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Contemporary Poetic Cinema through the Lens of Traditional Chinese Poetics

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the aesthetics of contemporary poetic cinema by Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick within a framework of ancient Chinese theories of poetry. I compare these theories to some other theoretical perspectives, such as Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, auteur theory, expression theories of art and Rudolf Arnheim's film aesthetics. I also consider film theorists' continued emphasis on emotion and feelings in a discussion of cinematic specificity, and film phenomenologists' considerations of objects, moods, sensations and atmospheres. I demonstrate that in some films by Sokurov, Wong and Malick, their presentation of ethereal realms, romantic and erotic relationships, and of a conjunction of macrocosm and microcosm fall under the categories of "lofty and ancient", "intricate sensuality", and "flowing movement". I maintain that art moods in cinema are discernibly distinct from human emotions as discussed in cognitive film theory. I ascribe film moods to a filmmaker's artistic expression of individuality and world view, a film's stylised and aesthetic presentation of experiential worlds, as well as the audience's experiences of the film. Drawing on the critical philosophical and aesthetic concepts of "heart-mind" (*xin* 心), "intentions" (*zhi* 志), "affections" (*qing* 情) and *qi* 氣 in ancient Chinese thought, my analysis of these films contends that poetic cinema records, manifests and offers bodily, sensual, emotional and intellectual experiences, as part of the physical world's richness, vibrancy and concreteness, with which our subjective states are deeply interconnected. Paramount to my enquiry into poetic cinema, therefore, is the ways in which the cinematic medium can be deployed both to express and to evoke subjective feelings in the spectator. My central point is that the aesthetic categories outlined in ancient Chinese poetics help identify potential candidates for the genre of poetic cinema in accordance with the classification of moods in the Chinese poetic tradition.

Lay Summary

Poetic cinema has been a central topic in film studies since the rise of European avant-garde cinema in the 1920s. The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the aesthetics of contemporary poetic cinema through the legacy of ancient Chinese theories of poetry. I demonstrate that some films by Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick are evocative of the affective qualities of the “lofty and ancient”, “intricate beauty” and “flowing movement” in traditional Chinese poetics. My analysis of their films unfolds a deft interplay between the traditional aesthetics of poetry in China and some certain practices of art cinema’s filmmaking in the contemporary context. In doing so, the thesis demonstrates the intriguing and strong possibilities of ancient Chinese poetics which is still relevant today beyond its literary domain and on the global scale.

Theoretically, the thesis adopts a transcultural standpoint that sparks comparative conversations between the Chinese cultural legacy and aesthetics and Euro-American film theories. In the thesis, I compare ancient Chinese theories of poetry to some other theories in the Euro-American canon, such as phenomenology, the auteur theory, expression theories of art, and Rudolf Arnheim’s film aesthetics. I also consider film scholars’ discussions on emotion and feelings related to the cinematic medium, as well as on the interconnection between our subjective states and our surrounding world. I review the places of filmmakers, the cinematic medium, audiences, external worlds as raw materials, and the subjective states of a subject with the lived body, in poetic cinema. I stress the bodily, sensual, emotional and intellectual aspects of poetic cinema, arguing that poetic cinema can record, manifest and provide subjective experiences in the physical world that is rich, vibrant and concrete.

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Introduction

The principal purpose of this thesis is to investigate the aesthetics of poetic cinema through the legacy of ancient Chinese theories of poetry. Such an attempt involves two overlapping tasks: (1) a mobilisation of the traditional Chinese thinking of the art of poetry for the poetics of cinema; (2) an application of such theoretical framework to the analysis of contemporary poetic cinema. Tom Gunning asks us several fundamental questions of poetic cinema: “what is a poetic film?”; “what does it mean to call a film ‘poetic’?”; “in what way can the cinematic image be thought of as poetic?” (Gunning 2019: 551-556). Gunning proposes that an initial response to these questions demands the most basic understanding of the concept of “poetry” as originated in the Greek word *ποίησις* (*poiesis*), which denotes production activity but also underlines crafts and formal characteristics. Nevertheless, the original etymology of “poetry” (*shi* 詩) in early China – a hieroglyph with signs representing for our mind, heart, mouth, feet, hands and bodily movements – enables me to offer an alternative approach to poetic cinema.

In consideration of traditional Chinese philosophy and poetics regarding the dynamic interaction between mind and objects, or that between inner worlds and outer realities, my research questions are as follows: How can such a conception of “poetry”,

that our organs express and engage in feelings, emotions and thoughts, lead us to reconsider what poetic cinema is and what poetic cinema can do? How is poetic cinema related to the external world? In this very process of connecting to the physical world, what role do filmmakers and the cinematic medium play through the production of poetic cinema? How and what can audiences watch, feel and think through their experience of poetic cinema? All these questions might have intrigued traditional aestheticians in China, where the art of poetry had been cherished greatly for more than two millennia, and where the fervent belief arising in the eleventh century CE that “poetry and painting”, as James Cahill asserts, “can be virtually interchangeable” (Cahill 1996: 7-8). Given that “today, filmmakers can see each other’s works more easily than in past eras” (Bordwell 2016: 25), I adopt a transcultural approach to poetic cinema in this thesis, and assess whether and to what extent various existing Euro-American film theories can be consolidated into traditional Chinese poetics as the backbone of my film analysis.

In the thesis, I compare traditional Chinese theories of poetry to some other theoretical perspectives, such as Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology, the auteur theory, expression theories of art, and Rudolf Arnheim’s film aesthetics. Moreover, I consider film theorists’ continued emphasis on emotion and feelings in a discussion of cinematic specificity, and film phenomenologists’ considerations of objects, moods, sensations and atmospheres. My contention is that art moods in cinema are discernibly distinct from human emotions as discussed in cognitive film theory, as I ascribe film moods to a filmmaker’s artistic expression of individuality and world view, a film’s stylised and aesthetic presentation of experiential worlds, as well as the audience’s experiences of

the film. My argument also stresses the bodily, sensual, emotional and intellectual aspects of poetic cinema, which is grounded in the philosophical and aesthetic concepts of “heart-mind” (*xin* 心), “intent” (*zhi* 志), “affections” (*qing* 情) and *qi* 氣 in traditional Chinese thought. While these terms are crucial in traditional Chinese poetics and my theoretical framework of poetic cinema, I acknowledge and underscore the fundamental and considerable differences between the cultural understandings and etymological evidence of “poetry” in ancient Greece and China. At the very beginning of this thesis, before making some of the basic assumptions of poetic cinema on the basis of traditional Chinese aesthetic thoughts, I would like to define the term “poetics” in general, and consider some issues behind David Bordwell’s approach to “poetics of cinema” that are deeply rooted in Aristotle’s aesthetics.

Definitions of “Poetics”

The term “poetics” is generally understood to mean the branch of literary theory that is devoted to the study of poetry and its general principles, conventions, values, as well as artistic techniques and strategies. Chris Baldick defines “poetics” as the theoretical study “concerned with the distinctive features of poetry (or literature as a whole), with its languages, forms, genres, and modes of composition” (Baldick 2001: 197-198). Brian Reed argues that the concept of “poetics” in the West has been “used in both a narrower and a more expansive sense”. In a narrow sense, “it can designate the compositional principles” applied by a particular poet; more broadly, poetics can be loosely described

as “any formal or informal survey of the structures, devices, and norms that enable a discourse, genre, or cultural system to produce particular effects” (Reed 2012: 1058-1059). In this broad sense, the term “poetics”, as Reed suggests, appears in Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1964), Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Poetics of Prose* (1977), and Linda Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). In this thesis, I mainly use the term “poetics” to refer to (1) traditional Chinese literary theories of poetry; and (2) an application of such theories of poetry to my study of contemporary poetic cinema which, purposely or unknowingly, explicitly or implicitly, might embody the aesthetics of traditional Chinese poetry. Now, I would like to add that there is a crucial link between the Greek concept of *poiesis* (ποίησις) and David Bordwell’s conception of “poetics of cinema”, deployed by Bordwell and his followers, in the sense of formal, historical and spectatorial investigation into how films are constructed to function and, to have certain effects, in the audiences. My position is that I would not embrace Bordwell’s “poetics”, since *poiesis* in ancient Greece highlights products and techniques, which is different from a traditional understanding of poetry as manifestations of inner states in China.

David Bordwell’s “Poetics of Cinema”

Originally signifying the production activity in general, *poiesis* in ancient Greek was used in a much narrower sense to denote merely one type of production – that of poetry, meaning that there is a hint of “producer” and “director of production” in the word “poet” (Tatarkiewicz 1975/1980: 73-74). In such a context, *poiesis*, understood as bringing forth,

aligns with *techné* that encompasses all practices of production; therefore, the common term of poetics typically pinpoints the understanding of how a poet makes a concerted effort to organise a text's different elements so as to produce the desired effects on the readers (Hui 2016: 4; Geertsema 2018: 7).

In *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (1988), Bordwell, accepting that *poiesis* highlights “active making” and “the artist’s craft”, implies that this concept, if applied to narrative films, necessitates an understanding of the construction of narrative and cinematic forms and materials, which correspondingly induce spectatorial activities, such as inference and comprehension (Bordwell 1988: 51). Later on in his *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1989), Bordwell also emphasises that as *poiesis* means “making”, poetics should concentrate on “the work—the film as an object, but also the regulated effort that produces and uses it” (Bordwell 1989: 268). Bordwell believes that filmmakers attempt to make films like certain types of products, with more or less predictable effects. The task for film poetics, thus, is to scrutinise these filmmaking activities that have realised those effects. In *Poetics of Cinema* (2008), Bordwell, while expressing his deep indebtedness to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, argues that “the poetics of any artistic medium studies the finished work as the result of a process of construction” (Bordwell 2008: 12). The implication of Bordwell’s usage of *poiesis* is that his poetics of cinema tends to focus on film materials that constitute filmmakers’ works and bring about spectatorial effects on audiences, which means that his approach is particularly interested in how filmmakers employ various techniques, strategies, and artistic choices to construct a film text and to further influence the audience’s cognitive

processes of engaging with the film. He further advocates that a poetics of cinema in film studies involves analytical analysis of particular devices in a single film or across a range of films, critical evaluations of a particular film genre, and a historical explanation of the continuity and change of film forms within a period or across periods.

Later on, Bordwell's poetics of cinema, however, has been challenged by some film scholars. Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, for instance, have disagreed with Bordwell's argument put forward in his *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* that film criticism, "best considered a practical art, somewhat like quilting or furniture-making" (Bordwell 1989: xii), relies on general cognitive abilities rather than on film theory. Contradicting Bordwell's viewpoint, Elsaesser and Buckland insist that film theory and film analysis are interconnected. They argue that analysis can inform theory, as seen in André Bazin's analysis of Italian neorealist films that gives rise to his conception of realism, and that theories can make implicit assumptions explicit and coherent (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002: 284). Miriam Bratu Hansen, identifying the potential link between Bordwell's research into classical Hollywood cinema and neo-Aristotelian theories of drama in the seventeenth-century, argues that Bordwell fails to address "the historicity of classical cinema" and "Hollywood's worldwide hegemony" (Hansen 2009: 248). For Hansen, Bordwell has overlooked Hollywood films' cultural embodiment of modernity, and only if classical Hollywood cinema is positioned as a cultural practice in the context of the experience of modernity, can we explain its wide appeal among avant-garde artists and intellectuals, but also mass audiences worldwide.

More broadly, John Gibbs and Douglas Pye maintain that Bordwell has dedicated himself to the research of cinema's stylistic history to such an extent that he also "erects another version of the age old style/content dichotomy" (Gibbs and Pye 2005: 10). In Gibbs and Pye's opinion, Bordwell often tends to overemphasise film styles, so that his approach to film interpretation is not often firmly based on a particular film's content. Likewise, Ira Bhaskar criticises Bordwell for his disregard of "implicit and symptomatic meanings", as Bordwell sometimes occupies himself in interrogating "form and style and their historical location without necessarily relating them to thematic significances" (Bhaskar 2004: 400). The result is that, as Bhaskar points out, Bordwell's formal analysis tends to end up with casual brief remarks: "the film as intriguing or challenging, perhaps because its operations lie beneath or beyond interpretation" (Bordwell 1989: 271). Bhaskar considers Bordwell's interpretation of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955) in *The Films of Carl Theodor Dreyer* (1981) as "impoverished", "inadequate", as well as "problematic" (Bhaskar 2004: 400): due to his emphasis on styles and his ignorance of *Ordet's* religious content, humanist worldview and aestheticist position, Bordwell fails to interpret the film's themes, evaluate the link between content and the cinematic medium, or to consider the emotional and psychological dimensions of spectatorship. In a similar fashion, since Bordwell insists that "ideology doesn't switch on the camera", he casts serious doubt about "'an Asian view of the world,' characterized by contemplation, meditation, and serenity" in films by some Asian filmmakers (Bordwell 2016: 25, 27), such as Jia Zhangke in mainland China, Tsai Ming-liang and Hou Hsiao-hsien in Taiwan, Hong Sang-soo in South Korea, Hirokazu Kore-eda and Shinji Aoyama in Japan, and

Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Pen-ek Ratanaruang in Thailand. Again, Bordwell herein stresses that the primary task for a poetics of cinema is to identify filmmakers' mobilisation of film devices which bring cinematic productions into being. In the thesis, I would not fully accept David Bordwell's poetics of cinema, not only due to his division between form and content, but also due to the essential, ontological, and etymological differences between ποίημα (*poiêma*) in ancient Greece and *shi* 詩 in ancient China.

The Conception of "Poetry" in Ancient Greece and China

As *poiesis* signifies the activity of production, ποίημα (*poiêma*) presumes an act of making which brings something into existence, but also highlights artistry involved in producing a work of art, particularly in the domain of poetry; in such a context, there has been a peculiar fascination with a poet's crafts and some technical issues that are of great importance for the poet, who, as the maker of that poem, exercises agency and intention in shaping the poem (Owen 1992: 27; Rusk 2012: 26). It is no wonder, then, that "poetry was seen as one among many productive arts in the fifth century BCE" (Ford 2015: 145), meaning that the purpose of creative activities of the productive agent – the "poet", in the sense of producer – was the realisation of the forms. As a result, Aristotle takes a rather strong interest in "what is technically correct in poetry", that is, poetry's innate qualities, such as "linguistic correctness" and "formal perfection" (Ford 2015: 155). Aristotle, according to Peter Lamarque, has provided "a rough and ready taxonomy of poetry" (Lamarque 2013: 533): poetry is distinct in its "means" typified by meter and

rhythm, its “objects” represented by characters and actions, and its “manner” concerned with drama and narrative. To put it simply, Aristotle’s approach to poetry also means the differentiation of poems through the form, the content, and the genre by modern terms.

However, technical manuals about “composition”, “the poetics of a genre”, as well as about “the normative qualities of the literary work in regard to its being ‘made’” had never been considered legitimate or as a high level of literary criticism in China; this is because poetry, for many Chinese theorists, “was supposed to be the involuntary manifestation of a state of mind” (Owen 1992: 11, 421-423). Unlike ποίημα considering poetry as a man-made product with skilled crafts, *shi* 詩 with its etymological roots even indicates multifarious organs of the human body tied up with the expression of the inner worlds. *Shi* has its roots in the logogram 止, which carries three variants of meaning, namely, “human feet”, “move forward” (*zhi* 之) and “stop” (*zhi* 止), suggesting the beating rhythm with the foot on the ground, and further indicating the embryonic, undifferentiated art of poetry, music and dance (Chow 1968: 195-197; Chen 1974: 15; Liu 1975: 67-68; Cai 2002: 38; Wang 2015: 13). These elements then evolved into a far more complex symbol – *si* 寺, comprised of two signs that represent the foot and the hand, respectively. Such a new symbol represented a disfigured attendant, who, as a “poet” or “poetry-person”, chanted poetry but also danced during ceremonial performance, and whose charms, prayers, and oracles involved rhyme and rhythm (Chow 1968: 205-209; Liu 1975: 67-68). Once the ancients from high antiquity realised that, in ritual ceremonies, accompanying musical elements also expressed their deepest wishes, other semantic

components, ranging from *xin* 心 (“heart”, “mind”), *kou* 口 (“mouth”) to *yan* 言 (“word”, “speech”), were added to *si* 寺, becoming the prototype of *shi* 詩 (Chow 1968: 205-209).

It is noteworthy that such an etymological analysis follows the scholar-official Xu Shen’s etymology (ca.58–ca.148_{CE}) that gave rise to both “more ‘scholarly’ etymologies and analysis” and “a more ‘intuitional’ approach towards the anatomy of graphs” (Führer 2006: 48). Accordingly, “etymology needs to be carefully distinguished from semantic analysis” (Bottéro and Harbsmeier 2008: 249), in that this practice might extend beyond characters’ form, sound, and meaning, and perceive them within a larger framework that involve situational, philosophical, or cosmological considerations. However “notoriously idiosyncratic” or “uncompromisingly intuitional” some of the graph analysts could be, Xu Shen and his disciples did contribute to “the more creative approach of glyphomancers and poets” (Führer 2006: 48). Indeed, throughout history in China, some major theories of poetry, echoing the etymological analysis of *shi*, considered our lived bodies as the pillar of poetic expression and experience. Briefly speaking, we can consider the “Great Preface”, in the first century _{BCE}, issued the canonical statement which detailed how, in our composition or appreciation of poems, “our hands dance them and our feet tap them” (Owen 1992: 41; Original Source Mao et al. ca.1st century _{BCE}/2018: 1). In the second century _{CE}, the emperor Cao Pi (187_{CE}–226_{CE}), who asserted: “in literature *qi* is the dominant factor” (Owen 1992: 65; Original Source Cao 218 _{CE}/2013: 237), ascribed the aesthetic activities of writers, performers and beholders to the material energy *qi* 氣 vital for psychophysical functions, becoming the cornerstone of poetics developed by Liu Xie (465–522_{CE}), Zhong Rong (ca.468–518_{CE}), and Han Yu (768–824_{CE}), among

others. In the eighteenth century ^{CE}, the poet and painter Yuan Mei (1716–1797^{CE}) also claimed that in terms of poetry, “it is enough to look no further than one’s body”, and that “if its patterns touch the heart-mind, its colours catch the eyes, its taste pleases the mouth, and its sounds delight the ears, then it is good poetry (Liu 1962: 73; translation modified; Original Source Yuan 1790^{CE}/1982: 565). Both the etymological evidence of *shi* and some traditional theories of poetry in China foreground an understanding of poetry, with a particular focus on the role of the lived body in the creation and experience of poetry, that uncover its intimate resonance with the human mind and senses.

Whereas Aristotle’s use of the term “poetry” to accommodate the Greek genres of epics and drama paid much closer attention to “principles of construction and design”, *shi*, according to Chen Shih-Hsiang’s comparative research, was viewed as “a natural-born entity” encompassing “a manifestation of creative consciousness of the poetic art” (Chen 1974: 12-13). Bruce Rusk claims, too, that the predominant focus on “conceptual-emotive content is typical of early statements about *shi*: they address its purpose and function, not its form” (Rusk 2012: 26); therefore, formal matters, such as rhyme and meter, had not been particularly mentioned. Unsurprisingly, even Haun Saussy’s careful research, on a phonetic and formal level, into the system of rhymes of some Chinese poems in antiquity, begins with the general observation that “Confucius and other early thinkers [...] emphasized theme and affect rather than compositional skill” (Saussy 1997: 519). Saussy is quite right to generalise about literary criticism in early China, which showed little interest in poetry’s workmanship or technical elements, but which focused principally, almost exclusively, on poetry’s affective outcomes regarding the expression

of thoughts and sentiments and the achievement of emotional effects on recipients. In a like manner, Stephen Owen makes generalisations about *shi*: the necessary condition for a text to be considered as *shi* has little to do with the technical aspects of a text, but the basic assumption of *shi* in early China, which has remained “for two and a half millennia, assures us that [*shi*] is, in some way, what was in the mind of the person” (Owen 1992: 27). In this respect, *shi* foregrounds the mental and physical process of expression, and is different from *poiesis* associated with those ideas of production and active making, of the genres of epic, drama and tragedy, of an enduring fascination for techniques, and of the deliberately designed effects on spectators, among others. What I can now infer from the etymological source of *shi* is that another approach to poetic cinema, from the conception of the art of poetry in early China, should stress the closer and greater involvement of bodily and mental activities in expressive functions.

The Thesis’s Rationale and Hypothesis

Film scholars have argued for the collective authorship in the mainstream cinema (Sellors 2007; Gaut 2010), but my discussion of poetic cinema is only limited to auteur cinema, where filmmakers’ authorial voices are guaranteed because of their tight control over cinematic productions safeguarding personal expressions. Such a general principle coincides closely with some of the broadest assumptions in ancient Chinese aesthetics that “writing is a mirror of an author’s personality” (Levy 2001: 916), and that emphasis has been put on the expressive qualities of the artist in all art forms, music, literature, calligraphy and painting included (Cahill 1960: 139; Bush 1971: x).

In consideration of three terms of “heart-mind” (xin 心), “intent” (zhi 志), “affections” (qing 情) in traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, which will be fully discussed in Chapter 1, my overall stance is that these terms convey the central message that our inner worlds are always interconnected with the outer world, intimately and subjectively, but also that, rather than a duality between mind and body, there is a holistic understanding of the dynamic interconnections among the physical, the emotional and the intellectual activities. Throughout Chinese history, theorists have used these concepts to argue that an artist’s interior state is first stirred by experiential realities and, through art mediums, finds aesthetic manifestations in an artwork. Such an artwork, as an object in the audiences’ external world, stirs their internal mental states finally. In this regard, I will also adopt phenomenological investigations of intentionality, the life-world, mood and embodied subjectivity to highlight the ways in which poetic cinema can record, manifest and provide bodily, sensuous, emotional and thoughtful experiences in the physical world that is rich, vibrant and concrete. Therefore, my hypothesis is that a poetic film embodies its auteur’s individualised expression of outlook and mental inclinations, so the film itself also becomes self-consciously expressive. In respect of the audiences’ reception, they respond to this film in a very physical, visceral and cerebral way. Whether we are concerned about the filmmaker’s expression in cinema or the audiences’ subjective response, I insist that the cinematic medium is an indispensable necessity, since those concepts implying subjective states are usually paired with the term “pattern” (wen 文), which designates an artwork’s medium.

The fact that poetry is normally associated with music in early Chinese arts signifies important implications for the traditional Chinese aesthetic thought too: moods, having strong ties with music's affective qualities and effects, occupy such a locus of criticism that various affective categories have been put forward, through which different moods in artworks are recognised, appreciated, and evaluated. In terms of expressing and evoking feelings in poetic cinema, the following three points deserve further attention.

The Taxonomy of Moods in Artwork

As I will unfold and extend to my analysis of poetic cinema in this thesis, mood in cinema has something to do with a film's content and aesthetic styles, and effects its filmmaker's expressions and audiences' cinematic experiences. I also suggest several distinctively different moods in poetic cinema that have been informed by traditional Chinese poetics. Ancient Chinese aesthetics of music and poetry before the first century CE had already proposed a wide diversity of moods, such as "peaceful", "happy", "resentful", "indignant", "sorrowful" and "brooding" (Owen 1992: 43; Original Source Mao et al. ca.1st century BCE/2018: 1). Subsequently, a sophisticated lexicon of terms related moods has been developed in Chinese literary thought over the centuries. Liu Xie (465–522CE) listed the eight styles: "elegant and graceful", "far-reaching and obscure", "terse and essential", "obvious and consecutive", "vigorous and beautiful", "novel and unusual", "lush and profuse", as well as "light and delicate" (Owen 1992: 214; translation modified; Original source Liu 502CE/1986: 255); *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* by Sikong Tu (837–908CE) eventually inspired Yan Yu's (1191–1241CE) nine affective categories of poetry:

“Lofty”, “Ancient”, “Deep-probing”, “Far-reaching”, “Long-lingering”, “Noble Grief”, “Gentle Melancholy”, “Drifting and Unrestrained”, and “Potent but Undifferentiated” (Owen 1992: 399-401; translation modified; Original source Yan ca.1230_{CE}/1961: 7). It should be noted that some of these terminologies refer not always to human affections, but more broadly to the nuance of an artwork, which, in itself, is not only emotionally charged and evocative, but also bears indelible trances of certain worldviews informed by certain philosophical ideas. What is most important is that the affective categories in traditional Chinese poetics, I contend, can be used as the selection criteria for poetic cinema, so that a film’s aesthetic qualities can be examined to determine its proximity to the “poetic” on the basis of the Chinese poetic tradition.

Though theories of poetic cinema have stressed the emotional tone indispensable for its aesthetic qualities (Epstein 1926; Piotrovskij 1927; Deren et al. 1953; Nichols 2010), I endeavour to identify a few moods, common to the Chinese poetic tradition, which share aesthetic equivalence in cinema. In particular, my discussions in the thesis of films by Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick will be underpinned by some categories in Sikong Tu’s treatise, such as the “Lofty and Ancient”, “Intricate Beauty” and “Flowing Movement”. Here, I would also like to justify in detail the auteurs and their films discussed in this thesis. My selection of these filmmakers is not arbitrary but has taken into account, quite obviously, many critical evaluations by film critics and scholars, who have been attaching labels such as “poet”, “poetry”, “poetic”, “lyrical”, or “lyricism” to these auteurs and their films.

Alexander Sokurov's works, across film criticism, have been variously summed up as "the photographic and poetic composition of frames" (Beumers 2011: 186), as unique expressions of a "Russian romantic cine-poet par excellence" (Alaniz 2011:155), and as a perpetuation of "the European tradition of elegiac poetry" (Binder 2011: 30). Sokurov's strong affinity, either personal or aesthetic, to Andrei Tarkovsky, has propelled sufficient considerations of Sokurov as one of the most precious inheritances of poetic cinema: the film historian Andrei Plakhov praises Sokurov as "the heir precisely to the cinema of Tarkovsky with its triumphant lyricism and extreme degree of subjectivity" (Plakhov 2011: 237), and Robert Bird reveals Sokurov's fascination with the temporal properties of the cinematic medium and experience to be "a sign of his profound kinship to the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky" (Bird 2011: 96). By the same token, Tony Rayns, commending Wong Kar-wai as "a poet of time", compares him to another well-established auteur: "no other director since the (distant) heyday of Alain Resnais has been so attuned to the effects of time on memory, sensation and emotion" (Rayns 1995: 12). Primarily following Rayns, Peter Brunette further equates Wong's adoption of film genres into his auteurist agenda on "an art-film concern for psychological realism" with "a more aesthetic expression of poetic ideas about life, love, memory, and loss" (Brunette 1998: 35). Stephen Teo also proposes that Wong's cinema delves "into psychological and poetic realms" (Teo 2005: 5). In the "Introduction" to *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America* (2007), its editor Hannah Patterson firstly invokes John Madden's *The Poetry of Cinema* (1994) that has outlined a diverse range of aesthetic principles of poetic cinema, which are "hallmarks of the European art cinema" too (Madden 1994: 1). In Patterson's eyes,

the aesthetics of Malick's cinema, which can be explained partially by Madden's theory, follow "a certain 'poetic' European tradition" as well, or, more precisely, are evocative of the artistry of "a director such as Michelangelo Antonioni" (Patterson 2007: 2).

However Eurocentric the majority of these views, evaluations, interpretations and conceptualisations turn out to be, they have, more or less, consistently accentuated the subjective sides of poetic cinema's auteurist expressions, of its sensuous and emotional appearances, and of our impressionistic experience of it. At first glance, these aesthetic features accord closely with my current brief discussion of traditional Chinese poetics as the thesis's major theoretical framework. Although Madden includes "Expressionism", "Psychology", "Subjectivity" and "Ambiguity" as the eight criteria for determining poetic cinema (Madden 1994: 1), and although I largely agree with Madden on his simplification of poetic cinema's defining elements and will in the thesis investigate, through the lens of traditional Chinese theories of poetry, how they operate and function exactly, one point I wish to raise now is that we should be aware of how we attenuate ourselves variously to the various modes of subjective qualities of the rich variety of poetic films. If we merely ruminate about Ackbar Abbas's formulation of "the erotics of disappointment" in Wong's cinema (Abbas 1997: 39), José Alaniz's defense of Sokurov's "reputation as the auteur of morose, anguished solitude" (Alaniz 2011: 155), or Robert Sinnerbrink's recognition of different moods of "joy, wonder, anxiety, restlessness, boredom, longing" in Malick's later films which invite "sensuous immersion and meditative contemplation" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 168), we can already detect wide discrepancies in various films' affective qualities regarding their cinematic expressions

and experiences. It is, thus, not an overstatement to imply that different poetic films have disparate moods, while audiences also feel them disparately. This is the reason why the taxonomy of affective qualities really matters. In the thesis, films selected for analysis, hence, are categorised according to some existing moods that have been widely created, discussed and appreciated in the Chinese poetic tradition throughout history. To be more specific, I will draw parallels between the “Lofty and Ancient” and Sokurov’s films that feature a lonesome, and even mystical, aloofness from contemporary realities, between “Intricate Beauty” and Wong’s sensuous rendering of romance stories in his career, as well as between “Flowing Movement” and Malick’s aesthetically restless films of the 2010s that explores human’s existence in the dynamic cosmos. Now, I also have to distinguish my account of moods expressed, evoked and experienced in poetic cinema from the cognitive approach to film emotions.

The Role of Medium in Poetic Arts

Cognitive psychology assumes that human emotions arise from our evaluation of a particular situation, and such judgement can further trigger a rational response to that situation (Arnold 2004; Prinz 2012; Gaut 2010). Unlike cognitivism’s understanding of cinematic emotions in mainstream cinema which has prioritised genre expectations, narrative comprehension, as well as character identification (Smith 1995; Carroll 2003; Plantinga 2009b; Gaut 2010), I underline the immediacy and specificity of the cinematic medium for the expression and elicitation of feelings. My consideration aligns with the wish of some early avant-garde filmmakers, who attribute poetic qualities in cinema to a

sharp decrease of the dramatic and to a substantial and apparent increase of the sensorial of film materials (Epstein 1926; Dulac 1927; Eisenstein 1940). Theorists in early China often couple the concept of “affections” (*qing* 情), which designates both objective circumstances and a diverse assemble of sensual and emotional feelings, with other terms that denote an artwork’s formal, perceptual properties, such as “sound”, “coloration”, “beautification”, “outer appearance”, “outward flourishes”, and “outer form and shape” (Dai ca.1st century BCE; Mao et al. ca.1st century BCE; Lu ca.280CE; Liu 502CE). It is, thus, necessary to give greater prominence to the sensory input from the film medium as a direct channel for artistic expressions and experiences.

Additionally, the “insufficiency” of “words” particularly mentioned in early Chinese poetics foregrounds the inadequacy and complication of artistic expressions, which are differentiated from ordinary discourse and demand the recipient’s active engagement (Owen 1985: 58-60; Riegel 2001: 108-109; Levy 2001: 920). James Cahill’s definition of “poetic painting” in medieval China has described poetry’s effects as “oblique” and “ambiguous rather than explicit” (Cahill 1996: 7-8), thus resulting in much sharper and more far-reaching responses in beholders, who seem to be isolated from ordinary lives. Mainstream films, as Carl Plantinga believes strongly when he contrasts “the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky, or Wong Kar-wai” with Hollywood cinema, usually “elicit strong, clear (if also sometimes mixed) emotions” (Plantinga 2009: 7). By contrast, poetic cinema, according to traditional Chinese poetics, as I argue, shall evoke much more subtle feelings that are even implicit and obscure for viewers. As such, the aesthetics of restraint implicitly engage audiences in reflective considerations.

The Mechanism of Evoking Moods in Artworks

Owen's exegesis of poetics formulated in some early texts points out that the "paradigm of poetic production" in traditional Chinese poetics was so concerned with "the stirring of mind in itself" that ancient theorists committed to identifying "what stirs the affections":

the political and social conditions of an age are given as the primary external condition that stirs the affections, but it is obvious that other outer circumstances can do so as well. In later poetic theory, a large variety are given as the center or part of the origin of the poetic process—some moment in human relations (e.g., parting), the cycle of the seasons, an ancient site, some principle recognized in the landscape. (Owen 1992: 44)

In this regard, I also attempt to determine ways in which poetic cinema's involvement in the experiential world of the cosmic, the historical, the political, the religious, the cultural, and the romantic, expresses and evokes some certain affections. In traditional Chinese poetics, Lu Ji's (261–303_{CE}) *The Poetic Exposition on Literature* shows such a strong interest in this direct, and subjective, world-relation, where the "dynamic and affective interaction between 'mind' and 'object'" gives birth to "feeling" (Sun 1995: 75). Lu Ji, in this treatise, has suggested that objects in the world stir a mind for contemplation, while the moods of sorrow and elation join the physical scenes in the autumn and springtime, thus forming an organic and indissoluble unit. Robert Sinnerbrink's criticism of cognitivist theories of emotions in cinema formulates "a more phenomenological approach to the aesthetics of mood", which can help address the revelation and expression of "distinctive cinematic worlds" (Sinnerbrink 2012: 149). What Sinnerbrink proposes here means that

a film's particular fictional world, which is rendered by cinematic devices expressively, contributes to the viewer's affective response to that world in the film.

My approach to poetic cinema, taking into account traditional Chinese poetics about the relation of the "heart-mind" (*xin* 心) to "objects" (*wu* 物), but also about the mutual and interdependent connection between "affections" (*qing* 情) and "scenes" (*jing* 景), will reveal how these worlds' atmospheres are created and moods elicited. I will discuss these ideas in more details throughout the thesis, but now I would like to point out that affections, on the basis of substantial exegeses of traditional Chinese poetics, should be understood as the ways in which an individual is affected by some external objects in the world, bringing about the entire range of perceptual, sensuous and emotional experiences that the individual undergo and even having profound impacts on that individual's thoughts. The "scene", in the Chinese poetic tradition, denote "a particular scene of the outer world [...] perceived from a particular place at a particular time, thus implicating the 'point of view' of a subject" (Owen 1992: 585), and I will align such an understanding of the external world felt by a particular subject with the phenomenology of moods and atmospheres. Moods mean the emotional states that colour an individual's subjective experience of the world, and atmospheres, encompassing the more ambient aspects of that experience, refer to the overall quality, or background emotional tones, of that particular physical environment of the world being perceived by that individual.

Moreover, I am also interested in the ontology of the cosmos presented in poetic cinema. Consider, for instance, the following two lines by Lu Ji, who argues that poetry has vast potential for:

Enveloping Heaven and Earth in fixed shape,
Subduing myriad objects with the tip of a brush. (Owen 1992: 90;
translation modified; Original Source Lu ca. 280_{CE}/2002: 60)

The strong linkage of feelings with objects ontologically lies in the deified proposition of the ultimate unity of the animate totality and dynamic resonance of the myriad things in the universe, as scholars' readings of Lu Ji's poetics have unveiled (Owen 1992: 111; Lewis 2009: 233-235; Sun 2011: 183; Swartz 2020: 151). In consideration of the cosmic poetics in China, this thesis ultimately designates poetic cinema as a sensual, emotional and intellectual approach to the existence and operations of the oneness of the great cosmos. While these are the basics of the rationale for and hypothesis of my thesis's approach to poetic cinema, now I would like to provide a literature review of Chinese film theories and theories of poetic cinema in the following two sections.

In Search of "Traditions" in Chinese Film Theories

A year after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, *Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era* (1990), edited by George S. Semsel, Xia Hong, and Hou Jianping, was published. The book, translating eighteen academic articles from Chinese to English, introduced to the Euro-American society several scholarly debates about cinematic aesthetics in China between 1979 and 1989. In the book's introduction, Luo Yijun argues

that representative films by the Fifth Generation filmmakers in China, like Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (1985), had already garnered international attention, but "little was known about Chinese film theory" to date (Luo 1990: xix). Luo acknowledges that, although Euro-American film theories, such as those by Sergei Eisenstein, Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, had been imported into China, Chinese film theory was still underdeveloped and, thus, needed to be advanced. Historically, compared with their counterparts in Euro-America, Chinese film scholars, according to Luo, tended to stress "the function of propaganda and film as an educational tool" and "seldom made a serious exploration of film ontology [...] there were some limited debates of theoretical issues [...] established themselves as serious film theory" (Luo 1990: xx). This situation changed dramatically since China's Reform and Opening-up policy was introduced in 1979: growing debates on ontological issues of the art of cinema from 1979 to 1989 had pushed film scholars in China to take seriously the establishment and development of Chinese film theory (Chen 2012: 473-474). Some of the most controversial issues under debate include the relationship between cinema and theatre (Bai 1979; Zhang and Li 1979), cinema's literary qualities (Zhang 1980; Zheng 1982), and the underlying tensions between modernisation and nationalisation in terms of film production (Zhang and Li 1979; Shao 1984; Chen 1986; Rong 1986), and some of these involve an examination of the roles of traditional Chinese poetry, painting and theatre in Chinese film theory. Since the 1990s, though "the theoretical construction of national cinema" is still in focus, film scholars in mainland China "have shifted from an ontological, aesthetic perspectives in the 1980s to an

ideological, political perspectives” (Chen 2012: 480), as evident in Jia Leilei’s adoption of socialism and Hu Ke’s mixture of socialist and marketing values.

David Bordwell’s poetics of cinema has also been broadly applied to film scholars’ exploration of Chinese-language cinema. Bordwell, in his own *Poetics of Cinema* (2008), investigates the aesthetic approach to the visual style of martial arts cinema by King Hu. Rather than spotlight Hu’s preoccupations with Zen Buddhism and historical periods in China, Bordwell analyses his combat sequences to indicate that Hu’s styles are inherited from some norms of Japanese cinema, as well as the editing techniques of the 1910s American films and the 1920s Soviet films, which split an action into separate shots. In Bordwell’s monograph *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (2000), he studies the aesthetic and commercial achievements of Hong Kong popular cinema from the viewpoint of industrial matters, production practices, narrative conventions, as well as cinematic structures and styles. If Chinese-language cinema, as Gary Bettinson has claimed, “is an auteurist cinema” so that the poetics approach lays stress on studies of “the stylistic traits of particular filmmakers” such as Fei Mu, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wong Kar-wai, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Jia Zhangke, to name a few (Bettinson 2016: 9), Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh’s *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (2005), James Udden’s *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (2009), and Bettinson’s *The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-wai: Film Poetics and the Aesthetics of Disturbance* (2015) are such scholarly works which conduct formal, historical and spectatorial analysis of auteur films of Chinese-language cinema. In addition, the questions of whether Chinese-language cinema has its unique film styles and how

Chinese-language cinema is related to traditional Chinese cultures have been attracting film poetics' academic interest and sustained attention (Silbergel 2012; Udden 2012, 2016; Bettinson 2016; Rist 2016). As Bettinson's summary of the poetics of Chinese-language cinema suggests, such an approach, unlike current scholarship on Chinese film spotlighting politics, societies, and cultures, "enables us to put the films themselves at center stage" through prioritising a film's "formal design" and "stylistic construction" (Bettinson 2016: 2). However, on the issue of the influence of traditional Chinese culture on Chen Kaige's early cinema, when Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar draw on the aesthetic concept of "idea" (*yi* 意) in ancient China (Berry and Ann 1994: 85-92) and An Jingfu refers to Daoism (An 1994: 117-125), James Udden still feels that, for poetics, "we have reached a theoretical dead end in trying to impose a traditional origin to certain cinematic techniques" (Udden 2016: 277).

As noted above, the poetics approach to cinema, as established and advanced by Bordwell, has already been criticised by several scholars in film studies for its neglect of the embodiment of worldview and cultural orientations in film crafts and materials that have been massively overemphasised. Instead of placing too much emphasis on formal properties of cinema, a few other approaches, in Chinese film scholarship in English, to Chinese film theories have increasingly diverted critical attention from formalist enquiries to cultural and ontological reflections with a comparative perspective. Zhang Zhen's *An Amorous History of Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (2005), in her own words, has adopted "a sensorial history of cinema" to examine "a cultural history of the body and the affective regime created or mediated in China through the cinema in the

early decades of the twentieth century” (Zhang 2005: 3). One particularly noteworthy aspect of Zhang’s comprehensive research into early Chinese cinema is her analysis of ordinary urban dwellers’ physical experiences of films amidst the vibrant popular modern mass cultures, along with a closer examination of cinematic representations of gendered bodies in genres such as martial arts cinema and horror films. Simultaneously, Zhang locates the early Chinese silent and sound film practices in global vernacular modernism, looking at Shanghai film culture both being influenced by Hollywood cinema and other foreign cultural productions but also contributing modern visual culture internationally. In *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (2015), Bao Weihong’s full inspection of early Chinese cinema has enquired about “how social politics intersect with media politics, especially with the politics of medium specificity and intermediality” (Bao 2015: 5). In Bao’s opinion, under the social context of wartime China between 1915 and 1945, early Chinese cinema is best understood as a fiery cinema and an affective medium, which, through its interconnection with an intricate network of politics, technologies, institutions and aesthetic codes and debates at that time, afforded different modes of perception and affective spectatorship across martial arts films, left-wing spoken drama and films, and wartime propaganda cinema.

Victor Fan, in *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (2015), has initiated “a comparative colloquy between Chinese and European-American film theories” (Fan 2015: 2). In this book on some major theoretical debates on cinema held in China from the 1920s to 1940s, Fan revisits the conception of shadowplay, the left-wing aesthetics and its antithesis of and Fei Mu’s Confucianism, while participating in a

transcultural dialogue that intertwines several Chinese aesthetic terms, such as “lifelike” (*bizhen* 逼真), “sketching ideation” (*xieyi* 寫意) and “air” (*kongqi* 空氣), with Euro-American aesthetics and theories of film, from Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic judgement, through Bazin’s ontology of cinema, to Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the image of thought, just to name a few. Peter C. Pugsley has made a bolder effort, in *Tradition, Culture and Aesthetics in Contemporary Asian Cinema* (2013), to formulate “a conception of an Asian aesthetic in films from and about Asia” (Pugsley 2013: 1), through identifying and analysing recognisable assemblages of culturally-loaded audiovisual elements in films from China, Japan, South Korea, India, Malaysia and Singapore. More interestingly, Stephen Teo’s comparative method, in his *Eastern Approaches to Western Film: Asian Reception and Aesthetics in Cinema* (2019), means “a synchronic application of Eastern concepts” to “a selective group of auteur directors” in Europe and America (Teo 2019: 1). Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1932) and Robert Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), for instance, are examined from the viewpoint of Daoist principles, whereas Sam Peckinpah’s Westerns are read through the contradiction between Confucian morality and Daoist amorality. I would like to compare and contrast the different methodologies and implications of Fan’s, Pugsley’s and Teo’s works briefly. Fan excavates film reviews, debates and theoretical constructs in Republic of China that have been overlooked and puts them into comparative conversation with classical Euro-American film theories, and such a method, according to Fan, can contribute to our contemporary understanding of film theory, particularly regarding the relation of the cinematic image to reality. Pugsley’s study of various cinematic devices in films from and about Asia, such as mise-en-scène

and the use of colour, music, sound and landscape, aims at defining what makes Asian cinema distinct and, on a global scale, facilitating both recognition and dissemination of cultural specificities and identities unique to Asian cinema. By applying Eastern thinking, specifically drawing on Daoist and Confucianist ideas, to classical Western films, Teo challenges the dominance of Euro-American perspectives in film studies and proffers a much more inclusive approach to cross-cultural film criticism that can transcend cultural boundaries.

Euro-American Theories of Poetic Cinema

Within the discipline of film studies, theories of poetic cinema are more often than not pertinent to experimental films. The Russian Formalists Viktor Shklovsky (1927) and Adrian Piotrovskij (1927) are keen to illustrate the montage experimentation brought about by Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. French filmmakers active between the 1920s and the 1940s, as representative by Jean Epstein (1926) and Jean Cocteau (1948), not only made narrative avant-garde films but also wrote extensively on cinema's poetic qualities. Between the 1950s and 1960s, Maya Deren's speech (1953) delivered at "Poetry and the Film" symposium is among one of her films and theoretical works informed other underground filmmakers in America, such as Joseph Cornell and Stan Brakhage. Pier Paolo Pasolini's (1965) reflections on the cinema of poetry may seem an exception, due to his particular discussion on feature-length narrative films by

Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci and Jean-Luc Godard. Here, I attempt to present a systematic overview of these major Euro-American theories of poetic cinema.

The Russian Formalists' approach to poetic cinema is marked by Viktor Shklovsky's "Poetry and Prose in Cinematography" (1927) and Adrian Piotrovskij's "Towards a Theory of Film Genres" (1927). Prior to his engagement with the art of cinema, Shklovsky in "Art as Device" (1919) already formulates the term "estrangement" and "defamiliarisation" to maintain that artists should render things unfamiliar through art devices. He writes that "the device of art is the 'estrangement' of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged" (Shklovsky 1919/2015: 162). The main objective of art, for Shklovsky, is to create unique sensations of things, which, rather than be recognised in habitual ways, should be perceived through artistic techniques that make things aesthetically strange and, accordingly, trigger a fresh, and prolonged, experience of artworks. In this regard, Shklovsky also differentiates practical language, often responsible for abstraction and theorems, from poetic language, which is "a means of intensifying an impression" and which creates "the strongest impression" (Shklovsky 1919/2015: 159). Shklovsky's position, that an image can be viewed "poetic" because of its provision of intensified sensations of things rendered strange, is implied in "Poetry and Prose in Cinematography" as well. In this essay, Shklovsky argues that, unlike prose with its plot construction and compositional strategies that are "based principally on a combination of everyday situation" (Shklovsky 1927/1982: 87), poetry foregrounds its exploitation of formal devices and artistic

techniques. In this vein, Shklovsky believes that “there exist both prose and poetry in cinema and this is the basic division between the genres”, and that they significantly differ from each other in “the prevalence in poetic cinema of technical and formal over semantic features, where formal features displace semantic and resolve the composition” (Shklovsky 1927/1982: 89). This means that Shklovsky is particularly interested in poetic cinema’s formal features that present things in a way that is different from the mass audience’s ordinary perception.

