

## Chapter One

### Introduction

This thesis aims at reading the poetics of HOU Hsiao-Hsien (Hou Xiaoxian)'s films in terms of an alternative position related to watching.<sup>1</sup> This alternative spectatorship results in the concept of 'train-image.' With the attention to this contingent idea, it demonstrates more precisely what is at stake in Hou's meditative practice on film. The purpose is neither to generalize Hou's poetics nor to denationalize his work, but rather to tease out the aspects of his practice that speak in pertinent ways to the new possibility of image.

Entitling the thesis 'Towards an Alternative Cinematic Poetics: The 'train-image' in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Films,' I attempt to focus on Hou's three films, *Millennium Mambo* (*Ch'ienhis manp'o* 2001), *Cafe Lumiere* (*K'afei shih kuang; Kohi jiko* 2004), and *Three Times* (*Tsuihao te shihkuang* 2006), in order to discuss the issues I bring up above.

The question at the outset can be formulated in this way: What kind of poetics is there in Hou's films? What is its implication for spectatorship? And from this

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will adopt Wade-Giles transliteration system when referring to Chinese names or titles. Nevertheless, when they are mentioned for the first time, another transliteration system, pinyin will be still given in a parenthesis for further reference if necessary.

spectatorship, can we elucidate an alternative relationship between Hou's works and their social context?

### The Previous Commentaries on Hou's Works

To explore the issues above, it would be appropriate to revisit a few key moments in the theorization of Hou's films that have had a significant impact on the way we read Hou's films today.

Hou has been one of the pioneers of Taiwan's New Wave Cinema since the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> This movement is noted for its preference for long takes, telephoto lensing, non-professional actors, temporal ellipsis and the quotidian space. Yet, a more intense engagement with Taiwan's history and identity of this movement, such as in *A City of Sadness* (*Peiching chingshih* 1989), has aroused profound anxieties among critics (Shen 165). The culmination of the criticism surrounding it can be exemplified in the 1991 anthology *Death of the New Cinema* (*Hsing-tien-ying chih si*).<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, those severe criticisms against Hou can be considered as an important exercise of the post-revolutionary cultural critique (Yeh, "Politics and Poetics" 65).

On the other hand, perceptive as these criticisms are, they sometimes may run the risk

<sup>2</sup> The film *In Our Time* (*Guangyin de gushi* 1982) is usually regarded as the rejuvenation of Taiwanese cinema: the New Wave Cinema. There are four filmmakers involved in this project, including Edward Yang, Ke Yi-Zheng, Tao De-Chen, and Zhang Yi.

<sup>3</sup> There have been several responses to the criticism of Hou in *Death of the New Cinema*, such as Yeh Yueh-Yu, "Why can't woman enter history: re-viewing *City of Sadness*" (73-80).

of falling into the category of 'repressive hypothesis' (Chow 1393).<sup>4</sup> That is, the characteristic or the presence of the medium, film may be ignored.

Returning to Hou's aesthetics, we will find that there is one common theoretical approach to it. That is, Hou's long-take style is a manifestation of the Oriental philosophy or poetics (Froden 25-28). This Oriental discourse has indeed offered a comprehensible way to examine Hou's films for foreign or domestic critics, as well as the audience. Yet simultaneously another question may be raised, as in Yeh, 'Is it really that difficult to come to terms with Hou Hsiao-hsien that a hackneyed East v. West needs to be re-enacted?' (Yeh, 'Politics' 69).

Could we then connect Hou's documentary-like films to Andre Bazin's neo-realism? Nevertheless, as many critics assert, there is still some difference between Hou's practice and Bazin's concept of cinema. For instance, Hou's long take, as James Udden observes, is in fact 'more Bazinian' (361). Carefully comparing Hou's films between 1983 and 1993, and other directors of the long-take style, Udden finds that Hou stands out in terms of the percentage of shots containing movements. That is to say, the fact that Hou pushes the static long take further than most other directors makes him more Bazinian. The distinction between Hou and Bazin becomes

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<sup>4</sup> In this hypothesis, critics keep their attention on what is behind the image (going through all hidden ideologies, that is), but ignore the transcultural aspect of it. That is, 'What is on the screen are not people but images,' which 'liberate us from the constraints of literal, bodily identification, while reminding us of the undertheorized relation between economics, on the one hand, and fantasy and identity, on the other' (Chow 1386-95).

more evident when one comes to question if Hou has a penchant for a Bazinian approach toward filmmaking.<sup>5</sup>

The view concerning the distinction between Hou and Bazin is also asserted by both Tony McKibbin and Charles R. Warner. In analyzing *Cafe Lumiere*, McKibbin claims that there is a moral purpose underlying Bazin's ontological ambiguity of reality; while there is none in Hou's mimetic ambiguity of reality (McKibbin, "Situations" 15). That is to say, Hou pushes the level of ambiguity further to a deeper level of impenetrability. Instead of a narrative, the situation or ambience becomes what the spectators ultimately derive from the images. To Warner, Hou does not express an objective time, but a sensuous time; he moves from a recorded quantity to a fermenting quality in time. When studying one of Hou's latest works, *The Three Times*, he finds that "the duration of the shot" counts less than "the duration revealed within and across shots" (Warner, "Smoke" 13).

Additionally, Hou's oeuvre also has undergone several changes, as Yeh divides into three episodes: "the commercial past (1975-1982), the New Cinema (1983-1988), and the international auteur (1989 to the present) (*Taiwan* 136). This "feedback mechanism"<sup>6</sup> also influences the style in his films. A typical example is his static

<sup>5</sup> James Udden also points out that Hou lacks knowledge of film history. For instance, Hou has never read about Bazin's neo-realism (Udden 361).

<sup>6</sup> In her "Politics and Poetics of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Films," Yeh defines this change as one of Hou's poetics. She regards it as a feedback mechanism, by which a director keeps refining his signature style via repetition. (72).

camera, which starts to move in *Good Men, Good Women* (Haonan haonu 1995) (Udden ;This Time; 188 -92). Thus, we can neither pinpoint the cultural specificity of Hou's style nor subordinate it to Western codes. Instead, a more intensive way to examine Hou's works is required. Certainly Hou's films can never be pinned down in terms of some formal and cinematographic characteristics, but as Graeme Turner proclaims, ;the relation between text, reader, and context; should receive more attention (Turner 198).

In this light, I attempt to focus more upon the relation between the spectators and the peculiarity of the film medium in Hou's films. The issue starts from Hou's conceptualization of time in his films, for which, in my view, is a pivotal point throughout Hou's films. In particular, the concept of time in his films becomes more sophisticated in his three later works: *Millennium Mambo* (2001), *Cafe Lumiere* (2004), and *Three Times* (2006), as each title suggests time. In this way, it is thought that Hou's films inspire a new way of thinking about cinematic time as well as its relationship to cinema. In the ensuing discussion, how the idea of ;train-image; is conceptualized in relation to time will be further explained.

The ;Train-Image;

The idea of this term ;train-image; is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's two

distinguished book on cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. In particular, one might propose a close relationship between the formation of time presented in Hou's films with Deleuze's concept of crystal of time mentioned in time-image. The past is not separated from the present, but is tightly connected to and interacts with the present. That is, 'a memory can interrupt the actual present only because memory is real and exists virtually alongside the present' (Colebrook 33). In Deleuzian terms, the present is an actual image whereas the past is a virtual one. Both constitute the so-called 'crystal-image,' by which the past, the present and even the future are dynamically being formed (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 81). Therefore with the variety contained within the formation of time as well as the figures we see in it, the crystal will demonstrate different states. In Hou's case, this also varies from film to film as his style is in a constant change.

However, this paper simultaneously takes as its point of departure from Deleuze's third principle for the direct time-image that 'the erasure of the unity of man and the world, in favour of a break which now leaves us with only a belief in this world' (*Cinema 2* 188). More specifically, his time-image rests decisively on some machinic quality,<sup>7</sup> and 'a series of images freed from the human eye and located observer' (Colebrook 55). That is the reason why 'difference' has been a key point in

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<sup>7</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, life consists of various of machinic connections: the eye connects with light, the brain connects with a language, the mouth connects with a language. With the changing connection, the movement of life undergoes a becoming process, which is 'a machinic becoming' (Colebrook 57).

time-image, which is embodied by irrational cuts or even an absolutely disconnected off-screen space. In this manner, the human eye connects with the eye of the camera to create new perceptions and images ;*beyond the human*.; (Colebrook 57). Time-image becomes more like a metaphysical being of cinema, and an ;*Idea*; of it (Colebrook 52).<sup>8</sup>

On the contrary, humanity, rather than a ;machine-oriented; structure, has been a crucial subject in Hou's films as he himself has also openly admitted.<sup>9</sup> Although there are sometimes irrational intervals in Hou's films, they function less as an autonomous whole than as a part of other sequences. The difference between Hou's images and time-image can be also observed from the distinction between Hou and Ozu, who is regarded as the pioneer of time-image by Deleuze.<sup>10</sup> As a whole, neither the time-image nor the movement-image can pin down Hou's films.

This in-between characteristic of Hou's images echoes his long-term escape from the western codes. It is from this paradoxical element in Hou's works that prompts one to think of the ;train-image,; as a contingent idea to re-examine Hou's films. Using the ;train-image; instead of the image of train is to broaden the conventional way of interpreting the visual motif. Train here is not an image for

<sup>8</sup> As Colebrook suggests, Deleuze takes Immanuel Kant's concept of the Idea throughout his work. The Idea is not fully presented or granted. Instead, ;it is the power for any series to extend itself beyond the actual; (52).

<sup>9</sup> See the interview with Hou by Emmanuel Burdeau in ;The Interview With Hou Hsiao-hsien. ; *Hou Hsiao-hsien*. Trans. Lin Yan-su. Taipei: Chinese Taipei Film Archive, 2000. 79-133.

<sup>10</sup> The difference between their styles will be further elaborated in the Chapter Three.

signification in the plot; rather, the movement of a train may be a starting point for us to re-examine Hou's images. That is the reason why a hyphen is used between the train and the image. But why the train?

The train has been one of the important indicators of modernization. As a long-distance transportation, it allows people and goods to move from one place to another. Due to its remarkable visual embodiment of vehicle movements, the image of the train has stimulated many film critics to employ the 'train-image' as a metaphor to grip the nature of cinema, such as Lynne Kirby's *The Railroad and Silent Cinema*.<sup>11</sup> As Anthony Lane also observed, there are several characteristics shared by train traveler and moviegoer: first, both are collective experiences; secondly, both are closely related to imagination and dream, and thirdly, their journey is always started at a particular time (Lane 1). Moreover, Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema: The Movement-Image* also calls attention to the train as one of the instances to explain the basic quality of cinema—movement. Cinema, as he claims, 'is always in the process of being formed or dissolving through the movement of lines and points taken at any-instant-whatevers of their course' (5). To go further back, one can also be reminded of the Lumiere brothers' train in *L'Arrivée d'un train en Gare* (*The Arrival of a Train at a Station*, 1895) which, startled the audience of the earliest years of

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<sup>11</sup> This book explores the relationship between the development of the early films and that of the railroad. By blending film scholarship, theoretical terms and railroad history, Kirby explains the impact that the railroad and the cinema have had on Western society and modern urban industrial culture.



cinema. Later the films of Buster Keaton or Alfred Hitchcock also work along the same line.<sup>12</sup>

In Taiwan, Hou Hsiao-hsien is another director who frequently inserts the train-image into his movies: *The Green, Green Grass of Home* (*Chjing chjing he pjan tsiao* 1983), *Dust in The Wind* (*Lienlien fengchjen* 1986), *Cafe Lumiere* (2003). More importantly, what makes Hou's train distinctive is that the crisscrossing of the train as a consistent interlude in Hou's films has been associated with Taiwan's process of modernization through a sense of displacement or nostalgia (Hung 141-63). That is, through the train, which is one of the most important means connecting the urban and the rural, the center and the periphery, or the past and the present are incessantly converging and diverging. It is in this intersection of the old and the new through the movement of the train that the modern history of Taiwan is visually crystallized, and at the same time the audience are invited to experience the affective dimension with respect to history, including displacement and nostalgia.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in terms of both its metaphorical aspect and historical context, the train is a key point one might use in order to read Hou's films from an alternative angle. It is

<sup>12</sup> Both have directed a series of films featuring the motif of train. They are such as Buster Keaton's *The General* (1927) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951).

