

# **World Cinema in Translation**

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Wong Kar-wai and the (Re)contextualizing Function of the DVD

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis will consider how the DVD medium shapes the conditions within which non-Western films are consumed, expectations are generated, and interpretations are formed. By way of illustration, it will analyze the extra-textual discourses surrounding Wong Kar-wai's most celebrated films, *Chungking Express* (1994) and *In The Mood For Love* (2000). I argue that these discourses, particularly when materially appended to the text as DVD "bonus features," significantly frame the viewer's access to the films. My aim is to consider the ways in which the DVDs' supplementary materials function as instruments of cultural translation, whereby the cultural particularities of the text are made accessible to the viewer. Moreover, the analysis of the DVDs and their "bonus features" can yield valuable insights into the different criteria and processes of canonization which have contributed to Wong's cult status as an *auteur*, and help to elucidate the role of translation in its formation.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Images, which are our key to the world shape our perception and knowledge: it is inasmuch as we have the word 'London' in mind and have already seen pictures of the Tower or the Horse Guards that, without having even visited the town, we can decide where *The Knack* takes place. Our awareness of what is going on around us is multiplied by images . . . We become familiar with distant people or countries we would never imagine 'unless by sight in the picture papers,' as Virginia Woolf used to say.<sup>1</sup>

The question of translation is not limited to the transfer of meaning from one language to another. It is involved in the very production of meaning within one or across several contexts, mentalities and cultures. Translation is here understood in the multiple, wider sense of the term.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis is primarily concerned with the categorization of films under the generic label "World Cinema," the translational dimensions of this cinema's cross-cultural circulation, and the various ways in which the directors whose films are distributed under this all-subsuming label are constructed as auteurs, their works framed as personal visions of film art, invariably to be interpreted as reflections of a particular local, national, or regional culture. By way of illustration, I will consider the ways in which the films of Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai have been mediated – received, decoded, and finally translated – for international audiences by a specific category of cultural gatekeepers (programmers, critics, scholars, etc.), prestigious distribution companies (particularly The Criterion Collection and its online partner The Auteurs), and increasingly by the director himself. More specifically, I will be examining several DVD editions of Wong's most celebrated films, *Chungking Express* (1994) and *In the Mood for Love* (2000), by looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939-1980* (New York; Routledge, 1991), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Cinema Interval* (New York; London; Routledge, 1999), 60.

variety of ways the films and their director have been packaged for international audiences. As it will soon be made clear, the international prestige bestowed upon both films has led to Wong's status as one of World Cinema's most respected *auteurs*. As a result of their preeminent stature within the canon of contemporary World Cinema, Wong's films have also been routinely employed by scholars as a paradigm of 'post-national' cinema,<sup>3</sup> or as Janet Harbord does, as a way to illustrate the limits of translation and the role that film plays in mediating cultural difference.<sup>4</sup> The goal of this study, therefore, is to highlight the different criteria and processes of canonization which have contributed to Wong's distinguished reputation among scholars, critics and audiences, and to elucidate the place of translation in its formation.

As this study will demonstrate, these issues are intrinsically connected to notions such as the tourist gaze and the geographical imagination, the local and the global, the particular and the universal. Research on these topics, falling under the umbrella category of the "spatial," has recently undergone a profound and sustained transformation, not just in film studies, but across a wide variety of disciplines, in part because globalization – as both a historical phenomenon and a theoretical field of inquiry – has heightened the significance of locality, of culture's relation to *place*. In film studies, for example, the "spatial turn" has contributed to a reconfiguration of national cinema analysis, as well as the rising interest in the category, or concept, of World Cinema, the study of which is

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<sup>3</sup> Martha P. Nochimson, *World on Film: An Introduction* (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Harbord, *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2007), 93-113.

unavoidably bound up with questions of spatiality. While attempts to define the term abound in film studies, it is commonplace to assume that, at the very least, World Cinema inevitably invokes that other beleaguered category of film culture – the “foreign film.” As Harbord reminds us, the term “foreign” necessarily refers to questions of context, “of who is at home and who is abroad, of what is perceived as belonging and what is regarded as alien.”<sup>5</sup> In light of this, I want to argue that to employ World Cinema as a meaningful category, it is imperative that as film and media scholars we must make it a priority to interrogate and reflect on the question of our own contexts, on the circumstances which condition the various prejudices and preconceptions that shape our points of view, in order to consider how films inflect our knowledge and understanding of the world. Knowledge in this case should never be perceived as fixed, since it necessarily requires a context in which it can be communicated and a frame through which it can be deciphered.

Considering the declining status of cinema as a discretely public, theatrical experience, and with its gradual dispersal across various locations and distribution formats, a project such as this one – where the question of cultural translation is central to its aims – can no longer insist on a purely textual form of analysis. To explore this phenomenon in all of its complexity requires to look beyond the film “text” proper, and the question of its translatability, towards the technologically mediated conditions of its cross-cultural reception. Consequently, the paths through which films circulate, and the various contexts in which their reception now takes place, have both gained considerable importance within the field of film studies. As Jeroen de Kloet insists, this is not to

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<sup>5</sup> Harbord, 93.

suggest that textual analysis is not a viable approach, but that current studies need to be complemented by a broader framework of analysis that could include, for example, the political economy that produces the text, as well as the conditions, or contexts, of its reception.<sup>6</sup>

The French film scholar Pierre Sorlin defines 'context' as "the amount of previous knowledge which a given public invests into the images, . . . [which] changes considerably according to the place and period in which the film is presented."<sup>7</sup> For a more general definition, the New Oxford American Dictionary explains that 'context' refers to "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed," or alternatively as "the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning." 'In context,' therefore, refers to something which is "considered together with the surrounding words or circumstances," while 'out of context' refers to that which is "not fully understandable" since the surrounding words or circumstances are absent. Linguistics professor Jacob Mey insightfully explains that to clarify the meaning of the word, linguists usually point out that the Latin word *textus* means 'something woven,' and hence 'a text.'<sup>8</sup> By extension, 'context' is that which surrounds this 'fabric,' its *frame* so to speak, through which knowledge about the object is communicated.

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<sup>6</sup> Jeroen de Kloet, "Crossing the threshold: Chinese cinema studies in the twenty-first century," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1:1 (2007): 63-70.

<sup>7</sup> Sorlin, 8

<sup>8</sup> Jacob L. Mey, *When Voices Clash: A Study in Literary Pragmatics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 37.

It is on this basis that I want to discuss World Cinema: as something that is tied to a verifiably *local* context, which delineates a geographically and historically bounded body of knowledge, produced under a series of interrelated cultural and commercial conditions still largely mediated by the institutions of Euro-American film culture. In emphasizing the *local* I am referring to the material contexts in which knowledge about World Cinema is produced, not the geographical domain to which this knowledge applies. By *geographically and historically bounded* I mean that this knowledge is institutionally and historically constrained, and produced within particular contexts — such as international film festivals, for example. In this way, as Trevor Barnes suggests, knowledge is connected to particular kinds of social practices that are historically and geographically variable: “Knowledge is therefore irreducibly social, never innocent, and always colored by the context of its production.”<sup>9</sup>

My aim here is ultimately to situate the following discussion of World Cinema within the contradictory sites of global film culture, through which knowledge about the cinema is produced, thereby shaping the conditions within which cross-cultural translation takes place. This is a strategic maneuver designed to tease out the particular limitations and political implications inherent in the act of translating Otherness. As James Clifford argues, translation is never entirely neutral, but is instead always enmeshed in relations of power:

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<sup>9</sup> Trevor Barnes, “Local knowledge,” in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, eds. R.J. Johnston, Derek Gregory, Geraldine Pratt, and Michael Watts, 452-453 (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 452.

One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes. In successful translation, the access to something alien — another language, culture, or code — is substantial. Something different is brought over, made available for understanding, appreciation, consumption. At the same time, . . . the moment of failure is inevitable.<sup>10</sup>

Central to my argument is that the spaces of consumption, the contexts within which knowledge-production takes place, are becoming increasingly transnational, if not global. Such spaces are today inflected by an overriding sense of spatial interconnectedness, a ‘structure of feeling’ involving what Charles Acland has identified as a form of popular cosmopolitanism — a ‘felt internationalism’ generated by “senses of allegiance and affiliation — about being in step — with imagined distant and synchronized populations.”<sup>11</sup> Under these conditions, the cinema often participates in what Martin Roberts calls a kind of coffee-table globalism, observing that “going to the movies and eating out have become more or less equivalent activities, with choosing a movie, like choosing a restaurant, a matter of selecting from a repertoire of available ethnic options.”<sup>12</sup> What is ultimately at stake here is the question of how social, cultural, and ethnic specificities that are beyond the limits of our own experience can be understood across the linguistic and geographical divides that inexorably stand between us. If, as Harbord attests, film provides us with an experience of difference,<sup>13</sup> it is important to explore how this difference is transformed through processes of mediation, whereby culturally specific markers tend to translate into

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<sup>10</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 182-183.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 237.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Roberts, “Baraka: World Cinema and the Global Culture Industry,” *Cinema Journal* 37:3 (Spring 1998), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Harbord, 38-39.

universalized symbols. Moreover, how might this mediated translation potentially shape our perceptions of the Other?

This thesis will approach these issues by looking at the relatively new distribution format of the Digital Video Disc (DVD). My aim here is to position the DVD as a technology, a delivery platform, and an exhibition site that implicitly constructs a very specific idea of World Cinema through a potentially homogenizing process of selective canonization, more or less resulting in a kind of cultural dislocation. Using Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* and *In The Mood For Love* as case studies, this study will be able to illustrate the various ways that the DVDs (re)contextualize and (mis)translate the cultural specificity of Hong Kong, and the cultural identity of the director.

Both films feature angst-ridden narratives that are populated with lovelorn characters who mostly fail in their attempts to establish an authentic, emotional connection with other people. Often simplistically described as a romantic comedy, *Chungking Express* playfully depicts the intersecting lives of four characters: a mysterious female gangster in the midst of a drug deal gone bad (Brigitte Lin); two police officers, Cop 223 (Takeshi Kaneshiro) and Cop 663 (Tony Leung), both of whom have recently split up with their girlfriends as they resort to risk-free relationships with their personal possessions, inanimate objects such as a large stuffed animal or a bar of soap; and finally, Faye (Faye Wong), who works at the Midnight Express take-out stand which both cops often frequent while on duty. *In the Mood for Love* is a slightly more stripped down film, featuring only two characters. Mr. Chow (Tony Leung), and Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) live next-door

to each other with their respective spouses in the tight spaces of a Hong Kong communal guest house run by Shanghainese immigrants. They quickly discover that their spouses, both in Tokyo away on business, are having an affair together. As they soon begin to spend more time with each other, their mutual feelings for one another begin to complicate their predicament, eventually forcing Mr. Chow to move away to Singapore, saving himself from the inevitable heartbreak.

*Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love* provide excellent case studies for several reasons. Not only are they Wong's most internationally celebrated works, but they also represent important landmarks for the cross-cultural circulation of Chinese cinemas. Moreover, both films have been released in multiple DVD editions which are heavily supplemented with "extra features" that differ in highly illuminating ways. They therefore represent ideal opportunities to assess the different criteria with which Wong's films have been evaluated, while also providing insight into how the mediated translation of the texts can take vastly different forms depending on the context.

### **The *Auteur(s)* & the Audience**

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The relationship between the viewer and the mediated image, filmic, televisual, or otherwise, has always been one of the central concerns for film and media scholars. However, in the context of what Harbord has termed film's "transient relocation,"<sup>14</sup> the relationship between films and their audiences has taken on radically new permutations, the form and function of the cinema transforming exponentially according to the design

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<sup>14</sup> Harbord, 36.

logic of new distribution technologies. The new modes of film consumption made available by the DVD and the Internet, which are emblematic of an increasingly digital media landscape, have provided viewers with a seemingly limitless number of portals into Other spaces and times, rendering film a “curious archive” of the Other.<sup>15</sup> As Jenna Ng explains, film consumption has become “a paradigm of access *sans* geography. Freed from the pragmatic shackles of territorial distance, the film cultures of the world are now fluid commodities – rentable, downloadable or simply available for purchase.”<sup>16</sup>

An exemplary case of this type of “access *sans* geography” is the recent online company The Auteurs, founded in 2007 by Efe Cakarel, a former banker for Goldman Sachs. Based in Palo Alto, New York, Paris, and London, The Auteurs was set up in partnership with the esteemed American distribution company The Criterion Collection,<sup>17</sup> the ubiquitous Paris-based international distribution and production outfit Celluloid Dreams, and Costa Films, a fast-growing Buenos Aires-based company founded in 2006 by millionaire Eduardo Costantini,<sup>18</sup> whose other co-venture, The Latin American Film Company, happens to be partnered with The Weinstein Company, thus forming yet another link in this increasingly global chain of content distribution. In 2009, the website also became the exclusive partner of Martin Scorsese’s World Cinema Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and restoring neglected films from around the world.

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<sup>15</sup> Harbord, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Jenna Ng, “Love in the Time of Transcultural Fusion: Cinephilia, Homage and Kill Bill,” in *Cinephelia: Movies, Love and Memory*, eds. Marjike de Valck and Malte Hagener, 65-82 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Simultaneous with the launch of The Auteurs, The Criterion Collection’s website was also redesigned in tandem with TheAuteurs.com. Moreover, Criterion curates a continuing monthly series of free, ad-supported film festivals on The Auteurs, usually based on a specific theme such as ‘Great Documentaries,’ ‘First Films,’ or ‘Cannes Classics.’

<sup>18</sup> Costantini is The Auteur’s chief financial backer.

What all of these companies have in common is their stated commitment to bringing World Cinema to a wider audience, as well as a mutual emphasis on the figure of the visionary director as the primary instrument of cinematic artistry.

What ultimately distinguishes this particular consumption space from the general pattern of online film culture is not simply the cultural pedigree involved, but that it is explicitly designed to satisfy the ‘mobile’ gaze of cosmopolitan *flânerie*, spectatorship and consumption. The site’s inaugural blog post describes it as “a venue that combines streaming the best independent film available with a dynamic community for cinephiles to discuss, analyze, and debate *world cinema*.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, The Auteurs is characterized as “a new social experience — an online movie theater where you watch, discover, and discuss *auteur cinema*.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, as an online hub for World Cinema, The Auteurs is premised on the belief that films are most likely to be valuable when they are conspicuously the product of their directors, and on a conviction that there is an audience of cinephiles across the globe who share in this belief. The goal of the site, therefore, is to generate a space for them to meet each other and interact in a welcoming, online “coffee shop,” conducive to discussion and debate over a shared passion for World Cinema:

The Auteurs is not just about discovering wonderful new cinema or classic masterpieces. It’s also about discussing and sharing these discoveries, which makes us like a small coffee shop—... a place where you can gather and talk about alternative endings, directors’ cuts, and whatever those frogs in *Magnolia* meant. Heated debates and passionate arguments are welcome.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “The Auteurs revealed.” <http://studio.theauteurs.com/post/98333989/the-auteurs-revealed>. February 1, 2008. My emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> “About The Auteurs.” <http://www.theauteurs.com/about>. 2008-2010. My emphasis. It is important to note that Auteur cinema is synonymous here with World cinema.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, the appeal of The Auteurs is that it provides a virtual platform for people to collectively discover World Cinema. With “no airline ticket required,”<sup>22</sup>The Auteurs is aiming to take you to Berlin, Cannes, Toronto, and Venice 365 days a year.

As a personalized, “virtual cinemathèque” — accessible to anyone, anytime, anywhere — The Auteurs perfectly embodies what Timothy Corrigan has described as a ‘cinema without walls.’<sup>23</sup> By borrowing André Malraux’s notion of a modern museum without walls, which Corrigan describes as “a way of collecting art and the details of aesthetic culture not as separate and distinctive objects but as a family of photographs,”<sup>24</sup> he is able to argue that the ‘four walls’ of theatrical viewing, which might have once determined the way movies were experienced, are no longer an appropriate metaphor with which to describe the contemporary film-viewing experience:

Viewers can now possess images as the backgrounds and ornaments of their lives, those images are recast as social objects defined by the conditions and contexts in which they are viewed. . . . If in Malraux’s museum, images removed objects from their authentic cultural place, in the contemporary cinema without walls, audiences remove images from their own authentic and authoritative place within culture and disperse their significance across the heterogenous activity that now defines them.<sup>25</sup>

In this ‘cinema without walls,’ the center of film-viewing is now squarely in the hands of audiences, who seemingly have more control now than ever before, forcing films to increasingly anticipate the volatility of their reception.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (New Brunswick, NJ; Rutgers University Press, 1991), 1-7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 6.