Historically, Soviet montage as one of the avant-garde movements in the 1920s was shaped by other modernist aesthetics of Constructivism, Futurism, Suprematism and Productivism, but Miriam Bratu Hansen’s recent research, coining the term of “vernacular modernism”, identifies “two kinds of Americanism” that corroborate “the impact of American on Soviet cinema” (Hansen 2009: 244). On the one hand, American montage brought about formal and narrative efficiency; on the other hand, Hollywood genre films were inspiring for Soviet filmmakers too, when it came to their rhythm, their excessive and eccentric situations, and their offerings of sensory film experiences through the production’s material surface. As Hansen stresses Soviet avant-garde cinema’s acceptance of popular Hollywood films for “unperceived modes of sensory perception and experience” and “a different organization of the daily world” (Hansen 2009: 255), it is interesting to note the convergence between Russian Formalism and vernacular modernism given the two’s recognition of artworks’ sensually unconventional aspects felt by ordinary people among their everyday experiences. Like Shklovsky’s emphasis on cinematic techniques, Piotrovskij also ascribes “the concept of ‘lyric’” to

“technical advances in cinema”, suggesting that filmmakers of lyrical films depend dominantly on “cinematic means of expression”, “a new and unexpected presentation of objects”, as well as “associative and other concepts of montage that are inherently cinematic” (Piotrovskij 1927/1982: 105). According to Piotrovskij’s film analysis, the emotional expressiveness of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Strike* (1925) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) derives from the non-diegetic juxtaposition of objects and people; in *A Sixth Part of the World* (Dziga Vertov, 1926), the rhythmic montage and composition completely break off diegetic cohesion, temporal continuity and spatial relationship between people and nature. Both Karla Oeler and Tom Gunning highlight that Russian formalism’s conception of poetic cinema has been influenced deeply by the linguist Roman Jakobson’s idea of “the poetic function of language” (Oeler 2014: 367; Gunning 2019: 553-554): as Jakobson’s poetic function is distinguishable from communicative function and draws attention to the existence of linguistic signs themselves rather than their meanings, the poetic function, for these Russian Formalists, should bring to the fore the reflectivity of cinematic forms.

In “Towards a Theory of Film Genres”, Piotrovskij also mentions the “lyrical experiments of the young French directors”, such as Louis Delluc, Marcel L’Herbier, Jean Epstein and René Clair, whose expressive films, with the aim “of constructing lyrical images of life as it passes by”, are “concentrated in widely dispersed ‘atmosphere’ fragments, in detailed pictures of a harbour fair, of a city” (Piotrovskij 1927/1982: 105). In these French avant-garde filmmakers’ discussions of poetic cinema, they always evince considerable enthusiasm for cinema’s extraordinary abilities to show subjective

feelings of the vitality of the world. The film theorist and historian Léon Moussinac equates “cinographic poem” with cinema’s power to “display and comment solely on states of mind” and produce “the visual suggestions and transfigurations of feelings” (Moussinac 1923/1988: 282). This means that the intrinsic values of moving images arise from the expressive scenario’s feelings conveyed through performance, rhythmic editing, as well as cinematographic means. In “On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie” (1926), Jean Epstein, who maintains that “the cinema is poetry’s most powerful medium, the medium most capable of realizing the unreal” (Epstein 1926/2012: 296), adopts Louis Delluc’s concept of “photogénie” to indicate the enhancement of the inner qualities of any things or beings through cinematic presentation. Epstein defines “photogénie” as “only the mobile and personal aspects of things, beings, and souls”, which possibly “acquire a higher moral value through filmic reproduction”, and adds that “every aspect of the world upon which the cinema confers life is elevated only if it possesses a personality of its own” (Epstein 1926/2012: 296). The implication of Epstein’s idea is that cinema can capture the mobility of reality, such as the spinning wheels in Abel Gance’s *The Wheel* (1923), but also reflect the soul of objects and even endow these objects with temperaments and subjective qualities, as exemplified by a close-up of a revolver that seems to be the brutality, menace or vigilance incarnate. The revelation of these objects’ immaterial qualities through cinematic means demonstrates that cinema, for Epstein, as Sarah Cooper’s interpretation of Epstein’s perspective through her review of French Impressionist filmmakers’ fascination with “photogénie” argues, “is animistic insofar as it gives a semblance of life to the objects that it show” (Cooper 2013: 45-46).

Along the lines of Cooper's summary, French Impressionism believes in poetic cinema's potential in offering a penetrating vision into the souls of inanimate objects, in evoking emotional and intellectual responses in audiences, and further in providing them with an access, uniquely anchored in cinema's technologies and expressive techniques, to the spiritual realm beyond the material world.

Gunning's reading of Epstein's film theory argues that his "nearly magical term" of "photogénie" uncovers cinema's "poetic possibility" (Gunning 2019: 562-563), which lies in cinema's ability to reveal the world being filmed and to affect audiences' unconscious mind. Epstein's conception of "cinépoetry", according to *Cinépoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (2012) by Christophe Wall-Romana, hinges both on the unconscious as "the realm of affects and sensorial intensities preceding emotions and language" and on the "photogénie" connecting all things' motions on screen with audiences' corporeal experience (Wall-Romana 2013: 120-121). In view of Epstein's educational background as a medical school student, it is unsurprising that he relates cinépoetry to physiology and genuinely appreciates the contribution of sensory experience offered by cinematic technologies towards modern sensibility. The narrative avant-garde filmmakers Marcel L'Herbier and Germaine Dulac, and his friends Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein, asserted potential influence on the works of versatile artist Jean Cocteau. Cocteau, however, has "his idiosyncratic cinematic taste", viewing cinépoetry as the intersection of "biographical data", "sensorial motifs" and "perceptual constructs" (Wall-Romana 2013: 98-99). For Cocteau, his ideal of poetic cinema means highly charged autobiographical expression. When he considers cinematography as an "incomparable medium for poetry as an art"

in his essay "Film as a Medium for Poetry" (1945-46), Cocteau asserts that "the author of a film is its director", and that "from now on, I shall try to make my own cinema" (Cocteau 1945-46/1992: 32-33). Cocteau draws an analogy between cinema and the states of mesmerism, daydream, and unconsciousness, as he writes in "Poetry and Film" (1948) that "poetry is a product of the unconscious" (Cocteau 1948/1992: 38) and, in "Poetry in Cinematography" (1949), that cinema can precipitate spectators into "a dream in which we all participate together through a kind of hypnosis" (Cocteau 1948/1992: 40). The making of poetic cinema, for Cocteau, becomes a manifestation of unconscious mental processes, while the viewing of it can further lead audiences to something of a rhythmic hypnotic trance. These French theories, in short, tie the poetic to subjective feelings and mental activities.

Instead of focusing exclusively on experimental or narrative avant-garde cinema, Pier Paolo Pasolini in his "The Cinema of Poetry" (1965) devotes much of his attention to the art cinema of the 1960s by Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci and Jean-Luc Godard. Pasolini's article begins with drawing a clear distinction between the linguistic signs gathered in dictionaries and the image-signs found in the chaotic reality, such as gestures, environments, dreams and memories. The subjectivity of these image-signs, which are "irrational, oneiric, elementary, and barbaric" but also "forced below the level of consciousness", in Pasolini's opinion, belongs "in the highest degree to the world of poetry"; therefore, cinema, whose materials derive not from dictionaries but from the raw world, which is not only objective but also subjective, "should be expressively subjective and lyrical" (Pasolini 1965/2000: 42). However, in film industries,

as Pasolini notices, “a tradition of the ‘language of narrative film prose’ was quickly established” because of the narrative convention (Pasolini 1965/2000: 43), except for the purely expressive and oneiric *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929). Pasolini, when delivering his argument at the First Pesaro Film Festival in 1965, also feels that the recent film production of Roberto Rossellini and of the French New Wave inclines towards a cinema of poetry. Pasolini then asks us: “How is the ‘language of poetry’ theoretically explicable and practically possible in cinema?” (Pasolini 1965/2000: 42). Pasolini’s recourse is free, indirect discourse, a literary device that allows an author to reveal a fictional character’s intimate subjectivity by means of blending the character’s speech with the author’s discourse without the use of quotation marks. By extension, then, “free indirect point of view” in cinema means “the immersion of the filmmaker in the mind of his character and then the adoption on the part of the filmmaker not only for the psychology of his character but also of his language” (Pasolini 1965/2000: 44). And, in doing so, “a sort of return to the origins until the original oneiric, barbaric, irregular, aggregative, visionary quality of cinema is found through its technical devices” (Pasolini 1965/2000: 47). In other words, Pasolini proposes that the technical language of poetry in cinema is possible through free indirect discourse, which enables a filmmaker to superimpose his or her own vision onto fictional characters; meanwhile, the revelation of the filmmaker’s worldview and characters’ psychology is not linguistic but stylistic. In their films about neurotics of the bourgeoisie, Pasolini has identified the aestheticist Antonioni’s obsessive framing, the elegiac Bertolucci’s editing rhythm, and the cubist Godard’s kaleidoscopic collages beyond comprehension.

Diverging from the “more familiar and established semiotic paradigms” established by Christian Metz, Umberto Eco and Peter Wollen (Yacavone 2018: 252-253), Pasolini’s semiotics of cinema during his lifetime, nevertheless, was met with skepticism and considered illogical by many scholars. It is not until Gilles Deleuze’s revisit that there was a reevaluation and increased appreciation of Pasolini’s conception of “the cinema of poetry”. As Daniel Yacavone outlines, Deleuze, who adopts both Pasolini’s and Jean Mitry’s theories, believes that cinema surpasses the limitations of language in that the photographic and temporal essence of filmmaking process makes possible both the direct visual presentation of “objects and events” and reflective manifestation of “inner conscious life” (Yacavone 2018: 253). That is, the poetic aspect of cinema might lie in the fact that the production of the moving image allows for deep connections with not only concrete realities, but also manifold forms of mental processes, such as dream, remembrance, fantasy, and imagination. Deleuze, indeed, has acknowledged that free indirect subjectivity “reflects its content in a camera-consciousness which has become autonomous (‘cinema of poetry’)” (Deleuze 1983/1986: 74). What Deleuze suggests by the purity and autonomy of poetic “camera-consciousness” is that, when the camera presents a character’s world in accordance with his or her own point of view, the character’s vision is also transformed by the camera that reflects and thinks over this vision. Particularly, through cinematographic forms, arthouse filmmakers’ reflection of their neurotic characters in the modern world tends to occasion a poetic consciousness, such as the aesthetic in Antonioni, the technical in Godard, the mystical in Pasolini himself, and the ethical in Eric Rohmer.

Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1954), according to Joseph Luzzi's reading in his *A Cinema of Poetry: Aesthetics of the Italian Art Film* (2014), creates "a 'cinema of poetry' that anticipates many of Pasolini's theories" (Luzzi 2014: xii). In the film, what the poet Charles Lewington, the deceased lover of the sad protagonist Katherine Joyce (Ingrid Bergman), has composed and what Katherine can see and feel during her visit to Naples, display a sharp difference between literary discourse and cinematic visibility, and that between opaque verses unavailable to human eyes and direct perceptions and sensations leading to the human mind without the mediation of language. Luzzi also exposes the way in which the philosophy of Giambattista Vico, who endorses "the raw data of perception" rather than the abstract and rational thinking in "overdeveloped societies" (Luzzi 2014: 78), underlies Pasolini's poetic image-signs which are concrete, irrational, and even animalistic. In the first part of his *The Cinema of Poetry* (2014), P. Adams Sitney bases his study of poetic cinema on Pasolini's theory to analyse narrative films by Dimitri Kirsanoff, Ingmar Bergman, and Andrei Tarkovsky. Sitney's reading of Pasolini's idea of "free indirect point of view" argues that such a subjective perspective links "the whole film to the perspective of its protagonist", so that the audiences are "drawn into the mental states and even the dreams of a character" (Sitney 2014: 6). The cinematic free, indirect discourse inviting viewers to the fictional characters' inner worlds, as Sitney further claims, also allows for filmmakers' autobiographical references, such as Tarkovsky's personal memories in *Mirror* (1975). In sum, Pasolini's theory stresses the subjective qualities of poetic cinema, as well as the expressive and stylistic presence of arthouse filmmakers in cinema.

The second part of Sitney's *The Cinema of Poetry* moves onto the American avant-garde cinema filmmakers such as Joseph Cornell, Lawrence Jordan, Stan Brakhage, Nathaniel Dorsky, Jerome Hiler, and Gregory Markopoulos. Sitney's extensive survey of their films, in part, has unearthed their cinematic engagement with poetry, indicating, for example, ways in which Cornell's collage films pay homage to Romantic poetry and French Symbolist poets, how Markopoulos's immersion in classical texts by Plato and a few ancient Greek poets exerts a profound impact on his eighty-hour project *Eniaios* (2004), as well as how Brakhage's reading of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound shapes his use of the cinematic techniques of superimposition, fast editing, collage of fragments, and rhythmic organisation of shots. In the meanwhile, Sitney extends Pasolini's theory of the cinema of poetry to these avant-garde films featuring "the disappearance of visible protagonists from the screen", proposing that the free indirect point of view is, in fact, replaced by "the creative persona of the filmmaker behind the photography and editing (and, in some cases, the voice-over)" (Sitney 2014: 12). As a case in point, Sitney's detailed analysis of Brakhage's *Faust* series (1987–1989) points to the deployment of his own voice-over which recites the filmmaker's own poetry, and which, on these film's soundtrack, associates the theme of art and vision, always enthralled Brakhage, with the works' cinematography and montage that provide unique aesthetic, perceptual and cognitive experience. Since Cornell, Jordan and Brakhage, according to Sitney, have inherited their filmmaking's aesthetics from their immediate predecessors such as May Deren, Kenneth Anger and Sidney Peterson, a major review of most of the literature on poetic cinema inevitably involves Deren's most well-known thesis formulated in a

symposium entitled “Poetry and the Film” held in 1953 by Cinema 16, with the participants of the playwright Arthur Miller, the poet Dylan Thomas, the critic Parker Tyler, the curator Amos Vogel, among others. Poetry, for Deren, “creates visible or auditory forms for something that is invisible, which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of the movement” (Deren et al. 1953/2000: 174). In this sense, Deren makes a clear distinction in cinema between “the ‘horizontal’ development” and “a ‘vertical’ investigation of a situation” (Deren et al. 1953/2000: 174). While the former rests on dramatic action and narrative construction, the latter, comparable to lyric poems or monologues, becomes a significant source for poetic sequences because of its deep exploration of oneiric or emotional qualities of experience. Deren’s idea of poetic cinema, as a few scholars’ readings have already revealed (Oeler 2014: 368; Kappenberg 2017: 104-105; Gunning 2019: 556-557), shows strong interest in the lyrical qualities of cinema, where a train of cause and effect events are suspended, and where particular feelings, achieved through visual metaphors, free associations and evocative imagery, radiate from the internal monologue, dream sequences and establishing shots setting the mood.

A Brief History of Traditional Chinese Poetics

There are definitely different understandings of poetry in such very wide-ranging discussions about poetic cinema from Epstein, through Pasolini, to Deren. As this thesis is based on traditional Chinese poetics, in this section I will offer a brief account of its development in China. Robert Ashmore reminds us that “a survey of Chinese poetics

must keep in view the intimate association between poetry and music” (Ashmore 2012: 239). However, in the meantime, it is important to mention that the notion of *shi* 詩 originally referred only to the *Classic of Poetry*, which is traditionally dated between 1000 and 600 BCE, or poems from the same era. It was not until 200 CE that *shi* began to be applied to other forms of verse composition more generally (Rouzer 2012: 234-235). The final selection of the three hundred and five poems in the *Classic of Poetry* was accredited to Confucius (551–479BCE): according to the historian Sima Qian’s (ca.145–ca.86BCE) *Historical Records*, Confucius “had chosen the ‘three hundred’ songs from an existing corpus of three thousand” (Kern 2010: 19). Compared with contemporaneous monumental works such as the *Homeric Hymns* (700–600BCE) in Greece, the *Rig Veda* (1200–900 BCE) in India, or the *Hebrew Psalms* (1030–580BCE) in the *Old Testament*, the *Classic of Poetry* scarcely involves mythological sources, but substantially displays the daily experience of the actual human world. Instead of presenting extraordinary heroic exploits, or evoking a marvellous world of divinities which transcend the human world, the *Classic of Poetry* has expressed strong sentiments of people suffering from political disturbance, witnessing social instability, engaging in agricultural activities, and having personal relationships with one another: the ties of kinship, friendships and love affairs (Jullien 2009: 214; Kern 2010: 18; Luo 2011: 7, 28).

Afterwards, poetry became the most important literary genre throughout Chinese history. In the Chinese literary tradition, poetry, loosely used to refer to literature as a whole, holds a unique and outstanding position, which has been, since the early Tang Dynasty, driven by social and political motivations for the inclusion of poetry as a crucial

component in civil-service examinations for selecting officials (Hartman 1986: 60-61; Wu 1998: 200). Traditional Chinese poetry, according to Charles Hartman, can be divided into six main categories, historically and typologically (Hartman 1986: 59): (1) the ancient poems in the *Classic of Poetry*; (2) the *sao* 騷 (elegiac poetry) of the state of Chu, or the so-called *Elegies of Chu*, and its subsequent imitations and continuation as *fu* 賦, translated as “rhapsody”, “rhyme-prose”, or “prose-poem”; (3) the *yuefu shi* 樂府詩 (Music-Bureau poetry) of the Han Dynasty, and its continuation as *guti shi* 古體詩 (old style-poetry); (4) the regulated verse (*lüshi* 律詩) of the Tang and after; 5) the *ci* 詞 (lyric) beginning in the Tang and flourishing in the Song; (6) and the *qu* 曲 (aria) emerging in the Yuan. Music-Bureau poetry, lyric and aria were meant to be sung, but only a few scores survive today.

In terms of traditional Chinese poetics, the “Canon of Yao” chapter in the *Book of Documents*, dated between the Western Zhou Dynasty and Eastern Zhou Dynasty, gave the earliest-known definition of poetry, which exercised “an enduring influence on the development of traditional Chinese literary criticism” (Cai 2002: 38). During the Spring and Autumn period, *Analects*, *The Commentary of Zuo*, and *Discourses of the States*, among others, encompassed plenty of passages that provided evaluations on the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* (Owen 1992: 19-36; Cai 2002: 39-44). In the Han Dynasty, as a hermeneutics of the *Classic of Poetry* sprung up, “The Great Preface to Mao’s Edition of the *Classic of Poetry*”, often known as the “Great Preface”, made “a complex statement on the nature of poetic expression” (Levy 2001: 919), thus becoming “the most authoritative statement on the nature and function of poetry in traditional China”

(Owen 1992: 37). The Six Dynasties witnessed an incredible flourishing of literary and art criticism. Lu Ji's (261–303_{CE}) *The Poetic Exposition on Literature*, influenced by the Neo-Daoist conception of “mind and the cosmological grounds on which the operations of mind are understood” (Owen 1992: 74), illuminates the mysteries of the poet's mind and his writing process, in which the genesis of a literary work is ascribable to the mind roaming about the microcosm (Wong 1983: 203; Owen 1992: 73-76; Sullivan 2008: 102). Zhong Rong's (ca. 468–518_{CE}) *Gradations of Poets*, a critical work dealing exclusively with poetry and “the first work systematically to filiate authors and literary history” (Levy 2001: 927), assesses a hundred and twenty-three poets up to Zhong Rong's own time and places these authors in a hierarchical category with three grades (Lewis 2009: 235-236; Tian 2010: 259; Owen 2014: 287). Then, the magnum opus *The Literary Mind and the Sculpting of Dragons* by Liu Xie (465–522_{CE}) gave “the fullest and most systematic exposition to date of ideas about literature that had developed in the preceding centuries” (Lewis 2009: 237). This work consists of fifty chapters: the first five chapters sketch the general outline of Liu Xie's literary theory; the subsequent twenty chapters describe the development and characteristics of various literary genres. From Chapter 26, the book concentrates on a good variety of literary concepts, such as styles, literary devices, the role of emotions and the physical world, the process of composing literary works, and the reader's response (Owen 1992: 183-186; Levy 2001: 928-929; Tian 2010: 257-259).

The Tang Dynasty witnessed unparalleled prosperity in the composition of poetry. However, for the theory of poetry, Sikong Tu (837–908_{CE}) is “really only one figure in the tradition of [Lu Ji] or [Liu Xie]”, with his elusive work *The Twenty-Four Categories of*

Poetry which attempts to clarify the “ultimate categories” of aesthetic experience of poetry (Levy 2001: 919), and which “has been generally considered the most important example of [Tang] poetics” since the seventeenth century (Owen 1992: 303). The most common practice of poetry criticism during the Song Dynasty had been the so-called “remarks on poetry”, as exemplified by Ouyang Xiu’s (1007–1072_{CE}) *Liuyi’s Remarks on Poetry* and Yan Yu’s (1191–1241_{CE}) *Canglang’s Remarks on Poetry*. A rich diversity of literary issues, from theoretical positions, through anecdotes in literary history and analysis of lines, to the evaluation and comparison of poets’ talents, are dealt with in a rather flexible way in the “remarks on poetry” (Levy 2001: 934-935; Egan 2010: 460-461). Amidst the transition from Ming to Qing, the prolific Wang Fuzhi’s (1619–1692_{CE}) *Ginger Studio’s Remarks on Poetry*, *Interpretations of Poetry*, *Broad Commentary on the Classic of Poetry*, and *Discussions to While Away the Days at Evening Hall* are merely a miniscule fraction of his scholarly works carrying out extensive research into philosophy, history and classical studies (Owen 1992: 451-452; Levy 2001: 936-937). Finished in 1686, Ye Xie’s (1627–1703_{CE}) *The Origins of Poetry*, arguing that poetry is the ultimate expression of the mind and such expression hinges on cosmic principles and processes, is commonly viewed by contemporary scholars as another systematic, comprehensive and organised poetics since Liu Xie’s work (Owen 1992: 493-496; Pohl 1992: 3-4; Levy 2001: 937-938; Cai 2002: 66-67).

For traditional Chinese poetics, “more than a millennium of literary theorizing and critiquing” came to a close (Levy 2001: 939), when *Remarks on Lyrics from the Human World* by Wang Guowei (1877–1927_{CE}) was finalised and serialised in *Journal of*

National Essence in 1908, three years before the collapse of the Qing as the final imperial dynasty in China. However, as Wang incorporates German aesthetic thoughts of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche into his understanding of traditional Chinese aesthetics, such a transcultural approach in fact has been deemed modern, and ever since, comparative poetics, further advanced by Zhu Guangqian (1897–1986_{CE}) and Zong Baihua (1897–1986_{CE}), began to emerge in Chinese academia. Whereas Zhu’s comparison of Chinese aesthetics with European philosophy explores the similarities and differences between the two, Zong, integrating traditional Chinese culture into a new global cultural framework, sought to rejuvenate China’s spiritual culture through the analysis of European philosophy and art (Bonner 1979: 443-445; Bunnin 2002: 6; Wang 2002: 40-44; Yue 2016: 59-60).

Chinese Lyric Aesthetics and the Chinese Poetic Tradition

In modern and contemporary scholars’ re-examination of traditional Chinese poetics and aesthetics, the conceptions of “the Chinese lyrical tradition” and of “the Chinese poetic tradition” abound in their academic research. It is commonly believed that Chen Shih-hisang’s (1912–1971) speech “On Chinese Lyrical Tradition”, delivered at the annual conference of the Association of Asian Studies in 1971 and published posthumously, invents the term “Chinese lyrical tradition” (Wu 2013: 14; Wang 2015: 11-12; Au 2020: 29). In this speech, Chen contrasts the European presumption, that all literature has its origin in the epic and drama, with the Chinese literary tradition, in which its lineage from

the *Classic of Poetry* and *Elegies of Chu* and its later development into other forms, such as “rhapsody” and Music-Bureau poetry, make such a tradition lyrical and poetic, rather than dramatic or narrative. In “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics” (1991), Gao Yougong (1929–2016) maintains that the Chinese aesthetic tradition “has successively focused on music, on poetry, and then on painting”; and, despite the different art mediums and genres, certain consistent and underlying aesthetic principles and features in these major art forms epitomise what Kao refers to as “lyric aesthetics” in ancient China (Gao 1991: 47). Kang-i Chang Sun and Shuen-fu Lin follow Gao’s theoretical basis: Sun’s *Six Dynasties Poetry* (1986) offers “a systematic account of the poetic development in the Six Dynasties” (Sun 1986: xii), while Lin, in *The Transformation of the Chinese Lyrical Tradition: Chiang K’uei and Southern Sung Tz’u Poetry* (1978), zooms in on the turn of the thirteenth century, during which time radical changes “took place in Chinese poetry, art, and intellectual history” (Lin 1978: 3). Apart from Gao Yougong’s followers, Pauline Yu’s *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (1987) and Charles Yim-tze Kwong’s *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity* (1994) use the phrase of “the Chinese poetic tradition” to entitle their works.

More recently, David Der-wei Wang in his *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (2015) adopts three propositions of “the lyrical tradition”, which were put forward by Chen Shih-hsiang, the writer Shen Congwen (1902–1988) and the Czech sinologist Jaroslav Průšek (1906–1980), to unveil the lyrical effects of poetry, painting, calligraphy and cinema in mid-twentieth-century China. While Wu Shengqing in her *Modern Archaics Continuity and Innovation in the Chinese Lyric*

Tradition, 1900-1937 (2013) surveys “the role of the lyric tradition and its sensuous and sentimental elements” in early twentieth-century Chinese poetry of classical-style (Wu 2013: 14), another work also by her, *Photo Poetics: Chinese Lyricism and Modern Media Culture* (2020), seeks to identify “the sedimentation of lyrical traditions in modern culture” of photography in early twentieth-century China (Wu 2020: 16). From Chen Shih-hsiang to David Der-wei Wang, these scholars’ works on the Chinese poetic tradition help me investigate the poetic qualities of cinema in one way or another. I use the phrase “the Chinese poetic tradition”, largely interchangeable with “the Chinese aesthetic tradition”, to point to the traditional thinking about the art of poetry in China, interpreted by modern and contemporary sinologists as well, in regard to poetry’s traits, styles, qualities, values, functions, poetic devices, and aesthetic experiences.

The Thesis’s Significance and Originality

The resemblance noticed by Tony Rayns between Wong Kar-wai and Alain Resnais in term of the two filmmakers’ common fascination with “the effects of time on memory, sensation and emotion” (Rayns 1995: 12), but also Wong’s earning of the soubriquet of “Proust from Hong Kong” (Front 2011: 146), due to his thematic preoccupation with the labyrinthine quality of time and the loss of memory that is so evocative of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* (1922–1931), are worth pondering. Despite the fact that “Wong’s model is Alain Resnais” and he achieves literary attainments from his extensive reading of novels by Liu Yichang from Hong Kong, Haruki Murakami from Japan, as well as Julio

Cortázar and Manuel Puig from Latin America (Teo 2005: 3-4), Shu-mei Shih, whose approach to comparative literature positions Sinophone studies at the convergence of diverse academic disciplines and areas that have previously remained disconnected from one another, might question: Why is Wong not referred to as “Murakami from Hong Kong” or “Cortázar from Hong Kong”?

The fact that Wong, for some critics and scholars, resembles Proust or Resnais, corresponds to facts, as summarised by Shih, that a hierarchy seems to exist in cultural research “led by Anglophone and Francophone studies that examine the legacies of British and French imperialism in Asia”, while other empires, such as the United States, Germany, Japan, Spain, Portugal, and especially China, have received comparatively less attention in this field (Shih 2013: 1). Further, Shih, who also points out the deification of the “‘European’ not merely as geographical designation but as connoting values of superiority, rationality, and enlightenment, which Europe supposedly embodied and spread through its colonial enterprises” (Shih 2013: 2), might feel uncomfortable as well about the theoretical model of poetic cinema formulated by John Madden, who centres around a certain tradition of “the European art cinema” (Madden 1994: 1). By pinpointing the current cultural research’s transparent imbalance of focus generated by European supremacy and domination, Shi has indicated an overriding need for broader exploration and recognition of diverse cultural legacies and practices in cultural studies. In his *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (2010), Kuan-Hsian Chen, reverberating Shih’s concerns, argues: “knowledge production is one of the major sites in which imperialism operates and exercises its power” (Chen 2010: 211). If we consider poetic cinema not

as an assemblage in which we can file a group of varied filmmakers worldwide away, but as a cultural construct by which a set of concepts that shape our understanding of its aesthetics in a particular way, and, indeed, it has been such theoretical constructions, given Madden's paradigm but also Jean Epstein's "photogénie", Pier Paolo Pasolini's "cinema of poetry", and Gilles Deleuze's "camera-consciousness", among others, what Chen indicates might reveal all these Eurocentric, and even colonial, frameworks and perspectives in film studies which have been, constantly, producing, disseminating and reinforcing knowledge and power structures from Europe and America. Scholars, by conducting comparative studies, unavoidably perform favourable or unfavourable comparisons "between Euro-American theory and our local experiences", but these studies, as Chen has summarised, have hitherto been "a familiar complaint", for the very reason that:

the West is equipped with universalist theory; the rest of us have particularist empirical data; and eventually our writings become a footnote that either validates or invalidates Western theoretical propositions. We serve as the native informant to the theoretically minded researcher. The agony implied by this relation is caused by a serious problem of our own: the worship of theory. (Chen 2010: 226)

Chen's idea of "the worship of theory" implies that, in current academia, the production of knowledge has been prioritised, universalised and solidified theoretical frameworks that are equated with some particular authors' names, while other perspectives beyond the Euro-American discourse have been relegated by Western researchers to empirical observations, supplementary information, and invalid formulas, thereby perpetuating the dominance of Euro-American theories in academic discourse.

To address such an inequality of knowledge production that regards Euro-American theories as superior, Chen further proposes the proposition of “Asia as method” as “an open-ended imagination”, in which “diverse frames of reference cross our horizon, multiply our perspectives, and enrich our subjectivity” (Chen 2010: 254-255). In this agenda, Asia, according to Chen, can be a synonym for any Asian countries, any Asian cities, or the third world, so Asia as method “is also transborder, regional, and even intercontinental” (Chen 2010: 255). Some of the most important aspects of Asia as method advice scholars to take it as a practice, as a strategy for engagement, and as an imaginary referencing point, so we can reconsider our methodologies and expand our perspectives beyond Western-centric frameworks. Since Asia as method is able to provide a platform for marginalised voices within Asia and beyond, it invites us to renounce the binary thinking that prioritises the Euro-American discourse over those from the rest of the world and to engage with alternative modes of thinking and particularly draw on multiple perspectives from Asia and the third world, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of the world. In this regard, Stephen Teo's *Eastern Approaches to Western Film: Asian Reception and Aesthetics in Cinema* can be counted as Asia as method, as his work shows to us that philosophical ideas and value systems from East Asia does not “exist primarily within Asian or Chinese films”, but can be applied to those “films as essentially Western creations coming out of Western minds” (Teo 2019: 12). After *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* that has already restored an interregional conversation between Chinese and Euro-American film theories, Victor Fan in his recent work *Cinema Illuminating*

Reality: Media Philosophy through Buddhism (2022) openly discusses Asia as method as a means of “decolonizing Euro-American theories” (Fan 2022: 12). Asia as method has encouraged Fan to view Buddhist concepts beyond their historical significance and to adapt these concepts in the contemporary context and in comparative analysis, which can realise their potential and ensure their continued vitality.

While continuing these film scholars’ comparative and interdisciplinary reflections on film theories, I am particularly interested in how traditional Chinese poetics, taken as Asia as method too, can shed new light on film aesthetics beyond Euro-American film theories, and how my hybrid framework is applicable to contemporary poetic cinema around the globe. I would like to contextualise the significant and original contribution of my research to existing knowledge in film studies from the perspective of traditional Chinese poetics and the prospective intersections between Chinese film aesthetics and Euro-American film theories. As we have seen above, some recent research in Chinese studies have shown considerable interest in the wide range of the applicability of traditional Chinese poetics to other art forms, from painting, calligraphy, to music and theatre, and to photography (Wang 2015; Wu 2020). My thesis contributes to such ongoing scholarship on traditional Chinese poetics through a particular focus on poetic cinema, which has been a central topic in film studies since the rise of European avant-garde cinema in the 1920s. Though various approaches to poetic cinema lay great emphasis on its affective nature, my theoretical formulations, through drawing on affective categories and on the aesthetic concept of “affections” (*qing* 情) fundamental in the Chinese poetic tradition, can not only specify some certain art moods ascribable

to poetic qualities, but can also unlock a plausible mechanism by which our inner feelings can be expressed and evoked in the cinematic medium. In doing so, I can demonstrate the intriguing and strong possibilities of traditional Chinese poetics which is still relevant today beyond its literary domain and on the global scale, unfolding a deft interplay between the Chinese poetic tradition and some certain practices of art cinema's filmmaking in the contemporary context.

It should be noticed that "Chinese film aesthetics has never been developed into purely theoretical patterns, as has Western film aesthetics" (Chen 1986/1990: 200-201), even though there were unprecedented debates about the ontology of cinema in China between 1979 and 1989. Afterwards, Chinese scholarship on the relation between films and traditional Chinese culture has, nevertheless, shifted from "an ontological, aesthetic perspective in the 1980s" to "an ideological, political perspective" (Chen 2012: 480). In my major effort to formulate a theoretical framework for contemporary poetic cinema, I endeavour to establish a much closer aesthetic and intermedial connections between cinema and poetry in the Chinese aesthetic tradition, and to contrive a coherent, analytical and, perhaps, distinctive, ontology of cinema according to traditional Chinese poetics. Accordingly, I respond to a general lack in China of rigorous and systematic theories regarding cinema as an art form by applying valuable insights I have obtained in traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic discourse to film aesthetics. Bringing to fore poetics by Lu Ji (261–303_{CE}), Liu Xie (465–522_{CE}), Zhong Rong (ca. 468–518_{CE}), Sikong Tu (837–908_{CE}), Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692_{CE}), and Ye Xie (1627–1703_{CE}), and a series of essential concepts in Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, I can illustrate how

these thoughts can be instrumental in theorisation about cinema concerning authorship, film form, its sensual, emotional and intellectual dynamics, and embodied spectatorship.

A few scholars in Chinese film studies in most recent years have paid attention to the potential applications of traditional Chinese philosophy to preliminary conceptual investigations into various specific aspects of the ontology of cinema. Duan Siying, for instance, analyses “the unique Asian film technique of ‘empty shot’ (*kong jingtou* 空镜头) from the perspective of Chinese philosophical thought and aesthetics” (Duan 2021: 346). Chen Shan’s review of Chinese films produced during the Seventeen-Year period (1949–1966) evaluates “similarities between inherent Chinese aesthetic sensibilities and modern cinematic thought” (Chen 2021: 399). Li Daoxin’s mobilisation of the concept of “assimilation” (*tonghua* 同化), as “an approach to film thinking”, examines “all aspects between human and universe, human and nature, human and human, and the whole process from film production to consumption” (Li 2022: 23). Echoing Li and drawing on “unique sources of Chinese cultural thought”, Wang Haizhou and Yuan Yaxuan have examined ways in which traditional Chinese values, like “the unity of man and heaven” and “the unity of body and mind”, are expressed in different Chinese films (Wang and Yuan 2022: 1). Most current published research as such tends to overlook the rapid and remarkable development in film studies in Euro-American academia.

By contrast, my research adopts Asia a method as a transcultural standpoint which allows me to spark comparative conversations between the Chinese cultural legacy and Euro-American theories of art and cinema. As it will be evident throughout the thesis,

the theoretical backbone of my thinking of film ontology has incorporated traditional Chinese aesthetics with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and a rich diversity of film theories in the Euro-American canon. Whereas most scholars in Chinese film studies more often than not mainly deal with Chinese-language cinema, my work further testifies to exciting possibilities of using East Asian thoughts to interpret films by Alexander Sokurov and Terrence Malick, both of whom are non-Chinese filmmakers, though interested in and influenced by oriental cultures likewise. If Asia as method as advised by Kuan-Hsian Chen designates a transborder and transdisciplinary approaches that facilitate open, friendly and stimulating conversations among various fields of knowledge, I, in this thesis, commit to cross the boundary between traditional Chinese poetics and the Euro-American discourse, and the hybridity of my approach to film ontology, I hope, can enrich our contemporary transcultural understanding of the aesthetics of arthouse films around the world.

Summary of Chapters

The thesis consists of four chapters, with the first one expounding on some crucial concepts and theories a critical and systematic theoretical framework for this thesis, and the remaining chapters organised around discrete aesthetic categories in the Chinese poetic tradition. In Chapter 1, I will adopt a comparative approach to establishing a connection between the aesthetics regarding “heart-mind” (*xin* 心), “intentions” (*zhi* 志) and “affections” (*qing* 情) in the Chinese poetic tradition and relevant philosophies and some

art and film theories in the Euro-American discourse, such as phenomenology, the expression and auteur theory, among others. The chapter will start with a consideration of the conception of the “heart-mind”, which is in charge of sensorial, affective, and intellectual capabilities. As for “intents”, the embodiment of mental states directed toward the outside world enables me to make a comparison with Edmund Husserl’s ideas of “intentionality” and “life-world”, arguing for our subjective existence inseparable from the experiential world. Taking into account the manifestation of an author’s “intents” in artworks, I will further draw on Rudolf Arnheim’s film aesthetics, as well as the position in *Cahiers du Cinéma* of *politique des auteurs*, to examine how the cinematic medium of the arthouse cinema can be deployed and manipulated by an individual filmmaker so as to display the relationship between his or her subjectivity and the external world.

From the concept of “affections” that implies both emotional states and bodily sensations, my first task is to point out that the cognitive approach to film emotions, with its predominant focus on mainstream cinema, is inappropriate for poetic cinema’s affective qualities. I will align traditional Chinese poetics of *qing* with (1) avant-garde filmmakers’ enthusiasm for the capabilities of cinema’s formal properties to provide audiences with sensory and emotional experiences; (2) phenomenological account of moods in arthouse cinema, as the Chinese poetic tradition is much more concerned with the ways in which moods and atmospheres are conveyed through an integration of feelings and objective situations. Most importantly, this chapter, after examining the affective categories of poetry in medieval China through the theories of Mikel Dufrenne and of Tarja Laine, will further propose that some categories in traditional Chinese

poetics, such as “Lofty and Ancient”, “Intricate Sensuality” and “Flowing Movement”, can be further used to structure the following chapters’ discussions of films by different contemporary auteurs in the world.

Alexander Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy* (1996) and *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001) engender a mood that is more tranquil, ethereal and contemplative. In Chapter 2, I claim that Sokurov’s cinematic rendering of his personal journey to a feudal-era island in Japan in *Oriental Elegy*, and to an art museum with historic paintings in Rotterdam in *Elegy of a Voyage*, is evocative of the affective category in the Chinese poetic tradition of “Lofty and Ancient”, which is characterised by an otherworldly return to antiquity. This chapter, theoretically, also attempts to create a bridge between the poetics of “poetry on objects” in medieval China and Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology. Harman has divided real objects from sensual objects, and real qualities from sensual qualities, which yields a fourfold structure of things. I contend that objects presented in Sokurov’s films can be considered as sensual objects, with sensual or real qualities. In addition, echoing traditional Chinese poetics, Sokurov in his films stresses how a thing is experienced by him as an active subject: not only does he pay careful attention to the thing’s sensuous properties, but he also endeavours to comprehend the significance of the thing through a conscious effort. This chapter concentrates particularly on candles in *Oriental Elegy* and paintings in *Elegy of a Voyage*, which are important motifs in “poetry on objects” as well. Drawing on Harman’s aesthetics, I further claim that viewers, through the aesthetic experience of the film’s defamiliarised appearance, are encouraged to engage with the inscrutable and inaccessible reality in the film, such as the island inhabited by ghosts.

Sikong Tu's affective category of "intricate-beauty", which takes root in Lu Ji's thesis of "intricate sensuality" (Owen 1992: 322-323), allows me to probe into Wong Kar-wai's auteurist preoccupations with romantic encounters, passionate love, wistful farewell, separation and desperate longing in Chapter 3. I will also attempt to link these aesthetic notions, in relation to emotional and sensuous appealing, to Laura U. Marks's and Jennifer M. Barker's phenomenological approach to cinema's materiality and emotional qualities, as well as audiences' visual and haptic experience. On this basis, I scrutinise the sense of touch as manifested in *The Hand's* (2004) presentation of fabric. I claim that the film's production history pertinent to the 2003 SARS pandemic provides its narrative with a principal focus on the touching and the touched through a display of direct skin contact, which, for the audiences, is affecting, sexually attractive, as well as threatening. Moreover, the film's protagonists' passion, longing, and unrequited love can be significantly felt through the fabrics of attractive cheongsams evoking visual pleasure, threat, and tactile sensation. In this chapter, I make use of the philosophy of "affective-responsive resonance" (*ganying* 感應) in early China and of its consequential poetics of *xing* 興, which is usually translated as "stirring", "evocation", "stimulation" or "affective images" (Wong 1983: 2; Yu 1987: 59; Owen 1992: 587; Jia 2004: 58; Sun 2011: xi), to theorise the mechanism for evoking moods and arousing subtle feelings in Wong's films. I argue that the critical term *xing* can be viewed through the prism of Daniel Yacavone's concept of "sensory-affective expression" (2015), but also of Tarja Laine's ideas of "an emotional event" (2010) and "affective glue" (2013). My analysis of the farewell scenes in both *Happy Together* (1997) and *The Grandmaster* (2013) shows that cinematic *xing*

involves the evocation of feelings among audiences by cinema's expressive audio-visual medium, mediated by the fictional characters' emotional and sensory experiences to display their resonance with external realities.

The last chapter links the category of "Flowing Movement", which is concerned with "the operations of the universe" (Owen 1992: 351), with Terrence Malick's films of the 2010s, which are aesthetically characterised by rhythmic movements. Furthermore, my key aim in this chapter is to deploy the conception of *qi* 氣 central to East Asian cultures to probe into the juxtaposition of the microcosm and the macrocosm in Malick's films. In brief, *qi*, often understood as "vital fluids", "material force" and "cosmological energy", designates a dynamic, continuous and all-pervasive force that forms, interconnects and resonates among all the things, animate or inanimate, in the universe; such a philosophy indicates that the environments that surround humans and humans' breath, blood flow, emotions and thoughts can all be attributed to *qi* (Pollard 1978: 45; Page 1988: 11-17; Owen 1992: 584-585; Ogawa 1998: 322; Cheng 2003: 615-616; Wand and Ding 2010: 42; Kim 2011: 8-11). In this regard, through my treatment of Malick's cinema, I wish to put an emphasis on a holistic approach to its aesthetics, where there is a dynamic unity of the inanimate and the animate, the exterior world of myriad things and the interior world of heart-minds, as well as the physical, the psychological and the mental. This concept, therefore, can help me address the transparent presentation in these films of the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans in a strong sense of continuity and oneness under a unified, energetic field of *qi*. Due to *qi*'s fluidity, momentum, dynamics and universal vivification, Malick's cinema can be regarded as a living organism in the

universe, as it externalises the cosmos's primal energy through the work's formal patterns and cinematic flow, as manifested by rhythmic elements, such as editing and camera movements. These films also further establish a resonance between the work's flow of life and its creators' and audiences' psychosomatic apparatus for sensing, moving, feeling and thinking.

Chapter 1. Subjectivity, the Medium and the World

In this chapter, I will outline the philosophical and aesthetic concepts of “heart-mind” (*xin* 心), “intents” (*zhi* 志) and “affections” (*qing* 情), all of which have been critically crucial for the establishment and development of traditional Chinese poetics. I will then further investigate some potential links between these traditional Chinese theories of the arts and Euro-American film aesthetics. On this basis, this chapter will offer a conceptual framework for my analysis in this thesis of a selection of poetic films by contemporary filmmakers around the globe: Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick.

First, I will begin with a philosophical anatomy of the concept of the “heart-mind”, suggesting that this term in early Chinese philosophy involves both the cognitive and the sensual and emotional, and hinges on the dynamic interaction between inner worlds and outer worlds. Second, my discussion of the “intents” is underpinned by (1) Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological concepts of “intentionality” and “life-world”, (2) expressive theory of art adopted by early film theorist Rudolf Arnheim and revisited by Katherine Thomson-Jones and Berys Gaut, and (3) auteurist criticism formulated by critics in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and supported by Pier Paolo Pasolini’s, David Bordwell’s and Paisley Livingston’s defence of the individual authorship in arthouse cinema. Drawing

on all these ideas, I posit that the poetic in films is inseparably linked with an auteur's conscious state coming into close contact with the subjective life-world, individualised expression of a particular outlook, and mental faculties through cinema, as well as artistic and stylised manipulation of the cinematic medium to achieve such expression of personalities and the lived realities.

Third, I meticulously examine the “affections” in traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, a term that indicates our emotions and sensations aroused by some concrete phenomena and felt by the “heart-mind”, the lived body and sense organs. Although Cai Zong-qi's (2020) comparative work draws an analogy between *qing* and the cognitive theory of emotion, my thesis rejects the cognitive approach to film emotion developed by Noël Carroll, Carl Plantinga, and Greg M. Smith, among others, who predominantly focus on audiences' emotional engagement with narrative situations and fictional characters in mainstream films. The fundamental and constructive criticism, from other theorists such as Robert Sinnerbrink, Daniel Yacavone and Amy Coplan, with whom I agree, of cognitivist accounts of cinematic points out the outstanding importance of the research into moods, atmospheres, aesthetic feelings, and sensory experiences in cinema. With the conception of *qing* in traditional Chinese poetics, I propose that the classification of moods in the Chinese poetic tradition can help identify some particular films which fall into traditional Chinese poetics' affective categories. I also suggest that the dynamic interplays among the heart-mind, objects and scenes, canonised in various aesthetic models and concepts throughout traditional Chinese theories of poetry, are able to explain the evocation of moods in poetic cinema, which might be a logical

extension of Sinnerbrink's phenomenological perspective of mood in film studies. While aesthetic cognitivists tend to overlook the contribution of cinema's formal properties to audiences' non-cognitive feelings, close associations between *qing* and other terms pinpointing an artwork's forms highlight sensual feelings and emotional resonance aroused by the cinematic medium. In short, *qing* lets me examine the affective force of poetic cinema.

