MIGRATION-AS-TRANSITION: HONG KONG CINEMA AND THE ETHICS OF LOVE IN WONG KAR-WAI’S 2046

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Introduction

Migration is always an on-going process of transition. It is a journey of physical displacement, as well as social and psychological dislocation. From the nostalgia of departure, the shock of arrival to the belonging of resettlement, migration-as-transition involves the continual transformation from one state to another (Yue, 2004). Central to this transformation is the encounter of the intersection as a border cultural practice consisting of convergence and divergence: the former through the bonds of similarities between home and host cultures; the latter through the transnationality of diasporic and global intimacies. At the heart of this intersection is a hope constituted in the anticipation that a better life elsewhere is also accompanied by the reciprocity of love. From the macro politics of the love for refugees, foreigners and strangers, to the micro regions of neighbourliness, to the daily vicissitudes of romantic and family love, the ethics of love (West, 1993) has become synonymous with the making of the migratory subject and the forming of the coming community (Agamben, 1993) in our current times.

This chapter begins by examining migration-as-transition in Hong Kong cinema. Hong Kong cinema is an exemplary site to examine migration-as-transition because of its pre-post-1997 cultural condition that precipitated a period of transition beginning in the 1997 Handover of the British colony to the Chinese motherland, and ending its “one country, two systems”
Special Administrative Region rule in 2046. The pre-1997 and post-1997 transitional years have witnessed the migration of its people and its film industry to the region and the West. For the diasporic community and the global audience, Hong Kong cinema is a site of transition through cultural maintenance and negotiation. Within Hong Kong, the cinema is a site of transition through cultural survival. The political crisis of the pre-1997 Handover has transformed into the post-1997 economic crisis evidenced through the pre-millennial financial meltdown and the post-SARS market collapse. With the promises and lies of reform, the ethics of love now complicates Hong Kong’s triangulated grand narratives of Britain and China. This chapter will further illustrate how the ethics of love is evident in Wong Kar-wai’s 2046, a love story with a science-fiction subtext set in 2046. It argues that love is an intermediary that can question Hong Kong’s political transition because its ethics enable the possibility and the potentiality of a post-transitional coming community.

The nature of Hong Kong migration is explored through its theme of transition in the cinema. The first section provides a critical overview of how migration-as-transition is conceptualised in the industry through its genre formations and auteur filmmakers. Figures such as refugees, astronaut families, returnees, transvestites, ghosts and gangsters characterise the literal and symbolic processes of transition through their physical and spectral displacements. This section also examines how Hong Kong’s political transition has brought about a travelling cinema through its diaspora and its Hollywoodisation. It further examines this travelling cinema as a site for producing new diasporic and global spectatorships, and enabling alternative circuits of distribution. The migration of Hong Kong cinema has challenged traditional Hollywood representations of Asian masculinity, created new audiences and expanded the flows of media circulation. This nature of Hong Kong migration through the trope of transition has resulted in two types of displacements: the first at the level of the local through the insensibility of translocalism; the second at the level of the global through the disjunctive globalisations of people and the reverse flow of its industry to the West. Through its film texts and cinematic institution, Hong Kong migration shows how the political process of transition is also a symbolic and conceptual process of thinking about the singularity of subject at the limit of its sameness and difference. Whether as emigrated diasporic subjects who have experienced physical migration, Hong Kong subjects who are
experiencing the reconciliation of its political transition, or new Hollywood audiences who are being interpellated by new representations, migration-as-transition shows how cultural identity is formulated through the border between the self and its other. At the heart of this border is the ethics of identity as the justice of cultural recognition.

The second section further formulates the conceptual framework of migration-as-transition through the intersection of the border as a practice of convergence (similarity) and divergence (difference). It uses the framework of love as a site of intersection to show how the ethics of identity is a form of cultural politics about the border. This theoretical border can be likened to the migratory subjects who inhabit the border, those who cross the border and those whose entries are denied. As a site of this intersection, love functions as an intermediary to expose the traffic of comings and goings, as the migratory movement of arrivals, departures and resettlements. This section demonstrates migration-as-transition through the trope of love in 2046, as the final instalment in Wong’s trilogy, beginning with Days of Being Wild (1991) and In The Mood for Love (2000). As a narrative of convergence, love is conceptualised as a third space of potentiality. This potentiality is characterised by love as a process of giving and giving up. This process resembles the migration process of leaving through giving (sacrifice and gift) and giving up (loss). Here, modes of mobility such as trains and taxis show this process as a constantly refiguring and transient journey of comings and goings. As a narrative of divergence, love shows how this journey uproots “home” through the detour of its return. The fixity of place is destabilised through heterotopia. Through its comings and goings, love also takes a turn elsewhere. This divergence shows how the deviance of erotic love exposes the politics of its morality and the ethics of identity. Hong Kong migration, through the process of transition, shows how mobility is constituted, not as a teleology of assimilation, but as a multi-accented journey of intersections consisting of the similarities of convergence and the differences of divergence. Central here is the paradox of mobility as a freedom and containment, producing the migrant as a self-fashioning and disciplined subject. The ethics of love exposes this process of subjectivisation and subject-formation, and emphasises how the justice of cultural recognition is integral to citizenship as a site of identity, rights and belonging. For Hong Kong, these citizenship claims are exigent to its post-2046 cultural future as a part of China.
Migration-as-Transition in Pre-1997 and Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema — Hong Kong and the Diaspora