One of the effects of this, Corrigan suggests, is the increasing importance of the *auteur* as a “commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur.”<sup>26</sup> In Corrigan’s formulation, directors are increasingly situated along an extra-textual path in which their commercial status as *auteurs* is in fact auteurism’s chief function: “the auteur-star is meaningful primarily as a promotion or recovery of a movie or group of movies, frequently regardless of the filmic text itself.”<sup>27</sup> Corrigan’s argument is that the *auteur*, as a practical and interpretive category, can now “be described according to the conditions of a cultural and commercial *intersubjectivity*, a social interaction distinct from an intentional causality or textual transcendence,”<sup>28</sup> almost to the point where an *auteur* film is capable of being understood and consumed without even being seen.

The Auteurs has clearly taken Corrigan’s notion of a ‘commerce of auteurism’ to new heights, employing the figure of the director as its central trademark. My interest, however, is less the website itself, but more in who it positions as its emblematic *auteurs*. Listed at the very top of their online mission statement are five things that were on their minds when they first dreamt up the site, the first three of which are crucial here:

- #1: Why can’t you watch *In the Mood for Love* in a café in Tokyo on your laptop?
- #2: Why is it so hard to meet people who share the same love for Antonioni?
- #3: Wouldn’t it be great to instantly send Tati’s *Playtime* to a friend if you think they needed it? (There’s nothing like film therapy!)

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 105

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 104.

#4: Why do films on the internet just look awful?

#5: Why are we talking as if we were John Cusack in *High Fidelity*?<sup>29</sup>

When the site eventually went public in November 2008, the press latched on to this list, often citing Cakarel's anecdote about not being able to watch Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) online, which apparently sparked the initial idea that led to the online venture. Writing for CNN, for example, Mairi Mackay states that Cakarel "came up with the idea back in 2007 in Tokyo when, with some spare time on his hands, he tried to watch Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* on the Internet."<sup>30</sup> This anecdote was repeated in many news reports on the site's launch, not only in the Anglophone press, but in other languages and territories as well.<sup>31</sup> Wong's name also appears in other promotional pieces. On its "Press" page, for example, The Auteurs promotes itself as "a social network that can let you find a visual gem that will definitely not be released in the local multiplex and allows you to find a girl in Tokyo who loves Kubrick (she actually exists, her name is Yuko and she's into Wong Kar-wai too!)." Evidently, this description has found its way into countless reports on The Auteurs, online and in print, exponentially reinforcing Wong's already established cult status.

### **The Making of a Reputation - Wong Kar-wai and the Digital Film Canon**

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.theauteurs.com/about>. Stanley Kubrick is also featured, as of course is Martin Scorsese.

<sup>30</sup> Mairi Mackay, "Scorsese and The Auteurs Put Film Classics Online for Free," *CNN*, June 12, 2009: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/Movies/06/11/the.auteurs.scorsese.vod/index.html> (Accessed April 10, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> In German, for example, at *Die Zeit Online*, May 7, 2009. <http://www.zeit.de/2009/20/The-Auteurs> (Accessed April 10, 2010).

Born in Shanghai in 1958, Wong Kar-wai moved to Hong Kong with his family when he was just five years old. Starting his career as a screenwriter, Wong was first given the opportunity to direct in 1988, with the crime melodrama *As Tears Go By*. While this debut did not garner much interest outside of Hong Kong, his next film *Days of Being Wild* (1991) did receive a modest amount of international exposure. However, since the 1996 release of *Chungking Express* by Miramax/Rolling Thunder, thanks to the efforts of iconoclastic American filmmaker Quentin Tarantino, Wong has arguably been one of the most internationally celebrated filmmakers working anywhere in the world. His first of many prestigious awards came soon after in 1998 when Wong won for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival for his 1997 film *Happy Together*. His next award came two years later, when *In the Mood for Love* was the buzz of the 2000 edition of Cannes, winning the Best Actor award for Tony Leung's performance as Mr. Chow. Also in 2000, in an article for the influential film magazine *Sight & Sound*, Wong was honored with a full retrospective article, titled "The Innovators 1990-2000: Charisma Express,"<sup>32</sup> written by the venerable Asian cinema critic Tony Rayns who has been a key supporter of Wong's work since the mid-90s.<sup>33</sup> Two years later, in a 2002 U.K. critics poll undertaken by the same magazine, Wong's 1994 film *Chungking Express* was voted as the eighth best film of the last twenty-five years, while Wong was chosen as the third most important filmmaker during the same period.<sup>34</sup> More recently in 2010, Wong's *In the Mood for Love* appeared

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<sup>32</sup> Tony Rayns, "The Innovators 1990-2000: Charisma Express," *Sight & Sound*, January 2000.

<sup>33</sup> His September 1995 article on Wong for *Sight & Sound*, called "Poet of Time," set the standard for interpretations of Wong's films as being principally interested with the issue of time. It has been quoted countless times ever since.

<sup>34</sup> Nick James, "Modern Times," *Sight & Sound*, December 2002. Also available online at <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/63/>.

near the top of innumerable best-of-the-decade lists, placing second, for example, in *Film Comment*'s best of the 2000s international critics' poll.<sup>35</sup>

Between 2002 and 2008, Wong's growing cult status was far from dormant. On the contrary, the director received three high profile world premieres at Cannes; first, with the follow-up and quasi-sequel to *In the Mood for Love*, entitled *2046* (2004); second, with his English-language debut *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), starring Norah Jones and Jude Law; and finally in 2008, opening in a special screening was Wong's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), a remixed and remastered version of his now-legendary 1994 martial arts film. To top this off, in 2006 he also became the first Chinese director to act as president of the Cannes jury for its main competition, during which he was also inducted into the highly prestigious French Legion of Honor by the Minister of Culture Jacques Duhamel. Additionally, the official poster for the 2006 edition also featured a still frame from Wong's *In the Mood for Love*, depicting a silhouetted Maggie Cheung on her way down a narrow flight of stairs. Clearly, his reputation as the 'favourite son' of Cannes is undeniable.<sup>36</sup>

Wong's status as an internationally recognized brand-name director was therefore already well-established by the time The Auteurs chose him to represent their online cinematheque alongside Jacques Tati and Michelangelo Antonioni, two of the most revered directors in the canon of 1960s European art cinema, both of which are also well-

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<sup>35</sup> "Film Comment's End-of-the-Decade Critics' Poll," *Film Comment*, January-February 2010. Also available online at <http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/jf10/best00s.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Numerous articles on either Wong, or Cannes, have referred to the director's relationship to the festival in this way. See for example: Joan Dupont, "Cannes: Wong Kar-wai: Exploring Displaced People and Foreign Lands," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2007.

represented in Criterion's DVD catalogue. Indeed, less than two months after the public launch of The Auteurs in November 2008, *Chungking Express* was released by Criterion on DVD and Blu-ray, representing the company's highly publicized first splash into the new Blu-ray format, further establishing Wong as the preeminent *auteur* of contemporary World Cinema. It was Wong's second film distributed by the label, which first released *In the Mood for Love* in a lavish two-disc special edition in 2002. Among the currently active non-Western directors represented in Criterion's DVD catalogue, Wong is the only one with multiple films in circulation, and only one of two Chinese directors represented at all, the other being the Taiwanese filmmaker Edward Yang (*Yi Yi*, 2000). He occupies a similar position in Kino International's Video and DVD catalogue, which is advertised as "The Best in World Cinema."<sup>37</sup> Of all of Kino's director box sets, the five-disc Wong Kar-wai Collection (2004) positions the director as only one of two non-Western directors held in such high esteem.<sup>38</sup>

This selective focus on particular directors is unavoidably informed by notions of a film 'canon,' a largely Eurocentric body of work composed mainly of films from important national movements such as Italian neorealism and the French New Wave, which are most often defined by a rather narrow representative set of *auteurs*, names such as Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, for example. According to David Bordwell, this auteurist canon "is a timeless collection of great films, hovering in aesthetic space, to be augmented whenever directors create more

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.kino.com/about/>

<sup>38</sup> Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai only recently became the second, with a 6-disc collection released in February 2010.

masterworks.”<sup>39</sup> By literally importing Wong Kar-wai into this space, his films are removed from their original contexts, and the regular flow of filmic circulation, only to be recontextualized and thrust into a universalizing, ahistorical process of cross-cultural consecration.

With this mind, this thesis will consider the implications of filtering the “foreign film” through Eurocentric paradigms of interpretation and established hierarchies of cultural value. The term “foreign” in this context is inescapably tied to the history of colonialism, and involves an unavoidable exercise in practices of exoticization. As Harbord points out, it also “articulates in the present usage a relation that comes from the outside, an alterity. Hence its usefulness in the present, a term that carries the weight of history, and underscores the ways in which the ‘foreign’ has become commodified (in tourism, food culture for example), made safe, consumable.”<sup>40</sup> This commodification raises questions about the categorisation of globally circulated cultural products under such all-subsuming generic labels as “World Cinema,” “World Literature,” and “World Music,” labels which often moderate the cultural specificity and locality of the text, ultimately resulting in the domestication of its foreignness. According to James F. English, the effort throughout the last half-century to begin identifying works from outside the so-called First World for inclusion in the global pantheon of “masterpieces,” has taken on a special importance in the context of the increasing globalization of the media and culture industries. English views this effort “on the one hand as a necessity for the postcolonial

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<sup>39</sup> David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81.

<sup>40</sup> Harbord, 95-96.

world and an ethical obligation on the part of the major powers (a matter of genuine and recognition, not mere symbolic philanthropy),”<sup>41</sup> and on the other hand “as a means of sustaining less overtly and directly the old patterns of imperial control over symbolic economies and hence over cultural practice itself.”<sup>42</sup> However, as English points out, this is certainly not a problem from which the cultural consecration of non-Western culture can hope to extract itself: “to honor and recognize local cultural achievement from a declaredly global point of vantage is inevitably to impose external interference on local systems of cultural value.”<sup>43</sup>

In view of this, I argue that it is necessary to consider how the DVDs of Wong’s films translate the cultural specificity of the texts, and the cultural identity of the director, thus shaping the conditions within which expectations are generated, and interpretations are formed. On the surface the now fifteen-year-old format does not appear to be so dissimilar to its predecessor, the VHS analog tape. However, considering the DVD’s capacity to supplement a film with a potentially endless amount of additional material, scholars must attend to the ways in which these “bonus features” shape the contemporary film-viewing experience, adding value and giving identity — albeit an externally imposed one — to the text.

### **Translating World Cinema - From ‘Text’ to ‘Paratext’**

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<sup>41</sup> James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 298.

<sup>42</sup> English, 298.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

My analysis will focus primarily on the cultural dynamics of what Barbara Klinger calls “home film cultures.”<sup>44</sup> Klinger’s approach to film convincingly moves beyond a primarily text-interpretative method towards one that considers the context(s) of viewing and the extra-textual discourses that begin to circulate before a film is ‘released’ into the world, and which continue to accumulate long after its initial theatrical ‘window.’ By extra-textual discourses I have in mind the secondary, ancillary or satellite texts that operate on the margins of the ‘official’ text – what Gérard Genette has termed the “paratext”<sup>45</sup> – including commentary in film festival catalogues, film reviews, editorials, production reports, online blogs and discussion forums, and, most significantly for my purposes here, the supplementary “texts” that are often included on special edition DVDs such as audio commentaries, cast and crew interviews, making-of documentaries, essay booklets, and so on. Central to my argument is that DVD “bonus features” have radically transformed the function of the filmic paratext, mainly due to the format’s capacity to transcend the old dichotomy between the primary “text” and its previously peripheral “extra-texts.”

Writing on the world of book publishing, Genette saw the paratext as any fragment of textuality that surrounds the text and serves to prepare us for it. He proposes a long list of such devices including covers, prefaces, dedications, typeface and afterwords as examples of *peritexts* – as paratexts found within the book, none of which is truly independent of the work, but all of which stand to substantially shape our interpretation of

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<sup>44</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies and the Home* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>45</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

it – and reviews, interviews, and advertisements as examples of *epitexts* – paratexts that circulate beyond the book itself.<sup>46</sup> P. David Marshall states that paratexts collectively work to establish an intertextual matrix that is “designed to encircle, entice and deepen the significance of the film for the audience.”<sup>47</sup> The paratext, therefore, effectively helps to construct the text, presenting it in often calculated and precise ways. Indeed, as Jonathan Gray explains, “amidst a textual world that also allows and at times encourages intertextuality and polysemy, paratexts are the tools with which producers can try to discipline our readings, closing off certain meanings, and playing up others.”<sup>48</sup>

However, the meaning or function of any given paratext and its relationship to the text still largely depends on the technological interfaces that mediate our relationship to it. The “framing” of film within the context of the home theater, for example, significantly changes depending on whether the text is presented to us on DVD, through niche cable channels such as Turner Classic Movies or The Independent Film Channel, or via on-demand or pay-per-view services offered by digital cable or satellite technologies – not to mention the variety of paratextual framing devices we encounter when we watch films on our personal computers, where they can be purchased through iTunes, streamed on YouTube, downloaded through illicit file-sharing websites, or even converted into miniaturized forms to be viewed on the go using any number of mobile hand-held devices. Such technologized contexts of viewing heavily mediate the film viewing experience,

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<sup>46</sup> Genette, 1-15.

<sup>47</sup> P. David Marshall, “The New Intertextual Commodity,” in *The New Media Book*, ed. Dan Harris, 69-81 (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 69.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Gray, “Examining the Extra-Text: A Call for Paratextual Analysis” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, LA, May 27, 2004) Online <PDF> from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p112917\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p112917_index.html) (December 15, 2009), 22.

reproducing the “text” in a variety of different ways, generating unique and often unintended connections to the world beyond the immediate context of the original, authentic “text” – though it is doubtful that such a thing ever truly existed to begin with.

The paratextual life of film, particularly in the age of the DVD and the Internet, therefore plays an important role in shaping the conditions within which interpretations of films can be formed prior to the act of viewing, and sustained long afterwards. According to Gray, the paratext does not just stand between the audience and the text, but instead infringes upon it, and invades its meaning-making process, rendering the two virtually inseparable.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as Matt Hills observes, in the case of DVD releases, the two forms of paratext (peritext and epitext) also start to blur together:

For instance, though it may be apparent that DVD menus, and box set packaging, are akin to “peritexts,” what should we make of audio commentaries? As paratexts, are they “inside” or “outside” the symbolic boundaries discursively activated by the DVD’s “text-function”? They may be activated by selecting a menu option (which suggests they are peritextual, and outside “the text”), but they then run alongside—and as part of—the screening of specific TV episodes (suggesting epitextual status).<sup>50</sup>

However, whether we categorize DVD bonus materials as “textual” or “extra-textual,” Hills argues that such paratexts work in the manner described by Gray: authors, producers, and critics can use the paratext “to hem in certain readings, to keep readers away from others and, overall, to authorize and legitimate their own favored reading strategies.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Matt Hills, “From the Box in the Corner to the Box Set on the Shelf: ‘TVIII’ and the cultural/textual valorizations of DVD,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5:1 (April 2007): 54.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Watching with The Simpsons* (London; New York; Routledge, 2006), 37.