The Heart-mind in Early Chinese Philosophy

To begin with, it is important to clarify the reason why the term *xin* 心 is often translated into "heart-mind" in academia. Unlike the English words "heart" or "mind" used separately, the translation of *xin* as "heart-mind" can better capture the nuanced understanding of this concept in China, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, sensual and intuitive aspects of human experience. John Berthrong recognises "heart-mind" as "an English neologism that captures the dual role of *xin*", namely, "the emotional and the cognitive aspects of human life" (Berthrong 2003: 796). By adopting this translation, most contemporary scholars agree that the "heart-mind" plays a double role in both affective and cognitive activities, in control of thinking and reasoning on the one hand, but is also responsible for feelings, emotions, as well as sensory and bodily perceptions on the other hand; meanwhile, the "heart-mind" also acts as the interface between the inner layer of selfhood and the external stimuli in natural and human

environments which surround the inner self (Cheng 2001: 302; Plaks 2006: 113; Santangelo 2007: 296; Virág 2014: 204; Chan 2019b: 222; Raphals 2019: 240).

“Heart-mind” occupies a central position within various philosophical traditions of the Chinese intellectual sphere. Admittedly, it is “a significant and debatable philosophic concept” throughout history, though the early discussions of the mind-heart in some classical literature already offered a broad arrange of meanings that would be employed in diverse texts of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism subsequently (Berthrong 2003: 795). The “Record of Music” (ca.1st century BCE) spoke about the interaction between the heart-mind and some objects in the external world: “the human’s heart-mind being moved is caused by objects” (Owen 1992: 51; translation modified; Original Source Dai ca.1st century BCE/2016: 424). Whereas Mencius (372–289BCE) claims that “the faculty of the heart-mind is to think”, and that “by thinking, it apprehends; by not thinking, it fails to apprehend” (Legge 1895/1970: 418; translation modified; Original Source Mencius ca.3rd century BCE/2010: 229), Xunzi (ca.298–238BCE) in his “Discourse on Nature” juxtaposes the emotional states felt by the heart-mind and bodily sensations associated with sensorial faculties in relation to their objects:

Like, dislike, delight, anger, sadness and joy are contained within—these are called the natural affections (*qing* 情). Ears, eyes, nose, mouth and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but they cannot substitute for one another—these are called the natural faculties. The heart-mind dwells within the central cavity so as to control the five faculties—it is called the natural lord. (Hutton 2014: 176; translation modified; Original Source Xun ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 267).

The heart-mind that takes up a central position in the entire human body governs the five senses. In addition, “Nature Derives from Endowment” (ca.3rd century BCE) suggests the heart-mind’s contemplation on affective responses to sensory stimuli in detail:

The way wailing moves the heart-mind is penetrating and severe, while its intensity continues in sorrow and ends in grief. The way pleasure moves the heart-mind is deep and profound, perturbing and exciting, while its intensity is flowing with sorrow, far-reaching with longing. Anxious thoughts generally lead up to grief; joyous thoughts generally lead up to delight. In general, all thoughts use the mind-heart profoundly. Sighing is the orientation of pensive thoughts. Sound changes, thus the heart-mind follows. When the heart-mind changes, the sound also changes correspondingly. (Cook 2012: 722-724; translation modified; Original Source Guodian ca.3rd century BCE/2005: 90).

The psychological content of a thought, so to speak, is in itself coloured by affective qualities and further intensifies the feelings of emotions. More than that, such physical behaviours as lamentation and vocalisation interact with the heart-mind reciprocally.

Not only does the mind-heart in this context carry affective capabilities, but it is also “involved in thinking, contemplating, and reflecting”, as Shirley Chan elucidates. Therefore, the above discussion in “Nature Derives from Endowment” of human’s sensory affective experience formulates “a complex and sensitive mechanism” that coalesces the mental, the physical, and the emotional “into a single sensation” (Chan 2019b: 222). From the viewpoint of comparative philosophy, the Chinese term of *xin* differs significantly from the Platonic or Cartesian perspective that believes in the distinction between the disembodied “mind” in charge of ideas and thoughts, and the “heart” in the body storing desires and emotions (Yu 2007: 27-28). Plato divides the soul

into “three separate agents” – the reasoning part, the appetitive part, and the spirited part – which is accountable for “understanding”, “sensual satisfaction”, and “self-assessment”, respectively (Knuuttila 2014: 467). Descartes’s mind-body dualism maintains that mind and body “can exist independently of each other” (Lagerlund 2014: 34). Paolo Santangelo, in this regard, maintains that “any distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘heart’, ‘reason’ and ‘feeling’, ‘body’ and ‘spirit’” in the West is absent in a Chinese conceptualisation of the “heart-mind” (Santangelo 2000: 245-255; 2007: 296; 2020a: 201-202). This is because the conception of *xin*, as seen by the various texts discussed above, embodies both the intellective and the sensory-affective faculties, though conceptual dichotomies in Chinese philosophy tend to focus on psychological representations in terms of human nature and psychophysical energy, stillness and movement, heavenly principles and personal desires, the inner world and the outer world. Andrew H. Plaks’s analysis of the traditional philosophical speculation on the inner self in China has also indicated that the overt perennial dualities between “inner” and “outer”, between “latent” and “activated”, and between “substance” and “function” are never “exclusive separation”, but “complementary interpenetration” (Plaks 2006: 114-115). These relational ideas in Confucianism admit intricate interconnections between the inner self and the outer world, latent potentials and external influences and interactions, as well as substance and function, while Daoism emphasises the dynamic interplay between opposing forces, which, in a harmonious and unified fashion, are able to contribute to the constant flow of realities. In sum, *xin* is spatially anchored and

insulated inside the body; as the intermediary between inner and outer, it is viewed as a dynamic, hyperactive element affected by external stimuli.

Intentional States, Expression in Art and Auteur Theory

My initial inquiry into poetic cinema begins by considering the canonical statement in the Chinese poetic tradition, which specifies that “poetry articulates intents” (Owen 1992: 26; translation modified; Original Source Shangshu ca.3rd century BCE/2012: 28). To take the aesthetic concept of “intents” (*zhi* 志) as the basic framework of poetic cinema, in this section, I would like to compare the term *zhi* with “intentions” and with “intentionality” in the Euro-American discourse. As *zhi* embodies a certain mental state directed outwards, I argue that this term might be comparable to the phenomenological concept of “intentionality” as defined by Edmund Husserl. “Intentionality”, according to Husserl’s philosophy, stresses our conscious states directed towards and correlated with objects in the world. Although *zhi* is sometimes translated as “intention” (Hartman 1986: 60; Kern 2010: 30), I differentiate “intents” from the aesthetic concept of “intentions” as used by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley. Whereas “intention” merely refers to an artist’s sole aim of producing an artwork, but also overlooks the subjective relation the artist has to the outside world, *zhi* underscores an artist’s relation to the real world outside of the artifact. At this point, I will further consider Husserl’s conception of the life-world that designates our surrounding world as experienced directly and subjectively in our everyday life. Moreover, Husserl’s analysis of the life-

world demonstrates that a self-conscious subject inseparable from the life-world is able to endow it with signification.

Since Confucius's (551–479_{BCE}) and Mencius's (372–289_{BCE}) discussion on "intents" is convinced that an author's literary style can reveal his personality, circumstances and inner mental and affective state (Van Zoeren 1991: 56-57; Owen 1992: 30), traditional Chinese literary thought values a single author's unique personality and personal experience as expressed through poetry. I will compare this with the expression theory in Euro-American aesthetics, suggesting that both theories have considered expression in art as an effective means to present an artist's psychological responses to the external world. Even though there is fear that the artist's expression might be independent of the artwork, I will refer to Noël Carroll, according to whom the artwork's formal properties must play an essential role in terms of how an artist can externalise his or her inner states in the artwork. With regard to cinema, Rudolf Arnheim's theory assures us that the discrepancy between the raw reality and the filmed reality can offer opportunities for filmmakers' expressive purposes. We must, however, be alert to Arnheim's ascription of cinema's expressive qualities to the failure of the film medium to duplicate reality, as the film theorists Berys Gaut and Katherine Thomson-Jones remind us that it is the cinematic medium's remarkable capacities that make possible filmmakers' artistic manipulation and expression.

Although the Chinese poetic tradition has long believed in poetry as a means of disconcealing and revealing its author's lived experiences in the world, the filmmaking

process, particularly that of highly commercialised films, usually involves multiple creative personnel, which has urged C. Paul Sellors and Berys Gaut to develop their strong arguments for collective authorship in film studies. In defence of the authorial role indispensable to poetic cinema's expression, I would like to indicate that a filmmaker's expression of individuality can be specifically found in avant-garde and arthouse cinema, such as that discussed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, David Bordwell and Paisley Livingston. Furthermore, I will refer to the auteur theory put forward by a handful of film critics in the 1950s and 1960s, such as François Truffaut and André Bazin, as they value an auteur-director's outlook and intended meanings across bodies of work. I will particularly draw on Alexandre Astruc and Amédée Ayfre, since both of them have shown keen interest in cinema's capability to reveal an auteur's thoughts and relate the auteur to his or her life-world through the cinematic medium.

Intents, Intention, Intentionality and the Life-world

Before the second century BCE in China, the canonical statement of poetry in the *Book of Documents* (ca.3rd century BCE) and the "Great Preface to Mao's Classic of Poetry" (ca.1st century BCE) has stipulated that *zhi* 志 (intents) is the essence of *shi* 詩 (poetry). Formulating the earliest known principle of poetry in China, the *Book of Documents* defines poetry as the heart-mind's intents:

Poetry articulates intents; songs prolong language.
(Owen 1992: 26; translation modified; Original Source Shangshu
ca.3rd century BCE/2012: 28)

This creed is so unchallengeable that the “Great Preface” reaffirms the contribution of the heart-mind towards poetry:

Poetry means where the intents go. Lying in the heart-mind, they are intents; expressed in words, they are poems. (Owen 1992: 40-41; translation modified; Original Source Mao et al. ca.1st century BCE/2018: 1)

As such a definition of poetry has a dominant position in the Chinese aesthetic tradition (Gao 1986: 339-340; Owen 1992: 37; Levy 2001: 919; Kern 2010: 30), large-scale claims by scholarly contributions have been made to elucidate the term *zhi*. However, a quick review of various translations indicates the bewildering complexity of its meanings. Some popular translations are “intent” (Levy 2001: 920), “intention” (Hartman 1986: 60; Kern 2010: 30), “thought” (Riegel 2001: 108), “the heart’s intent” (Cai 2002: 35), “the intent of the heart [or mind]” (Liu 1975: 69), “what is intended in the mind” (Wang 2015: 8). Steven Van Zoeren has considered *zhi* as “aim”, “goal” or “target” which carries “a guiding preoccupation or orientation” (Van Zoeren 1991: 12, 57). Such explanation implicitly considers *zhi* as a certain mental state that possesses a specific direction. This might be validated by the etymological evidence, as James J.Y. Liu suggests, that *zhi*, constructed by the phonetic *zhi* 之 (to go) and the signific *xin* 心 (heart-mind), has been traditionally understood as “‘where the hearts goes’ (i.e., heart’s wish, or emotional purport) or ‘where the mind goes’ (i.e., mind’s intent, will, or moral purpose)” (Liu 1975: 68). It should be noted that Liu’s approach to *zhi* predominantly follows Xu Shen’s (ca.58–ca.148CE) graphic etymology compiled in the dictionary *Explaining Graphs and Analysing Characters*, but some contemporary scholars have criticised such a method

for its misinterpretation of a few radicals, which actually “provide little or no insight into any sematic features of the characters subsumed under them” (Bottéro and Harbsmeier 2008: 259). In this case, 之 as the phonetic component of *zhi* does not necessarily has any identifiable relation to the term’s meaning.

Stephen Owen’s and Michael A. Fuller’s more recent interpretations of the poetics of *zhi*, nevertheless, do highlight the connection between the internal state and external objects. Owen, translating *zhi* into “what is intently on the mind”, argues that “[*zhi*] is a subjective relation to some content”, and “[*zhi*] is that condition when the mind is fixed on something, a ‘preoccupation’” (Owen 1992: 28). Fuller also views *zhi* as “a mediating term between external objects and the mind in the dynamics of response”, which “provides a more complex internal structure that allows individuation of response both in poetry and in life” (Fuller 2009: 11). All these scholars’ interpretations have converged on the understanding that *zhi*, structurally accompanied by an object-to-be-intent-upon, refers to a mental state with certain orientation towards something in the world, thus signifying the object or aspect that captures the focus and intention of the mind. The object of focus might range from concrete entities to abstract concepts or specific experiences; however, as these readings also stress, the poetics constructed through *zhi* in the context of early Confucianism, particularly before the collapse of the Han Dynasty, often carried political and moral ambitions related to territorial control, power dynamics, and the cultivation of an individual’s moral character. The relationship between the mind and the world, within this framework, is characterised by orientation and engagement. Through the faculty of *zhi*, the mind establishes a direct connection

with the real world, thereby demonstrating how both poetry and political life involve perception, response, and meticulous mental processes.

The Confucian idea of the mind oriented towards objects might be reconcilable with the intentional structure of human consciousness in phenomenology. Etymologically, *zhi*'s embodiment of "where the [heart-mind] goes" (Liu 1975: 68), and of "what is intently on the mind" (Owen 1992: 28), corresponds very closely to "intentionality". Such a term is derived from the Latin verb *intendo* indicating "to aim or point at, or to extend or stretch": while Saint Augustine equated *intentio* with "thought or attention focused on or aimed at something", Elizabeth Anscombe observed that "aiming one's mind at (*intendere animun in*) is like aiming one's bow at (*intendere arcum in*)" (Carman 2008: 31). I assume *zhi* is compatible with the phenomenological concept of "intentionality", which was formulated by Edmund Husserl in his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913). Husserl's concept of "intentionality" highlights consciousness's directedness towards an object: "under intentionality we understand the own peculiarity of mental processes 'to be consciousness of something'" (Husserl 1913/1983: 200). Intentionality necessitates a connection between the mental state and the object intended upon (Langdridge 2007: 13; Smith et al. 2009: 13; Priest 2014: 160). Intentionality, thus, intimates the direct connection between the process happening in consciousness and the object brought to the mind's attention in this very process: our consciousness is always consciousness of something, and that something – the object of which we are intent upon – might be a "real" object perceived in the world or a "virtual" one by means of an act of remembrance or imagination. The bottom line of intentionality,

therefore, is about object-directedness: through the structure of intentionality presenting things in certain ways, we experience—"intend" or are conscious of—things (Zahavi 2003: 14; Smith 2007: 26). Thus, we do not merely love, fear, see or judge, but all these subjective experiences inherently prescribe their objective experiential correlate: the subjects of any experience are always directed toward a beloved, something fearful, an object seen, and state of affairs judged.

Meanwhile, *zhi* usually specifies a poet's subjective response to the outside world through poetry. Owen argues that "when [*zhi*] occurs one is stirred by something in the external world" and then differentiates *zhi* from the concept of "intention" in Euro-American aesthetics. Whereas "intention" accentuates an author's voluntary purpose of creating a "literary artifact", *zhi* is "a relation to some object, event, or possibility in the living world outside of poetry" (Owen 1992: 28). Namely, *zhi* signifies the ways in which an author is related to the living world outside of the artwork, the world in which the author's mind is stirred by some certain objects, events and circumstances. For that reason, though *zhi* is frequently translated as "intention", it should be distinguished from the concept of "intention" as discussed particularly by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, "intention is design or plan in the author's mind"; however, they argue that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary work" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946: 468-469). The reason why they assume that a poet's particular purpose of producing a poem is unworthy of a critic's judgement on its aesthetic values is because the poem, for them, "is detached from the author at birth and goes about the

world beyond his power to intend about it or control it" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946: 470). Wimsatt and Beardsley insist that, due to the objective status of a finished poem as a self-sufficient object, a critic making an aesthetic evaluation of the poem should not take into account its author's purpose of composing it. Historically, Wimsatt and Beardsley, by establishing New Criticism in the postwar United States, rejected the idea of seeking the author's intention as a logical fallacy and argued for the autonomy of the literary work, insisting that a poem's meaning and value should be derived solely from its formal elements and internal coherence. This perspective was later embraced by structuralists in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Roland Barthes, who, arguing in *The Death of Author* (1967) that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1967/1977: 148), foregrounded the reader's engagement and interpretation of the text that invites active participant in creating meanings through dynamic reading experience.

It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that the artist as embodied in the artwork is usually a conscious and communicative subject. While Wimsatt and Beardsley prioritise the autonomy of the finished poem, we should not overlook the agency and intentionality of the artist as they imbue their work with meaning. Noël Carroll has challenged the legitimacy of Wimsatt and Beardsley's claim and considers an artist as a "human being (who) is saying to us", because he believes that "art is obviously in part a matter of communication" (Carroll 2001: 174-175). Carroll's fundamental point, thus, considers the artist as the one who endeavours to manifest one's viewpoint on society, politics, morality or philosophy in an artifact. Likewise, John Farrell indicates a number of errors

and omissions in Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay. When they regard intention as "the form of future planning", Wimsatt and Beardsley "treat the intentions embodied in a work as if they were singular" and fail to realise that an artwork "is typically the product of a complex nexus of intentions" (Farrell 2017: 42). Farrell's critique of Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument suggests that their overemphasis on an artist's purpose of producing an artwork contributes to their neglect of the communicative and practical dimensions of the author's intentions. That is to say, an author usually performs some communicate actions to bring forth a work's content and information, as well as its intended meanings; meanwhile, the author's composition is motivated by some practical intentions, resulting from "the author's condition or the condition of the world around him", to "influence opinion", "change the world", or to "keep the world the same" (Farrell 2017: 36, 38). In short, both Carroll and Farrell acknowledge the ways in which the artist's conscious decisions, experiences, and communicative intent shape the artistic expression and can further influence the reader's meaning-making process regarding the reception, evaluation, and interpretation and of the artwork. Given that an author has the desire to display the relation of an artist, as a social being, to the outside world, *zhi* in the Chinese poetic tradition also focuses not so much on a poet's specific goal of composing a poem, but on the correlation between the poet and the surrounding world.

Pauline Yu's analysis of the aesthetic statement in the "Great Preface" suggests its special emphasis on "the seamless connection between the individual and the world", "the connection between subject and object or among objects", as well as the "contact and interaction with the world". The subject's strong correlation with the world and

objects, accordingly, pushes ancient Chinese poets to consider poetry as a means by which one can “simultaneously reflect, affect, and effect” the external world (Yu 1987: 32-33). In consideration of the poet deeply engaging in the experiential world, I assume Owen is justified in arguing that *zhi*, derived from mental activities responding to some specific event or experience in the physical world, is symptomatic of the correlation between “psychological realities” and “particular experiences of the world”, which gives birth to a Chinese poet’s works (Owen 1981: 72-73). In regard to the world of the poet’s subjective experience, following phenomenology outlined, I wish to stress that central to Husserl’s thought is his ongoing investigation into the subjective world as experienced in everyday life, as epitomised by the term “Lebenswelt” (Life-world).

As early as 1913, Husserl has already maintained that the cognitive subject, charged with manifold conscious acts, continuously belongs to one’s “surrounding world” (Husserl 1913/1983: 53-54). In 1929, he further asserts that human existence “is always related consciously to an existent practical world”, but also that “a community of men and each particular man are vitally immersed in a concrete surrounding world, are related to it in undergoing” (Husserl 1929/1960: 135). Husserl herein is emphatic that a human being with one’s conscious existence is always related to an existent practical world, namely the concrete surrounding life-world given to not only each individual but also each human community, both naturally and culturally. Later on, Husserl, in his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1936), is concerned with the crucial distinction between the objective scientific world and the subjective life-world: while the former, constructed

out of “a theoretical-logical abstraction”, is, by and large, neither “perceivable” nor “experienceable”, the latter can actually be experienced by us in a rather concrete and subjective way (Husserl 1936/1970: 127). Additionally, whereas the scientific world as given abstractly and objectively is biased towards theoretical idealisation in fields such as physics and mathematics, the life-world, as Dan Zahavi has summarised, “is given concretely, sensuously, and intuitively” (Zahavi 2003: 126-129). Since one’s subjective experience takes place in the life-world, Husserl attaches central importance to the life-world as experienced in everyday life, insisting that all acts of human existence, whether outward actions or cognitive behaviours, are directed to such a concrete life-world.

Expression in Arts and Cinematic Art’s Expressive Qualities

In the Chinese poetic tradition, *zhi* is, by and large, meant to signal a particular poet projecting a subjective state in poetry, resulting in the equation of the poet’s work with the poet’s mind. This can be ascribed to Confucius’s (551–479_{BCE}) and Mencius’s (372–289_{BCE}) confidence in the power of written language to reveal the writer’s inner states. In the *Zuo Tradition* (ca. 3rd century _{BCE}), there is a statement attributed to Confucius:

There is a record of someone’s thoughts which says: the language is to be adequate to what is on the person’s mind, and the patterning is to be adequate to the language. If a person does not use language, who will know what is on his mind? (Owen 1992: 29; translation modified; Original Source *Zuo* ca. 4th century _{BCE}/2012: 1363)

In correlating a person’s thoughts and his or her literary patterning, Confucius stresses the language’s capability to manifest the person’s inner self. Considering this statement

as “an important collateral text for the canonical definition, ‘the poem articulates what is intently on the mind’”, Stephen Owen indicates its underlying assumption: an author’s inner truth is visible, manifest, and immanent in his or her words (Owen 1992: 30). As a result, as Owen further claims, Chinese literature has later enjoyed a massive increase in self-revelation to such an extent that literary works are essentially likened to a way of having knowledge of persons. Mencius, accepting the eclectic Guan Zhong’s (ca. 720–645_{BCE}) conception of *qi* 氣 associated with vital fluid, psychophysical state and the physiological phenomenon of breath (Berthrong 2003: 796), also discusses the organic system between *zhi*, *qi*, the “heart-mind” (*xin* 心) and language too. Mencius takes the position that *zhi* is “an integral element of the personality, connected to and ‘leading’ the emotional nature” (Van Zoeren 1991: 56-57). From Mencius’s dictum, Steven Van Zoeren maintains that, since *zhi* is connected with personality and embodies the completeness of a person’s being, “the self-revelation of *zhi*” through language, either involuntarily or straightforwardly, becomes an important way of knowing an individual’s personhood (Van Zoeren 1991: 57). In traditional Chinese poetics, a poet’s works, therefore, become a sincere, genuine imprint of his own personality and experience.

Added to this is Gao Yougong’s elucidation: whereas the phrase “poetry articulates intent”, “formed the basis of an ‘expressive theory of poetry,’ which has dominated the Chinese lyrical tradition until the present”, the Confucian viewpoint on the reciprocity between the mind and its expression in language guarantees that the communication and perpetuation of an inner state through artistic language inclines towards “both the expression of self and the recognition of the self” (Gao 1986: 339-340). Even though the

Confucian analysis of correlation between the mind and the language has shaped the Chinese poetic tradition fundamentally, I think there are three issues that matter in terms of both art and cinema: How can such a poetic tradition link to the expression theory in Euro-American aesthetics? Can cinema, relying upon the camera as a recording device, have expressive qualities? If so, how can cinema, understood as a collaborative art, permit a single filmmaker's expression? I will deal with the former two questions in this section, before examining the auteur theory closely linked to the last question in the next.

According to Li Zehou (1930–2021), a prominent, influential contemporary Chinese philosopher since the 1950s, there might be a degree of imprecision in drawing a parallel between “the original meaning of ‘poetry gives voice to the intent’” and “the present-day expressionism”. However, the thesis that “poetry gives voice to the intent” eventually referred to something similar to “emotional expression” and even to “the expression of individual aspirations and feelings” after the collapse of the Han Dynasty (Li 1988/2010: 34-38). Although, as Li claims, the quest for self-expression in the context of Confucian aesthetic philosophy is inseparable from the conveyance of political significance, its increasing emphasis on the expression of individual thoughts and feelings means that Chinese aesthetic theory is not so much interested in “imitation” or “representation” as in the mediation between art and politics, as well as between personal feelings and artistic forms. In a similar way, Pauline Yu also points out some major differences between the poetics formulated by Plato and Aristotle and the Chinese poetic tradition initiated by the *Book of Documents* and later by the “Great Preface”. The foundational European theories of poetry start from the assumption that an artwork is “mimetic” and

“fictive” so that the poet is nothing but an “artificer”, namely a producer manufacturing fictive artefacts which “represent yet are different from, other than, the phenomena of the concrete, sensible world”. In contrast, the “Great Preface” puts forward “a classical statement of the expressive-affective conception of poetry prevalent in Asian literary theory” (Yu 1987: 19, 31-37). Rather than focusing on the imitation of an action, Yu argues, theorists such as Lu Ji (261–303_{CE}), Zhong Rong (468–518_{CE}) and Liu Xie (465–522_{CE}), driven by the “Great Preface”, argue that a literary work has its origin in a network of pre-existing correlations between the poet’s psychological states and the sensible, external world around him, which attracts his sensory perception, elicits emotional responses, and further provokes intuitive contemplation in terms of literary composition.

In this context, it would be worthwhile to consider the sharp contrast between art as expression and art as representation that stands out since the end of the eighteenth century. Highlighting such a contrast, Noël Carroll refers to an outstanding subjective turn in Euro-American aesthetics, which started from the Romantic movement, and which still has a strong influence on contemporary artistic practice. Specifically, the artists’ desire to imitate “the actions of humans”, “the appearance of nature”, and “the manner of society” has been replaced by their strong interest in exploring their “subjective or ‘inner’ world of experience”, so that the world for them “is presented from an emotionally saturated pointed of view” (Carroll 1999: 59-60). As Carroll illustrates, some outward scenes may be contemplated by a poet, but that scene only has aesthetic value if it stimulates the poet to reflect upon how he or she responds to it from a very personal point of view. Such an opinion has been prevalent among traditional Chinese

poets due to the theoretical writings of Lu Ji and Liu Xie. Lu Ji argues for a dynamic process in which a poet's intimate contact with the external world gives rise to his series of complex mental activities, which becomes an essential precondition for composing a poem:

He moves along with the four seasons and sighs at their passing on,
Peers on all the things of the world, broods on their profusion,
Grieves for the falling leaves in strong autumn,
Rejoices in the pliant branches in sweet spring;
His mind shivers, taking the frost to heart;
His intent is remote, looking down on the clouds.
(Owen 1992: 90; Original Source Lu ca. 280_{CE}/2002: 20)

Similarly, Liu Xie's argument in "An Exegesis of Poetry", that "when moved by objects one sings of one's intent totally spontaneously" (Yu 1987: 34; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 56), also considers the poet's spontaneous expression as the outcome of the reaction of his state of mind to objective phenomena. All these arguments might be subsumed under the transmission model of expression theories as summarised by some scholars: an artwork necessarily involves the communication with the audience of an artist's particular experience of some inner mental states (Carroll 1999: 61-62; Ridley 2005: 212; Matravars 2009: 264).

However, there is fear that if a piece of art is nothing more than a vehicle for the expression of an artist's internal states, the content of the artist's feelings might be conveyed by some other vehicles, too. This means that one work of art can be replaced by something else that contains those feelings as effectively as that artwork (Ridley 2003: 212-213; Matravars 2009: 264). As a solution, Carroll proposes that expression theorists

might include “the relevant media for making art” on the artist’s process of exploring, reflecting upon and clarifying his or her emotional states (Carroll 1999: 63-65). By this, Carroll means that the manifestation of an artist’s emotional states in an artwork must be achieved through the formal elements of art, such as lines, shapes, colours, tempos, rhythms and dynamics. Ridley also reminds us that, to understand artworks as “objects having expressive properties capable of revealing and of being explained by the feelings of artists”, theorists must take specific actions to investigate the very different kinds of resources of the individual arts, ranging from the gesture in dance to the ambience in painting, available for “artistic manipulation” and “artistic expression” (Ridley 2005: 221-222). We should be concerned with whether cinema possesses expressive properties as such, an issue that is related to whether cinema can be counted as an art.

At this point, I would like to take account of the defence of cinema as an art raised by Rudolf Arnheim, who is “working under the assumption that art ought to be expressive” (Thomson-Jones 2008: 8), but also an astute observer of cinema’s “expressive capacity” (Gaut 2010: 25). Influenced by the theory of the Gestalt psychology, that the processes of vision “organize the sensory raw material creatively” rather than “produce mechanical recordings of the outer world”, Arnheim claims that the artwork “is simply not an imitation or selective duplication of reality but a translation of observed characteristics into the forms of a given medium” (Arnheim 1957/1958: 3). Hence, the difference between an objective outer reality and the reality presented in an artwork innovatively, according to its medium’s formal features, urges Arnheim to investigate ways in which some formal properties of the cinematic medium, which obstruct an exact copy of reality, can actually

offer excellent potential for expressive purposes. To summarize Arnheim's views on cinema, he emphasises that the inherent limitations of cinema as a mechanical device for recording the reality as it is provide practical opportunities for artistic interpretation, expressive sources, and the generation of meaning. In his thorough analysis of silent films, Arnheim identifies certain aspects of the medium that possess an element of unreality, enabling filmmakers to manipulate and harness its potential. (Andrew 1976: 28; Thomson-Jones 2008: 8). As it is, Arnheim's *Film* (1933) technically illustrates the incapacity of the cinematic medium to record the physical world in accordance with our natural perception, further encouraging filmmakers in their artistic usage of the discrepancies in the visual perception of shape and depth, the absence of colours, space-time continuum and non-visual sense experiences. By this means, a filmmaker is able to "create new realities" and "show the world not only as it appears objectively but also subjectively" (Arnheim 1933/1958: 133). We can consider Arnheim's analysis of a black-and-white film: the difference between its cinematic image with a range of grey tones and the real-world scene with a full range of actual colours brings forth the contrast between light and shade, which is not only decorative, but can also symbolically convey conceptual ideas, such as the battle between good and evil, and the opposition between optimism and pessimism.

But, then, why does Arnheim assert that the colours in a colour film fall short of "artistic possibilities" and fail to "provide the artist with a potentially useful medium of expression", and why does he cast considerable doubts over the sound film and dismiss the introduction of sound as "a radical artistic impoverishment" (Arnheim 1938/1958: 66,

230)? The reason why Arnheim shows a contempt for the colour and sound in film is because he assumes that “the technical development of the motion picture” facilitates the “mechanical imitation of nature” (Arnheim 1938/1958: 154). Technological advances would satisfy the desire to represent the real world; for Arnheim, however, what makes the cinematic medium capable of the artistic expression of thoughts is its incapacity to reproduce the appearance of reality faithfully. However, the introduction of sound, as Thomson-Jones argues, also presents the filmmaker with “more choices for how to tell a story, convey meaning and evoke emotions”; therefore, when Arnheim equates “the limitations of film as a recording device” with “the expressive potential of the film medium”, he is totally oblivious of the cinematic medium’s extra capacities and its sheer varieties of artistic recourses available to filmmakers’ expression (Thomson-Jones 2008: 11-12). Berys Gaut also identifies a defect in Arnheim’s argument by suggesting that “it is by virtue not of the limitations of the medium, but by virtue of the medium’s capacities to record reality in different ways that film can possess expressive properties, can communicate thoughts” (Gaut 2010: 41). In their critique of Arnheim’s theory, Thomson-Jones and Gaut ascertain the source of cinematic art’s expressive properties, which derives not from filmmakers’ usage of the film medium’s limitations on producing a total copy of reality. Instead, the extra capacities of the medium enable filmmakers to present reality in so many different ways so as to put artistic interpretations on that reality.

Auteur Cinema and Its Presentation of Authorial Presence

As indicated above, an artwork's potential for revealing the author's personality and experience has been one of the most widely held assumptions in the Chinese aesthetic tradition. As Dore J. Levy claims, "writing as a mirror of an author's personality is fundamental to the Chinese tradition", and that there is an inextricable link between the continuity of Chinese culture and the traditional belief in the writing functioning "both as a transmission of individual voices and as a window on the past" (Levy 2001: 916-917). Similarly, Stephen Owen, in "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography" (1986), argues: the Chinese poem is, by its very definition, "the stuff of inner life, the person's *zhi* 志, 'intent', and *qing* 情, 'emotions' or 'subjective disposition'" (Owen 1986: 74). While Owen maintains that the Chinese poetic tradition directly equates a poem with a unique document of its author's inner life and a potential presentation of his autobiographical data, the collaborative essence of filmmaking practice unavoidably raises doubts as to the existence of a single filmmaker's self-expression in film production.

Some film scholars, such as V.F. Perkins and C. Paul Sellors, share the opinion that cinematic production as one man's own creation is inconceivable, but also unattainable. Instead, they maintain that the filmmaking process, benefited from both the director and other staff in the film crew, inevitably involves variegated personalities, inconsistent intentions, variable control and different competences (Perkins 1972: 158-159; Sellors 2007: 270). Berys Gaut even provides a resolute support for the multiple-authorship viewpoint on what he calls the "mainstream film". Defining the "mainstream

film” as “one that has at least two people in the key production roles” (Gaut 2010: 106), Gaut then argues that the vital component of a film, formed by screenplay, direction, camerawork, performance, editing and musical scores and so on, makes it so difficult and ridiculous to imagine a single entity having the talent for and being competent in all these essential tasks. Since the filmmaking involves “artistic collaboration”, such “a difference between the ontology of traditional films and literature” causes Gaut to distrust the “auteurist programme” and the “single-authorship thesis” (Gaut 2010: 125). Even so, these film theories, among others, do acknowledge in different degrees the existence of a single individual’s expression in some filmmaking practices.

Perkins has mentioned the difference between the personal film and the factory film, suggesting that a good film is definitely an expression of an auteur, who aspires to communicate with the audience, thus giving rise to “the stamp of one predominating creative mind” in films (Perkins 1972: 173). Though Gaut belittles the single-authorship view in cinema, Stan Brakhage’s *Mothlight* (1963), for him, is an illustrative example of the films that are “the products of a single individual”, because “only one person makes the film” (Gaut 2010: 106). Given Gaut’s scope of study, it would seem that his so-called mainstream cinema deliberately excludes this kind of avant-garde cinema outside of the film industry. It is also especially noteworthy that Gaut’s distinction between cinema and poetry arises from the fact that a poem is created by an individual poet and can be identified on the basis of the writer, the text itself and the time of its composition. By contrast, cinema, for Gaut, is achieved from various casual sources, ranging from “visual and acoustic properties” to “recordings of performances”, so that it lacks any

individuation-condition (Gaut 2010: 126). However, what is missing in this view is an understanding that the uniqueness and individuality of the filmmaker's cinematic expression truly does exist. Pier Paolo Pasolini, for instance, regards Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) as the canon of "pure expressivity" (Pasolini 1965/2000: 43), as its pure cinematic images are foregrounded and committed to conveying dream-like qualities and presenting unconscious memories. In addition to avant-garde cinema that is largely dependent on the skills and abilities of an individual filmmaker, immune from cooperation with a film crew divided into various departments and comprised of a large number of professional staff members, the single-authorship thesis that receives tacit approval in academia also relates to the arthouse cinema that recognises its filmmaker as the one inclined and able to communicate with viewers.

David Bordwell in "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" (1979) discusses two principles motivating arthouse cinema's narratives. While "realism" habitually relates the art cinema to real locations and real problems in the society, "authorial expressivity" uses "psychologically complex-characters" as an excuse for exploring mental states (Bordwell 1979: 57-58). In some instances, such an expressive individual becomes the author him/herself, the result being that the audiences are encouraged to ponder about "'who' communicates (what is the film saying?) and 'who' expresses (what is the artist's personal vision?)" (Bordwell 1979: 59). Namely, in art cinema, such as *Wild Strawberries* (Ingmar Bergman, 1951), *8½* (Federico Fellini, 1963) and *Blow-up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), due to its lack of identifiable stars or familiar genres, the presence of the filmmaker, who either portrays a biographical individual within the film or organises

the film's formal properties, becomes crucial to the film's narrative structures to facilitate the audience's understanding. In terms of the authorship of arthouse cinema, Paisley Livingston considers Ingmar Bergman's *Winter Light* (1963) as "a case of successful individual authorship" (Livingston 1997: 143-148). Livingston's careful analysis of *Winter Light*—a studio production of the Swedish Film Industry—then suggests that, though it is not a case of an independent film with an individual filmmaker who realises expressive intentions, Bergman is still the cinematic author of *Winter Light*. As Bergman "wrote his own script" but also "exercised a high degree of control over" the film's images, sounds, performances, scores and montage, the actual author's activities contribute significantly to "the film's expressive qualities" (Livingston 1997: 143-145). Even so, Gaut does not accept Livingston's argument, and one of the issues at the centre of the dispute is the relation between the actor/actress's performance and the director's expression.

For Livingston, the actress Harriet Andersson's performance in Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1953) has not, whether explicitly or implicitly, expressed "her own attitudes in the film" in terms of the production of the cinematic work; by contrast, Bergman's crucial decision about modifying Andersson's performance through lighting and camera position facilitates his expression of various themes, such as the "painful ambivalence about parenthood and about traditional gender roles" (Livingston 2009: 77-82). In Gaut's opinion, conversely, as the Kuleshov effect shows that artistic meanings are derived both from the editing and from the performance, multiple collaborators should also be accounted as co-authors. Nevertheless, Gaut still, reluctantly, agrees that the filmmaker who possesses supreme authority over other collaborators is able to contribute "the

most important ‘voice’” and “expressive and artistic properties” to the film (Gaut 2010: 122-123). Indeed, as Pasolini’s analysis of *Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964) shows, the neurotic protagonist played by Monica Vitti promotes the manifestation of Antonioni’s formalistic vision of the world. Accordingly, the filmmaker of the cinema of poetry can express freely “in the first person singular” by virtue of such pretextual character, who is exactly comparable with the filmmaker in terms of culture, language and psychology (Pasolini 1965/2000: 47-49, 53). In sum, although there is increasing concern about the collective authorship in the mainstream cinema, I am still certain of the existence of a filmmaker’s personal expression in the avant-garde and arthouse cinema, both of which are not commercial production of the film industry aiming at entertaining the mass audience. The promotion of the expression of a filmmaker’s personality actually has an illustrious heritage in the so-called *la politique des auteurs*, coined by François Truffaut in “A certain Tendency of the French cinema” (1954) and carried forward by André Bazin and other critics in *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

Launching an outspoken attack on the “Tradition of Quality” due to its excessive reliance on literary classics, Truffaut voices his wholehearted approval of Jacques Tati’s performance, Jacques Becker’s usage of soliloquies, Max Ophüls’s direction of actors, and Abel Gance’s unique application of optical instrument, all of which are characterised by the peculiar presence of inventive scripts and cinematic devices (Truffaut 1954/1976: 224-237). The opening of Bazin’s “On the *politique des auteurs*” (1957) declares: “*Cahiers du Cinéma* is thought to practice the *politique des auteurs*”, of which Bazin does not disapprove (Bazin 1957/1985: 19). Quoting Jacques Rivette, Bazin defines an

auteur as “someone who speaks in the first person” (Bazin 1957/1985: 25). For Bazin, the auteur is the one who, in a series of cinematic works, presents the same story, delivers the same value judgements, as well as expresses consistent thematic concerns. However, as Bazin in the essay continues to point out that “paradoxically, the supporters of the *politique des auteurs* admire the American cinema” (Bazin 1957/1985: 27), it turns out that auteurism, acknowledgedly, is, in itself, rather complex and polemical. Bazin regards Hollywood, where “the greatest technical possibilities are offered to the director”, as “the genius of the system”, namely, “a base of operations for creative freedom” (Bazin 1957/1985: 27). In other words, in consideration of *Cahiers du Cinéma*’s publication of detailed studies, undertaken by then critics such as Truffaut and Rivette, of films directed by Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Orson Welles, Howard Hawks and other filmmakers of the sophisticated studio system, Bazin advises these critics to take a very cautious approach to the conception of auteur, which might be, inseparably, underpinned by the industrial, financial, and technological aspects of cinematic productions.

Peter Wollen’s application of the structuralist approach to his study of works by Hawks and Ford earmarks auteur-structuralism that views auteur cinema not as the individual expression of subjective vision but as some certain systems constructed through hidden binary oppositions; in doing so, critics can analyse “a director’s ultimate themes” on the basis of a systematic study of his or her films as a whole (Buckland 2014: 51-55). And yet, early auteurism’s focus on “dominant, mainstream cinema”, typified by those “films of certain ‘great’ directors such as John Ford or Howard Hawks” (Cook 1977/1981: 273), is problematic for Pam Cook, who, in her essay “The Point of Self-

expression in *Avant-garde Film*" (1977), questions why auteurism has nothing to say about the artisanal mode production of experimental cinema that is highly personal and poetic in its rejection of the conventions of commercial films. It should be noted, however, that *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s phenomenological approaches to cinema do consider how films can provide uniquely cinematic presentations of "concrete life experience in a more direct and authentic" fashion, which seems relatively absent in "classical Hollywood productions and popular French films" (Yacavone 2016: 161). As the current discussion of the Chinese poetic tradition has pinpointed the artistic expression of an individual's engagement in a particular world with a unique vision of a life lived, I wish to consider Alexandre Astruc's and Amédée Ayfre's emphasis on the authorial presence in auteur cinema also deserves special attention. Their arguments, if only indirectly, mesh with the above phenomenological approach to traditional Chinese poetics highlighting the expression of the author's experiential existence. Astruc's theory gives due prominence to the expression of thoughts in films. Ayfre's phenomenological research into cinema's relation to the reality stresses the direct correlation between a filmmaker's worldview as manifested in films and the surrounding world as experienced.

"The cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression," Astruc asserts in "The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Caméra-stylo" (1948), adding that it becomes "a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language" (Astruc 1948/1968: 17-18). The cinema, for Astruc, is foremost a language by which a filmmaker as an author is capable of expressing his thoughts, obsessions and meditations. In particular, Astruc

regards the camera that relates objects to objects and characters to objects as a major contributor to the conveyance of thought:

All thought, like all feeling, is a relationship between one human being and another human being or certain objects which form part of his universe. It is by clarifying these relationships, by making a tangible allusion, that the cinema can really make itself the vehicle of thought. (Astruc 1948/1968: 20)

In terms of illuminating such relationships, Astruc, later in “What is mise-en-scène” (1959), contends that “the cinema assumes a certain trust in the world just as it is”, citing Kenji Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) and Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) as notable examples (Astruc 1959/1985: 266-267). The mise-en-scène in *Ugetsu Monogatari*, for Astruc, crystalises Mizoguchi’s long-standing contemplation on physical violence and the universe’s horror and tenderness. Presenting the downtown Hiroshima in a state of widespread devastation, Resnais’s rapid tracking shots, to the accompaniment of the French actress’s soliloquies, testify the humane attentiveness to the severe trauma and barren landscape. From Astruc through Truffaut to Bazin, critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* have tended to regard an auteur’s individuality as the generative agent for filmmaking.

Ayfre’s phenomenological approach to cinema, without exception, also follows such an inclination to treat auteur cinema as a clear manifestation of the filmmaker’s personality and worldview. Andrew Quicke’s summary of Ayfre’s theory, which is put forward in *Le cinéma et la foi chrétienne* (1960/1988), indicates that Ayfre is concerned not only with the extent to which cinema can reveal the truth of reality, but also with the

worldview of a filmmaker who has an overwhelming desire to communicate with viewers; consequentially, the main criterion of truth becomes the auteur's sincerity (Quicke 2005: 241). Indeed, in "Neo-Realism and Phenomenology" (1952), Ayfre has detected Italian neorealist filmmakers' authentic expressions of humanistic attitudes, and their works' "passive 'objectivity'" and "neutral presentation" is by no means "cold" or "impersonal" (Ayfre 1952/1985: 184). According to Daniel Yacavone's reading of Ayfre's essay, by means of detectable stylistic choices, such as location shooting, narrative ellipses and construction of nondramatic time, neorealist auteurs are creative individuals who often express recognisable emotions and cinematic embodied themes (Yacavone 2016: 161-162). Ayfre's review of *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) shows us that Roberto Rossellini's human attitude towards the tragic death of a child is not unnoticeable, and even the rejection of style in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) should also be designated as a particular form of expressionism in consideration of Vittorio De Sica's painstaking efforts to make viewers unconscious of the existence of cinematic devices.

Furthermore, Andrew's reading of Ayfre's theory suggests a symbiotic relationship between the materials of cinematic medium and the filmmaker's mentality correlated with a surrounding world given to the filmmaker subjectively:

The author's intentions are valuable only when they are modified and formed in symbiosis with the world. The film, far from being a cold record of the world, is a record of that symbiotic rapport between intention and resistance, between author and material, mind and matter. (Andrew 1976: 249)

Ayfre's emphasis on Italian neorealist filmmakers' outlook and various aesthetic choices, inseparable from their social conditions, therefore, attests that an auteur's state of mind as manifested in the cinematic medium is very strongly correlated with the life-world. According to Yacavone, apart from Ayfre, the first-generation French phenomenological film criticism indebted to auteur theory has acknowledged communicative filmmakers' authorial expression. In particular, Maurice Merleau-Ponty foregrounds the "artistically creative filmmakers" who can create "singular expressive-aesthetic form(s)" to present a personal vision of reality, "which Merleau-Ponty describes as possessing both 'musical' and 'poetic' aspects" (Yacavone 2016: 171-173). In sum, these theories in *Cahiers du Cinéma* praise an auteur's expression of personality, but also accentuate ways in which the auteur's conscious manipulation of the cinematic medium is able to exhibit signs of subtle correlations the auteur has to the world, as experienced subjectively.