The theme of migration-as-transition is the most significant motif in contemporary Hong Kong cinema. When the New Wave emerged in the early 1980s with social realist films like Boat People (1982) and The Story of Woo Viet (1981), the enormous critical and box office success of these films that dealt with the dislocation of refugees resonated with an audience that was beginning to be anxious about the British capitalist colony’s impending return in 1997 to the socialist motherland, China. In the two decades that followed, the theme of migration-as-transition was creatively mobilised in a prolific cinema producing in excess of 300 films a year.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the spectre of 1997 functioned as a common allegory in the cinema. This allegory uses migration as a textual code to comment on the political transition. In the mo-lay-tau comedies of Stephen Chow, the nonsensical linguistic syncretism of pidgin Mandarin, Cantonese and English foregrounds migration-as-transition through the transformation of language as a device that questions Hong Kong’s triangular relationship with Britain and China. It localises the vernacular Cantonese with an impure origin (Chow, 1992). Humour also functions as a space of fantasy to subvert the anxiety of the milieu (Berry, 1992). In the urban noir spectacles of Tsui Hark, John Woo and Jackie Chan, migration-as-transition is evident through the moral ambiguity between the cop and the assassin as subjects of transformation. As a geography of renewal and rebirth, burning cityscapes also add to a changing metropolis under transition (Yue, 2005).

This period also saw the emergence of local auteurs such as Ann Hui, Clara Law, Stanley Kwan and Wong Kar-wai, who self-consciously engage migration-as-transition. Central to this is their representations of love. Hui’s feminist cinema, in Song of the Exile (1990) and Summer Snow (1994), uses the melodrama of family love to comment on familial bonding and the effects of Hong Kong modernity (Ho, 1999; Erens, 2000). The changing status of the family, as the site that negotiates the Confucian virtues of filial piety, collectivity and loyalty, is repositioned to critique cultural exile and reconciliation. These themes are also sustained in her post-1997 films in The Visible Secret (2001) and July Rhapsody (2002). Law’s post-feminist cinema, on the other hand, uses erotic love. Evident in the ethereality of the vixen-ghost in The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus (1994), the
viscerality of culture shock in *Farewell China* (1990), Japanese male nihilism in *Autumn Moon*, sexual transgression in *Temptation of a Monk* (1993) to the cultural and sexual dissonance in *Wonton Soup* (*Erotique*, 1994), erotic love is used to negotiate cultural difference. Law’s post-1997 Australian film, *The Goddess of 1967* (2000), also furthers this through incest and inter-racial sexual relations. In the works of gay filmmaker Stanley Kwan, romance is re-worked through the glamour in nostalgic films such as *Rouge* (1987) and *Centerstage* (1992), and contemporary romantic love is questioned through alternative desires such as anonymous sex (*Hold You Tight*, 1997), sex without love (*The Island Tales*, 1999) and homosexuality (*Lan Yu*, 2001).

Wong Kar-wai, the director par excellence of the lover’s discourse, has extended these themes into a renowned style that champions chanced encounters (*Days of Being Wild; Chungking Express*, 1994; *Fallen Angels*, 1996) and public intimacy (*Happy Together*, 1997; *In The Mood for Love*) (Siegel, 2001). Clearly, the motif of migration-as-transition, is evident in the textual codes of both mainstream gangster and comedy films, as well as in the auteur cinema.