The translational dimensions of the paratext's mediating function, its capacity to make the foreign intelligible, will be a principle concern in the chapters to follow. For Genette, the primary function of the paratext is to attract readers, to draw them toward and into the book. He argues that its secondary function is one of explanation and guidance.<sup>52</sup> However, in the context of non-Western films, which are inevitably complicated by the effects of deterritorialization, resulting to a greater or lesser extent in acts of misrecognition and mistranslation, the paratext takes on an added dimension. As Richard Watts explains, "with works by a perceived cultural Other, the secondary function of the paratext can more precisely be understood as one of intralingual cultural translation."<sup>53</sup> Watts argues that "it is in the paratext that the struggle over who has the right to mediate and who maintains the authority to present and interpret"<sup>54</sup> non-Western culture is fraught. In other words, it is in the "margins of the text that the intense mediation of the . . . text's gender, racial, political, aesthetic, and in the broadest terms, cultural specificity take place."<sup>55</sup>

In the case of non-Western films, therefore, the paratextual "framing" of film necessarily takes on a political dimension, since such films almost always circulate as either "art," "auteur," "cult," or, more inclusively, "World Cinema" – in other words, as taste-driven products which heavily rely on the subjective evaluations of an institutional community of cultural gatekeepers, still largely based in the West, whose activities greatly

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<sup>52</sup> Genette, 209.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

prefigure a film's global circulation. It is especially important, in this context, to examine the inner workings of the paratext in order to consider how it provokes certain readings, and discourages others. This study will therefore try to highlight some of the ways that the DVD paratexts framing Wong's films prefigure the viewer's meaning-making process. The central aim of this study, then, is to assess how the different paratexts to Wong's films have conditioned the reception of this now-canonical director. I will argue that they have served as instruments of cultural translation, working to a greater or lesser extent to render the culturally unfamiliar less so.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

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Through a "paratextual" analysis of several DVD editions of *Chungking Express* (1994) and *In The Mood For Love* (2000), the following chapters will examine the various ways in which the films and their director have been framed for international audiences. In Chapter One, I will look at how the DVD box, as the film's most visible paratextual frame, substantially shapes the film-viewing experience and the meaning-making process. More specifically, I will be comparing two different DVD editions of *Chungking Express*, namely the 2002 Rolling Thunder edition and the 2008 Criterion edition. Watts argues that by "projecting a singular version of the text through the lens of the chronotope (time/place) of its publication,"<sup>56</sup> the paratext functions as an instrument of cultural translation: "The paratext translates through its abbreviated textual forms (prefaces, dedications,

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<sup>56</sup> Watts, 14.

jacket copy, etc.) as well as iconic forms (cover art, illustrations).”<sup>57</sup> This, he argues, gives readers who might not otherwise be immediately able to identify or comprehend the text’s cultural differences access to it. I argue here that the paratextual design of the DVD box, which includes the text and all of its supplementary extra-texts, works precisely in this manner, thereby providing very specific contexts through which knowledge about the film is first communicated to the viewer. Following Watts’ explanation that each paratext addresses a culturally specific moment and a culturally specific readership, this chapter will look at how the different DVD editions of *Chungking Express* provide entirely different contexts through which viewers might interpret the film. In doing so, I will be able to illustrate how the text, which cannot be divorced from its frame, is subject to shifting interpretations as a result, to a greater or lesser degree, of the paratexts that surround it. Consequently, how *Chungking Express* is contextualized and translated for audiences changes considerably according to the space (the DVD box) and time (2002 or 2008) in which the film is presented.

Chapter Two will focus on several DVDs of both *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*, namely the Criterion editions of both films (2002, and 2008 respectively), as well as the 2001 TF1 edition of *In the Mood for Love*. By incorporating into the existing scholarship on filmic spectatorship, ideas associated with the “tourist gaze,”<sup>58</sup> this chapter will also be able to more effectively explore the cross-cultural consumption of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>58</sup> The concept of the tourist gaze was first employed by John Urry, in his book *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society* (London; Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990); updated in 2002 simply as *The Tourist Gaze* (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002).

Wong's films. Through an analysis of the texts and their DVD paratexts, while focusing on the intertwined elements of nostalgia and the search for authenticity, this chapter will illustrate the various ways in which the DVDs frame the films as a type of simulated travel experience, explicitly addressing the film spectator as a tourist. My argument here is twofold: first, that the films implicitly appeal to the touristic desire to submerge one's self in an Other time and place, one that is at once familiar *and* distinctive. In doing so, the films offer "a simulated experience of time-travel . . . and an ecstatic encounter with that much coveted fantasized Oriental exotica or erotica";<sup>59</sup> and second, that these appeals to the tourist gaze are made manifest, and even intensified, by the DVD paratexts which heavily supplement the film. Central to my argument is that the DVD editions of both *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love* are designed to satisfy the touristic component of filmic spectatorship, offering virtual guided tours of Hong Kong and the opportunity to gaze behind-the-scenes of the production process. My interrogation of how the DVDs operate in relation to the tourist gaze therefore partly draws upon Graham Huggan's notion that "the appeal to authenticity serves a paradoxical purpose: it grants the tourist the illusion of meaningful contact with the culture while maintaining distance between observer and observed."<sup>60</sup> While the DVDs do give viewers access to Wong's creative vision, and a brief peak into the imagined spaces of his cinematic Hong Kong, they also simultaneously project another image of the city, one that is, to varying degrees,

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<sup>59</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 250.

<sup>60</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 198.

designed to translate the spatiality of the films into a more historically “authentic,” recognizably familiar destination.

Throughout, this thesis will evaluate the extent to which the DVDs of Wong’s films have transformed the relationship between the texts, their director, and the viewer, while considering what these transformations might imply for the production and consumption of non-Western films. By way of conclusion, I assess the relative failure or success of the DVD paratext to translate the cultural particularities of Wong’s films, while also briefly looking outside of the Wong Kar-wai oeuvre to determine how my conclusions might be applicable to a larger body of films.

## CHAPTER ONE: Rethinking the Filmic Frame

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More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text). . . . Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public . . . at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.<sup>1</sup>

Since the mid-1990s, film critics have positioned Jean-Luc Godard as the main point of reference for understanding the particular appeal of Wong Kar-wai’s films. In a 1995 review of *Chungking Express*, for example, Jay Carr describes the film as “bursting with the kind of zappy visuals that would have Jean-Luc Godard beaming like a proud papa as it details the different love lives of two cops,”<sup>2</sup> while Roger Ebert similarly paints Wong “as a filmmaker in the tradition of Jean-Luc Godard.”<sup>3</sup> Wong’s apparent “debt” to Godard continues to follow the director with the release of his next film, *Fallen Angels* (1995), which Ebert claims transported him back “to the 1960s films of Jean-Luc Godard.”<sup>4</sup> Critics have even gone so far as to call Godard Wong’s acknowledged hero,<sup>5</sup> even though Wong himself has been rather elusive about the oft-made comparison. When asked about influences such as Antonioni, Godard, and Truffaut, Wong concludes that “as far as

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<sup>1</sup> Genette, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Carr, “Hong Kong, Indian films top Asian festival,” *The Boston Globe*, March 15, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Ebert, “‘Chungking Express’ an Acquired Taste, Except for Film Fan,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 15, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Ebert, “Director finds new thrills by taking ‘Express’ way,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 19, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd Sachs, “Lovers explore feelings, Argentina ‘Together’,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 23, 1998.

influences, we like what we see. And the sensations just stay.”<sup>6</sup> In a February 1998 issue of *Interview*, Wong was asked if constantly being compared to Godard was flattering or tiresome for the director. His response alludes to the ambiguity of the reference, whether it is meant to refer to Godard himself, or Godard the general impression, suggesting that critics often make the comparison when films appear to be challenging, “not because they really look like Godard.”<sup>7</sup> Finally admitting to have been influenced by the director, he inserts the fact “that most filmmakers my age are influenced by Godard,”<sup>8</sup> and wittingly adds that he is also influenced by his mother, first and foremost.

Regardless of Wong’s frequent repudiations of the comparison, Godard’s name continues to heavily “frame” the critical discourses surrounding *Chungking Express*, none more prominent than the DVD paratexts found on the Criterion and Rolling Thunder editions of the film, which continue to employ this now familiar rhetoric. References to Jean-Luc Godard have, since the 1960s, heavily inflected the reception of new filmmakers from such diverse locations as Brazil (Glauber Rocha) and Japan (Oshima Nagisa), and his name continues to be routinely used as a point of reference when new directors are discovered, their work acclaimed and occasionally canonized (like Wong’s). The figure of Godard can therefore be said to function as a kind legitimizing force, assuring that new directors are positioned as serious *auteurs*, while simultaneously reinforcing Godard’s

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Kaufman, “Decade: Wong Kar-wai on ‘In The Mood For Love’,” *indieWIRE*, December 6, 2009. [http://www.indiewire.com/article/decade\\_wong\\_Kar-wai\\_on\\_in\\_the\\_mood\\_for\\_love/](http://www.indiewire.com/article/decade_wong_Kar-wai_on_in_the_mood_for_love/) (Accessed December 15, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Weitzman, “Wong Kar-wai: The Director Who Knows all About Falling for the Wrong People,” *Interview*, February 1998. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1285/is\\_n2\\_v28/ai\\_20363519/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_n2_v28/ai_20363519/) (Accessed December 17, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

own canonical status and powerful cultural influence. It is fair to assume that even though Wong is now clearly regarded as one of the preeminent filmmakers in the world today, the figure of Godard will likely persist to shadow the reception of his films, due in part to the French director's inescapable "framing" presence throughout the DVD paratexts of *Chungking Express*. The various frames through which Wong Kar-wai is positioned, and what these might imply for the cross-cultural consumption of his films, constitutes the central question of this chapter.

One of the most difficult and confusing concepts in film studies is that of the "filmic frame." While numerous studies refer to and examine the frame, its definition remains somewhat elusive, often seen as functioning as a kind of window through which the viewer is able to experience the world represented on screen. In an essay entitled "Narrative Space," Stephen Heath provides one of the earliest attempts to conceptualize the integral function of the frame in narrative-based films.<sup>9</sup> His intention was to develop a theory of cinematic enunciation capable of explaining the medium's capacity to position the spectator, offering a coherent point of view from which he/she could follow the narrative. Heath argues that filmic space can be divided into two interrelated areas of inquiry, on-screen and off-screen space, and emphasizes the way that its strategic manipulation helps to create a stable, objective, and centered spectatorial position. This, he suggests, is facilitated by the employment of classical continuity editing, involving a careful manipulation of point-of-view. The purpose of film narrative, of continuity editing,

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* 17:1 (1976): 68-112.

is therefore to absorb the space beyond the frame, to contain it, “to regularize its fluctuation in a constant movement of reappropriation.”<sup>10</sup>

Our understanding of filmic space, of the frame that both encloses and opens up the image, can no longer insist on a purely textual framework such as the one proposed by Heath, especially given the contested status of the film “text” as a closed, internal structure, free from the influence of its originally intended or externally constructed meanings. I would argue, however, that Heath’s insistence that the frame helps to structure cinematic vision could still be a productive place from which to begin rethinking the concept of the filmic frame in the present context. If we extend Heath’s rationale to the space beyond the “text” and its most observable, internal frame, towards the immediate contexts of viewing that are now largely conditioned by their spatio-temporal circumstances, than his insistence on the frame’s capacity to position and guide the viewer would still seem to carry some weight.

According to Heath’s definition, the frame helps guide the viewer in how to interpret, or read the “text.” This description echoes the one found in the Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, which defines the frame as “a basic structure that underlies or supports a system, concept, or text: the establishment of conditions provides a frame for interpretation.” An additional definition of “frame” according to the Oxford English Dictionary is “to prepare, make ready for use; to furnish or adorn *with*,” as well as “to shape, direct (one’s thoughts, actions, powers, etc.) to a certain purpose.” It is on the basis of these definitions of the frame, as something that fundamentally changes the form or

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<sup>10</sup> Heath, 91.

perceived form of its enclosed object, that I wish to examine the DVD - as a medium through which the film text is *framed*, and ultimately (re)contextualized by the paratextual discourses that are now materially appended to it. It is within this context that I want to locate the following discussion of Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*, as an exemplary case of World Cinema's circulation on DVD. Through a "paratextual" analysis of two editions of the film on DVD, namely the Rolling Thunder (2002) and Criterion Collection (2008) editions, my intention is to analyze the ways in which the cultural specificity of Hong Kong, and the cultural identity of Wong Kar-wai are mediated, translated, and finally framed for international audiences. In doing so, my aim is to interrogate the various frames through which the cultural specificity of the text has been filtered, rendering the film more accessible to a North American audience. Before moving on to an analysis of the DVDs, however, it will be useful to first examine Gérard Genette's theory of the paratext, as well as the frame, and how these can be applied to the DVD. After this, I will look first at the Rolling Thunder edition of *Chungking Express*, and then at the Criterion edition, before finally returning to the figure of Jean-Luc Godard, whose ubiquitous appearance throughout the DVDs demands to be further explored.

### **The Filmic Paratext**

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Writing of books, Genette describes the paratext as a threshold, an "undefined zone" between text and off-text, which prepares us for the main text, framing its reception and significantly shaping and prefiguring the meaning-making process.<sup>11</sup> Turning to film, all

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<sup>11</sup> Genette, 2-3.

the secondary, ancillary or satellite texts that operate on the margins of the main text, such as promotional trailers or posters, film reviews, interviews with the director, production reports, online blog entries, and so on, are all important paratexts. However, these texts tend to exist outside of the work itself. On the other hand, I would argue that the supplementary materials now included on many DVDs, commonly referred to as “bonus features,” such as audio commentaries, cast and crew interviews, making-of documentaries, essay booklets, and so on, have radically transformed the function of the filmic paratext, mainly due to the format’s capacity to transcend the old dichotomy between the primary “text” and its previously peripheral “extra-texts.” One could say that in the context of the special edition DVD, the object of film, as a discreetly theatrical experience once thought to be the essence of the medium, is today often overshadowed by its digital appendages – in other words, by the paratextual materials that surround it, and which are now materially bound to it, adding value and giving identity to the main text.

The main focus of Genette’s analysis involves the relationship between the text and its frame. As Marie MacLean points out though, Genette’s conception of the frame suggests that it may operate in a variety of different ways:

It may appear as a purely spatial relationship, as when a poem is surrounded by the white page, a canvas set against a bare wall. Then again it may be so cumbersome as to eclipse the text itself, a foot of gilt surrounding a tiny miniature, or the weight of notes which threatens to submerge a marginal text. The frame may act as a means of leading the eye into the picture, and the reader into the text, thus presenting itself as the key to a solipsistic world; or it may deliberately lead the eye out, and encourage the reader to concentrate on the context rather than the text. Sometimes indeed the frame defines the text,

by appropriateness or complementarity; at others it defines the context, like an elaborately carved art nouveau setting to a simple mirror.<sup>12</sup>

As something that fundamentally changes the form or perceived form of its enclosed object, the frame is a very specific, very immediate kind of context that is bonded directly to the object, and which communicates important information about the work(s) contained within it. By definition, then, a frame is what relates a text to a particular context, for it exists *around* the work, and discursively defines or modifies its meaning in one way or another. In short, the paratextual frame functions as a gateway, guiding our entry into the text, often setting up a variety of meanings and strategies of interpretation, proposing different ways to make sense of what we will eventually find inside the text.

Looking beyond the most visible paratextual frame, the DVD box, Quentin Tarantino's video "Introduction" to the Rolling Thunder edition represents the only feature on either DVD explicitly designed to be viewed before watching the film. However, it could be argued that viewers who have already seen *Chungking Express* could conceivably choose to read Amy Taubin's essay included on the Criterion edition, for example, before re-viewing the film. In any case, my analysis will follow Martin Barker's logic that the meaning-making process should not be distinguished between its pre- or post-viewing practices, a logic that I suspect at least partially reflects how DVDs are actually consumed by audiences.<sup>13</sup> While Barker's concern is with how we might study these paratextual materials in their prefigurative capacity, he quickly raises the issue about

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<sup>12</sup> Marie MacLean, "Pretexes and Paratexes: The Art of the Peripheral," *New Literary History* 22:2 (Spring, 1991): 273-274.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Barker, "News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and Other Ancillary Materials – a Critique and Research Proposal," *Scope: on-line Film Studies Journal*, February 2004, included subsequently in *Scope Reader*, 2007. <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/reader/chapter.php?id=2> (Accessed December 15, 2009).

the meaning of “prefigurative,” acknowledging the obvious objection that not all ancillary materials are encountered prior to watching a film. Even more important is that “the objection may still depend on a particular notion of the ‘text’ of the film, . . . [which] presumes that an encounter with a film ends as the credits roll. This is the boundary of the film, therefore it is the boundary of the meaning-making function of the film. Everything that follows is of a different order.”<sup>14</sup> Barker argues against this view, suggesting that the process of sense-formation should not be distinguished between its pre- or post-viewing practices, and that “to read reviews, or clues, or anything else after the close of the film is still prefigurative in as much as it contributes to the understanding that people develop.”<sup>15</sup>

In light of these insights I argue here that all the supplementary materials included within the DVDs themselves should be considered as part of the medium’s overall paratextual design, since they function as framing devices similar to the DVD box itself. Accordingly, the following discussion will proceed from the outside in, beginning with the DVD’s most visible frame, the front and back covers of the boxes, only after which my analysis will delve into the paratexts found inside, namely Tarantino’s introductory video and post-viewing wrap-up, Amy Taubin’s critical essay, and Tony Rayns’ audio commentary, which viewers are able to listen to simultaneously while watching the film.