<sup>13</sup> In Taiwan's history, the encounter of the train and the cinema has an allegorically profound implication. According to *The Chronicle of Taiwan Cinema 1898-2000*, a Japanese businessman and a motion-picture projector brought about ten French films to Taiwan in 1900. Interestingly, it was in the same year that the Japanese government's transport service by an electricity-powered train between Tainan and Kaohsiung was launched (Huang 121).

also significant that the three essential elements of cinema; light, rhythm, and time; are correspondent with those involved in the movement of a train. Additionally, the relationship between people plays a crucial role both in terms of Hou's cinema and of taking a train. Seeing Hou's films can be likened to traveling on a train, instead of standing outside a moving train. The images in front of the viewers are like the moving sceneries viewed out of the window. However, what is important is not the scenery, but the relationship between the reflection on the window panes and the outside scenery. In other words, the relation between human activity and the environment is more important than the dialogues or the events in the film. A more active spectatorship is thus required when viewing Hou's films, as critics have proposed (Guest 29, Yeh 69, Shen 200).

With these overarching concerns in mind, Hou's three latest films, *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere*, and *Three Times* will be investigated. As each title suggests, 'time' plays an important role and yet, because of the movement in the images, the time shifts not only in a linear fashion but more importantly and in many cases in a non-linear one. In this sense, the 'time' does not mean just time, but includes also space and memory contained within time. This broadened meaning of time corresponds much more to the Chinese word: Shih-Kuang (時光). By means of the interaction of these three elements; time,

space, and memory; throughout the three films, different formations of time are singled out, whereby it is hoped an alternative way to approach Hou's films would be carved out. Furthermore, unlike his Taiwan Trilogy – *A City of Sadness*, *The Puppetmaster* (*Hsimeng jensheng*) and *Good Men, and Good Women*, which are mainly set in the past; these films deal more with contemporary subject matters. The relationship between actual reality and cinematic reality thus becomes more subtle. It is in this tricky relation that we find out what lurks more behind the techniques Hou utilizes in his films.

#### The Following Chapters

The train, as a major motif in most of Hou's films, has been a symbol of modernity and industrialization. Additionally, this study argues that train traveling can be a major line concerned with retracing how filmic reality, time, aesthetic have underlain Hou's films. In this way, I hope there will be new models or ways to impel the discovery of new viewing position in Hou's films.

In the second chapter 'The Route of the Train: The Cinematic Time,' an attempt is made to describe different formulation of time in Hou's three latest films. Time has been one of the crucial subjects in them. It is no exception to the three films as each film title suggests. However, as changeable as Hou's filmmaking practice is,

the three films present a more sophisticated relation of the present to the past than that in his previous films. Hou's well-known nostalgia, in this sense, is not simply a retraced root, but a multiple-developed route.

Chapter three is entitled 'The Aural Image: Retracing the Spectatorship in Hou's Films.' It will be argued that neither Deleuze's 'time-image' nor Bazin's neo-realism can fully explain the poetics in Hou's films. The deeper aspect of Hou's cinematic time will be explored, by which another kind of montage will be developed, which is aura montage. Contrary to Benjamin's theorization of it, the aura here refers to a specific context, such as a situation in which the characters behave and act. It is in particular closely related to the lighting in Hou's three films.

In the fourth chapter, which is 'The Silent Rhythm of the 'Train-Image'; the relation of Hou's films and the society and history in Taiwan is addressed. However, rather than focusing merely on the individual stories narrated in the films, an attempt is also made to elucidate a more complex relationship between the medium and the filmmaker. By the concept of 'internal rhythm' and 'external rhythm,' we see an elusive rhythm among the film, the filmmaker and the society. Additionally, we also see that the singular experience is concealed / unconcealed by the medium as film, as well as the filmmaker.

Finally, in chapter five, my thesis is concluded by studying the relationship

between the three chapters. The 'train-image' is the key idea throughout the discussion. If 'Hou's films can stimulate us to rediscover cinema,' then what kind of images does he produce in his films? (Hasumi 62). Combining the characteristics of a moving train and those of watching a film, an attempt is made to recuperate the components in the spectators' relation to Hou's films, and see how far the concept of 'train-image' can bring us to explore other possibilities associated with watching a film.



## Chapter Two

### The Route of the Train: The Cinematic Time

In this chapter, I aim to study the way the time frames are presented in Hou's work. By looking into the diegetic and non-diegetic space in the three films—*Millennium Mambo* (2001), *Cafe Lumiere* (2004) and *Three Times* (2006), we will see how the past, the present and the future are revealed in the form of a train trip.

As their film titles suggest, time is a crucial element of the three films, not to mention Hou's career. His films often bring us back to the rural space in the past, some memorable childhood or a period of difficult time in history. A strong sense of nostalgia often arises from his works. From personal memory to historical events, Hou keeps searching for a native element through different materials, as witness *The Boys From Fengkuai* (Fengguili laideren 1983), *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (Tongnian Wangshi 1985), and his Taiwan trilogy, *A City of Sadness* (1989), *The Puppetmaster* (Xi men rensheng 1993) and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995).<sup>14</sup> Then if the past is the root that Hou's films have developed from, how does this root play its role in Hou's three latest films, *Millennium Mambo* (2001), *Cafe Lumiere* (2004) and *Three Times* (2006)? In other words, what is the route that is built in the films for us to trace back to the root? As they are set mostly in contemporary urban life, the relation

<sup>14</sup> Hou also once said that he liked older things, which have had passed through time (Hou, Interview).

of the present to the past and the future is worth a careful discussion.<sup>15</sup> The issue here concerns not only the narrative, but also the medium, which is cinema. .

Returning to the birth of cinema, we find that cinema presents the ability to represent motion, the contingent and temporal duration faithfully. One of the earlier film theorists, Rudolf Arnheim states that cinema presents the ability of both recording and giving performances (268-77). That is, cinema sways between two styles: that of Lumiere and that of Melies. In any cases, film, this ;time-based media; helps us to reconceptualize time and its representability consistently (Doane 4). Hou; three recent films especially inspire us to rethink the temporality in modernity. This relation of cinema to time is further elaborated by Gilles Deleuze. By further elucidating Henri Bergson; philosophy about time, Deleuze asserts that time is outside us and that we are in it rather than it in us. That is, ;time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we live, and change; (*Cinema 2* 82). He then classifies the images of such filmmakers as Carl Theodore Dreyer and Michelangelo Antonioni as crystal-images. We live and move in time. Time-image is thus an image that subordinates itself to thought.<sup>16</sup> Moreover,

Deleuze points out that the past in cinema is like the reflection of the present in a

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<sup>15</sup> Except the first two parts in *Three Times*, the stories of the three films are set in the contemporary world.

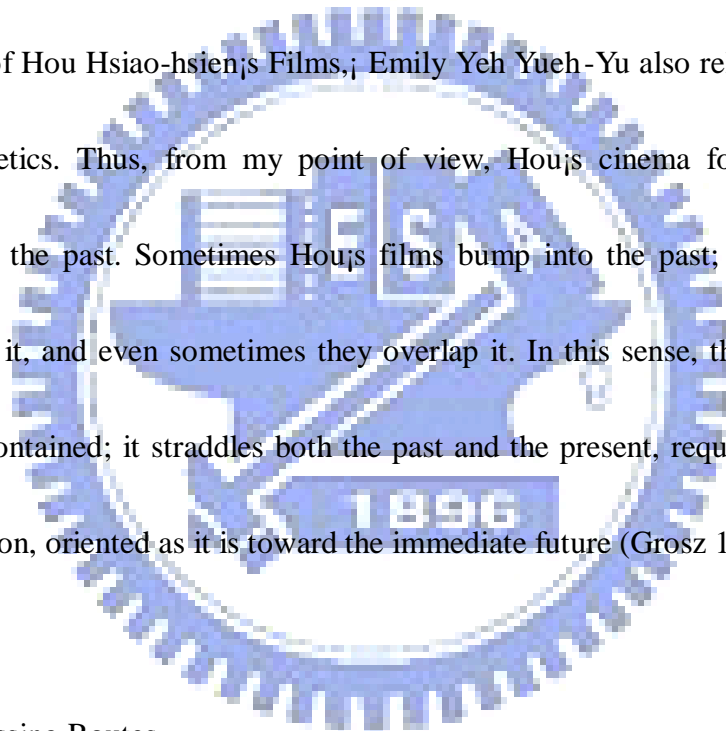
<sup>16</sup> In fact, Deleuze posits two kinds of or two dimensions of images: one is movement-image, and the other is time-image. The former refers to early classic cinema, which let us ;see movement itself or mobile sections.; As for the latter, it represents the images in modern cinema, which ;are no longer connected to form logical sequences; by the use of irrational cuts we are given an image of time itself;(Colebrook 54).

mirror. The past and the present represent the virtual and the actual aspect of our life respectively. Time thereby keeps splitting itself in two at any moment in two heterogeneous directions: one of which launches into the future, while the other falls back into the past. Whereas the actual is always objective, the virtual is subjective (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 81-91).

In other words, the crystal-time involves a double movement; the present keeps moving toward the future while preserving all the past. The distinction between the present (the actual) and the past (the virtual) becomes indiscernible. Furthermore, as Deleuze asserts, a new reality will come out of this indiscernibility. Against the usual claim of the succession of the past by the present, this leads to the simultaneity of the past and present. This postulate, in my view, is embraced by Hou's films, especially by his sense of nostalgia. To retrace the past does not mean a sentimental longing for it, but instead a sensitive coexistence with it. If we compare Hou's cinema to a train, the route, along which Hou's films move, is not to the past but along the past. That is, the past exists in a state of latency. Moreover, with the variety of the formation of time and the figures we see in it, there will be different states of the crystal. For instance, the German director, Max Ophüls's images are perfect crystals, whereas the French director, Jean Renoir's are always cracked (*Cinema 2* 89). In Hou's case, it is indeed this 'time-crystal' that is not only distinct from others; but



also varied from film to film. Examining Hou's post-1995 work, we can find a frequently moving camera after *Good Men, Good Woman*.<sup>17</sup> This sudden change marks a remarkable departure from Hou's previous films. Such a sudden change is ascribed by James Udden to one of the Taiwanese temperaments—the streak of adaptability and flexibility (This Time; 200). In other words, rather than a long-shot aesthetic, this change turns to be Hou's new signature style. In fact, in her *Politics and Poetics of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Films*, Emily Yeh Yueh-Yu also relates this change to Hou's poetics. Thus, from my point of view, Hou's cinema forms a different relation with the past. Sometimes Hou's films bump into the past; sometimes they parallel with it, and even sometimes they overlap it. In this sense, the present is not purely self-contained; it straddles both the past and the present, requiring the past as its precondition, oriented as it is toward the immediate future (Grosz 121).



### The Crisscrossing Routes

According to Hou Hsiao-hsien, *Millenium Mambo* is the modern vision of *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998) (Berry 260). Both films depict the group of people who lead the fashion of their era. In *Millenium Mambo*, there are two major temporal lines as represented by the images and the voice-over. The images record the past life of

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<sup>17</sup> According to Udden's later finding, the camera movements in *Good Men, Good Woman* amounts to 72%.

the female role Vicky in 2001, while the voice-over is Vicky in the future, 2010. In the film, we look into the intricate relation of Vicky to her ex-boyfriend Hau-hau and her close friend Jack. The present tense in *Millenium Mambo* is hence made strange by the voice-over that looks back from ten years in the future. With the nonlinear narrative and montage, the past and the present repeatedly interfere in, and cut into each other, both being even extended to the future.

In the opening scene, what comes into view first is a row of lights hanging on the top of a flyover. Then with a hand-held shot, the camera gradually descends to the Vicky's back, who is walking and smoking across the crossover. With the beat-driven music and the blue hue, the scene shows an imaginary and a bizarre feeling. Her looking back sometimes seems to be a gesture inducing the viewers to enter another world, where fantasy intertwines with memory. On the other hand, with sudden jump cuts in the following scenes, there appear several entrances that bring the viewers to different moments of her life. A strange nomadism is thus imposed upon Vicky, whose image crosses ages and circumstances. This floating characteristic is not only apparent through the diegetic space but through the non-diegetic as well, trafficking between the voice-over and the camera movement.

Typical is the scene in which Vicky visits the two brothers in Yubari in the middle of the film. It is an out-of-sequence jumble of quick cuts spliced with earlier

development of the story. According to the chronological development of the story, the visit paid to the friends in Japan is supposed to be presented near the end of the plot. However, it is divided into two parts placed in the middle and the last part of the film. This editing makes the middle part of the film – an interlude; imaginary as well as abstract. Moreover, with the sound-bridge (a song performed by the Taiwanese singer LIN Qiang), this dreamlike atmosphere lingers until Vicky opens the door of her apartment in Taipei.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in terms of the chronological development of the storyline, the present and the future at this moment are intertwined with each other. Like the door she opens, *Millenium Mambo* separates but also fuses different time frames simultaneously.

