In Wong Kar-wai's films, his characters always desire for mutual understanding with others however they have never achieved that. Ironically, because of their extreme fear of rejection and negation, Wong Kai-wai's characters choose to reject others before being rejected. Rather than open their hearts and reach out, they shrink into their own circle and cut off the access to the external world.

To varying degrees, characters in *Ashes of Time Redux* all have difficulty in communication, such as Ouyang Feng and his sister-in-law, Blind Swordsman and Peach Blossom, or Murong Yin/Yang and Huang Yaoshi. The barrier of their communications comes from their self-esteem, rejection, and misunderstanding. Paradoxically, though they are trapped by love, they are more likely to disclose private things or their true thoughts to strangers who have nothing to do with their life. Talking to strangers is indeed a disguised way of communication and it becomes the shackles for the real-life face to-face interaction. Hence it leads to the isolation and avoidance of individual subjects. Therefore, the manifestations of "rootlessness" and

“homelessness” are conveyed through the disguised communications, rejections and avoidance among characters.

A good example of such communication dilemma can be found repeatedly in the recurring one-way flow of love relationships in Wong Kar-wai’s films. If one would like to talk to the other, the latter would always refuse to communicate and escape away. Take Ouyang Feng and his sister-in-law for example, throughout his life, Ouyang Feng lives up to this belief that one will not be embarrassed and humiliated if he does not profess his love. He says, “If you do not want to be rejected, the best way is to reject others before they do this to you”. So he never says “I love you” to his Peach Blossom (played by Brigitte Cheung). His strong self-esteem breaks Peach Blossom’s heart that she finally marries his brother for revenge. For the rest of his life, Ouyang Feng regrets and suffers from this incurable pain. His envy for his brother and Hong Qi makes him finally understand that “When I look at them (Hong Qi and his wife) leaving, I envy Hong Qi. Once I had the same chance but I do not know why I gave up”. The tremendous agony Ouyang Feng has been suffered through his life is due to his rejection and avoidance of communication with his beloved one.

Conclusion

As we have discussed before, rootless and homeless are distinctive traits of Wong Kar-wai’s characters. Therefore “seeking roots” is another common motifs that he shares with French new wave directors. In their films, the rootless culture is the source of character’s purposeless life which is full of emptiness and shortness. Like many French new wave directors, Wong Kar-wai is concerned about the disorganized society where people are isolated from each other and disconnected from the social group.

The motif of “home” in *Ashes of Time Redux*, is represented through the rootless of these swordsmen who can never return to their homes. Now the city wanderer becomes the down and out swordsmen of the desert. Seeking one’s root is the recurring motif of these homeless individuals, such as Ouyang Feng, Huang Yaoshi, and Blind Swordsman. All of them are suffering tremendous torment after leaving home, unable to find their right place in a relationship. The only exception among these characters is Hong Qi, who is willing to take his wife together for his martial adventure.

Setting in an ancient time, Wong Kar-wai in *Ashes of Time Redux* explores the psychology of urban homeless wanderers through a martial arts film. The onscreen space is in the middle of an unknown desert where many famous or anonymous ancient swordsmen fight for their fame, life, and love. The analogue between the desert and the modern metropolitan Hong Kong is apparently presented.

To summarize, the communication dilemma of Wong Kar-wai’s characters makes them controversial subjects: on one hand, they are longing for love desperately; on the other hand, they fear of being hurt if rejected. In the end, they choose to avoid communication and escape away, living the rest of their life in great regret and loss of love. For these characters, the endless circle of seeking, avoiding, and rejecting love is the embodiment of their loneliness, rootlessness, and homelessness. As an allegorical story with rich imagination and innovative themes, *Ashes of Time Redux* provides us a unique perspective to explore the psychology of individual subjects through their sensations and perceptions embedded within their experiences of love and life.

Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the modernist aesthetics in the film works of Wong Kar-wai by examining how modern artistic and social perspectives are represented in cinematic forms and styles through the case study of *Ashes of Time*. The main arguments are summarized as follows.

Modernist Aesthetic Self-consciousness in Wong's Cinematic Forms

In Wong Kar-wai's films, modernist aesthetical self-consciousness is embedded in his iconoclastic experiments of various film materials in the process of creating new forms and skills. His iconoclastic approach in film style system, including mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound in *Ashes of Time*, subjectively breaks through the tradition of classical Hollywood and Hong Kong pop cinema.