### **The DVD Box and the Paratextual Frame**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

The DVD box, as a carefully designed art object placed on display in the library or the storefront window, has certainly become a key site of extra-textual signification, perhaps not entirely unique, but nonetheless integral to the home video era. As the most visible frame, the box provides the viewer's main point of entry into the film, containing both the text itself and all the liminal devices that mediate our relationship to it – signs of authorial presence, indicators of festival or commercial success, cast and crew interviews, making-of documentaries, audio commentaries, and so on. The paratextual design of the box therefore works to introduce a multiplicity of discourses that help direct the viewer's attention, establishing what kind of text they are being presented with and how to read it. While films have always been surrounded by paratextual adornments such as posters and trailers, in the last decade the design of the DVD special edition, or collector's box-set, has constituted a form of extra-textual meaning that differs from its predecessors. This brings the material object of "film on DVD" closer to that of the book, the compact disc, or the vinyl record, where the packaging and paratextual materials help to establish meaning, selling the work as an object to be owned and put on display, and a narrative to be continually (re)experienced.

Cover designs therefore inflect our understanding of the films that they house, allowing the box to emphasize some cultural elements over others, creating a framework for understanding a text even before it is watched. It would seem in this instance that the DVD paratext at least partially belongs within the field of marketing and publicity materials. For John Caldwell, DVD paratexts have inherited much from their prototypes,

which include promotional materials such as trailers, posters and press kits, as well as their electronic equivalents known as EPKs,<sup>16</sup> all of which Martin Barker argues “constitute more or less patterned discursive preparations for the act of viewing.”<sup>17</sup> However, as Jonathan Gray discusses regarding the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs, special editions differ in this regard, since their purpose is to stand out from the regular flow of the weekly release schedule.<sup>18</sup> The DVD special edition, Gray argues, recontextualizes the ephemeral media text into a collectable, symbolically bounded art object, sized perfectly for the bookshelf and appropriate for a spot next to its literary siblings. In this context, how a film is presented in its “special edition,” significantly prefigures our expectations by highlighting its uniqueness – its individuality – and by positioning it within a series of other, potentially similar products.

Genette’s analysis of the paratextual dynamics of “the cover and its appendages,” in which he distinguishes four book covers – including the front cover, inside front cover, back cover, and inside back cover – is helpful in thinking about how the DVD box, not unlike the book cover, functions to situate the film within a series of particular contexts, which prefigure the viewer’s expectations in very specific ways.<sup>19</sup> Aesthetic issues therefore concern both the “look” of the DVD box, and the contents within it. As Chris Koenig-Woodyard explains in his review of Genette’s work, each of the covers discussed

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<sup>16</sup> John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008): 298. EPK stands for “Electronic Press Kit.”

<sup>17</sup> Barker, n.p.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Gray, “Bonus material: the DVD layering of *The Lord of the Rings*,” in *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context*, ed. Ernest Mathijs, 238-235 (London; New York: Wallflower, 2006), 238.

<sup>19</sup> Genette, 23-32.

by Genette collectively “contain a variety of paratextual contexts that may potentially steer readers to have expectations of, if not to particular readings of the literary work. The name of the author, publisher, title, laudatory comments, excerpts from reviews, biographical notices, indication of genre (“a novel”) and publisher information pre-dispose readers to opinions of the literary work before they have commenced reading the work.”<sup>20</sup>

Considering that each DVD contains a variety of paratextual contexts, the reality that such contexts may considerably change depending on which edition viewers are presented with, can lead to illuminating and instructive conclusions about the function of the DVDs paratextual design. In the case of Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express*, for example, North American audiences have had the option to choose between two different DVDs of the film, including the 2002 Rolling Thunder edition, which explicitly features the mediating presence of American director Quentin Tarantino, and the 2008 edition distributed by The Criterion Collection, a company known to cater to a cinephile audience, and whose DVDs frequently offer the expert insights of influential critics and academics. Their edition of *Chungking Express*, for example, features the mediating presence of the highly respected critic and Vancouver Film Festival programmer Tony Rayns, and the film critic Amy Taubin, contributing editor to both *Sight & Sound* and *Film Comment*. Consequently, the DVDs offer viewers two vastly different frames through which to approach the film.

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Koenig-Woodyard, “Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,” *Romanticism On the Net* 13 (February 1999) <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1999/v/n13/005838ar.html>, (Accessed December 4, 2009)

## The Tarantino Effect

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Tarantino, who is best known for the Palme D'Or winning film *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and the Shaw Brothers-inspired *Kill Bill* films (2003, 2004), helped first introduce Wong to North American audiences by distributing *Chungking Express* in 1996 through his company Rolling Thunder Pictures. Though now defunct, Rolling Thunder Pictures was formed in partnership with Miramax as a way for Tarantino to introduce to North American audiences his own personally curated selection of cult and exploitation films from around the world. Consequently, *Chungking Express* was given the honour of being the first film released theatrically by the brand-new label, and was also its first DVD release six years later, in 2002.

First released by Rolling Thunder on VHS and Laserdisc in the late 1990s, the DVD box follows the same logic as its predecessors by emphasizing Tarantino's authority, conspicuously isolating his name, image, and company in the foreground of the front cover, while obscuring the presence of the film's actual director, Wong Kar-wai. Written in the director's trademark bold yellow font, and set against a black background, the DVD's address – "Quentin Tarantino's rolling thunder pictures presents" – underlines the fact that the film is presented to us courtesy of Tarantino. Hovering above and around the featured title itself, this address graphically frames *Chungking Express*, minimizing Wong's authorial presence, while emphasizing Tarantino's rising cult status instead. The rest of the front cover, which occupies less than eighty percent of the entire space, belongs to a trio of images from the film separated by thick white bands featuring black text quoting

anonymous reviews from the *Chicago Tribune* – “INCREDIBLY SEXY” – and *The Washington Post* – “INTOXICATING AND IRRESISTABLE – likely pulled from the film’s initial theatrical run six years earlier. Needless to say, the images emphasize the film’s “exotic,” sexy stars: first there is Brigitte Lin, as the nameless “Woman in blonde wig,” seen here engulfed by a bright white light, *literally* donning a white wig, looking conspicuously like *Gloria*-era Gena Rowlands, and mysteriously sporting a pair of sunglasses; just below her is Cop 663, played by Wong’s frequent collaborator Tony Leung, in the throws of a passionate kiss with his flight attendant girlfriend, played by Valerie Chow; and lastly the “free-spirited” Faye, played by Hong Kong pop star and first-time actress Faye Wong, delicately obscured in this image by a brush stroke of blue color. Beneath the images there is finally the film’s title, “*Chungking*” written in an eye-catching yellow font with a blue border, and “*Express*” right underneath it written in a dark shade of blue, barely larger than the quotations above. Much smaller, however, is the authorial signature, written just above and to the right of the title in a barely legible red font, finally acknowledging *Chungking Express* to be “a film by WONG KAR-WAI.”

This design effectively helps to guide the eye to Tarantino’s image or the quality-affirming press clippings, rather than the name-recognition of the film or its director. As Yiman Wang explains, “such graphic design creates a hierarchy in ordering the US audience’s (re)cognition of a foreign-language film – from the household cult figure Quentin Tarantino, to the foreign film title, and finally the foreign director (to be noticed

only with extended scrutiny).”<sup>21</sup> The spine of the DVD, is even more explicit in its hierarchical distribution, Tarantino’s name once again appearing first in the pecking order, and is indeed larger than the film’s title, rendering Wong’s name practically invisible, nearly impossible to see without a magnifying glass.

On the back cover of the DVD box there is once again the imprint of Tarantino’s mediating presence. At the very top are two excerpts of text, the first indicating *Chungking*’s status as “Another Must See Cinema Favourite From Maverick Filmmaker and *Pulp Fiction* creator Quentin Tarantino...,” leading into the second, a direct quote from Tarantino himself, written in his signature yellow font expressing how he’s so “Happy to Love A Movie This Much!” – a quote which also appears in Roger Ebert’s original review of the film.<sup>22</sup> Beneath the quote is the film’s title, the director’s name once again barely noticeable on top, followed by a short description employing all-too common orientalist tropes which promote the film as “tasty take-out” – a “spicy” and “deliciously crowd-pleasing romance.” To the right stands a clearly marked-off sidebar highlighting the DVD’s Bonus Material, which includes trailers for the film and two videos featuring Tarantino himself, both of which resemble the director’s familiar brand of self-promotion. Towards the bottom of the back cover there is the customary “billing block” listing the film’s main cast and crew, and finally a message notifying viewers to “Look For Quentin Tarantino’s other *Rolling Thunder Pictures* Presentations, Including *Switchblade Sisters!*,”

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<sup>21</sup> Yiman Wang, “Made in China, Sold in the United States, and Vice Versa - Transnational ‘Chinese’ Cinema Between Media Capitals,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 3:2 (2009): 164.

<sup>22</sup> Roger Ebert, “‘Chungking Express’ an Acquired Taste, Except for Film Fan,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 15, 1996.

thus improbably placing Wong's film within the context of the company's catalogue of exploitation films (*Switchblade Sister*; Jack Hill, 1975), American Blacksploitation (*Detroit 9000*; Arthur Marks, 1973), Italian horror (*The Beyond*; Lucio Fulci, 1981), the Japanese yakuza film (*Sonatine*; Takeshi Kitano, 1993), and finally, something perhaps slightly more appropriate, a Shaw Brothers obscurity from 1977 (*The Mighty Peking Man*, Ho Meng Hua).

### **The Criterion Effect**

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The paratextual design of the Criterion edition, on the other hand, works to insert the film into an entirely different context, presenting it as part of the company's "continuing series of important classic and contemporary films." Already acclaimed as one of the best films of the 1990s, Criterion's decision to include it as part of its first wave of Blu-Ray releases in December 2008 cemented *Chungking Express*' already rising canonical status, placing it alongside the work of Wes Anderson, Nicolas Roeg, and Bernardo Bertolucci, not to mention such "masters of cinema as Renoir, Godard, Kurosawa, Cocteau, Fellini, Bergman, Tarkovsky, Hitchcock, Fuller, Lean, Kubrick, Lang, Sturges, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Ozu, Sirk, Buñuel, Powell and Pressburger."<sup>23</sup>

Compared to the Rolling Thunder edition, the front cover of the Criterion DVD is strikingly sparse, avoiding any signs of promotional jargon, opting instead for a clean, "timeless" aesthetic that helps to situate the film within a larger canon of "great works." The film's title appears at the top, the Criterion C sitting snugly inside the capital C of

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<sup>23</sup> From The Criterion Collection's online Mission Statement © 2008 [http://www.criterion.com/about\\_us](http://www.criterion.com/about_us).

*Chungking*. Beneath the title, “A FILM BY WONG-KAR WAI” is written in a slightly smaller, though no less visible font, leaving the remaining space, effectively the entire cover, for the DVD’s producer Curtis Tsui to graphically portray Wong’s film for potential viewers. Tsui decides to feature only a single image from the film, rather than a collage of images that have most often occupied the promotional paratexts advertising the film’s prior releases. This clean, single frame aesthetic has become a staple of Criterion’s DVD covers, isolating one image that is meant to speak for the entire film. By featuring a very bare, minimal aesthetic, the box works to assign authority and meaning to a single exemplary frame.

Tsui’s selection for *Chungking Express* is deceptively simple. It features Faye Wong as the “ethereal pixie waitress” Faye. Referred to in Tarantino’s commentary as a nymphet, she is often described in reviews as compulsively impish, or, in Georgia Brown’s words, “a schizy string bean defined by style, moves, and mannerisms.”<sup>24</sup> Framed in profile, Faye is seen here looking slightly away from the camera, pondering a letter she has been holding for Leung’s police officer, a letter given to her by his ex-girlfriend. Bathed in washed-out tones of whites, blues, and greens, the image perfectly evokes Wong’s impressionistic aesthetic of sensuous, pixilated slow motion that has become the director’s most identifiable visual signature. On closer inspection, it is possible to make out Cop 663 standing in the left-hand corner of the image, the blue of his uniform momentarily drawing our attention away from Faye in the foreground. Resting his

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<sup>24</sup> Georgia Brown, “Only the Lonely -- *Chungking Express* Directed by Wong Kar-wai,” *Village Voice*, March 12, 1996.

arm on the counter of the Midnight Express take-out stand where Faye works, Leung's police officer appears completely out of focus, blending into the background, emphasizing the separateness of the characters and effectively highlighting the director's recurring themes of romantic longing and missed connections.

The front cover also bears the film's year of production, 1994, which sits directly above "The Criterion Collection." Both are vertically written in small, unobtrusively clean text in the lower left-hand corner of the box, surrounded by a border which folds over onto the box's spine. The spine itself predominantly features the film's title, written in narrow white capital letters, followed by the ubiquitous, yet understated Criterion company logo, and at the very bottom we find the number "453," written in white text set against a black background. This number locates the film's position within the collection, placing it directly between Martin Ritt's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (USA, 1965), and Lars Vars Trier's *Europa* (Denmark, 1991). If we turn the box over to the back cover, we are presented with a short summary describing the film as "one of the defining works of nineties cinema and the film that made Wong Kar-wai an instant icon." Below this we are provided with a list of the DVD's "special edition features," which include a Remastered soundtrack supervised by Wong, an audio commentary by Tony Rayns, the U.S. theatrical trailer, an excerpt from the BBC Television series *Moving Pictures*, featuring Wong and cinematographer Christopher Doyle, and a booklet featuring a new essay by critic Amy Taubin. Additionally, there is a list of the DVD's technical specifications, the film's duration, language and subtitle options (advertised as a "new and improved" English

translation), a billing block listing the main cast and crew, and finally a brief mission statement by The Criterion Collection, reaffirming the company's dedication "to gathering the greatest films from around the world and publishing them in editions of the highest technical quality, with supplementary features that enhance the appreciation of the art of film." Finally, there is an endorsement to visit them online at [criterion.com](http://criterion.com) where, in addition to a modified version of the back cover, there is a trailer for the film streaming in high definition, a link to purchase the DVD or Blu-ray, links to essays and blog entries on the DVD release, reviews of the DVD in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, press notes, as well as links to other films within the Criterion catalogue that fans of *Chungking Express* might be interested in; these selections change periodically, but as of February 2010 they consist of Jiri Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* (Czech Republic, 1966), Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (Taiwan, 2000), and Wong Kar-wai's own *In The Mood For Love* (2000). Lastly, we are provided with a series of links to various online discussions found on Criterion's sister site, [TheAuteurs.com](http://TheAuteurs.com), where fans can discuss and debate the film together.

As this description of the DVD boxes demonstrates, Wong's introduction to North American audiences as a serious *auteur* has depended considerably upon the authority of a third party whose expertise has been legitimized by the institutions of global film culture. As outside authorities, Tarantino, Rayns, and Taubin mediate the film in a variety of different ways, but are primarily there to help contextualize and, in effect, to translate the film for viewers. While film critics, festival catalogues, and marketing departments have

historically played this type of mediating role in film culture, the presence on DVD of an intermediary figure to help “explain” the film to viewers differs from what John Caldwell calls one of the DVD’s chief innovations:

Its ability to provide a cultural interface in which critical discourses (aesthetic analysis, knowledge about production technologies, working methods, and behind-the-scenes information) can be directly discussed and negotiated with audiences and users without critical/cultural middlemen. For almost a century some production knowledge has always played a part in studio-network marketing and promotions. Yet studios have aimed such knowledge mostly at cultural intermediaries, handlers, and gatekeepers (trade editors, distributors, exhibitors, journalists, reviewers, critics). These sanctioned intermediaries would then “translate” and “dumb down” that critical production knowledge for the audience and lay reader.<sup>25</sup>

From the perspective of its prototypes (such as Electronic Press Kits), Caldwell suggests that DVDs now aim marketing directly at the consumer and not at an intermediate cultural gatekeeper. By talking directly to the audience, film studios and television networks can now generate new media content that can be “managed” on their own, more traditional terms, conveying notions of artistry, quality, and cultural significance as they see fit.

