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碩士論文

The Crying Wound:

(Re)capturing Lost Love and the Repetition of Trauma in Films

哭泣的傷口：

在電影中失愛與其創傷重複展演的捕捉/重現

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中華民國九十八年一月

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## 摘要

本文所要探討的要點在於分析電影如何刻劃失愛的創傷以及這類創傷的重複展演。創傷是由突如其來的事件所造成，在其影響之下，形成一個無法言說的傷痛。對於創傷主體而言，創傷事件是揮之不去的。因為，創傷總是不斷地並且延遲地出現；在夢裡、在某些反覆的行為裡，創傷一再地顯現。透過分析三部電影，《2046》、《在黑暗中漫舞》、《悄悄告訴她》，對於創傷及失愛的論述，本文旨在解讀、探討電影如何再現劇中主角的創傷；藉由檢視他們無止盡似的執意找尋失去(或消失)的愛之行為，來分析在這些主角身上，創傷是如何以一種強制性的模式反覆出現；同時，深入研究「觸點」(與真實的遭逢)如何在電影中發揮作用，並且瞭解它是如何與創傷和身分認同的議題緊密結合。

本文分成五章，在序論中，我說明本文的目的及方向，並且建構本文理論的基礎。同時，第一章為接下來各章節論點的概述。第二章探討《2046》中，創傷事件發生後的影響以及其反覆的展演；端看劇中主角如何處於創傷的餘波中，以及愛與創傷是如何相互產生影響。第三章分析《在黑暗中漫舞》的視覺影像，著眼創傷事件發生的經過。另外，分析電影中兩種迥然不同的拍攝手法，分別呈現幻想與現實兩個世界，而這分裂的世界與主角對於創傷及失愛的反應關係密切，也與主角的覺醒、存活相關聯。第四章則是分析寂寞與失愛如何在電影《悄悄告訴她》裡慢慢鋪陳、形成創傷。在這個章節，指出了區分「失去」(loss)與「缺席」(absence)的重要性；如果模糊此區分的界線，創傷將無可避免的產生。論文的最末章，總結我在這三部電影當中，對於創傷、失愛、及創傷重複展演的觀察與發現。

關鍵字：創傷、失愛、重複展演、《2046》、《在黑暗中漫舞》、《悄悄告訴她》、

觸點(與真實的遭逢)、幻想

# The Crying Wound: (Re)capturing Lost Love and the Repetition of Trauma in Films

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## English Abstract

My thesis studies the trauma that is related to lost love and its repetition in films. Trauma is an unspeakable injury that, under the effect, occurs as the result of an unexpected event. The traumatized are haunted by the trauma, which manifests itself, insistently and belatedly, in the dreams and the repetition of particular behaviors. The films I choose to analyze, *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, and *Talk to Her*, are the narratives concerning trauma and lost love. Therefore, this thesis aims at analyzing how the films represent the traumatic experiences of the protagonists, the compulsive repetition of incomprehensible trauma through their endless and obstinate chasing after lost/absent love, and how *tuché* (an encounter with the real) functions and connects with the issues of trauma and the identity in films.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One serves as the introduction in which I explain the purpose and direction of my analysis, and build up the theoretical foundation in it. This section outlines the argument for the following chapters I delve into to discuss the issues of the trauma and lost love. Chapter Two examines the effects of the trauma that has happened and the representation of trauma in *2046*. It aims at analyzing the aftereffect of the past trauma and the interplay of trauma and love. Chapter Three focuses on analyzing the visual representations of trauma in love that is taking place in *Dancer in the Dark*. It scrutinizes how the split world of fantasy and reality is bound up with the response to trauma and lost love for the protagonist and is related to the awakening and surviving. Chapter Four explores how loneliness and lost love pave the way to trauma in *Talk to Her*. It also indicates the significance of distinction between loss and absence; that is, the conflation of them determines the doomed trauma. Chapter Five serves as a conclusion that summarizes my observation on these three films concerning the issues of trauma, lost love, and repetition.

Keywords: trauma, lost love, repetition, *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *Talk to Her*,

*tuché* (an encounter with the real), fantasy

## Acknowledgement

### Fly Beyond the Rainbow

It is really a long journey to go in the course of working on the thesis. Walking along the yellow brick road, like Dorothy in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, I stumble over the obstacles, and oftentimes I feel lost, frustrated, and uneasy. Writing the thesis is much like a journey in search of myself. I become, more and more, to embrace adventure that I undergo. “Over the Rainbow” in the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, is the song that I often hear when I take a break and meditate.

Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue  
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true  
Someday I'll wish upon a star  
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where troubles melt like lemon drops  
Away above the chimney tops  
That's where you'll find me  
Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly  
Birds fly over the rainbow  
Why then, oh why can't I?  
If happy little bluebirds fly  
Beyond the rainbow  
Why, oh why can't I?



Now, it is the moment that I am finally home and my dream comes true. It is a task that I accomplish with the help and support of many wonderful people around me. The completion of the thesis would not have been possible without them. Therefore, I would like to show my thanks to them for their important contributions on my journey.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Trauma is the pivot of my study, in which I attempt to probe into the enigmatic territory of the trauma and its nature of repetition, rivet on the issue of the trauma that is related to lost love, analyze how the trauma in love is portrayed and represented in films, and examine the subtle relationship between trauma and love.

Therefore, in my thesis, the main concern is to analyze the problems of trauma in love. Love is the universal feeling which is shared by all human beings—regardless of what kinds of love or relationships in love—and it is celebrated in literature throughout history. With its sublime value and status, love is highly praised as the holy gift, the most sacred and important human emotion. In that case, what is the relationship between love and trauma? Due to unlimited desire and endless request for love, people may be afflicted by lost love, such as pain, fear, anxiety, hurt, and even hatred. In a way, therefore, the loss of love is painful and traumatic. Also, people intend to trivialize the problem of trauma in love as a common one, which makes trauma in love a problem, most of the time, undetected and ignored. Although trauma in love is not as major as those traumatic experiences in history, it is still dangerous to cause breakdown in people and threaten people's lives. Most of the time, people who suffer from trauma in love carry the symptoms similar to the conventional trauma such as compulsion to repeat, anxiety, or amnesia, etc..

Etymologically speaking, trauma derives from the Greek word that means wound. This makes trauma a term that has long been used in medicine. Trauma refers to the severe wound caused by an external injury. Later the concept of trauma is adopted by psychiatrists and psychologists as a psychic injury rather than a physical one. With the increasing interests in the study of trauma, trauma is no longer a concept confined to the



terrains mentioned above, but open to other domains. As in “Trauma and Literary Theory,” James Berger writes,

With the publication of three important new books<sup>1</sup> on the psychoanalytic concept of trauma as it intersects with literature, literary theory, historiography, and contemporary culture, it is worth asking why, at this moment, trauma should attract such attention and become a pivotal subject connecting so many disciplines. (569)

Nevertheless, I explore the importance of the study on trauma that connects with another domain, on the ground of the cinema. Based on Berger’s comment, I learn that there are different ways of looking into the issue of trauma. Therefore, in my thesis, I assume that the cinematic representation can be another medium and way to represent and analyze the trauma through different perspectives.

In the way of conceptualizing the trauma, as Ruth Leys claims in *Trauma: a Genealogy*, Sigmund Freud is “a founding figure in the history of the conceptualization of trauma” (18). The evolution of Freud’s theory of trauma does not deviate from this focal point: the traumatic event, which is unacceptable to consciousness or the mind, returns later in the form of compulsive and repetitive behaviors or dreams.

In the context of Freud’s theory of trauma, the most manifest feature that remains central to the study of trauma is dedicated to the unconscious repetition of traumatic experiences. Freud mentions in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” that “the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud, 1914g: 150). People constantly and unconsciously repeat the trauma which has been forgotten since it occurred; when they experience

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<sup>1</sup> The three books on trauma that James Berger refers to are Dominick LaCapra’s *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), and Kalí Tal’s *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996).

trauma—trauma of disillusion, disappointment or the loss of a lover—the re-enactment (or the repetition) connotes a way of remembering what has been forgotten or what has not been integrated into the consciousness; that is, as acted-out remembering. This is the paradox of trauma as what Cathy Caruth points out in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, “Indeed, the vivid and precise return of the event appears, as modern researchers point out, to be accompanied by an amnesia for the past, a fact striking enough to be referred to by several major writers as a paradox” (Caruth, 1995: 152). In the enigmatic repetition of trauma, people unconsciously struggle to distance themselves from the traumatic past, but they somehow, unfortunately, fail and have mired in the state of deadlock without recognizing it. It explains that there exists a paradoxical relation of trauma with the traumatized; no matter how hard people try to get rid of their traumatic past, they are inevitably haunted by the trauma and under the control of it.

The repetition or the re-enactment of the traumatic experiences is explicated in three different examples. In analyzing the repetition, the vital importance is attributed to the case of the dream of the burning child, which is introduced by Freud, interpreted by Lacan, and elaborated by Cathy Caruth and Slavoj Žižek as well. Then, another example is the story of Tancred, which is pointed out by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and later becomes the theoretical thrust and literary reference in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* written by Caruth. The other one is the *fort/da* game that is proposed by Freud, also pointed out by Lacan, and clarified by Caruth. In these three cases, the repetition is enacted unconsciously and it is manifested in particular behaviors. Moreover, these examples illustrate and illuminate the issue of the trauma.

To be precise, in my thesis, what the trauma is has been listed on the following clarifications. Firstly, the trauma is related to the loss of love that happens so suddenly that the protagonists cannot recognize it; in that case, the trauma returns in the form of the repetition (of behaviors, dreams, or fantasy). Secondly, the trauma is taken further as the

effect for responding to the event in which the existence, being, or identity of the protagonists in love is questioned and threatened. Thirdly, the issue of the trauma discussed in my thesis is complicated and cannot be formed overnight, so the real cause of the trauma in love cannot be confined to the event itself. Therefore, the task of my thesis is not simply to examine the ways how people respond to trauma in love that has happened and how past trauma affects people in love. That is, the phases before or during the time that the trauma happens are endowed with considerable significance attached to the analysis of love and trauma.

To grasp the notion of trauma and its nature of repetition, the analyses will be proceeded through three films from different directors—*2046* directed by Wong Kar-wai, *Dancer in the Dark* by Lars von Trier, and *Talk to Her* by Pedro Almodóvar. They all contain motifs of trauma and love in films. Moreover, they form interrelated patterns in my analyses of trauma and lost love. In *2046*, it is a story about a man's trauma in which the protagonist, Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung), is reminiscent of his beautiful neighbor, So Lai-chan (Maggie Cheung)—a woman, a name that has left him but remains in his life in another form—and pursues fleeting relationships with women and tantalizing love. Flooded with shadowy melancholy and obscure ambivalence, *2046* portrays fragmented, mismatched love and inevitable loss, which are also projected into Chow's fantasy (his science fiction). As for *Dancer in the Dark*, it is a traumatic story about a mother's compensatory love for her son, in which the protagonist, Selma (Björk), is afflicted by the unremitting struggle between love and guilt, life and death, and reality and fantasy. In *Talk to Her*, it is a story also about a man's trauma in which the protagonist, Benigno (Javier Cámara), torments himself with his obsessive and fantastic love to a woman named Alicia (Leonor Watling), who is in coma. The essence of *Talk to Her* is situated in the air of loneliness and absence/nothingness, which construct Benigno's depression, melancholy, suffocating love and obstinate misrecognition of absence of love for loss of love.

Trauma comes from lost love which is embodied in the specific objects in films. Although love is lost (or absent), it is always what the protagonists unceasingly look for or what they are reminiscent of. In this case, the objects that embody love itself or the feelings of lost love become characteristic in films. In films, trauma, the unbearable pain of trauma in love, is manifested, insistently and belatedly, in the form of the intrusive memories, repeated images, and repetitive behaviors of the protagonists; on the other hand, trauma is expressed eloquently by the animate or inanimate objects that embody (lost) love in films.

The main concern of this thesis, on the one hand, focuses on delving into the notion of trauma and its nature of repetition from psychoanalytic aspects. Why do people keep repeating? What does the repetition actually convey to us? The theoretical framework is based on Freud's theory of trauma: the belated effect of the trauma and the uncanny repetition of the trauma. In addition, I apply Jacques Lacan's notion of trauma in "Tuché and Automaton"—the chance encounter with the trauma, the "tuché," to propose that the "tuché" defines the traumatic event and helps to explore the core of the trauma in the repetition. Moreover, I use Cathy Caruth's elaboration on Freud's theory of trauma in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*—the story of the wound that is crying—to argue that the trauma/wound cries out to be heard to address the truth to us which language cannot represent but is detected in the delicate way, the inevitable repetition.

On the other hand, trauma is something that is unintegratable into the realm of signifiers and it has never been fully integrated into understanding, the consciousness. As the texts chosen are films, analyzing the visual/cinematic representation of the incomprehensible and unrepresentable trauma becomes essential to the thesis as well. Cinema as an art form highlights its significant and specific characteristic of representation in sight and sound. Thus, cinema as a means of representation can subtly capture or

recapture what is incomprehensible and unrepresentable by means of the characteristic and unique features of the cinema—the expression of sight and sound. Inevitably, the access to making the trauma present requires the help of cinematic representation even though the trauma is beyond or against symbolization/signification/representation. It is what prompts me to set my sights on the interplay between trauma and representation in the core of the analysis. Thus, this thesis also tries to analyze how the films, *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, and *Talk to Her*, narrate and represent the traumatic experiences of the protagonists and the compulsive repetition of incomprehensible trauma through their endless and obstinate chasing after lost/absent love that is embodied in objects.

What is more, I propose that fantasies, daydreams, and particular behaviors in films function as mediators for the protagonists to cope with trauma. That is the reason why I bring into view Jacques Lacan's notion of trauma and especially his insight into the analysis of the dream of the burning child in "Tuché and Automaton" along with Caruth's interpretation of it in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Why is the "tuché", the real as the missed encounter, so important to the analysis of repetition in trauma and the repeated images in films? Moreover, what is the real that lies in the repetition?

In "Tuché and Automaton," Lacan mentions the dream of the burning child—the dream of a father who dreamed about his child who had been dead—which is introduced by Freud. In "The Psychology of the Dream-Processes" of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the story goes,

After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully, "Father, don't you see I am burning?"* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body

had been burned by a lighted candle that has fallen on them. (Freud, 1900a: 509)

The dream, as Freud suggests, is to prolong the sleep; the dream fulfills the father's wish to sleep and bears the father's desire to see his child alive. For Lacan, it is the dream that wakes up the father; there lies an unbearable reality in the addressee of the child, which attempts to lead the father to the awakening the death of the child but inevitably fails. This reality is "the missed reality—the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, in some never attained awakening" (Lacan, 1981: 58). Thus, the repetition is a way that the missed reality manifests itself and arouses acknowledgement of the reality which is shown only in the dream, in the "*tuché*"—the encounter with the real. According to Lacan, the encounter is "essentially the missed encounter" (Lacan, 1981:55); "the encounter, forever missed, has occurred between dream and awakening" (Lacan, 1981:59). In the dream, there occurs the in-between gap wherein the real erupts and the encounter meets. However, only in the dream can the voice be heard, "Father, don't you see I'm burning." Where the voice falls is at the moment when the father abruptly and unexpectedly encounters the real. The encounter with the real is necessary because it bears the testimony to the traumatic event and it leads us to see the truth, the missed reality, hidden beyond the dream. On the other hand, although the dream reveals the truth, when it comes too close to the real, it becomes unbearable so that the father has to awake. That is compatible with what Slavoj Žižek interprets in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, where he writes,

But the thing he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real ...is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself, and this is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire....He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep...to elude awakening into the real of his desire. (45)

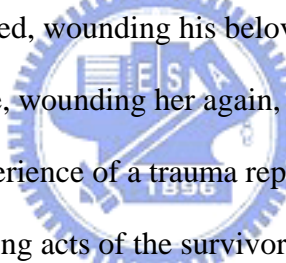
Under that condition—fleeing into the external reality—the father can maintain and secure his role as a father not to be collapsed; that is, to survive. It is similar to what Caruth

emphasizes, “to awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive” (Caruth, 1996: 105). The repeated images in films implicate the missed truth which needs witnessing. At the beginning, living in fantasy is as a way fulfillment of the wish; however, if it comes too near to the real, the only thing they can do is to awaken for survival. The continuous back-and-forth process between falling into the world of fantasy and awakening to the world of reality reveals to some extent the unstable and anguished state of mind. In sum, to look into the lost love and the trauma via the three films based on the theoretical backbone using Lacanian “*tuché*” and Caruth’s development from awakening to surviving would strengthen the integrity of my analysis.