Sometimes the past surfaces in the present like the old movie posters hung above the obsolete mining town Yubari in Japan. What are on those posters are some distinguished Japanese and American actors in the past, such as Chaplin. The audience hence moves among the present, the past and the future. In other words, this camera, as the leading role's eye, is not centered in the present, but roves around different tenses. Sometimes we may wonder if the protagonist is in her fantasy due to a non-linear narration. Sometimes, the voice-over and the images are even not correspondent with each other. What the voice-over says is before what happens in the

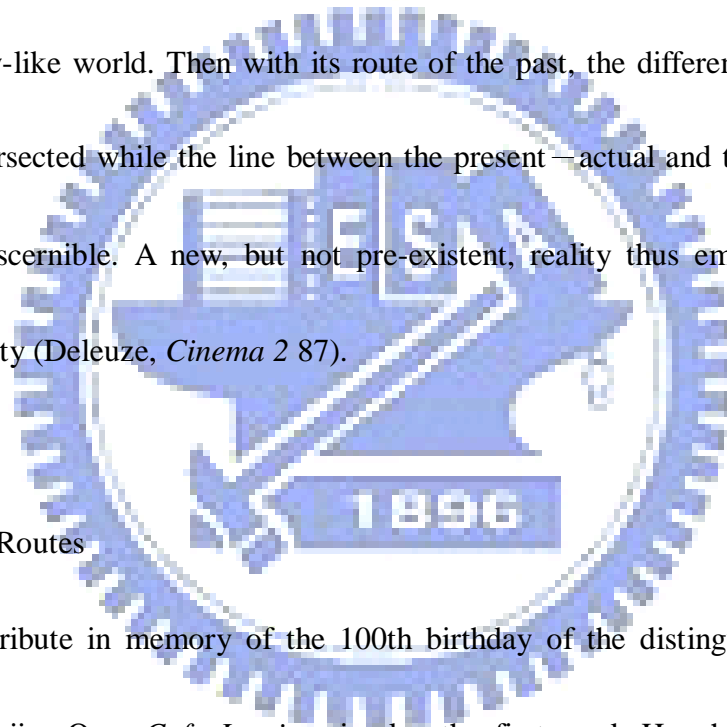
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<sup>18</sup> When a Chinese name appears for the first time, the name will be given in pinyin. If there is any English name, I will use his (her) English alias.

frame, and sometimes vice versa. In other words, the spectators are informed about the development beforehand, while sometimes they are left confused by the delay of the voice-over. One example is when the voice-over narrates the moment when Vicky and Hau-hau fall in love with each other, and the camera shows a fierce quarrel between them. Another is when the voice-over is talking about a street lined up with old movie boards in Yubari, and the image in the frame is a grandmother cooking oden. Time, at this moment, is suspended while space becomes fluid. Because of this fluid space, Vicky turns to be a name wandering among different tenses: the present, the progressive, the past and the future. The discordance between narration and images also makes her split between separated into the voice-over, the camera, and the leading actress in the film. The first-person perspective grows into an indefinite one. ;I; thus becomes a plural one, that is, the ;I;s; rather than a singular or a unified ;I.; This decentered ;I; is like the role of ;I; in the poetic mode of literature. The site where ;I; is situated is also the one ;where all other I;s can enter and cut cross one another; (Trinh, ;Film; 122).

Another instance of these intertwining temporal frames is the message in the cell phone from Jack. Near the end of film are the shots of Vicky;s trip to the town Yubari. We can hear a message from Jack;s voice flowing into the frame. From this message, Vicky gets the implication that Jack wants her to meet him in Japan.

Nevertheless Vicky never finds out where he is in Japan. Here the past (Jack's voice) does not only imply an intrusion into the present (the image), but a force defining the action in the present (Vicky's visit to Japan). Ultimately, *Millenium Mambo* is, in fact, like the train near the end of the film. Sometimes the train passes the window panes of a modern building, which resembles the present tense; sometimes it passes through the reflection of the blue screen of a TV set on the window, which is like the future, an imaginary-like world. Then with its route of the past, the different layers of time are then intersected while the line between the present—actual and the past—virtual become indiscernible. A new, but not pre-existent, reality thus emerges from this indiscernibility (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 87).



#### The Parallel Routes

As a tribute in memory of the 100th birthday of the distinguished Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu, *Cafe Lumiere* is also the first work Hou has directed in a foreign country. It is about a young Japanese woman Yoko (Yo Hitoto), who often travels between Taiwan and Japan for work. In the film, she returns to Japan to do research on a Taiwan-born composer, Jiang Wen-ye. Meanwhile, she has been pregnant for three months by her Taiwanese boyfriend. This event subtly changes the relationship between her parents and her and her intimate friend Hajime (Tadanobu

Asano). The past and the present turn into a parallel relationship in terms of either the aesthetic form or its diegetic content. In terms of aesthetic form, it is specifically shown by the comparison between Ozu's style and that of Hou's. The opening scene exemplifies this point of view.

The first shot shows an old-colored Shochiku Mount Fuji logo, which is suggestive of Ozu's four films made for Shochiku: *Equinox Flower* (1958), *Good Morning* (1959), *Late Morning* (1960), and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962). Following this shot, a train rumbles from the left to the right from a low-angle shot, and the scene ends with a slow fade-out. It specifically resembles the train in Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953). Daily life is also what both directors prefer to shoot in their films. Everything is ordinary and regular, including death. This staple is significant in several scenes in *Cafe Lumiere* when the heroine Yoko accompanies her parents to sweep their ancestors' tomb on the Tomb Sweeping Day, and when her father attends his colleague's funeral. In these scenes, death is more like an inevitable and normal interlude in life instead of an unpredictable and sorrowful casualty. Moreover, the tension between parents and their children (especially between the father and his daughter) is another staple in both Ozu's films and Hou's *Cafe Lumiere*. In fact, much similarity has been pointed out between two film makers (Cheshire 56-63). This work, as homage to Ozu, shares more characteristics with those in Ozu's films. For instance,

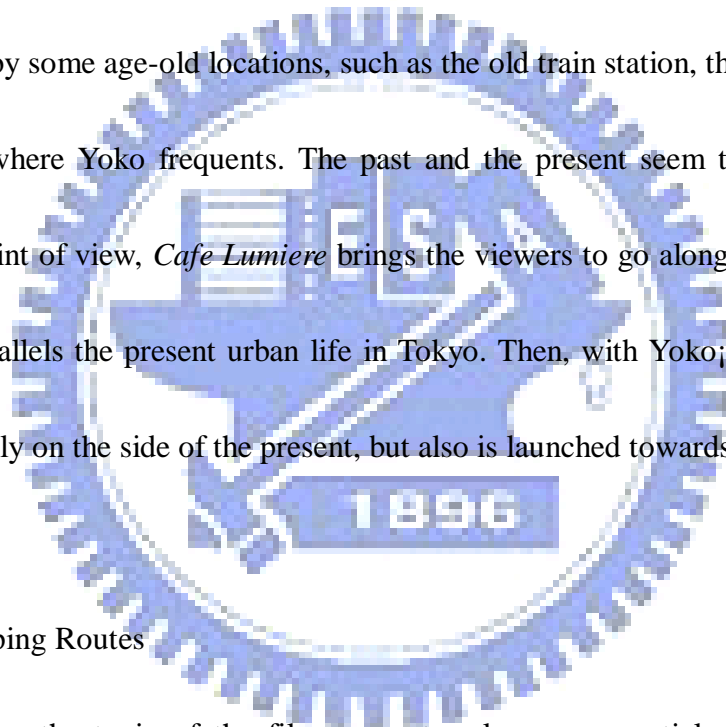
both directors lessen dramatic effect by focusing on quotidian space and daily rituals. Adopting minimalist approach, they push the representation of daily life on film to the extreme. This minimalism includes the decrease of camera movements, and complex editing or storytelling. Besides, silent scenes or empty scenes<sup>19</sup> are often the characteristics in their films. Different from most modern films, they keep a distance between the camera and the characters to form the so called ;objective; shots.

In terms of the storyline, there are two major parallel temporal lines that tell the relation of Yoko and the Taiwanese musician, JIANG Wen-Ye, and that of Japan to Taiwan. In the first storyline, Yoko is researching the life of the mid-20th century composer Jiang Wen-ye. Although for several times Yoko fails to recapture his trace, he is ever present in the film via his piano work on the soundtrack. For instance, when Yoko and Hajime fail to find the cafe where Jiang used to frequent, the music composed by him slowly seeps into the image. Or when Yoko looks at those old photos of him and his ex-wife, his music again flows out. Besides the two scenes, his music also appears on other occasions, such as when Yoko visits an old train station in her hometown or when she is in an old-fashioned cafe. Hence, although his traces disappear, he is like an invisible character going in and out of the frame through the soundtrack. Yoko, as a modern flaneur, follows the route Jiang initiated in the past.

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<sup>19</sup> ;Empty; scenes are not totally empty, but with no human characters within.

The parallel between the past and the present is also symbolized early on by the birthday gift Yoko gives to Hajime on her return from Taiwan; the pocket watch commemorating the 116th anniversary of the establishment of Taiwan Railway System. Besides the subtle connection between the two characters, the watch implicitly builds up the juxtaposition between Taiwan and Japan, the past and the present. Despite that the story is set in modern Japan, the film is imbued with a sense of nostalgia by some age-old locations, such as the old train station, the old bookstore, or the cafe where Yoko frequents. The past and the present seem to be coexistent. From this point of view, *Cafe Lumiere* brings the viewers to go along the route of the past, and parallels the present urban life in Tokyo. Then, with Yoko's pregnancy, the past is not only on the side of the present, but also is launched towards the future.



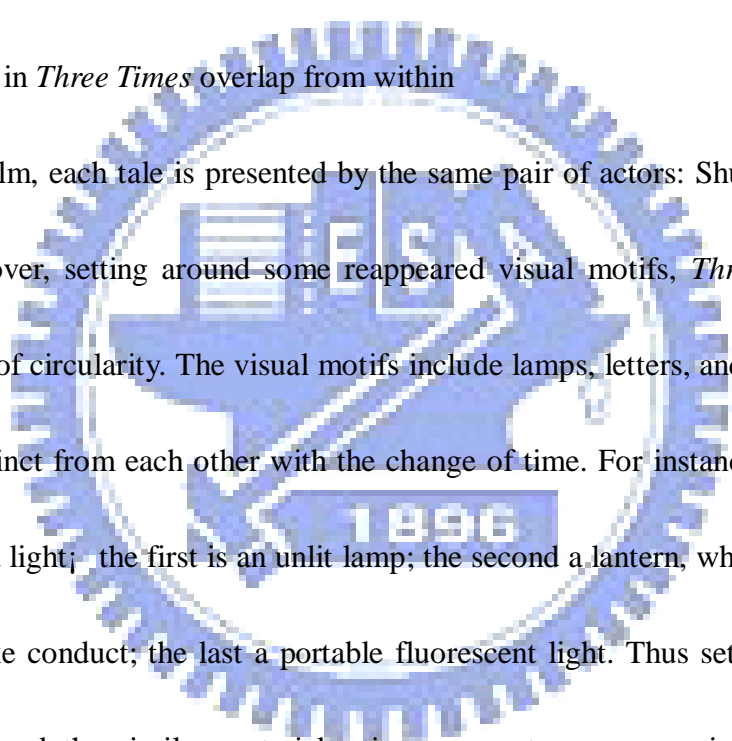
### The Overlapping Routes

Time, as the topic of the film suggests, plays an essential role in the film. Rather than the duration, the sensation plays a crucial role. That is, it moves from a recorded quantity to a fermenting quality in time.<sup>20</sup> As usual, *Three Times* is saturated with temporal ellipsis and loose causality. More interestingly, each segment in the film also partially casts a retrospective gaze at Hou's earlier works since the

<sup>20</sup> Different from Bergson's idea of it, duration here refers to the common definition, that is, an amount of time. Yet in place of this reduced-to-numbers, Bergson attaches the concept of duration to quality and multiplicity. (Moore 36).



mid-1980s. The first segment, 'A Time for Love,' echoes *Dust in the Wind* (1986) due to its interplay of sequence shots and elliptical edits; part two, 'A Time for Freedom,' resembles *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998) with its roving camera and closer lens, and part three, 'A Time for Youth,' returns to *Millennium Mambo* (2001), an overwhelming depiction of the modern youth in Taiwan. In addition to the resonant relation between each segment and Hou's previous work, I would also propose that the segments in *Three Times* overlap from within

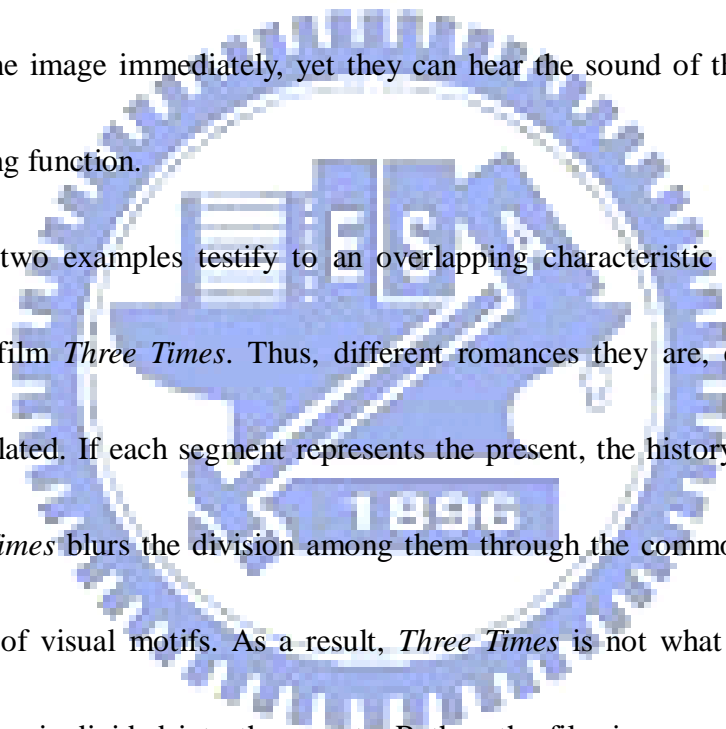


In the film, each tale is presented by the same pair of actors: Shu Qi and Chang Chen. Moreover, setting around some reappeared visual motifs, *Three Times* has a strong sense of circularity. The visual motifs include lamps, letters, and songs, each of which is distinct from each other with the change of time. For instance, each section begins with a light; the first is an unlit lamp; the second a lantern, which is always lit in a ritual-like conduct; the last a portable fluorescent light. Thus setting around the same actors and the similar materials, time seems to cease moving, though each segment is set in Taiwan at different points of time in the past 100 years.