An Outline of *Qing* in Traditional Chinese Aesthetics and Philosophy

In addition to *zhi* in traditional Chinese poetics discussed above, the term *qing* 情 is one of the most important aesthetic concepts in theories of the arts throughout history of China, which I will focus on in the rest of this chapter. The basic meanings of *qing* involve two equivalents: "affections", "emotions", "feelings", and "subjective disposition" on the one hand, and "facts", "essence", "reality", "circumstances" and "facts of a case" on the other hand (Owen 1992: 585; Santangelo 2000: 244; Hansen 2003: 620; Huang 2016: 73).

In various Pre-Qin classics, *qing* mainly refers to “basic instincts”. However, in the *Classic of Poetry*, a single occurrence of *qing* denotes the feelings of romantic love, while various usage examples of *qing* from *Elegies of Chu* indicate “emotions” and “feelings” (Eifring 2003: 11-15). With regard to aesthetic theories, this term emerges in several treatises on the art of music during the Warring States period: first, a text entitled “Nature Derives from Endowment” in the *Bamboo Slip Manuscripts from the Chu Tomb at Guodian*; then Xunzi’s (ca.298–238_{BCE}) “Discourse on Music”; and then the *Book of Rites*’s “Record of Music”, which upholds Xunzi’s aesthetic thoughts, and which is subsequently appropriated by the “Great Preface”. Of course, both the *Classic of Poetry* and the lost *Classic of Music* belonged to the six fundamental Confucian Classics, *liujing*, and poetry at that time was commonly sung and frequently accompanied by a dance performance (Liu 2014a: 227; Hutton and Harold 2016: 169). It is no wonder, then, that the poetics of the “Great Preface” borrow great quantities of textual materials from the aesthetics of music to discuss the dynamic process of expressing and engaging in affections through poetry, music, and even bodily movements. From the third century _{CE} onwards, *qing* for aestheticians means “deep feelings”, and for writers and critics of fiction and drama it means either erotic or romantic “love” (Eifring 2003: 11-34). Most significantly, during the Six Dynasties, Lu Ji’s (261–303_{CE}) thesis, “poetry follows from the affections and is sensually intricate” (Owen 1992: 130; translation modified; Original Source Lu ca. 280_{CE}/2002: 99), redefined the art of poetry in medieval China, thereby, as David Der-wei Wang stresses, “inaugurating the lyrical tradition of Chinese poetics” (Wang 2015: 8). Meanwhile, according to Chen Guying’s statistical analysis, Liu Xie

(465–522_{CE}) used the term *qing* 146 times in his magnum opus *The Literary Mind and the Sculpting of Dragons*, thus putting a considerable “emphasis on *qing* as a stylistic choice” and on “lyrical literature firmly rooted in tradition of emotional release” (Chen 2015: 344). For Neo-Confucian philosophers, such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200_{CE}) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529_{CE}), they tended to use the concept of *qing* with a rather skeptical attitude in the sense of human instincts rather than any specific emotions; however, from the late Ming Dynasty to the middle of the Qing Dynasty, a group of writers and scholars in their discussions on poetry, prose, novels and dramatic works, as represented by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616_{CE}), Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610_{CE}), Li Yu (1611–1680_{CE}) and Yuan Mei (1716–1798_{CE}), continued to reflect on the overwhelming dominance of affections, the genuine expression of passions, as well as the fulfillment of natural human desires in artworks, leading to the so-called “cult of *qing*” of that time (Wang 1994: 12; Huang 1998: 153; Santangelo 2006: 134; Jin 2014: 553).

Although Halvor Eifring observes that the term *qing* has been central to the aesthetic, moral and philosophical discourse with regard to what we now refer to as “emotions” throughout Chinese history (Eifring 2003: 2-3), *qing*, as David Der-wei Wang’s summary of the etymological research suggests, “has been a fairly unstable concept” across various periods of Chinese history (Wang 2015: 6). This semantic range of *qing* demonstrates to us its various connotations among a range of different discourses. Nevertheless, the aesthetic discourse is closely intertwined with the philosophical one in early China. Particularly in early thoughts, scholars’ intense philosophical scrutiny of *qing*, usually inseparable from their critical considerations of

the effects of music, directly contributed to traditional Chinese poetics. To further apply the aesthetics of *qing* to poetic cinema, I wish to first provide a theoretical framework of *qing* as discussed in early philosophical treatises that largely shaped aestheticians' thinking of *qing* in the Chinese poetic tradition.

The Philosophy of *Qing*: Sensual, Affective Interactions with the World

In terms of the philosophical concept of *qing*, the so-called “six emotions” (*liuqing* 六情) and “seven emotions” (*liuqing* 七情) in traditional Chinese philosophy are traceable to Xunzi and the *Book of Rites*. Xunzi's definition of *qing* in the “Correct Naming” chapter points to the feelings of “liking, dislike, delight, anger, sadness and joy in one's nature” (Hutton 2014: 236; translation modified; Original Source Xun ca.3rd century BCE/2010: 357), while the *Book of Rites* defines “human affections” (*renqing* 人情) as “delight, anger, sadness, fear, love, dislike and desire” (Luo 2017: 114; translation modified; Original Source Dai ca.1st century BCE/2016: 258). Johanna Liu renders *qing* in these texts as “human affectivity” that designates “various psychological forms of emotion” (Liu 2014a: 236). However, an examination of other interpretations might open up the way for a deeper understanding of the affective states as discussed in traditional Chinese philosophy. Angus C. Graham claims that, unlike Neo-Confucianism, *qing* in pre-Han literature “never means ‘passions’ even in [*Xunzi*]”, but betokens “the facts” as a noun, “genuine” as an adjective, and “genuinely” as an adverb. Therefore, for Graham, it is only in *Xunzi* and the *Book of Rituals* that *qing* “refers to the genuine in man” and obliquely to “his feelings” (Graham 1986a: 59-65). *Qing* in Chinese carries the meaning

of “facts”, “situations” and “circumstances”, and even Ye Xie’s (1627–1703_{CE}) *Origins of Poetry* mainly uses the term *qing* to pinpoint the circumstantial quality of external objects (Owen 1992: 586; Hansen 1995: 182). Thus, the question then becomes, as various scholars highlight, how the signification of *qing* shifts away from the objective, metaphysical dimension with regard to reality, essence and factuality to the subjective, psychological dimension which is concerned with feelings, emotions and passions (Hansen 1995: 195; Eifring 2003: 9; Puett 2003: 42).

Using Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance”, that a group of items with a crucial common characteristic can be linked by a set of overlapping similarities, Halvor Eifring has suggested a linkage between “‘basic facts (of a matter)’ and ‘basic instincts (of man)’”, and between ‘basic instincts’ and ‘emotions’” (Eifring 2003: 9). When the *Book of Rites* defines “human affections” and further argues “these seven affections are natural without learning” (Luo 2017: 114; translation modified; Original Source Dai ca.1st century _{BCE}/2016: 258), *qing* stresses, in Eifring’s opinion, an innate propensity for emotional reactions integral to human nature. According to Brian Bruya’s broad reading of *Xunzi*, the concept of *qing* in the “Correct Naming”, when compared with 115 other occurrences throughout the book, does not take on any new meaning. Instead, Xunzi is consistent in using *qing* to denote a series of natural processes in which humans harmonise with the outer world viscerally and cosmically, which cannot be reducible to either “a static entity” or “a mere psychological state” (Bruya 2003: 153-154). Both Eifring and Bruya underscore the aspect of subjective responses that contribute to *qing*, while Chad Hansen contends that *qing* “sometimes approximates general sensory input”, and

that *qing* is “received”, “the input from reality on the basis of which humans do this” and “our connection to reality, the facts, circumstances of action, and so on” (Hansen 1995: 196). *Qing* in various philosophical texts in early Chinese philosophy is not restricted to emotional states, but widely specifies sensual feelings and bodily sensations.

As a case in point, we can consider Zhuangzi’s (ca.369–286_{BCE}) investigation into “human affections” (*renzhiqing* 人之情):

The eyes desire to see colours, the ears desire to hear sounds, the mouth desires to taste flavours, the intent and vital energy desire fulfilment. (Watson 2013: 258; translation modified; Original Source Zhuangzi ca. 3rd century _{BCE}/2010: 509)

The *Huainanzi* also discusses “human affections”:

With regard to those with a frame seven feet tall, the heart-mind is conscious of anxiety, sadness, weariness and bitterness, and the skin is conscious of illness, pain, cold and heat. Human affections are the same. (Major et al. 2010: 782; translation modified; Original Source Liu 139_{BCE}/1998: 1353)

As for human affections, the ears and eyes respond to stimulus and movement, the heart-mind and intent are conscious of anxiety and happiness, the hands and feet rub at pains and itches and avoid cold and heat. This is how we come into contact with objects. (Major et al. 2010: 104; translation modified; Original Source Liu 139_{BCE}/1998: 152)

Michael Puett considers *qing* in these passages as how “humans relate to the world, or more explicitly, the ways in which particular faculties relate to external stimuli”, which accords with Hansen’s suggestion of “reality feedback” (Puett 2003: 40-41). Especially noteworthy is Zhuangzi’s acute awareness of the natural inclination of psychical organs towards sensual pleasure. Additionally, the parallel drawn in these passages among

sensory organs, the body and the heart-mind seems to foreground the correspondence between emotions and multifarious sensory experiences, all of which are rooted in those organs responding to sense data due to physical contact with the sensuous world.

Such a consideration can also be found in *Xunzi*. In “Correct Naming”, Xunzi even provides sensory lists in great detail with “the parallel structure”, which almost appears to subsume the emotions under “sense impressions”, and to give a broad outline of “responses of experience in the world” (Bruya 2003: 154):

Form, colour, and pattern are differentiated by the eyes. Pitch, timbre, tunings, pipes, and odd sounds are differentiated by the ear. Sweet, bitter, salty, bland, pungent, sour, and odd flavours are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrant, stink, flowery, rotten, fishy, foul, sharp and strange smells are differentiated by the nose. Pain, itch, cold, hot, smooth, rough, light and heavy are differentiated by the body. Hence, delight, anger, sadness, joy, love, dislike and desire are differentiated by the heart-mind. (Hutton 2014: 238; translation modified; Original Source Xun ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 360).

On this basis, ubiquitous throughout *Xunzi* is his acknowledgement of the intensity of pleasure felt by the heart-mind, the whole body, as well as ordinary sense organs:

As for human affections, his eyes desire the utmost in sights, his ears desire the utmost in sounds, his mouths desires the utmost in flavours, his nose desires the utmost in aromas, and his heart-mind desires the utmost in comfort. These “five utmosts” is something human affections cannot escape. (Hutton 2014: 104; translation modified; Original Source Xun ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 171).

With regard to such phenomena as the eye’s love of colours, the ear’s fondness of sounds, the mouth’s love of taste, the heart-mind’s love of interest, and the fondness of the bones, flesh, and skin-lines for pleasant sensations and relaxation—these are produced from humans’ inborn nature and affections. These are

things that come about of themselves in response to stimulation,
things that do not need to await being worked at before being
produced? (Hutton 2014: 250; translation modified; Original
Source Xun ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 379)

As can be seen from the current scrutiny into various major philosophical texts in early Chinese thought, their discussion on *qing* revolves around a dense cluster of emotional and sensual feelings induced by concrete external phenomena and received by the heart-mind, the physical body, and the sensory faculties. In particular, Xunzi explicitly acknowledges the intensity of these subjective feelings enjoyed by the human body and considers it as a spontaneous process.

The Cognitive Approach to Film Emotion in Mainstream Cinema

In his “A Study of Early Chinese Concepts of *Qing* 情 and a Dialogue with Western Emotion Studies” (2020), Cai Zong-qi sets out some particular meanings of *qing* by careful contextualisation of the term in various philosophical texts in early China from the Late Spring and Autumn Period to the Han dynasty. When attempting to further draw some lessons from studies of emotions in the Euro-American discourse, Cai proposes “the parallel strategies employed” by the “Great Preface” and “by Robert C. Solomon (1942–2007), a prominent exponent of cognitive theory of emotion” (Cai 2020a: 417). Cai suggests that a new understanding of the aesthetics of *qing* in the “Great Preface” might be attained by a comparison with Solomon’s conceptualisation of emotions that argues that emotions are intentional, constitute judgements about one’s situation, and can also bring about one’s rational actions. What Cai suggests here immediately brings

to mind the fact that such an account of emotions, heavily indebted to cognitive psychology, has been advocated in film studies by scholars, such as Carl Plantinga, Noël Carroll, Berys Gaut, Greg M. Smith, Murray Smith, and Ed S. Tan, among others. It is admitted that, thanks to these theorists' continuing effort, we can now ascertain viewers' emotional reception of genre films, their viewing pleasure derived from dramatic effects, as well as their complex psychological responses to fictional characters, such as pity, empathy and sympathy. I think, however, we must also be extremely alert to the potential applications of their cognitive theories of film emotions to arthouse cinema, which, more often than not, falls outside mainstream cinema and, more specifically, to poetic cinema. For this reason, I am much less certain about whether the aesthetics of *qing* in China are compatible with the cognitive theory of emotion, which, as we will soon see, seldom concerns, but also, fundamentally, fails to explain, the affective force of art cinema. I first review the cognitive theory of emotion and its application in popular cinema, and then discuss cognitivist aestheticians' failure in terms of arthouse cinema.

The basic assumption of cognitive appraisal theories of emotion maintains that emotion is primarily comprised of an act of cognitive evaluation and judgement of a particular situation. In cognitive psychology, the term "cognition" refers to cerebral processes by which humans become aware of, understand and develop our knowledge of the world through perception, memory, reasoning, problem solving, and information processing. Since the 1950s, cognitive psychologists, in attempting to investigate the relationship between those internal cognitive processes and human behaviours, assume that the human mind is analogous to the computer in that, once an outside

stimulus presented triggers the brain, cognitive processes would eventually produce responses and answers (Statt 1998: 26-27; Strickland 2001: 131-134; Altarriba 2009: 116; Eysenck and Keane 2015: 1-3). Therefore, in this domain, theorists such as Magda Arnold, Richard Lazarus and Robert Zajonc believe that human emotion is aroused by an appraisal and interpretation of a situation; anger, for instance, is elicited by evaluative thoughts which assess a situation as wrong, annoying or offensive, while a person's understanding of an event as a loss might feel sad (Arnold 2004: 191-192; Prinz 2012: 193-195).

Carl Plantinga, who draws on Robert C. Roberts's idea that emotion is a person's cognisance or judgement of a state of affairs relevant to that person's concerns, defines emotion as a "cognitive-perceptual construal", namely a type of felt bodily state necessarily employing "a higher degree of cognitive processing" (Plantinga 2009a: 86-87; 2009b: 54, 57). In Plantinga's eyes, unlike moods, bodily responses or physiological states, emotions such as fear, pity, passion, jealousy and suspense involve a person's cognitive appraisals of stimuli and events. Accepting "the truth of the cognitive-evaluative theory of the emotions", Berys Gaut also believes that emotions are not simply moods or feelings, for the very reason that "an emotion of something essentially involves evaluating thought about this object"; he further adds that, accompanied by "the appropriate beliefs", emotions can also provide the experiencing subject "a motivating force" (Gaut 2010: 244-245). Consider an adventurer in a jungle experiencing terrible fear of a bear; such emotion is based on a cognitive appraisal of the bear in that

environment, constituting a threat to personal safety, and, with the belief that his or her life is in danger, the belief-based fear then inclines the adventurer to flee.

Cognitive Film Theories of Emotion and Its Focus on Popular Cinema

Such is the basis of the cognitive appraisal theory of human emotion, on which aesthetic cognitivists have developed their approaches to the audience's emotional responses to mainstream cinema. Carl Plantinga, Noël Carroll, and Berys Gaut, as well as other film scholars accept cognitive psychology's investigation into the emotions. As they achieve a common consensus that all emotions are induced by "our perceptual construals", their comprehensive examinations of "the expressive potential of fiction films", according to Daniel Yacavone's summary, often ascribe film emotions to the audience's perceptual apprehension of mainstream cinema, which is facilitated by "genre expectations" and "comprehensible narratives" (Yacavone 2015: 165). The locus of cognitive film theory of emotions, in other words, has been specifically associated with distinct film genres and mainstream cinema that attract audiences worldwide to these works' clear generic expectations and transparent narrative conventions.

Indeed, in his "Film, Emotion and Genre" (2003), Carroll assumes that "the *emotive focus* of the audience" is, by and large, produced by "the *criterially prefocused film text*" that guarantees anticipated spectatorship (Carroll 2003: 70; emphasis in original). For Carroll, the emotive focus is something equated with audiences' fixed emotional states, which can direct their attention to expected emotional responses to films in their actual

viewing experience, responses which are secured by well-designed and standardised film texts. The audiences' angry response to a given character, for instance, can shape their attention to that character's offensive behaviours in later sequences; and, in order to trigger such a predictable response, the film's narrative must provide the viewer with evaluative appraisals of the unfolding events around that fictional character. There is nothing particularly new about emotional responses in spectatorship as such. Just as the core of Greek tragedy in Aristotle's poetics is "the arousal of pity and fear", so are popular film genres, such as melodrama, suspense and horror film, among others, all of which "are dedicated to eliciting certain specifiable kinds of emotions from spectators" (Carroll 2003: 70, 74). Carroll then details the ways in which misfortunes in melodramas arouse sympathy and compel admiration for fictional characters with honorable virtues in terror and hardship; harmful threats in horror movies elicit terrible fear, and even fill the audience with disgust over the impurity which violates social norms, and challenges cultural conventions; and a series of dramatic events, the outcome of which is uncertain and improbable, in suspense films cause mounting concern. In addition to such a system of expectations, Carroll mentions a filmmaker's "camera position and composition, editing, lighting, the use of color, and, of course, acting and the very structure of the script or narrative" (Carroll 2003: 68). However, these formal properties, for Carroll, only assist viewers in evaluating events in film narratives under some particular categories of some generic and relevant emotional states, namely pity, horror, fear and suspense.

Like Carroll, Plantinga considers "narrative and character engagement as central to the spectator's emotional response to a film" (Plantinga 2009a: 90-91). It is, thus, on

the basis of narrative techniques and character engagement that, in his *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009), Plantinga categorises different types of emotions of spectators into “global”, “local”, “direct”, “sympathetic/antipathetic”, “meta”, “fiction” and “artifact” emotions (Plantinga 2009b: 68-75). To put it briefly, global emotions, typified by anticipation, suspense and curiosity, are long-lasting and happen during the whole film-viewing process, which stand in contrast to the brief, more intense, local emotions arising from a particular sequence, such as fear, disgust, shock, elation and excitement. Direct emotions, as psychological responses to the narrative content, are caused by unfolding events able to evoke curiosity, surprise, suspense, excitement and fascination, while sympathetic and antipathetic emotions, varying from pity, anger, disgust, contempt, compassion to happiness, are rooted in the audience's assessment about a fictional character's goals, situation, behaviour, as well as well-being. Whereas “meta-emotions” refer to cognitive and emotional reactions to a viewer's own viewing experience, “fiction emotions” are defined as the viewer's emotional responses to a film's fictional world. Besides, when the audiences consider the film as a constructed artefact involving manufacturing processes, “artifact emotions” refer to “emotional responses that can be solicited directly by the artifactual status of film” (Plantinga 2009b: 75). This means that a viewer's emotional responses to the film's formal elements might include, according to Plantinga, antipathy towards illogical plots, annoyance at a dreadful camera movement, or exhilaration at a marvellous, long take.

We should bear in mind that aesthetic cognitivists, in their analyses of cinematic emotions, normally confine their studies to Hollywood popular films. In his *Engaging*

Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema (1995), Murray Smith argues that “the fundamental tenet of this study is that ‘Hollywood’” with “a cluster of formal practices which have proven enormously enduring and influential on mainstream narrative filmmaking world-wide”, is incompatible with “alternative cinematic aesthetics—Soviet montage, the American avant-garde, and so forth” (Smith 1995: 11). Carroll’s essay likewise restricts the scope of his discussion to “narrative fiction films”, although he assumes that our understanding of “the operation of the emotions” in “abstract and/or nonnarrative films” can benefit from his treatment of audiences’ cognitive emotions arising from the fictional narrative (Carroll 2003: 86). Plantinga aims to formulate “a theory of affect elicitation in mainstream American narrative fiction films—what some call Hollywood movies” (Plantinga 2009b: 6), as he supposes that Hollywood films often contain favoured characters who are able to evoke strong sympathies, action sequences which guarantee some strong emotions of exhilaration and amusement, as well as humorous content which can bring a powerful sense of irony and humour. All these traits contrast sharply with a particular arthouse film’s aesthetics, as Plantinga himself writes:

Mainstream American films rarely offer the kind of distanced, intellectual stance characteristic of some independent films (the work of Jim Jarmusch comes to mind) or various works of the European or international art cinema (such as the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky, or Wong Kar-wai). [...] In any case, mainstream films avoid audience boredom at all costs and attempt to elicit strong, clear (if also sometimes mixed) emotions throughout the viewing process. (Plantinga 2009b: 7)

To put this in another way, popular narrative cinema, for Plantinga, includes not only Hollywood cinema, but also Bollywood productions, European popular films such as the

Spaghetti Western and James Bond series, as well as commercial Chinese films like Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). All these films provoke intense emotions in a rather straightforward way. However, arthouse cinema has completely different mechanisms for arousing subtle feelings, evoking indefinite affections, and even demanding profound reflection among the audience. Even though Plantinga's conclusion once again confirms his theory of film emotions "applied only to movies—mainstream Hollywood films", and he even raises future possibilities of applying "the theory I develop here to various genres of media", art films and experimental films included (Plantinga 2009b: 224), it is noteworthy that there has already been a constant criticism of cognitive film theory of spectator emotions.

An Overview of Criticisms Levelled at Cognitivist Accounts of Film Emotion

Robert Sinnerbrink explicitly pinpoints the main drawback of "cognitivist accounts of emotion, understanding and character engagement": "how do we explain our affective and aesthetic responsiveness to films that thwart narrative expectations and disrupt routine cognitive reasoning processes?" (Sinnerbrink 2011: 67-68). Amy Coplan and Derek Matravers pinpoints the audience's sensual and affective responses to the "film medium and particular cinematic techniques", maintaining that "films are able to directly influence viewers' affective states without cognitive mediation" (Coplan and Matravers 2011: 119, 121). Carl Plantinga's conception of artifact emotions tends to highlight the viewers' cognitive evaluation of, and subsequent emotional responses to, a filmmaker's use of formal elements. Coplan and Matravers are more reminiscent of Xunzi's defence

for the great power of music and sound to affect and transform the human mind rapidly and immediately. “Sounds and music”, for Xunzi, “enter into human deeply and transform human promptly” (Hutton 2014: 219; translation modified; Original Source Xun ca. 3rd century BCE/2011: 327). The psychological power of music to affect spectators, for Xunzi, is not mediated by some cognitive thoughts. Xunzi’s argument, as Scott Cook elucidates, “implies not only changing something, but doing so quickly or immediately” (Cook 1997: 28). Unlike music, fictional films do feature characters in narrative scenes.

Tarja Laine does not disagree that cinematic emotions might be explained by “character identification”, “sympathetic engagement”, as well as the cognitive concerns about “characters” and “changes in action tendency”; however, she is more inclined to believe that “so far the study of cinematic emotions seems to be all narrowly focused on the aspects of empathy and sympathy in film experience” to such an extent that those theorists disregard film aesthetics’ ability “directly engage the spectators emotionally” (Laine 2013: 5). In a similar fashion, Daniel Yacavone holds that cognitive aestheticians are so obsessed with popular films with transparent “visual and spatial-temporal realism and naturalism”, that they entirely overlook other cinemas characterised by “formal stylization or narrative experimentation” (Yacavone 2015: 165). It becomes clear now that the cognitive theory of film emotions appears more effective in explaining audiences’ cognitive engagement in popular films, and their emotional involvement in characters and narrative situations. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the crucial role of cinema’s appreciable audiovisual styles and unconventional narrative strategies for the formation of its audiences’ different viewing experiences. Since the above-quoted passage by

Plantinga differentiates mainstream cinema from the films by Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky and Wong Kar-wai, which are, interestingly, often considered as exemplars of art films and poetic cinema, in what follows I wish to specify the impotence of cognitivist accounts of film emotions in the face of poetic cinema. Drawing on traditional Chinese poetics pertinent to *qing*, I further develop an alternative approach for the affective and sensuous spectatorship in poetic cinema.

The Affective Categories of and the Aesthetics of Mood in Poetic Cinema

One of the major problems with the cognitive approach to cinematic emotions is that it tends to disregard mood in cinematic aesthetics, which is scarcely discussed in film studies, as Robert Sinnerbrink has complained in his “*Stimmung*: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood” (2012): “while there has been intense interest in emotion and affect, mood has been largely ignored.” Therefore, when cognitivist theories of emotion focus on viewers’ comprehension of narrative content and cognitive responses to characters, it is unsurprising that “the aesthetics of mood (and the concept of *Stimmung*) have featured little in recent film theory” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 151). In this article, Sinnerbrink examines a few selected mood sequences from Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000), David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (2001), Pedro Almodóvar’s *Talk to Her* (2002), and Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). At first glance, Sinnerbrink’s selection of these four films is a hint that moods are of immense significance in arthouse cinema. Besides this, Sinnerbrink, who has adopted a phenomenological approach to the

aesthetics of mood, suggests that moods in narrative films “always reveal or express a cinematic world”, and that “distinctive cinematic worlds have their own specific kinds of mood” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 149). Sinnerbrink, here, is concerned with the ways that a cinematic world, with unique audiovisual styles and symbolic meanings, is revealed by moods, but also encompasses its own particular type of mood. Much in line with Sinnerbrink’s attempt to provide critical insights into cinematic moods in art films, in this section I would like to propose that the classification of moods in the Chinese poetic tradition provides us with a criterion to evaluate a film’s poetic quality, but is also particularly helpful in suggesting candidates for poetic cinema. Furthermore, I also intend to point out that the discussion of mood by cognitive aestheticians, as epitomised by the “mood-cue approach” formulated by Greg M. Smith (2003), completely fails to recognise the atmospheric aesthetics of mood characterised by the affective encounter between the self and the world, which is compatible neither with the phenomenological account of moods, nor with traditional Chinese poetics. With reference to mood as discussed by Sinnerbrink, Martin Heidegger, Thomas Fuchs, and other scholars, for whom the conception of “*Stimmung*” is reminiscent of the psychology of *qi* 氣 in traditional East Asia, I demonstrate that, in terms of the mechanism of evoking moods, the feelings of being-with-things and being-in-the-world are absolutely central to the aestheticisation of moods in poetic cinema.

Robert Sinnerbrink believes that when applying the concept of “mood” to the “pervasive aesthetic phenomenon” in artworks, this practice evokes “musical or sonic metaphors—like atmosphere, vibration, attunement or resonance” (Sinnerbrink 2012:

148). Echoing Sinnerbrink, the aesthetics of *qing* in the “Record of Music”, later also cited by the “Great Preface”, detail the way in which the different moods of disparate music mirror various social-political situations: “the tones of a well-governed age are peaceful and happy”, “the tones of a chaotic age are resentful and indignant”, while “the tones of ruined states are sorrowful and brooding” (Owen 1992: 52; translation modified; Original Source Dai ca.1st century BCE/2016: 425). These moods in music, such as “peaceful”, “delight”, “resentful”, “indignant”, “sorrowful” and “brooding”, sorted out in poetics in early China, might be what Thomas Fuchs calls “typical examples” of moods, such as “elation, euphoria, serenity, boredom, sadness, dysphoria, irritability, anxiety, or melancholy” (Fuchs 2013: 617). In both the “Record of Music” and the “Great Preface”, a wide variety of vocabularies enumerating diverse moods stimulate the subsequent development of the theory of poetry throughout history in China, which, as Stephen Owen maintains, regards “mood” as “a central aesthetic category”:

Mood, closely associated with the effect of music, became an important part of Chinese literary and aesthetic thought. Moods are not open to easy analysis, but neither are they vague. Later Chinese literary thought developed a complex vocabulary of moods, which, though overlapping, were immediately recognizable. (Owen 1992: 44)

After the “Great Preface”, Chinese theorists have undertaken the ongoing painstaking effort to categorise artworks according to the particular types of moods evoked.

Eastern Han’s tradition of “personality appraisal” at first gave birth to a rich vocabulary of air, manner and temperament, and from the Six Dynasties to the Tang these qualitative evaluations of personality traits were then borrowed by critics of poetry,

painting and calligraphy to investigate aesthetic styles (Owen 1992: 299-300). Liu Xie's (465–522_{CE}) magnum listed eight styles: “elegant and graceful”, “far-reaching and obscure”, “terse and essential”, “obvious and consecutive”, “vigorous and beautiful”, “novel and unusual”, “lush and profuse” and “light and delicate” (Owen 1992: 214; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 255). Over the centuries, Sikong Tu's (837–908_{CE}) work, *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry*, might be the most representative and influential one among all these theorists' treatises. Louise Sundararajan renders the title of this monograph as “Twenty-Four Poetic Moods”, while she considers Sikong Tu's taxonomy “as a type of ‘emotional response categorization’” (Sundararajan 2004: 201-202). For Sundararajan, Sikong's *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry*, as specified categories of poetry, is based on poems' emotional meanings, but also on readers' affective responses to them. For Owen, as Sikong Tu employs “a vocabulary applicable equally to personality and to the arts”, such a taxonomy, which implies “‘characters’ in traditional psychology or more transient ‘moods’”, acknowledges the critical importance of the categories of moods in terms of evaluating artworks' aesthetic qualities (Owen 1992: 299). However, “the poetic moods that fall under these categories are by no means”, as Sundararajan reminds us, “‘basic categories’ of emotions” (Sundararajan 2004: 202). Instead, Sikong Tu attributes artworks' poetic moods to some particular ineffable feeling states that are so subtle and nuanced that, as we will see very soon, they often go far beyond recognisable types of emotional states, such as joy, fear, anger, hatred, sadness and happiness.

At first glance, traditional Chinese aestheticians' efforts to classify poetic artworks' moods that are crystallised in Sikong Tu's poetics, are in tune with what Mikel Dufrenne refers to as "affective categories": the terms, such as "the beautiful", "the sublime", "the pretty", "the gracious", signify "what we mean by 'affective categories,' a phrase which seems the most precise for them" (Dufrenne 1953/1973: 465). Subsuming these terms under affective categories, Dufrenne concerns with subjective attitudes of individuals towards realities revealed through artworks, and such attitudes, for him, contribute to the expression, experience and interpretation of art. As Dufrenne's argument unfolds, when an artist expresses oneself through the depiction of a world in an artwork, the affective categories, during the creative process, play a crucial role in the artistic act of governing forms, principles and materials; when this artwork creates emotional impacts on recipients, the affective categories are intertwined with their experience of the work.

In this respect, Dufrenne cites Etienne Souriau's theory in *The Future of Aesthetics* (1929) as an example, suggesting that some of its terms, such as "the picturesque", "the elegiac", as well as "the noble", "gravitate around and carry the nuances of the beautiful", while some other terms, such as "the pathetic", "the heroic" and "the fantastic", "clearly designate qualities of the world which are tied to existential attitudes" (Dufrenne 1953/1973: 467-468). In sum, Dufrenne's conception of affective categories pertains to the ways in which individuals, whether artists or recipients, build up subjective connections to the world unveiled in the artwork. Having adopted Dufrenne's idea of "affective quality" in her book *Feeling Cinema: Emotional Dynamics in Film Studies* (2013), Tarja Laine further coins the term "the emotional core of the film" to designate

cinema both expressing emotions and embodying emotions. For Laine, the affective quality of a film “is immanent to the film and inseparable from the spectator’s aesthetic experience”; therefore, the affective categories enable the audience to feel a film’s affective quality “as a certain *kind* of quality” (Laine 2013: 3-4; emphasis in original). On that account, Laine tentatively lists the emotional core in quite a few art films: pleasure in Jean-Luc Godard’s *A Woman Is a Woman* (1961), boredom in Andy Warhol’s *Empire* (1964), nostalgia in Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* (1983), and guilt in Michael Haneke’s *Hidden* (2005). Given that Laine’s monograph, under the theoretical influence of Dufrenne’s affective category, is basically constructed through affective states, such as “anger”, “love”, “shame” and “anguish”, an examination of poetic cinema’s affective qualities through the Chinese poetic tradition also enables me to use *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* to identify the emotional and aesthetic core of some particular films.

For instance, with the category of “Transcendence”, often regarded by various commentators as elusive feelings which transcend “the ordinary world” and “cannot be achieved” through “any sharpness of apprehension” (Owen 1992: 346-347), we are immediately reminded of Paul Schrader’s account of “transcendental styles” in films by Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson and Carl Theodor Dreyer. The transcendental styles, in Schrader’s words, “maximize the mystery of existence” and “eschews all conventional interpretations of reality” (Schrader 1972/2018: 42). The category of “Melancholy and Depression”, which denotes “a series of correlative scenes and situation that give rise to feelings of despair” (Owen 1992: 343), is especially redolent of profoundly pessimistic and indignant moods towards the twentieth century’s turbulent history and political

disasters, as presented in cinemas by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Alexander Sokurov and Theo Angelopoulos. As the category of “Lofty and Ancient” indicates a type of mood which “requires void, space unfilled or filled with intangibles”, such as the pure moon, dim light, indiscernible sounds, the vast expanse of dark mountains and even unseen immortal beings (Owen 1992: 315), it soon evokes Alexander Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy* (1996) revolving around an unearthly journey to an isolated feudal-era island that engenders the subtle perception of illusory scenery, which I am going to analyse in more detail in the next chapter. Sinnerbrink ascribes Wong Kar-war’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000), “a strikingly evocative mood piece”, to its “romantic longing” coupled with “remarkable colour palette”, “Maggie Cheung’s beautiful cheongsams” and “Tony Leung’s handsome ties” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 158). Such aesthetics fits perfectly with the category of “Intricate Beauty”, “often associated with human artifacts” (Owen 1992: 323), but also with the category of “Delicate-Fresh and Rich-Lush”, an affective quality related to “lovely women” and “a sensuousness that verges on sensuality” (Owen 1992: 310), which I will discuss further in Chapter 3. The category of “Flowing Movement”, as a mood that is involved in the intuitive apprehension of “the operations of the universe” and “its subtle motions of change” (Owen 1992: 351), is synonymous with the exploration of human existence and the myriad objects in the cosmos by rhythmic montage and fluid camera movements in Terrence Malick’s films of the 2010s, which I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Greg M. Smith's "Mood-cue Approach to Filmic Emotion" and Its Problems

It should be noted that the aesthetic cognitivist Greg M. Smith's "mood-cue approach to filmic emotion", as formulated in his *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (2003), has also emphasised the role of mood in cinema's emotional appeal. Smith, who claims that "the primary emotive effect of film is to create mood", attempts to provide an approach to explain "how films are structured to appeal to audience's emotions": film structures increase the possibility of evoking emotion "by first creating a predisposition toward experiencing emotion: a mood" (Smith 2003: 41-42). According to Smith's argument, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), when Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) and Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) share a meal in Norman's parlour, various redundant cues, such as the orchestral music, the close-up of Norman mentioning a madhouse, low-angle shots rendering Norman ominous, and the narrative situation isolating Marion from the wider society, have already indicated the mood of fear to the audiences, while the maintaining of such mood requires stronger emotions. Nevertheless, as Smith moves on to refer to generic signposts that "tend to be more useful guides for the emotion system", he further classifies films with emotional appeal into "a densely informative emotional text" with a lot of redundant cues, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), and into "a sparsely informative emotional text", such as *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth, 1983) and *Stranger Than Paradise* (Jim Jarmusch, 1984) (Smith 2003: 48-57). It now seems that Smith is still too influenced by aesthetic cognitivism that ascribes audiences' emotional

response to a film “text” first to generic expectations and, subsequently, to cognitive apprehension of its narrative information with fictional characters.

Robert Sinnerbrink has already criticised Smith’s approach to mood, which is so “susceptible to challenge from a phenomenological perspective”, as “his approach still subordinates mood to the discrete emotional states generated in response to character action, narrative situation or generic convention” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 153). According to Sinnerbrink, a phenomenological perspective is more suitable to deal with moods than cognitive or any other theories, which tend to affiliate moods to emotional engagement resulting from the audiences’ comprehension of narrative content, and overemphasise narrative analysis to such an extent that cinematic styles, audiovisual presentation, as well as audiences’ aesthetic responses, have been overlooked. In particular, Sinnerbrink stresses that his purpose “is to suggest the virtues of taking a more phenomenological approach to the aesthetics of mood, understood as a way of revealing or opening up a cinematic world”, and to “show how mood, in revealing distinctive cinematic worlds, is essential to our aesthetic and emotional engagement with film” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 149). Since I am in agreement with Sinnerbrink’s considerable resistance to the cognitivist approach to cinematic emotions in avant-garde and arthouse cinema, my initial attempt to apply the affective categories in Sikong Tu’s *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry*, as outlined above, will highlight cinema’s audiovisual styles and aesthetic qualities, but also propose ways in which a particular affective category is closely related to a specific cinematic world as presented aesthetically. Briefly, we can now consider that unearthly ancient island in Japan reverberating with the intangibles in *Oriental Elegy*, those urban

streets in Hong Kong in the early 1960s filled with multicoloured cheongsams in *In the Mood for Love*, as well as the political environments in *A City of Sadness* which witness the Kuomintang troops' bloody massacre of innocent citizens during the February 28 incident in 1947. Besides, I also wish to suggest that Sinnerbrink's attempt to adopt a phenomenological approach to cinematic worlds' moods, through the concept of *Stimmung*, is compatible with traditional Chinese poetics, which place much stress on an artwork's atmospheric feelings stemming from the aesthetic integration of affections into objects, scenes and circumstances as presented in the artwork.

Affections, Objects and Scenes: The Evocation of Moods and Atmospheres

Like Sinnerbrink, the German philosopher and psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs, in his "The Phenomenology of Affectivity" (2013), also complains that "affective atmospheres are only rarely treated in emotion research and theory" in the Euro-American discourse (Fuchs 2013: 616). However, Fuchs notices that, unlike Euro-American psychiatry, the concept of *qi* 氣 in traditional Chinese medicine has long highlighted atmospheric effects evoked by the dynamics between a person's mental states and his or her surroundings:

in traditional Japanese or Chinese psychopathology the surrounding climate and social atmospheres such as the *ki* (or *qi*) are even regarded as carriers of mental illness: *ki* means "air," "breath," but also "attunement" and "atmosphere," and thus constitutes the "in-between" from which mental disorders. (Fuchs 2013: 617)

With reference to *qi*, a concept that will also help me examine Malick's films in Chapter 4, Fuchs here attempts to point out that the feeling of "affective atmospheres" involves

the emotional encounter of “an enveloping aura, radiating or emanating from the space or environment that one enters” (Fuchs 2013: 617). In this regard, when Carl Plantinga later defends his theory of cinematic emotions in “Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema” (2012) and claims that “atmospheres are not emotions, and neither are moods, exactly” (Plantinga 2012: 456), it is nothing but a clear cue that aesthetic cognitivists are still rather blind to the interconnection of our affective states, prevailing bodily feelings, and surrounding atmospheres. Referring back to Fuchs’s comparative philosophy, from this very idea of *qi* in traditional Chinese and Japanese psychology, Fuchs further proposes the German term *Stimmung*, which, through its “metaphors of orchestration, consonance, and attunement” (Fuchs 2013: 619), implies the resonance among the self, the body, mood swings, the situation and the surrounding atmospheres. In fact, the comparison between *qi* and *Stimmung* can also be found in other scholars’ works (Ogawa 1998: 326-328; Hepach 2018: 55-57; Marinucci 2019a: 110).

Insofar as *qi*, which is etymologically based on the concept of cloud and vapour, is often understood as “air” figuratively (Kim 2011: 5; Lee 2014: 42; Marinucci 2019: 93), we can also compare this with Fuchs’s account of feeling “something ‘in the air’” or sensing “an interpersonal ‘climate,’ for example a serene, a solemn, or a threatening atmosphere”: “feelings befall us; they emerge from situations, persons, and objects which have their expressive features and attract or repel us” (Fuchs 2013: 613). By this, Fuchs means that the experienced space around the subject is already imbued with affective qualities.

To talk about the interrelatedness of moods, Fuchs also quotes Martin Heidegger's treatment of *Stimmung* in his *Being and Time* (1927):

A mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being. [...] *The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something.* Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons. It is in this that the *second* essential characteristic of states-of-mind show itself. (Heidegger 1927/1962: 176; emphasis in original)

As scholars' comments on Heidegger's philosophy of mood have already pointed out, the dichotomy between inside and outside, namely that between the solely inner world of moods and the outside of objective situations, dissolves, so that moods affect our existence in and engagement with the world (Inwood 1997: 40-41; Wrathall 2006: 33-34; Hasse 2019: 87), and this is what Mark Wrathall calls "moods [...] relating ourselves to the things and people around us" (Wrathall 2006: 34). In Fuchs's opinion, moods, for Heidegger, "permeate and tinge the whole experiential field", "radiating through the environment and conferring concordant and conferring concordant affective qualities on the whole situation" (Fuchs 2013: 618). Heidegger's chief concern with the mood that oscillates between the outside and the inside is pertinent to the traditional Chinese thinking of the heart-mind, which rests upon the complementary inner-outer dichotomy.

Moods, as our affective states of being-in-the-world which "direct oneself towards something", might perhaps be what the poetician Liu Xie has in mind, when he talks about "the relation between self and world" (Owen 1992: 205):

When one ascends mountains, one's affections (*qing* 情) are filled by the mountain; when one contemplates the sea, one's concepts (*yi* 意) are brought to brimming over by the sea. One can roam as companion of the winds and clouds according to the measure of his talents. (Owen 1992: 205; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 248)

Yi, as another important aesthetic concept in traditional Chinese poetics, refers to both “the incitement-transformation of the world” and “the conscious evolution of man as point of view, intention, vision, state of mind, disposition, meaning, desire, and volition all at once” (Jullien 2003/2009: 221), even though Vincent Yu-chung Shih’s translation of the above passage also demonstrates ways in which a specific environment is “saturated with” or “tinged with the coloring of” a subject’s “feelings” (Shih 2015: 205). Accordingly, the very idea here echoes Fuchs who, through Heidegger’s existential phenomenology, argues that the mood belongs to “a primordial sphere of attunement of self and world” and, therefore, is “a background through which we encounter things” (Fuchs 2013: 618). In other words, similar to Liu Xie, the phenomenological account of moods might not be that much concerned with the cognitive evaluation of whether one’s life and safety is threatened in the mountain or by the sea, which leads to the subject’s emotional states, but with how the subject with a particular mood attributes some corresponding affective qualities to the objects encountered and even the whole surrounding experiential field.

Stephen Owen’s reading of the above-quoted passage also draws our attention to the fact that Liu Xie’s thesis “occupies an intermediate stage in the theory of the relation between [heart-mind] and the world, a question all important in Chinese literary thought” (Owen 1992: 205). To be more specific, drawing upon the pre-Qin and Han psychology,

critics of Liu Xie's times are intrigued by the very attractive model of the heart-mind's being-with-things. And yet, from the Song Dynasty and onwards, this mode of thought is replaced by another model known as *qingjing jiaorong* 情景交融, "the interfusion of scene and the affections" (Liu 1975: 42; Wong 1978: 121; Owen 1992: 476; Sun 1995: 142; Jullien 1995/2000: 152; Sun 2011: 191), in which both the self and the world are determined and intertwined in a mutual, or shared, manner. With respect to Liu Xie's own statement, here he is extremely familiar with "the model of being 'with' things" which sustains "a relation between self and things", but the opinion that a subject's ideas and affections are filled by, or brim over with, "vast things", such as the mountains and the sea, also indicate some correspondence between "the self" and "the external scene", and that "between the external object and the content of what consequently lies in the affections" (Owen 1992: 206). In traditional Chinese poetics, such a dramatic shift of emphasis from the correlation between the heart-mind and objects to affections-scene interfusion allows me to propose the mechanism of evoking moods in poetic cinema in the following chapters. As we will see in Chapter 2, Alexander Sokurov's presentation of his close personal contact with oil lamps in *Oriental Elegy*, as well as with paintings of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001), engenders a contemplative mood and creates a certain atmosphere that is pure, calm and refined. In Chapter 3, I will draw on the aesthetic principle of *xing* 興, often rendered as "stirring", "evocation", "stimulation" or "affective images" (Wong 1983: 2; Yu 1987: 59; Owen 1992: 587; Jia 2004: 58; Sun 2011: xi), to examine the way in which Wong Kar-wai in his films displays the resonance between sentimental characters and objects around them so as

to construct affective scenes for audiences, who can, in turn, feel the characters' romantic encounters, wistful farewell and desperate longing. I am interested in how characters' affective experiences are interlaced with the fictional worlds' diegetic cinematic spaces.

Art cinema, as David Bordwell suggests, often revolves around “psychologically complex characters” (Bordwell 1979: 57-58). Hence, the poetic evocation of moods in the art cinema, viewed through the lens of traditional Chinese poetics, may lie in the fact that its emotional cinematic world is often tinged with the affective dynamics between these internally complicated characters and their surrounding worlds. It follows that if, in arthouse cinema, “stylistic signatures in the narration” are foregrounded (Bordwell 1979: 59), and if “distinctive cinematic worlds” with “their own specific kinds of mood” tend to be revealed by “style and composition” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 148-149), cinematic devices and audiovisual techniques in poetic cinema can be deployed by filmmakers to evoke moods and to construct affective atmospheres. This means that the aesthetics of *xing* and *qingjing jiaorong* in the cinematic context should take into account the manipulations of cinema's formal properties as well. For that matter, I will consider Daniel Yacavone's “sensory-affective expression” and “the ‘world-feeling’ of a cinematic work” (Yacavone 2015: 53-54; 171), with which I will demonstrate that these films' stylised presentation of mentally sensitive characters' being-with-things and being-in-the world immerse the audiences in atmospheric evocative scenes. In this regards, the extraordinary ability of the cinematic medium's audiovisual elements to elicit non-cognitive affective responses among viewers, nevertheless, has been overlooked by cognitivists, too.