Wong focuses on creating the fluidity of film space by using the mobile framing to transform the angle, level, height, and distance of objects. Tracking and crane shots make the object more steric while subjective shots by hand-held camera maximize the visual impacts of fighting actions. Canted framing creates the unbalanced onscreen spaces which push audiences to reflect on the internal anxiety, fear, and struggle of the characters. Wong employs Kuleshov effect to fragmentize film spaces in order to breaks down the continuity and unity of the narrative structure. Speed of motion is constantly altered by Wong's stylistic time-lapse and high-speed cinematography. Disparities of rhythm in sound and image disrupt the narrative coordination, which emphasizes the contrast between onscreen and off-screen perspectives, between fast

music and slow motion, even between the still image and the lively music and sound effects. Unlike classical Hollywood films, film sound in Wong's film concentrates on voice-over rather than speech. The symbolic fluidity of monologue is an extremely radical approach, which has blurred the boundary between narrative perspectives and expectations of the audience. It also effectively represents the alienation among human being in the era of aphasias. Various music motifs establish a dynamic atmosphere, interacting and intertwined with film narrative to reflect the internal activities of the characters. Wong's expressionist time-space motifs are embedded within the classical Chinese aesthetics, which stresses the poetical and emotional sentiments. By adding the Chinese Zodiac into each chapter of the film, Wong subtly integrates the harmony of nature and human in Chinese philosophy with the modern film aesthetics. Constant use of exposure and filter constructs recurring color motifs, echoing with the development of the narration and the changing of character's feelings. In this way, Wong expands his exploration of alternative or possibilities in filmic expressions beyond the two-dimensions of the images. Wong as a modernist artist considers his film as a pure reflection of the 'outer' reality. The well-designed dialogue presents the metaphor of the reality and the character's internal world. His symbolic character and objects are both his radical critics towards the modern life experience. Wong attempts to make his films highly artificial, showing that a broader society can be constructed by the imagination of the auteur himself, not that of the unchangeable.

As a modern auteur director, Wong shows his aesthetic self-consciousness through the iconoclastic cinematic forms and styles. His subjective cinematography, subversive film sound, and symbolic metaphors challenge audience's expectations and offer them with a critical attitude.

Juxtaposition, Simultaneity and Montage.

Tony Rayns says that Wong Kar-wai is a poet of time. In fact, Wong is more than a poet but a magician holding the crystals of time in his hand. Time fleets inexorably away between our fingers. It is only through memories of the past that one can grasp the ashes of time. Rejecting the classic Hollywood's order of opening, closing, and its pattern of development in the 'cause and effect' principle, Wong Kar-wai consciously alters the temporal order, duration and frequency in his film narrative. He focuses on the subjectivity of constructive time and space beyond the reality. It is through juxtaposition and montage of these time and spaces that the characters and their spirits and emotions connect with each other.

Rather than focusing on linear and chronological development, Wong gathers together fragments from a variety of visual, sensual, social, and cultural forms together to construct the unity of the film. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, he juxtaposes past, present, and future through image and sound. Wong uses multi-parallelism to present the alternative perspectives. The fluid changing of voice-over, especially in the monologue of different characters, emphasizes the ubiquity of helplessness and depression in the life experience of modern men and women. Juxtaposition of various narrative forms, like the synchronous sound and image, reinforces schizoid personality disorder of the modern human being.

Wong's modernist perspectives on film narrative are also presented through the circuit and cyclical structures in his films. Instead of following the traditional order of depicting one event, one feeling at one time, Wong prefers to conceal the apparent cause and effect in an open ending or a 'continuing present'. He juxtaposes different experiences and feelings, past and present, internal and external, all of which no long

in the distance from each other. Instead, every fragment occupies a location in the flat space. Recurring themes such as Peach Blossom, the Wine, and the White Camel Mountain, constantly drag audience's attention to its symbolic meaning of the memories of characters.

Negativity and Problems of the Modern Experience: Paradox, Ambiguity, and Uncertainty

Modernists explore the paradoxical many-sidedness of the world. Modernists view reality as necessarily constructed from relative perspectives, while they seek to exploit the aesthetic and ethical richness of ambiguous images, sounds, and authorial points of view. Many modernist works turn on ambiguous treatments of the contemporary city, the machine, or the "masses." Modernists find the aesthetic value in confronting urban experience. *Ashes of Time Redux* is metaphor of modern experience in the metropolitan city of Hong Kong. Some main characters are named after space, referring that their fate and personality are constrained by the place where they live.

Instead of an omniscient and reliable narrator, modern writers develop either single or multiple, but all limited and fallible, vantages from which to view events. In *Ashes of Time Redux*, multiple narrators in the voice-over offer multi-perspectives on the events. Ouyang Feng, Huang Yaoshi, and the Blind Swordsman, all of them are limited to their knowledge and experiences. Non-simultaneous and asynchronous sound and image create uncertainty for our understanding. Moreover, the ambiguity among the transitions of the three voice-overs also conveys the problem of narrative.