After Hong Kong’s 1997 Handover, this motif continues with slight variations. Just as pre-1997 films use transnational geographies, histories and desires to locate the colony’s destinations — global Chinatowns, the Mainland, Indo-China, Taiwan and South-East Asia — post-1997 films follow in this tradition, most notably, using a new generation of “youth gang” stars such as Nicholas Tse, Ekin Cheng, Edison Chen and Shawn Yue to show the complex translocal Hong Kong space, as a source of continuing emigration (*City of Glass*, 1998; *Sausalito*, 2000) as well as a renewed destination for returnees, astronaut families and new Mainland Chinese immigrants. Of the latter, post-1997 films show the incompatibility of the “one country, two systems” reconciliation by inverting the fairy-tale ending in *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (1996), in films such as *Love Will Tear Us Apart* (1999) and *One Nite in Mongkok* (2004) that destroy the glamorous appeal of Hong Kong for Chinese immigrants by returning to its underbelly as a place corrupted with menial labour, crime and prostitution. The famed cross-dressing films of the pre-Handover milieu such as *Swordsman 3: The East Is Red* (1992), *Fong Sai Yuk* (1993) and *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* (1994), is also repeated in a more hyperbolic style, evident in the critical and mainstream success of the preposterous *Chinese Odyssey* (2002). In these films, migration-as-transition is evident not only in the setting of
immigrant stories in transnational and cross-border locations, the practice of border-crossing is also problematised through the use of transsexuality and transvestism. A more remarkable change is the return to the Buddhist themes of transmigration and reincarnation as metaphors for the transitory journey of migration. Where pre-1997 films such as Rouge (1987), A Chinese Ghost Story (1986) and Dream Lovers (1986) use the figure of the female ghost as a trope for the netherworld to symbolise the transit zone of transmigration and to question the boundaries between past and present, life and death, real and virtual, new post-1997 neo-noir such as the Infernal Affairs trilogy (2002, 2003, 2004), Running on Karma (2003) and The Goddess of Mercy (2004) return to a new spirituality as a translocal affect of transition (Yue, 2000a; Yue, 2005).

Pre-1997 and post-1997 Hong Kong cinema evince migration-as-transition not only through its texts that function within Hong Kong as narratives of cultural survival, but also through its institution outside of Hong Kong as a form of “mediated community” through its narratives of cultural maintenance and negotiation. (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2000: 3) Mediated communities are an effect of disjunctive globalisation, where the flow of people has enabled the formation of an imagined community through the cultural similarities shared by members of geolinguistic regions. The Hong Kong media space, as a form of mediated community, is evident in recent years through the migration of the film industry and the people to global diasporas and into Hollywood. Where its previous diasporic cinema rely on transnational and subterranean consumption circuits such as satellite television, Chinatown video stores and even informal networks of borrowing and lending amongst friends and relatives, the incorporation of Hong Kong cinema into Hollywood has not only witnessed the mainstream transformation of the cinema into a dominant cultural form, diasporic Hong Kong cinema’s distribution circuits have also expanded. In Australia, Hong Kong cinema can now be locally accessed through mainstream video outlets such as Blockbusters, multiplexes such as Hoyts and even on the national narrowcast multicultural television, Special Broadcasting Service (Sinclair et al., 2000).

Whether as diasporic or mainstream cinema in the West, the Hong Kong cinema institution displays narratives of cultural maintenance and negotiation. In the former, films that engage cultural survival also function as sites for the ritualistic reproduction of “homeland” cultures. Unlike
diasporic Bollywood films that construct the home through the stereotyping of a kitsch sentimentality (Mishra, 2002: 242), Hong Kong films reproduce the narrative of “home” through the heterogeneity of postmodern Chinese-ness. From the panic in the social realist Home at Hong Kong (1983), the euphoric post-Sino-British Joint Declaration Chinese-funded Homecoming (1984), Fruit Chan’s independently-produced 1997 allegory, The Longest Summer (1997), Clara Law’s Australia-funded Floating Life (1996) about the migration of a Hong Kong family to Australia, to Johnnie To’s more recent media satire in Breaking News (2003), “home” is rendered through the diversity of Chineseness shaped and re-shaped by the transformation of migration. In these films, the “home” of Hong Kong and Chinese identities are produced through the global ethnoscapes of Vietnamese-Chinese boat people, Chinese returnees, Hong Kong settlers, Australian economic migrants and illegal Mainland immigrants. Cultural maintenance is evident in the formation of diasporic spectatorship cultivated by the multiple homes of postmodern Chineseness.

Cultural negotiation is also evident in the flow of Hong Kong cinema to Hollywood. In transnational action films such as The Replacement Killers (1998), Bulletproof Monk (2003), The One (2001), Romeo Must Die (2000), Shanghai Noon (2000) and the Rush Hour sequels (1998, 2001), cross-over stars Chow Yun Fatt, Jet Li and Jackie Chan are cast as either ruthless Chinese assassins or highly-accented police assistants exaggerated by queues, bad English or Buddhist and kung fu kitsch. These roles repeat the yellowface ideology of the bucktooth Chinaman, and in their performativity, expose the racist construction of the diasporic Chinese stereotype in the West (Lo, 2001). Migration-as-transition is evident in these repetitions that fix and destabilise the stereotype. These repetitions show cultural negotiation as a complex and contradictory process of diasporic and mainstream spectatorship consisting of identification and disidentification. Identification is produced through how the stereotype constitutes cultural identity in the recognition of sameness and difference; disidentification is produced through how the stereotype constitutes cultural identity by being worked with and worked over so that it can still function as a site for pleasurable and meaningful consumption.