Affections and Patterns: The Significance of Medium-specificity in Feeling Cinema

Another problem with the cognitive approach to film emotions is its overemphasis on the remarkable similarities between mainstream films' narrative scenarios and ordinary audiences' real-life events, resulting in its lack of appreciation of the expressive theory of art and recognition of the close interconnection between high art and arthouse cinema. For that reason, such a theory typically ignores the contribution of art cinema's aesthetic styles and expressive patterns to the viewers' sensuous responses to the poetic quality of these films. In the previous discussion, we have already seen that the Chinese scholar Li Zehou compares traditional Chinese poetics concerned with "emotional expression" to the expression theory in the Euro-American discourse (Li 1988/2010: 34-38). Though Carl Plantinga does briefly mention expression theories by Benedetto Croce and Robin George Collingwood, he casts strong doubt on Clive Bell's account of "aesthetic emotions" and of "significant forms", and further wonders what "Bell would have thought that aesthetic emotions have any place in the viewing of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1990), or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005)" (Plantinga 2009b: 61-62). For Plantinga, the viewers' emotional responses to these popular Hollywood films, whose unfolding narratives, though manipulated and exaggerated, are grounded in real-world schemas, are, to a large degree, shaped by their perceptual abilities and concern-based construals acquired from their actual lives outside the film theatre.

Plantinga also considers Bell's concern with emotions "reserved for elite artists and critics", and then maintains that "but even if we grant that such 'aesthetic' emotions exist, they are not central to my attempts to shed light on the kind of mass emotions generally elicited by movies" (Plantinga 2009b: 62). According to Bell's theory, there is a particular type of emotion in music and visual arts evoked not by "representational content" but by "successfully created form": in Paul Cézanne's and Paul Gauguin's paintings, for instance, there are "particularly beautiful, harmonious, or powerful forms" (Robinson 2004: 174-175). It seems as if Plantinga reluctantly admits the differentiation between high art and mass art, but also that between arthouse cinema and mainstream cinema in terms of mechanisms of eliciting feelings among viewers. As Plantinga refers to Bell's aesthetics, we can consider the Chinese poetic tradition where the contrast of *qing*, understood as our inner sensitivity, against outer manifestation leads to ancient Chinese aestheticians' consuming interest in artworks' patterns and appearances. By mentioning "patterning" (*wen* 文), both the "Record of Music" and the "Great Preface" are concerned with the refinement of bodily sensations and emotional content through the elaborate patterns of music and poetry. I will suggest that such an idea is more consistent with the discussion of emotions by pioneering filmmakers and critics, such as Ricciotto Canudo and Sergei Eisenstein, who wish to reduce narrative elements and to further heighten the sensory perception of cinematic medium's formal properties. Furthermore, in consideration of Lu Ji's thesis and Liu Xie's theoretical writings, I will demonstrate the dynamic connection between the surface manifestations of affections and the recipient's sensory experience

of the artwork's forms, and highlight the great potential of cinema's formal elements to arouse sensual feelings and emotional resonance among the audiences.

Inner Feelings, Bodily Sensations and Artworks' Patterns

As the basic meanings of *qing* involves not only “‘feeling or affective state of mind’ and ‘inclination or affection or desire’” but also “‘circumstances’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘human conditions’” (Santangelo 2020b: 19), the metaphysical dimension of *qing*, understood as basic propensity and instinctive responses, has prompted modern scholars to examine its opposition to “sound” (*sheng* 聲), “outer verbalization” (*yan* 言), “outer appearance” (*mao* 貌), “outward flourishes” (*hua* 華), and “outer form and shape” (*xing* 形) (Graham 1986a: 59-65; Hansen 1995:196; Harbsmeier 2003: 134-137). In this regard, early Chinese aestheticians are well aware of the substantial contribution of an artwork's ornamental patterns to the expression of sentiments and the elicitation of sensations.

The assertion in the “Great Preface”, that “the affections [*qing*] emerge in sounds; when those sounds have patterning [*wen*], they are called ‘tones’” (Owen 1992: 43; translation modified; Original Source Mao et al. ca.1st century BCE/2018: 1), seems to be shorthand for the theoretical model formulated in the “Record of Music”: “the affections are moved from within and take shape in sound, and when these sounds have patterning, they are called ‘tones’” (Owen 1992: 51-52; translation modified; Original Source Dai ca.1st century BCE/2016: 425). In these arguments, the concept of *wen* has important consequences. Quite the opposite to “military” (*wu* 武), *wen* is understood as “‘culture,’

‘refinement,’ ‘learning,’ the ‘civil’ aspect of the state”, but it “originally referred to the ‘pattern’ on a piece of jade and was early extended to mean pattern in general” (Owen 1992: 594). It is in terms of pattern that the “Record of Music” differentiates music from crude sounds. Music is much “more advanced form of aural expression” in that, as Scott Cook’s reading of its passage claims, only if sounds “have formed patterns” and attained “a degree of order” and “a sense of organization” could music arise to evoke more than instinctive reactions, but also to communicate complex feelings (Cook 1995: 30). In a broader sense, “both rites and music are closely related to aesthetics” in early China (Li 1988/2010: 11). Christoph Harbsmeier’s analysis of the theory of ritual in the *Book of Rites* also maintains that the legitimation of ritual comes from *qing*, or “fundamental human sensibilities”; however, as *qing* “is in some sense raw or instinctual”, it requires “beautification” (*shi* 飾). Specifically, Harbsmeier argues that “the process by which instinct gets informed by *wen* 文 ‘dignified patterning’ is at the very core of Confucius’ educational project” (Harbsmeier 2003: 84-86). This helps explain the reason why the *Book of Rites* is quite insistent on the linkage between *qing* and *wen*. Or, to put it differently: rites and music are able to manifest inner feelings. For Confucian ritual practice, however, this is legitimate only insofar as these bodily sensations and emotional content are refined through artworks’ elaborate patterns.

A Quest for Medium-specific Feelings in Avant-garde Cinema

From music to poetry, aesthetic theories in early China highlight the substantial contribution of an artwork’s ornamental appearance to the expression of affections and

the elicitation of sensations. Such a thought is compatible not with aesthetic cognitivists' examination of film emotion, but with the discussion of feelings by a group of pioneering filmmakers and film critics closely related to the avant-garde film movement in the very early period of cinema. They are more inclined to differentiate films from the dramatic arts and to explore the potential of the peculiar medium of cinema for eliciting aesthetic sensations, which are comparable to those of music and poetry.

The Italian film theorist Ricciotto Canudo, for instance, claims that "films will reach us with a supreme clarity of ideas and visual emotions" (Canudo 1923/1988: 293), and in "The Triumph of Cinema" (1908), he emphasises the creation of "a new current of aesthetic emotion with a *Plastic art in motion*" (Canudo 1908/2017: 68; emphasis in original). By using the phrase "a plastic art in motion", Canudo envisages that cinema as a new art form of that time approximated the synthesis of visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, and poetry and music with temporal rhythms. In an essay on cinegraphic rhythm, Léon Moussinac argues that the display of dramatic actions in films should be subordinated to "the visual suggestions and transfigurations of feeling", so as to invent a type of "the cinegraphic poem" tantamount to music with psychological resonance among recipients (Moussinac 1923/1988: 282). Likewise, Germaine Dulac is concerned with the reduction of narrative content, but also with the enhancement of the sensory perception of the cinematic medium's formal properties. In her "Visualization" (1927), Dulac asserts that "the future belongs to a film which cannot be summed up in its story" because priority should be given to, in her eyes, the portrait of "a sensibility by harmonies and the play of shadows, light, rhythm, movement, facial expressions", so that to be

visual “is to address the sensibility and the intelligence of the eye” (Dulac 1927/2020: 156). In “Vertical Montage” (1940), Sergei Eisenstein, who is so familiar with traditional Chinese culture throughout his film career, explores the dynamic synchronicity between the visual and the auditory perceptions engendered by compositional movements, but also examines the elicitation of the whole range of human sensory perceptions through montage techniques.

Eisenstein refers further to *Master Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals*, which has proposed the correspondences among the four elements (fire, water, wood, metal), the four virtues (morals, wisdom, love, justice), the four colours (red, black, green, white), the four tones (“G”, “A”, “E”, “D”) and the four tastes (bitter, salty, sour, spicy) (Eisenstein 1940/2010: 329, 334). Whereas Eisenstein puts forward “audiovisual correspondences” from the teaching of the Chinese poetic tradition, which inspires him to the realisation of “the stylistic aspirations of particular ‘ears’” regarding the active structure of images, colours, sounds and music (Eisenstein 1940/2010: 340-341), he could have referred to the ancient theorist Liu Xie, who, in the “Affections and Coloration” chapter, had already used “five tones”, “five colours” and “five affections” to advocate aesthetic feelings specific to artistic mediums.

The title itself of Liu Xie’s chapter is worthy of inspection: in parallel to *qing, cai* 采, whose literal meaning is “the bright, variegated pattern” with “a flashy appearance”, is the earmark of “the affect of a text”, namely, “a supremely outward quality, a sensuous allure and affective capacity” (Owen 1992: 239, 592). Therefore, this is still very closely

related to the aesthetics with regard to the parallel between innermost affections and its corresponding feelings manifested in artworks' patterns and appearances. Liu's chapter begins with the enumeration of water ripples, wood texture, the pelts of tiger and leopard, and the skins of rhinoceros and wild bull, aiming to show that the essential nature of an object and its exterior surface with ornamental patterns are, in fact, mutually dependent. Subsequently, Liu Xie, moving on to deal with artworks, pinpoints the close relationship between affections and literary ornamentation. He suggests the power of affective states of humans forms a sensible surface externally:

Regarding the Way of setting forth pattern, there are three basic principles. The first is the pattern of shapes constituted of the five colours. The second is the pattern of sounds constituted of the five tones. The third is the pattern of the affections constituted of the five "natures". A mixture of the five colours forms the patterns of elegant embroidery. The conjunction of the five tones creates the ancient music, such as the piece "Shaoxia". The five natures come forth and they are pieces of language. This is the fixed number of divine principle. (Owen 1992: 241; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 285)

In what he calls the "five colours", "five tones", "five natures", Liu Xie indubitably has in mind traditional Chinese philosophy of the so-called "Five Phases" (*wuxing* 五行), which is a systematic conceptual framework that describes and explains processes of change in a series of interconnected realms ranging from internal organs to political regimes and to cosmic movements. Such philosophy refers to the five material constituents, which obey the law of mutual production and conquest, of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. These also correspond to the five colours of white, green, black, red, and yellow, the five tones of *Shang* (re), *Jue* (mi), *Yü* (la), *Zhi* (so), and *Gong* (do), and the five affections

of sadness, anger, fear, delight, and thought (Graham 1986b: 42-66; Henderson 2003: 786-788; Rossi and Caretto 2007: 30-31; Wang et al 2011/2020: 211-220). For the sake of variation, Liu Xie employs the “five natures” to render the “five affections”, since “natural tendencies” (*xing* 性) and “human affections” (*qing* 情) are etymologically linked and occasionally interchangeable (Owen 1992: 614). The kernel of Liu Xie’s above argument is grounded in his view that all things in the cosmos, either animate or inanimate, have patterns. However, unlike delicate flowers or an eye-catching pelt, the human pattern is exhibited in a different way: “not through the organic human body”, but by means of the natural display of affections through literary works (Tian 2007: 166-169). Therefore, from the above-quoted passage, it is also not difficult for us to comprehend the insistence on the correspondence between the feelings and the medium-specificity’s formal qualities.

Once again, Liu Xie’s thesis still falls in line with the Chinese poetic tradition, which attaches outstanding importance to the dynamic interplay between *qing*, pointing to our inner sensitivity, and the artwork’s outer appearances comprised of colours, shapes, sounds and tones. The recipients’ sensuous feelings of these patterns are grounded in their sensory organs’ inherent propensities for sense data. This line of thinking, very similar to those of Canudo, Moussinac and Dulac, and having inspired Eisenstein’s theoretical writings, supports their concerns about the sensual and affective quality of films in the domain of avant-garde cinema. In short, the viewers’ emotional responses do not derive from a film’s narrative content, which, in fact, should be reduced dramatically. Instead, the audience, by using their ears, eyes and heart-minds, can have

emotional responses intuitively and immediately through their sensual and sensory engagement with the cinematic medium's formal properties, such as the contrast between light and shadow, the operation of editing rhythm and camera movements, and the complex interaction among images, sounds and music.

Non-cognitive Affections and Patterned Forms in Narrative-based Arthouse Cinema

In Tian Xiaofei's reading of Liu Xie's chapter, she even presents solid proof throughout Liu Xie's treatise of his intense interest in literary works' ornamental beauty. The verb "sculpting" (*diao* 雕), with which he is in favour, connotes exquisite craftsmanship, the hexagram *bi* 贲, "decoration", to which he refers, is a token of patterned ornamentation, and he even observes that some writers unavoidably "produce affections for the sake of patterns" (Owen 1992: 243; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 287). This is reminiscent of Michelangelo Antonioni's cinematic aesthetics, which undeniably build up a strong alliance between his works' formal patterns and his viewers' sensory perception and emotional experiences. On the part of Pier Paolo Pasolini's discussion of the cinema of poetry, Pasolini, while claiming for Antonioni's *Red Desert* "universally recognised as 'poetic'", identifies some sequences in the film as a testament to "a deep, mysterious, and—at times—great intensity in the formal idea that that excites the fantasy of Antonioni" (Pasolini 1965/2000: 47). The poetic aspects of *Red Desert*, according to Pasolini, can be noticed in Giuliana's (Monica Vitti) dream of the tropical beach rendered by outstanding Technicolor, in the warehouse's whitewashed wall with an electric blue strip shown by a panning shot, and in those violet flowers initially shown out of focus in

the foreground and, later, in focus in the background. More recently, critics suggest how the film's formal elements work directly on the audience's perception and affection.

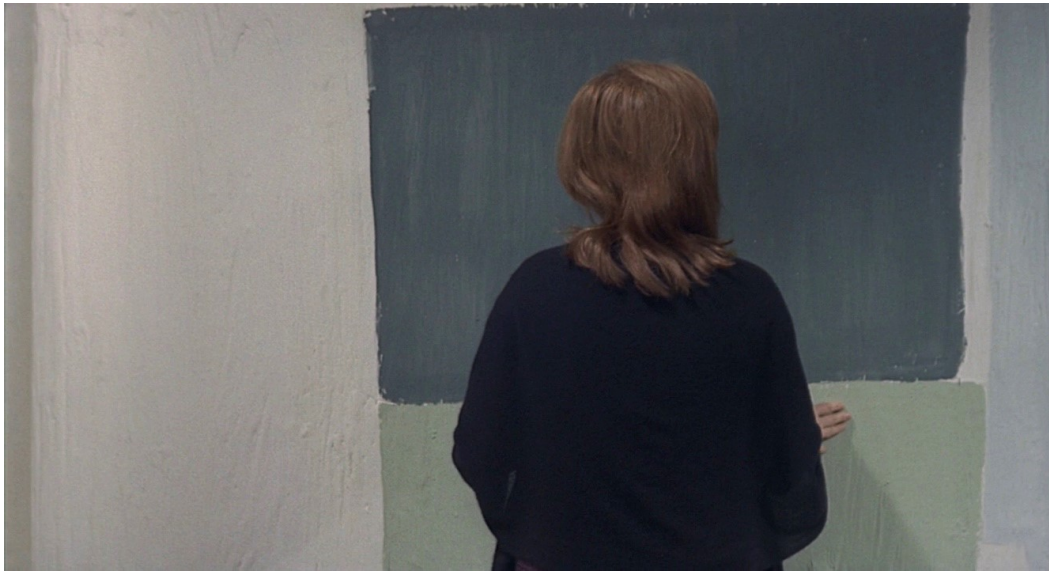


Figure 1.1: *Red Desert*: Rothko-like patterns in Giuliana's shop.

The American abstract painter Mark Rothko's aesthetics assert such an impactful influence on Antonioni's usage of colour in *Red Desert*, as Peter Brunette argues, that "Giuliana's Rothko-like patterns in her shop" (Figure 1.1), together with other blocks and fields of colours evident throughout the whole film, not only bring "a Rothko-like intensity" to the film's cinematic images, but also channel the continuing "effort of teaching us how to look" (Brunette 1998: 92, 94). In short, visual patterns in the film are so intense and enduring that it is so easy to affect the audience's perception. Christine Henderson, who notices Antonioni's infatuation with abstract expressionism, indicates that the film's bold colours render "perceivable its more intangible aspects, such as qualities of feeling, mood, and sensation". This means that, through Giuliana's "sensory experience", *Red Desert* guarantees "the very appearance of things" and "their visibility", thus blending "a

kaleidoscopic field comprised of patterns, shapes, and colours” with “an ephemeral constellation of mood and energy, vibration and intensity” (Henderson 2011: 170). All these comments remind us of traditional Chinese poetics, drawing a parallel between *qing* and *wen*, namely between an artwork’s emotional appeals imbuing the recipients and the work’s sensuous appearances as manifest in patterned “shapes”, “colours”, “sounds” and “tones”. Brunette even suggests similarities between *Red Desert*’s “visual imagery” and its soundtrack that is filled with “strange electronic music” and “a constant pounding noise”. These ambient sounds and music, in Antonioni’s earlier work *L’Eclisse* (1962), “massively exceed(s) even the jangling telephones and stock market hubbub”, preventing audiences from listening to the spoken dialogue and even forcing them to have a sense of “neurosis” (Brunette 1998: 96-97). From the viewpoint of the Chinese poetic tradition, arthouse cinema’s audiovisual patterns and other external perceivable appearances are crucial factors in producing poetic feelings.

As film theorists who have questioned aesthetic cognitivists’ reduction of cinematic emotions to cognitive-assessment of characters and narrative situation would agree, there is indeed non-cognitive affective feedback to cinematic medium in the audiences’ viewing experience. According to Amy Coplan, “affect”, as a broader category, involves “feelings”, “a wide range of mental states” and “some type of physiological arousal”, so “affective states” might not necessarily demand “cognitive evaluations or appraisals”. Therefore, “even if one subscribes to a cognitive theory of emotion and thus denies the possibility of non-cognitive emotions, one can still acknowledge the existence of non-cognitive affect” (Coplan 2011: 119). This is almost certainly a very fundamental and

significant challenge to cognitivists' theoretical premise of human emotion, as Thomas Fuchs argues straightforwardly. When the cognitive philosophy and psychology prefer to "subsume affects and emotions under more 'tidy' mental categories such as desires, volitions, beliefs, or judgements", these cognitive models fail to provide "an adequate description and understanding of affective phenomena in their own right", as affectivity is inseparable from feelings and bodily resonance (Fuchs 2013: 612-613). In this sense, traditional Chinese philosophy of *qing* clearly designates human emotions charged with both affective states and bodily sensations.

Lu Ji's statement of poetry about *qing*, that "poetry follows from the affections and is sensually intricate" (Owen 1992: 130; Original Source Lu ca.280_{CE}/2002: 99), signals "intricate elegance", "strongly suggests a self-conscious patterning of elegant phrases" (Cai and Wu 2019: 2). Such an argument thus advocates a delicate perception of the inner life, proposing a subtle blend of affectionate sentiments and sensuous feelings on the one hand, and a kind of aesthetic form characterised by exquisite, flamboyant, and even seductive, appearance as its outwardly visible counterpart, on the other hand. In Chapter 3, I will further relate aesthetics as such to Laura U. Marks's and Jennifer M. Barker's phenomenological theory of cinema's materiality and its affective qualities, as well as audiences' visual and haptic experience. Nevertheless, Coplan, challenging the cognitive approach to film emotion, has already suggested that cinema, as a powerful medium, is extraordinarily capable of bringing forth "non-cognitive affective responses" but also "direct sensory engagement". It is "through the deployment of visual and aural information" that cinema "can evoke intense feelings in us that are independent of and

sometimes even incompatible with our cognitive judgments of what we are watching” (Coplan 2011: 120). Both Noël Carroll and Carl Plantinga, as Robert Sinnerbrink claims, overlook “the specifically aesthetic and expressive aspects of narrative film”, because, apart from “character action” and “narrative content”, in terms of evoking emotions and expressing “a film’s style and meaning”, what is also significant is “the entire repertoire of cinematic-aesthetic devices (lighting, mise-en-scene, montage, rhythm, tempo, colour, texture, gesture, performance, music and sound)” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 151-152). For Daniel Yacavone, the overemphasis on “character and situation ‘identification’” has overshadowed not only cinema’s “affective and emotive content” related to their “formal and aesthetic features”, but also its “varied sources of affective expression”, which are particularly likely to take root in films’ “sensory and formal properties” (Yacavone 2015: 163). Yacavone indicates the right balance between sensory-affective feelings derived from the non-fictional, non-representational, and audiovisual properties, and emotional-cognitive states attained through fictional, representational and narrative elements.

Nevertheless, as *Red Desert* with “a kind of apotheosis of formalist *abstraction*” demonstrates to us, Antonioni predominantly intensifies “the expressivity of line, shape, and form”, and unavoidably lessens “the importance of narrative and character-driven drama” (Brunette 1998: 91; emphasis in original). Even if we do not concern ourselves with avant-garde cinema’s radical formal experimentation, which might “only elicit(s) non-cognitive affect”, to borrow from Coplan (Coplan 2011: 121), some arthouse cinema, with weakening narrative development and character motivations, especially inclines the audiences towards their sensory engagement in, and affective encounters with, the

film's sensuous appearances. This corresponds rather closely to traditional Chinese poetics associating *qing*, referring not only to emotional states but also to bodily sensations, with an artwork's refined formal properties, which are able to arouse sensual feelings and emotional resonance among the recipients.

In the "Affections and Coloration" chapter, Liu Xie, who considers the affections as "the medium of literature", reveals its substantial similarity to the colours as "the medium of embroidery" and the tones as "the medium of music" (Owen 1992: 241). Thus, Liu argues that a writer's presentation and manipulation of human affections is, in fact, not much different from an embroidery's arrangement of colours and patterns, or a composer's organisation of tones for musical composition. Cai Zong-qi and Wu Shengqing also maintain that, when Liu Xie attempts to compare "a patterning of emotion" in writing with "a patterning of shapes" in embroidery, and with "a patterning of sounds" in music, he views the pattern of "an influx of emotion" as a catalyst for "an inner visualization", therefore, together with Lu Ji, endorsing "artistic feeling" and "an aestheticization of emotion" (Cai and Wu 2019: 1-5). Because of these and comparable developments in traditional Chinese poetics, I argue that it is important to highlight poetic cinema's affective medium where affections are externalised in stylised formal elements, and that these sensual, richly patterned, appearances, in turn, become the dynamic nexus and interplay between outward manifestations of inner emotions and a powerful sensory experience of formal qualities presented for the audience.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this chapter was to outline the aesthetics of “intents” (*zhi* 志) and “affections” (*qing* 情) in the Chinese poetic tradition and then to propose the theoretical framework for poetic cinema. To do so, I have first offered a philosophical investigation into the concept of the “heart-mind” (*xin* 心), suggesting that it takes charges both of thinking activities and of feelings, emotions and bodily sensations, and that it functions as the intermediary between the inner body and the outer world with external stimuli. I further adopted a Husserlian phenomenological approach to claim that the conception of *zhi* can be regarded as a particular subject’s mental activities intimately involved in some objects in the outside world. This term also accentuates the indissoluble linkage between the experience of one’s conscious thoughts and one’s subjective life-world. In addition, Confucius’s and Mencius’s shared belief in the interrelatedness between one’s language and one’s psychological situation establishes the Chinese poetic tradition that emphasises a single author’s expression of one’s own personality and experience. In this regard, I have then referred to the expression theory in the Euro-American discourse which, similarly, argues for an artist’s expressive faculties, and is convinced of the ability of the artistic mediums to express one’s individuality and display one’s mental state related to the life-world as concretely lived and perceptually experienced. In terms of cinema as an art form, from Rudolf Arnheim to Berys Gaut and Katherine Thomson-Jones, these scholars pinpoint the cinematic medium’s capacities to present the reality differently, so that an individual filmmaker’s manipulation of the medium’s formal

properties can offer practical possibilities for interpreting the external world and for conveying expressive meanings. The multiple-authorship receives substantial support from scholars' analysis of the mainstream cinema. Nevertheless, the auteurist tradition in film studies values the identifiable thematic and stylistic presence in films, and a cinematic author's expression of individuality tends to exist in the avant-garde and arthouse cinema, as demonstrated by Pier Paolo Pasolini's analysis of the "cinema of poetry", David Bordwell's definition of the arthouse cinema, and Paisley Livingston's defence of the individual authorship of Ingmar Bergman's works, which might be a source of the poetic in cinema.

I then moved on to investigate the notion of *qing* in early Chinese philosophy, which designates not only specific kinds of emotions, but also indicates, more broadly, general sensory input. *Qing* clearly evinces the interconnection among the heart-mind, the body and sensory organs that prompts human interact with the physical world, both affectively and sensually. Although Cai Zong-qi in "A Study of Early Chinese Concepts of Qing 情 and a Dialogue with Western Emotion Studies" (2020) has tried to draw a parallel between the poetics of *qing* in the "Great Preface" and the cognitive approach to emotion, we can see that the cognitivist account of film emotions, which often tends to centre on the mass audience's cognitive-emotional appraisal of popular films' narrative content, has actually failed to explain the affective force of avant-garde and arthouse cinema. Drawing on the traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics of *qing*, I have indicated that the cognitive theory of cinematic emotions is confronted with two major problems in the face of poetic cinema. First, cognitive film theory rarely refers to moods and affective

atmospheres in film aesthetics. Second, aesthetic cognitivists' neglect of non-cognitive feelings leads to devalue the contribution of art films' formal elements to audiences' affective and sensory responses to the cinematic medium of these films.

Whereas the so-called the turn to affect in film studies, with the dominance of the cognitive-appraisal theory of emotions, has turned the spotlight on mainstream narrative films, early avant-garde film practitioners' consuming interest in non-fiction avant-garde films foregrounds the tremendous potential of the formal properties of film medium to offer the audience a sensory experience. Even in narrative-based arthouse cinema, *Red Desert* evinces that the film's formal patterns are, to a large extent, directly contributory to the audience's sensory perception and emotional experience. At this point, I have referred to the aesthetics of *qing* often paired with the "patterning" (*wen* 文) of artworks, along with other terms such as "a flashy appearance" (*cai* 采), "sound" (*sheng* 聲), "outer form and shape" (*xing* 形), "outer appearance" (*mao* 貌) and "outward flourishes" (*hua* 華), highlighting the role of poetic cinema's affective medium in arousing sensations, in evoking moods, and in constructing atmospheres. In terms of the evocation of moods and atmospheres in cinema, I have aligned traditional Chinese poetics of *qing* not with the cognitive theorist Greg M. Smith's "the mood-cue approach to filmic emotion", but with the phenomenological account of mood adopted by Robert Sinnerbrink. I contend that, through the cinematic, and stylised, presentation of affective images, accompanied by the subjectified soundtrack as well, poetic cinema externalises fictional characters' perceptions, sensations and affections, and manifests a communion of their heart-minds and objects, environments and circumstances around them. In Chapter 3, I will unpack

this point with reference to the aesthetic principle of *xing* 興, which, according to Stephen Owen, means “the stirring of a particular affection or mood”(Owen 1992: 46).

In this current chapter, we have also become aware of the classification of moods in the Chinese poetic tradition. I have proposed that the affective categories in Sikong Tu’s *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* can help us identify a potential candidate for poetic cinema. Therefore, the following three chapters will be organised around some categories in Sikong Tu’s poetics, such as “Lofty and Ancient”, “Intricate Beauty” plus “Delicate-Fresh and Rich-Lush”, and “Flowing Movement”, to examine various different moods evoked in films by Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-war and Terrence Malick. With the philosophy of the “heart-mind” stressing the dynamics between mental activities and objects, now we turn to an analysis of Alexander Sokurov’s display of close contact with lamps and oil paintings in his documentaries that evoke the mood of “Lofty and Ancient”.

Chapter 2. The “Ethereal Ancient”: Alexander Sokurov

In *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* by Sikong Tu (837–908_{CE}), its poetic category of “Lofty and Ancient”, first and foremost, revolves around an ethereal return to antiquity. In this chapter, I will suggest that Alexander Sokurov’s personal journey to a feudal-era island in Japan in *Oriental Elegy* (1996), and to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam in the second half of *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001) that zooms in on many of its historic paintings, has an overwhelming feeling of a hermit-like existence isolated from the modern world. In particular, in *Oriental Elegy*, the film’s focus on a group of old people presented as some ghostly beings living in the past, as well as on the misty world often shrouded in swirling clouds, is likely to evoke Sikong Tu’s concern over “the immortal being” which “becomes formless and ethereal, leaving the dominant motif of emptiness, unbounded space and time” in the category of “Lofty and Ancient” (Owen 1992: 314). I have in Chapter 1 tried to relate the aesthetic concept of *zhi* in traditional Chinese poetics to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological notions of “the life-world” and of “intentionality”. The fact that a poet’s *zhi*, generally understood as mental states, is often revealed in one particular literary genre, “poems on objects” (Chen 2010: 216; Knechtges 2014: 1956; Yan 2016: 376; Yang 2017: 70), leads me to further

consider Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology in this chapter. I will propose that objects presented in artworks might be sensual objects with sensual qualities or real qualities: an object is usually experienced in the life-world of the poet, who not only pays close attention to the thing's sensuous properties, but also endeavours to grasp the deep meaning behind the thing through a conscious effort.

In this respect, this chapter will analyse the lamps and candles in *Oriental Elegy*, as well as various paintings in *Elegy of a Voyage*. My analysis of the visual motif of candlelight and shadows in *Oriental Elegy* will be based on Tian Xiaofei's close reading of poems by Xiao Gang (503–551_{CE}), Xiao Yi (508–555_{CE}) and Liu Xiaowei (496–549_{CE}). I argue that, like these poets, Sokurov in the film is well aware of how lamps and candles are interlocked with perception, attention, illusion, and the Buddhist contemplation on the impermanence of human existence. Drawing on Harman's aesthetics, I also suggest that viewers, through the aesthetic experience of the film's defamiliarised appearance, are encouraged to engage with the inscrutable and inaccessible reality in the film of an island inhabited by ghosts of the remote past. In terms of the paintings in *Elegy of a Voyage*, I will use the aesthetics of the subgenre of "poems inscribed on paintings", which once took root in "poems on objects" in the Chinese poetic tradition, to examine Sokurov's own intimate relations with paintings: Sokurov is interested equally in the interaction between paintings and the viewing subject, but also between the viewing experience of paintings and that of the real world.

The Poetics of “Poems on objects” and Object-Oriented Ontology

As fully discussed in Chapter 1, the poetics of *zhi* in the Chinese aesthetic tradition hinge on the correlation between a particular subject's mind and an object-to-be-intent-upon. Stephen Owen elucidates for us: “[*zhi*] may be ‘intent’ in the sense of English ‘being intent upon something’” (Owen 1992: 28). Such an idea that a particular poet's internal state is related to certain objects, on the whole, contributes to one literary genre in traditional Chinese literature, namely *yongwu shi*, or “poems on objects”. *Yongwu*, according to David R. Knechtges, “literally means ‘versifying about a thing’”, while the thing can be any object from “the natural or human world”. A potential candidate for a *yongwu* poem widely varies from living things that include “plants and animals”, to such natural phenomena as “sun, moon, stars, clouds, wind, rain, snow”, and to artefacts, which include, but are not limited to, artistic objects, writing implements, technological devices, and household furnishings (Knechtges 2014: 1956). More importantly, as the theorist Liu Xie (465–522_{CE}) has argued for “writing intent by embodying an object” (Fong 1985: 328; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 75), the object in a *yongwu* poem is usually permeated by the presence of a poet's personality and his mental states. These poems, in Yang Haihong's opinion, practise “the Confucius poetic ideal advocating that a lyric portrait of objects shall serve the purpose of voicing the poet's aspiration” (Yang 2017: 70). In addition, Yan Zinan's summary of various studies of “poems on objects” suggests that the objects selected from “the real world” usually function as “a vehicle for the poet's feelings” (Yan 2016: 376). Likewise, Jack W. Chen, who agrees to the

interconnection between “the language of *zhi*” and “personhood”, also argues that, even though the human person is subordinated from the objects in “poems on objects”, these poems are always inseparable from “the discourse on persons and minds” (Chen 2010: 216). If a Chinese poet’s description of the object in “poems on objects” is habitually intermingled with the conveyance of a “personal message” so that “the ‘thing’ serves to represent the author of the poem” (Knechtges 2014: 1956), such a concern corresponds to Sokurov’s claim about objects as presented in his cinematic works:

With a documentary, we are never trying to be objective. As soon as any object appears on the screen, all objective criteria vanish, yielding their place to the absolutely subjective dictatorship of the filmmaker’s will. (quoted in Sedofsky 2001: 127)

In the forthcoming discussion in this chapter, I will offer a careful analysis of Sokurov’s presentation of lamps and candles in *Oriental Elegy*, as well as paintings in *Elegy of a Voyage*, for the reason that these objects are of particular interest to many poets expert in composing “poems on objects” in the Chinese poetic tradition. But now, in light of the indispensable presence of objects in “poems on objects”, I want to turn to Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology that differentiates sensual objects from real objects.

Object-oriented ontology’s usage of “object”, as Harman himself acknowledges, is indebted to Franz Brentano, “who famously revived the medieval term ‘intentionality’”, and “objects”; object-oriented ontology does not mean a preference for “inanimate objects” to “humans”, but include “human beings as well as dragons, stones and the Dutch East India Company” (Harman 2015: 401-402). The Chinese character *wu* 物 appearing in *yongwu shi* has been interpreted as “thing” and “phenomenon” by Owen,

who also suggests that “*wu* varies in usage from an ‘animal’ to a ‘physical thing’ to any ‘object of consciousness’” (Owen 1992: 594). It then seems that objects in “poems on objects” that are filled with poets’ conscious experiences belong not to real objects, but to “sensual, or intentional, objects” that “exist in our perception of them” (Ezra 2018: 11). Real objects, in Harman’s own words, “are non-relational” and “withdraw from all human view and even from all relations with each other”, so that “they cannot make any contact with each other” (Harman 2009: 194-195). To illustrate this point, Harman has suggested that a real cat continues to exist when its owner falls asleep, but, at this moment, a sensual cat vanishes from the owner, who is incapable of having immediate access to that real cat. Accordingly, unlike real objects that “are hidden and never present enough”, “intentional objects are always already present” but also “intended or touched by me, since they are a genuine part of my life at this instant” (Harman 2009: 195-196). That is to say, the existence of an intentional, or sensual, object is dependent upon the real object being experienced in a subject’s conscious life in a given moment, meaning that they “are fully accessible to the mind” (Harman 2009: 403). Once again, as Shuen-fu Lin has argued: when a song lyric “depicts an object”, *wu* means “all concrete entities and phenomena in the material world and in human affairs, as well as abstract ideas and unreal and imaginary things” that are “apprehended or perceived” by “the experiencing subject” (Lin 2008: 287). An object present in the human mind is very important in the poetics of “poems on objects” and the concept of “sensual objects”.

Charles Hartman, borrowing “the words of one scholar, ‘sensuous word-pictures’” to capture the poetics of poems on things, maintains as well that the purpose of these

poems “was not simply to describe the object but to evoke in words the mood or feeling associated with the object” (Hartman 2001: 474). Although Harman, when reiterating “‘objects’ does not mean non-humans any more than it means humans”, also proposes that “if we speak of object-oriented cinema, we are not referring to images of inanimate objects on screen” (Harman 2015: 407), I feel that some other ideas related to object-oriented ontology, which lay stress on “the ‘autonomous reality’ of objects”, “a ‘finally subjectless’ object” or “objects independent of humans” (Ezra 2018: 11-12), do not necessarily extend to the aesthetics of poems on things in the Chinese poetic tradition, as the human mind in the real life still coexists with the objects.



Figure 2.1: *Oriental Elegy*: Sokurov standing by the window accompanied by a living crane.

In Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy*, there is a medium shot of a solitary crane standing in a doorway and looking around; elsewhere in the film, another shot displays Sokurov

gazing out of the window to the accompaniment of the crane (Figure 2.1), followed by an extreme close-up of the crane's foot stepping on Sokurov's hand, its beak pecking his index finger, and Sokurov, speaking in whispers, describing the feeling of his intimate contact with the crane in a rather soft, gentle way: "This is my crane. A warm little foot." These shots remind us of the poet and scholar-artist Lin Bu (957–1028_{CE}), who "was said to have 'plums for a wife and cranes for children'", as he never married but lived in seclusion, raising cranes and growing plum trees, in the mountains of Gushan around the West Lake (Fuller 2001: 343). Like Lin Bu, Sokurov truly "owned a pet crane for many years" and, according to an interview, he even regards the crane as "a sacred existence" which is able to "see, hear, remember everything", further indicating how the crane "with its long and delicate neck and legs, served to symbolise Russia, especially in its oriental dimension: fragile, very sensitive" (Szaniawski 2014: 115). It should be noted that throughout his career, Sokurov demonstrates rather ambivalent attitudes towards oriental cultures in his films: whereas *Mournful Unconcern* (1987) and *Days of the Eclipse* (1988) still perpetuate Europe's canonical gaze of the East as exotic, his documentaries made in Japan are infused with a more sincere admiration and his later feature film *The Sun* (2005) even attempts to reflect on both Russia's and Japan's colonial ambitions (Condee 2009: 178-180). The crane presented in *Oriental Elegy* might not really be stereotyped through European eyes, and it is by no means the independence of a subjectless object either. Instead, both Sokurov and Lin Bu regard the crane as a sensual object experienced in their lives, keeping it for a long time during their lives,

paying considerable attention to its appearance and behaviours, and later transforming such personal experiences into artworks.

Added to the distinction between “the sensual object that exists *only* in experience” and “the real object that withdraws from all experience”, object-oriented ontology also has “two kinds of qualities”: whereas the sensual qualities can be “found in experience”, the real qualities “are accessible intellectually rather than through sensuous intuition” (Harman 2011: 49; emphasis in original). Two kinds of objects can be paired with two different types of qualities, thus yielding four distinct poles of realities. In this regard, those objects in poems on things might be sensual objects with sensual qualities, or sensual objects with real qualities, since the poet in the Chinese poetic tradition, more often than not, unfolds multisensory experiences of a thing, followed by an intellectual grasp of the thing’s deep meanings. I will have more to say about these later on when I draw on the traditional poetics of “poems on paintings” in China to analyse how Sokurov in his *Elegy of a Voyage* sheds light on paintings that he has experienced in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Now, I will refer back to Sikong Tu’s aesthetic category and pinpoint the poetic mode of “Lofty and Ancient” as seen in *Oriental Elegy*.

“Lofty and Ancient”: Antiquity, Immortality and The Ethereal Realm

Sokurov's portrayal and engagement with the Oriental in his films, as the preceding discussion shows, are neither single nor simplistic, as his attitudes have been shaped by Orientalism, Russian nationalism, and his growing appreciation for oriental cultures.

His documentaries shot in Japan, not only *Oriental Elegy* but also *A Humble Life* (1997) and *dolce...* (1999), have become an outward manifestation of Sokurov's admiration for the ancient world cut off from the hustle and bustle of modern life. Eva Binder's analysis of *A Humble Life*, a cinematic portrait of an old Japanese lady who is a kimono maker, maintains that her wooden house in the film is "a place of yearning and a vanishing point in the narrator's imagination: it represents a world and a way of life that cannot be reconciled with the demands of modernity" (Binder 2011: 40). An important narrative strand of *dolce...*, in Alexandra Tchniskaya's eyes, is "a lyrical monologue" and revolves around Miho Shimao, the Japanese writer Toshio Shimao's (1917–1986) widow, who "lives on a solitary island far into the ocean" and "discovers herself through self-analysis, a form of catharsis brought on by the spiritual denudation of this existence" (Tchniskaya, n.d.a, online). While noticing "a direct reference to" *The Oriental Elegy* in *Robert. A Fortunate Life* (1999), in which it is the unique trait of "a fragment of an ideal past" that "brings the painting of ruins close to the art of cinema", Mikhail Lampolski claims: "from the entire repertoire of world painting Sokurov chose the eighteenth-century French artist Hubert Robert" (Lampolski 1999: 127-128). I would like to connect Sokurov's artistic pursuit of a sense of antiquity in these works with the poetic mood of "Lofty and Ancient" in Sikong Tu's poetics. As the phrase suggests, this mode, which is "very common categories of critical judgement", "involves the style of the past repapering in the present" (Owen 1992: 314). Poet Li Bai (701–762_{CE}) also wrote fifty-nine poems of "Ancient Mode" to imitate the poetic styles and sensibilities of poets from the previous era of the Six Dynasties. In this group of poems, Paula Varsano has argued

for a “return to antiquity”, suggesting that these works can be understood as “a straightforward expression of his allegiance to past poetic principles” and “an intention to continue in or return to the ancient tradition” (Varsano 2003: 145). The presentations of obsolete houses and ruined landscapes in Sokurov’s documentaries, as critics have commonly described these works as somewhat anachronistic, at first glance, brim with a strong sense of ancientness inherent in the poetics of “Lofty and Ancient”.

Stephen Owen, furthermore, highlights ways in which Sikong Tu associated the aesthetic qualities of such “a category of mood”, often appearing in Tang aestheticians’ taxonomies, with “ethereal purity”. The term “the ‘man of wonders’” used by Sikong Tu refers to “an ‘immortal being,’ or simply one who rises above the ordinary world”, and yet, “the immortal being becomes formless and ethereal, leaving the dominant motif of emptiness, unbounded space and time” (Owen 1992: 313-314). In terms of Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy*, his visit to Japan, and his shooting of “the old people in the neglected interiors of the Japanese national lodgings” (Tuchniskaya, n.d.b, online), are presented as a mystical journey to such an ethereal realm of the dead, or immortal beings, in an isolated feudal-era island as perceived and imagined by Sokurov himself. The feeling of emptiness and formlessness seems to be externalised through the pervasive mist shrouding the antiquated village. Louise Sundararajan compares the “poetic mode-mood” of “Lofty and Ancient” to “the reverie [that] concerns a cool and serene night”, and has the impression that “all these images ‘speak’ the same values of void, serenity and transcendence” (Sundararajan 2004: 205). Sundararajan refers to Owen’s interpretation of the following lines by Sikong Tu:

The moon emerges in the eastern Dipper,
And a good wind follows it.
[Taihua] Mountain is emerald green this night,
And he hears the sound of a clear bell.
(Owen 1992: 313; Original Source Sikong ca.8th century CE/2013: 21)



Figure 2.2: *Oriental Elegy*: A full moon is hung high in a windy night sky.

For Owen, Sikong Tu, in the aesthetic mood of “Lofty and Ancient”, is so concerned with the ethereal atmosphere that “all is wind, light, and sound, with the only shape in the void being the mysterious and dark mas of Mount [Taihua], around which immortal beings from the past play unseen” (Owen 1992: 315). As it will become clear in what follows, the film often presents some ghostly beings living in the feudal-era island as some shadowy figures indiscernible in the darkness. Now, these lines are reminiscent of the scenery of the island shown in *Oriental Elegy*: some wooden houses with old-style thatched roofs stand along a lofty mountain’s ridge in a pitch-black night, and soon it follows a full moon hung high in the night sky with fluffy clouds in the wind (Figure 2.2).

While we know that Sikong Tu's account of "Lofty and Ancient" adapted the first four lines of Li Bai's nineteenth "Ancient Mode":

Westward I climbed Lotus Blossom Peak
And far in the distance saw Bright Star:
In her hand she held a lotus,
Walking in air, striding the Utterly Clear.
(Owen 1992: 313; Original Source Sikong ca.8th century CE/2013: 21)

Varsano's close reading of Li Bai's works further maintains that the thematic subgenre of "climbing high", where "the poet ascends a tower or a mountain and looks out at the vast landscape unfurled before his eyes", contributes "particularly well to preserving the pastness of the past" (Varsano 2003: 175). In such a poem, the poet, as Varsano has suggested, is usually confronted with the fact that the same high place has already been visited by forebears who have passed away. Sokurov, in a letter to his Japanese friend Hideki Mayeda, also describes his personal experience of climbing a towering mountain during the days when he shot *Oriental Elegy*:

When I remember those days now, I am afraid, understanding how great the risk was—the risk to fall down and break... The mountain which I decided to climb was too high. Besides, the ascent was made at the most unfavourable time and along the steepest slope. How much was it my merit, that the ascent was performed—and more or less successfully? It is mine, concerning only the reckless resolution with which I started. (Tuchinskaya, n.d.c, online)

This letter, which has detailed an unnerving yet unforgettable experience of ascending a mountain, is evocative of the subgenre of "climbing high" written by poets in medieval China, who are themselves incredibly enthusiastic about wandering the natural world, but also working on the popular topic of climbing a hill to take in a view in their works.