In order to create obscurity and ambiguity, Wong Kar-wai uses superimposition to play with dreams, imaginations, and memories of the characters.

Open-ended paradoxes may be structured in such a manner to the reader or audience how they may resolve the contradictions outside the intentionally unfinished work, or provisionally synthesize the multiple perspectives. More radically, however, the paradoxes may be heightened to the point of apparent irresolution, confronting the reader or audience with a “Janus-faced” reality, impenetrable in its enigmas. Wong Kar-wai challenges the classic Chinese Wuxia story, which always focuses on themes of revenge and heroes. Instead, Wong’s iconoclastic break through with a pre-history story into the classic literature opens a space, where we are able to get close to the hearts of the characters through their personal love stories. Wong’s reconstruction of the classic Wuxia heroes emphasizes their endurance of the negativity, the dark side in their encounter with the problems of modern life.

Alienation and Dehumanization

Character for modernists, is regarded not as a coherent, definable and well-structured entity, but as a psychic battlefield, or an insoluble puzzle, or the occasion for a flow of perceptions and sensations. This tendency to dissolve characters into a stream of atomized experiences give way to an opposite tendency in which character is severed from psychology and confined to a sequence of objective events. In modern painting, the human form is violently distorted by expressionists, decomposed and geometrically resynthesized by cubists, and disappears entirely in nonfigurative abstract art.

Loneliness, endurance, and the melancholy are the psychological dimensions of Wong's character in *Ashes of Time*. Close-up shot is the commonly used techniques for Wong to deconstruct the human body into pieces. All of the characters are the homeless people who are constantly longing for settlement but never able to find one. Rootless in their whole life of seeking homes, these characters are just like people in modern cities. Communications and rejection are the representation of their homelessness. People are being rejected while rejecting others because of their fear of communication. The one-way flow of emotions is the cause for alienation.

Beyond Postmodernism and Returning to Modernism

The prominence of the present is typically conveyed through the structure of Wong-Kar Wai's narratives. Firstly, the narratives often cover a short time span, hours rather than days or weeks. On some occasions, particularly in *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, narrative time seems identical to real time. Secondly, everything happens at once; the present moment is always packed with events, people, and their thoughts, and there is typically more than one main narrative running in each film. In *Chungking Express* two stories are told consecutively, in *Fallen Angels* two narratives intertwine. *Ashes of Times Redux* superficially has a linear narrative and only one main character, a contract killer. However, his "meta narrative" unfolds stories of other people that often eclipse his own. Again, all the narratives appear to take place at the same time. The impression of narrative abundance is increased through sharp, MTV-style editing, often reflecting images of the same thing seen from many different perspectives. The films also produce an "aural abundance" reminiscent of the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard. The noisy soundtrack includes dialogue or voiceover narration, various city noises produced by cars, planes, and people quarreling in the streets, and

loud music. The sounds perfectly convey the speed and pressure of life in contemporary Hong Kong.

The importance attached to the present moment is also communicated in the difference between what is revealed to the viewers and what is hidden. In traditional action cinema, the spectator knows the present, while the future is hidden from him. The main point of watching the film is to find out what will happen next. In Wong Kar-Wai's films, on the other hand, the future is typically revealed to us at the very beginning, either in the voiceover or visually. The characters themselves seem to know perfectly well their own fate and that of others. Examples include *Ashes of Time Redux*, which starts with the words of the protagonist explaining, "In the years to come I will be given the nickname Malicious West"; *Chungking Express*, in which the main character informs us that "55 hours later, I was in love with this woman"; and *Days of Being Wild*, which begins with the images of a tropical forest identical with that which will be shown at the end of the film, the scene of Yuddi's death. There is also nothing mysterious about the past --it is revealed by the characters with the same sincerity and matter of fact accuracy as the future. Both past and future are closed, sealed, determined. Thus, paradoxically, only the present remains open, an enigma and a chance for adventure. In spite of Wong Kar-Wai's nonchalant attitude to the narrative and in contrast to many postmodern films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), his films generally obey the rule of chronology, containing few flashbacks or flashforwards. Again, we will argue that this reveals his desire to stick to the present.

Moreover, unlike the bulk of postmodern directors such as David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, Derek Jarman, Ridley Scott, and Terry Gilliam, Wong Kar Wai does not instill his films with retro architecture, old cars, or references to forgotten film stars.