In this section, I have discussed how migration-as-transition is evident in pre-1997 and post-1997 Hong Kong cinema through cultural production and cultural consumption. As texts at the level of production, different
genres such as action noir, comedy, cross-dressing, horror and auteur engage the practice of migration as a process of transformation from one state to another. These are imagined in many ways, from the literal process of physical migration, to the figurative process of transsubstantiation. At the heart of this is the questioning of Hong Kong’s cultural identity. Similarly, as institutions at the level of consumption, diasporic Hong Kong and Hollywood Hong Kong cinemas demonstrate migration as a disjunctive global flow. New audiences, mediated communities, distribution markets and mediascapes attest to the effects of the cross-over. Through cultural maintenance and cultural negotiation, these cinemas show how migration-as-transition is a cultural practice that constitutes diasporic and Hollywood spectatorships as processes of cultural identity.

The formation of cultural identity is a process of the transformation of an individual into the subject. Michel Foucault explains this transformation as a form of subjectification. His writings on governmentality and sexuality show how the individual becomes a subject through the governance of moral conduct (1978; 1985; 1988; 1991). The subject is the outcome of a set of procedures that produce the transformation which constitutes it. This means that the subject is produced through a history that determines and defines the conditions of existence for the subject. In such a context, history is not universal, but singular. This singularity allows Foucault (1988) to further emphasise the field of ethics as a specific set of regulations that is defined, not in relation to a universal law (morality), but in relation to the singularity of subjectification. To understand an ethical history of the subject is to question how history “subjects”, “subjectivises” and “makes subject”. He formulates this ethics as a practice of the self to refer to the labour of self-cultivation and transformation. In _The Use of Pleasure_, he writes that “a history of ‘ethics’ (is) understood as the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables the individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct” (1985: 251). In this formula, the subject is a subject (of self-knowledge) as well as an object (of regulation).

To consider the subject in the domain of ethics in this way is to understand how the self gains freedom by paradoxically losing it. Gilles Deleuze attributes this Foucauldian formula as the fold: “The inside as an operation of the outside. Foucault seems to be haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a
folding of the sea ... the boat as interior of the exterior” (1988: 97, 123). In this operation, the self is the same of the other, and the other of the same. Its identity is constituted at the limit of this difference. Pierre Macherey extends this by suggesting that “(situating) the subject at the limit, to identify it by its difference, then, is to consider how the subject is constituted through its singularity” (1998: 98).

The formulation of the ethics of the self, as a cultural practice of the border, is pertinent to Hong Kong and its “one country, two systems” transition. In the context of its emigration, ethics relates to the border as a site of the cultural recognition of migrants as well as its migratory film industry. It shifts the emphasis from the rights of cultural inclusion and the global appeal to cultural diversity to question the justice of cultural recognition. In the context of its Handover reconciliation, ethics, too, relates to the border as a site of the cultural recognition of the singularity of Hong Kong as the same of the other (system), and the other (system) of the same. It shifts the emphasis from the politics of mutual tolerance, joint co-operation and Chinese nationalism to question the self-autonomy of Hong Kong and the limit of the difference between one country and two systems. Clearly, whether as emigration or reconciliation, the ethics of the border underpins migration-as-transition. In the following section, I examine the ethics of the border through the singularity of love in Wong Kar-wai’s 2046.

The Singularity and the Trilogy of Love: 2046 and Transition as Convergence and Divergence

Wong Kar-wai’s 2046 is a pertinent film to discuss migration-as-transition because the film raises issues about the ethics of the border through its narrative of intersection. Intersection is the threshold of the margin that constitutes the singularity of the subject at its limit and its difference. For Hong Kong, intersection can be understood through the political period of transition from 1984, the year of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration that signalled Hong Kong’s return to Chinese rule in 1997, to 2046, the end of the Declaration’s “one country, two systems” 50 years of transition. As political transition, intersection is the intermediary between two pairs of opposites: capitalism/post-socialism, democracy/communism, one system/the other system, same/other. The film’s title directly refers to
the end of the period of Hong Kong's political transition, as seen in the last inter-title insert at the end of the film.

The film's political allegory is also an analogy about love, evident in "2046" as the hotel room number that consummated the relationship between the two protagonists Chow Mo-yan (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Su Lizhen (Maggie Cheung) in the earlier sequel, In The Mood for Love. Love, as Luce Irigaray reminds us in her reading of Diotima's speech in Plato's Symposium, is a third term that functions as "an intermediary that allows for the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between the two" (1993: 21). As the place of becoming, love is also anticipatory in terms of its potentiality. This is referred to in the intra-diegesis of the film, where "2046" is also the title of the science fiction novel written by the male protagonist Chow set in the futuristic time of 2046. The narrative of intersection is evident in Wong's story-telling style.