Sun Kangyi claims that the poetic description of landscapes by Xie Lingyun (385–433_{CE}), who gained considerable pleasure in hiking over rugged mountains, “is only a point of departure for his self-realization”, and that “it is the visual perception that elicits the strong emotions in the poet, not the other way” (Sun 1986: 73). The reason for this is because his poems usually begin with the journey, proceeds with visual experience, and ends with an emotional response and revelation. At the core of the poetics of Xie Lingyun’s landscape is also the process of “inner struggle” and “of constant search and changing realizations” (Sun 1986: 75), as illustrated by the ending couplet of his “Climbing the Very Highest Peak of Stone Gate”:

My only regret is that there is no understanding friend,
To climb with me this ladder to the blue clouds.
(Sun 1986: 75; Original Source Xie 430_{CE}/1987: 178)

According to Sun’s analysis of the work, Xie Lingyun is “preoccupied with the thoughts of finding” someone “with whom he may communicate his self-realization” (Sun 1986: 75). Around three centuries later, Li Bai in his “Mount Skyland Ascended in a Dream—A Song of Farewell” responds to Xie Lingyun’s unfulfillment:

Where Hermitage of Master Xie can still be seen,
And clearly gibbons wail o’er ripple water green.
I put Xie’s pegged boot, Each on one foot,
And scale the mountain ladder to blue cloud.
(Xu 2007:127; Original Source Li 745_{CE}/1977: 108)

In like manner, Sokurov in *Oriental Elegy* shows himself climbing the cloud-capped stone ladder in an extreme long shot (Figure 2.3), which appears to bespeak the phrase of “in air he stands long”, borrowed from “walking in air” of Li Bai’s lines, in Sikong Tu’s explanation of the poetic mood of “Lofty and Ancient” (Owen 1992: 314). As Sokurov’s

monologue continues in the sequence and is later accompanied by the sounds of rippling waters, tweeting birds and even some roaring wild beasts, Sokurov describes his visual, audio and olfactory experiences of ascending the mountain, all leading to a reflection on his whereabouts, to a strong emotional response to the scene, and even to an illusion of his silent steps:

Old stone steps. Huge cryptomerias. I take a deep breath of jasmine. Sounds, sounds. Where am I? In paradise? But then, why do I feel so sad? What a strange island! The houses are as if turned to stone. I do not hear my steps at all. In this fog I am like a fish in water, but I feel a chill as a human would. There is a light in a window. For me perhaps?



Figure 2.3: *Oriental Elegy*: Sokurov climbs a mountain enveloped in clouds.

While visual perception plays a crucial role in Xie Lingyun's poetics, Li Bai's poem is characterized by the presentation of "visionary worlds" and "its transcendent beauty and imaginary power" (Obata 1928: 20). *Oriental Elegy* also frames quite a few objects

witnessed by Sokurov during his journey crossing the misty mountain: hilly pinewoods, stone sculptures, and a wooden lantern swaying gently in the wind, to name a few.

The scene thus exemplifies the poetics of “climbing high” summarised by Varsano: “poets’ emotions were stirred by observed objects in nature”, and their “feelings were first moved by his direct observation of nature, at a specific moment in a specific place” (Varsano 2003: 175-176). From the viewpoint of object-oriented ontology, both the film and Varsano’s account showcase a series of intentional objects that evoke Sokurov’s poetic descriptions. These objects, whose sensual qualities are perceptible, and then revealed, through Sokurov’s subjective observations, become a projection of Sokurov’s memories and dispositions. In the subgenre of “climbing high”, the reflection of the poet, who is “confronted with the evidence of nature’s cycles”, on “his own impermanence”, “the brevity of life”, and “the inevitability of the poet’s own demise” (Varsano 2003: 175, 179), however, is characteristic of what Graham Harman has called “real qualities” that are obtained intellectually by a conscious mind. Whereas Varsano believes that Li Bai in his poems of “Ancient Mode” “objectifies those all-too-human feelings”, I will in the following section point out that Sokurov’s preoccupation with the impermanence of human life and the physical world in *Oriental Elegy* has its roots in the film’s persistent presentation of lamps and candles leading to Buddhist meditation on the evanescence.

Candlelight, Shadows and Mist: Contemplating the Evanescence

Oriental Elegy is a film laden with Buddhism-related figures and objects: a monk as an interviewee, a facing-upward Buddha statue and a Buddha bending down, as well as candles and lamps that are recurrently presented by cinematic frames with a wide diversity of camera angles and distances. Closely related to a series of core concepts in Buddhism, lamps and candles are, first of all, crucial religious objects. According to Tian Xiaofei's overall summary of Buddhist teachings, the lamp "giving forth light and illuminating things" is a sign of wisdom (*prajñā*), which means "the ability to understand the myriad phenomena of the universe exactly as they are" (Tian 2007: 224-225). As *prajñā* refers to "an understanding of reality that transcends ordinary comprehension", one of the distinctive features of *prajñā* which stems from meditation is concentration (*vipaśyanā*) – "an understanding of reality (either conceptual or nonconceptual) at a level of mental concentration" (Buswell and Lopez 2014: 655, 979). Moreover, as "the clear, penetrating, illuminating observation of the world as it is", *vipaśyanā* allows one to perceive "the world as transient, relative, constantly changing, and unreal" (Tian 2007: 225). This means that, although the lamp enables one to see in the darkness, sight can also be unreal and delusive, and makes one realise the illusory, inconstant and impermanent appearances of the physical objects being perceived. Based on such a Buddhist context, Tian has then conducted a thorough analysis of those poems on lamps and candles, which were composed by Southern Liang poets such as Xiao Gang (503–551_{CE}), Xiao Yi (508–555_{CE}) and Liu Xiaowei (496–549_{CE}).

Tian maintains that the reason why these poets, familiar with Buddhist scripture, were fascinated by lamps and candles is because these objects “illustrate most clearly the new poetics of seeing” and embody “Buddhist teachings about illusion, illumination, meditative concentration, and visualisation” (Tian 2007: 212). In other words, the lamps and candles, in these poets’ eyes, are closely linked with mental activities, such as meditation, contemplation and concentration, and effects of the visual perception of lamplight and candlelight - a dim, soft glow to psychical objects in the darkness. The dynamic relationship between such light and its mysterious shadows, moreover, makes the poets conscious of the impermanent world. If the lamps and candles are objects in everyday life that attract the attention of a handful of poets in the Chinese poetic tradition, who spared no effort to accentuate the experience of visual perception and meditative contemplation in their works, I argue that the visual motif of candle and lamp, shown emphatically throughout *Oriental Elegy*, is conducive to Sokurov’s thematic preoccupations with the illusory and ephemeral essence of the physical world, perceived by the human eye on the one hand, but also becomes a contributory factor in the murky, shadowy and phantasmagorical atmosphere of the evanescent phenomenal world being perceived on the other hand.

The Illuminated Ghosts Deep in Contemplation

To begin with, Sokurov is familiar with the subtle interconnection between oriental arts and meditation methods, but he is also involved in those contemplative activities in his life. In an interview, he mentions some “valuable principles in art which exist in Eastern



Figure 2.4: *Oriental Elegy*: Sokurov holds a lighted candle inside a closed room.

tradition”, further disclosing that “from many times that I’ve been in Japan, for example, I’ve been able to observe this using my inner consciousness, and my inner [intuitive] process” (quoted in Galetski 2001: 6). In *Oriental Elegy*, the film’s “increasingly long rendering of the takes”, from Morteza Dehghani’s viewpoint, highlights “the correlation between shots/takes and reflection”, as exemplified by a one-minute-and-forty-second static shot which displays the “silent contemplation” of a female ghost “in answer to the question ‘what is happiness’” (Dehghani 2019: 197). Moreover, also worth mentioning is the medium shot right before this long take, which frames Sokurov kneeling down on the ground inside a Japanese-style room, holding a lighted candle with both hands, and then scooping it up (Figure 2.4), while his voiceover is pondering: “So I returned to you. I want to ask you about one thing only: what is happiness?” The way Sokurov phrases such a probing philosophical question is co-consistent with his regular practice of

revealing his contemplative mood, while and the composition of his kneeling figure inside a claustrophobic room is redolent with the lines by Zhi Yi (538–597_{CE}).

To illustrate the attainment of “illuminating observation” of the world undergoing changes, Zhi Yi, who combined Daoist methods of meditation with Buddhist ones, likened meditation to a closed room and compares concentration to a burning lamp in that room, as he wrote: “If one cultivates one’s concentration, then it is like a lamp in a closed room, which is capable of illumining great darkness” (Tian 2007: 225-226). Given this background, it is no wonder that Sokurov in *Oriental Elegy* gives a special prominence to the visual presence of lamps and candles inside the sombre, enclosed interior space that carry a strong message about the existence of enlightenment and meditative concentration from the perspective of Buddhist teachings. Sokurov’s initial entrance of a tatami room in *Oriental Elegy* which prompts him to sigh dreamily “the scent of a candle” is even a telling sign of his olfactory sensation directed toward candle smoke. Almost all of the static long takes in the film, which display talking head interviews inside the interior space, are intercut with extreme close-ups of lamps and candles, suggesting the act of engaging in quiet contemplation. More concretely, if lamps and candles in the Buddhist context, as Tian Xiaofei is supposed to emphasise, have imparted the aforementioned Chinese poets “the power of illumination achieved through an intensely concentrated and yet all-encompassing vision” (Tian 2007: 237-238), the recurring inserted shots of the lamp/candle into dialogue scenes in Sokurov’s film offer physical evidence of intense observation. These shots further establish the editing pattern to suggest both those ghosts, in a state of rumination, who attempt to

contemplate their previous lives, and Sokurov himself hoping to comprehend the meaning of life from these ghostly figures. The presentation of these ghosts, depicted through the film's murky visuality that will be analysed shortly, signifies an ongoing existence in the physical world, albeit in a different form and with a distinct perception.



Figure 2.5: *Oriental Elegy*: A close-up of an oil lamp indicates the quiet contemplation.

After Sokurov warmly greets a female ghost with a soft whisper “how do you do”, an oblique medium close-up, for instance, shows the ghost mumbling inarticulately, while bowing her head in meditation. Although a flickering lamp behind the ghost is so indiscernible, it throws her dense shadow against the wall, and then an immediate cut takes us to an extreme close of a burning oil lamp and a hand later putting a clear glass chimney on it (Figure 2.5). This is followed by a medium shot of Sokurov’s kneeling figure, who murmurs his amazement at the words and actions of this ghost: “But if this

soul responded, others too may be waiting for me. A soul loves humans.” Towards the end of the film, when this “soul” confesses to Sokurov that she has little knowledge of life and happiness, a similar editing pattern reoccurs: (a) a one-minute-and-fifteen-second medium shot inside a closed room, in which the ghost, with a feeling of pure delight, talks to Sokurov who rephrases her Japanese sentences in Russian: “I do not know anything about happiness. What can I know about happiness in life? Nothing. Nothing. What can I know about life? I know nothing”; (b) a fifteen-second medium shot, showing that the silhouette of Sokurov, keeping silent and kneeling down on the tatami floor, is clear against the translucent sliding doors; (c) a fifteen-second medium shot of an extreme close-up of the oil-lamp with its tiny yellow flame swaying in the wind; (d) a one-minute-and-forty-five-second medium shot of the ghost, who, in her room with an ocean view, feels completely at ease when listening to crashing waves and chirping birds, and who, before sitting there deep in contemplation with a smile, once again confesses her ignorance about life in measured tones: “How could I understand it? All is so complicated in life. For instance, wars are not necessary, but they are fought.”

Though Dehghani has not mentioned Buddhist thought in her review of *Oriental Elegy*, she has provided a succinct explanation of the oil lamp as an important object in the film’s mise-en-scène, suggesting that the flickering oil lamp in the film, which “enlightens modestly” and is “illuminating very little in the room”, indicates “how little the mind is illumined” (Dehghani 2019: 185). While Dehghani notices the old lady both “looking at the burning light” and “contemplating the meaning of happiness in silence for some long moments” as well (Dehghani 2019: 185), it may be necessary to add, in the

context of Buddhism, that the oil lamp functions both as the physical object of Sokurov's and his interviewees' contemplation, and as the tangible index of these contemplating subjects trying to comprehend the significance of living and existence. In fact, the juxtaposition of candlelight and enlightenment can be found in the monk Zhi Tandi's (347–411_{CE}) "An Ode on a Lamp", the first poem in Chinese literary history that correlates the lamp with a tool for "achieving Buddhist enlightenment" (Tian 2007: 224). In its last two couplets, the interplay between smoke and light, which lend charm and radiance to one another, is linked to a person's visual perception in darkness and a profound understanding of the mysterious truth:

Spreading smoke on a clear night,
it emanates light that illuminates all.
Seeing forms, delighting its radiance,
one becomes enlightened and comprehends the subtle truth.
(Tian 2007: 224)

Tian Xiaofei's reading of this poem also draws our attention to the fact that the lamp is ranked as the sixth offering made to Buddha, and thus corresponds to the sixth of the means "of crossing over (du 度) this shore of birth and death to the other shore, which is [nirvāṇa]" (Tian 2007: 224). Let us examine such thought and practice in more detail. What Tian refers to as the six offerings contributed to Buddha here include food, drink, fruits, flowers, burning incense, and a lit candle or oil lamp. These objects aim to inspire a deep longing for progress on the path to enlightenment but also a joyful, devout "reflection on the impermanence of human life", and "such acts consequently generate karmic fruitfulness" (Harvey 2013: 241). Interconnected with the idea of karma, "the cycle of rebirth" (saṃsāra) indicates that "all living creatures are part of this cyclic

movement and will continue to be reborn until they attain [nirvāṇa]" (Keown 1996: 29). Nirvāṇa designates "the cessation of the afflictions", "of the actions produced by these afflictions", as well as of the cycle of rebirth "for the person who has completed the path" (Buswell and Lopez 2014: 589). In short, the lit candle or oil lamp help one achieve an understanding of the sufferings of human life, and they bring one more promising results for one's karma, either a better rebirth, or the nirvāṇa that terminates all sufferings.

Human Suffering and Meditation on Life, Illness, and Death

There is no lack of intense scrutiny of the universal problem of human suffering in Sokurov's *Elegy* films. *Peasant Elegy* (1978/1988) centres on the death of the Russian peasant woman Maria Semionovna Voinova, the direct result being that her agricultural knowledge and methods vanish. In *Elegy of Life: Rostropovich, Vishnevskaya* (2006), a film about the 50th wedding anniversary of the renowned couple in Russian classical music – the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and the opera singer, Galina Vishnevskaya, Sokurov laboriously tracks down the couple's unbearable personal experiences hidden by their international fame, calling up the death of their son, and their expulsion from the Soviet Union and deprivation of Soviet citizenship in 1970s due to Rostropovich's support for dissidents. According to Eva Binder, who assumes that the elegy depends upon the juxtaposition of "transience and permanence, loss and its contemplation", *Soviet Elegy* (1989) is "a minimalist portrait of a politician and an elegy to seventy years of Soviet history", where Sokurov "juxtaposes—and links—the permanence of nature (the autumnal trees, the birds) with the passing of life (the cemetery) and the transience of

everyday life (washing, playing, working)” (Binder 2011: 29, 36). Binder points to the meditation on the loss of life and the transient moment of ordinary everyday existence, standing in contrast to an endless succession of living organisms in the world.

In *Oriental Elegy*, the problem of suffering is also embodied in that female ghost’s genuine concern for vicious wars, a distinctive Sokurovian thematic preoccupation as manifested in his *Spiritual Voices: From the Dairies of War* (1995) revolving around the Moscow Army stationed in the Tadjik/Afghani frontier, *Father and Son* (2003) focusing on the predicament of life of a young military cadet and his middle-aged war veteran father, and *Alexandra* (2007) with a setting of Second Chechen War. In addition, other ghostly interviewees in *Oriental Elegy* more or less conjure up afflicting memories of their previous lives, even though their meditation after the death of their physical bodies on afflictions displays a calm attitude towards personal misery. As a case in point, after Sokurov murmurs “I sense you and I am listening”, a middle-aged lady recounts her previous incarnation as someone who “suffered from paralysis and from solitude” since she was a child, while her oral narrative is interrupted by the sound of an explosion. In answering Sokurov’s question “Has life worn you?”, she seems unperturbed and she even raises a beaming smile, although her answer is “yes, very much”. Around the middle of the film, a monk, who used to be a fisherman in his past life, brings back the miserable memory of a shipwreck after a storm: some lifeless bodies on the sea were caught by and then placed on the shore by him and other fishermen, and a mad woman is dancing among these bodies with “a horrible grimace”. More dead bodies, still elegant in dress, were found among breaking waves, and among these dead persons, a young

man whispers to him: “It is all right, it is all right”, while the sailor also speaks to him: “It is all right. All right, don’t be afraid of anything. Everything will be all right.”



Figure 2.6: *Oriental Elegy*: A close-up of a burning candle on a wooden table.

The monk’s peaceful narration also arouses Sokurov’s sudden interest in the issue of the afterlife and the prevalence of sorrowful mood in poetry, as he asks the monk: “Do you know how men change after death?” “Why is there so much sadness in poetry? Perhaps you know why?” At this moment, the aforementioned editing pattern reoccurs, once again giving special emphasis on the correlation between a lit candle and the subject’s contemplation on the complicated problems of birth, old age, sickness and death. A fifteen-second medium shot shows the monk sitting inside a pitch-black room with a flickering candle flame in the background, suggesting kindly that: “They become more tender. I learned it after having spoken with people like me, who are no longer of

this world.” The next shot is a ten-second extreme close-up of a wrinkly hand stroking the surface of a wooden table with a burning candle (Figure 2.6), which is cut back to a one-minute-and-thirty-second medium shot of the monk bowing his head in silent contemplation and finally disclosing to Sokurov that: “I am weary. But if I had to live the earthly life once more, I would like to live it as a great tree with red fruits.” Dehghani is



Figure 2.7: *Oriental Elegy*: A tree with red fruits corresponds to the monk's wish.

well aware of a long shot of a tree with red fruits at the end of the film (Figure 2.7), suggesting that this shot “is pivotal in the film”, and that “the camera shows the image of a green tree with red fruits at a time when the colour is at its most conspicuous in the film, catapulting the film briefly from the near monochrome of black-and-white to a chromatic possibility” (Dehghani 2019: 186-187). From the viewpoint of Buddhism, as the monk on reflection mentions his deepest wish to live another life as “a great tree with

red fruits,” this most bright and flamboyant shot in the film aligns with the Buddhist concept of interbeing, which “carries the message of interdependence and inseparability (unity) of all things” (Lim 2021: 345). The portrayal of the monk’s genuine desire through this vibrant shot of the fruit tree illustrates the continuous cycle of rebirths in an endless succession in the universe, and further indicates the profound interconnectedness and interpenetration of existence among all things.

The idea of the process of transformation is very likely to find cinematic expression in the film’s dissolving, the most conspicuous transitions in *Oriental Elegy*. Dissolving, in general, according to Rudolf Arnheim, who subsumes “fading in”, “fading out” and “dissolving” into the additional capacities of cinematic techniques, “destroys the illusion of an unbroken passage of time and of one fixed place, because it presents a visible superimposition of times and places, and only separate things can be superimposed on one another” (Arnheim 1933/1957: 119). What Arnheim means is that dissolving is utilised more often when objects in different coordinates of time or space need to be connected with the prime purpose of demonstrating the passage of time or the process of crossing over unconnected spaces. Throughout *Oriental Elegy*, “the fleeting life is signified by the candle and”, as Dehghani stresses, “this is one reason why the shots of the interviewees are repeatedly dissolved into the flickering candle or light, which dissolves back into those characters” (Dehghani 2019: 198). As an illustration, the two-minute long shot of the monk recounting the shipwreck is eventually overlapped with a twenty-second close-up of a burning candle, which then dissolves into a one-minute medium shot of the monk who relates to Sokurov his most vivid family memories in his

previous life (Figure 2.8). Because a lit candle or oil lamp in the Buddhist context, as suggested above, can facilitate the process of leaving this shore of life and death to another shore, it seems to the audience that the dissolving used in the film hints at the transient nature of human life, and alludes to the potential for liberation from the cycle of birth and death and the prospect of an afterlife in a realm beyond worldly existence.



Figure 2.8: *Oriental Elegy*: The monk's face is superimposed on a lit candle.

Rapt Attention Paid to the Physical World

Through her close reading of a poem by Liu Xiaowei, with the title “Companion Piece for ‘On a Candle behind the Curtains’”, Tian Xiaofei has made the significant deduction that its motif of lighting candles is also concerned with meticulous attention paid to the world. They informed poets, whom Liu Xiaowei was contemporary with, “about paying

attention to the small details of life”, bringing forth “a way of experiencing the physical world”, while illuminating things “in one precious, if brief, instant”. They thus constituted “a moment of ‘enlightenment’”, an index of total engrossment in the finest detail of a brief instant in motion “unconcealed” by candlelight; they pointed to and allowed for the careful observation of “a presence” of the world (Tian 2007: 239). As earlier analysed, candles, lamps and lanterns in Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy* are often shown in extreme close-ups. All these shots, which appear to cinematically exemplify Tian’s argument, can also be explained by the German psychologist Hugo Münsterberg’s pioneering research on the psychological effect of close-ups. In the chapter “Attention” in his *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), Münsterberg argues:

The detail which is being watched has suddenly become the whole content of the performance, and everything which our mind wants to disregard has been suddenly banished from our sight and has disappeared... *The close-up has objectified in our world of perception our mental act of attention...* (Münsterberg 1916/2002: 87; emphasis in original)

Münsterberg here highlights the extraordinary ability of the close-up to call forth great concentration of our mind on a particular object’s minute details to such an extent that other objects are, temporarily and automatically, excluded. In *Oriental Elegy*, as an illustration of Münsterberg’s thesis, but also the poetics of candlelight in early medieval China elucidated by Tian, the burning flame framed by those close-up shots earmark the ubiquitous presence of attention throughout the film, thereby evoking other things equally presented by extreme close-ups, too. When Sokurov puts his palm on a bamboo mat, an extreme close-up shows the tender touch of his fingers on its surface



Figure 2.9: *Oriental Elegy*: Sokurov puts his palm on a bamboo mat.

with wavy textures (Figure 2.9). In the other instance, the talking-head interview with the monk is interleaved with a close-up confining its attention to a black bug plodding its way across the wooden wall, and much later, the film's camera lovingly concentrates on a moth resting on the windowsill and suddenly flying away with a flap of its wings (Figure 2.10). These close-up shots of insects remind us of Tian's interpretation of Xiao Gang's poem "Evening Sun in the Rear Hall", in which the poet's gaze becomes so "intense" and "extremely focused" that such a gaze enables him "to see the powder a butterfly's wings leave on flower petals or to notice the slower, heavier flight of birds in a fine drizzle" (Tian 2007: 234). That close-up shot of the moth's sudden action, with the diegetic sound of its wings flapping so loudly, evinces Sokurov's rapt attention paid to, both visually and acoustically, the tiniest detail of a fleeting moment. Although birds flocking together above the lake in *Oriental Elegy* are framed not by a close-up but by a long shot, the

film's usage of the slow motion accompanied by the high-pitched twitter reverberating through the lake sharpens the camera's piercing gaze.



Figure 2.10: *Oriental Elegy*: A most rests on the windowsill before suddenly flying away.

In Stephen Owen's opinion, Xiao Gang's poems, "often drawing the eye closely to some detail", have concern for "beautiful, enigmatic patterns" (Owen 1996: 326). In his "Evening Sun in the Rear Hall", Xiao Gang has a strong interest in plant patterns:

Willows on the bank droop long leaves;
Peach blossoms by the window shed delicate calyxes.
(Tian 2008: 146; Original Source Xiao ca.6th century
CE/2008: 146)

These lines immediately call to mind a few shots of plants in *Oriental Elegy*. In a close-up shot, the camera fixes its attention on the trunk of a tree, in which its sap, reflecting the dim afternoon sunlight, flows through the wrinkled bark. Owen also stresses Xiao Gang's "attention to sensuous surfaces, to distorting perspectives and illusions in

reflection” (Owen 1996: 326). Tian seems to follow Owen in arguing that the detail of the physical world being perceived is “so minute in fact that one can hardly tell whether it is real or imaginary” (Tian 2007: 239). Likewise, Sokurov in the film uses visual effects to subjectively transform his visual observations of plants into distorted, and somewhat hallucinatory, perceptions of them. Early in the film, a jasmine plant, for instance, experiences a miraculous, gradual transformation from black-and-white to bright yellow, and its attractive colour and sweet fragrance that attracts Sokurov’s attention evokes his sudden exclamation later: “How lovely is the scent of jasmine on the sea-shore. How lovely it is.” In another shot that displays a bizarrely contorted branch of a cherry tree, a wriggling pink brook, which overflows with fallen petals and luxuriant vegetation in the background, is progressively transmuted into a garden with yellow flowers in full bloom. Such a dreamlike scenery with a riot of colour once again makes Sokurov in amazement exclaim: “And this is my river. And this is my old park. All is like a dream.” Though Münsterberg suggests that when “our attention becomes focused on a special feature”, the outer world is accordingly “woven into our mind” and “shaped not through its own laws but by the acts of our attention” (Münsterberg 1916/2002: 88), Tian’s reading of “Evening Sun in the Rear Hall” points to the dynamics between “the most careful observation” and “the poetic imagination”:

In this poem, the act of looking and seeing is also the act of visualizing and creating. Perception becomes indistinguishable from representation... the scene is as much real as imagined, and visualization is always a private, individual act. (Tian 2008: 147)

Tian's interpretation of the poem, that the poet's visual perception becomes intricately entangled with creation and imagination, and Münsterberg's opinion on the potential of our attention for remoulding objective reality, are relevant to those two shots in *Oriental Elegy*, since Sokurov's attention directed toward the real scenery conforms to his own inner vision: his visual manipulation of that natural scene in the real world reinforces a very personal impression, or imagination, of an unearthly island, that wonderland which belongs only to those ghostly beings, but which holds Sokurov's spellbound and lets him repeat softly, over and over again: "I shall return someday. I shall return."

The Murky Presence Obscured by Mists, Clouds and Shadows

Those lamps flickering in rooms shrouded in darkness in *Oriental Elegy* create a dim atmosphere of obscurity for the whole film, brimming with eerie shadows and indistinct views. It is, visually, much the same as David Sterritt's description of the visual style of Sokurov's *Stone* (1992): "Everything else is as shadowy, obscure, and spectral as the shade of Chekhov who reveals himself to the building's only inhabitant, a young security guard" (Sterritt 2013: 61). No matter how perceptually indiscernible the scene could be, such a faint glow is able to, as Hugo Münsterberg indicates, strongly attract the focal point of our mind:

A faint light to which we turn our attention does not become the strong light of an incandescent lamp. No, it remains the faint, just perceptible of lightness, but it has grown more impressive, more distinct, more clear in its details, more vivid. It has taken a stronger hold of us or, as we may say by a metaphor, it has come into the center of our consciousness. (Münsterberg 1916/2002: 85)

This idea meshes entirely with Tian's suggestion of the poetics of "things" in darkness:

The poem is an act of uncovering and unconcealing: the glowing contours of things begin to emerge against a dark background. The emergence betrays a keenly observant eye and often an unexpected perspective. (Tian 2007: 234)



Figure 2.11: *Oriental Elegy*: A female ghost's face is transformed into a shadowy existence.

Such aesthetics might be best exemplified in poems by Xiao Gang, who "was so taken by shadows and wrote about shadows so often" (Tian 2008: 145). In *Oriental Elegy*, a female ghost, faintly lit by candlelight, casts a dark shadow on the wall predominantly visible to viewers, while another shadow, covering her face later, is even transformed into a shadowy existence emerging against a completely dark background (Figure 2.11). The cutaway from a close-up of that face, which is covered by hands and surrounded by darkness, to a series of close-ups that scrutinise a writing desk with some fern plants, a coffee mug, a reading lamp and a photo frame, appears to intimate how the perception

of a dim shape engenders a more intense concentration on details of things, and Sokurov's voiceover bears evidence of his mind active in introspection:

What a strange dream. Where was I born? I no longer remember. Where is my motherland? I no longer remember. Ah, this is my writing desk.



Figure 2.12: *Oriental Elegy*: Sokurov's dark figure is silhouetted against a translucent sliding door.

Throughout the film, Sokurov is very keen to display his own shadows, again and again drawing viewers' attention to his dark figure silhouetted against some translucent sliding doors made of sheets on lattice frames (Figure 2.12). As usual, his voiceover narration phenomenologically describes his perceptual experience of such doors "like a sheet of paper, weightless", in which "my shadow precedes me".

Mikhail Iampolski has noticed that Sokurov, in this film, "is shown exclusively as a silhouette" which is "filmed against the light" and "turns into a shadow on the fine paper

screen of a traditional Japanese house” (Iampolski 1999: 138). The fact that Sokurov’s “three-dimensional body” is unnoticeably transformed into “a flat projection on to the screen” is thematically important for Iampolski, because it designates a transition from the three-dimensional real world into not only “a flat surface, a plane”, but also “the sphere of death and eternity” (Iampolski 1999: 138). *Oriental Elegy* undoubtedly refers to those apparitions often through out-of-focus anamorphic distortions that flatten the cinematic space, but Iampolski’s idea of “eternity”, without any sufficient consideration of the film’s Buddhist context in his analysis, is somewhat untenable. Shadows for Southern Liang poets well versed in Buddhism are, as Tian suggests, “impermanent, conditional, and empty” (Tian 2007: 242) and, thus, together with a dim circumstance, impart the physical world’s impermanency to them and their readers:

the dark background is the somber Buddhist mise-en-scène that constantly reminds both poet and reader that everything they see is impermanent and illusory and hence has no reality separate from the background against which it has emerged. (Tian 2007: 234)

Although it is difficult to speculate as to what constitutes a “Buddhist mise-en-scène” in a strict sense in film studies, various murky and shadowy spaces in *Oriental Elegy* indeed form a sombre backdrop to things and figures which, sometimes achieved by the effects of fade-in and fade-out, gradually appear, then manifest themselves on the screen, and eventually disappear. Such obscurity, as I just indicated, effects perceptive insights into the surroundings’ finest details; added to this, however, is a heightened awareness that such a world perceived is illusionary, evanescent and ever-changing.

When Tian highlights the visual motif of shadows in Xiao Gang's poems, she is also more concerned with the central ideas of "transience" and "the impermanence of human life", which are typically "Buddhist theme(s)", in his works (Tian 2008: 144-145). Unlike Sokurov, Xiao Gang did not, of course, make explicit references to the fragility of human existence by means of any contemplative interview with ghostly figures, and yet his poetry's strong interest in "the vibrant and ephemeral world", embodied in the portrayal of the gloom of "a specific time of day" and "fleeting moments in the flow of time" (Tian 2008: 145), is much more consistent with Sokurov's cinematic construction of a phantasmagorical atmosphere filled with swirling mist, scudding clouds, and last rays of the setting sun. His *Stone*, as Jeremi Szaniawski describes, "constantly posed in an in-between space: neither day nor night, always fuzzily ambiguous", as proven by "the haze, the dreamlike imagery" that presents "the murky landscape, the fog, the snow-storm" (Szaniawski 2014: 113, 116). Szaniawski's succinct account of such an atmosphere is reminiscent of Tian's reading of Xiao Gang's "Autumn Evening" which depicts twilight as "a time of division and ambiguity", as "the day is ceasing to be day but the night is not yet quite begun" (Tian 2007: 236). Xiao Gang writes in this poem:

Drifting clouds emerge from the eastern peaks;
In the west the sun descends to the river. (Tian 2008: 145)

These two lines seem to have striking echoes of two long shots earlier in *Oriental Elegy*: the sun's last rays are shining on some ripples on the calm sea's surface in the breeze, and, soon afterwards, while Sokurov murmurs that "an island appears in the sea", the film presents that particular moment of a day in a state of transition, showing a figure,

possibly Sokurov himself, who, staring into the distance, faces the sun descending into the sea and is encircled by the tangled clouds (Figure 2.13).



Figure 2.13: *Oriental Elegy*: A figure facing the sun descending to the sea is encircled by the tangled clouds.

The sunset scenery, murky with fog, completely concurs with what Tian refers to as “a world gradually sinking into shadows” in Xiao Gang’s poem, “where boundaries begin to break down” (Tian 2007: 236). In a somewhat comparable fashion, the film, in which almost a whole range of things and figures in that gloomy island are often seen indistinctly through the mist that obscures them, blurs boundaries between light and darkness, between visibility and invisibility, and even between the living and the dead, as Sokurov himself mysteriously says to the audience: “I believe someone has called me. No one is there.” Lampolski has understood the aesthetics of “an island appear(ing) in the sea” in the film *Oriental Elegy* as “a free stylization of an archaic Japanese world

mystically emerging from the mist” (Iampolski 1999: 137). Iampolski, in the meantime, believes that Sokurov’s stylistic and thematic treatment of “the space of death” in this work “is not taken from European tradition”; however, to study the film’s technique of “blocking of a clear vision”, Iampolski’s following analysis of how the film’s “cloudy haze” blurs, and even negates “line and contour”, has exclusively drawn on Leonardo da Vinci’s flat denial of “clear contours” and on Johannes Vermeer’s refutation of a distinct background (Iampolski 1999: 137-139). This theoretical framework, however, seems to neglect the film’s particular reference to an aesthetic tradition beyond Europe once more. Whereas Xiao Gang, so keen to compose “poems on objects” to intimate objects “vulnerable to the ravages of time”, writes the poem “On Clouds” with a few words “such as ‘floating,’ ‘shadows,’ and ‘mist’” related to “insubstantiality” (Tian 2008: 148), I also wish to further consider the aesthetics of misty scenes in traditional Chinese arts, as discussed by François Jullien, to scrutinise the film’s blurry visuality.

The Chinese painter, according to Jullien, is much more interested in painting “the world beyond its distinctive features and in its essential transition”. These indistinct scenes, such as “an afternoon gradually growing dim”, the thick fog fading the ridges, or “the whole landscape (which) begins to sink into penumbra”, imply an “emerging-submerging” world in which “presence is diluted and permeated by absence” (Jullien 2003/2009: 1-2). Along this line, we can surmise that it is precisely the indistinctness of the scenery in a state of transition that such an artwork asks the audience to perceive the existence not as a permanent entity, but as an ongoing process in gradual transition. In it, the presence comes into being and undergoes transition, but also, ultimately and



Figure 2.14: *Oriental Elegy*: A haze of grey clouds in the opening sequence of the film.

inescapably, dissolves and disappears. The opening scene of *Oriental Elegy* seems to manifest the murky world, in the midst of which images form but which are also effaced as time goes by, since it begins with an empty expanse of blackness gradually covered by a haze of grey clouds gathering, permeating and then dissipating (Figure 2.14), foreshadowing the ubiquity of a thick blanket of fog covering the dim island's ancient architectural complex, as repeatedly shown in the film. Lampolski's research into the film's technique has pointed to the fact that its images are often "filmed through a cloudy haze or edited as a frame projected twice through the mist" (Lampolski 1999: 138). This conjures up a strong preference of painters in the Song Dynasty for "washing over the outlined forms and dissolving their borders" through painting "the haze, wisps, or storm clouds" that render things "evasive" and further "open them onto absence" (Jullien

2003/2009: 3). Jullien identifies “poetic expression” in traditional Chinese poetry with “the art of dissolving presence into absence”, by quoting these lines:

Sometimes seeing a boat go by
In the fog, beyond the water and the clouds. (Jullien 2003/2009: 4)

In the film, a wrinkled face, appearing in, and then completely obliterated by, the mist, might exemplify what Jullien calls the presence open to its absence, as Lampolski, in consideration of “the undefined bodies of those who have died” and who “emerge from the mist”, has likewise proposed a “*movement* towards presence” in relation to “death and non-existence” (Lampolski 1999: 139-140; emphasis in original). The film’s ending appears to illustrate the verse in a cinematic sense: a shingle beach with some jagged rocks, beside which a tiny figure is standing still and facing the sea silently, which is so well evocative of a “less concrete” scene in Sikong Tu’s poetic mood of “Lofty and Ancient”, where “the poet stands long in a realm of formlessness” (Owen 1992: 314), fades away in a dense fog that is transformed into curling clouds. After the thick clouds disperse at a slow pace, a desert island, suspended in a vast expanse of sea, gradually emerges in the mist, is seen indistinctly, and finally vanishes in the swirling mists (Figure 2.15). The island that *Oriental Elegy*’s ghostly beings inhabit is hazy in the extreme, and yet, in its finale, it is also the clouds that nullify the illusionary existence of this unearthly world. The film, from the point of view of the Chinese poetic tradition, reflects upon this world that is evanescent rather than changeless, through the candlelight that brings about Buddhist contemplation, and through the clouds and mists that call the audience’s attention to how presence continually collapses into absence.



Figure 2.15: *Oriental Elegy*: The island gradually vanishes in the swirling mists.

Inscrutable Realities: The Rift Between the Real and the Sensual

Upon his arrival on that mysterious island, Sokurov's voiceover in the sequence uses a striking metaphor to describe to the audience his experience of being shrouded in the mist: "In this fog I am like a fish in water, but I feel a chill as a human would." To return to Harman's object-oriented ontology mentioned earlier, such a metaphor might illustrate what he calls a real object with sensual qualities particularly significant to the aesthetic experience of the recipients, whose approach to the object is retracted, as the artwork's independent realities are somewhat veiled rather than directly accessible.

Harman's idea of real objects is, in part, based on an essay by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who has analysed "a metaphor from a Spanish poet

named López-Picó: ‘the cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame’” (Harman 2017: 72). According to Harman’s understanding and appropriation of Ortega’s thought, unlike the expression “a cypress is like a juniper”, which in fact can be regarded as botanical information for us to understand the similarity between the two species of trees, López-Picó’s metaphor can be experienced aesthetically, because readers can form a new reality where the cypress, playing the role of an object, has been infused with the flame qualities. Harman continues to contend that “a successful metaphor”, by amalgamating “two vastly dissimilar entities” and consequently producing “an impossible new one”, offers us an aesthetic experience of “a new entity that somehow combines cypress and flame” (Harman 2017: 73-74). It is also noteworthy that the object in the metaphor is in essence inaccessible. The hybrid between the cypress and the flame, for the beholder who is executing an amalgamation of the two images, is difficult. The beholder is “unable [to] actually melt together instantly by way of their truly minimal common qualities”; it is still an “inscrutable” unit which exists in “the magic world” and has “cryptic essences” (Harman 2005: 108-109). Harman then uses the phrase “the executant inwardness of these things” to point out how, in aesthetic contact, sensual qualities break off from the usual sensual object and assign to a new, real object which is unavailable anywhere in “everyday experience” other than as an artwork and, thus, withdrawn from other access (Harman 2017: 82). More importantly, Harman’s ontology and aesthetics, proposing “a *theatrical* model of aesthetics” (Harman 2017: 149; emphasis in original), stress the importance of the beholder’s engagement in the deeper enigma of the artwork, maintaining that the unfathomable real object is replaced by the one who experiences

the artwork and supports its sensual qualities. In this respect, Sokurov's usage of the above metaphor also produces a new object by enabling an audience to intermingle with a lonesome traveller feeling chill in the fog with the qualities of a fish swimming in water. In doing so, audiences accordingly uphold the metaphor's abnormal sensual qualities.

As object-oriented ontology's aesthetic model has underscored "tension between objects and their qualities", Harman's investigation into cinematic aesthetics also tends to foreground such a gap between reality and appearance to look for real objects which "have an inscrutable inwardness withdrawn from direct access" and "are somehow split off from their accessible traits" (Harman 2015: 407). Using *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979) as a case in point, Harman indicates that not only "the enchanted Zone", where a person's innermost wishes are able to come true, but also Stalker himself (Alexander Kaidanovsky) and "other living and dead characters in the film", such as the Professor (Nikolai Grinko), the Writer (Anatoly Solonitsyn), and the Stalker's daughter named Monkey (Natasha Abramova), are all "inscrutable" and "unnameable" objects (Harman 2015: 407). In Harman's opinion, Stalker neither has a proper name nor fits customarily with his own family or occupation, while his ritual behaviours in the Zone are too odd to ascertain their functions. The same can also be said for the Professor and the Writer, since they are not ordinary characters constrained by the names of their professions, but some peculiar persons embarking on their bizarre pilgrimage to the Zone to fathom out its uncertain intrinsic nature. Even the Monkey, in poor health, has psychokinesis so that, just by eye contact, she can make the glasses on the table move inexplicably.

As the aesthetics of Harman's object-oriented ontology would claim, these fairly enigmatic characters in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* appear to demonstrate how the artwork brings "real objects into play" so that the audiences can "experience the unknowable uniqueness of a real object" (Harman 2017: 170). In terms of Sokurov's own work, the documentary subjects in his *Oriental Elegy*, who were originally "the old people in the neglected interiors of the Japanese national lodgings" (Tuchniskaya, n.d., online), have been transformed into those eerie entities as ghostly interviewees. These characters, as just analysed earlier, had undergone the miseries of human life in their previous incarnations, and therefore typify real objects which can offer the aesthetic experience of "weirdness or strangeness that breaks down our habitual relationship with the world of objects" (Arsenjuk 2016: 208). Typically, the devout monk in *Oriental Elegy*, once a fisherman catching the bodies of dead sailors after a shipwreck and listening to their compassionate whispers, still remains a radically withdrawn mystery inaccessible to us, leaving the audiences involved with such an uncanny character who has described human flesh after death as "tender". Pino Viscusi's analysis of *Oriental Elegy* regards the filmmaker Alexander Sokurov as "a wandering spirit enter[ing] an ethereal world", who "frees himself from his body" and "meets other ghosts" (Viscusi 2016: 148). It is also reasonable to extrapolate from Viscusi's reading to suggest that Sokurov himself as presented in *Oriental Elegy*, for the audience, is also an inscrutable object. This on-screen filmmaker does not seem to settle into "the stereotyped routines" or belong to "industrialized human 'types' that fill our days" (Harman 2015: 407). Instead, he has been, quite bewilderingly, transferred into an enigma, travelling to a feudal-era village in

Japan in order to understand happiness and human sorrow, having an urgent desire and mystical powers to summon and communicate with ghosts, which is totally beyond the scope of human capability.

On the whole, it is difficult not to relate the film's narrative to *youxian* poetry, namely a literary genre on "Roaming into Immortality" in the Chinese aesthetic tradition. These poems revolve around an other-worldly journey in "higher realms of nature inhabited by sublime figures", whose bodies have "a more ethereal and more durable form", and who enjoy "an enduring life of purity, freedom, and bliss", which, as Zornica Kirkova has argued, opens up "worlds different from the mundane reality of their authors and their ordinary experiences" (Kirkova 2016: 1). Both those ghosts and Sokurov, who keeps himself aloof from the secular world, are content to live a contemplative life in a village exclusive to these characters so keen on spiritual purity. The whole misty island, which becomes, to quote Harman, "somehow split off from their accessible traits" (Harman 2015: 407), is demonstrative of the withdrawn reality indifferent to that of the audience.

Defamiliarisation, Altered Perception and Seeing the Impossible

In Viscusi's eyes, the on-screen Sokurov treats the island of the remote past as "his only shelter" and "does not show any desire of returning to mainland, where he has ever known happiness", and yet, the audiences "can see only a shadow" of such a protagonist undertaking "this emblematic journey" (Viscusi 2016: 149). What Viscusi suggests, once again, pinpoints the ineffaceable rift between the withdrawn real and the sensuous so

central to object-oriented ontology's aesthetics. When describing the way in which aesthetic beholders "vaguely recognize" López-Picó's metaphor as "a kind of inscrutable monad", Harman maintains that, in the face of these kinds of real objects, instead of "touching their nethermost reality", we "grasp things by their shape and color or by the musical sounds they generate" (Harman 2005: 108). In this regard, could not the same point be put for our aesthetic experience of *Oriental Elegy*? The inaccessible reality of this cryptic island is not fully open to the audience's ordinary world, and what we are able to perceive is merely its ethereal appearance permeated with colourless smokes, indistinct shadows, and dimly discernible traditional Japanese music, all of which are still unusual for our habitual perceptions in everyday life.

Luka Arsenjuk's questioning of the possibility of applying Harman's object-oriented ontology to film theory has identified how object-oriented ontology's aesthetic interests resonate with the special focus in film studies on "the strangeness of objects", "their weird reality" being rendered visible, as well as "the force of objects that exceeds our habitual representations of them" (Arsenjuk 2016: 206-208). This is most apparent in, as Arsenjuk suggests, the Russian Formalism with Viktor Shklovsky's (1919) concept of "estrangement (*ostraneine*)". Kristin Thompson, who, in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (1988), adopts Russian Formalism, claims that through an artwork's strong defamiliarisation of our ordinary realities "in its new context", the audiences can "see everything in the artwork differently from the way we would see it in reality" (Thompson 1988: 10-11). A quick glance over *Oriental Elegy*'s visuality soon reveals formalist defamiliarisation at play in differentiating the reality of that feudal-era

village obscured by fog from our ordinary life. A monochromatic colour scheme renders almost all of its cinematic images as bleak and bleached, the fisheye lens produces a highly distorted view of interlocutors and tatami rooms, and the monk's face, framed by an extreme long shot, even appears in the background of pure darkness (Figure 2.16).