While Caldwell’s claims appear reasonable in the context of Hollywood’s control of the DVD market, which represents the main focus of his analysis, they do not appear to accurately describe the dynamics involved in the circulation on DVD of non-Western films, which are more often than not ghettoized within the reductive categories of either cult or art cinemas, rather than the national, or regional film traditions they more appropriately belong to. Outside of diasporic networks of cultural circulation, non-Western films tend to circulate as taste-driven products. When such texts are introduced into a new

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<sup>25</sup> Caldwell, 298.

cultural environment, the presence of a cultural intermediary is often a necessity for exposure, immediately adding value to a film, while giving it an identity as a culturally significant work of film artistry – based on pre-established standards of value, of course. In the case of *Chungking Express*, the film’s supporters, led by Tarantino, have bestowed upon it a high degree of cultural prestige that unavoidably works to complicate the film’s connection to its original context, at least at the moment of reception.

It would seem in this instance that the presence of an intermediary should be viewed along the same lines as marketing and publicity materials, or perhaps conceptually from the point of view of political economy. If we turn to Genette, for example, in discussing the allographic preface – a preface written by someone other than the author – Genette identifies “recommendation” as its most important purpose: “[T]he function of recommending usually remains implicit because the mere presence of this type of preface is in itself a recommendation.”<sup>26</sup> However, as Watts notes, Genette’s description of the generic effect that an allographic preface is meant to have, posits the implied “reader” as a kind of “cultural universal, a reader out of time and place.”<sup>27</sup> Watts explains that Genette’s assumption regarding the reader is that he/she shares with the text a common cultural code. However, this is certainly not the case with audiences of non-Western texts, whose understanding of the Other is always mediated by the paratext, “which registers and transmits the cultural specificity of the work and the moment of its reception.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Genette, 268.

<sup>27</sup> Watts, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14.

## Jean-Luc Godard and Nostalgia for the Nouvelle Vague

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Looking beyond the mere fact of their presence as cultural intermediaries, it is crucial to consider how each of their discourses are designed to establish more precise frames through which *Chungking Express* can be interpreted by viewers. While an in depth analysis of the “bonus features” in their entirety is beyond the purview of this chapter, the ubiquitous presence of Jean-Luc Godard throughout the film’s extra-textual life should be addressed in some detail within the context of the DVDs’ overall paratextual design. The following discussion will therefore consider the various ways that Godard has functioned as a paradigm for understanding Wong’s films.

In the video introduction to the 2002 Rolling Thunder DVD, Tarantino initially conjures Godard’s name to help differentiate Wong’s aesthetic from Hong Kong action or fantasy films, alluding to a predominant Godardian influence in Wong’s films. He states that what separates Wong’s work from fellow Hong Kongers Jackie Chan and John Woo is that he “takes his cue from the French New Wave films of the late 50s, early 60s: Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer. But in particular Godard is his man - his style, sense of fun.” In an article concerned with the border politics related to Chinese cinema’s North American distribution, Yiman Wang explains that following his emphasis on the New Wave, and Godard in particular, Tarantino uses his DVD commentary to insert *Chungking Express* and Wong’s other films into a lineage defined by what he feels to be a certain spontaneity and anti-institutional zest, which he sees embodied in Wong and especially *Chungking Express*, the French New Wave, and himself. “Thus, he does not so much

make Wong familiar (i.e. domesticated) to the American mass audience as delivering him as an auteur who continues European intellectual cinema while echoing American cult-film culture. He renders Wong both recognizable and different — a desirable high-culture specimen emerging from transnational filmic linkages.”<sup>29</sup>

I want to argue here that Godard’s ubiquitous framing presence should at least in part be seen as a site of nostalgia, in the way that Wong’s films seem to represent for critics an example of what the New Waves of the 1950s and 60s symbolized, the promise of a revolutionary exuberance which now resides only in memory and the imagination. Gary Arnold sums up this nostalgic appeal best in his 1996 review of *Chungking Express* by pointing out to his readers the possibility that the film “may stir fond memories of the long-gone youthful promise of the French New Wave in spectators old enough to recall the earliest presentable work of Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Philippe de Broca and Jacques Demy.”<sup>30</sup> Even more explicit in its nostalgia is Amy Taubin’s essay “Electric Youth,” included as a preface to the Criterion DVD. The essay begins with an elaborate comparison between Wong and Godard, suggesting that “what Jean-Luc Godard did for ‘the generation of Marx and Coca-Cola’ in the mid-1960s, Wong Kar-wai did for restless Hong Kong youth during the anxious decade that preceded the handoff to China.”<sup>31</sup> A remarkable twenty-five percent of “Electric Youth” is eventually devoted to Taubin’s discussion of Wong’s connection to Godard. From the very first lines of this introductory

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<sup>29</sup> Wang, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Gary Arnold, “‘Express’ is Anything But; Takes 2 Tales to Dead Ends,” *The Washington Times*, March 15, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Amy Taubin, “Electric Youth,” The Criterion Collection DVD, *Chungking Express*, 2008, n.p.

essay, *Chungking Express* (1994) is positioned as if to be read as the heir to the French New Wave, and particularly the Godard of the 1960s. More specifically, the film is set up as the *Masculin féminin* (1966) of the 1990s, “a pop art movie about cool twentysomethings looking for love in the city that has replaced Paris as the center of the world-cinema imagination.”<sup>32</sup>

While only referring sparingly to the French New Wave in his audio commentary, Tony Rayns still falls prey to the habitual reference to Godard. While he explains that Wong’s influences are more often literary, he still acknowledges the omnipresent reference to Godard and the New Wave in reviews of his films. He reiterates that Wong Kar-wai has “never referred to his work as Godardian, or anything else.” However, while discussing Wong’s influence on the world of design, advertising, and music videos, Rayns insists that his work is instead much closer to the heart of cinema, and particularly Godard’s brand of filmmaking, than to MTV, especially “in the way that film language can be used expressively to bring out certain hidden sentiments, feelings, emotions, and even spiritual states.” Rather than viewing *Chungking Express* as an MTV film, Rayns believes it would be more productive to think about the film in terms similar to the impact Godard had with *Breathless*. He argues that *Chungking Express* is similar to Godard’s film in that they both reflect the circumstances of their making, “the sheer speed with which [they were] put together, from initial concept to actual release,” eventually suggesting that everything about the style of *Chungking Express*, “and indeed the content of the film, reflects that speed, that energy and brio – very similar to what Godard did in *Breathless*.”

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

The role of the DVD paratext in perpetuating the myth of Wong's affinity with Godard becomes clear in reviews of the DVD releases. For instance, in a 2004 *Boston Globe* review of Kino's five-disc box-set of Wong's work, which includes the Rolling Thunder edition of *Chungking Express*, Tom Russo notes how "the pleasant, stylish, free-form breeziness of [the film] merits the Godard comparisons that 'presenter' Quentin Tarantino offers in a wrap-up segment on the disc."<sup>33</sup> More recently, in a review of the Criterion edition, Preston Jones seems to have based most of his evaluation of the film on Amy Taubin's essay, stating that Taubin was right to highlight *Chungking Express*' debt "to Jean-Luc Godard's jump-cut brand of hopeless romanticism."<sup>34</sup> These examples not only allude to Wong's seemingly inescapable 'debt' to Godard, but also to the influence that the DVDs' paratextual materials have had, and will likely continue to have on the reception of Wong's films, as well as the shape of his international reputation.<sup>35</sup>

### INTERTEXTUAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE

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Both the Criterion and the Rolling Thunder DVD boxes clearly "frame" *Chungking Express* as an exemplary case of contemporary World Cinema. Designed to be read within the relational contexts of either cult or art cinema traditions, the film is ultimately projected into a universalizing, a-historical constellation. Recontextualized in this way, the film is bracketed by a series of mostly European and North American intertextual frames

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<sup>33</sup> Tom Russo, "From Hong Kong, Lyrical Violence and Love," *The Boston Globe*, October 17, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Preston Jones, "Chungking Express: Criterion Collection," *DVDTalk*, November 23, 2008. <http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/35529/chungking-express-criterion-collection/> (Accessed December 15, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> The presence of Quentin Tarantino also continues to shadow Wong, evidenced by the 2009 DVD and Blu-ray editions of *Chungking Express* distributed by the U.K. company Artificial Eye, which resurrected Tarantino's 10-year-old video introduction to the film originally recorded for the Rolling Thunder edition.

of reference – epitomized by the figure of Jean-Luc Godard – that render the culturally unfamiliar easier to process, thereby effacing the film’s Otherness in favor of accessibility. Watts describes this process as one of migration, whereby the global circulation of the text ultimately results in the abandonment of its original context, and its relocation into an adopted culture. The paratext, in this analogy, Watts argues, “is not so much a passport but the garment of integration or assimilation that the text is obliged to wear in order to find its place in the land of immigration.”<sup>36</sup> The references to Godard on both the Criterion and Rolling Thunder DVDs, which work to collectively position the French director as the central figure against whom Wong is to be compared and ultimately understood, would seem to work precisely in the manner described by Watts.

While Wong has frequently been championed by critics, filmmakers, and scholars as the most important film artist since Godard, the question of auteurist ranking is negligible for my purposes here. Rather, the mere *question* of influence is more pertinent. Applying Harold Bloom’s theory of poetic influence, Yosefa Loshitzky observes that cinematic history is largely indistinguishable from cinematic influence. This history, she suggests, “is essentially a process of strong filmmakers misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.”<sup>37</sup> While this formulation only pertains to a history of film as narrated via popular film culture, it clearly applies even less in the case of Wong Kar-wai, since such allusions to a Godardian sensibility have been imposed on Wong from the outside, rather than extracted from the texts themselves or through interviews with the

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<sup>36</sup> Watts, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Yosefa Loshitzky, *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 14.

director. This implicates Wong and his revered status among Western viewers in a rather asymmetrical form of cross-cultural exchange. From this perspective, the propensity on the part of critics to tirelessly construct an implicit affinity between Wong's films and Godard's would seem to suggest that what we *project* on non-Western films is as problematic as what we *impose* on them. One of the ways in which such a projection manifests itself is through an appeal to the touristic impulse of the viewer, the nature of which will be pursued in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO: “Guide du Voyageur” – The DVD and the Tourist Gaze

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The cinema has amplified and mobilized the virtual gaze of ethnography, bringing past into present, distant to near. It has offered the spectator a mediated relationship with imaged others from diverse cultures. . . . The cinema’s ability to ‘fly’ spectators around the globe gave them a position as film’s audio-visual’ masters.<sup>1</sup>

The film ‘viewer’ is a practitioner of viewing space – a tourist.<sup>2</sup>

One of the initial ideas that fueled this research project stems from my conviction that when we encounter images from elsewhere through the medium of film, the capacity for these images to shape our perception and knowledge of the world, of distant places and Other peoples, is extremely potent and complex. To illustrate this point, one needs only to look as far as *The New York Times* travel section to see the influence of the cinema on our perceptions of the Other. Case in point are two articles on Hong Kong written by the author of the Frugal Traveler column for *The New York Times*, Daisann McLane, in which Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* figures prominently. The film had imprinted such a strong impression of Hong Kong on the writer’s imagination before she had ever traveled there, that when she finally did so she was compelled to conjure up its imagery as a way to express her experience as a tourist, using the film as a kind of shorthand to help her describe Hong Kong’s distinctive appeal. Furthermore, what is insightful about McLane’s articles on Hong Kong is how its films, especially Wong’s, are incorporated into her own experience of traveling there, woven into the very fabric of its narrative. Moreover, their presence in the widely read *New York Times* travel section will now surely influence the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York : Verso, 2002), 62.

perception of Hong Kong in the geographical imaginations of those who read it and particularly for those who then feel compelled to search out its films.

In an article aptly titled “Celluloid Dreams in Hong Kong,” McLane invokes *Chungking Express* as a way to illustrate the energy of the city and the particular forms of people-watching that its architecture lends itself to. Seeing the film prior to visiting Hong Kong gave McLane the courage to explore a part of the city that few casual tourists would ever know, or feel compelled to visit, and describes this first experience visiting the global metropolis as follows:

Having seen Wong Kar-wai's “Chongqing Express,” I felt bold enough to enter the notorious housing block on Nathan Road called Chongqing Mansions, where Indian and Nigerian traders share space with very low-rent backpackers' guest houses of the fleabag category. Gloomy and louche it was, yet while exploring there I found a decent, clean and cheap Indian restaurant called The Delhi Club (my lunch cost about \$9). “Chongqing Express,” which takes place around the trendy Lan Kwai Fong area and the Mid-Levels Escalator, had also prepared me for Hong Kong's confusing, three-dimensional urban landscape, in which elevated walkways, long public escalators and paths through interconnected shopping malls are as crucial to pedestrian navigation as streets.<sup>3</sup>

In another article, “One Street at a Time; Hong Kong's Great Electric Ladder,” McLane's descriptive prose deliberately confuses the “real” Hong Kong with Wong's imaginary equivalent, combining her own exotic fantasies and cinematic fetishes with the concrete spatial realities of the city itself. In one passage she describes Hong Kong as if she were experiencing it from a moving train. “The passing scene,” she writes, “takes on a dreamlike, cinematic quality,”<sup>4</sup> linking her gaze as a tourist with the cinema's armchair

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<sup>3</sup> Daisann McLane, “Celluloid Dreams in Hong Kong,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Daisann McLane, “One Street at a Time; Hong Kong's Great Electric Ladder,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2004.

traveling spectator, whose mobile gaze observes from a distance and through the filtered lens of the mediated image, thus maintaining the illusion of authenticity. Mclean continues: “One morning, I was having a Hong Kong reverie, watching the elderly shop owners assembling their fruit stalls, while clusters of impossibly cute school kids in white uniforms skipped by. Then, suddenly, the reel of film broke -- my treadless sandals lost their grip on the wet metal surface and I was flat on my back, looking at slowly floating clouds in a bright blue sky.”<sup>5</sup>

McLane’s travel writing alludes to the often discussed relationship between cinema and travel, between filmic spectatorship and the “tourist gaze,” the intersection of which represents the primary focus of this chapter. As Geoffrey Ruoff states, “the exploration of the world through images and sounds of travel has always been one of its principal features.”<sup>6</sup> My aim here is to illustrate how the correlation between cinema and travel has been magnified by contemporary practices of film production and consumption. I argue that a better understanding of the film-viewer relationship in the present context would benefit from an integrated conceptual approach that incorporates into the existing scholarship on filmic spectatorship ideas associated with the “tourist gaze,” as originally elaborated by John Urry.<sup>7</sup> By bringing together the concepts of the tourist gaze and the filmic gaze, focusing on the intertwined elements of nostalgia and the search for

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<sup>5</sup> McLane, “One Street at a Time,” n.p.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Ruoff, “Introduction: The Filmic Fourth Dimension: Cinema as Audiovisual Vehicle,” in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, edited by Geoffrey Ruoff, 1-24 (Durham : Duke University Press, 2006),

<sup>7</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002).

authenticity, this chapter will also be able to more effectively explore the cultural dynamics of the contemporary film-viewing experience.

It is within this context that I would like to situate the following discussion of DVD consumption, cross-cultural spectatorship, and the touristic component of Wong Kar-wai's films. These issues will be pursued in greater depth in relation to several DVD editions of Wong's *In The Mood For Love* (2000) and *Chungking Express* (1994), namely the Criterion editions of both films (2002, and 2008 respectively), as well as the 2001 TF1 edition of *In the Mood for Love*. Both films are set mainly in Hong Kong, whose status surrounding the 1997 handover from Britain to the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been a particularly contested issue for critics of Chinese and Hong Kong cinemas. The impressions of Hong Kong that non-Chinese viewers may form through these films will most often fail to reflect the political and cultural implications of the territory's recently acquired identity as a special administrative region of the PRC - in other words, its shifting status in relation to the Mainland. It is from this perspective that I want to look at the films, and the DVDs which heavily frame them. More specifically, I will be looking at the ways in which both "text" and "paratext" construct for the viewer an understanding of Hong Kong formed out of various references to time, space, memory, and history.