Another perspective to interpret the repetition of the trauma in love relies on Freud’s viewpoint on loss in “Mourning and Melancholia.” Freud differentiates between mourning and melancholia: he takes the former as “regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one” (Freud, 1917g: 243). But he regards the later as a pathological condition—the impossible and unsuccessful mourning. Why melancholia is pathological and dangerous is that the ego identifies/incorporates itself with the object and “it wants to do so by devouring it” (Freud, 1917g: 250). This process of identification or internalization is violent and cannibalistic. By doing so, the object that the subject longs for or is fond of is eaten and annihilated along with the subject. From this perspective, it can explain the responses of the protagonists to the lost love and the reason why they repeat chasing after their lost love and are incapable of letting go of it. The distinction between mourning and melancholia can be found in distinguishing concepts of absence and loss, which are differentiated by Dominick LaCapra in “Trauma, Absence, Loss.” It is important to tell them apart. Blurring the distinction between absence and loss, it will produce some problems, such as misplaced nostalgia or endless melancholy. In film, the protagonists all suffer from either the loss of love or the absence of love, which places them in melancholia. In consequence, they are trapped in

the situation of impasse by endlessly pursuing the loss or the absence. The insistent repetition of searching for what has been lost or what is absent shows how the relationship between the protagonists and their traumatic experiences is related and how they are imprisoned by their traumatic experiences.

The topic of my thesis is entitled “The Crying Wound: (Re)capturing Lost Love and the Repetition of Trauma in Films.” The trauma/wound is the unspeakable pain for the traumatized. However, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth brings up her conception of the wound that speaks and initiates her analysis of trauma in the very act of repetition through the parable of the trauma/wound that is derived from the work written by Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, which is introduced by Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” Caruth writes,



The actions of Tancred, wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unknowingly, seemingly by chance, wounding her again, evocatively represent in Freud’s text the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will. As Tasso’s story dramatizes it, the repetition at the heart of catastrophe—the experience that Freud will call “traumatic neurosis”—emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind. (2)

In this case, I analyze the trauma that expresses itself in the very act of repetition. In other words, the repetition is the language or the message that the unspeakable trauma conveys to us. On the other hands, cinema puts its uniqueness into full play by representing the repetition and the trauma in diversity. In the cinema, the repetition and the trauma take different forms depending on a variety of ways of storytelling, arranging the time point of the trauma that happens, and blending some significant elements of the cinema together, such as music, light, and shots. Therefore, the main purpose of my thesis is to recapture/capture the repetition—the message of the trauma—and hear the cry of the trauma



in films to analyze the issue of the lost love, the trauma.

Divided into three chapters, this thesis tries to explore the psychological responses to the traumatic experiences that are related to the loss of love for the protagonists in these three films I choose, *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, and *Talk to Her*. Putting the analyses of these films in sequence intentionally coincides with the time point of representing the traumatic events. In *2046*, trauma has taken place. Since the trauma happened in the past, there is no option for the protagonists to choose. As if shrouded in the fallout from an explosion, the protagonist is in the aftermath of the traumatic event. As for *Dancer in the Dark*, trauma is being made now. The protagonist, Selma, is experiencing the explosion, the traumatic event that is also not at her option to confront or elude. When it comes to *Talk to Her*, trauma will be made. It is optional for the protagonist to involve in or to get away from the tempest-like trauma. Therefore, through the analyses in sequence, I want to read the effect of the trauma from different stages and from different time points.

In the second chapter, thus, I focus on analyzing the first film, *2046*. The title of this chapter is “Wondering/Wandering in Love: Trauma, Repetition, and Afterimage in *2046*.” I postulate that the film itself is a traumatic narrative that voices the story of the wound and distressing pain for love and that of longing for recapturing lost love/memories in its deploy of unconscious repetition. It is also a traumatic space, as a labyrinth, which stores the past where the protagonist is trapped, and in which the protagonist unconsciously wanders and wonders about love. Examining the trauma in love through the particular behaviors of Chow Mo-wan is the way that reveals the feeling of love is metamorphosing in the aftermath of the trauma within the traumatic space. Besides, on closer inspection, I examine the representation of trauma, in the form of flashback, intrusive memories and particular activities. The film, *2046*, conjures up the images of traumatic experience in love by very allusive way that accompanies the splendid tones, lingering effect, fragmentation, and function of reference, namely the afterimage. I assume that it is the

effect of afterimage or remnants that constructs the particularity of traumatic narrative and traumatic space and also exposes traumatic experience in love in the film, *2046*. In this case, I connect the mechanism of afterimage to that of trauma in visual and psychoanalytic perspectives, that is to say, in cinematic representation and psychological representation. Moreover, reading the always-already missing love through a Lacanian lens becomes a primary way to understand Chow's trauma in love. Since *2046* portrays the aftermath of the trauma, it cannot escape delineating the widely different attitude toward love due to the effect of the trauma that is no less important than the traumatic event itself. The missed or missing love forms a significant feature in *2046* and signifies the impossible and failed response to his trauma as the father does in the dream of the burning child.

In chapter three, I interpret the trauma in love from another different angle by means of its definition in the second film, *Dancer in the Dark*. Turning around the way of seeing trauma resituates another possibility for examining trauma. This chapter is entitled "Dancing to the End of Life: Trauma, Fantasy, and Death in *Dancer in the Dark*." How the interplay of fantasy (in musical world) and reality is constructed highlights the stylistic feature of the film. The focus of my analysis in this chapter, hence, falls on studying the visual representation and auditory expression—the music and songs—in the film. Let's look back upon the framework of the thesis: *Dancer in the Dark* unfolds and dramatized that the trauma is taking place and breaking forth. Once a traumatic event occurs, it takes on a life of its own. Moreover, in *Dancer in the Dark*, it deals with a mother's love and her trauma. Thus, when paying close attention to *Dancer in the Dark*, I find the existing tension that is caused by the emotional fluctuation due to the relationship between the occurrence of a sudden traumatic event (of loss or murder) and a struggle for existence and survival for the protagonist, Selma. For a mother, sacrificing for her son is an unalterable principle and a legitimate act that is perfectly justified. Nevertheless, when sacrifices are directly involved in hereditary disease and death, they are inevitably engendered by guilt

and related to trauma. Moreover, the musical plays a requisite and substantial role in *Dancer in the Dark* and for Selma equally, and it stands for the relative world to the reality. Thus, the film, through juxtaposition, contrast, and echo, brings the audience an unusual experience of viewing the trauma. On the other hand, what characterizes the musical in *Dancer in the Dark* is its refrain, a form of the repetition in music, which is the narration of the film, taking its distinct course of storyline. So far as the representation of trauma is concerned, the last scene—the gallows scene—of the film should be discussed in terms of witness and traumatization, which, in my analysis, combines the theory with the theatrical experience and leads us to comprehend the notion of trauma and grasp its essence all the more.

In chapter four, I relate the loneliness and the obsessive love to the characterization of the protagonist in the last film, *Talk to Her*. The chapter bears a headline, “Scarring the Mind: Obsessive Love, Loss, and Sexuality in *Talk to Her*,” in which I lay great stress on analysis of repetition and the distinguishing concepts of loss and absence that are related to the problems in love before the trauma happens. On the other hand, I suggest that the repetition should be integrated into the analysis of the trauma prior to the occurrence of the traumatic event. Owing to the deadlock/failure of communication in love, the protagonist is compelled by anguish. Blurring the line between the loss of love and the absence of love is the significant and prominent factor which drives the protagonist to construct an imaginary world and leads him to conduct the coma rape and then to ingest a lot of pills to try to put himself into a coma from the overdose in order to complete his world, secure his ideal, and fulfill his identity as a lover for Alicia at the cost of his subjectivity. In this case, I emphasize the analysis of failure in love that ignites the extreme feelings and acts which result in tragic love.

In conclusion, in this thesis, cinematic/psychological expression of trauma in repetition becomes the pivot of analysis. Therefore, at the end of my thesis, I conclude my thesis

with a summary and what I have learned in the study of the trauma, and emphasize again the importance of reading the trauma and its repetition, the relationship between love and trauma, and that between trauma and representation as well from three different time points. What is more, it is important not only to read the texts or the meanings in the texts but also to read through and penetrate the cinematic images and its meanings. And then, I try to trace back to the dynamics emitting behind cinematic images and listen to the cry of trauma to find out the truth, another reality in it.



## Chapter Two

Wondering/ Wandering in Love: Trauma, Repetition, and Afterimage in *2046*

*All memories are traces of tears.*<sup>2</sup>

Wong Kar-wai, *2046*

The film, *2046*, is about a lovelorn man who unconsciously strives to get rid of his past and to get over the loss of his idealized love which is his traumatic core, and who, nevertheless, fails and is still haunted by his trauma in love. In a way, *2046* is a loose sequel to *Days of Being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*. Some might take *2046* as a twin film of *In the Mood for Love*, ascribing to its aesthetic and thematic continuity. In his book, *Wong Kar-wai*, Stephen Teo brings up the statement of one critic (Di Shiwen), “the story, the characters and the dialogue of *2046* can be traced back to *Days of Being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*” (137). Or, in “Elusive Objects of Desire,” as Nathan Lee finds, *In the Mood for Love* “was an erotic depth charge; *2046* is the pattern made by its aftershocks” (31). From this point of view, undoubtedly, *2046* can be taken as the aftermath of the trauma in love. Therefore, in some aspects, *2046* implicitly indicates the literal and insistent return to the past and the process of repeated tracing back to the experiences in the past.

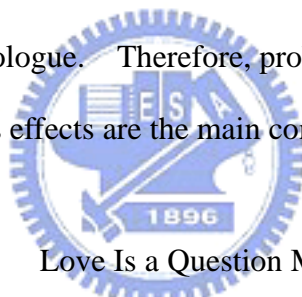
The director, Wong Kar-wai, is an excellent storyteller; he is skilled in mastering time and images for narrating the stories about love in his films.<sup>3</sup> With the subtle way of presenting memory or the past trauma in love, Wong is credited with rendering memory and

<sup>2</sup> It is one of the intertitles on DVD of the film, *2046*. The intertitle in Chinese is 所有的記憶都是潮濕的, which means “All memories are wet.”

<sup>3</sup> The unique feature can also be detected in the commercial that Wong Kar-wai shoots for BMW entitled *The Follow* (2001). In spite of different background and scenario, the commercial shares the identical atmosphere/aura—due to the resemblance of hues, furnishings, and shooting angle—with *2046* and *In the Mood for Love*; moreover, they deal with the common theme—the loss.

the trauma visualized. As Stephen Teo proposes, “Wong strives to achieve a transmutation of memory into being, setting his memory in motion in the medium of the cinema” (5).

Moreover, Peter Brunette mentions that, “many of Wong’s perennial themes remain present in this new film [2046]: the painful contradictions of love; the persistence of longing, memory and regret; and the hopelessness of ever recapturing, modifying, or getting rid of the past” (*Wong Kar-wai* 105). In this way, love, trauma, and memory are interwoven in Wong’s films. Overall, in viewing 2046, it seems that most of the characters in the film suffer from the pain of love, the trauma in love (disillusion, disappointment or the loss of the loved one); on the other hand, they possess their own stories or their own secrets. As a narrator, Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) tells the stories and reveals his traumatic experiences in love. His reaction to the loss can be detected through his repetition of trauma in love and in his monologue. Therefore, probing into the issue of love, the repetition of the trauma and its effects are the main concern of the chapter.



#### Love Is a Question Mark

“If there is an extra ship ticket, would you go with me?”<sup>4</sup> is the unanswered question raised by Chow Mo-wan at the end of *In the Mood for love*, which becomes an enigma and persistent doubt for Chow Mo-wan in 2046. Chow suffers from the pain of the mismatched and forbidden love with So Lai-chan<sup>5</sup> (Maggie Cheung); later, what it leaves is only a sigh of regret, and it becomes the trauma in love for Chow. At the outset, love was bittersweet for Chow; it was torturing, yet irresistible and rapturous. However, at the end, love is no longer about happiness or happy experiences which have gone in the past; love is only about separation, departure, inevitable loss, and unbearable heartbreak. Due to that

<sup>4</sup> In Chinese, 如果多一張船票，你會不會跟我走？.

<sup>5</sup> The name indicated here, So Lai-chan played by Maggie Cheung, is the pronunciation in Cantonese, and its Mandarin pronunciation is Su Li-zhen, played by Gong Li. In this thesis, I use these different spellings to distinguish these two roles—Maggie Cheung and Gong Li— with the same name in the film.

experience, Chow becomes a different man in *2046* not only in appearance but also in his attitude toward love. He has grown a moustache, which as a disguise covers up his secrets. Amy Taubin offers a detailed and particular account of what in Chow has changed:

The moustache practically screams “don’t trust me.” Add to that a bit of pomade in the hair, a smile that’s a little too wide, a chin held a little too high and a hint of strut that’s lifted from some movie gangster, and, voilà, the former Mr. Chow is no more. (28)

Besides, Chow does not let go of his lost love so that he becomes melancholic. Freud points out the differences between mourning and melancholia: mourning is the reaction to the loss of a loved object; melancholia is the impossible / unsuccessful mourning. As Freud states in “Mourning and Melancholia,”

In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished. (246)

Chow transforms him into a detached heartbreaker and a licentious dandy who lacks fidelity and virtues in love. In fact, “the self-reproaches are the reproaches against a loved object” (Freud, 1917g: 248); “the shadow of the object fell upon the ego,” and then “an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss” (Freud, 1917g: 249). Self-criticism of Chow is really the accusation of So Lai-chan for her rejection and leaving. Thus, Chow’s narcissistic identification with So Lai-chan allows him to sustain and retrieve his love through the process of internalization of the lost object as a strategy to resuscitate the lost love. Therefore, the way he cold-heartedly treats women as objects in lots of one-night stands is the externalization of the refusal, retreat and departure of So Lai-chan. Or, it can be interpreted that it is the transmission of the traumatic experience. Taubin indicates that, “He [Chow] learns that, like himself, they can’t resist opening old wounds or inflicting

similar wounds on others, as circumstances permit” (29). It is as the viewpoint that Cathy Caruth proposes in “Introduction: The Wound and the Voice,” “one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another” (8). Therefore, Chow’s trauma has passed on in some way and become the trauma of the women in whom he is involved. In turn, the women experience the trauma in love as Chow does, and they mourn for the lost love. Like what Bai Ling (Zhang Ziyi) does in the film, she “weeps inconsolably over the impossibility of the fulfillment of her love for Mo-wan” (Brunette 105).

On the other hand, he meets a mysterious woman in Singapore named Su Li-zhen (Gong Li). The coincidence of the name is a trigger that confines him in Su Li-zhen due to the previous So Lai-chan. Somehow Chow unconsciously takes Su Li-zhen as the substitute of So Lai-chan, in whom he tries to look for his feelings about So Lai-chan and look for what has lost. Later, Chow asks Su Li-zhen to go with him, but she rejects him in an indirect way and gives him an ambiguous answer. When Chow leaves alone, a close-up of his face is shot, in which Chow’s emotions flow quietly yet intensely—the excessive and pervasive despair. The crushing disappointment in love—the trauma in love again—triggers his painful experience in love and drives the heartbroken to become a dandy, a womanizer, and a heartbreaker; Chow constantly pursues the fleeting relationship with women. Especially, it can be noticed that “the women who at various times occupy 2046 become in various ways objects of his desire” (Taubin 27).

2046 is the number of the hotel room where Chow Mo-wan and So Lai-chan rent for collaborating to write the novels and spent their happiest time in *In the Mood for Love*; in 2046, it is the same number next to the room Chow moves in. The coincidence of the number seemingly posits Chow in the “labyrinthine hall of mirrors” (Taubin 26). He sees the multiple images of So Lai-chan everywhere; however, they are everywhere except the real So Lai-chan. Sometimes, he feels disorientated and lost. Moreover, everything, he feels, is related to the situation happening in the past, and, in the labyrinth, is just the



projection of his fantasy.

The situation that Chow faces verifies that the trauma is represented in two stages: in the first stage, the trauma suddenly occurs and it is repressed; then, in the second stage, the trauma is triggered and returns. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud (1939a) goes,

It may happen that a man who has experienced some frightful accident—a railway collision, for instance—leaves the scene of the event apparently uninjured. In the course of the next few weeks, however, he develops a number of severe psychical and motor symptoms which can only be traced to his shock, the concussion or whatever else it was. He now has a “traumatic neurosis”. . . . The time that has passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is described as the “incubation period”, in a clear allusion to the pathology of infectious diseases. . . . namely, in the characteristic that might be described as “*latency*.” (67-68; emphasis added)

The trauma happens unexpectedly, and it cannot be assimilated by the consciousness. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth writes that, “that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness” (6). From the perspective, we can say that Chow’s experience of loss of So Lai-chan is repressed since it occurs; he is not fully conscious during the event and looks “apparently uninjured” (Freud, 1939a: 67). His traumatic experience in love is conjured up under the specific condition—the familiar name, the identical rejection, the repeated loss, which prompt the re-enactment of the loss. It is as what Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart point out, “When one element of a traumatic experience is evoked, all other elements follow automatically” (163). However, because the enigmatic trauma is not integrated into the consciousness, the trauma is forgotten since it occurred. Therefore, the traumatic experience implies “the impossibility of its direct access” (Caruth, 1995: 9). The repetition in the fleeting relationship is Chow’s re-enactment of the traumatic experiences in love. In some way, the repetition or the

re-enactment retroactively renders the experiences in the past traumatic. The relocation of the traumatic experiences can be explicated by the concept of “*Nachträglichkeit*,” that is, “après-coup” or “deferred action.”<sup>6</sup> In *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis define the connotation of deferred action designated by Freud; they describe it as that:

Term frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions, and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness. (111)

The experiences about So Lai-chan in the past are relocated in the present experiences with Su Li-zhen and endowed with a new meaning. Laplanche and Pontalis also point out that, “the subject revises past events at a later date (*nachträglich*), and that it is this revision which invest them with significance and even with efficacy or pathogenic force” (112).<sup>7</sup> In this case, the experience of being rejected by Su Li-zhen retroactively marks the loss of So Lai-chan as the trauma for Chow.