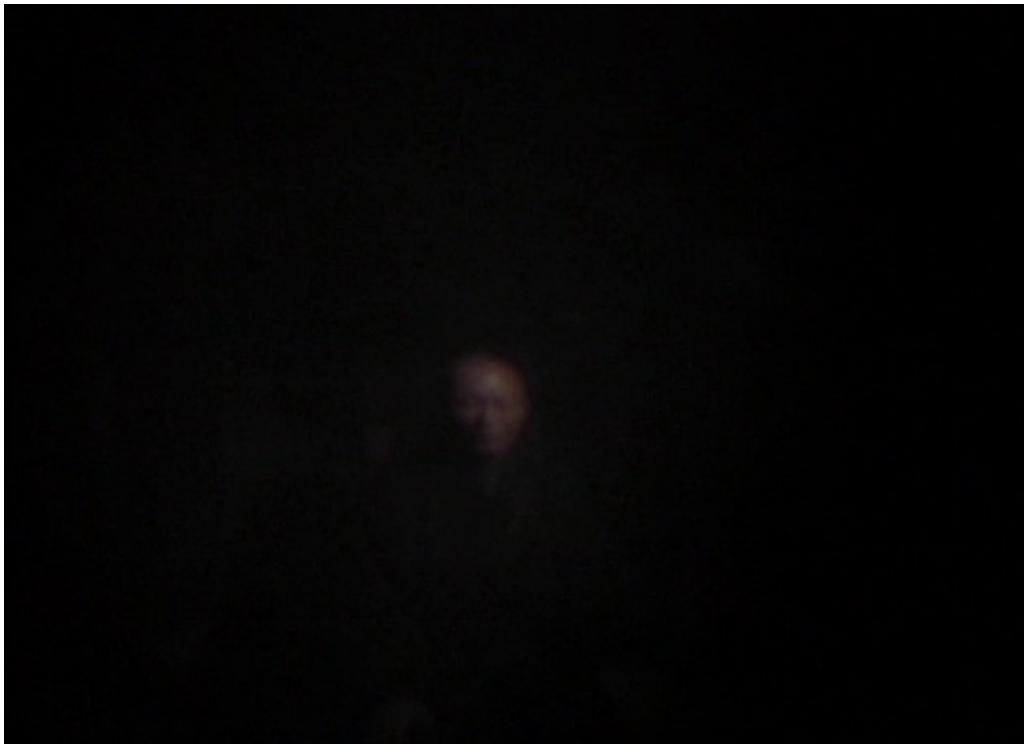


Figure 2.16: *Oriental Elegy*: An extreme long shot of the monk in darkness.

Harman might argue that by defamiliarising the shapes and colours of these figures and objects, “an aesthetic effect is achieved” in the film, so viewers “become involved with an eccentric or absurd object” in a way that is radically different from our daily engagement with everyday objects, which does not necessarily require us to be involved in and to “consciously differentiate ourselves with these things” (Harman 2015: 408). Arsenjuk claims that Harman differs from Russian Formalists in that, instead of looking on “formal operations and devices”, Harman seems more concerned with how objects in artworks split from their usual qualities ontologically, pushing the viewer to engage in

“the inaccessible and mysterious being of objects themselves” and also “a reality that comes to surprise our continuously incomplete grasp of it” (Arsenjuk 2016: 208). Simon Weir holds a very similar position when he uses Harman’s aesthetics to examine paintings by Raphael and Salvador Dalí. The effect of colouring, for Arsenjuk, makes painted objects “more intensely separated from their worlds than objects appear in real life”, so that “the experiencer sees something impossible”, such as mythological figures and incomprehensible objects (Weir 2020: 405). From this point of view, because of its artfully depleted colouring and unconventional distortions of objects in the unnatural island, Sokurov’s film isolates the mystical existence of the village from the audience’s quotidian happenings. In consequence, the audience is supposed to be cutting off from the prosaic side of life and getting involved in the prevailing myths of these impossible real objects: an acute traveller conversing with ghosts, the dead with painful memories of their previous incarnations lingering on, the possibility of achieving nirvāṇa through contemplation with the help of candles and oil lamps. All this withdrawn reality is paired with a defamiliarised appearance, so that the occult of everything onscreen remains unfathomable and engrosses audiences, themselves.

Being-with-Paintings and Being-in-the-Painted-World

When looking at Sokurov’s *Robert. A Fortunate Life*, *Elegy of a Voyage*, and “the Japanese cluster” with *Oriental Elegy*, *A Humble Life* and *dolce...*, Nancy Condee has identified “the reconciliations of cinema with painting”, which engender “a segmented,

stationery gaze with deep affinities to painting” (Condee 2011: 193). In Sokurov’s films, his formal experimentation with the cinematic medium is stressed by Sabine Hänsen, and such manipulative treatments of cinematic images, for Hänsen, have created “cinematic paintings” too: “By creating special optical conditions for capturing an object, even technical media can be used to produce a painterly effect” (Hänsen 2011: 50). Hänsen is not alone in showing interest in Sokurov’s widespread usage of cinematic techniques to “suggest an approximation of painterly practices” (Hänsen 2011: 51), since there has now been a considerable amount of research that likewise puts forward a remarkable rapprochement between cinema and painting in Sokurov’s works. Robert Bird, in the opening of his “Medium Intimacy” (2011), contends that the formal attempt to explore the cinema’s optical effects spurs Sokurov on to “an imitation of painting in its visuality” (Bird 2011: 90). Like quite a few scholars who underline the influence of Romantic landscape painting on Sokurov’s presentation of landscape (Alaniz 2008: 184; Szaniawski 2014: 128; Bugaj 2016: 9-11), Mikhail Lampolski also finds Sokurov’s “special interest in the pictorial treatment of space” since his *Save and Protect* (1989), but also proposes a measurable impact of Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings on those “picturesque” spaces in films like *Mother and Son* (1997) (Lampolski 2011: 114-115). As the current discussion has revolved around the poetics of “poems on objects” in medieval China, I am going to draw on the subgenre of “poems inscribed on paintings” in the Chinese poetic tradition to investigate the presentation of Sokurov’s very own intimate relations with paintings collected in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in his *Elegy of a Voyage*. An analysis of Sokurov’s achievement of painterly effects in the

film through his manipulation of cinematic images might be equally important, and by being framed by long-focus close-up shots, Sokurov shown in his film is almost, to borrow from Lampolski's commentary, "inscribed into" those paintings "as if on to a surface" (Lampolski 2011: 114). I assume that the close intimacy between Sokurov and paintings, which is visually conspicuous in his works, embodies the important theme of poets' relation to paintings in the subgenre of "poems inscribed on paintings" (Hartman 2001: 475-476; Egan 2010: 432-434). I will, therefore, examine Sokurov's critical reflection on the interactions between paintings and him as a viewing subject, and on the link between the viewing experience of paintings and that of the real world.

Sokurov's persistent exploration of a close affinity between cinema and painting that leads to painterly visuality, as mentioned earlier, is symptomatic of his obsession with fine art. In an interview with Jeremi Szaniawski, Sokurov assumes that "the strongest sensations in the arts are always produced by painting and symphonic music", with the result that many aspects of his films "come instead through the influence of these two art forms" (Szaniawski 2006: 14). When asked by Paul Schrader about some particular painters that have a profound influence on him, Sokurov mentions Rembrandt, Andrew Wyeth, and Russian and German painters of the nineteenth century, and even talks about the strong impact of traditional Chinese paintings on his treatment of cinematic images in *Mother and Son*: "I'm using a couple of simple mirrors, large panes of glass, as well as brush and paint, and then I look into the lens... I work with very thin, delicate painting brushes. Like those used in traditional Chinese paintings" (Schrader 1997: 23, 25). This level of enthusiasm for paintings, implied in these interviews,

perceivable in his films' painterly effects, or made manifest by allusive strategies through a journey to the State Hermitage Museum in *Hubert Robert. A Fortunate Life* and later in *Russian Ark* (2002), to Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in *Elegy of a Voyage*, or to the Louvre in *Francofonia: An Elegy for Europe* (2015), recalls the consuming interest of the literati of the Chinese poetic tradition in paintings over the centuries.

Du Fu's (712–770_{CE}) more than twenty poems on paintings already established the subgenre of “poems inscribed on paintings”, namely, poetry whose subject matter is painting. Du's ideas on the complexities of the relationship of painting and life, and that of image and text, were extended during the mid-Northern Song, during which time the literati, such as Su Shi (1037–1101_{CE}) and Huang Tingjian (1045–1105_{CE}), found paintings intrinsic to their lives and were fascinated by the visual art justifiably (Hartman 2001: 479; Egan 2010: 432-433). However, for the development of the subgenre of “poems inscribed on paintings”, it had been deeply indebted to, as Charles Hartman suggests, the poetics of “poems on objects”, although paintings with diverse, but subtle, themes were much more complicated than other simple objects, such as fans and mirrors, and the descriptive mode inherent in “poems on objects” was then substituted by a newfound and continued insistence on the behaviour of “viewing” and “looking at” in “poems inscribed on paintings” (Hartman 2001: 474-475). Stuart H. Sargent examines the phenomenon of paintings as favourite topics for poetry in the eleventh century, and identifies the similarities and differences between paintings and other objects of daily consumption, such as tea, ink, incense and inkstones. According to Sargent's research, these objects “assumed sufficient literary and historical aura to make them acceptable

topics for poetry” for the literati, who had “a growing interest in antiques”. However, paintings differed from other objects in that, due to a general lack of use value, they were rarely regarded as gifts or consumer goods, but rather as aesthetic objects with “a surplus of both expression and content”. Nevertheless, in both “poems on objects” and “poems inscribed on paintings”, the poet’s discussion of various aspects of “experiencing” and “appreciating” objects could commonly revolve around “the viewer’s absorption in the object”, “outlines of aesthetic theories or values related to the object”, and “digressions into the life of the poet” (Sargent 1992: 265-266). In short, for the aesthetics of “poems inscribed on paintings”, in spite of such a long-established convention of a self-reflexive subject’s immersive experience of an object in “poems on objects”, there has been a new focus on visual experience, the viewer’s elucidation on a painting’s subject matter, and reflection upon the specific aesthetic issues about the relation between word and image, and of that between the painted world and the real world experienced.

Like Chinese poets in the eleventh century who had pursued an antique sense of historical ambience through the appreciation of paintings, Sokurov, while succeeding in a few of his films, as the current analysis has demonstrated, in creating the aesthetic mood and atmosphere that is “lofty and ancient” in the Chinese poetic tradition, prefers “old painters”, who, for himself, are “incredibly skillful” (Schrader 1997: 25). He has an aversion to “modernism, the avant-garde, different forms of this direction”, because he assumes that “they are all art that requires no intellectual work” (Hänsngen 2011: 53). As Hänsngen has pointed out, unlike Michael Snow or Andy Warhol, Sokurov attempts to

deliberately avoid “an aggressive contemporary visual culture”, and still remains very insistent about referring to “the old media” and the “aura” and “signature” of “traditional painting” (Hänsen 2011: 53-54). In addition to such a passion for those old paintings, the poetics of “poems inscribed on paintings” is also applicable to *Elegy of a Voyage*.

Personal Observations and Elucidations of Paintings

In the second half of the film, Sokurov, as a solitary visitor to the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam at midnight, encounters, views and muses about a multitude of historical paintings in the museum’s deserted rooms. As Sokurov takes these paintings as the film’s subject and as objects for him to contemplate in silence, his act almost approximates to those of the poets of “poems inscribed on paintings” in the Chinese poetic tradition, because both Sokurov and these poets foreground their subjective response to paintings in their works. Kathlyn Liscomb notes that, in “poems inscribed on paintings”, a poet usually offered personal reflections on issues pertinent to a painting, and poems composed on those occasions can be regarded as “painting-response poems”. This is because the poet, who now became a singular viewing subject of a painting by another artist, was actively involved in the viewing experience of the painting. Due to such participation, in their poems, they tended to “create a meaningful congruence of the response to the stimulus” and to “provide more subjective reflections on matters relevant to paintings” (Liscomb 2010: 334-336). When examining “poems inscribed on paintings” by Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, Ronald Egan has pointed out a few types of “literary treatment of, or reaction to, a painting” in those poems, which

include “the expression of the poet’s personal response to the painting”, as well as “the exploration or interpretation of the imaginary world of the painting” (Egan 1983: 420). The argument then proceeds: as paintings are aesthetic objects with subject matters and thematic concerns, whether elaborate or simple, the poet, as a subject viewing paintings, unavoidably, endeavours to shed light on the deeper meaning of a painting being viewed.

At this point, one exemplary scene in *Elegy of a Voyage* concerns Sokurov’s aesthetic appreciation and interpretation of *The Tower of Babel* (ca.1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The sequence is evidently organised around an editing pattern that shows Sokurov’s visual perception of the painting. A long shot of Sokurov standing in front of *The Tower of Babel* is cut to a medium shot of him taking a step towards that work. These establishing shots are followed by a close-up, which zooms in and then tilts up, of the monumental tower in the painting, and then by an extreme close-up of a few vessels in the harbour in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting. The film then cuts back to the long shot of Sokurov, lost in deep thought and standing still in the gallery. Adrian Martin regards *Elegy of a Voyage* as “Sokurov’s meditation on classic painting, specifically Breughel’s *The Tower of Babel*”, and the film’s title brings Sokurov “into the painting’s holy presence” (Martin 2002: online). Sokurov’s personal reflection is manifested in his voiceover in the scene:

That is *The Tower of Babel*. Breughel. Breughel. Breughel. What is it? A philosophy or life itself? Freedom? Or a dream of a cage? Who are they, the builders of this tower? Christians or heathens? What does it matter? Christians, heathens. The Tower of Babel, and sailboats. It was wise to put them together. Then I understood

it was my last occasion to see *The Tower of Babel*. So I said farewell to it.

A series of questions, which Sokurov raises here, imply his mental presence of active participation in the viewing experience, and reveal his conscious effort to elucidate the work's complex meanings, or to speculate as to how and why various elements in that painting appear and are connected compositionally and thematically.

Such internal monologue, which ends with Sokurov's deep sigh for an unrivalled opportunity to appreciate *The Tower of Babel*, appears to amount to the text of Du Fu's "poems inscribed on paintings". Du's poems are described by Charles Hartman as "an instrument to record the interaction between the image and the poet as viewer", and as "a vehicle for recording the viewer's subjective reaction to the painting". Hartman continues to suggest that, for Du Fu, it is a poet as an observer that brings the painting ultimate meanings, because the poet "brings his mind and experience of the world to reading significance into its images" (Hartman 2001: 475, 480). Either Su Shi or Huang Tingjian, according to Egan's analysis, also uses poetry "as a vehicle for expressing his own feelings about the painting, or for recording the thoughts that inspires in him", as exemplified by Su Shi's poem with an extended passage of his personal reflections, on a painting by Wang Shen (1036–ca.1093_{CE}), which are "private", "individual" and "truly autobiographical" (Egan 1983: 427-430). The above voiceover in the sequence about Sokurov's elucidation of *The Tower of Babel* hints at a gradual process in which he attaches profound significance to the painting by involving himself in the continuous mental activities of evaluating and explaining. Sokurov's particular observation of the

clouds in Pieter Saenredam's *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht* (1663) is a much more personal account. After the camera zooms in to focus on some white clouds which hover around the blue sky in that painting, Sokurov's pensive monologue narrates his well-remembered experience of the cloud:

Didn't I paint this picture myself? Didn't I see all that before me?
Every tree, every shadow. I remember well this sky. I remember it well, because I waited a long time for the cloud to move away from me, so that I could see its reverse side and read what was written on it: if there is faith, the sky is alive.

Sokurov has a good reason to assert his vivid memory of his intense gaze resting on the sky and clouds thoughtfully, as, not long after the film opens, there is a shot of thick clouds diffusing rapidly in the gloomy sky, accompanied by his voiceover that murmurs: "strange clouds appeared, as if it were summer not autumn". Sokurov's response to those clouds in *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht*, emphasised by a close-up shot that zooms in on its painterly textures, while narrated by Sokurov's voice that declares his personal experience memorable and meaningful, is autobiographical to such an extent that he refers to his cinematic recordings of clouds self-reflexively.

Active Participation in and Sensitivity to the Painted World

The painted clouds in Pieter Saenredam's *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht*, for Sokurov, bring an immediate intensity and have more than a passing resemblance to the real clouds he witnessed. In fact, the interrogation of a parallel and chasm between a painting's painted reality and the empirical reality in the real world of

the poet, as a viewer of that painting, often occurs in “poems inscribed on paintings” in the Chinese poetic tradition, as Jonathan Chaves summarise: from Du Fu, through the literati in the Song Dynasty, to numerous scholars in later dynasties, there had always been an intense interest in and the ongoing debate over “the extent to which a poem inscribed on a painting ought to acknowledge that it is dealing with a painting and not with the real world” (Chaves 1991: 435). Although poets before Du Fu had dealt with “the painting’s ‘reality’”, according to Hartman, it is Du Fu who later converted such a poetic motif into an aesthetic concept “that linked the experience of viewing the painting to the viewer’s experience of the actual world”; thus, the appreciation of “the fictional ‘reality’ of the painting” was identical to, for Du Fu, the contemplation on “the real world” (Hartman 2001: 475-476). This idea seems rather close to Laura Rascaroli’s analysis of *Elegy of a Voyage*: “The narrator talks about the pictures as if they were real and present” (Rascaroli 2017: 44). As a case in point, we can refer to Sokurov’s description of his viewing experience of Wijnand Nuijen’s *Water Landscape with Mill* (1836):

Then I find myself near a windmill. At last, I see people. Here they are, sitting in the boat. They sat there once and remained forever in their village. That evening is their eternal day. The mill must be on an island. How calm it is.

In such an instance, the landscape painting by Nuijen appears to present an immediate experience of the Dutch rural scene in the nineteenth century to Sokurov, who, in turn, assumes that the painted reality precipitates him into an integral part of its scene rather than an observer of the painting standing outside of the work. Sokurov’s line, “at last, I see people”, attracts Silke Panse’s attention. The fact that Sokurov, until the very end

of his journey, can find “living subjects only in the paintings” signifies that “the only meaningful reality” for Sokurov is “that of the painting” (Panse 2006: 12). Panse then goes on to suggest that Sokurov has identified “the reality of the painting” with “‘real’ reality”: “eighteenth-century realist paintings are treated as having the same degree of reality as the contemporary documentary image” (Panse 2006: 19). In other words, through the experience of viewing the painting, Sokurov, similar to Du Fu, has a strong sense of intimacy with the painted world, by which he can find attachment to the real world in the past and even experience it as if it actually happened to him.

Du Fu, in his *Three Poems upon Viewing a Landscape Painted by the Adjutant at the Request of His Brother Li Gu*, even expressed his strong wish “to enter the picture”, and an implicit assumption that a landscape painting was equal to “a ‘realised’ scene”, or to “a ‘real’” landscape, that lets the poet as a viewer of the painting have aspirations to enter that painted world, then “became a commonplace in later [Song] and [Yuan] inscription poetry” (Hartman 2001: 477). When viewing Andreas Schelfhout’s *View of a Hilly Landscape* (1869), Sokurov is also obsessed with the idea of gaining access to the painted landscape, lingering over the view, and even staying there forever:

Paintings. A landscape, a river, a sail. Silence. If I just enter there,
I will never come back.

Schelfhout’s painting of a natural scene attaches Sokurov so promptly, and arouses such an urgent desire for an immediate and everlasting presence in that work, as Rascaroli maintains that Sokurov “mentions his desire to become part of the picture” (Rascaroli 2017: 42). This accords with the aesthetic function of landscape painting

proposed by Zong Bing (375–444_{CE}), who suggested “the use of landscape images as a substitute for the experience of the actual landscape itself” (Hartman 2001: 477). In other words, the boundary between the painted world and the actual world should break down. For Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, in some of their entire poems, the poet is able to “enter the world of the painting” and to “cross over into the realm of representation”, so that “the reader find himself ‘inside’ the painting one moment, ‘outside’ the next (or vice versa)” (Egan 1983: 444). In an analogous way, Rascaroli’s analysis of Sokurov’s film points out a seamless connectedness between the physical and painted worlds. “The camera regularly performs movements that progressively bring it closer to the painting until the frame of the video fully coincides with the paintings frame”. The cinematic image, thus, “ineffably transforms into the painted image and vice versa” (Rascaroli 2017: 43-44). That is to say, a transformative pattern in this film, which shuttles between the world inside the painting and the world outside of the painting, is established by the mobile framing that embodies the physical act of overstepping the boundaries between reality and representation, implying the assimilation of the real into the painted.

The long take that inspects Schelfhout’s *View of a Hilly Landscape*, for instance, initially slides along the exquisite picture frame decorated in high relief, unveiling what André Bazin, in his essay “Painting and Cinema” (1967), describes as “the discontinuity between the painting and the wall, that is to say between the painting and reality” (Bazin 1967: 165). After Sokurov’s dense shadow appears in the painting, the camera glides over the painting to present the world inside *View of a Hilly Landscape* with a wilderness of weeds, a house encircled by dense woods, as well as a narrow river with a drifting

boat. The camera that steadily presents the details of the painting as if it floats along the landscape in the real world seems apposite to Bazin's comment on *Van Gogh* (Alain Resnais, 1948), a short film that provides a biographical account of Vincent Van Gogh's life events and illustrates his drawings and paintings.

Resnais, for Bazin, "has treated the whole of the artist's output as one large painting over which the camera has wandered freely as in any ordinary documentary" (Bazin 1967: 166). However, Sokurov differs from Resnais in his approach. Resnais, in *Van Gogh*, skillfully employs a vast and multifarious montage devices, as Steven Jacobs's analysis in his book *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (2011) demonstrates: this eighteen-minute film "consists of a masterful succession of 207 shots of paintings, which suggest a continuity that is comparable with a feature film" (Jacobs 2011: 24). By contrast, Sokurov's use of long take might have been lavishly praised by Bazin, who had burnt with an aesthetic zeal for "bringing together real time, in which things exist, along with the duration of the action" (Bazin 1967: 39). Jeremi Szaniawski views *Elegy of a Voyage* as "an appetizer" for Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002), "a far more ambitious project" renowned as "the first ever single-take feature film in motion picture history" (Szaniawski 2014: 166). If so, the above long take in *Elegy of a Voyage* seems to prefigure such an astonishing feat in *Russian Ark*. After leaving Schelfhout's painting, the camera continues to wander around the gallery at a leisurely pace, then approaches, enters and fixes on the painted world of Hendrikus van de Sande Bakhuyzen's *Landscape with Cows and Other Cattle* (1845), before finally switching its attention toward a window in another painting. This long take, which brings viewers the real-time

experience of appreciating a few paintings in the gallery that enchant Sokurov, displays the subtle interplay between the real world and the painted world, embodying a fervent wish for total absorption in these artworks through mobile framing.

In “poems inscribed on paintings”, poets even try to “convey the inner, experiential aspects of a scene while at the same time deepening even the purely visual aspects” (Chaves 1991: 445). Or, to put it another way, insofar as there is a fevered imagination of virtual presence in the painted world, the poet can even offer sensory details beyond the sense of sight and envision how sensory organs respond to the painted scene. Chaves, borrowing ideas from Ye Xie’s (1627–1703_{CE}) *The Origins of Poetry*, suggests: to capture “the *experiential texture* of a moment”, “a fusion of sense impressions takes place” in “poems inscribed on paintings”, which often express “the total feel of such an experiential moment” and provide “precisely the element of *felt experience* to the total work” (Chaves 1991: 442; emphasis in original). Sokurov’s visual experience of *View of a Hilly Landscape*, objectified by that long take, appears to accompany by the usage of his nose that triggers the olfactory experience of lush weeds on the shore:

Why is this boat next to the shore? The water is pure, with a scent
of grass. Is it evening or morning? It is morning.

In addition to smell, Panse finds out that Sokurov in *Elegy of a Voyage* usually “relates to objects tactilely”, since Sokurov in the Boijmans Museum “touches the walls and the paintings, and he feels the temperature of the ground beneath him” (Panse 2006: 15). Likewise, Chaves’s analysis of Ye Xie’s quotation from a single line by Du Fu stresses tactile experiences: “sensory reference” is not limited to the “visual”, but rather includes

“the sense of touch”, such as the feeling of “chill” experienced by one’s skin (Chaves 1991: 442). Sokurov’s hands, frequently framed in the film in close-ups, which touch a cherry blossom in the chill of a late night, grip a window ledge, and gently stroke the museum’s smooth walls that are “cold” for him, astonishingly seem to be affected by a freezing cold winter depicted by *Charles Leickert*. When the dolly shot gradually approaches *Cityscape in Winter* (ca.1860–1880) and then crosses the boundary established by the frame between reality and the painting, Sokurov can even feel the icy wind in the work:

And that? A town street. But it’s winter. They are all frozen. The past must have been cold. And life was so beautiful only because of the cruelty of winds and frost of the sky.

The whole dynamic between the visual and the auditory is the central pillar of “poems inscribed on paintings” too. According to Susan Bush, literati in the Song Dynasty were fairly keen on the conception of “paintings with sound”, as Huang Tingjian’s poem on Li Gonglin’s (1049–1106_{CE}) “Yang Pass” wrote that the silent picture was able to evoke the heartfelt sounds: “In the sound of heartbreak there is no form or shadow; Painting is made without sound and is also heartbreaking” (Bush 1971/2012: 25). Inside the Boijmans Museum, Sokurov occasionally mentions “some music” and “sounds around me”. The shot examining *View of a Hilly Landscape* is accompanied by the non-diegetic sound of twittering birds, while the tinkle of church bells resounds around the painted world of *St Mary’s Square and St Mary’s Church at Utrecht* continually. “Sounds and voices are heard on the soundtrack”, as Rascaroli notices, “as if the scenes were alive and taking place before [Sokurov’s] eyes” (Rascaroli 2017: 44). A whole range of

sensory data associated with the imaginary attendance in various painted scenes is presented in the film, highlighting the multisensory engagement in viewing paintings.

Permanency and The illusion of Reality in Paintings

Sokurov's literary strategy of describing the painted scenery of *Water Landscape with Mill*, which illustrates things such as the windmill, the island and the villagers on the boat, seen from the vantage point of the painted world, is redolent of the technique of Su Shi as well. According to Egan's reading of Su's *Written on an Autumn Landscape Painting by Li Shinan*, Su "confines himself to the world of the painting, selecting certain of its particulars and writing about them" and "writes about the landscape as if it were real" (Egan 1983: 435). As in the case of this poem, that is so characteristic of Su Shi's "poems inscribed on paintings" that the poet, when responding to the monk painter Hui Chong's (965–1017_{CE}) *A Evening Landscape of the Yangtze in Spring*, in like manner, "describes the painted landscape much as he might describe a real one" (Egan 1983: 436). Sokurov's description of *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht*, at first glance, seems to conquer the illusion of Saenredam's painted world, which opens up the way for the sudden influx of a first-hand experience of Utrecht's street scene:

A square in an old town. The calm of summer. An eternal life.

Sokurov's succinct phrase of "an eternal life" is once again heard later, thereby literally acknowledging an eternity of the painted townscape exempting from the passage of time. However intentional the treatment of the pictured scene as the real scene is, a sigh for

the underlying tension between a painted picture's perpetuation of the real life and the perished, and fragile, reality it represents does often exist in Du Fu's "poems inscribed on paintings". As Hartman's reading demonstrates to us, Du Fu in *A Song on a Goshawk Painted by Jiang, Duke of Chu* regards the contrast between the painted hawk and the actual one that has already passed away as a reminder of his frustrated career in old age. In *I View a Painting of Horse by General Cao Ba in the Residence of Recorder Wei Feng*, Hartman expresses an overwhelming poignant feeling and the sense of loss generated by a clear-cut opposition between the painting's "fictive 'reality'" and "the lost reality of the genuine past" (Hartman 2001: 476). Such an acute, and fundamentally antagonistic, contradiction is displayed by the juxtaposition between paintings and real-world scenes in the museum section of *Elegy of a Voyage*.

The medium shot of Sokurov approaching *Poplars near Nuenen* (1885) by Vincent van Gogh is well lit and rendered brightly coloured. From this painting, Sokurov purports that he can catch sight of "an alley in sunlight" that is "gentle and kind". While the shot strikes the audience as the brightest one in the whole film with rare warm colours, it is also reminiscent of, due to a similar compositional strategy that frames Sokurov as an observer, another shot in the earlier scene. In that shot, Sokurov, framed in the gallery, is bending forward to gaze out of its window and perceiving swaying branches in pitch darkness that seemingly resemble, but dramatically contrast with, van Gogh's painting (Figure 2.17-2.18). With regard to *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht*, a series of extreme close-ups that examine some minute details of the painting are cut to a shot of the complete work with a wooden frame. Immediately, from this painted world,



Figure 2.17: *Elegy of a Voyage*: Sokurov is viewing *Poplars near Nuenen* (1885).



Figure 2.18: *Elegy of a Voyage*: Sokurov is gazing out of the gallery's window.

there is a cutaway to a window frame in the museum, outside of which a full moon is shimmering on dense clouds scudding across the night sky. The insertion of the image

of the pale moon and fast-moving clouds, once again, possesses a “formless” and “ethereal” sense of the intangible atmosphere of “lofty and ancient” in traditional Chinese poetics (Owen 1992: 314). This strongly creates a tension between the reality outside of the painting, which is phantasmagorical and continuously passing, and the immortality of a seventeenth-century townscape retained by the painting. When Panse examines Sokurov’s overnight journey in the Boijmans Museum, she suggests that Sokurov even “treats dead objects as though they were living”, with the result that “Saenredam’s painting becomes his own living history” (Panse 2006: 12). A confused thought as such, or an utter confusion between the painted world and the real world, is very typical in Du Fu’s “poems inscribed on paintings”.

For Du Fu, all beings in the real world outside the painting are mortal, and art has great potential to “create an illusion of reality” and is, accordingly, “a deed of eternity” and “essentially a gesture against time” (Owen 1981: 222). It is, then, no surprise that the Southern Song scholar Hong Mai’s (1123–1202_{CE}) comment on Du Fu’s poems on paintings points to the reciprocity between the illusory nature of reality and the illusion of eternal, but fictive, reality that is created in paintings: “reality is fiction, and fiction is reality, and both are but illusory scenes” (Hartman 2001: 476). At the beginning of the *Elegy of a Voyage*, Sokurov once lamented the unstable essence of phenomena and human experience when he witnessed a tree that “had lost its leaves” and houses that “appeared like an abandoned village”. And yet, the conviction, that the painting is able to keep memories of fleeting glimpses of realities alive, and to give comforting illusions

of the eternal existence of the world that has faded away, comes to the fore at the very end of the film.

When the camera eventually inspects *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht* in greater detail, the film displays a figure pushing a baby carriage, villagers standing outside of the church while gossiping at leisure, some children having fun on the central open space, and the everyday life scene of the residential quarter. Sokurov even fictionalises himself as one of the ordinary citizens in that painted world, exposing Saenredam's fictitious depiction of a few of those figures, though confirming the actual existence of the trees and the chatting local residents:

There was no baby carriage. These people, they used to come here to talk. I do remember the trees, but I believe there were more of them. I don't remember any children. No, no children. And that window never did open. Pieter invented it. Nobody knew who lived there. Neither had I ever seen that gentleman.

Whereas Rascaroli assumes that Sokurov as a narrator here “so feels at one with the painter's eye that looked at the square as to identify with it completely” (Rascaroli 2017: 44), it seems that Sokurov's concern is not so much an identification with Saenredam's eyes, as a revelation of an evocative and engrossing creation of realities which used to be seen by Saenredam through painting. Despite the fictionality of Saenredam's work, just as Sokurov's cinematic recording of fleeting clouds in his documentaries becomes the tangible evidence of his experience, he casts no doubt about the credibility of this painting in terms of the retention of a world in the past, as Sokurov's murmur repeatedly affirms: “St Mary's Square. This is St Mary's Square.”

After the juxtaposition of *St Mary's Square and St Mary's Church at Utrecht* and the moon shining brightly in a cloudy night sky, as mentioned earlier, the film cuts back to the painting. In front of the painting, Sokurov stands, leans forward to scrutinise its details, and even makes an effort to caress the canvas by placing his hand in the air, while, on the soundtrack, Sokurov suggests a sense of immortality in that painting:

The paint has dried. Everything has stopped. Everything is still, until we return to this town. Everything will remain still. Should we return? But how? The clock has stopped. So let us restart it! Let us restart the tower. The shadows are motionless. The sun has changed position. No going back. But the canvas remains warm.

The tactile perception of Sokurov, who once again seems to plug into an illusionary world, of the painting's drying pigments and the canvas's warmth, strongly implies the resurrection of Saenredam's physical act of painting. And yet, this whole painted world that is just finished, in Sokurov's view, immobilises a moment of the real world outside that is constantly in a state of flux, standing in total contrast to the opening of the film flooded with accidental images and momentary moods. Rascaroli, by analysing the subtle distance between the canvas and Sokurov's hand that attempts to get closer to it, maintains that this is a gap between "observer and observed, lens and profilmic, eye and picture", which "allows the imponderable question of what lies at the bottom of the representation to be asked" (Rascaroli 2017: 44-45). Pushing Rascaroli's reading a step further, it is also possible to conceive of the wide gap between the permanence of a world fixed on the painting and the impermanence of the outside world in which the observer lives. Du Fu regards art "as a 'deed of eternity'", while "making the poetic gesture of permanence, order, and civilisation", but also feels "tossed about by winds"



Figure 2.19: *Elegy of a Voyage*: Sokurov makes a desperate attempt to touch the canvas.

(Owen 1981: 224). Before *Elegy of a Voyage* ends, the howl of a wind resounds on the soundtrack, reminding us of the real world outside of the Boijmans Museum hit by the fierce wind, which sweeps through a vast wasteland, the raging sea and the frozen cities, and later turns into an icy draught of air that blows the museum's empty rooms. While Sokurov's fingers at this moment are stroking the name of "Pieter Saenredam" inscribed on the frame of the painting, in the very last shot of the film an overwhelming shadow befalls, inch by inch, Saenredam's work. Sokurov makes a desperate attempt to touch the canvas once more, but finally chooses to give up (Figure 2.19), until both the painted world and the real world are totally swallowed by the darkness. Even though Sokurov considers the painting as the embodiment of the permanence of human experience independent of time gone by, the wind that once harassed Du Fu, now even with the

enormous shadow and utter darkness, also engulfs Sokurov, causing him to realise his own existence confronted by time's flux.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have particularly considered the aesthetics of “poems on objects” in the Chinese poetic tradition, which have also been examined through Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology. A given thing as experienced in an artist’s life-world, before being presented in artworks, appears to be consistent with sensual objects only present in human experience, rather than real objects withdrawn from all experiences. Harman’s further classification of sensual objects with sensual qualities, and of sensual objects with real qualities, has also helped to reveal a subject’s sensual access to and intellectual understanding of the thing’s existence open to the subject’s experience.

Tian Xiaofei once indicated that “poems on objects”, before being fully developed into one significant genre of classical Chinese poetry, became more and more popular in the Southern Dynasties, during which time the poet Xiao Gang had written around forty pieces of “poems on objects”. Tian’s analysis of Xiao Gang’s poetics highlights the obsessive attention paid to things in the physical world:

Xiao Gang’s intense gaze is focused on a much smaller sphere, and he resorts to the mind’s eye no less than to his physical vision to detect and construct the complex relations existing among the myriad things of the world apparently all standing alone. (Tian 2008: 147)

Drawing on Hugo Münsterberg's investigation on the psychological effect of close-ups, I have analysed Sokurov's extensive usage of extreme close-up shots in *Oriental Elegy* to manifest his attention directed toward the minute details of some given objects, such as a bamboo mat, a tree trunk, as well as a moth resting on the windowsill. The film's emphasis on concentration is clearly connected with the visual motif of candles and oil lamps as well, as these are religious objects having imparted to quite a few poets in early medieval China the Buddhist teachings of perception, illusion and contemplation. My analysis of the film's editing patterns has suggested that a few inserted close-ups of candlelight in *Oriental Elegy* are suggestive of the act of intense observations and quiet meditation, implying both the ghostly interviewees ruminating on their previous lives and Sokurov aspiring to comprehend the meaning of life. In addition, this physical world, from the viewpoint of Buddhism, being perceived as illusionary, evanescent and impermanent, is betrayed by the film's murky and shadowy visuality, while the ubiquity of the mists and clouds in the feudal-era island further manifests a continuous process in which presence witnesses gradual transition and eventually collapses into absence.

From the aesthetics of Hartman's object-oriented ontology, this chapter claims that Sokurov's visual manipulation of the real world's natural scenery reinforces a very personal impression, or imagination, of an unearthly island, indicating the ineffaceable rift between the withdrawn real and the sensuous. The audience, through the aesthetic experience of the film's defamiliarised appearance, is thus encouraged to engage with the inscrutable and inaccessible reality in the film of human sufferings, the death, reincarnation and afterlife. Both *Oriental Elegy* and *Elegy of a Voyage* achieve painterly

effects, which leads me to consider “poems inscribed on paintings”, having an affinity to “poems on objects”, in the Chinese poetic tradition. In those poems, poets usually view a painting as an aesthetic object with far more complex meanings, which requires the poet, as a viewing subject, to engage in the painted scene but also to elucidate the painting’s significance from a personal perspective. I demonstrate that, in Sokurov’s night visit to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, as shown in the second half of *Elegy of a Voyage*, he often foregrounds his subjective responses to some historic paintings collected in its deserted galleries. He occupies himself with the comprehension of these works’ subject matters and thematic concerns on the one hand, while, on the other, utilises sensory organs to experience the sights and sounds of the painted worlds by imagining entering them. In the film, furthermore, the contrast between paintings and real-world scenes, the fictionalisation of Sokurov himself as a figure living in the painted world, while exposing the painting’s eternity and fictionality, and the real Sokurov in the empty gallery finally swallowed by utter darkness, call forth the tensions between the impermanence of the real world and the permanence of the fictive painted world, which is also the central pillar of the aesthetics of “poems inscribed on paintings”.

Chapter 3. “Intricate Sensuality”: Wong Kar-wai

In their discussions on sentimental characters in Wong Kar-wai’s cinema, film scholars, such as David Bordwell and Gary Bettinson, have tended to use the term “pathetic fallacy” coined by the Victorian art critic John Ruskin, which means an artistic device that imbues external objects with inner feelings (Ruskin 1888: 160), to analyse how these characters’ emotions resonate with objects around them (Bordwell 2011: 174; Bettinson 2015: 63, 76, 108, 114). Nevertheless, in order to analyse the emotional resonance between characters and objects in Wong’s cinema from the viewpoint of traditional Chinese poetics, I will, in this chapter, first look at the concept of *gan* 感 in traditional Chinese philosophy. The term is about an emotional correlation among things, in the interconnected cosmos, that can be affected mutually and respond resonantly. I will then consider its concomitant aesthetic principle of *xing* 興, translated as “affective image” by Stephen Owen (Owen 1992: 45, 256, 435, 572), that describes the poetic medium’s arousal of psychological effects on the recipient, by the seamless integration of moods into objects, scenes and circumstances. Drawing on Daniel Yacavone’s “sensory-affective expression” (2015) and Tarja Laine’s “an emotional event” (2010) and “affective glue” (2013), I will propose that cinematic *xing* means the evocation of feelings

in an audience by a film's expressive audio-visual medium, which is mediated by the characters' emotional and sensory experiences, and manifests a communion of their heart-minds (*xin* 心) and their surroundings.

Stephen Teo's defence of Wong's auteurist filmmaking, basing his argument on Romanticism, identifies "the sentiments, emotions, and tone that pervade his films" that tell stories with "a mood of dreamy sensuality" (Teo 2016: 522-523). For me, I would like to pick up on the concept of *qing* 情 in traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics from an earlier discussion in Chapter 1. As I have pointed out, *qing*, as a polysemous term among a broad range of different discourses throughout Chinese history, carries the various basic meanings of emotions, sensual feelings, bodily sensation, personal desires, erotic love, as well as romantic orientation. In this chapter, I will spotlight Wong Kar-wai's sensuous films that embodies his auteurist preoccupations with romantic encounters, passionate love, wistful farewell, separation, and desperate longing.

My central focus in this chapter will be on three films across Wong's career: *Happy Together* (1997), the director's cut *The Hand* (2004), and his latest feature film *The Grandmaster* (2013). *The Grandmaster* as a commercial genre film of the martial arts seems different from his other arthouse films, but Wong's thematic preoccupation with "love or lovesickness", as Teo's careful analysis demonstrates to us (Teo 2016: 527), is evidently expressed in these films. With regard to the idea of lovesickness, I want to analyse two scenes about painful farewells in *Happy Together* and *The Grandmaster*, because parting, separation and longing are typical themes in traditional Chinese poetry

(Frankel 1976: 73; Lavrač 2015: 106, 120). I explore how Wong's films resonate with those poems' affective images, such as dew and raindrops, to build up poignant scenes and to invite the audience to "feel with" his sorrowful characters amidst tearful farewells. My analysis of *The Grandmaster*, centring on its motif of unrequited love, will examine how audiences become, sensually and emotionally, aware of a sense of romance (Lee 2016; Leung 2016; Nochimson 2016; Provencher 2016; Reynaud 2016). I suggest that not only do various stylistic devices render physical intimacy sexually arousing, but a good variety of objects presented on the screen concretise the characters' passionate longings, thereby promoting the audience's sensual and emotional involvement.

The Hand, relatively overlooked by critics of Wong's cinema, is originally a part of the anthology film *Eros* (2004) that also includes Steven Soderbergh's *Equilibrium* and Michelangelo Antonioni's own *The Dangerous Thread of Things*, with the aim of paying homage to Antonioni's unique film styles and extensive exploration of contemporary erotic behaviours throughout his career. In Chapter 1, advancing the close relation of *qing* to "pattern" (*wen* 文) in traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic thought, I illustrated Antonioni's obsession with abstract patterns in his *Red Desert* (1964), which directly contribute to the audience's sensory engagement and emotional response. In treating *The Hand*, I will specifically refer to the concept of "intricate sensuality" formulated by Lu Ji (261–303_{CE}), who applies such a term to patterned silk and artworks. While *qing* is of the utmost importance in poetry, Sikong Tu's (837–908_{CE}) categories of "intricate beauty" and "delicate-fresh and rich-lush", influenced by Lu Ji, highlight sensual pleasure and sensuous appealing. These ideas are comparable to film

phenomenologists' approach to cinema's materiality and emotional qualities and the audience's visual and haptic experience. *The Hand*, I will argue, encourages the viewer to feel the characters' passion through cheongsams, which evokes both visual pleasure and tactile sensation.

The Psychological Dynamics of Emotional Affect and Pathetic Fallacy

As we have just seen in Chapter 2, Alexander Sokurov's presentation of his close personal contact with oil lamps, paintings and various objects in *Oriental Elegy* (1996) and *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001) has disclosed his meditative mind which is completely preoccupied with the in-betweenness of the eternal and the impermanent. In doing so, Sokurov also, in these two films, creates a certain atmosphere that is so pure, calm, and refined that the works' aesthetics approach the affective mode of "lofty and ancient" in the Chinese poetic tradition. Once again, referring back to the theoretical framework in Chapter 1, we are reminded of the aestheticians of Liu Xie's (465–522_{CE}) times, who are indebted to the pre-Qin and Han philosophical concept of how the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is affected (*gan* 感) so as to respond (*ying* 應) to "the things of the world" (Owen 1992: 206). Such a line of thought, profoundly and persistently, provides a mechanism of evoking moods in artworks with the model of being-with-things in traditional Chinese poetics. As I move on to analyse how affective effects on the audiences of Wong Kai-wai's films are achieved by his stylised rendering of the resonance between sentimental characters and objects around them, I would like to detail such a conception of *ganying*

in traditional Chinese philosophy and consider its concomitant aesthetic concept of *xing* 興, often rendered as “stirring”, “evocation”, or “stimulation”, which is fundamental to the Chinese poetic tradition.

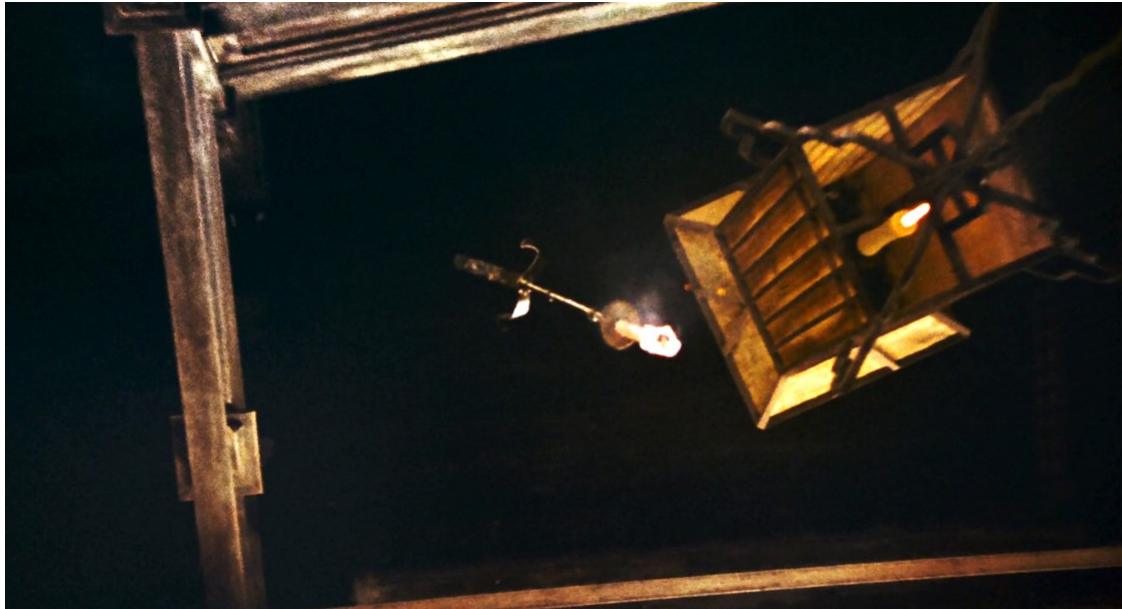


Figure 3.1: *Ashes of Time*: A candle falling into darkness implies the extinguishing of passion and hatred.