### **Theorizing the Gaze**

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In their highly influential 1994 book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Robert Stam and Ella Shohat provide an excellent account of the intertwined histories of colonialism and the camera, stating that its mobility allowed photographers, and later filmmakers, to "set out

to ‘explore’ new geographical, ethnographic, and archeological territories. . . . The excitement generated by the camera’s capacity to register the formal qualities of movement reverberated with the full-steam-ahead expansionism of imperialism itself.”<sup>8</sup> The cinema and the ‘mobilized’ tourist gaze both came into being during the height of the colonial period and the age of the “world exhibition,” which first brought the Other into closer proximity with the West, rendering it a commodity to be desired, possessed, and consumed. Timothy Mitchell explains that “world exhibition here refers not to an exhibition of the world, but to the world conceived and grasped as though it were an exhibition.”<sup>9</sup> The objectification and exoticization of the Other, and its accompanying commodification, have certainly evolved since the colonial era, yet the tourist gaze and its associated cultural practices continue to shape the increasingly digital cultural landscape of our global age. The world-as-exhibition therefore persists in many forms, not the least of which is in the production and consumption of World Cinema.

The tourist gaze is most often described as a cinematic, mobilized ‘way of looking,’ which seeks out signs of difference and distinctiveness. Central to this notion of the gaze, argues Rob Shields, is a type of spectatorship which presupposes “a static, contemplative and interested viewer and the arrested mobility of the eternal moment, . . . [involving] an alienated and monadic subject, looking in fascination and with desire at a reified object.”<sup>10</sup> This conception of the tourist gaze as a mode of spectatorship, as a filtering device that

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<sup>8</sup> Stam and Shohat, 104.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31:2 (April 1989), 222.

<sup>10</sup> Rob Shields, “Visualicity: On Urban Visuality and Invisibility,” *Visual Culture in Britain* 5:1 (2004): 26.

produces a particular ‘way of looking,’ would seem to bear a striking resemblance to Laura Mulvey’s notion of the gaze,<sup>11</sup> since both are typically underscored by relations of power and desire between subjects and objects. Conceptualized primarily as a question of positionality, both the tourist gaze and Mulvey’s notion of the gaze as voyeuristic and fetishistic are commonly understood to refer to a culturally determined, socially situated practice of observation, based on a highly constructed dynamic of sight and representation. As Rhona Jackson explains, both tourism and filmic spectatorship are “predicated on the desire to look, and to possess (by appropriation) what is looked at.”<sup>12</sup> In film theory, she explains, “this desire is motivated by the psychoanalytical determination of male heterosexual gratification, whereas the tourist desires to look in order to feed power associated with socio-culturally understood superior knowledge of place and space, and the ideological permission of the visited.”<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Mulvey’s gaze, which is premised on the gendered pleasures of scopophilia, the tourist gaze involves an overriding emphasis on geographical distance and cultural difference, hence its roots in late nineteenth century colonialism, “where the twin forces of an emergent tourist economy and a consumer culture” contributed to the surfacing of “a particular form of looking.”<sup>14</sup> As Harbord has observed, “whilst tourism engendered a culture of interest in other places (underpinned by a colonial infrastructure), consumer culture brought goods from elsewhere into proximity. . . . These encounters with

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6-18.

<sup>12</sup> Rhona Jackson, “Converging Cultures: Converging Gazes,” in *The Media & the Tourist Imagination: Converging Cultures*, eds. David Crouch, Rhona Jackson, and Felix Thompson, 183-197 (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 193.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 45.

otherness, read as a type of cultural tourism, . . . were constructed around the possibility of mobility and a mobile cultural gaze.”<sup>15</sup> In Anne Friedberg’s analysis of this emerging commodity culture, the cinema is singled out for its unique ability to bring together the tourist and consumer gazes. “Cinema spectatorship,” argues Friedberg, “brought together the mobilized gaze of the shopper and tourist into a ‘virtual mobility.’”<sup>16</sup> Her argument is pushed further to claim that this mobile virtual gaze, forming a link between tourism, consumption, and the cinema, has become “paradigmatic of a postmodern subjectivity”<sup>17</sup> ultimately driven by the mediated consumption of images from Other places and times. In this context, the historical past and the cultural Other are staged for the spectator-tourist as ‘authentic,’ and “rendered a commodity experience with a price attached, available to the consumer at any time, open to repetitive viewing.”<sup>18</sup>

It was John Urry who first employed the concept of the tourist gaze in his seminal 1990 book *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society*. Similar to Friedberg, Urry sees the tourist gaze as the new “cultural paradigm” of postmodern consumption.<sup>19</sup> Updated in 2002 to include a new chapter entitled “Globalizing the Gaze,” his book outlines the various ways in which tourists perceive the places they visit and the people they encounter there as distinctly Other, and how this perception is principally constructed through the representation of cultural “authenticity” by the tourism industry and, more importantly for my purposes here, through advertising and other media-

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<sup>15</sup> Harbord, *Film Cultures*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 147.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Harbord, *Film Cultures*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Urry, 75-78, 111.

generated signs, which work to “render extraordinary, activities that otherwise would be mundane and everyday.”<sup>20</sup> Particular destinations are chosen by the tourist based on the interconnected elements of anticipation and the promise of an authentic experience, both of which are built up “through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce” the tourist gaze.<sup>21</sup> Always mediated by expectation, the tourist gaze is therefore largely shaped by a set of shared viewing practices, and, as Ellen Strain notes, “a dense process of culturally situated interpretation.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Nostalgia and the Search for Authenticity**

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Implicit in the tourist’s search for authenticity, explains Graham Huggan, “is the exercise of nostalgia,”<sup>23</sup> the exoticist desire for an authentic, raw experience that is thought to reside “at other times, in other places and other cultures; its ‘discovery’ redeems the tourist while gratifying his/her desire for cultural contact.”<sup>24</sup> Yingjin Zhang has identified Chinese ethnographic cinema as a genre that has successfully satisfied this demand in the global marketplace by feeding into this kind of ‘self-satisfied tourist fantasy.’<sup>25</sup> Zhang evokes Mike Featherstone’s notion of the post-tourist, stating that Western audiences for these films are “willing to accept the substitutability of screen images (as simulacra, that

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<sup>20</sup> Urry, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Huggan, 198.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang, 250.

is, reproductions of the 'real' without origins) for 'authentic' experience, . . . and can therefore satisfy their desire to tread the globe and taste ethnic difference without ever leaving the comfort of their home."<sup>26</sup> For Featherstone, the figure of the post-tourist describes the traveler who finds it less and less necessary to leave home since film, television, and the Internet provide ample opportunity to 'gaze' on tourist sites from the comforts of their living room sofas. Central to this notion of the post-tourist is the recognition that the apparently 'authentic' experiences offered by tourism are merely simulations. In other words, post-modern tourists do "not quest after an authentic pre-simulational reality but have the necessary dispositions to engage in 'the play of the real' and capacity to open up to surface sensations, spectacular imagery, liminoid experiences and intensities without the nostalgia for the real."<sup>27</sup>

While I certainly agree that Chinese ethnographic cinema has, since the mid-1980s, been afforded a particularly privileged position within 'the global imaginary museum,' as Zhang calls it, I would like to extend this discussion to Wong Kar-wai's films, particularly *In The Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express*. Although many critics have remarked on the recurring theme of nostalgia in contemporary Chinese cinema, Zhang perceptively explains that "this is not simply a nostalgia for the legendary or glorified past. . . . [I]t is also a nostalgia for the fast-disappearing present,"<sup>28</sup> which he argues goes hand in hand with an urban setting. *In the Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express* are enveloped by

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<sup>26</sup> Zhang, 250.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 58-59.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang, 11-12.

exactly this kind of ‘nostalgia for the present’ – in other words, “the stylized presentation of the present as if it has already slipped away.”<sup>29</sup> Both films depict an elusive, seemingly unrecognizable Hong Kong, resembling what Zhang calls the “glocal city,”<sup>30</sup> presenting the viewer with a collection of indeterminate spaces which oscillate “between the local and the global, refusing to be either indigenous *or* foreign, creating a suspension of identification.”<sup>31</sup> As Pam Cook explains, “Wong’s reconstruction of Hong Kong is impressionistic rather than strictly authentic. . . . Wong employs a kind of shorthand to sketch in a mood or feeling rather than an actual location.”<sup>32</sup> While Cook is describing Wong’s representation of Hong Kong in *In the Mood for Love*, *Chungking Express*’ Hong Kong is equally impressionistic, leaving viewers without a coherent topographical picture of the city or its relationship to the Mainland. Wong’s highly expressive, distinctly postmodern aesthetic, which is infused with an ambiguous aura of nostalgia, ultimately works to obscure the temporal and spatial referents which would normally allow international audiences to form a more concrete understanding of the time and place in which the films are set. Hong Kong, and elsewhere, are depicted in Wong’s films not as specific space-times, but as permeable impressions, the meanings of which are often elusive and fleeting, likely to mutate long after the end credits have rolled past the screen and the last “bonus feature” consumed.

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<sup>29</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 77.

<sup>30</sup> Zhang, 251.

<sup>31</sup> Allan Cameron, “Trajectories of identification: travel and global culture in the films of Wong Kar-wai,” *Jump Cut* 49 (Spring 2007): <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/wongKarWai/text.html> (February 21, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 7-9.

Accordingly, the following analysis will explore how the viewer's mediated understanding of Hong Kong as a representational space – integral to both the tourist gaze *and* the cinema – is prefigured by the paratextual materials included on the DVDs. My aim here is to illustrate how the DVDs collectively redefine each film's relationship to Hong Kong as an "authentic" place. I argue here that the cinema's mimetic capacity to represent Other times and spaces inherently satisfies the tourist's desire to both be immersed in that space and understand it from a distance, and that this appeal to the tourist gaze is foregrounded and even intensified by the ways in which Wong's films are packaged on DVD. This appeal to a touristic understanding of space is in fact a key outcome of the design of the DVD format in general, and for that matter, other computer-mediated forms of image consumption. The DVD user, for example, is able to pause the film, navigate to other parts of the DVD in order to engage in a different type of spatial representation, moving in a variety of directions while opening up the film to a series of new spaces. In this way the viewer is introduced to new ways of seeing and representing the world (of the film). How viewers are directed to navigate through the DVD menus shapes the nature of the film-viewing experience and highlights the cinema's propensity for appealing to the tourist gaze. As I will discuss below, this impulse is exploited in the TF1 DVD of *In the Mood for Love*.

As the following analysis will demonstrate, the DVDs map out the space of Wong's films through various supplementary features designed to provide contextual frames through which the viewer can better understand the films. In so doing, their spatiality is

translated into a series of moving pictures and still images, assembled from a collection of scraps salvaged from the cutting-room floor, including crucial deleted scenes and alternate endings, behind-the-scenes information and other promotional content, combined with critical essays and audio commentaries that further enhance the viewer's touristic experience. My interest here is in precisely how these fragments of information collectively construct an image of Hong Kong that is not necessarily dependent on how it is depicted in the films themselves. Through an analysis of the DVD paratexts of both *In the Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express*, the following discussion will therefore be able to demonstrate the ways in which the DVDs re-present the films' unique spatiality through various processes of translation, whereby the *spaces* of 1960s and 1990s Hong Kong are filtered through a variety of frames that are largely touristic in nature, rendering the city a more concrete, identifiable *place*.

### **The TF1 Edition**

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Whether filmic spectatorship involves entering a movie theater, tiptoeing around the sticky floors while looking for a seat, or popping in a DVD, shutting off the lights, stretching out on the sofa and hitting the play button, as Jeff Hopkins argues, "these are merely points of departure into the spatiality of the screen image, the *place* of cinematic representation."<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the notion of a *cinematic place*, he suggests, challenges the conventional idea of place since it is not tied to a specific location in physical space. A cinematic place

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<sup>33</sup> Jeff Hopkins, "Mapping of Cinematic Places: Icons, Ideology, and the Power of (Mis)representation," in *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*, eds. Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn, 47-68 (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 50.

can therefore be described as a composite of the real and the imagined, a juxtaposition of multiple space-times, wherein the temporalities and spatialities of cinematic place collapse “into one schizophrenic, albeit pleasurable, present where the boundaries of past, present, and future, of here and there, are distorted into one heterotopic ‘now’ and ‘everywhere.’”<sup>34</sup>

The physical location of the viewer, argues Hopkins, is extraneous in this context:

A theatre or living room anywhere will suffice – but the situation of the viewer remains fixed; the center of felt value remains grounded in the experience of the film, in the viewer-mediated relationship. The cinematic place is not, therefore, limited to the world represented on the screen (a geography in film), but the meanings constructed through the experience of film (a geography of film).<sup>35</sup>

In the case of Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*, the mobilized yet corporally immobile spectator-tourist engages in the representational spaces of Hong Kong as a *cinematic place*, fully aware of the image’s status as a reproduction, a mere simulation of the “real.” In this way, the experience of watching the films can be described as a kind of virtual voyage; filmic spectatorship as a mode of being somewhere without actually being there at all.

The French DVD of *In the Mood for Love*, distributed by the national television channel TF1 in 2001, is designed precisely to appeal to this mode of spectatorship. Beyond the two discs of “extra features,” which I will look at in a moment, the DVD also includes a small booklet designed to map out the ensuing experience. Modeled after a pocket-sized “traveler’s guide,” identified as the 1962 edition (the year in which the narrative of the film begins), it purports to offer a travel companion to Hong Kong and a

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<sup>34</sup> Hopkins, 57.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

user's guide to the DVD. On the backside of the booklet, there is a brief historical survey of the city dating back to 1848 when it was ceded to Britain. Hong Kong in 1848 is initially described as a barren rock, however it "soon became the 'port of incense' as its name suggests in Cantonese. Several generations of Chinese refugees and 'foreign devils' have made it a major financial center, a center of commerce and trade at the gates of Communist China."<sup>36</sup> A "City of Contrasts," the Hong Kong of 1962 has grown into a "vertical city, the buildings rivaling the skyscrapers of America. But, it is also a village, with its Victorian buildings and scented gardens," a city defined by its "immense fortunes and large Western banks," its fishermen in sampans (flat-bottomed boats), snake markets, luxury hotels, guesthouses, modern restaurants, noodle shops, typical neighborhoods, and so forth. Finally, the "guide" promises to offer travelers Hong Kong's best addresses: "To help you in your choices, this traveler's guide shows exactly what you'll find for each site. Enjoy your stay!"

The first thing one finds inside the booklet is a customs document from Hong Kong's Department of Immigration instructing passengers to remember to fill it out before landing. Upon turning the page one immediately realizes that the rest of the guide is for the most part a reproduction in print form of the DVD's menus. It does, however, also provide some extra content which works to enhance the touristic frame of mind the viewer is encouraged to adopt before watching the film. Beginning with "Les Taxis - Vos déplacements," the spectator-tourist is advised that "At your arrival in Hong Kong, many

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<sup>36</sup> "Hong Kong: Guide du Voyageur. Edition 1962," TF1 DVD *In the Mood for Love*, 2001, n.p. My Translation.

red taxis will welcome you at the port or airport. If you do not speak Cantonese you can, depending on the driver, communicate in the following languages: German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Danish.” These replicate the language and subtitle options presented to viewers as they play the DVDs for the first time. Finally, “Your driver will take you to the different districts of Hong Kong: Central, Admiralty, Wanachai, Causeway Bay...or in the Kowloon Peninsula. Tell them where you want to go.” This identifies the booklet and the DVD’s menu navigation as a kind of simulated guided tour, one in which the viewer is seemingly in control.