Occasionally, we can catch a glimpse of his pain, despair, and struggle for getting over the loss of his idealized love. Frequently getting involved in the transient relationship is probably the reaction to the loss of his love, or, maybe, it is the way to search for substitutes for his idealized love. That makes sense as what Freud proposes in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, “The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (Freud, 1905d:

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, under the entry of “deferred action,” Laplanche and Pontalis list its German equivalent, “*Nachträglichkeit*,” (as a noun and “*nachträglich*” for its adjective or adverb) and also the French one, “après-coup” (111).

<sup>7</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis further point out the deferred action specifically takes place in the traumatic events, they writes, “It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first stance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context The traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience” (112).

222). Unfortunately, he fails over and over again. That is why Amy Taubin points out that “Mr. Chow of *2046* has a memory of a first love so perfect that nothing else can measure up. Fetishizing the past, he condemns himself to rejecting the present” (28). Therefore, he spends a large amount of time on one-night stands. However, what does Chow really reject? Does it turn out that Chow reject himself while rejecting the present?

So far as the relation with coquettish Bai Ling is concerned, Chow does not love her even though there are fine similarities between her and So Lai-chan. Having a similar figure as So Lai-chan, Bai Ling wears tight and gorgeous cheongsam, with her hair piling high and perfectly coiffed. On the other hand, they both get hurt in love—So Lai-chan is betrayed by her husband and Bai Ling is abandoned by her lover, who once promised to take her to Singapore. They share some common features in figures and in experiences; they are different in their nature and temperament notwithstanding. In some aspects, Bai Ling is the antithesis of So Lai-chan. She is the derivative character on the model of So Lai-chan; that is, the metamorphosis of So Lai-chan. Compared with So Lai-chan, Bai Ling is wild, fiery, and possessive. If Chow idealizes So Lai-chan, and then he in some way debases Bai Ling as an object of desire rather than a love. It can be explicated in the article written by Freud, “A Special Type of Object-Choice Made by Men,” in which Freud mentions that men have the inclination for choosing special types of women as their love-objects: one is the women who are engaged (to other men), and the other is the women of bad or doubtful reputation sexually; that is, “of being like a prostitute” (Freud, 1910h: 167). For Chow, Bai Ling is the type of women “of being like a prostitute.” Their relationship is grounded in the carnal lust in which they find satisfaction of fleshly desires. Moreover, in “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” Freud proposes that, “Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love” (Freud, 1912d:183). Owing to the reason that So Lai-chan is the woman who has been sublimated and has become unique and incomparable in Chow’s deep mind, what he

can do is to take those women he is involved with as the objects instead of loves. Treating women as objects is the manifestation of debasement, and Freud also writes that, “As soon as the condition of debasement is fulfilled, sensuality can be freely expressed, and important sexual capacities and a high degree of pleasure can develop” (Freud, 1912d: 183). This explains why in the condition Chow can develop the relationship with them, he does not love, he only desires. Furthermore, when Chow chooses the women with the characteristic of being like a prostitute, the love-relationship never lasts long, because as Freud points out,

[P]assionately attached of this sort are repeated with the same peculiarities—each an exact replica of the others—again and again in the lives of men of this type; . . . the love-objects may replace one another so frequently that a long series of them is formed. (Freud, 1910h: 168)

Therefore, when Bai Ling asks Chow for a long-term and steadfast love-relationship and asks him to be faithful to her, Chow rejects her. Bai Ling felt distressed, and near the end of the film, she poses the question to Chow, “Why can’t it be like it was before?”<sup>8</sup> The inquiry indicates their different attitudes toward love. From the moment of experiencing heartbreak, the meaning of love has been changing for Chow.

Constant seeking out love or pondering upon the meaning of love also reflects in his science fiction—the world of his projection and fantasy. On the other hand, it is the tunnel that leads to where the secret lies. In the novel entitled *2046* that Chow Mo-wan writes, there is a mysterious train left for 2046 that indicates as a year/place to which people long to travel to recapture their lost memories for the reason that nothing ever changes there. As Peter Brunette interprets, 2046 is “a place that people seek to arrive at by means of an ultrafast bullet train, in order to *preserve* or *relocate* their memories” (*Wong Kar-wai* 103; emphasis mine). Similarly, in “Wong Kar-wai’s Trilogy of Desire: On *Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*,” Chia-chin Tsai points out that 2046 is the place that stores

<sup>8</sup> In Chinese, 爲什麼我們不能像以前一樣？.

all memories, a “total recall” whose function is to fulfill the “lack” of the subject. That is to say, what has lost or what has been missing can be found there.

However, whether those memories of love can be preserved or retrieved is arguable, and whether what the story says is true is questionable, because no one has ever come back from there, except Tak (Takuya Kimura) — the Japanese passenger on the train. The film begins with the monologue of Tak, with his offscreen voice and the adagio as the background—in an elegiac and melancholic tone. In fact, he is the character in the novel written by Chow; moreover, he is the projection/double of Chow himself. Pervading the feeling of sadness, and accompanied by the music, slow and sentimental, Tak tells the reason why he leaves 2046.

Tak: I once fell in love with someone. After a while, she wasn't there. I went to 2046. I thought she might be waiting for me there. But I couldn't find her. I can't stop wondering if she loved me or not. But I never found out. Maybe her answer was like a secret that no one else would ever know.<sup>9</sup>

The monologue of Tak reveals that Chow undergoes the traumatic and painful loss of So Lai-chan and hints his doubt about love. By going back to 2046, he expects to recapture his lost love and to fulfill the missing part of him. Unfortunately, he fails and experiences the loss again. To sum up, impossibility, disappointment, and uncertainty construct the characteristics of love in *2046*. Love is always an unanswered and unintelligible question and a mystery which drives people constantly to seek it. Consequently, Chow continues to wander and wonder in the labyrinth of love.

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<sup>9</sup> In Chinese, 我曾經愛上一個人，後來她走了，我去 2046 是因為我以為她在那裡等我，但我找不到她，我很想知道她到底喜不喜歡我，但我始終得不到答案，她的答案就像一個秘密，永遠不會有人知道。

## Haunted by the Enigmatic Trauma

In “Trauma, the Body and Transformation,” Kim Etherington offers us the definition of trauma, “Trauma: a wound: an injury: an emotional shock that may be the origin of neurosis: the state or condition caused by a physical or emotional shock” (22).<sup>10</sup> Comparing trauma to the physical wound is what Caroline Garland demonstrates in “Thinking about Trauma,”

Trauma is a kind of wound. When we call an event traumatic, we are borrowing the word from the Greek where it refers to a piercing of the skin, a breaking of the bodily envelope. Freud (1920) used the word metaphorically to emphasize how the mind too can be pierced and wounded by events giving graphic force to his description of the way in which the mind can be thought of as being enveloped by a kind of skin, or protective shield. (9)

In this way, people have the emotional shock or injury which causes the mental wound; that is, the wound of the mind, the trauma. As in the story told by Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Freud takes it as an example that well demonstrates the compulsion to repeat in the traumatic experience:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Freud, 1920g: 22)

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth suggests that in the story “its striking juxtaposition of the unknowing, injurious repetition and the witness of the crying voice,” best expressing Freud’s idea of traumatic experience (3). Therefore, the crying wound in some aspects functions as the reminder of the past trauma which draws the

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<sup>10</sup> It is the definition in *Chambers English Dictionary* (1998) offered by Kim Etherington.

character back to the scene of the trauma and makes the character recognize the trauma in the return of the traumatic experience. As Dominick LaCapra's analysis of trauma in "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: 'Here There Is No Way'," he clearly states that, "Trauma is precisely the gap—the open wound—in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonized in the present" (244). The resistance of the wound reflects the reaction to the traumatic experience and the demand for representation and reexamination of the traumatic events.

The idea of the trauma as the wound is vividly demonstrated in the film, *2046*. It is represented in the image of injured Tak, who has been lacerated and who is bandaged up all over his body, counting the numbers for waiting the impossible response and shedding tears over the trauma in love. The incarnation of the trauma marks the emotional pain and makes it manifest and explicit. The audience can see clearly the pain of Tak through his facial expression and the pain-ridden body with lots of scars. On the other hand, the giant hole<sup>11</sup> that appears in the film, in my opinion, is the embodiment of the wound. According to the legend, people whisper their secrets into the hole and cover it over with mud.<sup>12</sup> The hole contains all the secrets and the stories about the trauma in love. In the meantime, the voice of the wound echoes across the hole; the resounding voice repeatedly disturbs people and enables the possibility of recognizing the trauma.

On the other hand, the repetition is marked as the specific feature of enigmatic trauma

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<sup>11</sup> The legend about the hole is derived from what Chow says *In the Mood for Love*. There is the hole also in the film, *In the Mood for Love*. At the end of *In the Mood for Love*, Chow whispers his secret into the hole of the wall. In the article, "In The Mood For Edinburgh," Tony Rayns points out, the scene is "a coda set in Angkor Wat in Cambodia" (14).

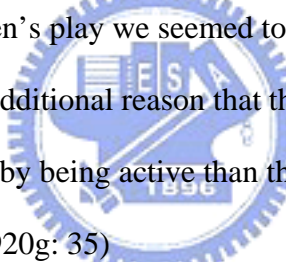
<sup>12</sup> In fact, the legend about the hold is narrated both in *2046* and *In the Mood for Love*. It goes, "In the old day, if someone had a secret they didn't want to share . . . They went up a mountain, found a tree, carved a hole in it, and whispered the secret into the hole. Then they covered it with mud. And leave the secret there forever." In Chinese, it means, "從前的人，要是心裡有了秘密，不想讓別人知道的話 . . . 他們會跑到山上找一顆樹，在樹上挖一個洞，然後把秘密全說進去，再用泥巴封起來，那秘密就永遠留在樹裡，沒有人知道。"

concerning the psyche's response to the hidden reality. The restless trauma continually and repeatedly returns and haunts the sufferer. In "Traumatic Awakenings," Cathy Caruth points out that, "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). Moreover, most of the time, people do not remember the forgotten or repressed memories, but they act it out repeatedly. The repetition is the reenactment of the traumatic experience which has been forgotten; in this case, the repetition serves as an unconscious way of remembering. This pattern of suffering—traumatic repetition—appears in the film and becomes the theme of the film. Most of the characters in *2046* (or in the films of Wong Kar-wai) suffer from the pain of love and keep re-experiencing the traumatic experiences.

For Chow, the past is in fact his trauma—the loss of his love and the disappointment in love; paradoxically, it is also the memories of his best time with So Lai-chan. Disappointment in love—either loss of love or the non-fulfillment of love—indicates the inability of capturing or controlling love, which turns out to be a trauma. In "A Reconsideration of Freud's Views of Trauma," Phil Mollon points out that in *Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud considers "the essence of trauma as the experience of helplessness in the face of an accumulation of tension or excitation which the ego cannot master" (17). Trauma occurs when the ego cannot master and fully control the loss of love or disappointment in love (they are the experience of helplessness). That the loss of So Lai-chan is traumatic reveals Chow's inability to control the situation, which becomes the experience of helplessness. Therefore, he struggles for getting rid of his past and getting out of the helpless experience. However, the past, in fact, is reluctant to let go of the person who bears traumatic experiences; likewise, Chow does not let go of his lost love, which results in his melancholia. The memories about So Lai-chan keeps emerging and haunting Chow, and they are in some respects repressed or forgotten. In this case, they can



loom out only through some repeated actions. This explains Chow's repeated behaviors of having a fleeting relationship with women in whom he reduplicates the mode, the mood, and the occasion as a replica. Therefore, situated in the context, the body as the site of the memories becomes then the site of releasing the memories or conjuring up the memories. In the film, the images are usually incomplete and fragmented; most of the time, they are shot in an extreme close-up or close-up, such as hands, legs, or faces. In this way, Chow can reproduce the situation by acting out his memory. Furthermore, he can try to reserve the passive experience of the trauma. As in the *fort/da* game proposed by Freud, the little boy invents the game of disappearance and return—*fort* for “gone” and *da* for “there”<sup>13</sup>—to allow him to manage the unpleasurable experience of the absence of his mother. Freud states that,


  
 In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. (Freud, 1920g: 35)

Similarly, Chow can try to master the traumatic experiences by playing the game of repetition of looking for substitutes. In other words, over and over, Chow actively plays “gone” with the women in one-night stands. For the child, the painful experience of the departure of his mother is overcome by the game of the creation. Freud also writes that, “As the child passed over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience of one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute” (Freud, 1920g: 17). Therefore, the painful experience of the departure of So Lai-chan is transformed into the departure from the women by Chow in the

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<sup>13</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud introduces the game in which when the little boy throws away any small objects or toys, he sends out a word, “o-o-o-o,” which represents “the German word ‘*fort*’ [‘gone’]” (Freud, 1920g: 15). While getting back the objects, he gives another word, “‘*da*’ [there]” (Freud, 1920g: 15).

game in order to overcome his trauma.

Besides, the pattern of repetition becomes the pattern in Chow's writing. In his stories, ostensibly he writes about the future; in fact, he writes his loss/trauma happening in the past. The novel is the reflection of his life and his inner world. The space in *2046* is dim, bleak and fragmented; so is his memory or trauma. Through his science fiction stories, he combines his own life and others' to complete his desire and projection. Thus, in his world of fantasy, the materials are from the sources of the fragmented and repressed memories. By writing out in his fantasy as a way of transmission, he re-experiences the trauma and yet relieves his pain in some respects. When Tak is on the train leaving 2046—in fact, with the voice-over, we can say that Tak is the double of Chow Mo-wan—he asks, “How long does it take to leave 2046?”<sup>14</sup> Here, it implies how long it takes to get rid of the past/trauma. He continually writes the stories about the past or about what he has repressed or forgotten. In the film, the repeated monologue, the same words and continual questions connote Chow's reaction to his loss of love. The film itself is the trauma that mourns for the non-fulfillment, incompleteness and impossibility of love. The incomprehensible and enigmatic mode of melancholic compulsion to repeat echoes Chow's unconscious repetition of searching and asking for the love and the repeated returning of the repressed memories, in the form of repetition or particular activities, which haunt him; in a way he acts out his trauma. As in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through,” Freud states,

[T]he patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulse to remember . . . in every other activity and relationship which may occupy his life at the time . . . The part played by resistance, too, is easily recognized. The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering. (Freud, 1914g: 151)

<sup>14</sup> In Chinese, 一個人要離開 2046 需要多長的時間？.

Therefore, the repetition is an unconscious way of providing a meaning upon the traumatic experience that is not assimilated into the consciousness and making it be “remembered”.

The lost love and the disappointment in love are represented in the effects of repeated images ascribed to Wong Kar-wai’s skill of dealing with time and speed in the film, which contributes to part of the style of Wong Kar-wai’s films. Tony Rayns appreciates Wong Kar-wai’s talent of mastering the cinematic technique in “Poet of Time,” and notes, “He [Wong] is also a poet of time...so attuned to the effects of time on memory, sensation and emotions. Few other directors have ever imbued their movies with such a metaphysical sense of time at work: dilating, stretching, lurching, dragging, speeding by” (12). The creation of the unstable and floating images through skillfully mastering of time and speed dazzles the visual perception of the viewer; then the images become what Ackbar Abbas calls— the images of disappointment.<sup>15</sup> In “Cinema, the City and the Cinematic,” Abbas explicates, “Disappointment is like love in at least one respect: they are not where we expect them to be” and “Disappointment is the realization that every desire that we want to believe is unique and original is already a repetition, like an old song or an old fashion that is revived”(10). Just as Chow’s disappointment, the loss of love is not what he expects it to be and it repeats itself over and over again.