The correlation between different temporal lies is pushed further by the soundtrack during the slow fade-ins and fade-outs among the segments. One example is the song 'Rain and Tears' in the first segment 'A Time for Love,' which does not end until the beginning of the second one. What is more interesting is that the music

does not end as soon as the second section begins. Instead, the song lasts for a few more minutes, even though the image starts to show a different background at a different age. Another instance is the interval between the middle part ;A Time for Freedom; and the last one ;A Time for Youth.; Similarly, there is soundtrack accompanying the black fade-out and fade-in. What is different this time is that the sound is from the opening scene of the following section. Hence although the viewers cannot see the image immediately, yet they can hear the sound of the highway as a foreshadowing function.

These two examples testify to an overlapping characteristic of the temporal lines in the film *Three Times*. Thus, different romances they are, each of them is closely correlated. If each segment represents the present, the history and the future, then *Three Times* blurs the division among them through the common subject, love, and a series of visual motifs. As a result, *Three Times* is not what its English title suggests; time is divided into three parts. Rather, the film is more connected to the implication of its Chinese title *Zui hao de shi guang*; a period of time which has been the best. What is emphasized is the corresponding sensation registered by the three romances instead of the causality and the time span among them. In this manner, the three stories turn to exist in a topological space.



Like the sea in the repetitive ferry scene<sup>21</sup> in *A Time for Love*, the pressure and the tension from time (the appearance of the sea) changes with different events (ferries) while staying as a whole. And it is the daily routines in the life, such as mopping the pool table, opening and closing the doors, and eating the meals that enhance the sense of overlapping time.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have studied both the diegetic and non-diegetic space in three films, *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere*, and *Three Times*, to explore how cinematic time is developed. From the films, we find that Hou's nostalgia is not simply a root. Instead, the root may have become a route, which grows into different shapes. More specifically, the root grows out of some mobile routes of cinematic time. Hou's version of time is thus a more dynamic tension between the transient, real-time unfolding of the moment and its passage into the retroactive temporalities of memory. This is especially significant in the three films, crisscrossing, paralleling or overlapping.

However, in any case, there is indiscernibility between the past, the present, and the future. Like the old movie posters near the end of *Millennium Mambo*, the three

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<sup>21</sup> The ferry scene appears twice in the first segment. Each implies the situation of Chen (Chang Chen) and May (Shu Qi) missing one another.

films incessantly restages the present while being framed as the past through the cinematographical medium. This is what Pier Paolo Pasolini discovers: the present is transformed into past by virtue of montage, but this past still appears as present by virtue of the nature of the image; (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 36).



## Chapter Three

### The Aural Image: Retracing the Spectatorship in Hou's Films

In this chapter, I will inquire further how the cinematic time discussed before determines the structure and the style of Hou's films. Through this research, I hope to redefine the spectatorship in his films. The *aura montage* will be the focus of the following discussion, which, in my view, is a crucial element for Hou to formulate his way of filmmaking.

As my earlier treatment in the preceding expose, I have discussed how cinematic time is presented in Hou's films in terms of Deleuze's crystals of time. Based on the indiscernibility of the past and the present; the real and the imaginary, the time-image registers another way of editing. Rather than integration and differentiation in the classical image, the time-image is achieved through the incommensurability of space and time reasserted in every irrational interval; (Rodowick 179). The direct image of time thus becomes the obliteration of a whole or of a totalization of images, in favor of an outside which is inserted between them; the erasure of the internal monologue as the whole of the film, in favor of a free indirect discourse and vision; the erasure of the unity of man and the world; (Deleuze, *Time Image* 187-88).

However, having a close look at the principals defining the direct time-image, one may find out the subtle distinction between the time-image and Hou's cinema. First, what interests Hou more is the human element that closely correlates to the world in which human live.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, there is no absolutely irrational cut between the space and the time, or between 'the visual image and the sound image' (Deleuze, *Time Image* 278). Instead, Hou's works might appear to be a return to a more primitive kind of cinema, which depends less on a sophisticated structure or a transcendental form of time. The difference between Deleuze's direct time-image and Hou's films is also observed in the one between Hou's style and one of Yasujiro Ozu's cinema, one of the instances of Deleuze's time-image.

Much similarity between the two directors has been compared, particularly when both pay attention to the placid rhythm in the daily life. However, there is still some differences between them in terms of the way they make films. First, Hou stresses less the detail of the composition than the actors or actresses in the film. Seldom instructing the actors, he endows the actors much freedom to act in a way of portraying a documentary-like reality. He often develops his films mainly based on the situation of the local shutting. For example, the actors are often endowed with the freedom to eat or talk as they are in the daily life.

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<sup>22</sup> In an interview after he shot *Cafe Lumiere*, Hou said 'the things about humanity are what I like the most' (Hou 'Interviews').

Alternatively, Ozu tends to be more formalistic by focusing on the delicate composition of each frame, or even each action. By adopting a Bresson-like method, Ozu shows his preference for repetitious rehearsals and consistent instructions.<sup>23</sup> His insistence on the right composition and action ultimately achieves ‘an unvarying structure of the film itself’ (Richie 185). This characteristic also sets a contrast to Hou’s alternating structure from one film to another as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Thus, it is necessary for us to retrace the elements that contribute to the main characteristics in Hou’s films. For most people, being sedate is a common signature of Hou’s images (McKibbin, ‘Situations’ 12). ‘Emptiness,’ ‘anti-montage,’ ‘being indirect,’ and ‘essentially Chinese’ are the common terms to describe Hou’s distinction from the norms of Western cinema (Yeh 68). For instance, Jean-Michel Froden attributes Hou’s ‘anti-montage’ to the transcendence of Chinese philosophy, and further asserts that Hou’s works belong to an earlier type of cinema—the works by European filmmakers during 1920s and 1930s, rather than the new wave of cinema in French, the U.S., Italy, or Japan during 1950s (25-28). In other words, instead of following the well-developed tradition in the modern cinema, Hou creates a new Eastern aesthetic of film, in which montage does not exist. This statement indeed

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<sup>23</sup> However, the result, as Donald Richie noted, differs from Robert Bresson’s, who seeks to withdraw the toneless enactment from the actors, whereas Ozu imbues his actors with the characteristics of the characters (Richie 146)

points out the fact that Hou often eludes the codes of western cinema. Nevertheless, this point of view inevitably implies a dichotomy of cultural thinking (East vs. West). Yeh thus poses the question: 'is it really difficult to come to terms with Hou Hsiao-hsien that a hackneyed East v. West needs to be enacted?' (69)

Could then we relate Hou's films to Andre Bazin's fact-image to avoid the dichotomy between the East and the West? As a neo-realism film critic, Bazin has successfully merged together the two concepts; photogenic and the nature to assert the ambiguity and autonomy of images in his thinking. The long take, in Bazin's view, can take us closer to the world, the documentary-like reality. Consequently, instead of montage and editing, mise en scene is a crucial part in the film, and the homogeneity of space is the primary goal a film should achieve. However, Hou's long takes, as James Udden further observes, are in fact 'more Bazinian' <sup>24</sup> (361). Tony McKibbin also contends that the impenetrability in Hou's films goes deeper than Bazin's epistemological purpose (McKibbin, 'Situations' 14). <sup>25</sup> Similar criticisms about the distinction between Hou and Bazin also have been observed by other critics (Shen 200-221; Warner 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' 8).

In this respect, I attempt to adopt an alternative perspective to analyze Hou's films. Based on the cinematic time discussed in the previous chapter, I will argue that

<sup>24</sup> James Udden also points out Hou's lack of film-historical knowledge (361).

<sup>25</sup> Hou also admits that the aura and relation among people has been always his interest (Li 82).



Hou's editing reveals another sort of montage instead of wiping it out. What the montage relies on is not Lev Kuleshov's "inter-relationship of shots" that stresses the assembly of fragments (340). Nor should Hou's editing technique be subordinate to Sergei Eisenstein's dialogical synthesis (3-37). Like a "montage obtus," it is the internal difference in each frame that results in Hou's montage (Huang 11).<sup>26</sup> In other words, the rhythm in his films is not caused from the difference between the frames, but from the subtle shifting cues in the frames. This technique instills a stronger sense of sliding than separating to the relationship between the frames. The air-like connectedness, as I would call, is an aura montage.

According to OED, we will find the various meanings of aura as "air," "smelling," and "sensation," happen to reflect what is stressed each time in his films (see the entry "Aura"). Different from Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura, the aura here is related to a specific context as a situation in which the characters behave and act.<sup>27</sup> It results from Hou's impromptu way of directing, and the negotiation between the personality of the characters and that of the actors in reality.<sup>28</sup> This impromptu

<sup>26</sup> Derived from Roland Barthes' concept of "sens obtus," montage obtus, as Huang Jian-Hong asserts, is formed through the internal transformation of the elements in each scene. The elements can be the variegated lighting scheme, the way the sound changes in a frame, or the relationship between the onscreen and the offscreen space (Huang 8-19).

<sup>27</sup> For Benjamin, the aura refers to a sort of ceremonial phenomenon surrounding the works of fine arts. Film, to him, is a subversive tool to dispel such kind of cult produced by the result of the politicization of aesthetic. Film can overcome the distance that distinguishes the "high art" from the lower art (Benjamin 251-83). In fact, according to Siegfried J. Schmidt, the theological concept of "aureole" rather than the medical concept of the aura would be closer to Benjamin's purpose (83).

<sup>28</sup> In an interview, Hou said that he usually designed a situation based on the personality of the actor and that of the role he was going to play. From this situation, he achieved the effect of the drama he wanted (Hou, "Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Film Career" 78).

directing makes the aural montage achieve a documentary-like effect.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, in terms of the way Hou edits, the films are paradoxically subjective. Thus, the realistic effect, in my view, is not built upon the objective narration, but upon the air-like sensation freely floating between the viewers and the films. Hou's films are not representations of another world anymore.<sup>30</sup> Rather, they establish a parallel aura between the worlds inside and outside of the film.

In the following discussion, I would like to study the equal, multiple interactions of diverse presences on film (Trinh 198). In particular, I will focus my study on one of the transforming elements in a frame, that is, the play of light, which is also one of the noted characteristics in Hou's films. As Kent Jones observes, almost every shot Hou has ever filmed has a ravishing arrangement of light shapes, little corners and crooks of color or darkness that the eye tunnels in defined spaces (Cinema 13). In particular, the lighting in the three films plays a crucial role in the three films in terms of the relation of scenes to the temporal frames within.

### The Translucent Aura

<sup>29</sup> No doubt Hou's impromptu way of directing also results largely from the compromise between Hou's aesthetic thinking and the limit of the resources in Taiwan film industry. For example, because the actor Tony Leung could not speak Minnan, Hou made him a deaf-mute in *City of Sadness* (Chen 89).

<sup>30</sup> According to Tadanobu Asano (who plays the second-hand bookstore owner Hajime), none of the footage shot in Hokkaido was used, though it took one-week shooting. Moreover, Hou edited *Cafe Lumiere* for three times (Tadanobu Asano).

Like *Goodbye South, Goodbye*(1996), *Millenium Mambo* applies a lot of unstable lighting to depict the contemporary society in Taiwan. And like *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998), it is mostly shot in the interior space. Yet unlike his previous works, *Millenium Mambo* shows a strong sense of contradiction through its nonlinear narration, the split between the voice-over and the frames, and the complicated temporal lines as discussed. The interaction between the characters and the world becomes vague. The vague interaction results in a translucent aural montage. The correlation among different presences on film becomes thus abstract and dreamy. Throughout the film, the dreamy aura is mostly obvious in its dim lighting.