The DVD’s second disc, which includes the majority of its supplemental features, is divided into four sections, previously mapped out in the booklet. First, there is the question of where to stay? The spectator-tourist must choose between the “Guest House” or the “Hotel.” The guesthouse recommended belongs to one of the characters from the film, Ms. Suen, where travelers could share in the daily lives of a family from Hong Kong’s Shanghainese community: “In a welcoming atmosphere, you can share meals and enjoy your host’s Shanghai cuisine and flavors of the season, play mah-jong until the end of the night, listen to trendy or traditional Chinese music in the lounge.” Hong Kong, it is mentioned, is also known for its hotels, “whose Western design makes a happy marriage with Eastern hospitality.” The traveler’s guide recommends the South Pacific Hotel, which is “fully decorated and furnished to the highest standards of the 50s. We advise you to book the room 2046, for a most pleasant stay.” The next question facing the spectator-tourist is where to eat? For meals, the guide suggests that as you stroll through the streets

of the picturesque city, you will find shops that offer soups, noodles and various pastries. However, “If you are looking for western food, we recommend the Golden Finch Restaurant, modern decor inspired by the American diner.” Finally, there is the question of where to shop? Hong Kong is described here as a shopper's paradise: “In many local businesses, which are better than those for tourists, you can find souvenirs to take home, have a traditional robe tailor-made, try a trendy hairstyle, eat a bowl of noodles on the run and even take a risk in a game of mah-jong.”

After flipping through the booklet or clicking through the menu options, however, it is blatantly obvious that rather than a virtual tour of the city, the DVDs paratextual design functions more as a guide through the production, exhibition, and reception of the film itself — and even at this it is only partially successful. At its best, the DVD offers the viewer a look into Wong's creative process, including a lengthy interview with the director conducted by *Positif's* Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret, a short making-of documentary, as well as a series of deleted scenes illustrating the difficult creative decisions that went into the film's final cut. At its worst, it offers a bizarre mixture of superfluous gimmickry — such as a list of recipes including sesame syrup, pan-fried noodles, Won Ton, or Chinese Ravioli, or the opportunity to watch a one-minute game of mah-jong, taken completely out of context — and “documentary” — for example, there is an entirely uninformative report on how the patterns were made for the traditional Chinese dresses worn in the film by Maggie Cheung. This amounts to a rather awkward clip lasting less than a minute, featuring a tailor quietly taking measurements from a woman,

presumably Cheung's stand-in, while offering no explanation about the process itself. Oddly enough, these "documentary" features represent the only glimpses found on the entire DVD, however brief and out of context, of modern-day Hong Kong.

In the end, the TF1 DVD disappointingly offers only a limited amount of historical context, of either the 1960s Hong Kong in which the film is set, or the 1990s Hong Kong that forms the backdrop for the film's production. Ultimately, what the supplementary features of the TF1 edition do offer is something more like a virtual trip around the world, collectively mapping out the narrative of *In the Mood for Love*'s international success. In effect, the DVD traces the film's various paths of circulation through a series of extra features, including "World Tour," which takes the viewer first to Cannes and then to New York for the film's high profile international, and North American premieres, then back to Hong Kong for its local premier, finally moving on to more festival screenings in the PRC, Taiwan, Tokyo, South Korea, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Rome, and so on. Presented with absolutely no context, and little discernible dialogue, it is seemingly cut together at random using bits of film festival press conferences, Q&A sessions, talk-show appearances, and footage of Wong and the film's stars traveling between stops on their trip around the world. Set to some of the same music by Nat King Cole (popular Mexican song "Aquellos ojos verdes") featured in the film itself, the "World Tour" performs a kind of fetishistic, intratextual re-telling of the film's international success. Using similar material included on the Criterion DVD of the film, the TF1 edition also features nineteen minutes worth of trailers, teasers, and promo-reels designed for territories as diverse as France,

Korea, Germany, and of course, Hong Kong, as well as posters used to promote the film in Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia. These features give the viewer a varied perspective on the film, giving insight into how it was marketed to different audiences. More importantly, though, it also reinforces the sense of 'felt internationalism' alluded to earlier, giving the spectator-tourist a sense that their film-viewing is an experience they share with a global cohort of like-minded individuals.

### **The Criterion Editions**

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It is worth mentioning at this point the fact that Wong's films have been routinely read as allegorical texts evidently reflecting Hong Kong during the anxious period before and after the now former British colony's "return" to the PRC in 1997, a fact which is almost entirely absent from the TF1 DVD. Janice Tong, for example, argues that Hong Kong, as a city in flux whose vanishing identity is representative of its indeterminate future, is reflected in *Chungking Express*'s destabilizing self-image of the city.<sup>37</sup> Space, in this context, becomes ambiguous: "Things and objects around the foreground and background merge and blend with each other. Hong Kong has been stripped of its appearance, the signs that are so easily recognizable have been replaced by an underbelly of non-signs."<sup>38</sup> Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar argue "that *In the Mood for Love* also narrates the post-1997 mood through a nostalgic allegory haunted by both past and future."<sup>39</sup> Cook

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<sup>37</sup> Janice Tong, "Chungking Express: Time and Its Displacements," in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry, 47-55 (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 41.

agrees, stating that although *In the Mood for Love* is set entirely in the 1960s with no direct references to the present day, it still resonates with the mood and concerns of post-1997 Hong Kong:

This appears in something as obvious as the hotel room Mr. Chow rents when he wants to find a space to write his martial arts comic books. The number of the room, 2046, is the same as that of the year when Hong Kong's new status as a "Special Administrative Region" will end, followed by fuller integration into the People's Republic. In this way, the anxiety about 1997 is replaced with a new 'use-by' date, and the continued presence of clocks and concerns about time in *In the Mood for Love* resonates with 2046 rather than 1997.<sup>40</sup>

Audrey Yue similarly views *In the Mood for Love* as a product of the temporal and spatial displacement experienced by Hong Kongers before and after the handover. She reads the film's ending, in which we are shown archival footage of Charles de Gaulle's 1966 visit to Cambodia on the eve of the Vietnam War and the start of China's Cultural Revolution, "as a historical and metaphorical staging for Hong Kong, as a transit destination for Chinese migrants and Indochinese and Vietnamese refugees, as well as for Hong Kong's 1997 return to Chinese rule."<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the TF1 DVD, the Criterion editions of both *In the Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express* include introductory essays that frame both texts in exactly this way. In her essay "Electric Youth," included as part of the supplementary booklet included with the *Chungking Express* DVD, Amy Taubin argues that the handover of Hong Kong to China, which was three years away at the time of the film's production, hovers over Wong's film. She explains:

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<sup>40</sup> Cook, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Audrey Yue, "In the Mood for Love: Intersections of Hong Kong Modernity," in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, edited by Chris Berry, 128-136 (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 133.

Comic anxiety about sex and romance is a front for the deeper fear that political freedom—an entire way of life—has an expiration date in the near future. . . . [L]ike Eastern European filmmakers of the Soviet era or, more to the point, like some of his Chinese mainland contemporaries, he smuggles politics into his films through metaphor. Thus the loaded meaning of the expiration date of canned goods.<sup>42</sup>

Gina Marchetti's introductory essay "Hong Kong, 1960s," included on Disc 2 of the *In the Mood for Love* DVD, similarly positions the film to be read against the political context surrounding both the 1997 handover as well as the turbulent decade of the 1960s, which saw Hong Kong's relationship to the Mainland drastically change throughout the period. Marchetti argues that "*In the Mood for Love* tells its story of misplaced affection and frustrated passion with sumptuous images that evoke Hong Kong's past. The superficial richness of its images belies a cultural historical and political depth hinted at by what is captured within the frame and structured by what is alluded to, but absent from the screen."<sup>43</sup>

In interviews, Wong has largely denied any political overtones underlying his work. This has not, however, dissuaded both Chinese and non-Chinese critics from reading Wong's films as allegories of Hong Kong on the verge of its return to the Mainland. As Julian Stringer notes, "with Hong Kong now positioned between its existence as a postcolonial global city and its destiny as part of the Chinese nation-state, Wong's films have come to bear the burden of historical representation. Whenever audiences and commentators seek to account for the meaning of new times in Hong Kong they invariably

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<sup>42</sup> Taubin, "Electric Youth," n.p.

<sup>43</sup> Gina Marchetti, "Hong Kong, 1960s," The Criterion Collection DVD *In the Mood for Love*, 2002, n.p.

scour his work looking for clues.”<sup>44</sup> Taubin, for example, reads the situation of Brigitte Lin’s blonde-wigged gangster in *Chunking Express* as reflecting the darker aspects of the collective anxiety about the handover: “When someone slips her a can of sardines dated May 1, she gets the message: time is running out for her. If she doesn’t deliver the drugs that her two-timing couriers have stolen, she will die.”<sup>45</sup>

This tendency in analyses of Wong’s films to move between the social context of the nation and a metaphorical interpretation of the text “appears to work against the very differently textured grain of the film’s language,” which according to Harbord “refutes a sense of place as a bounded knowable location.”<sup>46</sup> Referring to Stringer’s emphasis on the presumed historical burden facing Chinese directors, she argues that this classification binds Wong’s work to a place of origin, inevitably leading to notions of representation of a national culture. Harbord uses this criticism as a point of entry into her own analysis of *Chungking Express*, which can most accurately be described as an inquiry into its unique “spatiality.” She concludes that the film depicts the local “as a permeable space, fundamentally mediated by elsewhere.”<sup>47</sup> The streets of Wong Kar-wai’s Hong Kong are, in Harbord’s words, “over-written by dreams of another place,”<sup>48</sup> made explicit by the constantly replaying of “California Dreaming” by the Momas and the Papas. The Hong Kong of *Chungking Express* is therefore a place whose identity is mostly undiscoverable (at least to the non-Chinese viewer). In this sense, it is not film as tourism, argues

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<sup>44</sup> Julian Stringer, “Wong Kar-wai,” in *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (London ; New York : Routledge, 2002), 395-396.

<sup>45</sup> Taubin, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Harbord, *The Evolution of Film*, 99.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Harbord, “but a series of interrelating sites of different scales and dimensions. . . . This filmic Hong Kong of *Chungking Express* offers a space without a meaningful geography. It is rather a network of endless detail.”<sup>49</sup>

Harbord’s emphasis on the spatiality of *Chungking Express* mirrors the predominant discourses found on the other two supplemental features included on the Criterion edition: Tony Rayns’ audio commentary and the excerpt from the BBC Television series *Moving Pictures*, in which Wong and his frequent collaborator, cinematographer Christopher Doyle, literally take the viewer on a guided tour of Hong Kong, exploring the locations used in the filming of *Chungking Express*. Similar to Harbord, Rayns describes the way Wong shoots the city as hardly providing a single glimpse into the modern Hong Kong, the high-tech urban, futuristic Hong Kong that is familiar from tourist brochures. Instead, he suggests that Wong is focused on the old Hong Kong, with a distinct nostalgic bent to it, which Harbord describes as a “disorientation that operates across time and space. If, in the film, time is stretched and contrasted to produce chronological disorientation, the spatial experiences a similar treatment. Space suffers a lack of correspondence between parts, surfaces and routes, dissolving into pockets that are not stitched into a larger fabric.”<sup>50</sup>

For the most part, Rayns pays scant attention to the handover or the political climate surrounding the film’s production. Whether or not one wishes to read the film as an

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

allegory of the colony's anxieties, it is suggestive that Rayns refers to the handover only briefly, and at the very end of the film, as a coda to the preceding action:

The whole theme of leaving Hong Kong and emigrating, and being somewhere else . . . loomed pretty large in the minds of many people. Large parts of the Hong Kong middle class had emigrated in the late 80s and early 90s, usually to countries like Canada and Australia, which were quite welcoming and quite generous with their offers of passports, because many people were paranoid about the future of Hong Kong under China. So the whole theme of emigration and the idea of getting away from Hong Kong carried a resonance, which is not part of this story, but which inevitably hangs over it.<sup>51</sup>

While Rayns does acknowledge the anxieties surrounding the future, he ignores what much early scholarship on the director has been based on; namely, the tendency to read the failed relationships and missed connections that populate his films from within a broader political thematic, one which positions the context of Hong Kong's uncertain political status both preceding and following the 1997 handover as the filter through which Wong's work is most appropriately understood.<sup>52</sup>

Instead of attending to the implications of the handover on the political, social, and cultural character of Hong Kong, Rayns chooses to focus mostly on the film's use of space, using an anecdotal approach to discussing the locations that were used in the film. He goes to great lengths to give viewers a better idea of Hong Kong geography, distinguishing between Central – also known as Hong Kong Island, and the location for much of the film's second story, the Midnight Express take-out stand – and Tsim Sha Tsui

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<sup>51</sup> Tony Rayns, "Audio Commentary," The Criterion Collection DVD *Chungking Express*, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> See as examples Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), and Lisa Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (New York: Verso, 1999).

– the heavily urbanized area in the Yau Tsim Mong District of Kowloon, the second of Hong Kong’s two main islands, which is also home to Chungking Mansion, where much of the film’s first story takes place. It is of great significance that the film, as it appears in its international version, is designed precisely to convey this abstract sense of the geography of Hong Kong. Stephen Teo explains:

To foreign audiences, Chungking Mansions and Midnight Express, Tsimshatsui and Central might as well be only a stone’s throw away from each other. The distance between Tsimshatsui and Central, divided by the Victoria Harbour, would of course be apparent to old Hong Kong hands. The Hong Kong version of the film contains a scene in which Takeshi runs to the Star Ferry and crosses the harbour. . . . The deletion of this scene in the international version . . . further strengthens the illusion of space as one integrated block: *Chungking Express* as a solid geographical fixture.<sup>53</sup>

Rayns’s commentary, therefore, works to “correct” this abstractness by giving the viewer insight into the “real” Hong Kong. He describes Chungking Mansion, for example, as a “Labyrinthine building crowded with alleyways and back rooms, filled with lots of non-Chinese foreigners,” as well as little tailoring shops, electronics stores, and family-run restaurants. Rayns also makes a point of alerting the viewer to the fact that the real Chungking Mansion was not actually used very much in the film. In fact, he states that most of the time, the location is “played” by Mirador Mansion, a very similar backpacker haven located just down the road from Chungking. “Chungking House,” which appears in the film as a sign out in front of the building, is therefore clearly a fiction invented for the film. The Midnight Express take-out stand, on the other hand, really does exist in Lam Hoi Fung. As Rayns describes it, Midnight Express “was something that existed there to serve

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Teo, *Wong Kar-wai: Auteur of Time* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 54-55.

the needs of late-night revelers, so it offered Western varieties of snack food, basically for people who were tottering drunk out of late night bars, late night discotheques...and needed something to sustain them on the way home, or to stop from throwing up on the taxi.”

Much of the commentary regarding the film’s locations is clearly inflected by Rayns’ own experience, as well as anecdotes related to him by Wong and Christopher Doyle, all of which adds to the ‘authenticity’ of the commentary. It is no surprise, therefore, that Wong, and even Doyle to some extent, feature prominently in Rayns’ insights. Tsim Sha Tsui, for example, is described as a neighborhood that embodies a very autobiographical element for Wong Kar-wai. The director grew up in Tsim Tsa Tsui after having moved with his family in 1963 from Shanghai to Hong Kong when Wong was five years old. According to Rayns, it was at the time not the backpacker hub that it is now, “but by contrast it was the most cosmopolitan part of Hong Kong, crowded with non-Chinese foreigners, including White Russians and Jews and Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Phillipinos.” He notes that Wong’s father was a nightclub manager, suggesting this played a big part in exposing the director to the polyglot community of immigrants, and eventually leading him to explore this aspect of the city in *Chungking Express*.

Rayns also devotes a substantial portion of the commentary track to the various challenges Wong and his production team faced during the shooting of the film. He uses this as an opportunity to describe some of the history behind the locations, while going

into detail regarding their use by everyday Hong Kongers. He informs the viewer of a scene shot in the old Kai Tak Airport, which used to be right in the middle of Kowloon, and which famously never allowed filming. “So you know these shots were taken on the run, illicitly.” Like the old airport, Rayns explains that the subway also routinely refuses permission to shoot, so Wong would have had to covertly capture these images as well. He adds that the subway system opened in Hong Kong in the 1980s, and now represents one of the world’s most modern and efficient subways systems.

At times, Rayns’ references to Hong Kong geography can function as a curious side-note, such as the discussion of the Central escalator, which is clearly visible from Cop 663’s window. It is described by Rayns as a “series of escalators that descend from the mid-levels to the central business district, introduced in the early 1990s as a green measure. [It] runs in one direction in the morning, and the opposite direction in the evening, [encouraging] Hong Kongers to come and go to work by foot.” Another example is the street market in Central district where Faye and Cop 663 accidentally run into each other. Rayns explains that the market is not very far from the Midnight Express,

So this is all geographically right in fact, in Hong Kong topography terms. This kind of street market with street food is called a Dai Pai Dong. [It] doesn’t exist much in Hong Kong anymore. Quite a lot of them have disappeared even since the film was made, which was only some fifteen years ago. But at the time that was very much part of Hong Kong street culture, so these are scenes totally reflect the realities of life both in Hong Kong generally, and in this particular district of Central.