In fact, images of disappointment stand for the pain of love and highlight the psyche of characters in *2046*. For example, Chow pleads Su Li-zhen for leaving with him, but he is rejected. And he walks away with deep despair. Or, when Bai Ling appeals to Chow for staying, she is turned down and left behind. What they leave is nothing but the images of disappointment, which show that the characters are disappointed in love. The images of

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of “the image of disappointment” is the concept that is designated from Ackbar Abbas when he talks about the film, *In the Mood for Love*, in “Cinema, the City and the Cinematic.” Abbas writes that, “it [*In the Mood for Love*] is entirely a question of a perverse kind of seduction; of being seduced by the power of the negative affect, which at one and the same time draws these two people [Chow and So] together and keeps them apart. This structure of proximity without intimacy is repeated in scene after scene, each one precisely setting the tone for the film’s special mood for love” (9).

disappointment suggest non-fulfillment of love/wish. With the special design by Wong—the over-the-shoulder shot is arranged here: the character who is often arranged only with his or her back/head seen is blocked out by a wall or other objects; the other character is left with partial representation of his or her face in the background. Only partial face of Su Li-zhen, Chow Mo-wan and Bai Ling can the audience see; however, the partial achieves the intense emotions as a whole. In addition, when Tak asks Jing-wen (Faye Wong) to leave with him, he has to leave because of the absent response. At first, the audience sees his leaving and hears he says “goodbye” only through the frosted glass, and then Wong repeats his leaving by representing it in front of the audience. The repetition represents the climax of the feelings and reinforces the emotional tension/disappointment. Wong is the master of representation in his dialectic of images and emotions. The cinematic representation can help the traumatic experiences loom out and become representable. In “Psychobiology of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder,” Hassan Hagh-Shenas, Laura Goldstein and William Yule mention,

Janet (1889) suggested that intense emotional reactions to a traumatic event resulted in memories related to the event being dissociated from consciousness and being stored as visceral sensations or visual images. At a later stage, visceral sensation presented themselves as feeling of anxiety and panic and visual images emerged as flashbacks and nightmares. (153)

Thus, the traumatic scenes or sites by their roles as the locus of the trauma appear in the form of flashback and overlap the present. It explains why the double of the black and white image, with its lingering aura of melancholy, interweaving the flashback and the present, is represented while Chow takes a car with Bai Ling, which is identical with what Chow Mo-wan and So Lai-chan did before. Again, the analysis of trauma by Dominick LaCapra can completely account for the double of the traumatic scenes:

Certainly and significantly, these scenes resist closure and attest to a past that will

not—and should not—pass away, a past that must remain an open wound in the present, but they do so with a dominant tonality of unrelieved melancholy and desperation. (LaCapra, 1997: 250)

The uncanny haunting trauma which resists leaving and being healed drives the sufferer to wander in the maze of memories and to be in the state of impasse and melancholy.

### Trauma, Afterimage, and Remnants

The unusual characteristic of Wong Kar-wai's images is somewhat an afterimage and remnant (or leftover). In *Oxford English Dictionary*, afterimage is defined as "The impression retained by the retina of the eye, or by any other organ of sense, of a vivid sensation, after the external cause has been removed" (236). For example, when looking at a bright light for a while (the bright light is the source of stimulus), there remains the lingering visual impression that is called afterimage. Afterimage is the persistence of vision and is engendered by the stimulus.

In *2046*, the glamorous and magnificently brilliant image implies the prosperous Hong Kong; however, the image is bright but blurred as afterimage or remnant image—they are lingering, fragmented, exorbitant for the excess of images. However, what remains is the double of the original image—too bright to grasp—that brims from the excess of the stimulus. It can be related to the effects of traumatic experiences. In "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice," as Cathy Caruth explicates, the trauma "is experiences too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4) and "traumatic experience ...is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occur" (5). In this way, trauma is like afterimage: the stimulus is transmitted, and then the stimulus ceases, and it remains in another form afterward. The trauma lingers and prolongs in another form. Besides, the stimulus is the trauma itself, and it motivates the unconscious

repetition compulsion after it is absent, which makes the sufferer repeatedly enact the unintelligible behaviors; on the other hand, the remnants of stimulus in relation to trauma are the objects that arouse the memories or triggers the kernel of the trauma. Although afterimage is the extension or persistence of vision of the original object, it is only the image without the substance of the original and it can never be equivalent to the original object. In this case, it signifies the impossible return as the trauma. Therefore, shrouding in the afterimage—the effect of trauma—Chow constantly replaces his love-objects and indulges in the different relationship or asks the question, “Would you leave with me?” Moreover, the love-objects remind Chow of his lost love, so Chow projects So Lai-chan’s image or shadow on the women who live next to him for getting the consolation and the fulfillment of love. Unfortunately, he is doomed to fail to return to the past and to recapture his lost love. The remnants of the trauma come from the excess of emotional shock or mental injury; the remnants brim out of the memories and onto the screen. That is, as in *2046*, Wong Kar-wai deliberately makes his characters be placed off center and leave on the edge of the frame. For example, in the scenes on the rooftop, characters are on the corner with the extremely unproportionate huge sign of The Oriental Hotel to set a contrast. Generally speaking, the rooftop is a public space, but it becomes a private space for the characters in the film. The fragmentary and incomplete images imply the unspeakable and fragmentary emotions overflowing that are compelled to be repressed and hidden in the corner of mind.

The afterimage possesses one distinguishing feature: when the image emerges, it is disappearing; however, paradoxically, disappearance here means invisible appearance—that is, there exists the afterimage/after-effect. In “Trauma, the Body and Transformation,” Kim Etherington points out that,

When this stress persists after the source of threat has been removed, it becomes known as a post traumatic stress, which may progress over time to produce

symptoms that interfere with a person's life and become post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (23)

That is the aftereffect of the trauma/stimulus; even though it has been removed or has disappeared, it is still there in the form of invisibility—only available in the perception of the mind later. As Stuart Klawans indicates in “Time Out of Mind,”

Time, meanwhile, is the reality that Chou doesn't want to escape; it's not a flow but a cluster of remembered moments, some of which recur through odd coincidences, or expand into his stories, or surround him like the walls of a hotel room. Time is the glamour, the fantasy, the romance over which Chou wants to linger. (42-43)

In some way, it is the good old days with So Lai-chan—even though Chow has lost his love—that Chow Mo-wan wants to linger around and go back to. It is the after-effect of the trauma. In addition, the effects of afterimage and remnants that construct the particularity of traumatic space in the film and expose the trauma belonging to those people in *2046*. Therefore, it is the specific feature that characterizes *2046* and reveals the emotional suffering and conflict to expose the seemingly oblivious past (or memory).

One of the conspicuous features of the trauma is its delayed appearance. In the science fiction stories written by Chow, there is a train leading toward 2046. On the train, there are androids that serve the human passengers. When Tak is on the train to recapture his lost memories, he encounters an android, the female robot called wjw 1967 (Faye Wong), who is like the one he loves. For the long journey, there is a period of decline in the reaction of the androids: when they want to laugh or cry they can laugh or cry ten hours later (or even one hundred or one thousand hours); “it won't be until tomorrow when the tears start to flow” (Teo 136). That is the delayed reaction/emotional lag that postpones and prolongs their emotional expression. What causes the emotional lag? As a matter of fact, it is the effect of trauma that brings in the emotional lag for the androids. Generally

speaking, androids do not have emotions and cannot articulate their feelings, which coincide with the real situation that Jing-wen encounters the forbidden and unspeakable love. As Stephen Teo points out, referring to the scene in which Tak leaves Jing-wen hopelessly for her silence,

At this point, Wong jumpcuts to a point after Tak's departure before we actually hear him say "Sayonara" and take his leave of the woman he loves, an editing technique used to emphasise the dialectic of time and emotion. Because it is delayed, the emotion is felt more deeply—and delivered here by Faye Wong's tears. (144)

This echoes the reaction to the lost love of Chow; it is always a belated response. The emotional lag can be explained by the mechanism of trauma—the delayed appearance. The traumatic event happened unexpectedly and cannot be integrated into the consciousness; therefore, the trauma reappears later in the form of repetition for the sufferer to recognize. The extreme contrast between the high-speed train (the ultrafast bullet train) and the lengthily delayed emotional reaction connotes that Chow desperately longs for recapturing his lost love; however, the truth is unbearable, so he delays the moment of facing the reality or delays his response to the trauma. It is the talent of Wong Kar-wai that he highly transforms and delicately extracts the meaning of time and space.

Concerning the representation of afterimage or that of the return of the trauma, there are three different scenes in black and white that are seemingly parallel at the first glance, but are in fact mutually correlative. In the first scene, Chow takes a car with Bai Ling, and he leans against her shoulder; the second scene is set identically with the first one, yet replaced by Chow and So Lai-chan; the third scene is with Chow alone. These three scenes imply two significant meanings: one is that the trauma repeats itself in the form of flashback and haunts Chow; the other is that Chow is brought back to the scene by trauma, but he can never achieve the actual return to the original scene. Besides, the film employs



black-and-white to create an extraordinary effect to portray its characters. The image in black-and white can become the record which is close to the scene; it can represent the state of mind of the characters in which they can be away from the reality (Huang 61). By interweaving the bright and the dark, the image serves as a way of representing the memories. The white image is like the exposure: it drives the characters to the explosive memories which fade away. The black image is like the black hole with its overwhelming power to draw the characters into the fathomless part of the memories inscribed on the deep mind. Therefore, in the black and white scenes, the profound emotions can stand out. In these three scenes, the audience can see how the lost love is inscribed on Chow's memories and how the traumatic memories intrude in the form of afterimage; moreover, they can perceive how the trauma affects Chow, which is especially manifested by the last black-and-white scene—Chow is lonely and seems lost in thought.



Chow suffers from the lost love and repeatedly re-experiences the traumatic loss. He cannot master the situation of falling in love with So Lai-chan; he is a failure in love. Being as such is traumatic for Chow so that what he can do is to fall into his fantasy and indulge himself in the game of love. In “Tuché and Automaton,” Lacan interprets that the moment when the father dreams of his lost child burning is the moment of an encounter with the real. In the dream which wakes up the father; there lies an unbearable reality in the addressee of the child—the reality of being the father as a failure. The missed reality can never produce itself so it needs to endlessly repeat itself. Although the encounter with the real impels the father to the awakening to the truth—being a failed father, the encounter is so traumatic that he needs to wake up and go back to the reality/fantasy that he constructs. To fend off the invasion of the real which endangers one's life—or jeopardizes the subject's consistency, one needs to construct the fantasy to adapt to the hard reality. In this case, the

encounter with the real must be a necessarily missed encounter. Following Lacan's discourse, Caruth further develops that the dream connotes the repeated failure and she writes,

The bond to the child, the sense of responsibility, is in its essence tied to the impossibility of recognizing the child in its potential death. And it is this bond that the dream reveals, exemplarily, as the real, as an encounter with a real established around an inherent impossibility. (Caruth, 1996: 103)

This indicates that once again it is always too late for the father to rescue his child and it is impossible for the father to fulfill his wish and his identity as a father. Therefore, the dream not only points to the awakening to or the recognition of the death of the child and to the repeated loss but also leads to the need of waking and returning to the external reality to survive.

Similarly, the lost love drives Chow to retreat to his fantasy and the game of love; in some aspects, he wants to recapture his lost love and fulfill his wish/identity as the lover of So Lai-chan in his search. However, the intrusive memories about So Lai-chan keep returning—she always appears unawares in part of Chow's writing and in his life, and the women—the name, the figure, and the gesture—remind him of the loss of his idealized love, in which the hidden reality appears and leads him to the awakening to the traumatic loss and to his identity as a failure in love. In some ways, it is the effect of trauma, endless returning, haunting, and repeating. Nonetheless, the truth of the repeated loss and that of being a failure are too traumatic for Chow to bear. What he can do is to keep writing, searching, and jumping from one love relationship to another—living in the fantasy which masks his traumatic core—in order that he can survive but not break down. In his search for his idealized love and his effort for fulfilling his wish/identity, there exist the necessary missed encounter and the inherent impossibility. In this case, love is always the endless missing and inevitable loss for him; just like many chances in life missed due to one's

inability to grasp. The best answer for his question of love is best not answered; the best woman for his idealized love is best not found. From this perspective, Chow can go on his life and survive. Inevitably, love is always-already missing for Chow when he wanders and wonders in the labyrinth of love.

*2046* represents the unspeakable loss of love and the after-effect of the trauma in love which happened in the past through its remarkable representation of sight and sound. It allows me to examine how the lost love becomes traumatic to people, how people are under the effects of their traumatic experiences, and also how the effects change their attitudes in love. In the continual repetition, people can further understand who they are and also can recognize the trauma. It is arguable that Chow gets rid of his past or that he works through his traumatic loss. However, at least, he has changed at the end of the film. Maybe he can let bygones be bygones one day. In the meantime, the film functions as the traumatic narratives and the traumatic space in which the stories are told and the trauma is exposed in the repetition of images; the film visualizes the trauma and represents the unrepresentable. In the visual world, the film wavers from now to then, from fantasy to reality, in which the images float, haul and flash by. Therefore, in *2046*, it is not just the characters who tell the stories but also the images, the hues, and music of the film, all of which tell the stories of the wound.

## Chapter Three

Dancing to the End of Life: Trauma, Fantasy, and Death in *Dancer in the Dark*

*Dancer in the Dark* is the last film of the Golden-Heart trilogy, in which the heroines go through the torture in the earthly hell, and they, nevertheless, maintain their goodness. Lars von Trier is a Danish director whose films are experimental and innovative, and who challenges the convention of cinema. This has caused polarized reactions from film critics and great effects on audience. Most of his films are classified into a series of thematic trilogy: the Europe trilogy, the Golden-Heart trilogy, and the USA-Land of Opportunities trilogy. The film, *Dancer in the Dark*, attributes its success to the highly unconventional melodramatic musical and the dramatic representation of how a persistent mother, who struggles to save her son from getting blind, encounters overwhelming trauma. In *Dancer in the Dark*, the trauma can then be compared with the trauma in *2046*. Through Chow's unconscious recollection in his writing in *2046*, the audience learns that his trauma happened in the past; however, in *Dancer in the Dark*, the audience witnesses what Selma Jezkova (Björk) is undergoing and detects her trauma via her music or singing. The protagonist, the mother, encounters her traumatic lost love substantially, symbolically, and spiritually. The film reveals inner struggle and emotional turmoil while Selma is confronting a succession of sufferings and it indicates the effects of the trauma on Selma and the audience as well. Lars von Trier employs the cinematic technique to display Selma's traumatic loss which is related to love with the resonance of music, lighting and shots. Like a vortex arrayed on concentric circles, they pull the audience into the center, the core of the trauma. Thus, the discourse of trauma from different perspective is imprinted on multiple layers of reality, fantasy, and identity through cinematic representation on the screen.

### Lost Love, Blindness and Death

The film is set in a small town in Washington State in the mid 60s; Selma is a Czech immigrant worker and a single mother who stays with her son in a trailer. Without any further information or background about Selma given in the film, the audience only knows that she is an introverted and innocent person seemingly with several secrets. The hereditary eye disease afflicts Selma and threatens her with blindness; the congenital eye disease foreshadows the inevitable loss of vision. Although she suffers from the failing eyesight, she still works around the clock in the tinware factory to save up enough money for the operation on the eyes of her son, Gene Jezkova (Vladica Kostic) and to keep him away from the eye problem that has tortured her and ruined her life. The degeneration of vision entails a progressive death of eyesight which afflicts and threatens Selma, who is always on tenterhooks and in fear, with its drag (the degeneration) and its abruptness (without knowing the specific moment of getting blind completely); that is, the encroaching blindness is the trauma-to-be. The imminent trauma is in the uncertain yet forthcoming future. Although Selma knows that she will get blind one day, she cannot predict when she becomes blind completely. Therefore, with fear and uncertainty, she is posited in the effects of the trauma and its repetition of the traumatic experience. Getting blind becomes traumatic only when the moment of loss of her love, her favorite things to do, and the moment of the death of her eyesight, triggers the original traumatic loss of eyesight.

Caroline Bainbridge points out,

It is possible to distinguish between the first moment of trauma, the moment in which the trauma occurs and is repressed, and the second moment, in which the memory of the experience of trauma is triggered and prompts an overwhelming sense of psychical struggle and pain in an effort to master the effects of the trauma and to regain a sense of balance and wholeness. (394)

From this perspective, in the case of Selma, the first moment of trauma is the time when she

learns that she will get blind, and then the trauma is repressed. Later, it is the second moment in which the traumatic experience of the loss of eyesight is stimulated. Therefore, her disinclined resignation from starring as Maria at the local theater—the inability to sing and dance on the stage—marks her blindness as the traumatic loss.

As far as lost love is concerned, in the film, the absent father implies “the missing half” of the parents for the family as a whole and also indicates the emotional incompleteness either for Gene or Selma—although the film does not offer the explanation who the father of Gene is or who the father of Selma is. Thus, the paternal love is lost from the very outset. Selma’s striving for gaining money is enacted as the compensation for her unfulfilled love for her son. Money becomes the token of love. The monotonous and routine sound of machines—the heavy clank and hammering—reflects not only the hardship that constantly weighs upon Selma but also the excessive insistence that Selma repeatedly holds on to. In this regard, Selma awaits her fulfillment of love for her son and that of her identity as a real mother by means of accumulating a pile of money day by day.

Although life is severe and tough on Selma, everything goes smoothly until it takes a sudden turn. At this point in time, Selma loses all her eyesight and her job as well. Meanwhile, she finds out that money in her tin chocolate box is gone, and she assumes that it is taken by Bill, who is at the end of his rope. The unexpected loss of money almost destroys her only hope. The traumatic loss happens so suddenly that her mind cannot master it. In this case, the traumatic loss is not integrated into the consciousness at first, but it repeats itself and returns to haunt the poor mother, Selma. Besides, the loss of her money symbolizes the loss of love and confirmedly verifies her failure as a mother. She somehow feels guilty about failing to protect her savings prepared for Gene’s operation. Therefore, Selma is reluctant to let go of the loss of money and makes great effort to take back her money. The loss makes Selma melancholic. In fact, unconsciously, she rejects the loss of love, and she frantically exerts all her strength to fulfill her identity as a real

mother, which drives her to the impasse, the dead end. José Arroyo suggests that “*Dancer* is a musical about alienation,” and “Selma’s love for her son Gene is overwhelming, overriding every other human relationship” (15). Therefore, she negates any other forms of love and isolates herself from any other emotional attachments; she turns down the love from her admirer, Jeff (Peter Stormier), which is, in fact, the rejection to herself as well. Probably, she is the least person she loves because she dedicates her life/love to her son.