First of all, the color of the opening scene enhances a dreamy atmosphere by the blue hue and the handheld shot. After the opening scene, the title *Millennium Mambo* shows up, its English and Chinese versions displayed respectively in green and blue neon light. The two contrasting primary colors foreshadow a sense of contradiction in the film. Besides, what the two cool colors suggest also aloofness and tranquility; as is implied by the mood throughout the film. The aloof aura keeps flowing from the beginning to the end, even when the settings are mostly in pubs. The tranquility particularly achieves its climax when Vicky arrives at Hokkaido in winter. The lighting becomes cooler; pale white encapsulated by the snow and the street light.

Moreover, owing to the high-contrast lighting and vague focus, many visual elements in the frame become obscure. This overexposure technique further suggests the rootless and aimless young people nowadays. Besides, the camera movement makes the camera like an indifferent and autonomous onlooker. What is in the focus is not the central action, but the pervasive atmosphere around it. Typical is the scene in which Vicky is making love with Hau-hau in a small hotel. After a jump cut from a fighting scene, a lovemaking scene is presented to the viewers with a blue filter. Then the camera slowly moves to the mirror attached to the ceiling. The mirror reflects several yellow blinking neon bulbs and the lovemaking scene under it. Rather than giving forth sexual fantasies, the scene registers a sense of detachment between the frame and the characters.

This detached and straying camera in the film seems to constitute an offshoot of the protagonist's state of mind. The camera floats into and out of different temporal spaces without obvious intervals, like the movement of smoke. One example to exemplify this smoky continuity is between the interlude of Vicky's visit to Japan, and Vicky's return from work to the apartment. What bridges the interlude and Vicky's life in Taipei is a door in Taipei. With similar lighting in the two different settings (pale white), one may misrecognize the next scene as Japan, though the setting has been changed. It is the continuous aura that reconciles the abrupt feeling brought by

the irrational cutting. Another example of the succession in aura is the blue hue. Throughout *Millennium Mambo*, the frames are often imbued with blue, such as the opening scene (Vicky walking in a breezeway) and the monitor scene (the color of the monitor screen). A cold and aloof mood thus underlies the whole film.

Nevertheless, there are still some subtle shifts of tone in *Millennium Mambo*. The shifting of tone is exemplified by Vicky's visit to Japan, which is cut into two parts, and is respectively put in the middle and the end of the film. Compared with the other scenes, the lighting in the two interludes appears paler and more stable. In this manner, Vicky's stay in Japan seems to be a world separated from the noisy and gloomy one in Taipei. *Millennium Mambo* becomes a crossing between the two worlds, and shows a complex temporal structure.

Like the coach or the train before each interlude, the film takes us between the past and the present, the imaginary and the actual. However, the aura, like the out-of-focus clutter in the films, seems distracting and obscure. The small gradients of change in the image become fainter, and gradually wane in a dusky light. The translucent aura also points to the discordance between the form and the content, as implied by the film title *Millennium Mambo*. As a traditional dance, the rhythm of mambos seems unable to be related to that of the modern life. The disunity is specifically expressed by the words said by Hau-hau to Vicky: 'You (Vicky) fall from

her world to his world, so you can't understand my world. In *Millennium Mambo*, the director seems also to fall into another world where his value in the past cannot match that of the modern young people. He tries to observe them in a shorter distance but the aura appears more oblique than before. Consequently, the present life appears rootless when the relation between the past and the present is vague.

### The Transparent Aura

By comparing them to the change of lighting, Amy Taubin asserts that the two films, *Millennium Mambo* and *Cafe Lumiere* present a complementary relationship. That is, if the previous film *Millennium Mambo* offered a dark, glittering vision of contemporary youth, then it is the moon to *Cafe Lumiere*'s sun (Taubin 'Light Fantastic' 4). Indeed, compared with *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere* presents the urban youth with more natural light. There is no filter effect or slow-motion shot anymore as used in the previous film. Instead, the interaction between different objects in a set becomes more significant. The reflection of the characters in the glass is the first instance.

In the beginning of *Cafe Lumiere*, we are given an interior shot of Yoko's apartment. With his staple style (a long take), Hou gives us a shot looking out onto the balcony, where the light outside suffuses the room. In the window panes on the right

side the viewers can observe the reflection of Yoko, who is hanging out washing. The dim, compressed reflection of her body foreshadows her dark and melancholic childhood, which seems to be a long-term trauma to her. Her childhood memory later becomes a weird and annoying dream when she is becoming a mother herself.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the reflection of activities of the characters is obvious in many places in *Cafe Lumiere*. Another instance which explains this point of view is the shot of Yoko's arriving at her parents' house. The shot is taken from outside, and a third of the frame on the right is taken up by the French windows. In the glass, we see the reflection of Yoko's arrival in her father's car. Behind the French window, we can see a living room with a Japanese low table in the center of the frame, which is reminiscent of Ozu. And further behind the living room is a kitchen, where Yoko's step-mother is busying herself with the dinner. Through the deep-focus long shot, the space seems to be extended. Each detail in the frame is presented with equal clarity. There is thus a real time-space continuum in Bazanian terms. The relationship between people and things is highlighted, such as the scenery reflected outside on the windows and the people inside the house.

This relationship between nature and human beings has been important in Hou's films. It is particularly evident in *Cafe Lumiere* for its many train scenes. Shot

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<sup>31</sup> Later in a rainy day in the film, Yoko starts to recall her childhood memory and then tell her good friend, Hajime via the cell phone.

during the day time, the scenes show many clear reflections of people's movements in the windows of the trains. One significant instance is the shot near the end when Yoko is taking a tram to another site. In the bright daylight, the reflection of Yoko's face on the window panes is clearly juxtaposed with the passing scenery outside of the train. Due to the movement of the train and the variegated lighting, the scenery and Yoko's face become obscure at times, just like the oblique style of narration or out-of-focus images in Hou's films. Nevertheless, like the relation between the reflections upon the landscape outside of the moving train, the relation between the characters and the world is never separated, but sometimes even intertwine.

Moreover, this film reminds the viewers of a short-lived cinema in the history that is, Lumiere Brothers' cinema as its French title *Cafe Lumiere* suggests.<sup>32</sup> Each shot is like a slice of a continuously indivisible unity of time and movement. Like the spirit of Impressionist paintings, it is the attempt to seize the moment that flees and simultaneously to grasp it as a fugitive moment; (Doane 178). In particular, several scenes of passengers getting on and off are suggestive of the earlier film, *L'Arrivee d'un Train en Gare* (*The Arrival of a Train at a Station*). Those ordinary and everyday routines become the focus whereas dramatic elements are eliminated.

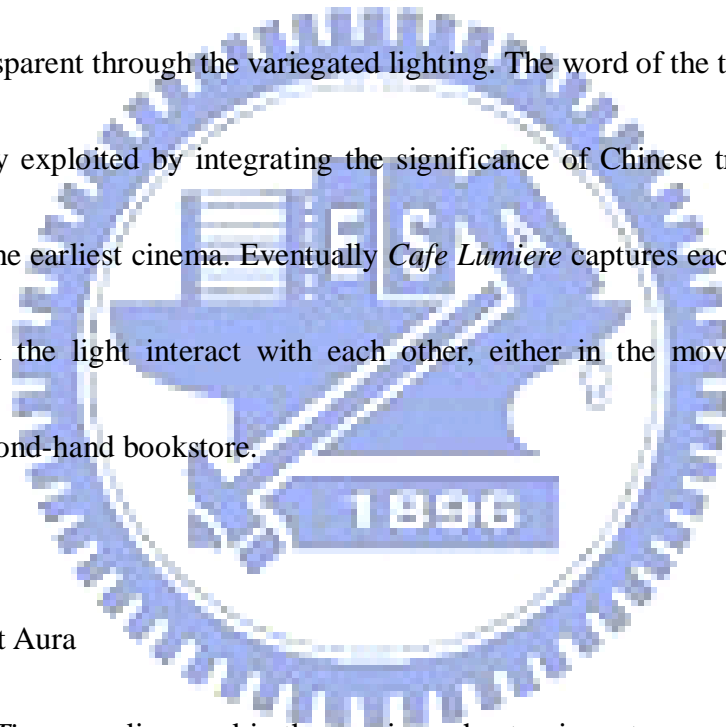
In *Cafe Lumiere*, I find the dramatic values are further pushed to the corner.

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<sup>32</sup> Here it refers to the father of cinema Louis Lumiere.



They are like the ambiguous relation of Yoko to Hajime, and the generation gap between Yoko and her father. For the former, Hou uses the train motif to imply their potential romance.<sup>33</sup> For the latter, the silence of the father embodies the tension between him and his daughter, whose thinking belongs to another generation. Consequently, it achieves an ultimate ambiguity of the image; (McKibbin, Situations; 45). Ambiguous as the film appears, the aura between the people and the world is transparent through the variegated lighting. The word of the title; Lumiere; is hence fully exploited by integrating the significance of Chinese translation<sup>34</sup> into the style of the earliest cinema. Eventually *Cafe Lumiere* captures each moment when the time and the light interact with each other, either in the moving trains or in Hajime's second-hand bookstore.



### The Resonant Aura

*Three Times*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is cast as a retrospective gaze at Hou's earlier career in terms of its style. The overlapping state of cinematic time makes *Three Times* whole and timeless with its continuously related gestures and

<sup>33</sup> There are two instances to support this viewpoint. The first is a shot of Yoko and Hajime standing by the windows of parallel trains, neither noticing the other. In this scene, the two parallel trains sometimes seem to be close but are in fact far apart. As a result, they miss each other. The other is in the film's final section. This time Hajime and Yoko get on the same train, but at different times. When Hajime gets on the train, Yoko has dozed off. Nevertheless, he stands quietly in front of her until she awakens. This kind of wordless empathy shared by both of them is prompted throughout the film.

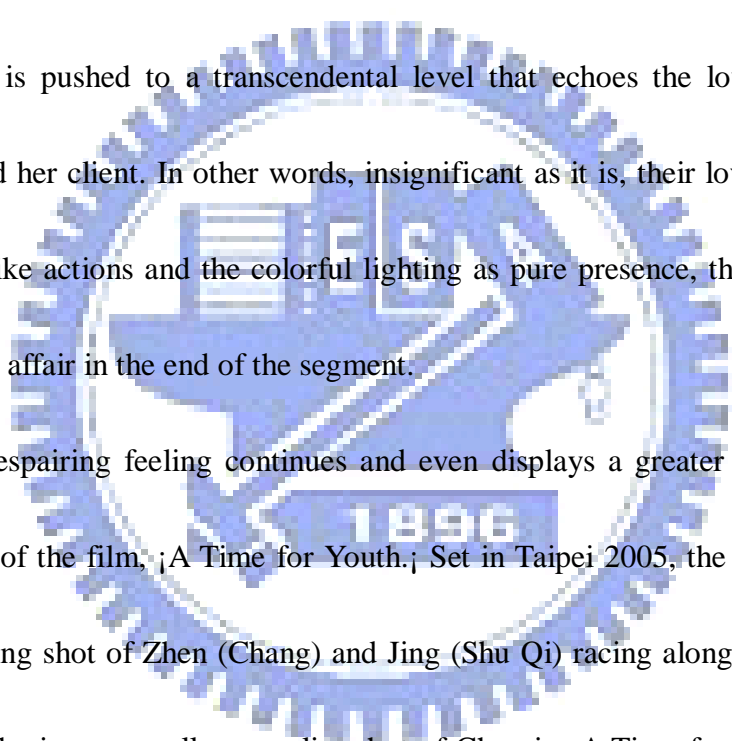
<sup>34</sup> The Chinese translation of 'lumiere' is 'shi (time) guang (light),' whose meaning includes time, space and memory.

soundtrack. This undivided sense also registers a resonant relation among the hues in the three segments. Neither being consonant or dissonant, the aura appears resonant in each segment of *Three Times*.

First of all, we can find several common techniques in the three segments, such as the use of the soft focus and telephoto lens. Through them, either the background or the foreground is blurred into etherealized air surrounding the characters. The halo effect is particularly significant in the first part 'A Time for Love.' Set in Kaohsiung in 1966, the color of the first chapter 'A Time for Love' is muted, and bright with overexposure. This kind of lighting makes the first segment seem to reverberate with its predecessors; *Millennium Mambo* and *Cafe Lumiere*. The images also often appear lustrous with the yellow light radiating from a ceiling light or a desk lamp. This lustrous lighting strengthens a sense of nostalgia inside of the pool halls. In addition to the swooning nostalgia, the puppy love between May (Shu Qi) and Chen (Chang Chen) slowly ferments in the reticence between them. The tension is particularly pungent in the close-up of their clasping hands in the last scene. The overexposure technique, distracted background and the color of the lighting reminds one of Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (*Huayang nianhua* 2000).