Wong is Hong Kong's exemplary director renowned for his innovative style of filmmaking. Common to his oeuvre is the use of parallel narrative. This is characterised by the use of double protagonists to construct narrative continuity: Yuddy (Leslie Cheung) and Tide (Andy Lau) in Days of Being Wild, Cop 633 (Takeshi Kaneshiro) and Cop 223 (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) in Chungking Express, Evil East (Leslie Cheung) and Poison West (Tony Leung Ka-fai) in Ashes of Time, the killer (Leon Lai) and his agent (Karen Mok) in Fallen Angels, Yu-fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Bao-wing (Leslie Cheung) in Happy Together and Chow Mo-wan and Su Lizhen in In the Mood for Love. Ackbar Abbas terms this as metonymic substitution where one character is interchangeable with the next (1997: 48–62). For example, in the postscript in Days of Being Wild, Yuddy's death is substituted with the unexplained appearance of the anonymous gambler preening himself in front of the mirror. This character is later intertextualised as the male protagonist Chow in In the Mood for Love and 2046.

The narrative of intersection relies on the use of parallel narrative but differs from Abbas' dialectical substitution. Intersection is an intermediary that shows an encounter between the two parallel narratives. This is evident where narrative continuity is enabled through parallel editing until a point in the narrative when an encounter occurs between the double protagonists. This encounter functions as the point of intersection that mediates and transforms the one and the other. The narrative of intersection consists of the narrative of convergence and the narrative of
divergence (Yue, 2003). Convergence and divergence demonstrate the intersection as a border that is criss-crossed by an encounter between the two as well as a transformation of the two.

I begin by mapping convergence through the character of Su Lizhen played by Maggie Cheung. Although this Su does not appear in 2046 (only in two quick frames), the film is structured through Chow’s memories of her. She is the spectral image that haunts the nostalgia in 2046. In the film, Chow becomes a Yuddy-like playboy and seeks temporary solace with different women. Each bears some resemblance or connection to Su. Su is reprised in many ways. First, through the repetition of the name, evident in the role Gong Li plays as Su Lizhen #2, a mysterious black-gloved gambler. Second, through its intertextuality to Days of Being Wild, evident in the conversation between Chow and Lu Lu who pretends she does not remember him from their Philippine days. Lu Lu is played by Carina Lau, who also starred as Yuddy’s first girlfriend in Days of Being Wild. Third, when Lu Lu vacates the 2046 room at the Oriental Hotel, the prostitute Bai Ling (Zhang Ziyi) moves in and replaces her as Chow’s lover. Finally, the elusive Wang Jung Wen (Faye Wong), like Su in In the Mood for Love, also collaborates with him in his writing. Wang even ghost writes his erotic serials when he is sick. These women can be likened to the part object status connoted by the fetish where they function as dis-assembled parts to the whole meta-text embodied by Su. From this context, the spectrality of Su is central to the narrative of intersection. This spectrality is evident through how the discourse of love functions in the narratives of convergence and divergence.

First, convergence is evident in the narrative of Su Lizhen as an intertextual link in Days of Being Wild, In the Mood for Love and 2046. These three films can be considered Wong’s trilogy of love. The method for mapping intertextuality is a device for understanding intersection known as tête bêche, a technique that Wong has used in In The Mood for Love (Yue, 2003). Tête bêche, a French world to describe “head-to-tail”, is a philatelic method for arranging unsevered stamps where one is the inverted in relation the other. Tête bêche is evident in the interchangeability between the subject-positions of the lover and the beloved across the trilogy.

In Days of Being Wild, Su is the lover of Yuddy and Tide. As a lover of Yuddy, she does not possess love. She seeks in him the beauty of love. Yuddy’s beauty is demonstrated in their first encounter when he propositions her. Yuddy is confident, poised and well-groomed. Su, on the other hand,
is naïve, tentative and even awkward in her gait. He teases and she languishes. Lacking and yearning, she looks to Yuddy as the object of beauty and the outcome of happiness. As Yuddy’s troubled past takes him to the Philippines, Tide replaces Yuddy and imagines Su as the beloved. He is resourceful in his lack but his love is never returned. It is also in the Philippines that Chow first appears, as the nameless well-groomed gambler. In *Days of Being Wild*, Su’s love can be considered dialectical where desire is a lack that can be fulfilled by the other. This illustrates the concept of Aristophanic love as a form of shared identity, as a form of desire to be reunited with one’s love. Robert Solomon refers to how this concept relies on “ontological dependency” as the mythical foundation of understanding selfhood (2004: 182). In this dialectic where identity is defined in relation to the self and to each other, love determines selfhood. The product of love, in this instance, is fecundity.