Unsurprisingly, with keen feeling and strong determination to reclaim her money/love, Selma kills Bill with the force of arms—in her deep heart, she does not want to, but has to. The act of murder highlights the suicidal action or sacrifice and martyrdom of the mother for her son. Moreover, it reverses the offender-victim relationship; the innocent Selma becomes the killer, and the policeman who steals the money becomes the victim. The scene of murder full of blood and tears is, in fact, drawn-out, not speedy. With the long and slow scene of shooting, it intensifies the extreme conflict and contradiction Selma faces and also features the dissociation between her physical action, thoughts and emotions. The scene is dramatized by the inversion of power. Guns originally represent power. The fragile Selma is the one who possesses a weapon; the tough policeman, Bill, is the one who begs Selma for mercy by killing him. The way that she fires at Bill is compulsive, aimless, helpless, and powerless, with hysterical cry. She stands in front of Bill with the gun drooping, stamping her foot irrationally; her face is distorted with pain. She is completely out of her mind; she raises high her box which is full of her money/love for her son, and then she smashes Bill’s head. These indicate the incredible and great pain she bears and the traumatic event she experiences and also underline her determination to fulfill her identity as a real mother by killing Bill to retrieve her money/love. It is the moment of emotional explosion and the moment of encountering the death of the other.

Love is everything for Selma and also the cause that generates her tragedy. In this way, love, blindness and death are significant elements in the film and they are inextricably

intertwined. What is more, they are related to the traumatic loss that is multi-faceted. The consequence and how Selma reacts to her trauma are determined through the complicated interaction between them.

### Fantasy, Encounter, and Survival

The outstanding feature of the film is its interplay of reality and fantasy. It juxtaposes the divergent ways of representation in the film: the reality is shot by the handheld camera;<sup>16</sup> the fantasy (the musical), on the contrary, is filmed by one hundred stationary cameras.<sup>17</sup> Shooting the reality with the handheld camera creates the documentary style to focus on the exploration of the truth within the shots. Although the images are rough, unstable, and a little sloppy, in the tone of bleakness, they are intentionally created by the director to capture more the images of the characters than the words in the film, *Dancer in the Dark*. On the other hand, shooting the musical with the stationary cameras creates the contrast to allow Selma to construct her own rosy dream/reality in which the vision of Selma is as vivid as the images. These two different layers of representation are connected throughout the film. On the other hand, the compartmentation of the world into the reality

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<sup>16</sup> Using handheld cameras is the distinct feature of Direct Cinema, a documentary genre. In “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription,” Brian Winston points out the characterization of Direct Cinema, which functions as an observer, in Winston’s quotation, “recording what happens” (Winston 44; Shivas 14) and producing “a representation of reality” (40). In this case, Direct Cinema is characterized to record/capture the reality and to represent the truth. Take the Zapruder Film and Oliver Stone’s *JFK*, for examples. Zapruder’s Film is a film, with a handheld camera that records the event of the Kennedy assassination from the beginning to the end. In *JFK*, the Zapruder Film is brought into the film and serves as the access to the reality/truth and a testimony to the assassination, a traumatic event. The feature is also applied in *Dancer in the Dark*; with its raw and shaky images, Lars von Trier uses a handheld camera to film the reality, which attempts to “capture the moment” (Smith 26) or represent the event truly and allows the audience to get access to the trauma of Selma.

<sup>17</sup> The hundred stationary cameras are mentioned in the article, “Imitation of Life,” in which Gavin Smith interviews Lars von Trier. Lars von Trier explains why “the musical numbers are more mechanically and rigidly constructed,” he says that, “What kind of musical would Selma do in her head? . . . the idea was that we took the hundred non-professional video cameras . . . we placed them all around . . . to cover the dance in one go . . .” (Smith 25).



and fantasy signifies the departure from the reality and the split, the breach on the mind.

As Gavin Smith suggests in “Imitation of Life,”

Because the numbers themselves convey something quite specific: Selma's intermittent mental dissociation in the face of crisis or malaise. Von Trier accentuates this sense of dissociation through both the texture of the image—the color suddenly changes to a more vibrant register—and the montage, in which the performances are dissected and fragmented by his 100 stationary cameras into a hallucinatory swirl, an alternate happy reality in the process of being imagined.

(24)

Thus, the daydream, the fantasy is the “alternate happy reality” of Selma and her way to cope with the unbearable life in the external reality. Fantasy/daydream is constructed as a dream, and “[l]ike nocturnal dream, day-dreams are wish-fulfillments” (Laplanche and Pontalis 95). In this case, Selma desires to fulfill her wish which contradicts what she faces in the reality. Moreover, fantasy functions as “screen memories,” a concept presented by Freud (1899 a), and shows the seeming insignificance to screen out the repressed materials that is unacceptable to the ego, which, paradoxically, project one’s repressed desire. Similarly, fantasy masks the unacceptable or unbearable real and fills up the gap that is caused by the trauma; on the other hand, fantasy, paradoxically, points to and uncovers what it hides at the same time. For Selma, the fragmentary fantasy in the form of the montage is the residues of the reality and it is the potential wish-fulfillment or “an imaginatively empathetic form” which is converted from the reality (Smith 25). In the wish-fulfillment fantasy, it does not reverse the reality into a different world but offers an alternative and adaptable reality based on available materials in the surroundings. Thus, the extension and adaptation of the external reality can be recognized through the given scenario with the same people and settings existing in the fantasy and a mood of optimism pervaded in the “alternate happy reality” (Smith 24).

Selma unconsciously repeats her falling into her daydream or fantasy; she does not know or recognize why she repeats and what leads her to the repetition, yet she can feel it. Those daydreams or fantasies appear when Selma has the emotional upsurge or encounters the unbearable pain, which is introduced by a hint or clue of sounds and beats from mundane objects in life—“[n]oise is music in Selma’s dreams” (Arroyo 15). Let’s take the scene after Selma kills Bill as an example. There is no doubt that the murder of her neighbor who provides a dwelling for her is the unbearable trauma for Selma. Accordingly, hinted by beats, she unconsciously immerses herself in her fantasy, her musical world, to react on her traumatic experience. With closer examination of the fantasy, it is detectable that Selma does not reverse the reality into a complete different situation, but she revises the reality and projects her longing for wish-fulfillment. Peter Matthews notes that, “musicals comprise a utopian space where suffering is abolished” (42). Therefore, in the daydream/fantasy, Bill, who has been dead, wakes up all at once, listens to Selma’s explanation, and embraces her kindly. In the tender and considerate comfort from Bill, the forgiveness is given, and in the justification of Gene, who sings, “You just did what you had to do,” there lies another possibility and wish-fulfillment that does not pertain to the external world. In her daydream/fantasy, the desire of being a real mother is constituted. Therefore, the daydream or the fantasy serves as the mask to cover up the painful truth, the repressed and to build up the desire on it.

Nevertheless, paradoxically, there exists the other reality hidden in the fantasy which drives Selma to return to the external reality. This explains why the juxtaposition and alternation of reality and fantasy are continuously repeated in the film. As she encounters with the death (of the other), the original trauma is not recognized by Selma because it “is not fully assimilated as it occurs” (Caruth, 1996: 5). Hence, it requires the repetition, namely, a double wound, a double telling, which calls for the hearing. That is to say, in the deferred impact of the trauma, it demands the witness by means of repetition. Moreover,

as Cathy Caruth points out, “[f]or what returns to haunt the trauma victim . . . is not just any event but, significantly, the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident” (Caruth, 1996: 6). Thus, Selma is haunted by the fright and the unexpected accident in the state of the unprepared mind. Therefore, there is “inescapably bound to a referential return” (Caruth, 1996: 7) and any stimulus which can stir and trigger the original traumatic experience makes the event traumatic. As Slavoj Žižek mentions in “Does the Subject Have a Cause?”

This paradox of trauma qua cause that does not pre-exist its effects but is itself retroactively “posited” by them involves a kind of temporal loop: *it is through its “repetition,” through its echoes within the signifying structure, that the cause retroactively becomes what is always-already was.* (32)

In this case, the repetition of daydreaming or singing as reference echoes and triggers the traumatic experience of lost love and confirms the loss of love as the trauma.

Even if José Arroyo has put his opinion on the scene which “risks risibility,” he thinks that it is gothic, for “*Dancer* has a musical number with a corpse” (15). However, does the gothic scene not remind us of the dream of the burning child, in which the dead child talks to the father? Although Selma desires to be forgiven, she cannot evade the return of the trauma. Even in her fantasy, it is impossible to wash away the blood stains that remain on Bill. Thus, it is the encounter with death and the real, which only occurs in the daydream or fantasy. Undeniably, the blood stains on Bill’s head mean the irremovable sin and pain for Selma; the repetition of the wound in the fantasy indicates that the trauma constantly returns to haunt Selma and she unconsciously repeats the traumatic experience without being aware of it. Moreover, when Gene appears in her fantasy and rides the bike that Selma cannot afford, what her son addresses in the refrain, “You just did what you had to do,” does not simply reflect the desire of Selma to be approved but also reveals the hidden reality, the truth, of the mother as a failure, who desperately wants to compensate her son

for lost love. Furthermore, Selma is extraordinarily sensitive to the sound around her. The discordant siren which rings in the fantasy—in fact, the sound is heard within and without—exposes the hidden reality, confirms the fact of the murder, and awakens Selma to another reality, that is, the awakening to the death of the other and to the failure of being a real mother. Suddenly, the traumatic real erupting from the gap makes the fantasy unbearable and painful, and it causes Selma to wake up and return to the external reality to keep dreaming. It is as what Lacan mentions, “What is missed is not adaptation, but tuché, the encounter” (69). From this perspective, the song dialogue with the dead Bill, the refrain sung by Gene, and the unexpected siren play the role as the referential return and accentuate the impossibility of reversibility and the necessary missed encounter with death. It is the necessarily missed encounter that enables Selma to survive. In “Traumatic Awakenings,” Cathy Caruth points out that “From this perspective, the trauma that the dream, as an awakening, reenacts is not only the missed encounter with the child’s death but also the way in which *that missing also constitutes the very survival of the father*” (100; emphasis added). Equally, the prerequisite that constructs the survival of Selma is the essential encounter, the missed encounter.

In the film, Selma repeatedly carries out the cycle that goes through the fantasy, the encounter with the real, and the survival. The repetition of the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality verifies the entire process that is performed and reiterated throughout the film. Whenever the external reality is too harsh to bear, she turns into her musical world, her fantasy; then, she awakens to the hidden reality in the fantasy, and returns to the outside world. Thus, the musical repeatedly appears in her workplace, in confronting the truth of blindness with Jeff, in the courtroom, and in the death chamber. The repetition not only represents how Selma faces the exploding traumatic experience with her drastically unstable mind and how she is overwhelmed by the powerful trauma. Furthermore, the process of the repetition throughout the film resembles the rolling stone in Sisyphean task. Selma is

deluged with and overcome by the continuously thronging trauma and its incessant return.

### Beyond the Voice, Beyond the Vision

Shrouded in darkness, Selma has been excluded from the world of light in the reality. The shadow of loss and death casts on Selma, who cannot be excused from the world of pain. The unspeakable trauma and secrets silence Selma in the external world. Thus she creates her exhilarating and cheerful world that enables her to go beyond the voice and vision. In “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival,” Caruth finds that the fort/da game mentioned by Freud is the story that represents the inner world of the child, who tries to fulfill his wish and replaces the pain of loss with the pleasure of creation (78). In the game, the meaning lies in the repetition of the painful experience of departure of a mother. Caruth points out, “What is most surprising in the child’s game, however, is that this re-enactment of reality in the game places repetition at the very heart of childhood, and links the repetition to a creative act of invention” (Caruth, 2000: 78). Is not the creative act of invention similar to the invention of music in Selma’s mind? The act of fantasy is an act of invention by creating numbers in her head. The music as the game allows Selma to master the unpleasant loss and employs the pleasure of creation or invention to replace the painful loss.

The musicals as interludes provide the audience a provocative viewing experience. In her musical world, sometimes in the air of the carnival-like atmosphere and sometimes in the breeze of peacefulness, Selma sings, dances, and gains the transient freedom. In “Selma, or the Absence of God,” Dina Kassir points out the significance of music for Selma:

At no time during the movie, does Selma, or any other character in the plot, turn to God for solace, guidance, endorsement, or help. She never glances toward heaven, never utters a single prayer, even at the end, when she marches towards

her execution. On the contrary, there is a strikingly human and earthly quality to Selma best depicted by her utter and total solitude, both when facing her life and her death. This is, however, not an empty solitude, for it is filled with music and dancing — Selma's utter joy in life. (28)

Music, in fact, serves not simply as a solace to Selma but as transcendence that allows her to go beyond. In addition, music reveals the unspeakable trauma of Selma and manifests the truth in the form of repetition or refrain. However, when music ends, the joy in the musical world underlines and intensifies the sharp reality. In the scene of the oncoming train, Jeff confronts Selma with the truth of her blindness by asking “You cannot see, can you?” In response to the confrontation, the song, “I’ve Seen It All,” goes,

I’ve seen it all, I have seen the trees,  
 I’ve seen the willow leaves dancing in the breeze,  
 I’ve seen a friend killed by a friend,  
 And lives that were over before they were spent.  
 I’ve seen what I was—I know what I’ll be.  
 I’ve seen it all—there is no more to see!<sup>18</sup>

In the tone of seeming acceptance and resignation, the song voices the traumatic loss of eyesight and reveals the truth of the blindness and the accidental murder that are kept silent in the reality. The trauma returns to haunt Selma who does not know that she repeats the traumatic experience even in her fantasy. Following the scene of fantasy, it is an abrupt slit where Selma returns to the reality. The off-screen voice of Jeff suddenly bursts and the question is repeated, “You cannot see, can you?” The repetition of the same question ostensibly sutures the discontinuity between the reality and fantasy; however, paradoxically, it clearly divides the fantasy and reality apart, draws Selma back to the reality and the

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<sup>18</sup> In this chapter, the lyrics for the song are extracted from the DVD of the film, *Dancer in the Dark*.

audience as well, and more importantly, exposes the truth and the trauma which Selma re-experiences. In this case, songs and dances in the film narrate and record the story of the wound that is taking place and voices for Selma the unspeakable trauma.

Most importantly, the power of music helps Selma to transcend death. She says to the guard (Siobhan Fallon), “In a musical, nothing dreadful ever happens.” In the jail, she cannot produce her fantasy for the unbearable quietness while facing the impending death. In this way, she sings the song of *The Sound of Music*, “My Favorite Things,” in the reality rather than in her head, in imagination. At first, she cannot sing fluently or carry on the lyrics due to the agony of death, the unbearable trauma. Her version of “My Favorite Things” is completely different from that of Maria in *The Sound of Music*. Flooded by bleakness and fear, Selma’s voice quavers and is extraordinarily heartbreaking, plaintive, and sorrowful. Later, the voice gradually changes into a happy one because music leads her to transcend the trauma. It is just like the lyrics in “107 Steps” that is simply the counting; however, what counts is the meaning of music for Selma. The film begins with music and ends likewise. When Selma is put unto the gallows, she learns that Gene has already had the operation. Her retrieval of her lost love is realized and culminates in the scene that she is hanged to death. At that moment, she fulfills her identity as a real mother that she makes great efforts and struggles to achieve at the cost of her own subjectivity, her life. Meanwhile, compared with other songs which only come out in her fantasy, in her head, the finale, “The Next-to-Last Song,” is sung by Selma out loud in the external reality because there is nothing to fear and it is unnecessary to live in her fantasy any more. Finally, she has transcended death and trauma in her resonant voice.

### Witness and Traumatization

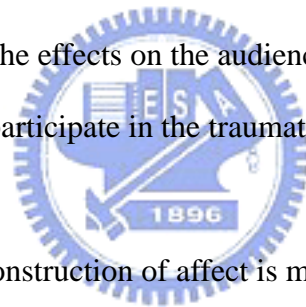
*Dancer in the Dark* presents that the trauma is exploding in front of the audience.