This sensuous effect is used to the extreme in the second segment 'A Time for Freedom'; Similar to *Flowers of Shanghai* (*Haishang hua* 1998), the setting in this

segment is situated in a lavishly decorated brothel filmed with drifting lighting and recurrent actions, such as eating, drinking and grooming. Each thematic motif lies under yellow lighting and the light reflected from the actors; brightly colored costume. In addition, daily objects such as a lantern, a kettle, mirrors, Chinese writing brush, silks, as well as daily gestures like brushing the hair, washing the face, and dressing, all seem to be enlarged under the panning camera. In this manner, the languid rhythm of daily life is pushed to a transcendental level that echoes the love between the courtesan and her client. In other words, insignificant as it is, their love looms out of those ritual-like actions and the colorful lighting as pure presence, though it turns to be a hopeless affair in the end of the segment.



This despairing feeling continues and even displays a greater intensity in the last segment of the film, *¡A Time for Youth.¡* Set in Taipei 2005, the segment opens with a traveling shot of Zhen (Chang) and Jing (Shu Qi) racing along a freeway on a motorbike. The image recalls an earlier shot of Chen in *¡A Time for Love¡* taking a coach in pursuit of May. However, without a tinge of romance or nostalgia, this segment expresses an aimless life and the fleeting present, like what is presented in *Millennium Mambo* or *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (*Nanguo zaijian*, *nanguo* 1996). The mood of despair is intensified by the events, such as the consequence of Jing's premature birth and her epilepsy. The lighting throughout this segment is generally

dim, and dark, shot in dark blue, and pale white, with flashing light only except the canary light at times from the lamps in the room or the pub. A cold and rootless atmosphere flows throughout the whole section. Sometimes Hou cuts from a point-of-view shot to the artificial lighting reflected from the cell phone or the computer. Their relationships, as the swaying fluorescent light held by Jing in the opening sequence suggests, is unsteady and fragile.

Thus, from the bright daylight to the yellow lighting in the middle, and to the harsh, electronic lighting in the end, the lighting in this film segment is changeable as the setting is. Nevertheless, the three segments are resonant with their similar subject, and the way of narration (the deep exploration of the mundane world and rhythm). Several visual motifs, such as the written letters and light in the three stories, register more temporal and spatial dynamics through the transition between the present and the past, the reality and the dream.

Consequently, in spite of the three different love stories as each subtitle suggests (‘A Time for Love,’ ‘A Time for Freedom,’ and ‘A Time for Youth’), each story appears changeable, and yet in a resonant form. Unbounded by either the different age or the length of the edited pieces, memory resembles that in *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust. It does not catch the true state of the original events, but recapitulates the embodied nature of the temporal experience

instead. This embodied temporal feeling ultimately makes the sensation readable. The pressure of time within and across the shots is thus more crucial than the duration of the shot.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have studied the editing in Hou's films, and how it is connected with the cinematic time in the previous chapter. The lighting is the focus of the discussion above for it often governs the play of visibility in Hou's films.<sup>35</sup> Through the analysis of the three films, I find an alternative way of editing in Hou's film. That is, he specializes in sifting an *aura* around an event from the combination of the background of the story, and the situation in a setting.<sup>36</sup> Hou's way of editing encapsulates an air-like quality as the meaning of the word *aura* indicates. Hou thus redefines the space-time relation by focusing on the subtle transformation in a frame, instead of focusing on the dialogic connection between different frames. In this manner, Hou opens up the conventional way of cutting in western cinema, and adds a new dimension of montage in cinema, *aura montage* as I would call it.

Therefore, the idea of Hou's film does not lie in the contemplation of each object or some specific moment. A lamp and a vase do not endure the change of time

<sup>35</sup> In fact, Hou concentrates much on lighting on site. One of the actors in *Cafe Lumiere* said, 'he (Hou) is always paying attention to lighting' (Hagiwara Masato).

<sup>36</sup> According to an interview, Hou explained that his storylines and styles are developed from the different temperaments of the actors and places he shot (Interview with Li Da-yi. 78).

any more, but the relation between them and their surroundings does. In other words, time lives in the interaction between the characters and their surroundings in the frames. The space in the films is for a more active observation and sensibility, which has already been implied by one scene of an earlier film *The Boys from Fengkuei*.<sup>37</sup> Only when the spectators carefully observe the change of this relationship do they feel the rhythm in the films. Hou's films thus register an alternative spectatorship, as many critics have pointed out (Guest 29; Yeh 69).

It is also this alternative editing—aura montage, which distinguishes Hou from Ozu. If Ozu's images are the observation of the humans, then in my view, Hou's are more abstract for they give a space for human observation. Rather than a well-designed composition of a frame, the aura in the frame is what Hou's cinema constitutes. In other words, the cinematic time in Hou's films is perceptible from the change of the aura in the images instead of a still-life like image. In this way, they provide us another way of perception in seeing a film or the world we live in.

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<sup>37</sup> In that scene, three boys are cheated: they are invited to see a film, that does not exist and that is actually a hole in a building under construction. One boy even said teasingly, 'Not bad. It is a color film.' The relation between cinema and world becomes tricky as well as significant.

## Chapter Four

### The Silent Rhythm of the 'Train-Image'

In practical terms, therefore, the question of the difference between real life and reproduced life, that is, between reality and cinema, is a question, as I was saying, of temporal rhythm. (Pasolini, 'Is Being Natural?'; 241)

In this chapter, I would like to study further the relation of Hou's films to their social contexts. More specifically, this chapter aims at reading how the individual experience and the social background in the stories are represented through cinema, in particular through the filmmaker's style. An alternative concept of rhythm will be applied for discussing the issues.

Instead of retracing Taiwan's social-political history, the three films *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere* and *Three Times* reveal rather the close relationship between the filmmaker and the society he lives in. Combining documentary-like elements and contemporary backdrops, each film shows how a specific group of people live in their social context, and throughout the history. For instance, *Millennium Mambo* and *Cafe Lumiere* inspect respectively the younger generation in modern society. Despite the fact that its first two sections depict personal memories, *Three Times* consistently

reflects how personal emotion tracks down the political situation from the past to the present. At the same time, it is worth exploring how one singular experience is interpreted through the singularity of film. Here the concept of rhythm would be applied to my analysis.

According to OED, rhythm is connected to the ;feature of musical composition, which depends on the systematic grouping of notes according to their duration.; Another definition is the ;movement marked by the regulated succession of strong and weak elements, or of opposite or different conditions.;<sup>38</sup> In filmmaking, ;rhythm; has been historically associated with the motion, which is as essential as the photographic element. This characteristic has been explored and developed by different directors since the 1930s. For instance, Dziga Vertov's ;Kino-Eye; seeks to incorporate the movement within the images that contain ;the internal rhythm of each object; (8). The French film theorist Germaine Dulac also states that: ;the integral film which we all hope to compose is a visual symphony made of rhythmic images, coordinated and thrown upon the screen exclusively by the perception of an artist; (41). More specifically, the rhythm can be seen from two dimensions— ;internal rhythm; and ;external rhythm; (Oumano 161). Internal rhythm refers to the diegetic space within the scene such as camera movement, lighting, action, dialogue and music.

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<sup>38</sup> ;Rhythm;, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).



On the other hand, external rhythm refers to the non-diegetic elements, like editing, which links the frames and controls scene length. In this regard, my purpose in this paper is to study whether the singularity of experience is indistinctly presented or concealed via the interaction between the two rhythms. Simultaneously, I will find out what context in the film itself is generated by that interaction. Moreover, if the director of a film is also a part of the singularities presented in the film, I will then ask how these three films represent the filmmaker's singularity, instead of a voice for the public, or an everlasting truth (Huang 18). In other words, the singularity of experience here relates not only to the individuals in the films, but to the medium, the cinema itself and the filmmaker. It is the complex relationship among the three aspects that becomes the pivotal point of this paper. To further explore the conceptual issues at stake here, I would like to apply Jacques Ranciere's idea of 'quasi-bodies' in *The Politics of Aesthetics* and Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of 'void.' The ensuing discussion will be divided into three parts to examine the three different aspects of singularity in the three films.

### The Absent Rhythm

Like *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996) before it, *Millennium Mambo* depicts the life of the contemporary youth. The protagonist Vicky (Shu Qi), a young woman is

torn between two men, Hao-hao (Tuan Chun-Hao) and Jack (Jack Kao). Adapted from real-life events, *Millenium Mambo* combines such elements of instability and fantasy as mise-en-scene, background music, and its temporal storylines. Simultaneously, *Millennium Mambo* is like a documentary recording the night life of the youths in modern Taiwan society under Vicky's gaze (Huang 146). However, the extremely elusive narrative and a repeated viewing of the film seem to make the film less powerful and less satisfactory than Hou's earlier films (Chen 102; Lin 71). It may be regarded as a gap between Hou's perspective toward life and the young men's. Ultimately, the gap makes the rhythm between the film and its context absent. Absent as it is, the rhythm unconceals another heterogeneous space.

In the beginning of this film, what is presented to our eyes first is a number of lights hung above Vicky, who walks and smokes in a breezeway. With distracting blue lighting, throbbing techno music, slow motion and the hand-held shot, the viewers seem to be introduced into a strange world. The slow-motion shot keeps following Vicky until she runs down the breezeway and disappears in the dark. This prelude, in fact, has set the tone of the film, and signaled the relation of Hou to the young people, that is, close as well as distant. Instead of the habitual long shot used before, Hou utilizes a lot of medium shots and close-ups. However, the visual elements in the movie often appear hazy and obscure. On the one hand, it reflects the hollowness of

the youths in Taiwan. The consistently floating smoke from the cigarettes, the marijuana in the pubs, or other drugs testify to the rootless state shared by the young generation. On the other hand, the smoke implicates the abstract relationship between the filmmaker and the subjects he shoots. The gap results from the different pace of life each generation lives at.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, it registers an ever-disappearing focus on the contemporary world from the camera. The alienating atmosphere is especially put to the extreme in the end of the film.

After those sparkling and brightly colored visual elements in the previous scenes, the last scene returns to a paler color and to a stabilized situation without any voice-over. Simultaneously it begins as an unreadable frame comprising an empty street in the winter. There is no dialogue, action, or camera movement, except for a few birds flying in the snow, and an ambient folktronica song. In this extremely long take, it presents a quiet street with some old movie posters hung above.<sup>40</sup> The film at this point resembles the purest of actualities, in which the camera aims simply at a street scene and is left to record whatever happens before it (Doane 181). The historicity of the past, the immediacy of the present, and the unpredictability of the future, all seem to be mixed, as affected by the hybrid style of the soundtrack.

On the other hand, this long take makes the scene photo-like without any action

<sup>39</sup> According to Hou Hsiao-hsien, the life cycle of the young people nowadays is much shorter than his generation, notably the young women. Here, it means that many young people nowadays easily get morally astray (Lin 71).

<sup>40</sup> The last scene lasts for over one minute without any camera movement.

and dialogue. With its suspended meaning, the frame becomes a 'void' or an 'interval.' As the way an image breathes, it is not merely the opposite of fullness or objecthood. Instead, it is the very site that makes forms and contents inseparable (Trinh, 'From' 142). The process has hence more to do with a 'revelation' than with a 'symbolization' (Doane 183). Moreover, with the hybrid and trance-like background music, a kind of heterogeneity arises. It brings out a brute presence, which 'remains a deaf and silent obstacle to all forms of signification' (Ranciere 92).

This absent presence is implied by the absence of Jack near the end of the film. Like Vicky's search, the spectators are driven to keep searching for something in another space with a dim clue.

As a whole, in *Millennium Mambo*, the interaction between the filmmaker and the characters seems to be lost. Nevertheless, it is the lost correlation that subtly echoes the rootless youth, who fool around different pubs. Besides, it is suggestive of the sense of emptiness and alienation felt by the young people nowadays. In this way, the lost interaction subtly forms another rhythm between the film and the characters. It is absent, but not insensible. By problematizing our sensibility, the viewers are situated at an active position through a force of multiple dissociated elements, whether from within or outside of the film.

## The Outside Rhythm

Hou's next film is *Cafe Lumiere*, which is Hou's first directed film abroad. As a homage paid to Yasujiro Ozu on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, *Cafe Lumiere* succeeds in echoing Ozu in spirit, presenting a new version of his *Tokyo Story* (1953) for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to its more impromptu way of filmmaking<sup>41</sup> than before, *Cafe Lumiere* encompasses a more impressive documentary style. With the long expressive tracking shots, it is more like a story directly snapped from one part of the daily life in modern Tokyo. On the other hand, unlike the fashionable and avant-garde life style depicted in *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere* captures a strong sense of vintage atmosphere through its mise-en-scene. Consequently it forms a juxtaposition of the past and the present. The past becomes the external rhythm of the present action in the film. This external rhythm can also be seen from the identity problem encountered by Yoko, the musician Jiang Wen-ye, and Yo Hitoto, who plays the role of Yoko.