Such side notes have the effect of turning the film, as experienced through the commentary track, into a kind of documentary. Catherine Grant argues that the documentary rhetoric of many DVD bonus features has not been sufficiently emphasized

in academic work. While Grant describes the DVD audio commentary as an “intimate address,”<sup>54</sup> she reminds us that in addition to this, commentary tracks often resemble the voice-over narration present in many documentaries. Selecting the commentary track “turns the ‘original’ (theatrical) experience of watching the film as *fiction* into one of watching it ‘re-directed,’ or literally ‘re-performed,’ as a *documentary*, one in which the film’s existing visual track is employed as graphic illustration of a teleological story of its own production.”<sup>55</sup> In his review of the Blu-ray release, Svet Atanasov describes the commentary in just this way, as a full-blown documentary where Rayns effectively deconstructs *Chungking Express*.<sup>56</sup>

### Film as Tourism

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Contrary to Harbord’s suggestion that *Chungking Express* is not “film as tourism,”<sup>57</sup> I argue that watching the film on DVD, particularly while listening to Rayns’ commentary track, provides just such an experience. It does not, however, offer a guided tour of Hong Kong in the conventional sense; there is very little attention paid to the city’s landmarks or its major tourist attractions, nor does it truly provide a look at Hong Kong off the beaten path — though it may indeed satisfy those spectator-tourists who may be looking for this. More accurately, both the Criterion and TF1 editions of *Chungking Express* and *In the*

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<sup>54</sup> Grant, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Svet Atanasov, “*Chungking Express* Blu-ray: Criterion Collection,” *Blu-ray.com*, December 16, 2008. <http://www.blu-ray.com/movies/Chungking-Express-Blu-ray-Review/1197/> (Accessed March 18, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Harbord, *The Evolution of Film*, 97.

*Mood for Love* effectively appeal to a similar touristic impulse Bill Nichols has used to describe the prevailing mode of filmic spectatorship at international film festivals:

Like the tourist, [film festival-goers] hope to go behind appearances, to grasp the meanings of things as those who present them would, to step outside our (inescapable) status as outsiders and diagnosticians to attain a more intimate, more authentic form of experience. Festivals, like museums and tourist sites, foster and accommodate such desire. A festival allows us a ‘back-region’ glimpse into another culture through the filmmakers and actors it presents in person.<sup>58</sup>

While Nichols argues that back-region or behind-the-scenes information gives festival-goers “an edge over those who see the films in regular distribution,”<sup>59</sup> it is clear that the above description now equally applies to a more general mode of filmic spectatorship. This is especially true in the context of the special edition DVD, which is designed to appeal to viewers as ‘insiders,’ or connoisseurs, by feeding into their desire to acquire even the smallest details involved in a film’s production. The DVDs of both *In the Mood for Love* and *Chungking Express* give the spectator-as-outsider the impression of receiving an insider’s look behind the production of the films and the sense of having visited their Hong Kong locations, thereby satisfying the touristic desire “to get off the beaten path” and “in with the natives,” in order to “share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived.”<sup>60</sup>

By foregrounding the encounter with the Other through the discourse of travel, the paratextual designs of the DVDs are designed to provide an accessible point of entry for

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<sup>58</sup> Bill Nichols, “Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit,” *Film Quarterly* 47:3 (Spring, 1994), 19.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 96-97.

the spectator-tourist, neutralizing possible disorientation and culture shock by giving viewers a sense of mastery over the space and the culture, while simultaneously creating the illusion of intimacy with it. Being ‘one of them,’ argues Dean MacCannell, “means, in part, being permitted to share back regions with ‘them.’ This is a sharing which allows one to see behind the others’ mere performances, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, as I have argued throughout this thesis, *access* to the cinematic Other is always mediated, whether that Other is defined as a foreign person (Wong Kar-wai), an exoticized culture (Chinese), or an unfamiliar landscape (Hong Kong). Recalling Huggan’s notion that tourist gazes act as filters of touristic perception, which not only provide a medium for what tourists see, but also act as a guideline as to how they *ought* to see, it would appear that the DVD’s paratextual design has the capacity to function in exactly this way: as “screening devices that restrict or impair vision,”<sup>62</sup> which ultimately undermine the viewer’s imagined sense of authority over the text, its author, and the cultural context of its production.

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<sup>61</sup> MacCannell, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Huggan, 40.

## CONCLUSION

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Authorship is the principle of specificity in the world of texts.<sup>1</sup>

Auteurism, like many other features of cinema, is a matter of supply and demand.<sup>2</sup>

Looking back on my own experience traveling to Hong Kong for the first time, I wonder how much of it was inflected by the Wong Kar-wai films I'd become enthralled with only several years earlier as an undergraduate film student in Montreal. As I arrived in Hong Kong during the summer of 2004, traces of Wong's "world" were undoubtedly all around me. Not only did I choose to find lodging in Tsim Tsa Tsui district located on the Kowloon peninsula, instead of the more glamorous Hong Kong island, but my guesthouse also happened to be on the twelfth floor of the famous Mirador Mansion, where much of the filming for *Chungking Express* took place. Capping off my seven-month stay in South East Asia, I spent eight days exploring Mirador and Chungking Mansions, and the surrounding back-alleys of Tsim Tsa Tsui, while conveniently staying in the well-known backpacker haven, the suitably named Cosmic Guesthouse.<sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines cosmic as something that is "of this world, worldly; Of or belonging to the universe; relating to the sum or universal system of things. Also, universal; infinite; immense."

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<sup>1</sup> Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, 101.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cosmicguesthouse.com/>

It is without question that this definition reflects the atmosphere surrounding Mirador and Chungking Mansions, both of which are among the most densely packed, multicultural housing and commercial complexes in the world. Just down the street from one another along Kowloon's Nathan Road, they represent the pinnacle of 'global' Hong Kong, known to many as "Asia's World City."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Chungking Mansion was voted by *Time* as the "Best Example of Globalization in Action"<sup>5</sup> in the magazine's annual feature "The Best Of Asia."<sup>6</sup> In his piece on Chungking Mansions, Liam Fitzpatrick suggests that its worldliness is characterized by an assortment of "Nepalese sex workers, Bangladeshi hash dealers and Nigerian men trading used PCs by the container load."<sup>7</sup> My own recollection of the sprawling buildings and surrounding neighborhoods revolves more around the Pakistani immigrants selling Rolex watches out of suitcases on the street out front, and the used bookshops and bootleg DVD vendors scattered amongst the sea of 7-11 convenience stores, designer clothing outlets, and fast-food noodle shops. It is easy to confuse this Hong Kong with the one depicted in Wong's film. Yet as I look back on my experience traveling there, I wonder how much of my own impressions of the place are coloured by my fascination with the films. Have my memories of Tsim Tsa Tsui become entangled with the representational spaces of *Chungking Express*? The truth is that rather than a realistic portrait of the city, Wong's Hong Kong is just as he claims,<sup>8</sup> more of a

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<sup>4</sup> Liam Fitzpatrick, "Best Example of Globalization in Action: Chungking Mansions, Kowloon, Hong Kong," *Time*, 2007. [http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/best\\_of\\_asia/article/0,28804,1614524\\_1614473\\_1614447,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/best_of_asia/article/0,28804,1614524_1614473_1614447,00.html) (Accessed April 12, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "The Best of Asia," *Time*, 2007. <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1614524,00.html> (Accessed April 12, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick, n.p.

<sup>8</sup> "Wong Kar-wai's Works Show Enormous Energy," interview by Cameron Bailey, July 6, 1997, quoted in Huang 2004, 50.

diary based on his perceived logic of the city — in other words, it is a space distorted by Wong's personal memory, perceptible only in his imagination, finally rendered concrete through the creative and commercial processes of film production and consumption.

The reality is that during my trip I was only truly able to find Wong's Hong Kong while browsing through the aisles of bootlegged DVDs in Mirador Mansion, where I bought several copies of locally produced editions of *Happy Together*, *Fallen Angels*, and *Chungking Express*, as well as a rather cheaply made imitation of Criterion's edition of *In the Mood for Love*. In this sense, Wong's Hong Kong is a portable space, a mobile, imagined geography that is paradigmatic of an increasingly borderless, *cosmopolitan* World Cinema that is now routinely consumed as a disc, housed in a box, which fits squarely on the bookshelf right next to *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954) and *À bout de souffle* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). As I have argued throughout this thesis, this mode of consumption risks obscuring the threads which connect a film to a place of origin, only to be left untethered in the virtual non-place of a digital film canon. While it could be argued that Wong's films depict this type of 'global,' postmodern culture, where every place has become indistinguishable from every other, it is important to remember that the director is still deeply indebted to Hong Kong. As James Udden notes, "Wong Kar-wai is not just closely tied to Hong Kong thematically and temporally, he is also an indelible product of the local film industry."<sup>9</sup> It is crucial, in this context, to foreground Wong's authorship as

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<sup>9</sup> James Udden, "The Stubborn Persistence of the Local in Wong Kar-wai," *Post Script* 25:2 (Winter/Spring 2006), 67.

the main object of analysis, for as Seán Burke argues, “the retracing of the work to its author is a working back to historical, cultural and political embeddedness.”<sup>10</sup>

However, as this study has demonstrated, the figure of the *auteur* does not emerge solely through a retracing of the text back to its source, the guiding vision of its director. Rather, as Michel Foucault suggests within a literary context, the author more accurately materializes as “a function of discourse.”<sup>11</sup> Foucault is referring here to the fact that although all texts may be created by an actual ‘author,’ not all texts have been equally viewed as ‘authored’ within Western culture. It is thus the role and operation of the ‘author-function,’ as a malleable discourse, to confer authorial value and coherence on specific texts. The selective nature of the ‘author-function’ clearly contributes to the formation of canons of taste and value. In the context of the cross-cultural consecration I have tried to outline through the example of Wong Kar-wai, the ‘author-function’ takes on an unavoidably translational dimension, since it filters the text and its author through the lens of an auteurist film canon, which is undoubtedly rooted in a Western, Eurocentric tradition, and is thus far from universal.

As my analysis of the *Chungking Express* DVDs in Chapter Two suggests, it is imperative that more attention be paid to the role that cultural institutions play in the transformation of film history into an auteurist canon of ‘great works.’ As Julian Stringer notes, cultural institutions “help determine the specific shape of current thinking regarding cinema's past, present, and future, . . . [and the] relatively small number of titles eventually

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<sup>10</sup> Burke, 202.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is an author?,” *Screen*, 20:1 (1979): 19.

sold, projected, written about, taught, or revived, will be largely confined to those legitimized for one reason or another by these different kinds of organizational bodies.”<sup>12</sup>

A closer look at the media’s representation of The Criterion Collection provides ample evidence of its central role in the formation of a digital film canon. In an article for *Newsweek*, Daniel D’Addario articulates Criterion’s reputation as a canon-building organization as follows:

If a special-edition DVD is the gold standard of film, a Criterion DVD—with its good-as-new image quality, carefully curated featurettes, and striking packaging—is triple platinum. The big guys are all there—Godard, Truffaut, Kurosawa, Hitchcock—with each film assigned a number on its spine, like an encyclopedia volume. Which is precisely the point. These films are important. They’re practically a syllabus for a Ph.D. in film.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of Wong Kar-wai’s canonical status, as I have repeatedly illustrated, is an exemplary case in contemporary World Cinema. In fact, Wong’s films have been consistently used as benchmarks for The Criterion Criterion as film culture has transitioned from Laserdisc and VHS to DVD, and now Blu-ray. *In the Mood for Love*, for example, has often been used as an example of the company’s trendsetting DVD production: “This edition of Wong Kar-Wai’s ravishing 2001 Hong Kong melodrama . . . functions as a demo disc for the visual possibilities of the format with its sharp and stable presentation of Mr. Wong’s elaborate color scheme, full of the hot reds and yellows that often overwhelm VHS tape.”<sup>14</sup> As the company’s first ever Blu-ray release, *Chungking Express* was praised as “a revelation. It should thrill cinephiles and tech wonks in equal

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<sup>12</sup> Julian Stringer, “Regarding Film Festivals” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2003), 200-201.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel D’Addario, “The Curious Case of the Instant Classic,” *Newsweek*, Dec 31, 2009: [http:// www.newsweek.com/id/228834](http://www.newsweek.com/id/228834) (Accessed April 10, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Dave Kehr, “Movies ‘Deluxe’: Definitely Bigger, Sometimes Better,” *The New York Times*, December 15, 2002.

measure. . . . Bottom line: a fantastic Blu-ray debut from Criterion and an essential addition to any High-Def home library.”<sup>15</sup>

The DVD’s ‘author-function’ therefore significantly contributes to the discursive shaping of directors as brand-name *auteurs*. Accordingly, the goal of this thesis has been to assess the different criteria and processes of canonization that have helped establish the Wong Kar-wai brand name — or WKW, as he is frequently called. As my example of The Auteurs’ promotional campaign indicates, Wong’s reputation rests on the perceived universality of his films, and the mobile currency of his image, both of which are exemplified by the desire to “watch *In the Mood for Love* in a café in Tokyo on your laptop.”<sup>16</sup> This imposed sense of universalism many have come to associate with the director and his films has allowed for their easy incorporation into the auteurist canon. While on the surface Wong’s insertion into the Criterion catalogue suggests the potential for the globalization of the canon, it has unfortunately come at the expense of approaching the films as ‘things in themselves’ — in other words, as works separate from the canon of European art cinema and the powerful cultural influence of Jean-Luc Godard.

The prospects for a less homogenizing form of cross-cultural consecration would seem quite bleak based on this initial account. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that the DVD paratext has been used solely to perpetuate the notion that World Cinema constitutes a one-way street in which the East is read strictly through the West’s familiar

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<sup>15</sup> Glenn Kenny, “Criterion’s first Blu-ray: ‘Chungking Express,’” *Some Came Running*, November 26, 2008: [http://somecamerunning.typepad.com/some\\_came\\_running/2008/11/criterions-first-bluray-chungking-express.html](http://somecamerunning.typepad.com/some_came_running/2008/11/criterions-first-bluray-chungking-express.html) (Accessed April 11, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> “About The Auteurs.” <http://www.theauteurs.com/about>.

frames of intertextual reference. Looking at the case of Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu, for example, it is clear that non-Western directors are also acknowledged as important influences on contemporary Western filmmaking. The Criterion DVD of his most well-known film, *Tokyo Story* (1953), features a variety of extra features spread out over two discs, including a forty-minute short “documentary” that presents a series of personal reflections by filmmakers discussing Ozu’s lasting influence. The contributors range from Asian directors such as Stanley Kwan (Hong Kong) and Hou Hsiao-hsien (Taiwan), to a selection of filmmakers based in the West, including Claire Denis (France), Lindsay Anderson (England), Aki Kaurismäki (Iceland), Wim Wenders (Germany), and Paul Schrader (USA). Created by the Shochiku Film Company to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of Ozu’s birth, the film’s inclusion on the *Tokyo Story* DVD illustrates how the DVD paratext may be capable, albeit somewhat conservatively, of providing a potentially valuable forum for cross-cultural dialogue – one that is perhaps better able to contextualize a film’s place in the history of cinema than what we find on any of the *Chungking Express* or *In the Mood for Love* DVDs. A more in depth, historical examination of Ozu’s rise to canonical status would certainly be worth pursuing, particularly as a counterpoint to Wong’s example.

In reality though, to more accurately assess the possibility for the DVD paratext to effectively contextualize and communicate the spaces and identities that define a film’s production, requires an analysis which casts a much wider net, expanding the corpus it seeks to explore. As a discursive construct, the figure of the *auteur* should continue to be

scrutinized, as I have done throughout this thesis, and can be employed as a useful analytical tool, one that I view as ideal for the explication of the text-context relationship that is central to the study of World Cinema. As auteurist practices continue to dominate global film culture, it remains crucial for scholars to interrogate the contexts in which cross-cultural consumption takes place, to assess whether or not the particularities of local, national, and regional cultures are, in the context of film's global circulation, destined to become universalized and translated into an easily digestible, consumable form.

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