That is, the audience is witnessing the trauma. The film is traumatic not only in theme but

also in representation. It includes the alternate use of handheld and stationary camera and the mixture of the musical and the melodrama. Shooting by the handheld camera is the strategy that Lars von Trier deploys for storytelling in which he actively captures the moment rather than passively films it. Lars von Trier says in an interview,

[W]hen you use a handheld camera, the search for the object becomes part of the story. I have tried to be very precise but I also like it to a little bit sloppy. So when I hear someone say something, I pan to a reaction, or not, and this is part of storytelling with a handheld camera. (Smith 26)

It is the way of using handheld camera for storytelling that directs the spectators to and invites them into the story.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the audiences are those who witness the trauma that is occurring in the film. On the other hand, the way that Lars von Trier deals with and represents the trauma creates the effects on the audience, which traumatizes the witnesses in the end and prompts them to participate in the traumatic event. Caroline Bainbridge indicates,



In this trilogy, the construction of affect is most clearly seen in the closing sequences of the films when the spectator is left overwrought and without closure from the filmic ending. . . . in *Dancer in the Dark* the ending is intensely brutal, as the public hanging of Selma culminates in our view of her dangling body being closed off from prying eyes by the drawing of curtains. (393)

The aftermath of the trauma is left on the screen even when the story ends. There is no doubt that the scene of the execution is so real, cruel, and traumatic. The spectators are bombarded by the shock, the effects of the scene; they are traumatized. The effect can be seen in the ending of another film of Lars von Trier, as Bainbridge indicates, “At the end of

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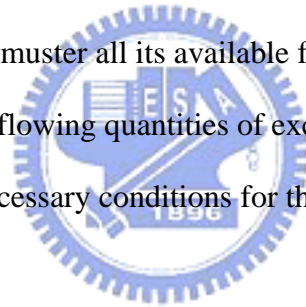
<sup>19</sup> In “Imitation of Life,” Gavin Smith interviews Lars von Trier and he comments on the use of a handheld camera, he says, “So in a sense you become a participant in the performance of the scene” (26). In this case, not only the filmmaker but also the audience participate in the film for the reason that the camera conveys “the feeling of being there” (Winston 43).



*The Idiots*, we might be seen to have an excess of powerful stimulus that breaches out psychic defenses and marks us as bearers of affect in relation to that which we have witnessed” (398). Equally, in *Dancer in the Dark*, the spectators as bearers of effects created in film witness the trauma of Selma and are simultaneously traumatized.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud suggests that “the living vesicle is provided with a shield against stimuli from the external world” (28). And he also mentions that, “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (Freud 1920g: 29). Therefore, the effects of the trauma are so powerful that they break through the shield of the spectators. Moreover, Laplanche and Pontalis point out,

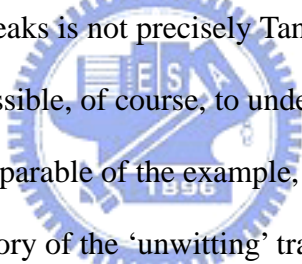
Should this barrier suffer any breach, we have a trauma: the task of the apparatus at this juncture is to muster all its available forces so as to establish anticathexes, to immobilise the inflowing quantities of excitation and thus to permit the restoration of the necessary conditions for the functioning of the pleasure principle. (466)



In this case, the mechanism of viewing experience is disrupted due to the effects which invite traumatization. Peter Matthews even writes, “The gruesome finale is obscene in a way it rapes the audience’s sensibilities but it’s also devastating” (42). In viewing these sequences—including the dreadful moment before the execution, the horrible hanging, and the terrifyingly dangling body, there is no doubt that the spectators are traumatized. After the scene of the execution, as Caroline Bainbridge points out, the film “ends with a lyric from Selma’s dying song superimposed on the final scenes and a crane shot to a densely black screen encompassed in silence” (393). The specific ending throws a bomb toward the spectators and detonates it among them. On the one hand, the blackness echoes the blindness that Selma experiences and also symbolizes the death and the bleakness that are left behind; the silence resembles the unspeakable traumatic experience that Selma

encounters and forces her to be silent. On the other hand, the complete darkness and silence that give rise to the shock and effects stand out and highlight the traumatization for which the spectators are left without closure but still affected by the trauma without knowing it.

As the story of Tancred mentioned in Chapter Two in my thesis, his life is constructed by the repetition of the trauma. As Caruth finds, the story of Tancred, “the repeated thrusts of his unwitting sword and the suffering he recognizes through the voice he hears, represents the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past” (Caruth, 1996: 8). It is the case that demonstrates the nature of the trauma which constantly repeats itself and manifests how one unconsciously repeats one’s own traumatic experience. However, Caruth further points out that,



[T]he wound that speaks is not precisely Tancred’s own but the wound, the trauma, of another. It is possible, of course, to understand that other voice, the voice of Clorinda, within the parable of the example, to represent the other within the self that retains the memory of the ‘unwitting’ traumatic events of one’s past. But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound. (Caruth, 1996: 8)

From this viewpoint, the voice of Selma transmits and makes “the other within the self.” In this case, I argue that the trauma of the spectators is linked to the trauma of Selma tightly; that is, the trauma of another is transmissible and can be passed on to the witness who hears the cry of the wound. Therefore, the spectators encounter with Selma and become the witnesses through cinematic representation of the trauma and visual representation of the fantasy in Selma’s head, seeing the traumatic events happen to Selma and listening to the

traumatic narratives via Selma's singing; and then they are traumatized due to their witnessing and hearing the wound.

*Dancer in the Dark* explicitly represents the trauma and its nature of repetition and visualizes the emotional turmoil in the face of crisis through the interplay of reality and fantasy. In its traumatic narrative, the film, *Dancer in the Dark*, synchronizes the storytelling with the witnessing of traumatic happenings. Moreover, the film utilizes its cinematic representation—the distinctive and diverse ways of filming, the singular texture of the image, and the editing—to reveal the significant characteristic of the trauma, that is to say, the repetition which masks the real, and it, paradoxically, points to the real. With Selma's voice, the spectators are drawn into her fantasy, a dazzlingly rosy world with a secret garden, to explore the naked reality and deepest emotions. The meaning of the film is constituted only by traumatization and its successful transmission, in which the story of the wound can be heard and spread.



## Chapter Four

Scarring the Mind: Obsessive Love, Loss, and Sexuality in *Talk to Her*

*Talk to Her* is a film about absence of love that is painted as a background, overlaid with rich loneliness and a sense of loss; it is about the realization of the absence that determines the trauma. As one of the important directors in Spain, Pedro Almodóvar has won a great reputation in the world for his unconventional and unique representation of gender, sexuality, and violence; his films are also flooded with visually glorious and splendid images. Besides, he is also called a “women’s director” in “Comatose women in ‘El bosque’: Sleeping Beauty and other literary motifs in Pedro Almodóvar’s *Hable con ella*” (Naughten 81). His subtle observation and sensitive characterization of women in his films are really impressive. In his colorful, candy-like world of the cinema, Almodóvar is good at unfolding women’s state of mind by embroidering the story in a subtle way. The veiled emotions of women about grief, uneasiness, fortitude, and passion, etc. are rendered gently and delicately beneath the magnificent coating. Moreover, in “Pedro Almodóvar Creates Another Lush, Bittersweet Object of Beauty,” Kent Jones notes that, “In any case, as always with Almodóvar, the expression of emotion is treated as an event worthy of his (and our) rapt attention” (15). Emotions, such as love and grief, are certainly significant in the film; at the same time, the way how they are represented needs emphasizing. However, Jonathan Holland points out in the film review that, “Men, not women, are at the emotional heart of *Talk to Her*” (9). Therefore, *Talk to Her* deals with how the emotions of men are revealed and represented when they face the difficult problems in love. Due to the incommunication and unilateral love in relationship, loneliness colors the film. There is a feeling of the dense and intense loneliness hovering and pervading this film. Loneliness and the impossibility of love become important factors that help to explore the trauma in

love in *Talk to Her*. In addition, they are provided with the possibility of becoming a trauma. By setting a contrast on two male protagonists, the film *Talk to Her* emphasizes and demonstrates their different responses on emotion and understanding of love while facing their predicament in relationship. This film offers another perspective to examine the trauma in love and explore the repeated behaviors that manifest the repressed painful experience, express the unremitting quest of love, and foreshadow the trauma before the lost love is converted into the trauma.

### Obsessive Love and Loneliness

There is no doubt that the mood of loneliness pervades the film *Talk to Her*. As its press kit on the official website claims, *Talk to Her* “is a story . . . about loneliness and the long convalescence of the wounds provoked by passion” (7).<sup>20</sup> Since the storyline substantially focuses on men, characterization of men’s loneliness and emotional suffering is much deeper and more conspicuous. Loneliness is not simply a mood in the film or just a feeling, but also the disposition of the male characters. With his obsessive love, Benigno (Javier Cámara) devotes himself to taking care of Alicia (Leonor Watling), who is in a coma because of a car accident. Therefore, Benigno’s part is concerned with reciprocal causation between loneliness and obsessive love, which leads to his tragic end. From this point, his loneliness results from his obsessive love that implies unconditional yet unilateral love; on the other hand, his obsessive love intensifies his loneliness. The loneliness of the other male protagonist, Marco (Darío Grandinetti), is related to his fascination with desperate women and his struggle for getting over his trauma in love as compared with Benigno. They demonstrate two different types of getting involved in a predicament in

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<sup>20</sup> This press kit appears on the official website of the film, *Talk to Her*, in which Pedro Almodóvar introduces the film and interviews himself. In “Only Connect,” Paul Julian Smith mentions “the director’s ‘auto-interview’, a self-penned inquisition in which he answers only questions posed by himself. (This is by now a familiar tradition when he releases a new film.)” (25).

love. However, Benigno's melancholic loneliness and obsessive love foreshadow his trauma, which is the core of the film and moves the film to the territory of the trauma.

At the layer of the narrative, the flows of all directions converge on the main stream of the film. The film condenses its content from stories belonging to four characters—Marco, Lydia (Rosario Flores), Benigno, and Alicia—to a well-structured story by means of interweaving the present and the past, that is, the fragmented strands of memories and stories are integrated into a single storyline. A series of flashbacks bridge the time or ellipsis in the storyline of the film to explicate things that happened and how they become who they are. Therefore, not only the flashbacks but also the interrelation between the present and the past are significant to help to understand the story in *Talk to Her*.

Benigno is a male nurse, who is sensitive and caring, and gets the nursing experience and profession for attending his ailing mother on the sickbed. In the film review of *Talk to Her*, David Lichtenstein considers Benigno “a sheltered soul who . . . cared for his lonely bedridden mother to the extent that he never left the house” (905). What propels Benigno to stay in day and night is his ambition to keep the beauty of his mother, who, according to Benigno, is lazy. However, in Benigno's description, the fact is exposed: Benigno's mother abandons herself to grief and despair due to the leaving of her husband. When this sheltered child-man meets the beautiful Alicia at the hospital, Benigno seems to be her guardian angel, devoting his life to taking care of her. However, the narrative flows forward with the flashback within which reveals that Benigno has met Alicia before. During the time of looking after his mother, Benigno is attracted by the ballerina, Alicia, and he often stands behind the window to look at her. Behind the curtain of the window or on the street, Benigno's eyes follow Alicia wherever she goes; he is portrayed as a voyeur, a stalker, and a thief, sneaking and stealing a hairgrip from her room. In “Reports and Brief Communications: A Psychoanalyst's Reflections on Almodóvar's Film ‘Talk to Her’,” Christer Sjödin notes that Alicia's hairgrip is a fetish for Benigno, who derives his fantasy

from the hairgrip:

Fingering the fetish, he uses this information to construct a fantasy world for himself and Alicia. He knows what Alicia needs. The lack of ambivalence means that his fantasies are rigid and assume omnipotent and omniscient features.

(166)

Obviously, Benigno is exceedingly obsessed by Alicia. After his mother dies, even though Benigno ends his seemingly secluded homebound existence, he feels lonely, possibly because of the loss of his mother, who was the only purpose for his past years. Therefore, Benigno's dedication to caring and his feeling of being needed develop his obsessive love and they were channeled to his ill mother before, but now to the comatose Alicia. In this case, the fantastic communication with Alicia is all a means for Benigno to project his love on the beautiful Alicia and flee the loneliness that, as a creeping shadow, overwhelms and overpowers him. Therefore, when the question, "Do you have a partner?" is raised by Dr. Roncero (Helio Pedregal), Benigno replies that, "More or less. I'm not alone anymore. That isn't a problem now."<sup>21</sup>

Such is the case when Benigno is infatuated with Alicia and consecrates his life to her. No belief is more unyielding and truer than the one that Alicia and he are perfect lovers, which is resolutely held by Benigno. In his fantasy, Benigno communes with Alicia and thinks that they communicate with each other regardless of what state Alicia is in. As Kent Jones points out, "Almost every character in *Talk to Her* channels his/her emotional turmoil into physical enterprises like bullfighting or dancing. Or else they project their desire onto people both animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious" (15).

Following the notion, in Benigno's case, he channels and projects his desire on Alicia—the unconscious woman lying motionless in the hospital bed—by means of talking, touching,

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<sup>21</sup> In my thesis, the dialogues in this chapter are extracted from the DVD of the film, *Talk to Her*.

and caring. Therefore, these repeated and particular behaviors—talking, touching, and caring—convey Benigno’s innermost emotions and contain his absolute yet turbulent love; on the other hand, they imply the loneliness that imbues and gnaws Benigno. Furthermore, it demands our attention: only in the condition—Alicia is in the persistent vegetative state—can Benigno love Alicia and accompany her. In *Talk to Her*, there is no denying that “[t]his is Benigno’s position: a helpless, comatose woman is a woman he can love” (Lichtenstein 905). Otherwise, he can just hide behind the curtain and looks at her from afar. However, here lies the most depressing thing: even though he spends his time on Alicia day and night, he cannot dispel his emotional turmoil from beginning to end. The fact is this: the stronger his obsessive love grows, the lonelier Benigno feels.

#### Loss and Absence

Uncovering the loneliness, what stirs Benigno’s emotions is his loss of absent love, the loss of nothingness. To further probe into the issue, it is necessary to distinguish the loss from the absence, which is pivotal in the analysis of the trauma in love that Benigno experiences. In his essay, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” Dominick LaCapra proposes that there exists a danger to conflate absence and loss so that it is compulsory to distinguish them for the process of recovery from traumatic events. To LaCapra, absence is posited “on a transhistorical level,” whereas loss “on a historical level” (LaCapra, 2001: 48). It is important to note that “[i]n terms of absence, one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had” (LaCapra, 2001: 50). In addition, LaCapra explains,

In this transhistorical sense absence is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future). Moreover, losses are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones on a personal level or, on a broader scale, the losses brought about by apartheid or by the Holocaust in its effects on Jews and other victims of the Nazi genocide, including both the lives and the cultures



of affected groups. (LaCapra, 2001: 49)

Thus, there exist fundamental differences between absence and loss; it is indispensable to differentiate these two concepts. Otherwise, LaCapra points out,

To blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the post-traumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling. (LaCapra, 2001: 46)

Although the distinction is crucially required after the traumatic events, I find that it is equally essential for pre-traumatic period in the case of Benigno within the scenario of the film, *Talk to Her*. On the other hand, the misplacement or the misrecognition of the loss and the absence invites jeopardy or a threat to the life of Benigno.

Love should not be all on one side. For a love relationship to exist, there must be mutual love. However, there is only Benigno's obsessive and unilateral love in this film. In addition, it's arguable that Alicia indeed responds to Benigno's love. Nevertheless, it is certain that Benigno plunges into his fantasy, his one-man show, or the insane monologue that Marco reproaches him for what he does and thinks. From this perspective, the absent love fundamentally and implicitly motivates the fantasy constructed by Benigno. David Lichtenstein writes, "The psychoanalytic view is that when confronted with negation/absence, the human subject inevitably resists. . . .The absent object is replaced by an imagined/hallucinated wish-fulfilling object: the hallucinatory wish fulfillment" (909). This is Benigno's situation that he resists accepting the absent love of Alicia, the nothingness, so he negates the absence by creating his wish-fulfilling fantasy in which they are perfect couple and the immobile body of Alicia becomes the material or the object for his fantasy, which can fill in the gap of the absent love. By going deeper, it is detectable that the fantasy actually comprises a twofold layer of denial, the double denial. The first

denial is that he radically and absolutely denies the existence of the absent love, which is replaced by the lost love. He chooses to believe that Alicia's love is lost on account of her coma rather than that the love never exists. Furthermore, he partially refuses the lost love that he accepts ostensibly and is stuck to the idea/ideal that they can commune and communicate with each other. Both layers of denial indicate Benigno's rejection of the painful reality; one is the reality of the negation of Alicia's love, and the other is the reality that Alicia is unconsciously and brain-deadly situated.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra speculates on the problem of the trauma concerning "major historical events" (ix). He argues, "When absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community" (LaCapra, 2001: 46). From this perspective, what LaCapra proposes can be applied to the case of Benigno in *Talk to Her*. His conversion from absence to loss resolves his love into his trauma and paves the way for his tragic end. LaCapra also indicates that, "In converting absence into loss, one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted or contaminated and this made 'us' lose" (LaCapra, 2001: 58). In his fantasy, Benigno converts the absent love into the lost love, and then the "misplaced nostalgia" (what LaCapra terms), for which he insists on pursuing the unity and fulfilling his identity, expands and hollows out his mind. In this case, Benigno feels lonelier and lonelier so that he desperately pines for the oneness and the union with Alicia and regains the unity of the love that is broken by the accident, which brings about the coma of Alicia.