In the story, the protagonist Yoko is a Japanese young woman who often travels between Taiwan and Japan to do research on a documentary film on the Taiwan-born composer Jiang Wen-ye. She interviews Jiang's ex-wife in Japan, and sees the photos of Jiang. She also goes to the old bookstore and the old cafe to track his legacy, though she fails due to the rapid demolition of the places caused by modernization.

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<sup>41</sup> Hou openly admitted that he concentrated more on the images than the mise-en scene when shooting *Cafe Lumiere*. In addition, it was partly because he did not understand Japanese. See Hou Hsiao-hsien's interview with Zhu Tien-wen, 'Who Entitles the Good Weather?' (Hou, Interview with Chu Tjen-Wen).

The recollection of the past seems to be impossible in the modern society. However, this impossibility is subtly turned to be a possibility through the singularity of the film. This is most obvious when Jiang's music is used as the background music of *Cafe Lumiere*. As an invisible character passing between the images, Jiang is sensible through the piano music composed by him. This paradox is particularly exemplified at the moment when Yoko and her friend Hajime (Tadanobu Asano) try to find out the location of the cafe that Jiang used to frequent. While they find out that the old cafe has been replaced by a new building and they wander in the street, a section of the piano music by Jiang ironically looms out of the scene.

The implicit relationship between the onscreen and offscreen spaces also echoes the one between Yoko and Jiang in terms of their similar in-betweenness, and the oscillation of their identification. As a soon-to-be single mother, she drifts between two men, Hajime and her boyfriend; between Japan and Taiwan; between her apartment in Tokyo and her hometown in Takasaki. Here the sense of displacement parallels with her research subject, Jiang Wen-ye. He is a typical example of the Asian diasporic experience during the Japanese colonial and postwar era (1910-1983).<sup>42</sup>

Later in the film, we know from Yoko's words that her boyfriend in Taiwan also has a similar experience of displacement: he goes to America for further study and then

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<sup>42</sup> Jiang Wen-ye was born in Taiwan, and studied engineering in Japan. At last, he was forced to settle down in Mainland China due to political persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, he always considered Taiwan as his homeland and frequently expressed his homesickness in his musical composition.

helps his family manage an umbrella factory in Amoy. As a result, through *Cafe Lumiere*, the past diasporic experience in the off-screen space turns into an external rhythm underlying the modern life. The oscillation of one's identification is also implicated through Yoko's future child in the future. The child's mixed nationality forms an inter-textual relation to the lead actress, Yo Hitoto's.<sup>43</sup>

Through the elliptical narrative, the film reflects the two social phenomena that Hou is concerned about in the present social conditions. One is the rise of single mothers who choose to raise their children without the restriction of marriage. The other is the increase of young Taiwanese studying abroad and preparing for careers in family-owned industries overseas (Leary B20+). Additionally, the passion for religion shown by Yoko's biological mother implies a general sense of aimlessness and uncertainty felt by people nowadays.<sup>44</sup> In *Cafe Lumiere*, Yoko and her father were abandoned by her mother when she was only four years old. This childhood memory is transformed into a weird dream, which frequently comes back to Yoko.

Invisible as it is, the dream always underlies Yoko's life, and is drawn forth by the moment when Yoko is going to be a mother herself. Her childhood memory and unexpected pregnancy make Yoko stop to reflect upon her life and to decide what to do next. It is also her pregnancy that gradually changes the relationship between Yoko

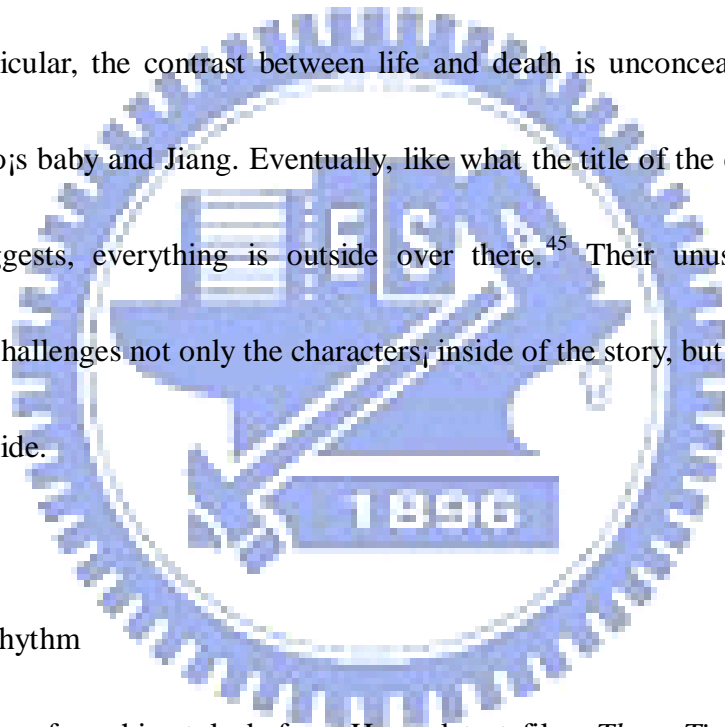
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<sup>43</sup> With a Taiwanese father and a Japanese mother, she came to Taiwan shortly after being born. And Taiwan was where she lived until moving back to Japan before reaching seven years old.

<sup>44</sup> This resort to religious comfort is also revealed in Edward Yang's film, *Yi yi* (2000).

and her parents, as well as her best friend, Hajime. In some sense, the original life is perturbed by the two events as 'quasi-bodies, which reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission; (Ranciere 39). The way they modify the social relationship and sensory perception coincidentally is juxtaposed with the ambient soundtrack; Jiang's music.

In particular, the contrast between life and death is unconcealed respectively through Yoko's baby and Jiang. Eventually, like what the title of the children book in the film suggests, everything is outside over there.<sup>45</sup> Their unusual position of enunciation challenges not only the characters; inside of the story, but also the viewers from the outside.



### The Latent Rhythm

Diverting from his style before, Hou's latest film, *Three Times*, comprises a trilogy in three distinct ways. Although all segments are love stories, a certain kind of political aura has always been latent throughout the three ages. Moreover, the three social contexts echo each other through their influence upon individuals.

In the first chapter 'The Time for Love,' the backdrop is set in 1966. It was this

<sup>45</sup> The title of the children book is *Outside Over There* by Maurice Sendak.



year that the Cultural Revolution occurred in China, whereas Taiwan served as a short-term military base for the U.S. during the Cold War. Instead of stressing the transient political scenes, Hou dwells more on the quotidian space, the chores and activities of daily life. We consistently see May opening and closing the pool hall; May eating with her boss; family or with Chen; and people ceaselessly playing billiards. Yet from the clothing, the background music (‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’ and ‘Rain and Tears’), the impact of western culture is implicated. With the lack of information concerning the social turbulence on the other side of Taiwan Strait, the ambient atmosphere of serenity in the pool hall also implies the segregation between China and Taiwan at that time. Simultaneously, the lack of information and the unstable politics forms a sense of uncertainty that saturated the society at that time. The scene where Chen keeps traveling to reunite with May exemplifies it. The rootless feeling is reflected in the transient nature of May as she looks for work.

The second segment ‘A Time for Freedom’ is presented as a silent film. The characters’ dialogue is conveyed by the intertitles. This time it is set in 1911, when a revolution occurred in China, the Wuchang Uprising that triggered the Xinhai revolution. Simultaneously, the awareness of the need to resist the Japanese rule was also arising in Taiwan. However, the activities of the individuals are still restrained by the social conventions. It is particularly testified by the courtesan’s (Shu Qi) loss of

freedom. The contradiction between restriction and freedom can also be observed from the love between the political activist, Mr. Chang (Chang Chen) and her. Under the political atmosphere at that time, personal affair is subordinate to the national one. The unspeakable love subtly registers an echo in the silence of the images. It is not until the end of the segment that this love becomes half speakable through a poem in a letter.

Written by Mr. Chang in Japan at the end of the film, the poem writes about the political situation at that time, while implicitly expressing his regretful feelings for the courtesan. After reading the poem, the courtesan cannot but shed her tears over the meaning between the lines. At this point, another space of enunciation opens up for the love between Mr. Chang and the courtesan. Besides the unspeakable emotion between the characters, the voiceless images also understate a repressed Taiwan. In 1911, Taiwan was still colonized by Japan. Despite the increasing awareness of democracy and freedom, speeches and activities in Taiwan were still restricted by the Japanese government. Nevertheless, in terms of spectatorship, the return to the form of early silent films enables the viewers to change from a passive position to an active one. In other words, the spectators actively produce the meaning of the images and have a dialogue with them.

The finale, *‘A Time for Youth,’* was adapted from a real-life bisexual rock star,

who has many physical deficiencies due to her premature birth, such as epilepsy and the near blindness in one eye. Moving into modern Taipei, the story depicts how the heroine Jing shuttles between the male photographer Zheng and Micky, a lesbian. Unlike the limited space that the courtesan lives in from the previous chapter, the female rock singer, Jiang seems to be afloat everywhere. She oscillates between various places and the lovers of different sexes. Moreover, instead of letters, text messages, personal blogs, and emails become the major means of communication between individuals in the modern world. However, an emotional distance is enlarged between people, and everything seems to be transient. In the film, this includes love, life, and memories. It is quite telling, for instance, when we see the love between Zheng and Jing develops much faster than the couples in previous chapters. Yet, it also fades more quickly as exemplified by Jing's relationships with various lovers.

Moreover, due to the modern-day changes, life nowadays seems to be more vulnerable. This is particularly emphasized with a close-up of the words on Jing's blog: 'The cost of being a premature infant is high, including fractures, the hole in the heart, the soon-to-be blind right eye, and epilepsy.' The ephemeral life is also depicted through Micky's suicide, who is tired of Jing's affair with an amateur photographer. Except for a thud on the soundtrack, the suicide happens entirely off-screen. There is no deep sorrow, but a little sadness and numbness shown on

Jing's face. The story ends with the photographer and the singer driving a motorcycle over a bridge, just like the beginning of *A Time for Youth*. Saturated with apathy, everything becomes routine in this final segment. On the other hand, the third section reveals a more complex environment individuals live in nowadays. Apart from the night life as depicted in *Millennium Mambo*, *A Time for Youth* describes the saturation of technology via devices, such as lomography and downloaded music. Efficient as they are, these technological devices increase the distance between people. Moreover, it shows the number of nameless diseases increasing with the development of economy. This phenomenon is particularly characterized by Jing's several physical deficiencies.

Then despite the change of the age, an underlying political implication is still observable in the finale. Like the political situation in the preceding years, the year 2005 is still significant in terms of the cross-strait relationship. The sporadic attitudes of the Taiwanese toward mainland China parallel the sense of the oscillation in *A Time for Youth*. Consequently, the inter-connection of the island and the mainland has never disappeared throughout the three different years.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, the social contexts of the three segments resonate with each other, as the other subjects and presences in *Three Times*. For instance, the three stories echo each other with the

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<sup>46</sup> In 2005, two formal leaders of the older generation of Pan-Blue camp visited mainland China. This event shows the obvious opposite attitudes toward mainland China between the Pan-Green camp and the Pan-Blue camp. In the same year, the Chinese government passed an *anti-secession law* that outlaws any declaration of independence by Taiwan (*Cross-Strait* 7).

common subject, that is, love. Characters and the lamp imply in each story, like love itself, appear differently in the three ages.<sup>47</sup> These shared subjects or visual presences register a latent rhythm in the film. Nevertheless, being neither consonant nor dissonant, they resonate with each other.

### Conclusions

In this chapter, I study the three dimensions of the singularity expressed through the films, that is, the director, the film and the characters in the stories. Each singularity is presented through a specific context in each film. And the context, in my view, arises from an interaction between an external and an internal rhythm of film. The interaction refers to a relation between the filmmaker and the reality. On the other hand, it means a negotiation between the filmmaker and the medium. In the discussion above, this interaction is regarded as another rhythm, a breath each film has of its own (Oumano 162).

From Hou's three films, *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere* and *Three Times*, the rhythm appears subtly different. Consequently with their varied rhythms, the three films point out individual displacement and generation gap in the contemporary world. In *Three Times*, it particularly displays three resonant political situations in three

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<sup>47</sup> Through the camera movements, the viewers can specifically observe the different lighting techniques used in each story: the electric ceiling lamp in the first segment, the oil lamps of the second one, and the manually-operated neon light in the finale.