In *In the Mood for Love*, Su and Chow are domesticated by love through their respective marriages. Even as they discover that their spouses are cheating on them, and in their play-acting of these scenarios, find themselves becoming increasingly attracted to each other, they do not consummate their love for each other. Desire is interwoven through the discourse of duty. Love is not an end in itself, but serve as a Confucian discourse of ethics, as a by-product of marriage, family procreation and continuity. The gossip generated amongst Mrs Suen and the community reinforces the moral code of such ethics. Again, the fecundity of love illustrated here is dialectical. This form of love is contested in the desire that Su and Chow express for each other. Their desire does not appropriate each other, but allows each to transform each other. They do not seek to possess each other. Irigaray’s notion of love as the site for becoming is instructive here:

Love can be the becoming which appropriates the other for itself by consuming it, introjecting it into itself, to the point where the other disappears. Or love can be the motor of becoming, allowing both the one and the other to grow. For such a love, each must keep their body autonomous. The one should not be the source of the other nor the other of the one. Two lives should embrace and fertilise each other, without either being a fixed goal for the other (1992: 27).
Hence, love is positioned as a third space of potentiality. Elsewhere, I have written about how the film’s erotic extra-diegetic stylised sequences of Su sashaying along the alleyway, and brushing past Chow, express love as an in-between that anchors the illicit desire between the two married protagonists. This is further supported by the film’s multiple interior shots that signal claustrophobia (Yue, 2003). Told from the point-of-view of Chow, Su functions in this film as the site of the beloved. He, after all, is the source and the key to the secret, that was whispered to a rock at Angkor Wat and amplified through the gramophone at the start of 2046. Here, the becoming of love is not about union and reunification. Similar to the inversion in Happy Together where being together does not necessarily bring happiness, the becoming of love is about giving up, what Jean-Luc Nancy describes as “shattered” (1991: 82–109).

To understand the becoming of love as shattered love requires a return to the Lacanian notion of love as consisting in giving what one does not have. It means that in the process of giving, it gives up the notion of the self as possession. This refers to the impossibility of being a self, and the process of giving is to give to the other the same impossibility of being a self. For Lacan (1991), love is a lack or a form of an emptiness. To give is to give emptiness with emptiness and to share emptiness. Hence, shattered love points to the giving of nothing, of the impossibility of the subject, of emptiness. Nancy proposes a rethinking of love from its ontological dialectic, and suggests that at the heart of the dialectic love is empty and shattered because love is always deferred through the anticipation of an arrival and a completion. For him, such ontological dependency constructs love always as an access to an end. If love is incomplete, it is driven by completion. If completion is impossible to attain, it is attained through the tension or the suppression of the self of love. If love has taken place, it is through the alterity of the other, and beyond this place of the same, is fulfilled as the same in the other. Nancy suggests that this dialectic is ambivalent and proposes that love be rethought through its singularity:

Love in its singularity, when it is grasped absolutely, is itself perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, and indeed to the disorder of these explosions. The thinking of love should learn to yield to this abandon: to receive the prodigality, the
collisions, and the contradictions of love, without submitting them to an order that they essentially defy (1991: 81).

The becoming of love, as a process of giving and giving up, of abandonment, frames the convergence of Su in 2046. Although the film uses many repetition techniques to reprise her as illustrated earlier, Su’s emptiness in 2046 is profound. This emptiness is evident in two ways. First, in the director’s decision to par the screen presence of Cheung down to two quick frames. This has led critics to note Cheung’s star persona and Su’s mythical and legendary status. One even exclaims: “It is excruciatingly torturous to see only a few glimpses of Maggie Cheung!” (Khoo, 2005). Second, Su’s emptiness is what drives Chow to spurn his lovers because he is emotionally remote. Hence, popular reviews continue to reify the affective postmodern states of unrequited love, eternal loneliness and emotional alienation as the themes that make Wong a great auteur.

To read the becoming of love as the singularity of love requires working through the comings and goings of love. This is evident in the modes of mobility, as migratory sites of departures, arrivals and resettlements that transcend love from the dialectic into an intermediary that questions the self in the other, and the other in the self. As Wong states in the film, “love is all a matter of timing”. This alludes to timing as an event of the encounter in the intersection where love converges and matches up. Mobility is evident in the bullet train that takes one to 2046. 2046 is a place where one can recapture memory and lost loves. In this science-fiction sequence, love does not consist of a desire for completion, nor the answer to its secret. The train connotes Hong Kong’s political transition where the “through train” concept was formulated during the drafting of the Basic Law to ensure political continuity across the duration of transition (Wang and Wong, 1995: 149). This reference to continuity is anchored in the narrative that tells us no one ever returns from 2046 because nothing ever changes. Here, the continually moving train is also contextualised in relation to its stasis and nostalgia. I have referred elsewhere to this logic of pre-post-1997, where the movement forward in time is also a movement backward in time (Yue, 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2004). This is evident in the general structure of the film where anticipating the future of Hong Kong in 2046 is also a returning to the 1960s as the beginnings of Hong Kong modernity and postcoloniality. The archival footages of the 1965 curfew and the 1967
riots do not so much as lend authenticity as Pam Cook has suggested about Su’s dress in *In The Mood for Love* (2005: 5–10), but inscribe, more specifically, the origins of Hong Kong’s autodecolonisation. (Welsch, 1994: 459–73) This double movement is also evident in the film’s science fiction and nostalgia genres. Even the science fiction is rendered to suit the nostalgia of future noir, replete with the Bladerunner LG-product-placed skyline. Here, nostalgia is not a desire to return to the past, but a structure of displacement (Chow, 2000). Time is displaced, and out of joint. This temporal dissonance is evident throughout the film, and is especially foregrounded in the android’s belated response that highlights the disjunctive tension where a movement forward in time is also a movement that slows and moves back time. Faye Wong’s role as the android is central here to read the singularity of love. She is the reason the train man (Tak, as Chow’s alter-ego) decided to time-travel. Yet, she is unable to respond. The singularity of love, then, defies the desire for an end, or a completion. Its intermediary position, demonstrated through the mobility of the train, as the comings and goings of love, produces emptiness. The train man is unable to find the answer to this quest.