The omnipotent and omniscient fantasy formed in the mind of Benigno seemingly exceeds the fantasy of the lost love. Even so, the fantasy constructed by Benigno is exploded by the reality, which reveals his contradiction in the face of Dr. Roncero, Alicia's father and the psychiatrist of Benigno himself as well. As a psychiatrist, Dr. Roncero objectively analyzes Benigno in the office; as a father, Dr. Roncero subjectively observes

how Benigno executes his work of massage on the body of Alicia in the hospital. In this case, when Dr. Roncero queries Benigno about his sexual orientation, he speaks on behalf of Alicia's father over that of the psychiatrist of Benigno. But then, to secure his fantasy, Benigno lies to Dr. Roncero:

Dr. Roncero: The other day, going through my papers, I found some notes I took the day you came to see me. I'd written down a topic to discuss on your second visit. A visit that never took place.

Benigno: What topic?

Dr. Roncero: Your sexual orientation.

Benigno: My sexual orientation?

Dr. Roncero: Yes, your sexuality. If you like men or women. When you came to see me, you said you were still a virgin.

Benigno: Well . . . . To answer your question in some way, I think I'm oriented more towards men.

Benigno's composed reply to the question manifests that his fantasy of having Alicia as his companion is constructed and illuminates Benigno's desire for Alicia. However, the fabrication of his true identity, on the other hand, functions as the negation/elimination of the love for Alicia in public/reality and exposes the fear of Benigno divulging his secret in front of the authority that Dr. Roncero embodies. Moreover, the denial of his true sexual orientation indicates that Benigno unconsciously admits that his love for Alicia is forbidden and his fantasy is unacceptable. Therefore, in this scene of interrogation, the reality challenges the rightness of the behaviors and the fantasy of Benigno.

In *Talk to Her*, the director, Almodóvar, exercises the performance pieces with their excellent visual effects to express the central theme of the film—loneliness—and connect to the emotional turmoil of Benigno, such as the scenes of bullfighting. In "La Séduction de La Femme: Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*," Jui-hua Tseng relates the scenes of bullfighting to

the process of seduction. Moreover, Tseng analyzes “the absence of the alluring woman in the process of seduction” (32) and he states that “*Talk to Her* addresses the impossibility of seduction with the absence of seducer from the bullring” (34). Thus, the scenes of bullfighting echo the uncontrollable love and the inevitable loneliness in a relationship in the case of Benigno. In the first scene of bullfighting, the director, Almodóvar, employs the slow motion to create the exquisite and enthralled atmosphere of beautiful seduction between the female matador/seducer, Lydia, and the bull. What haunts the audiences is the brimming loneliness that “diffuses in its excessive performance” (Tseng 35). When it comes to the second scene of bullfighting, the sequence ends all of a sudden, with the gored Lydia moved out, leaving the wild bull on the scene. Tseng specifies,

a matador functions here to control or to configure the bull’s blind impulse, giving it the “clue” of where to run in order to be stabbed “rightly” between its shoulder blades, the absence of the desire leader (or the misleader) from the battlefield leaves the blind impulse remaining unregulated, free, and yet absurd. (35)

The scenes not only suggest the impossibility of seduction with the absent seducer but also infer the impossibility of love on account of the absent seducer for Benigno. However, the reality is too painful for Benigno to bear. Take the dream of the burning child as an example, which is also pointed out in the previous two chapters. Escaping from the terrible reality shown in the dream, the father goes through it as a nightmare. In “How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?” Slavoj Žižek writes, “When we awaken into reality after a dream, we usually say to ourselves ‘it was just a dream’, thereby blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, wakening reality we are nothing but a consciousness of this dream” (47). Similarly, to ward off the unbearable reality, what Benigno can do is to create a fantasy of having Alicia as his seducer and imagine that the love is lost as his external reality. However, the unbound impulse of Benigno, which is directed to the absent love, Alicia, is futile and void of effects and then inevitably becomes out of control.

The conversion of absence into loss culminates in the scene of the rape wherein Benigno realizes and accomplishes his wish of getting united with Alicia and that of retrieving the wholeness of the love.

### Body, Sexuality, and Coma Rape

There is a large proportion of the representation of the comatose body in *Talk to Her*. In “Weepers,” Andrew Holleran comments that, “this [*Talk to Her*] is a movie that haunts you after seeing it, what haunts you are images of women in comas” (48). The divergent representations of the images of Alicia and Lydia in their comas are related to the men whom they respectively get involved in. For example, with her snow-white complexion, Alicia is portrayed as a protagonist in a fairy tale as what Almodóvar comments in the press kit of *Talk to Her*, “She’s [Watling’s] wonderful playing the sleeping beauty in the ‘El Bosque’ [‘The Forest’] Clinic” (19). Compared with the images of Alicia in a tranquil coma, Lydia is represented by the broken images of an impaired woman and looks like that she has been dead already. In this regard, the loss of Lydia in some ways triggers the past memory of Marco’s loss of his ex-girlfriend. The loss is traumatic to Marco and becomes the unacceptable reality. He confesses to Benigno: “I can’t even touch her [Lydia]. I don’t recognize her body. . . .And I feel so despicable.”

Conversely, the way that Benigno treats the body of Alicia bears witness to his joy of being with the body rather than a trauma Marco faces. In his fantasy, Benigno enjoys the game that is invented by him; in other words, he amuses himself by immersing into the imaginative world. Jui-hua Tseng points out “the possibility of a man’s seduction by himself, Alicia, the beautiful dancer/body in her coma, a pure icon, would be the seducer engendered by Benigno’s imagination” (41). Or, in the film review, Karen Backstein writes, “With her body, awareness, and any potential resistance stilled, Alicia has become Benigno’s doll” (41). To Benigno, the body is the pure object and the vehicle for

discharging the love and the loneliness no matter what the body of Alicia is like—a pure icon or a doll. However, it casts doubt on whether Alicia contains or carries the love of Benigno with her body. It reminds me of the classic line from the play written by American playwright Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which the protagonist Blanche Dubois says, “Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers” (142). In *Talk to Her*, the way that the body of Alicia is represented is the image that is imagined by Benigno and is perceived through his eyes. From Benigno’s perspective, Alicia is helpless and fragile, as Lichtenstein portrays, “She [Alicia] is naked, vulnerable and supremely unreachable” (905). Therefore, in her particular circumstance, what really counts for Alicia is the dependence of the care that is afforded by Benigno. However, what the body of Alicia expresses is not her desire, her helplessness, or her loneliness but, on the contrary, Benigno’s. In this regard, Benigno is caught up in his own desire, helplessness, and loneliness reflected on the smooth body of Alicia.

To consider “the possibility of a man’s seduction by himself” (Tseng 41), it requires a further analysis of the representation of the naked body of Alicia—an image of a complete, perfect, and ideal body. The perfect and whole image of the body coincides with the perfect image of the self when the subject perceives in the mirror stage. In “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,” Lacan proposes,

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with it rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.

(Lacan, 1977: 4)

From this perspective, Benigno undergoes the similar process of the mirror stage: the process of identification with the ideal image of the other to form a sense of completeness for the subject. As the film shows, love is surrounded in the imaginary field, in the fantasy. The perfection and wholeness is formative and imaginary. For the love as a whole, Benigno identifies and incorporates the ideal body-image of Alicia with him. The idealized image of the pure Alicia is extended and projected from the imaginary fantasy of Benigno, which supports and helps to construct his identity. Firmly, the concept of oneness/wholeness is held by Benigno. Therefore, he endeavors to fulfill the oneness/wholeness by means of identification or incorporation with Alicia. Nevertheless, it exposes that Benigno as a subject is insufficient, incomplete, and fragmented.

When it comes to the issue of body, sexuality, and coma rape, the performances that is inserted into *Talk to Her*—such as the dancing pieces of Pina Bausch and the black-and-white silent film—should be included into the analysis. The dancing pieces in *Talk to Her* function as intertextual materials to reveal what unfolds in the film. At the beginning, the first dancing piece of Pina Bausch adopted by Almodóvar, which is titled *Café Müller*, is taken as an epitome that highlights the essence of the film, *Talk to Her*; moreover, the dancing piece enacts the role to commence the film and foreshadow the development of the plots. In “Body, Silence, and Movement: Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller* in Almodóvar’s *Hable con ella*,” Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla points out,

This excerpt from Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller* . . . is successfully integrated into the film as *a form of a visual quotation*. Almodóvar . . . gives the dance piece a significance . . . as a unit that is symbolically linked to the main action and the themes of the film: the inability to communicate, the alienation that exists between couples, the search for self-fulfillment and intimacy. (52; emphasis added)

Benigno is like the man in the dancing piece, who desperately strives for pushing away

whatever obstacles that stand in the way of the woman, who is like a sleepwalker.

Moreover, on the balcony of the hospital, the idea of the second dancing piece, “Trenches,” as portrayed by Alicia’s teacher (Geraldine Chaplin) “from death emerges life . . . From the male emerges the female. . . . From the earth emerges . . . the ethereal.” This idea of the choreography gives rise to the omission of the boundaries, that is to say, “the blurring of subject and object, self and other, mortality and immortality” (Gutiérrez-Albilla 53).

Gutiérrez-Albilla also comments, “The dance intertext thus offers a potential avenue for understanding . . . the central corporeal act of the film, Benigno’s attempt to achieve communicative interaction with Alicia through her silent, yet expressive, body” (53). In *Talk to Her*, the most significant element in dancing is the expressive and eloquent body and gesture of the dancers, and at that moment, silence speaks better than sounds. For this reason, the emotions can be revealed through the dancing performances, which allude to Benigno’s emotions in detection of his gesturality.

Furthermore, in *Talk to Her*, the black and white silent film (the film within a film), *Shrinking Lover*, is a comedy and is initially created as a screen to cover yet indistinctly show the explosive scene of the immoral act—the rape. José Arroyo reviews, in *Sight and Sound*, the insertion of *Shrinking Lover* in *Talk to Her* as “extraordinarily accomplished pastiche” (78); he also writes, “This pastiche is so shocking and funny it manages to both reveal and hide the emotional and physical dimensions of what is unquestionably rape” (78). The silent film is rendered amazingly, dramatically, and profoundly by Almodóvar. While the passionate Benigno is vehemently telling the story of the seven-minute silent film, *Shrinking Lover*,<sup>22</sup> it parallels and overlaps the scene of rape. By intersecting the silent film, Almodóvar employs an elusive and metaphorical way to represent the event of the rape and voice the outburst of feelings for Benigno. In this way, it can be comprehended

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<sup>22</sup> In the press kit of *Talk to Her*, Almodóvar talks about the silent film that Benigno sees, “‘Amante Menguante’ (‘Shrinking Lover’). I show about seven minutes of that film” (9).



why in the press kit Almodóvar offers the heading, “Spoken Cinema” (9), before referring to this silent film.<sup>23</sup> It, once again, irrefutably displays that silence speaks, which is to say, it outspeaks what is unspoken in the repressed desire. Even though the silent film is shot in a comic way, it is the saddest one. It intensifies the effect of upheaval in perceiving the utmost attainment of the love engendered by the extreme passion. The effect does not remain as light or weightless as it appears; on the contrary, the impressive effect lingers and is strongly rooted in the heart of the audience.

The heart of the Benigno vibrates to the sublime act of the tiny man, who, by means of entering the body of his girlfriend, achieves the complete love and eternity (for staying with/inside his love forever). There is no denying that it moves Benigno beyond words, to the utmost extent and intensity. Therefore, in some way, the silent film motivates Benigno to achieve eternity, re-gain the lost unity/love, or even realize his identity as a real lover to Alicia—of course, that is his (mis)recognition—and in his viewpoint, it justifies his act. Gutiérrez-Albilla quotes what Robert De La Calle and Ene Hurtado writes and he translates,

[T]he body is a territory whose boundaries cannot be crossed. As long as one does not cross this threshold, there can be exchanges that are cynically or vilely agreed. However, once the taboo of the other’s body is broken, as a consequence of desiring or consummating that body, there can only be feelings, abuse, or sexual offence. (54)

By adopting this viewpoint, the coma rape is deemed an act that breaks the boundary of the body. And further, it is undertaken under the very circumstance with no permission for potential resistance—Alicia is unconscious.

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<sup>23</sup> In this part, “Spoken Cinema,” Almodóvar points out that, “I don’t want to show it to the spectator and I invented ‘Shrinking Lover’ as a kind of blindfold. In any case, the spectator will discover what has happened at the same time as the other characters. It’s a secret which I’d like no one to reveal” (9).

## Talk to Her! Talk to Me!

As the title of the film suggests, talking is the gist of the film and the particular, noticeable, and profound behavior that repeats in the film. In “Comatose Women in ‘El Bosque’: Sleeping Beauty and Other Literary Motifs in Pedro Almodóvar’s *Hable con ella*,” Rebecca Naughten writes, “*Todo sobre mi madre* [*All About My Mother*] explores performance, *Hable con ella* [*Talk to Her*] focuses on storytelling”(78). In this compelling film, *Talk to Her*, storytelling is more than a way for Benigno to account for how he feels and what he sees while replicating and experiencing the life that Alicia is possessed of before her coma. Moreover, storytelling is more than a method for the characters to recollect and re-tell their memories or for the cinematic representation of the past and the present interweaving. Furthermore, storytelling is more than an imperative of what the title of the film recommends acquiring the communication and intimacy with the beloved—“Talk to her! Tell her that!”<sup>24</sup> The film actually narrates the story of a man’s loneliness and his yearning for the complete love that is lost or, specifically, the absent love, and his voice of crying for love.

The repetition in the trauma is a means to act out what is repressed. Here, in *Talk to Her*, the repetition—that of particular behaviors—also functions as a performance to express and visualize the emotional conflicts and what is repressed or negated at heart; furthermore, the repetition implicitly narrates the traumatic story of love, which is going to happen in the film. In this case, the repeated and unremitting talking and touching infer the reciprocal/reflective request for the response and the return of love through words and bodily contact. The incessant urge “talk to her” reflects the unsatisfactory yelling at the heart of the problem: the imperative, “Talk to her!” is the command, “Talk to me!” The command can be read as the quest of fulfilling the love and identity for Benigno. However,

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<sup>24</sup> When Marco is in predicament of facing the comatose Lydia, these words are what Benigno advises Marco that he communicate and respond to Lydia.

as a failure in love, slim chances for Benigno to fulfill his love and identity in the reality are explicated in the film, *Talk to Her*. Let's take the dream of the burning child as an example to demonstrate it. This dream situations the father in the space of externalization of his desire. In "Tuché and Automaton," Lacan states,

Desire manifests itself in the dream by the loss expressed in an image at the most cruel point of the object. It is only in the dream that this truly unique encounter can occur. Only a rite, an endlessly repeated act, can commemorate this not very memorable encounter—for no one can say what the death of a child is, except the father qua father, that is to say, no conscious being." (Lacan, 1981: 59)

It is not simply the desire of seeing his child alive. It is, in the dream, the desire that points at the beyond, the real; that is, "the terrible vision of the dead son taking the father by the arm designates *a beyond that makes itself heard* in the dream" (Lacan 59; emphasis added). The father is led by the words to the beyond, the real. Words connote the "address" that is the locus and the focus of analyses for Cathy Caruth. In "Traumatic Awakening," as Caruth explicates, "In Lacan's analysis, indeed, the words of the child, 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'" do not simply represent the burning without, but rather address the father from within . . ." (1996: 99). The address of the child in the dream is "a failed address" (1996: 102). Caruth argues that "the response of the father in this awakening dramatizes, as I have suggested, the story of a repeated failure to respond adequately . . ." (Caruth 1996: 103). In this case, the address suggests the impossibility of communication, which is identical with the true state of Benigno.

Moreover, in "The Split between the Eye and the Gaze," Lacan proposes that, "In the field of the dream, on the other hand, what characterizes the images in that it shows. . . . The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows" (Lacan, 1981: 75). Thus, the dream shows the image of the dead child and the address of the child, which point to the real and lead the father to the missed encounter with the real. In the communicative fantasy, the

words of Benigno does not convey to the comatose Alicia in the external world, but addresses himself from within; at the same time, they not merely suggests the failed and impossible communication but also point to the real, which indicates the unattainable wish of being a real lover for Alicia.

Concerning the awakening, the father, in the missed encounter with the real, awakens to “survive”. In “Tuché and Automaton,” Lacan states that, “This sentence is itself a firebrand—of itself brings fire where it falls—and one cannot see what is burning, for the flames blind us to the fact that the fire bears on the *Unterlegt*, on the *Untertragen*, on the real”(59). The fire brings light and illuminates the truth, the real, but paradoxically, the flame blinds the father to see the real. Undoubtedly, the failure of seeing determines the survival of the father. On the contrary, what will happen to the father if he sees the real clearly and tries to resuscitate his son, in other words, to fulfill his identity as a real father, in the dream?