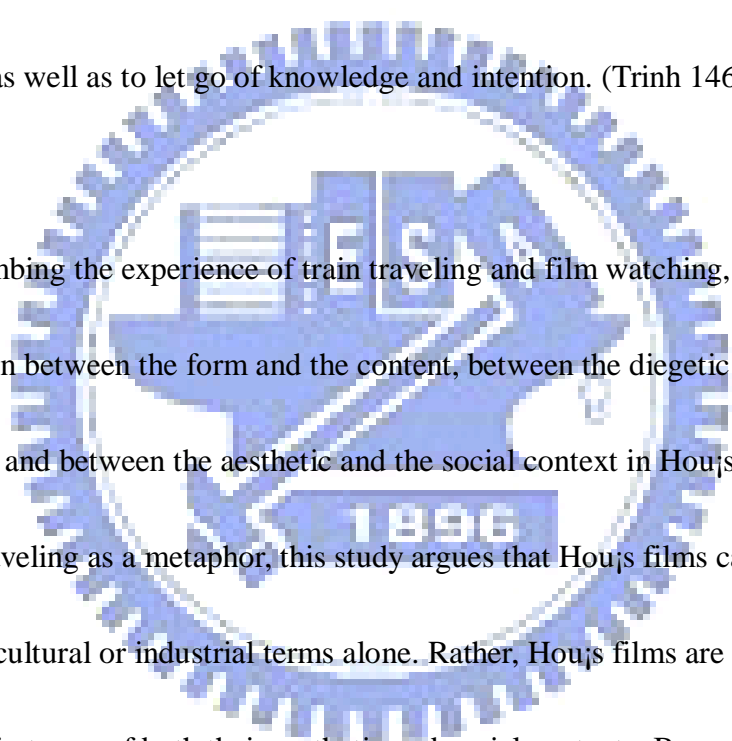
distinct ages, and how the individuals react through their love stories. Insignificant as they are through the elusive narrative, those singularities keep passing through the onscreen space in the form of silent speech. Nevertheless, different from lacuna or emptiness, their silence is a different sound, a soundless space of resonance, and a language of its own; (Trinh, *Cinema Interval* 38-9). The temporal rhythm between reality and cinema in Hou's films thus appears more sophisticated than is commonly assumed.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Instead of being a mere illustration of a point that is evident from the beginning, a film could be a constant discovery process. Much of filmmaking and storytelling relies on an ability to withhold information as well as to let go of knowledge and intention. (Trinh 146)



By combining the experience of train traveling and film watching, I have studied the connection between the form and the content, between the diegetic and the non-diegetic, and between the aesthetic and the social context in Hou's three films. With train traveling as a metaphor, this study argues that Hou's films can never be explained in cultural or industrial terms alone. Rather, Hou's films are worth a deeper examination in terms of both their aesthetic and social contexts. By employing different filmic or cultural theories, such as Deleuze's time-image, Huang's montage obtus and Oumano's filmic rhythm, I re-examine the distinct characteristics in Hou's films in the previous three chapters. The potential conceptual extension of train traveling experience turns out to become the core issue.

The 'Train-Image'

'Like music, train traveling brings out a sense of flowing,' as Hou once said after shooting *Cafe Lumiere* (Lan 1). He also compares the physical experience of train traveling to that of listening to music or sitting in a cafe (Lan 2). The movement of the train thus seems to set up the tone of Hou's whole cinema. In fact, being one of the symbols of modernization, a moving train consists of the three crucial elements in film, that is, time, light, and rhythm.

The three elements are respectively developed into the following chapters. The first chapter, 'The Route of Hou's Cinema: The Temporal Frames,' is to find out the different conceptions of temporality in Hou's films. In particular, in the three films; *Millennium Mambo*(2001), *Cafe Lumiere*(2004), and *Three Times*(2006); the relation of the present to the past is not subject to a linear one. Rather, the past and the present coexist and interact with each other. Similar to Deleuze's concept of crystal-time, the distinction between the present and the past is indiscernible, which leads to the simultaneity of the actual and the virtual.

Moreover, in my view, the relationship between the past and the present could vary due to different subjects narrated in the film. Nostalgia, which is often alluded to when studying Hou's films, thus needs to be investigated more carefully. Under this consideration, I have discovered three types of the formation of the temporal frames



in the three films: crisscrossing, parallel, and overlapped relation. The three kinds of relation are then compared to the route or the railroad by which the three films follow.

Given such cinematic time frames above, the specific means of expression of Hou's films is further analyzed in the third chapter, 'The Aural Image: Retracing the Spectatorship in Hou's Films.' However, different from the irrational cuts or absolutely disconnected off-screen space as asserted in the concept of time-image, I argue that Hou's films reveal another sort of image. Slow as Hou's style is noted for, there is a rhythm residing in the internal difference within each frame. The internal difference could be the subtle shifting cues in one scene, such as the variegated lighting, and the relationship between the onscreen and the offscreen space. As a result, Hou's montage does not lie in the editing and the rearrangement of the scenes. Instead, the editing is replaced by the internal shift through the mise en scene. The rhythm in Hou's films thus features an air-like and sensational connectedness within one scene. As Sun Meng-pu observes, Hou is one of the directors who can grasp the rhythm in the same space and time (230).

Moreover, with Hou's impromptu way of directing, there is an air-like sensation freely flowing between the viewers and the films. The distinct documentary-like quality of Hou's films thus does not lie in the objective narration, or in the length of the edited pieces. Instead, the realistic effect is determined by the open and free

sensation flowing between the film and the reality. In my view, this air-like connectedness between the scenes or between the viewers and the films represents another kind of image, the *aural image*. The aural image in Hou's film is in particular exemplified by the play of light in Hou's films. However, based on the different formations of temporal frames, there are also different states of aural image in each of the three films; *Millennium Mambo*(2001), *Cafe Lumiere*(2004), and *Three Times*(2006). As a result, each of them presents a translucent, a transparent, and a resonant aura respectively.

According to Ellen Oumano, the movement of motion pictures can be divided into two kinds: internal and external rhythm. Each represents the diegetic (the camera movement, lighting, action, dialogue, and music) and the non-diegetic aspect (scene length and the relatedness of the cuts). In the third chapter, 'The Silent Rhythm of the Train-Image', the interaction of these two rhythms in the films is explored to find out the complex relation among the three kinds of singularities: the characters, the filmmaker, and the medium as cinema. In this sense, rhythm does not only refer to the aesthetic level but also refer to the social contextual dimension in the films. With the elliptic narrative and the emphasis on daily banality, this kind of rhythm seems to be so feeble to be perceived or heard. Nevertheless, I posit that the social dimension is not inexistent, but always exists in another space instead. As a result, the rhythm

between Hou's films and the society plays an absent role in *Millennium Mambo*, stays outside as that in *Cafe Lumiere*, or is latent among the three love stories in *Three Times*.

From the routes to the aural image and to the silent rhythm, I attempt to use the three common aspects shared by train traveling and film viewing to re-examine several signature styles in Hou's films: nostalgia, slowness, and realism. On the other hand, my analysis starts from the image of train, and then to the filmic time and the aesthetic through a train of images. At last but not the least, I use 'Train-Image' to discuss the interaction between the aesthetic and the political aspects in the films. Train, in this sense, is not reduced to a diegetic object for interpretation, but a conceptual point by which the meaning of Hou's films or cinema is reread. Different from Deleuze's movement-image and time-image,<sup>48</sup> Hou's cinema unfolds the primal presence of cinema as represented by the work of Louis Lumiere, as implied by the title of the film *Cafe Lumiere*. As the Japanese critic Hasumi claims, Hou re-invents the cinema by his films that well combine the three essential elements: light, voice and time (87). Moreover, the identity of the image and train stems from the identity of the image and time and movement in Deleuzian terms. This equal position indicates a two-way movement in film studies. That is, film should not be reduced to a

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<sup>48</sup> From Deleuze's point of view, it is World War II that divides cinema into the two kinds: one is the movement-image and the other is the time-image (Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* 46). Nevertheless, this kind of distinction, in my view, can not be exemplified in Asian films.

submissive context to explain a concept. On the contrary, the filmic time, movement, or an object in a film, could be a way for us to think *with* film instead of *about* or *of* it.

### The Interrelationship between the Three Films

In the last three chapters, I have employed different concepts or theories to reflect on the temporality, the rhythm, and the relation of the form to the content in the three films, *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere*, and *Three Times*. Each chapter is divided into three parts to see how the three issues are transformed based on different subjects in each film. In other words, I am interested in the difference between the three films even they are made by the same director. In this way, Hou's cinema would not be generalized to be an authorial significance. Nor is it subsumed under a certain theory. Yet these new categories are not rigid. Through the classification; different style in different films, we can perceive further the the distinct characteristics of each film. Nevertheless, varied as these characteristics seem to be, I posit that they still keep a resonant relation as implicated by the relation between the three segments in *Three Times*. In what follows, I want to elaborate this position still further, looking at *Millennium Mambo*, *Cafe Lumiere*, and *Three Times*, their resonant relationship in terms of the similar aesthetic strategies and the viewing positions implied therein.

First of all, the titles of the three films all implicate time, such as *Millennium*,

*Lumiere*, and *Times*. They are, in particular, more or less concerned with the past. The past could be the unpredictable and brutal presence of the old movie posters in the last scene of *Millennium Mambo*. Or the past may go alongside the present, which is the reason behind the concurrence of those old trams and modern buildings in Tokyo in *Cafe Lumiere*. Or the past may seem to be repeated, which is presented by the same characters (Shu Qi and Chang Chen) and the same topic; love in *Three Times*.

Furthermore, as Tony Rayns observes, the late phase of Hou's career often focuses on the ;marginalized figure of a woman; such as Vicky in *Millennium Mambo*, Yuko in *Cafe Lumiere*, and the snooker-hall girl, the nameless courtesan and the real-life bisexual female all played by Shu Qi in *Three Times* (Rayns 18-19).

Moreover, with Hou's noted impromptu and intuitive way of directing, the characters in the three films often perform in reticence. Instead of carrying out dialogues or following a storyline, the characters; behavior and the atmosphere in the different times and places often become the crucial point of the films. For example, the eating scene seems to be the usual ritual in Hou's films. There are also several recurrent motifs, such as the movement of the vehicles (train, motorcycle, car or boat), love story, smoke, and the variegated lighting. And it is in my third chapter, ;The Aural Images,; that focuses on the relationship between temporality and lighting. We can see that lighting often reflects the inner world of the characters, or the irrelation to

the real world. For example, in *Millennium Mambo*, the light often appears dim, diffused, and unstable, which reflects the unstable and prison-like life of the modern youths. In *Cafe Lumiere*, the lighting is usually from the bright natural light, which in my view implicates the ultimate hope and confidence held by Yuko in spite of the generation gap between her and her parents. As for *Three Times*, the lighting changing from soft light to richly-colored lighting and to deep-colored one presents the different attitudes toward love in different periods of time. On the whole, *Millennium Mambo* symbolizes the night whereas *Cafe Lumiere* represents the day. *Three Times* involves the interchanging of days and nights.

Besides the repeated filmic elements mentioned, the viewing position is also one of the elements which make the three films consonant. Throughout the three films, Hou activates the viewing position of the viewers by offering a distract point-of-view within an entire frame. Consequently, vision cannot be taken as given; it must be achieved; (Warner 11).

### What Is Cinema?

I have examined the aesthetic strategies and what kind of social-political situation reflected as in the three films. By studying Hou's several signature styles, nostalgia, slow and realistic, I attempt to search for a possibility of problematizing

them instead of interpreting or translating them. And the 'train-image' is a concept for a type of reflection and analysis that tries to recuperate the components in the spectators' relationship to Hou's films. Setting out from the physical experience of taking a train, I attempt to theorize *with* film instead of theorizing *about* or *of* it, that is to regard film as a submissive context to explain a theory. That is the reason why not only one but several theories are applied in the thesis to work with the concepts produced in Hou's films. Ultimately, the key question in the above discussion is not what Hou's cinema means, but what they can or might do. As Deleuze suggests, 'we should look to the past, not to find out what it was, but to allow the force of past problems, questions or directions to transform the present to the future' (Colebrook 64).

Yet it is much less the idea of a full appropriation of Deleuze's concept of 'time-image' for such a project that has motivated my concentration here than the hope that a confrontation with the *relation* between time and image might broaden our minds and thus help us to think beyond the limits of the metaphysical tradition. By studying the significance of both filmic aesthetic and cultural meaning embodied in Hou's films, I hope a more complete reading of Hou's films will be achieved.

I might also trace here, as Bazin himself does, the 'myth' of cinema (Bazin 22). Comparing film to a moving train again, what interests me is not the reflection on the

window (the plot or the characters) but the change of the light (the non-diegetic part), and the relation between the reflection and the changing light (the rhythm between the non-diegetic and the diegetic; the relation between the films and the social context).

More specifically, the whole discussion of Hou's three films has been based on the in-between quality of film. Like Martin Heidegger's 'Being,' it crosses the threshold between the networks of the semantics and other cultural distinction. Cinema also always keeps an ongoing double movement of unconcealment and of hiding

(Gumbrecht 70).





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