This emptiness is further anchored in the final taxi scene, with an enlightened Chow on his own. Its intertextuality here can be traced to *Happy Together*, where Bao-wing and Yu-fai, although together, are unhappy in love. It can also be inferred from *In The Mood for Love*, where Chow and Su, although together, are unable to fulfil their desire for each other. The taxi, as another transportation mode of mobility, also shows the comings and goings of love. Unlike the other earlier films, the black and white image of Chow alone in the taxi also supports emptiness as a form of transcending the subject’s immanence not by rejoining, but through disjoining. It is at this point that transcendence evinces itself as the unfulfilment of love that “love takes place, it happens, it happens endlessly in the withdrawal of its own presentation” (Nancy, 1991: 97). At this margin, love is an act of transport that represents the subject to itself as broken. It presents to Chow that he has been touched and his subjectivity broken into and fractured. In this break, the subject “I”, the lover, is broken. In the film, love is always already proposed, addressed, suspended in its arrival, not presented, but already imposed and reached its end. The narrative concerns Chow’s propositions to Su (Cheung), as the beloved, in the form of yearning and melancholia. He addresses these by substituting her with
other love objects. The beloved has already arrived through her departure; her departure is only the coming of the other. This cycle is anchored in the Nat King Cole repetitions of lost loves every Christmas. In this singularity, love shows the limit of its difference through the construction of the same in the other, and the other in the same.

Clearly, the narrative of convergence, through the intersection of Su, shows love as a cultural border practice of coming and going. This motor of the becoming of love is enabled by the mobility connoted through the train and the taxi. This trope mobilises migration-as-transition as a journey of arrivals, departures and resettlements. This journey shows how the singularity of love is also an ethics of love. Chow's quest for love is not a quest to fulfil his lack; it is a quest that exposes the practice of self through the labour of self-cultivation. The care that defines him as a lover is evident in his well-combed Brylcreemed hair, sleek Shantung suits with matching cufflinks and tie pins, to the attention to details in his gifts — stockings, meals, money and even time. Each is a set of meticulous operations that shows how he is transformed into the subject for the moral conduct exemplified by his litany of abject lovers — a nightclub hostess, a prostitute, a gambler and a ghost writer of pornography. These practices show that at the center of convergence is also divergence.

In Hong Kong’s political transition, divergence refers to a re-turn through routes rather than roots. It shows the impossibility of reconciliation through an unproblematic reunification and how this is divested by taking a turn elsewhere. For many, taking a turn elsewhere has resulted in their physical migration to the global diasporas. In the film, divergence is evident through the comings and goings in the heterotopic Oriental Hotel, and its practices of erotic love. Hong Kong and selfhood are problematised and transformed through translocality and questioning its burden of history.

The film shows the comings and goings of the characters through their foreigner status. Tak, Wang’s lover, is a Japanese expatriate worker. Her Nipponphobe Harbin father, the owner of Oriental Hotel, disapproves of her relationship. Chow met Su #2 and Lu Lu when he was working in Singapore. Bai Ling, is a gold digger sex worker from Shanghai. These characters show their transience by making a home at Oriental Hotel, a transitional dwelling usually reserved for the homeless, itinerants and temporary residents. Here, they become intimate strangers. They sleep with each other, hear each other's sexual encounters, see each other's
abuses, and form each other's friends and foes. Oriental Hotel is the place where the intimacy of strangers has revealed the strangeness of home through its alterity and its proximity. Its heterotopic relation to Hong Kong is inferred when we consider how its rooftop sequences with its neon sign are the only external shots in the film that allow us to anchor the spatial geography of a place that has re-turned and displaced. Oriental Hotel shows how the same and the other are transformed through a translocalism that demonstrates Hong Kong as a more complex local space as a result of the contradictory forces of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, globalisation, traditionalism and indigenisation. Divergence is also further supported through the use of regional superstars such as Zhang Ziyi, Gong Li, Chang Chen, Takuya Kimura and Thongchai McIntyre. More significantly, divergence is a process that also questions the modal codes that have come to constitute the ethics of love. This is evident in the portrayal of erotic love in the film.