Here is the case that demonstrates the fulfillment of identity in the dream/fantasy. Among the Chinese fictions, there is one of the Chinese four great classic novels, *The Dream of the Red Chamber (Hung Lou Meng)*, written by Tsao Hsueh-chin in the eighteenth century. In this novel, there is one chapter that tells a story about a man named Chia Jui, who yearns madly for Phoenix and then gets serious lovesickness.<sup>25</sup> One day, a monk gives Chia Jui a mirror called “The Precious Mirror to Wind-and-Moon” because the

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<sup>25</sup> In Chinese, the chapter is headed, “王熙鳳毒設相思局，賈天祥正照風月鑑”. There are many different versions of the title of this chapter, which is translated in English. For example, in the version that is translated by Chi-chen Wang, the chapter is headed, “In which Phoenix proves herself an able strategist, [a]nd Chia Jui looks into the fatal right side of the Wind-and-Moon Mirror” (90). In another version translated by Florence and Isabel McHugh, the chapter is headed, “Phoenix maliciously incites an unrequited passion. In spite of warnings, Chia Jui looks into the forbidden side of the Wind and Moon Mirror” (84). Besides, in Hsien-yi Yang and Gladys Yang’s translation, the title of the chapter is given, “Chia Jui Meets and Lusts After Hsi-feng” (69). Moreover, the chapter is entitled in the other version that is translated by David Hawkes, “Wang Xi-feng sets a trap for her admirer; and Jia Rui looks into the wrong side of the mirror”(243).

mirror “has curative qualities for diseases resulting from impure thoughts and self-destructive habits. It can save the world and restore life. . . . But do not look into the right side. Only use the reverse” (91). Then, the story goes,

Chia Jui took the mirror and looked into the reverse side as the Taoist had directed. He threw it down with an oath, for he saw a gruesome skeleton staring at him with hollow eyes. . . . Then he thought he would see what was on the right side. He took up the mirror and look. Phoenix, in her best clothes, stood beckoning to him. Chia Jui felt himself wafted into a mirror world, wherein he fulfilled his desire for Phoenix. (91)

The mirror is possessed of images on its two sides: the reality and the fantasy. The reverse side of the mirror shows Chia Jui who he is, namely, the real: it is the impossible and unattainable task for Chia Jui to realize his wish of being a lover for Phoenix. The image implies another reality that is too horrible for Chia Jui to look at. On the other hand, the right side of the mirror shows what he desires. The lovely image of his love is the projection of his desire and fantasy that is constructed by Chia Jui, in which he fulfills his identity and desire in an illusory world, but he, insisting on taking the mirror with him, dies at the end. From the story, it coincides with the condition of Benigno.

After the rape is exposed, Benigno is imprisoned in the jail where he is forced to separate from Alicia or lose Alicia in some way, which is a traumatic loss for him. From then on, he cannot touch her and talk to her; at that moment he truly loses Alicia—there is no body that he can project his desire or love and there is only the unrequited love remaining. The loss does not need concocting in his fantasy anymore—he rigs up the loss for negating the absence—because the loss comes to the fore in reality. Imaginary wholeness is finally lost for him (as matter of fact, absent at the very beginning); it is impossible to attain. The jail in which Benigno is incarcerated is new, bare and destitute of any colors, painted white. In addition, it is presented as nothingness in its purest state.

Everything that is related to Alicia is deliberately effaced on the screen. The scenes in the jail complete the cinematic representation of absence/emptiness/nothingness. Namely, the absence of love is realized in its authentic meaning on the screen and in the film.

Now, it is time to return to the distinction of loss and absence that is proposed by LaCapra in “Trauma, Absence, Loss.” He goes:

When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (LaCapra, 2001: 46)

In *Talk to Her*, when the film restores the absence, the loss of love is converted into (or returned to) the absence of loss. In this condition, the jail, enclosed with inanimate high wall and barbed wire, embodies the power that posits Benigno, who is severed from any information about Alicia, in a state of enforced isolation. The sudden loss or the absence of Alicia results in a trauma for Benigno. Refusing to let go of Alicia or accept the absence of love, Benigno, who gets bogged down in the state of melancholia, suffers from the letting go of his idealized object of love with his excessive and unbound desire. As the mirror in the story of Chai Jui, at that time, inside the jail, Benigno encounters with the real—the absent love—that is definitely and unbearably traumatic for him. The stark-naked jail that embodies the absence bears on the real. Under the circumstance, Benigno struggles to fall into his fantasy and undergo the missed encounter with the real. He agonizes himself with grieving over his loss; on the other hand, he desperately wants to stay with Alicia. I quote the line in the play by Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan: A Play About a Good Woman*, “If I lost my ideals, I should lose everything” (66); the line as an explanation verifies and voices the predicament of Benigno while facing traumatic loss in love. When Benigno leaves a message for Marco, he says, “You know they won’t let

me out of here. Or it'll only be to lock me up somewhere else. I don't want to live in a world without Alicia, a place where I can't even have her hair clip with me. So I've decided to escape." Inside the jail, the absence is not only experienced in the absence of love-object but also the absence of the thing to refer to the object—the hair clip, which is the resource of the fantasy for Benigno. Therefore, like Chia Jui, who chooses to live with his ideal object of love in his fantasy by reversing the mirror to the right side, Benigno chooses to fulfill his desire and his identity as a real lover for Alicia at the cost of his own subjectivity by stepping beyond the jail, which is to say, putting himself into a coma from the overdose.

In the flashback of writing a letter before escaping by means of the overdose, Benigno shows his determination and commands the talking again:

It's still raining. I think it's a good omen. When Alicia had her accident, it was raining. I'm writing minutes before I escape. I hope that all I've taken is enough to put me in a coma, and reunite me with her. You're my only friend. I'm leaving you the house I prepare for Alicia and me. Wherever they take me, come and see me, and talk to me. Tell me everything. Don't be so secretive.

In this way, coma "reunites" Benigno with his ideal love, Alicia, in another world.

*Talk to Her* skillfully represents the most delicate emotions, as José Arroyo remarks on the film: "What the characters repress, the film-making must express" (76). On the other hand, as the title of her article literally shows, "A Reminder That Love Hurts," René Rodríguez specifically notes that, "In its ardent, melancholic way, *Talk to Her* reminds you that love does indeed hurt—it hurts more than anything" (68). The director, Almodóvar, tells us a story about love and trauma in this film from an unusual perspective. Love, death, and the trauma are represented in an implicit and indirect way by Almodóvar. Undoubtedly, *Talk to Her*, as a guide, leads us to a new field of reading the trauma in love as compared with the previous two films, *2046* and *Dancing in the Dark*.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The interrelationship between love and trauma and the interplay of trauma and representation are visualized and dramatized in *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, and *Talk to Her*. In my thesis, each film stands for the specific time point of representing the trauma—the past, the present, and the forthcoming future—which means that the trauma was/is/will be due to arrive for the protagonists in the films and for the films themselves, with divergent ways of representation. In short, the timing is determined by the form in which the films tell their story. Love, moreover, determines the type of trauma that occurs in each film; how love is portrayed depends on the effects engendered by how traumas get portrayed from three different angles and junctures in three films.

Without a doubt, Freud's analyses of trauma help to capture the trauma in love and its uncanny repetition. They also help to examine the inner struggles in the battlefield of love the protagonists undergo in the films. The temporal aspect of the trauma—the deferred action—is essential in Freud's explanation of the trauma and fundamental to the analysis of its aftermath. Besides the dialectic of time within the analyses of the trauma in love, I also find that both trauma and love inseparably adhere to one distinct characteristic—repetition. However, repetition not merely aims to master the painful experiences, but, as a repeated enactment, points to the reality that is repressed or lurks behind. Furthermore, repetition is designated as a means for the protagonists to cope with the trauma and is endowed with the potential for transcending or going beyond it no matter how. In this case, with Lacan's and Caruth's elaborations, I find that there exists a mysterious region that is worthy of exploring in order to reach the essence of trauma and grasp the incomprehensible repetition in the films I analyze, which is to say, the beyond, the real, and the truth of traumas. The importance of paying attention to the response to the trauma—awakening and



surviving—constitutes another perspective on reading the representation of trauma. Awakening and surviving result in the split world where there is a gap between the external reality and another reality hidden in the dream or fantasy. Therefore, how the films demarcate the world of the protagonists as reality and fantasy, or on the contrary overlap or mingle them together constitutes the complicated relationship between love and trauma and the interplay of trauma and representation.

In terms of the films themselves, the pattern of repetition is evident and significant in the cinematic representation among these three films as central to my study of trauma in the thesis. On the one hand, this pattern suggests the attempt to represent the trauma, and on the other hand, it suggests the unsuccessful and impossible task for representation. That is, the cinematic representation is a failure itself, failing to directly and fully represent the trauma; therefore, it keeps repeating itself and returning, trying to fulfill its attempt at representation. Its function in the films echoes the mechanism of the deferred action—the repetition for the traumatized—which is manifest in some particular activities. The cinematic repetition is put into play by means of the repeated images of fragmentation, disappointment, juxtaposition, interruption, inconsistency, and the repeated narrative and theme—the incessant return and echo—in these three films. Paradoxically, only through the repetition—an indirect and allusive way of representation—can the trauma be detected and the story of the traumatic loss be heard by the audience.

*2046* is the first film where I dilate upon the problems of the trauma that happens in the past. The reason why I start with *2046* in my analysis is that it not only visualizes the typical issue that is premised on the past trauma—the aftermath of a traumatic event—but also provides the theoretical framework for opening a door to get access to other ways of examining the trauma in the following chapters. For the protagonist, Chow Mo-wan, the traumatic loss occurred in his past; for the film itself, *2046*, the trauma dates back to one previous film of Wong Kar-wai, *In the Mood for Love*. In this way, Chow's trauma has

existed from the beginning of the film so that the audience cannot directly see how his trauma happened. The trauma can be detected and represented by the recollection of Chow in flashbacks and voice-over narration and also by the repetition of Chow—in the repeated involvements in transient relationships, writing, and narrating. The fragmented, incomplete, and disappointed images that interweave the present and the past can obliquely represent the excruciating anguish of lost love and the unspeakable trauma profound and intense all the more. What the film represents is the aftermath of the traumatic loss in love, but there is actually no mood for love in *2046*. What is past is past. What remains is nothing but futile regret and impossible grieving for love. The mood for trauma succeeds and has replaced the mood for love in *2046*. The features of love resemble the image at the end of *In the Mood for Love*: the ruins of Angkor Wat—magnificent yet fragmentary. Moreover, how Chow's love looks like is transformed into the image appearing at the end of *2046*: the prosperous Hong Kong—resplendent and glamorous, but blurred and disoriented—it is hard to grasp the true image and the essence of Chow's love, which is gone with the leaving of his love. Moreover, the repeated enactment of the trauma in the form of flashbacks or particular behaviors reveals the truth of the trauma: Chow's inability/failure to fulfill his identity as a real lover for So Lai-chan.

Among these three films that I choose to analyze, the most dramatic, violent and vivid representation of the trauma unquestionably goes to *Dancer in the Dark*. This film provokes out-of-the-box thinking of the trauma, which means that we should not only look back at the trauma from its repetition; rather we must look directly at/witness the trauma. The audience is witnessing how the trauma is taking place in *Dancer in the Dark*. Moreover, the smooth switching of the shooting techniques contributes a singular effect to the film, *Dancer in the Dark*. With the editing, Lars von Trier interlaces two different ways of shooting—one is shot with the handheld camera, and the other stationary cameras—and creates the smooth switching in the film. What the flow of the way of

shooting represents is exactly the flow of thoughts in the mind. *Dancer in the Dark* consists of two different layers of representation—vibrant images versus rough and shaky ones— that create a split world that belongs to the protagonist, Selma. Apparently, the method of Direct Cinema is applied to the film with its characteristic handheld shooting style. In this case, the footage with swinging effects and raw images in this film that stand for the external reality for Selma are dedicated to offering the audience the most extraordinary and real-life experience with its special filming techniques, approaching the reality, and unveiling the truth of the trauma. In this regard, the audience is led to witness the traumatic event by the very act of viewing the film. In a way, witnessing itself is also traumatic. Therefore, Direct Cinema can best and only suit the representation of trauma that is violently taking place. It shatters the tenses and creates the effects of witnessing and traumatization at the same time. In addition, the ambiance of love and trauma (of loss) is strongly felt and strikingly shown in *Dancer in the Dark*. The power of the strong love is as firm as the box that is tightly grasped in Selma's hand. However, the trauma refuses to budge ahead of love, which results in the frequent replacement between the world of the reality and that of the fantasy. In *Dancer in the Dark*, it pertains to the time point where love and trauma inseparably coexist and baffle each other. Moreover, the repeated falling into fantasy and returning to the external reality back and forth echo Selma's unstable state of mind while encountering the trauma. This pattern of repetition indicates a gap. What Selma repeats in her fantasy reveals her unfulfilled identity as a real mother for her son. Even so, the repetition in singing and dancing is the act of creation that makes her transcendence over her incredible pain possible.

In *Talk to Her*, however, the situation is unlike the previous ones: a feeling of the trauma is not so strong as to bring an obvious or violent impact like that in *2046* or *Dancer in the Dark*. The absence of love begets the trauma that is going to happen in *Talk to Her*. The thick air of loneliness and unilateral love, which permeates through the film, paves the

way for the trauma at the end of the film. The repetition implies Benigno's rigid fantasy and stubborn denial of the absence of love, the impossibility, which foreshadows his end. In other words, the forthcoming trauma is determined at the outset. Benigno's trauma is foreseeable when viewing his response to the absence of love or his loneliness in love. In *Talk to Her*, I expatiate on the issue of love in the pre-traumatic stage and find the possibility of triggering the repetition before the trauma. The repetition articulates and expresses what is repressed and rejected in Benigno's mind. That the trauma lurks in the seemingly tranquil path of love is remarkably illustrated with the intensified desire on the verge of explosion. Therefore, in the eyes of Benigno, he sees no trauma, but only love. In Benigno's viewpoint, he dies for love (for his reunion with Alicia) rather than for the trauma. In this case, when the trauma happens at the end, it emerges in a transitory way. Almodóvar only offers a flashy profile of the trauma. However, the effect is grand and enduring, which stirs us to look deeper at how the relationship between love and trauma is formed and what the repetition means for the impending trauma. In *2046* and *Dancer in the Dark*, Chow Mo-wan and Selma are compelled (or partially forced) to encounter the trauma. Only in *Talk to Her* does the trauma come from the choice of Benigno, which makes this film another version of interrelationship between love and trauma and also the essence of the trauma.

Furthermore, what these three films resemble in analysis of love and trauma is the incommunicability (of their love, secrets and traumas). It is impossible for Chow Mo-wan to communicate his love to So Lai-chan or articulate his trauma in *2046*. The incommunicability is also the problem that appears in *Dancer in the Dark*; for Selma, the secrets that she bears and the overwhelming trauma thereof makes her silent. The incommunicability is best illustrated in the monologue of Benigno in *Talk to Her*. The incommunicability not merely infers the unspeakable pain of traumas and the unbearable truth for the protagonists but also indicates the inevitable immersion into the fantasy in the

form of writing, singing, and talking, which functions as an alternative route or bypass to address the trauma. In this way, the unrepresentable trauma and unspeakable pain for lost love can be represented and visualized with the aid of sight and sound in *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, and *Talk to Her*.

Besides, lost love is one of the important issues that connect these three films. Although love is absent in *Talk to Her*, for Benigno, it is lost. Absence, in LaCapra's clarification, is something that one never had. However, in Benigno's world, the absence of love is converted into the loss of love. Therefore, Benigno longs for a "reunion" with Alicia; he desperately wants to regain what he lost. Looking for the lost love is the same situation for Chow Mo-wan in *2046* and Selma in *Dancer in the Dark*—these three protagonists all crave to recapture their lost love, which is shown in their continual behaviors and the repeated images in films. The repetition that they enact reveals the desire of fulfilling their identity as a real lover or mother. It can also be deemed their reaction to lost love. In Show-Fen Cheng's M.A. thesis, "America is Burning: On Its Split Subjectivity and Unfulfilled Identity on Film", he writes, "the subjectivity stands only when its identity is unfulfilled" (34). When one's subjectivity is destructed, he/she fulfills and attains his/her identity. This can explain when Benigno or Selma chooses to fulfill his/her identity as a lover or as a mother, he or she needs to sacrifice his/her subjectivity. The fulfilling identity is attained at the cost of the subjectivity. Otherwise, it would be like Chow Mo-wan: his identity is unfulfilled so he can maintain his subjectivity. Therefore, the different choices cause different results for the protagonists.

For me, all three films themselves are wounds—like the wound on the tree in the story of Tancred or the hole of the tree in *2046*—different in size and vein, with different layers, mien and expression. However, they all address the stories of lost love, the trauma. Again, I restate what Caruth proposes in "The Wound and the Voice": "*it is always a story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that*

*is not otherwise available*” (Caruth, 1996: 4; emphasis added). From this perspective, the films wield the power of representation and tell the truth by crying aloud, weeping, or whimpering, and make the reality heard. The wave of pathos emanating from the films rushes toward and sweeps over the audience, and it provokes various feelings and experiences in viewing the trauma by divergent cinematic representations of trauma and love on film. In a way, therefore, by the traumatic narrative of the films themselves, the stories of the wounds can be seen and heard in the narration of the films as *2046*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *Talk to Her* do.



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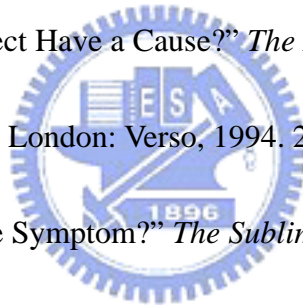
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