To use Fredric Jameson's phrase, he has no "appetite for dead styles and fashions" (1985, pp. 118-125). The contemporary culture he depicts, although often dangerous and dystopian, looks robust and thriving. Its success does not appear to be founded on past achievements, but on the strength of the present. Thus, his characters typically do not ponder what happened to them, they are always prepared to move on and start over again (1985, p. 5) Jameson regards nostalgia as the symptom of the past being taken over by the present, but in our opinion it rather testifies to the strength of the past (however distorted or fake this past may be) in shaping present cultures and societies. Consequently, Wong Kar-Wai's rejection of nostalgia suggests that he does not seek any safe regions of escape from the present; rather he looks it "straight in the eye" in an almost heroic fashion.

Wong Kar-Wai seems to be fascinated with the idea of alternative temporalities; the world for him consists of numerous private microcosms, some of them real, the majority only possible and existing in people's imagination. As Ursula K. Heise notes, the notion of alternative temporalities is central to the narrative organization of postmodern novels, such as those of Italo Calvino and Alain Robbe-Grillet (1997, p. 29). Wong Kar-Wai is also not unique in bringing the idea of parallel, private universes to the cinema; the concept pervades the films of Eric Rohmer such as *Nuit chez Maud* (My Night with Maud, 1969) or *Le rayon vert* (The Green Ray, 1986); the films of Alain Resnais, Richard Linklater's *Smoking/Non Smoking* (1993), and *Slacker*, Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Przypadek* (Blind Chance, 1982) and *Dekalog* (1988); and, to a certain extent, the films of Jean-Luc Godard. However, each of these filmmakers seems to have a different reason to ponder on parallel worlds. Rohmer is interested primarily in the motives and results of human decisions; Resnais reflects on

narrative as a game of combinations and alternatives; Linklater investigates what can be described as an ontology of microcosms; Kieslowski ponders on the tragic dimension of the human condition; Godard uses the realm of the possible mainly as a vehicle to uncover the artificiality and arbitrariness of cinema.

Wong Kar-Wai, on the other hand, draws attention to the unlimited opportunities of people meeting each other and overcoming their solitude, as conveyed at the beginning of *Chungking Express* when He Qiwu says in his inner monologue: "We rub shoulders every day. We might not know each other. But we could be friends some day." Almost the same words are repeated by He Qiwu's namesake, played by the same actor, in *Fallen Angels*. At the same time, the director of *Fallen Angels* notes the gulf between the possibility of numerous encounters and the tragedy of unfulfilled love and friendship, and ultimately of solitude, which he seems to regard as the natural state of human existence. Time is the main reason why people do not meet: they occupy the same space, but in different times. In *Days of Being Wild* Mimi comes to Manila when her lover Yuddi is already on the train, leaving the city; Fai in *Chungking Express* and Wong's agent in *Fallen Angels* always visit their men when they are not there; in *In the Mood For Love* Mrs. Chan goes to Mr. Chow's apartment in Singapore but he is not there, and when he arrives she is already gone. Even relying on knowledge of other people's habits does not help in meeting them, as their habits tend to change. Thus, Chang in *Happy Together* visits the restaurant where he used to sit with his friend Fai, but Fai is already in Taipei, seeing Chang's parents; Charlie in *Fallen Angels* goes to a football match in search of her ex-boyfriend, but on this occasion he is somewhere else. When those who loved each other eventually meet, the impulse by which they sought each other's company has passed.

The structures of Wong Kar-Wai's narratives perfectly render the notion of fragmented identities and the "cultural schizophrenia" of our times by being themselves fragmented, abrupt, cryptic, and ambiguous. Without a rationale the director may introduce a new character, as in *Days of Being Wild*, which finishes with a snapshot of the life of a man whose identity is never revealed. In reality he was meant to be the hero of the second part of a film trilogy that was never produced. Whatever the explanation, the very fact of including a character who is so unconnected to the narrative suggests that Wong Kar-Wai lacks respect for the classic rules of storytelling, favoring a postmodern collage. In a similar, disorienting way, the director introduces new characters in *Chungking Express*, *Ashes of Time Redux*, and *Happy Together*. In common with the anti-psychological cinema of Jean Luc Godard, he avoids explanation of why certain things happen but simply shows that they do happen. Psychology assumes a link between consecutive moments in an individual history. Consequently, rejection of psychology leads to favoring the notion of time as disjointed. As Tony Rayns (1995, p. 48) and Larry Gross (1996, p. 8) note, Wong's rejection of classical narration results in a difficulty in "understanding" his films at the first viewing, a phenomenon that is typical of postmodernism.

To summarize, Wong's characters are always self-contradictive. On one hand, they are longing for the true love and sincere relationship. But on the other hand, they are afraid of being hurt. In this way, they are always in the process of searching, escaping, and rejecting, which finally lead them to the extreme loneliness and tough situation. This is why *Ashes of Time Redux* is the metaphor of the modern experience.

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