Unlike the lack of sexual consummation in In The Mood for Love, erotic love is demonstrated in the sequences between Chow and his lovers. Although the only sex scenes that are screened are the 35-seconds kiss between Chow and Su#2, and the intercourse between Chow and Bai Ling, sex is evident throughout the narrative that explicitly constructs these women as his sexual partners. Unlike the illicit love that is coded through the proprietary marriage in the earlier sequel, the sanctioned love that is coded in 2046 is a deviant sexuality that is connoted through prostitution, escort hostessing and pornography. Unlike the love that cannot be spoken or displayed in the earlier sequel, these forms of love are explicit precisely of its display status. The pornography written by Wang (and Chow) is a ritualised performative sexuality that is consumed by the pulp serial readers. This is even read out loud by Chow weekly on the telephone, and imaged in the voyeuristic science fiction sequence. The hostessing and escort work conducted by Lu Lu relies precisely on her seductive public performance as a singer. Gambling too, embodied by Su#2, is also a public display of skill and risk. Prostitution is clearly a service trade between the client and the worker, as ritualistically re-enacted between Chow and Bai Ling. The self-presence of these subjects are noted by their absence of children, family and marriage. They are freed from the fecundity of love demanded by the labour of the state for sexuality's regeneration, procreation and continuity. Their bodies are sites for a radical freedom that have escaped
political control, moral education and social reform. These elocutions are also transformative in that they awaken the self-consciousness of the performer by blurring the distinction between the subject and object because the performance can only succeed if the performer (as representation) also assumes the role of the audience-observer (as represented). In such a practice of erotic love, the ethics of love questions the role of the law as the defender of a morality. If the subject is constituted through history, then these practices respond to “the burdens of history” (Kahn, 2005: 204) recognised through the social commitment to the family and marriage, to the economic commitment to productive labour and the political commitment to (Confucian and Judeo-Christian) sacrifice.

Like convergence, the narrative of divergence is demonstrated through the comings and goings of love. These movements reflect the migratory tropes of arrivals, departures and resettlements. Divergence critically illustrates how, at the center of intersection, re-turn is routed through a regional diversity (of stars and migration) as well as through the deviance of erotic love. These transformations engage the cultural practice of the border, between Hong Kong and elsewhere, restriction and freedom, liberalism and conservatism. These opposites relate to the broader question of Hong Kong’s 50-year transition, and its realities and fantasies of freedom. Reading the discourse of love through migration-as-transition has exposed the ethics of love as a site that can question the limits of its difference and the margins of its selfhood.

**Conclusion: The Taking-place of 2047 ...**

This chapter has introduced migration as a process of transition through its strategies in contemporary Hong Kong cinema. It has shown how migration-as-transition is evident through the cinema’s circuits of cultural production and consumption. This trope is also evident through the narrative of intersection as both convergence and divergence. Central to this is its articulation of identity as a process of questioning the ethics of subjectivity. This chapter has also further illustrated how the ethics of subjectivity is evident in Wong Kar-wai’s *2046*. Its singularity of love is a site to question the ethics of how the subject is constituted through a (British colonial and Chinese post-socialist) history that has denied and enabled individual freedom. To be located in history is to ensure a commitment to a future.
At the heart of this is a responsibility to the ethics of love as the potentiality of a coming community held together, not through roots and origins, but through being-in-common. I conclude by illustrating how this is evident in the taking-place of the intelligibility of 2047.

2047 is the room that Chow rents when 2046 is being refurbished. It is also the science-fiction novel that he devotes to Wang, who has left for Japan to marry Tak. In the story the train man returns from 2046. Chow experiences his own possibility and his own potentiality by telling us in a voice-over that the references to 1224 and 1225 are his own coded messages to Wang about how he spends his cold Christmases (24 and 25 December) giving warmth to anyone who needs him at that time of the year. Hence, the film’s Christmas repetitions: in 1966 with Lu Lu; in 1967 with Bai Ling; in 1968 with Wang, and, in 1969 in Singapore with Su. The film’s transmuted science fiction form shows the taking place of love in its in/actuality. The android’s unanswered reply and her delayed tears echo the tears of Chow’s surrogate in 2047, Lu Lu’s weeping for her dead boyfriend, Su’s (Gong Li) crying and Bai Ling’s emotional sob. It is in 2047 that Chow substitutes himself for someone else in the place of others that being-in-common represents the taking place of love, as an ethics of one’s own potentiality and possibility. This too is the potentiality and the possibility of the Hong Kong post-transitional coming community.

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