David Bordwell’s discussion of Wong Kar-wai’s films highlights that “the images of mutability become at once echoes of the characters’ emotional states” (Bordwell 2011: 174). According to his analysis, a burning candle falling into the abyss in *Ashes of Time* (1994) appears to be an indication of the extinguishing of passion and hatred (Figure 3.1), while a drying dishtowel’s drips in *Chungking Express* (1994) is interchangeable with its owner weeping over his lover’s departure. This is particularly so in *Chungking Express*, in which its “protagonists live their lives by the Pathetic Fallacy”, which proves that on-screen cinematic images of Wong’s cinema might resonate with his characters’ “disarming expressions of love hoped for, strained at, just missed, or shared for an instant” (Bordwell 2011: 174). What Bordwell calls the “Pathetic Fallacy” is a concept

coined by the Victorian art critic John Ruskin in the third volume of his *Modern Painter* (1856). As “a fallacy caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational”, it produces “in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things” (Ruskin 1888: 160). Simply put, Ruskin defines the pathetic fallacy as an artistic device imbuing external objective phenomena with subjective feelings and emotions. According to Sidney Burris’s interpretation, the pathetic fallacy, for Ruskin, “becomes an important criterion of artistic excellence”. Since the early twentieth century, the most dominant applications of such a technique, however, are generally more detectable in a self-conscious exploration of the epistemological issues. This device is mobilised to mourn “the loss of communion between the individual and the natural world”, or offer “subjective renderings of individual perception that privilege a kind of ‘middle ground’ between the object we perceive and the act of perception itself” (Burris 2012: 1009-1010). Burris’s elucidation points to the fact that the pathetic fallacy as used in artworks hinges on a close affinity between the subject and the outside world, as well as a critical mediation between a perceiving subject and the perceived objects, with the result that human emotions can be assigned to inanimate objects or other non-human things. By inviting an individual to perceive the surrounding environments, and by connecting the perception of the presence to the feelings permanently etched on affective phenomena, the poetic device of pathetic fallacy might make contemporary audiences conscious of the extent to which human existence is intertwined with other entities. In this respect, I assume that the pathetic fallacy is strongly reminiscent of the Chinese notion of *gan*.

Gan is translated as “affectivity” by Louise Sundararajan, and she finds several important compounds in various aesthetic discourses in ancient China, such as “responding in kind” (*ganlei*) and “stirring and responding” (*ganying*). Behind these significant aesthetic concepts, Sundararajan proposes “a resonating feedback loop based on the intrinsic affinity between all things in a sympathetic universe”, suggesting that as *gan* is “affinity-based responsiveness”, “[...] to be affected is to participate in the cosmic loop of mutual responsiveness” (Sundararajan 2015: 93, 97-98). In other words, since the concept of *gan* is underpinned by the epistemology in early China, which stresses an affective correlation in the universe where objects are able to be affected mutually and respond resonantly, *gan* designates the affective dynamics of an encounter that usually arises from the interconnectedness between the subjective mind and the existence of other entities. According to Weihong Bao’s research on early Chinese cinema between the 1920s and the 1930s, interestingly, the conception of spectatorial resonance had been developed to theorise cinema as an affective medium which can, through its aesthetic, social and technological operations, stimulate the audience’s physiological response (Bao 2015: 64-71). However, diverging from the prevalent approach of intellectuals during that era, who drew on Euro-American modern physics and various schools of psychology, I contextualise such aesthetics within traditional Chinese epistemology.

Ganying, often translated as “stimulus-response”, “sympathetic resonance”, “impulse and response”, “resonance and responsiveness” or “response and retribution” in the Euro-American discourse, refers to the resonating process whereby objects can

resonate with each other spontaneously (Munakata 1983: 124; Owen 1992: 588-589; Wu 2013: 185-186; Anderson 2014: 100; Park 2020: 259). This is because, according to cosmology in early and medieval China, things are all sharing the same material force known as *qi* 氣, meaning they are interrelated and interdependent, so that a reciprocal and instantaneous intimacy among them occurs. Elisa Rossi and Laura Caretto, who notice that the term *gan* meaning “awaken, stimulate, influence” is normally paired with *ying* translated as “responds” in Daoist philosophical texts, interpret *ganying* as an “immediate and spontaneous response which precedes thought, assimilated to a resonance or an echo” (Rossi and Caretto 2007: 19). Cecile Chu-chin Sun, who, in her comparative study of Chinese and English lyric poetry, translates *ganying* into “affective-responsive resonance”, likewise stresses these spontaneous acts of psychological resonance:

such a direct and spontaneous communion between what the eye sees and what the mind intuitively originates from the affective-responsive resonance (*ganying*) in Chinese culture between human beings and external reality, which is predicated on a bond of primordial organicity among all things in the cosmos. (Sun 2011: 201)

Ganying conveys the sense of an irrational psychological realm, where an individual's immediate relationship with, as well as intuition and perception of, the external world, unmediated by abstract thinking, reacts to it instantly, naturally, and spontaneously. All things external to the person in the cosmos are, too, in a web of entangled relationships.

“At the very basis of this resonance”, as Sun implies, “is a deep-seated conviction that all aspects of reality are intimately related to one another in a bond of primordial

organicity” (Sun 2011: 185). At this point, we can consider a clear definition, provided by the *Book of Changes*, of *gan* 感 which is constructed by the radical of the heart-mind (*xin* 心) and the phonological sign *xian* 咸. In the *Book of Changes*, *xian* is listed as its thirty-first hexagram which designates “sensation”, “attraction”, “stimulation” and “influence”, while the “Tuan Treatise” section of the *Book of Changes* explains much more clearly that “*xian* is here used in the sense of *gan*, meaning (mutually influencing)”, but also that “Heaven and Earth exert their influences (*gan*), and there ensure the transformation and production of myriad objects. [...] If we observe how these things are affected (*gan*), affections (*qing* 情) in Heaven and Earth and of myriad objects can be seen” (Legge 1899: 238; translation modified; Original Source Zhouyi ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 282). In short, cosmology in early China believes in mutual attractions in the universe, and assumes that all things in it are mediated by an affinity impulse, mutual resonance and an interactive and affective attunement.

The Aesthetics of Affective Correlation and Correlative Resonance

When Sidney Burris mentions the achievement of the “symbiosis of inner and outer” by means of the pathetic fallacy (Burris 2012: 1010), this also takes us back to the traditional Chinese thought of psychological dynamics, which has laid enormous stress on the reciprocal interactions between the inner states and the outer realm, and that between the subjective and the objective. Cecile Chu-chin Sun contextualises the philosophical view of *ganying* in traditional Chinese poetics, and proposes the resonant

rapport “between poet and environment”, but also “between the poem and the reader as the latter re-enacts the rapport in the mind” (Sun 2011: 184). We can deduce from Sun’s argument that the application of *ganying* to film poetics might investigate such an intimate rapport between characters and their surrounding environments in diegesis, and that between the film itself and audiences’ affective reactions evoked. Specifically related to the psychological dynamics of *ganying* in early and medieval China, the poetic device termed “stirring” (*xing* 興) functions as the evocation of subtle feelings among the audiences through objects. Simply put, the aesthetics of *xing* might be exemplified by water drops from a drying dishtowel in *Chungking Express* and by the burning candle falling into darkness in *Ashes of Time*: instead of expressing emotions explicitly, these objects, correlated with the characters’ sentimental lives, merely suggest a particular internal state of mind and further arouse resonance among the viewers.

In traditional Chinese poetics, the crucial concept of *xing* appears when the “Great Preface” summarises the aesthetics of *Classic of Poetry* as follows:

There are six principles in the *Poetry*: first, Airs/Winds; second, description; third, comparison; forth, stirring; fifth, Odes; sixth, Hymns. (Owen 1992: 45; translation modified; Original Source Mao et al. ca.1st century BCE/2018: 1)

“Airs/Winds”, “Odes”, and “Hymns” refer to the three sections of the *Classic of Poetry*. However, the meanings of the other three principles—“description”, “comparison”, and “stirring” (*xing*)—remain highly debatable. Yeh Chia-ying sees this group of principles as a “stimulus-response relationship between emotion and image in poetry” (Yeh 1984: 333-342, quoted in Jia 2004: 58). Sabina Knight considers poems in the *Classic of*

Poetry as lyrical responses of the ancients, who inhabited nature, the solid world, arguing that the “Great Preface” introduced a mode of poetic composition, unique to the Chinese poetics, which appertains to the response to external stimuli (Knight 2012: 29-31). Jia Jinhua maintains that these concepts are “grounded in traditional Chinese cosmological thinking on the organic, correlative relationships among all phenomena in the universe”, so they are ontological or cosmic principles manifesting as “the stimulus-response relationship between the poet and the world” (Jia 2004: 58). In sum, the three poetic devices—“description”, “comparison”, and “stirring”—are still very closely linked with the aforementioned philosophical concepts regarding “affecting and responding”. There is, therefore, an aesthetic quality that is essentially intrinsic to traditional Chinese poetry, which is its reliance on the cosmological ontology and epistemology that stress the interrelatedness of phenomena and our subjective reactions to the concrete world.

Among the three techniques, according to Stephen Owen, *xing*, which he often renders as “affective image” (Owen 1992: 45, 256, 435, 572), “has drawn the most attention from both traditional theorists and modern scholars” (Owen 1992: 46). Owen emphasises a direct link between *xing* and “the distinction between ‘stirring,’ [*gan*], and ‘response,’ *ying*”: “something in the outer world may [*xing*] a person, and what then occurs in the person is also [*xing*]”. Furthermore, “[*xing*] may be used to refer to the response to a poem, and a poem may be used to [*xing*], to elicit a response from readers” (Owen 1992: 587). To put it briefly, *xing* pertains to the arousal of particular psychological effects in the recipient, but also to the cosmic loop of stimulus, resonance and responsiveness among objects in the universe. Owen’s further illumination on *xing*,

with regard to the hermeneutics of the *Classic of Poetry*, also implies mechanisms of evoking moods in early Chinese poetics:

[*Xing*] is an image whose primary function is not signification but, rather, the stirring of a particular affection or mood: [*xing*] does not “refer to” that mood; it generates it. (Owen 1992: 46)

Arguing against *xing* as “a rhetorical figure”, Owen then insists that “the privilege of [*xing*] over *fu* and [*bi*] in part explains why traditional China did not develop a complex classification system of rhetorical figures, such as we find in the West” (Owen 1992: 46). By this, he means that, unlike Euro-American poetics devolving a complicated system of rhetorical devices, the poetics of *xing* in ancient China have been more interested in the classification of moods and the externalisation of the inner states of our minds through artistic language. The Chinese poetic tradition, thus, tends to conceive “affective images” as the seamless integration of moods into objects, scenes and circumstances.

While contemporary scholars raise these points, the very essence of *xing* has also been elucidated by many ancient theorists, from Kong Anguo (156–74_{BCE}) and Zheng Zhong (fl. 58–76_{CE}), through Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072_{CE}), Su Zhe (1039–1112_{CE}) and Zheng Qiao (1104–1162_{CE}), to Yao Jiheng (1647–ca.1715_{CE}), to name a few (Yu 1987: 57-68). As I will discuss the application of *xing* to poetic cinema in much more detail later, here I only offer a brief introduction to this concept by presenting the exegesis by Kong Yingda (574–648_{CE}), one of the most prominent Confucian scholars, who, during the Tang Dynasty, provides authoritative commentary on the Five Classics, the *Classic*

of *Poetry* included. Drawing on Zheng Zhong, who argues that “*xing* entrusts a situation to an object” (Yu 1987: 58-59), Kong Yingda explicates:

Xing means to arouse (*qi* 起): to select a comparison which draws forth the categorical correspondence and stimulates one’s [mind-heart]. In the text of the *Classic of Poetry*, all examples of using plants, trees, birds, and beasts to manifest [implication] are words that [*xing*]. (Yu 1987: 59)

Since *xing* and its equivalence *qi* “possess a variety of meanings, including ‘to begin,’ ‘to arouse,’ and ‘to inspire,’” (Yu 1987: 59), *xing*, in consideration of Kong’s and Owen’s explanation, on earth means the evocation of circumstantial mood or affection through the presentation of a series of corresponding, or correlative, objects in that situation. It is no wonder that Li Zehou once translated *xing* as “imagistic association”, maintaining that such a device requires the artist to objectify “subjective emotions” that correspond with a particular “object” (Li 1980/2010: 142). By implication, in traditional Chinese poetry applying the poetic device of *xing*, an audience might find that some certain moods have already been externalised in the form of evocative objects, and vice versa: objects and exterior scenes presented in a poem are by no means objective, but have become highly charged, affective elements that lead to immediate fluctuations in the audience’s subtle feelings. It is by this technique that poetry can create affective effects.

Waterfalls and Downpour: Sentimental Characters Lost in Farewells

With the traditional Chinese philosophy of affections and its resultant aesthetics of *xing* in the Chinese poetic tradition in mind, let me now examine ways in which these

philosophical and aesthetic thoughts can be applied to two poetic scenes about painful farewell in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997) and *The Grandmaster* (2013). The reason why I exclusively look at these sequences about separation here is because it is a recurring theme in traditional Chinese poems. Such poetics, therefore, enable me to analyse the way in which Wong borrows various evocative objects from those poems, such as dew and raindrops, to construct poignant sequences and to evoke a sorrowful mood of farewell in his films.

According to Hans H. Frankel's research, "parting" is "one of the most common themes found in Chinese lyric poetry" (Frankel 1976: 73). In "On Parting, Separation and Longing in the Chinese Poetic Tradition" (2015), Maja Lavrač regards "parting from a dear friend or a lover" and "separation and longing between husband and wife" as two "most recurrent themes" of classical Chinese poetry. Such themes are common in the poetry of other cultures, too; however, as Lavrač argues, instead of revealing "this subject matter directly", traditional Chinese poems tend to allude to it indirectly by "using images and associations suggesting a variety of feelings that the couple's particular situation evokes" (Lavrač 2015: 106, 120). Though Lavrač does not refer to traditional Chinese aesthetic theory throughout her article, it is apparent that it is the aesthetic principle of *xing* in traditional Chinese poetics that enables poets to use emotionally charged and sensual objects in some particular situations to evoke, rather than betray, subtle moods among recipients. In what follows, I will investigate a series of "affective images", to borrow from Stephen Owen's translation of *xing*, in Wong's films. I maintain that these images heighten the communion between protagonists and objects around

them and bring along sensuous perceptions mediated between protagonists' emotional states and their surroundings felt subjectively.

Happy Together, for which Wong was awarded Best Director at Cannes in 1997, centres on a tumultuous romance between homosexual lovers, Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing) and Lai Yiu-Fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai). They escape from Hong Kong to Buenos Aires in Argentina in order to fix their broken relationship, since the audience has been told from the film's hallmark phrase in its opening sequence: "Let's start over". Toward the end of the film, however, Yiu-Fai is finally released from the relentless pressure of his impossible love for Ho Po-Wing and starts a new friendship with the easy-going Chang (Chang Chen). B. Ruby Rich regards this film as "a poem to frustrated desire, grief, longing, exile, cultural displacement, and sexual commerce". Rich's comment suggests that the film's camerawork, carried out by Chris Doyle, "finds a visual register for every chord of emotion", so that its appropriate locations and "right trappings", thanks to William Chang Suk-ping, the film's editor and art director, can carry "the emotional weight" and "snag our hearts"; as a result, the film "becomes an ode to love that shows us what happens when love rots and vanishes, leaving tragedy in its wake" (Rich 2013: 43). The implication in Rich's review is that *Happy Together*, with its particular focus on the gay couple's broken romance and tenuous relationship, inclines towards provoking excessive emotional qualities, such as sorrow, loneliness and alienation, and the audience is profoundly affected by the film, whose costumes, interior décor and exterior scenes externalise those emotions artfully. For Stephen Teo, "the setting of Lai's apartment" is "evocative", but also establishes "a pulsating, restless,

baroque atmosphere, in which the lovers clash, fight and wrestle for emotional control”, whereas “Doyle’s cinematography reflects the subjectivity of his characters and their psychic energy” (Teo 2005: 110-112). In short, the film for the audiences is poetic due to its evocation of intricate emotions and intense sensations. I also assume that the achievement of emotional effects in *Happy Together* is akin to the aesthetic principle of *xing* in the Chinese poetic tradition, because the film’s devices intensify the affective resonance between the protagonists’ moods and their surroundings and possessions.



Figure 3.2: *Happy Together*: Ho Po-Wing stares at a lamp of the Iguaçu Falls with rapt attention.

Such poetics are best exemplified in *Happy Together* in the sequence about the final tearful breakdown between Po-Wing and Yiu-Fai. Accompanied by the “Tango Apasionado”, Po-Wing, who had just repaired a lamp of the Iguaçu Falls in Lai’s small apartment, stares at the light with rapt attention, all alone (Figure 3.2). In order to show—and, of course, to invite viewers to become immersed in—Po-Wing’s gaze and his lonesome state of being-with-things, the sequence cuts from a straight-on angle shot,

positioned like a participatory onlooker, to an over-the-shoulder shot seeing with him, and finally to an extreme close-up of the lamp's glittery surface with two tiny figures leaning on a railing and gazing into the Falls with a flowing-light effect. Subsequently, there is a crane shot winding its way through the apartment's corridor and pointing toward its closed door, followed by a long shot of Po-Wing sitting curled up, and another medium shot of him hugging a quilt and wailing with grief. Ackbar Abbas considers this "kitschy lamp for tourist that Ho and Lai bought together in the early part of them" as "one of the most important images in the film", because it is charged with immense disappointment and sheer desperation due to the fact that "Ho and Lai never made it to Iguaçu" (Abbas 2016: 122-123). In consideration of the above aesthetic thoughts, from the repaired lamp to the closed door and to the embraced quilt, Po-Wing's emotional reaction to those objects might be pathetic fallacy. However, these objects are also cinematic *xing* which generates a pervasive sense of gloom and desolation caused by the absence of a lover, as the film's framing and editing call our attention to Po-Wing's emotional experience of these objects in a room without the presence of his lover, Yiu-Fai. Soon afterwards, while the music continues, Yiu-Fai's voiceover tells us:

I lost my way and wandered around for a while, but I finally reached Iguaçu. I felt very sad. I always thought there should be two of us standing here.

Meanwhile, a close-up displays the magnificent Iguaçu Falls obscured by layers of moisture. It follows a static long shot of Yiu-Fai fixing his intense gaze on the Falls, a facial close-up of him with water dripping down his face and, possibly, his tears, as well as a tracking shot approaching him that even drenches the lens (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: *Happy Together*: The damp atmosphere of the Iguazu Falls.

For Peter Brunette, the parallel editing is very “powerful” as it gives expression to Wong’s thematic concern over “the tragic impossibility of love”. Moreover, a two-minute long shot overlooking the Iguazu Falls at the end of this scene, what Brunette describes as “a supremely expressive helicopter shot”, becomes “the emotional high point of the film” with “the effect [that] is enormously haunting” (Brunette 2005: 84). In terms of the visual motif of water in *Happy Together*, it is Shohini Chaudhuri who is well aware of the fact that “in Chinese aesthetics, water is the element associated with black and extinction” (Chaudhuri 2016: 72), when she analyses the scene where Yiu-Fai, after a severe quarrel with Po-Wing, travels in despair on a boat floating on an industrial river with murky water. In the context of poetry about separation in the Chinese poetic tradition, dew is a typical “poetic association” that “occurs often in Chinese poems dealing with separation and other states of transience” (Frankel 1976: 82-83). As Frankel’s research shows, from Cao Zhi (192–232_{CE}) to Li Bai (701–762_{CE}), Chinese poets concerned with the very theme of parting and longing prefer the affective

association between tears and dewdrops, while the sensual image of dew in itself can evoke an overwhelming feeling of instability and impermanence in terms of human relationships. *Happy Together*, of course, revolves around the fragile romance between Po-Wing and Yiu-Fai. It is also noteworthy that, in Wong's original plan, Yiu-Fai's frustration at his broken relationship with Po-Wing even prompts him to commit suicide, as evidenced by the film's documentary *Buenos Aires Zero Degree* (Pun-Leung Kwa/Amos Lee, 1999), which includes a deleted sequence of Yiu-Fai's bleeding wrists. In the light of the Iguaçu Falls shots in *Happy Together*, "water disappearing into a vast hole", for Jeremy Tambling, "gives an image of absence" and implies the equivalence of "a form of death" and Lai's lonely completion of the quest for waterfalls (Tambling 2003: 60). Tambling's phrase of "a form of death" might refer to Yiu-Fai's psychological death rather than biological death and, correspondingly, his immersion in moisture is almost interchangeable with a strong sense of abandonment, dejection and disillusionment. As for the audience in cinemas, these abstract concepts related to psychological states are not drilled into them; conversely, the shots in Iguaçu Falls, gradually intensifying the sensation of a damp atmosphere, invite viewers to feel with Yiu-Fai sensually amidst a tearful farewell in front of the breathtaking Iguaçu Falls.

Farewell, Sorrowful Yip Man in the Rain

The Grandmaster, Wong's latest feature-length film, unfolds the life story of the real historical figure of Yip Man (1893–1972), played by Wong's long-time collaborator Tony Leung Chiu-wai. In this film, Yip pursues, practises, and perfects the Wing Chun martial

art, during which he witnesses the Second Sino-Japanese War, later suffers from the civil war, resulting in the break-up of his family, and finally migrates from Foshan in mainland China to the British colony of Hong Kong, where he trains Bruce Lee. With the martial artist Yip Man as its protagonist, the film belongs to “the genre of the martial arts as a generic form in Chinese cinema”, and particularly “is a kung-fu film” with a focus on “fist-fighting and the use of the legs” (Teo 2016: 524). The adoption of such a conventional film genre popular in East and Southeast Asian territories significantly contributes to Wong’s “biggest commercial success to date” with “\$45,27,000 in the PRC market alone”. Furthermore, the distribution by “the Weinstein Company as a Martin Scorsese Presentation” in the North American Market strongly promotes the film’s global popularity and international reputation (Bettinson 2015: 125, 131). It is worth mentioning that, apart from the 108-minute North American version put forward by the Weinstein Company, there are also other multiple versions of the film: the 130-minute domestic version released in Mainland China and Hong Kong, a European version premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, and a 3D version mastered by Wong Kai-wai himself. Through re-editing the film, Wong seemingly attempts to exert tight control over his work, as he himself discloses: “ultimately, I worked to envision the most perfect clock or the essence of marital arts itself; it is all about precision and balance” (Wong 2013, online), though this reworking of the film was also driven, at least in part, by the Weinstein Company's desire to streamline the plot and clarify its complex historical context for American audiences. While my analysis of the film will equate all these various versions embodying Wong’s auteurist endeavour, film scholars have already

maintained that *The Grandmaster*, in spite of the film's popular genre and the ensuing outstanding box office success, can still be discussed in the context of arthouse cinema.

Stylistically speaking, visual trademarks, such as “step printing, edge framings, jump cuts, back-to-camera staging, refracted imagery”, as Gary Bettinson maintains, evince “Wong’s authorial control” to such an extent that the film’s visual narration “is entirely subsumable to the author’s oeuvre”. In terms of the film’s subject matter, the film “flaunts genre elements”, but “its centre is an art-film protagonist” (Bettinson 2015: 127-130). By this, Bettinson means that Wong has transformed an urban legend into his own authorial work with a tentative, inactive, and impassive Yip Man that becomes a representative character of Wong. Echoing Bettinson, Vivian P.Y. Lee notices that Yip seldom acts upon life, but, in most scenes, “remains an observer of people and events”. As a figure deprived of firm action or heroic idealism, Yip even appears to become “an anachronistic incarnate of Chow Mo-wan” (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) in Wong’s other film *In the Mood for Love* (2001) (Lee 2016: 392, 394). Stephen Teo also argues for Wong’s auteurist position in *The Grandmaster* in his article “Wong Kar-wai’s Genre Practice and Romantic Authorship: The Cases of *Ashes of Time Redux* and *The Grandmaster*” (2016).

Wong is so preoccupied with the romantic concept of love and lovesickness that the affair between Yip Man and Gong Er (Zhang Ziyi) is almost “the martial arts variant of the platonic relationship in *In the Mood for Love*”, though Yip’s wife, Cheung Wing-sing (Song Hye-kyo), “appears deferential and tolerant of the affair”, leading to Yip’s kinder considerations towards his wife in an equally romantic way (Teo 2016: 532).

Critics' understanding of Yip as a romantic, but reticent, protagonist typical in Wong's other works is largely because, in this film, his duel with Gong Er, an elegant and charming female martial artist who is proficient at the "Sixty-Four Hands" technique of her prestigious family from Northeast China, all of a sudden arouses their secret, yet consuming, romantic passion. Nevertheless, factors such as the Japanese invasion, Yip's commitment to traditional marriage, and Gong's determination to avenge her father's murder, eventually lead to an impossible romance between Yip and Gong. The ambiguity of Yip's special affection for Gong, as Bettinson has indicated, might be more helpful for establishing a national hero's image that is supposed to be decent, loyal and honourable. Anyhow, Yip, having a deep emotional attachment to his wife and Gong in this film, is still a sentimental figure typical among Wong's authorial programmes.

Since the current chapter exclusively focuses on Wong's investments in romantic love, I would like to suggest that, in a film well supplied with martial arts fight scenes, quite a few sequences which suspend the plot of betrayal and vengeance and turn to explore characters' mutual affection, emotional separation and passionate longing can be said to be poetic moments of *The Grandmaster*. In this regard, we can also consider Maya Deren's theory which differentiates "a 'vertical' investigation of a situation" from the 'horizontal' development" in cinema, as she explains to us:

the poetic construct arises from the fact, if you will, that it is a "vertical" investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means. ... and this may be a little bit clearer if you will contrast it to what I would

call the “horizontal” attack of drama, which is concerned with the development. (Deren et al. 1953/2000: 174)

Deren’s idea of poetry is reasonably similar to traditional Chinese poetics: “a poem”, according to her, “creates visible or auditory forms for something that is visible, which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of the movement” (Deren et al. 1953/2000: 174). For Deren, the plot’s horizontal development contrasts sharply with the vertical investigation of a particular moment, and it is the latter that becomes the poetic part of a film and approaches to poetry’s inspection into emotions, sensual feelings, and contemplations. Now let us have a look a rainy scene in *The Grandmaster*, in which Yip Man bids a farewell to mainland China as well as to his wife.

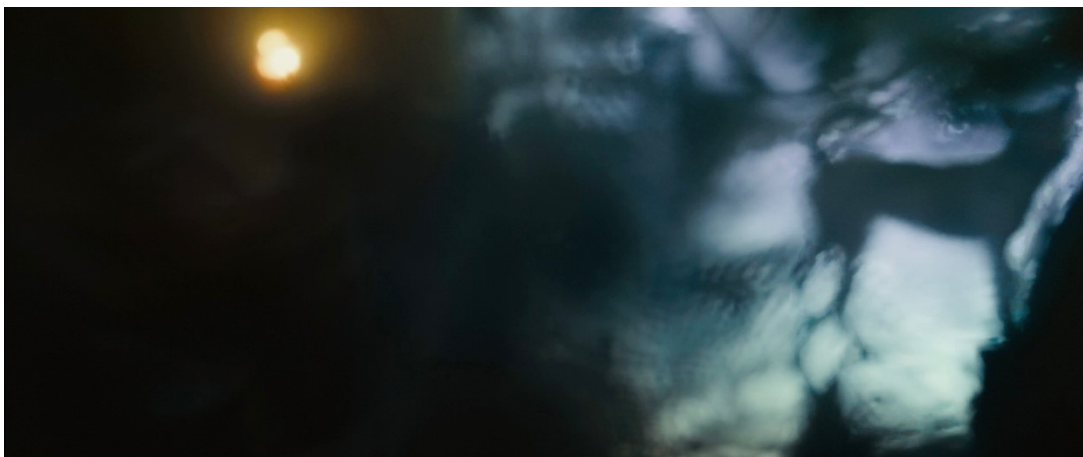


Figure 3.4: *The Grandmaster*: An atmosphere of gloom on a showery day in Hong Kong.

After the title card notifies the audience that Yip Man receives his Hong Kong identification before the border to China is shut in 1953, the film presents a showery day in which Yip, with an anxious air, is smoking. Some shadowy, dampened shots in smooth motion closely correspond to a traveller’s leaden heart (Figure 3.4). Visual elements in these shots also corroborate Frankel’s summary of poetic images from nature, such as perceivable wind, pelting rain, thick clouds, and murky skies, which are

used in Chinese poems dealing with the theme of parting. On the one hand, these natural elements are “themselves in motion”, but also what travellers are exposed to, contributing to “the discomforts of travelling, thus adding physical pain to the mental anguish of separation”. On the other hand, their sensuous properties, which tend to be rather “heavy” in the very “specific situation of parting and travel”, demonstrate ways in which “vagueness, distance, infiniteness, and melancholy” pervade the atmosphere (Frankel 1976: 84, 103). Whereas the above-mentioned shots are enough to create a vague and desolate atmosphere, Yip Man’s sentimental voiceover on the soundtrack, which, for Bettinson, becomes “a device granting subjective access” to Yip’s thoughts (Bettinson 2015: 128), discloses his severe discomfort about separation in a sad tone:

China closed the border with Hong Kong later that year. I was separated from my family. For the identification photo, a student lent me a suit, so I fit in. I never wore one again. If I couldn’t go home, I never fit in what I wore.

Yip’s voiceover continues: “The day I left Foshan, I was sure I would return, never thought it’d be the last time I saw her.” There follows a flashback, all of a sudden, to another rainy day when he bids a tearful farewell to his wife at the gate of their mansion: he writes something on her hand, in total silence, the implication of which might be “my heart will carry me back to you” as suggested by the following title card. While Yip looks back at his wife with an expression full of love and tenderness, a series of shots are again dampened (Figure 3.5): the surface of a puddle of water, rendered by slow motion, rippling, sparkling and reflecting Yip’s heavy steps upside down; his wife running

desperately in the courtyard murky with an imminent downpouring of rain; and eventually her face staring back at him in tears, yet dripping wet in torrential rain.



Figure 3.5: *The Grandmaster*: The courtyard of Yip Man's mansion murky with a coming rain.

This sequence's mood and atmosphere echo with a poem by Wei Yingwu (737–792_{CE}), “A Farewell in the Evening Rain to Li Zhou”. Though the final couplet of this poem fully discloses the strong sentiment of a reluctant farewell, the whole poem remarkably revolves around a good variety of objects, scenes and state of affairs that approximately correspond to the feeling of distressed parting full of tears:

River of Ch'u in light rain
evening bells of Chienyeh
rows of sails spreading out
birds disappearing slowly
Ocean Gate too far to see
riverside trees a distant green
there's no end to goodbye
a pair of silk streams soak my sleeves
(Pine 2009: 213; Original Source Wei 783_{CE}/2002: 367)

The two discussed farewell scenes in *Happy Together* and *The Grandmaster* almost appear as cinematic illustrations of the last line of this poem. At a moment when they bid a farewell to their beloved, the clothes of Lai Yiu-Fai, Yip Man and Cheung Wing-

sing are all wet through with a cloud of fine spray or heavy rainfalls, imply tearful goodbyes, and evoke the sensual feeling of separation among viewers. In her *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in A New Key* (1953), Susanne Langer also analyses this poem: “the rain on the river, in the sail, on the obstructing boughs, finally becomes a flow of tears”. Similarly, objects, such as “the bell, the shadowy birds, the invisible ocean-gate”, are woven into “the great love for which the whole poem is weeping” (Langer 1953: 215-216). Whereas the poem pays attention to the tolling of the evening bells, the soundtrack of the film is comprised of the sounds of muffled thunder, howling winds, chirping of cicada, raindrops spattering on pools of water, and, of course, Ennio Morricone’s non-diegetic soul-stirring music “Deborah’s Theme”, originally composed for *Once Upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984). Affective images in this sequence, as listed above, are also similar to the poetic composition of lines through the technique of *xing* in the poem: all things in the dusky twilight are enveloped in gentle rain but also saturated with rain drops, which lead to the event’s emotional core: “there’s no end to goodbye”. Additionally, Yip’s voiceover sounds like he is muttering to himself that there seemed to be a chance for him to return home, but it was the last time he saw his wife. It cuts back to him smoking alone in Hong Kong in 1953, who is gradually swallowed by the darkness, accompanied by his monologue, sighing with melancholy and nostalgia: “After that I only had the path ahead. There was no turning back, and no road home.”

Affective Images or Metaphors?

From the viewpoint of comparative poetics, scholars' discussion of *xing* often links such a device to Ezra Pound's idea of "image" so influenced by, in spite of Pound's limited knowledge gained from Ernest Fenollosa's essay on Chinese ideogram that somewhat misunderstands Chinese written characters (Twitchell-Waas 2020: 161-165), traditional Chinese poems, and especially to T.S. Eliot's conception of an "objective correlative". In his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919), Eliot, arguing that "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'", defines the term as follows:

a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (Eliot 1919/1932: 145)

Simply put, an artwork's emotional equivalents should exist in those external objects, circumstances, or state of affairs that, on earth, can evoke sensuous experiences. *Xing* is then comparable to such an "objective correlative" in that *xing* "is a relation of process between the image and the emotion" instead of "serving as a referential 'sign'" (Owen 1992: 587). When linking *xing* to Eliot's concept, but also to Pound's idea of "image", Ming Dong Gu is in fact much more emphatic that *xing* "is a spontaneous act of making connection between" the external world and a subject's conscious state (Gu 1997: 22). *Xing*, according to Gu's interpretation, prescribes the subject's sensual perception and emotional response to external phenomena, and attends to artistic repositories of such affections and perceptions in artworks; correspondingly, it insists on and believes in the potential of these poetic works to inspire and affect recipients. Those sequences in

Happy Together and *The Grandmaster* demonstrate that, to *xing*, namely, to stir a particular mood or emotion among the audience, a poetic construct of affective images in films in a highly stylised way tends to be sensuously affected by a perceiving subject's emotional feeling towards his or her surrounding environment.

Therefore, *xing* as a poetic device in cinema, that evokes affections in the audience through subjective manipulations of its audiovisual properties, might be loosely allied with what Daniel Yacavone refers to as “sensory-affective expression”. According to Yacavone's taxonomy, the term means “the most direct and immediate, nonreflective feeling responses prompted by perceptual attention” (Yacavone 2015: 171). To illustrate the sensory-affective expression, he then suggests the attempts to incorporate cinematic narratives into the exploration of audiovisual capacities by Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov, the stylistic modification of the natural colour of objects, landscapes, cityscapes through painting, repainting, lens filters and postproduction effects in works by Michelangelo Antonioni and Andrei Tarkovsky, and the sublimity of natural landscapes as featured in films by Werner Herzog and Terrence Malick, all of which are generally considered “poetic”. Sensory-affective expressions are, therefore, asserts Yacavone, “inherently *audiovisual* and a cinematic product of ‘presentational form’ (in Langer's sense)” and have “little genuine counterpart in any form of literature, however poetically or imaginatively ‘imagistic’” (Yacavone 2015: 175-176; emphasis in original). However, as Langer's appreciation of Wei Yingwu's poem might have already revealed, unlike “the break with actual existence” in William Blake's “The Tyger” (1794), traditional Chinese poetry is more “close to common experience” by

“mentioning real places” and “real people” (Langer 1953: 215). For this reason, it often displays a string of affective images that literally integrate the visual, auditory and tactile perceptions into a holistic sense of emotive circumstances, which almost seems to prepare scripts of poetic scenes for arthouse cinema’s filmmakers, as demonstrated by the sequence of the sentimental Yip Man bidding a farewell to his wife in the rain in *The Grandmaster*.

With regard to fictional characters’ emotions expressed through poetic cinema’s formal devices that call the viewer’s attention to an experience’s sensuous elements, *xing* that mediates between the subject and the object, and between inner states and outer realms, is more likely to tally with what Tarja Laine calls “an emotional event” constructed through a film’s aesthetic system which directly engages the audience affectively. In her detailed analysis of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Julian Schnabel, 2007), Laine suggests that, in order to present to the viewer the subjective experience of its protagonist Jean-Dominique Bauby (Mathieu Amalric), a French journalist who is physically paralysed but mentally normal, the film’s usage of “perceptual and mental subjectivity” frequently “transcends the subject-object distinction”, but also facilitates “the constant movement between subjectivity and objectivity, inside and outside”. More than this, quite a few affective sequences are usually constructed by the inextricable entanglement between the inward and the outward “in particularly suggestive ways” (Laine 2010: 297-300). Bauby’s monologue in this film, for instance, is well integrated with Tom Waits’s non-diegetic music, and there are also frequent alternations between the point-of-view shot embodying Bauby’s sensorial system and the establishing shot

presenting landscapes surrounding him. Laine's strong interest in the inward-outward affective dynamics appears to be a distant echo of the traditional Chinese thinking on psychological representations, as I have pointed out in one context after another. At this point, Laine's account of "an emotional event" is also appropriate for those affective sequences in Wong's films, since they all saturate a cinematic event with a subject's internal states in a particular circumstance.

In her book *Feeling Cinema: Emotional Dynamics in Film Studies* (2013), Laine later once again insists on a shift of emphasis from "character-affinity to aesthetic elements that are less character-bound", but also argues for "the aesthetic system of film servers as 'affective glue' that sensitizes us to a dual capability of picking up the emotions that film embodies and reacting to them" (Laine 2013: 5-6). The "affective glue" might be *xing*, namely, the evocation of a certain mood and affection among audiences by means of an attractive display of evocative images dependent on a filmmaker's aesthetic awareness and authorial control over his or her film's audiovisual elements. In poetic cinema that revolves around sentimental characters, *xing*, hence, means the evocation of feelings through a series of affective images, often accompanied by highly expressive soundtracks, which are imbued with these characters' perceptions, sensations and affections. *Xing* also demonstrates a communion of their heart-minds and the objects and environments around them.

This may, of course, raise the question among some readers: should an affective image be regarded as a metaphor as well? To take the Iguazu Falls in *Happy Together*

as an example, film scholars have endeavoured to interpret its symbolic meanings. For instance, Ackbar Abbas takes it as an image of “happiness”, “erotic relations” and “the beginning and the end of a relationship” (Abbas 2016: 122). For Shohini Chaudhuri, it is a token that denotes “desire”, “the lover’s fantasy of their union” and “a dream that isn’t realised” (Chaudhuri 2016: 176). Chris Berry even proposes that not only does the image of the waterfall represent “the anus as a black hole leading to death” persistent in “homophobic heterosexual cultures”, but it is also “a metaphor for Hong Kong’s no-man’s land status between China and Britain or the West in general as a place of transit” (Berry 2000: 194-195), due to the Iguaçu Falls lying on the border between Argentina and Paraguay. These scholars’ “readings” of the Iguaçu Falls undoubtedly can enhance our intellectual understanding of the film as a whole. However, we should also bear in mind that, since “metaphorical operations of meaning” in Euro-American theories of art, according to Stephen Owen, rarely occur in most traditional Chinese poems, “the reader’s first allegiance is to direct presentation of the physical world”. A “blossom-fragrance-stream” in a Chinese poem, for instance, shall be viewed as “a real stream filled with the scent of fallen blossoms rather than a metaphorical ‘stream’ of fragrance filling the air” (Owen 1985: 57, 292-293). My analysis of the waterfall scene in *Happy Together*, accordingly, has laid more stress on its sensual qualities that hold tremendous potential for inviting the general audience to undergo a sensuous and emotive experience of Yiu-Fai’s final farewell to Po-Wing. I have also demonstrated that the obscure and rain-soaked sequence in *The Grandmaster* of the separation and longing

between Yip Man and his wife creates a gloomy atmosphere phenomenally and evokes a sad mood of departing emotionally among the viewers.

Owen's assertion, that a Euro-American theory of metaphor is never popular in traditional Chinese poetics, has roots in his comprehensive analysis of Liu Xie's "Comparison and Affective Image" chapter in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a chapter dealing exclusively with the aesthetic principles of the *Classic of Poetry* of "description", "comparison" (*bi*), and "affective image" (*xing*). From Owen's reading of this chapter, we know that *bi* is a trope in the Euro-American discourse, but *xing* far surpasses *bi* in the Chinese poetic tradition, because ancient Chinese theorists "had largely abandoned a theory of signs in favor of a notion of language that incorporated motive, circumstance, and state of mind". As a consequence, *xing* "uses words to stir a certain response" and "works on the affections [*qing*] directly, unmediated by" rational understanding (Owen 1992: 256-257). Langer's appreciation of "A Farewell in the Evening Rain to Li Zhou", to a certain extent, meshes with Owen's summary of the aesthetics of *xing*, when she rightly observes how various objects in this poem, such as the "heavy" sail and "shadowy" birds, create "a complete subjective situation", and then argues: "the rain, the river, the parting, the motions and sounds and the time of day, are the poetic elements" and "emotional factor(s)" (Langer 1953: 215-216). Nevertheless, I am less certain about Langer's phrase of "a mere simile" in her book, because, again, the aesthetics of *xing* in ancient China regard the poetic as "the manifestation of some integral state of mind" rather than "as sign and referent" (Owen 1992: 46). When those scholars downplay sensuous elements in their film-viewing experience, their diverse

interpretations of the affective image of the Iguazu Falls in *Happy Together*, therefore, tend to overlook its evocation of a melancholy mood through Yiu-Fai's encounter with and immersion in it. As Owen maintains, *xing* in the Chinese poetic tradition "lies outside the scope of Western theory of metaphor": it is always concerned with how "the presentation of some phenomenon" through the artistic medium "is mysteriously able to 'stir' [*xing*] a response or evoke a mood"; "such a response, as it occurs, is prereflective" and untouched by metaphorical thinking (Owen 1992: 258). From this point of view, another poetic sequence in *The Grandmaster*, where viewers all at once experience, both sensually and emotionally, a sense of romance between Yip Man and Gong Er, must be discussed.

Love Letters, Duelling, and Revolving Bodies in the Brothel

After Gong defeats Yip in a combat in 1936, just before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Yip sees her off at the gate of his mansion, where he proposes a rematch, while Gong, whose eyes are full of tenderness, admiration and expectations, gently replies: "If you come, I will wait for you". Very soon afterwards, accompanied by the non-diegetic "Dreaming of the Sixty-Four Hands", a haunting melody composed by Umebayashi Shigeru, which, for Gary Bettinson, "confers a romantic tenor upon the encounters (and nonencounters) between [Yip] Man and Gong Er" (Bettinson 2015: 129), the sequence allows the audience to feel the affective resonance between them. The inevitably painful separation driving Yip to desperate longing can be felt intuitively

through the cutaway from a medium shot of him at home failing to practise the Wing Chun martial arts, but lapsing into a reverie, to an extreme long shot of Gong rambling alone in a frozen field with snow falling heavily, in her north-eastern hometown.

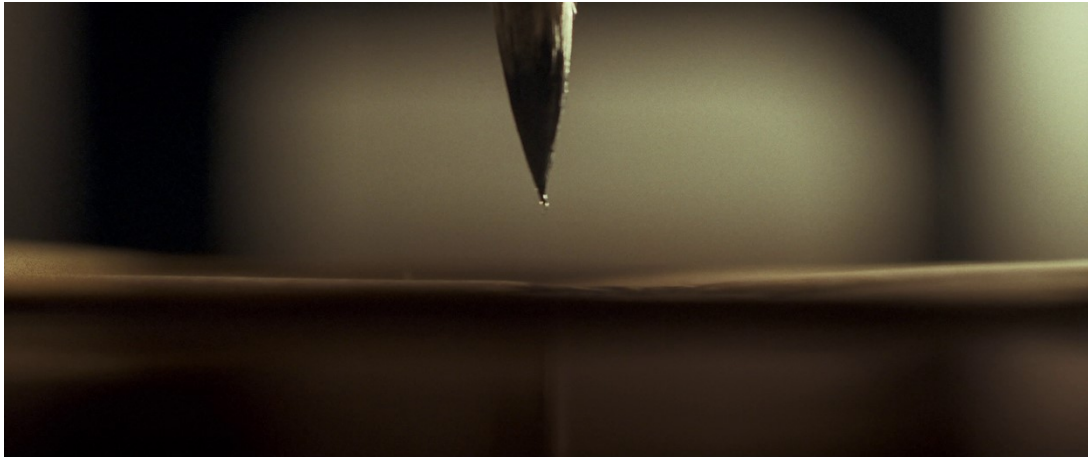


Figure 3.6: *The Grandmaster*: A soft-focus close-up of an ink brush lingering over a piece of paper.

From a soft-focus close-up that gives sensual prominence to an ink brush lingering over a blank piece of writing paper (Figure 3.6), the film then cuts to Gong suspending herself in a trance-like state, with a deep feeling, in her study, and later to the refracted imagery of Yip finding himself distracted by the repression of love and, subsequently, focusing all his attention on writing a love letter to Gong. Moral constraints render their love obscure and restrained. Nevertheless, the sequence's editing pattern, evocative of those love poems flourishing in China from the tenth to thirteenth centuries which are characterised by "frequent transposition between reality (actual experience) and the illusory experience of dream and reverie, vision and flashback" (Fong 1987: 105), actually arouses an all-consuming passion among the audience, as proved by scholars' strong response to it. Bettinson describes "their long-distance exchange of missives" as "tender" and "heartfelt" (Bettinson 2015: 129), while Vivian P.Y. Lee precisely observes

how the “tight-lipped” Yip and Gong channel their mutual affections through poetry confidentially, which “is the only way to communicate their feelings”, and by which the bond between them “gets stronger the further they are apart” (Lee 2016: 391). Whereas these subjective responses approach the aesthetic effect of *xing*, in relation to the implication of *xing* as the evocation of emotion through an objective correlative, further parallels arise if we take into account Dominic Griffin’s comment. “The frenetic passion displayed in [Yip]’s calligraphy in his letters to Gong” demonstrates Wong’s outstanding ability to “imbue inanimate objects with such emotional power” (Griffin 2013: online). As traditional Chinese poetics have a keen interest in the manifestation of internal states through the artistic medium, Yip’s frenetic passion embodied in his calligraphy is further manifest in the following two shots, which visualise his romantic fantasy about paying a visit to Gong’s family on a day when snowflakes fall thick and fast, and even enjoying the sheer joy of practising martial arts with Gong in her parlour, as if they are having a rendezvous and immersed in a surge of excitement (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7: *The Grandmaster*: Yip Man’s fantasy about having a rendezvous with Gong Er.

As the sequence unfolds gradually, several close-ups of Gong, by which viewers see her indulging in lovesickness with an expression of slight bewilderment on her face, and later beaming with joy on receipt of Yip's love letter and then replying to him brightly, are intercut with two title cards of their correspondence having tremendous sentimental value. While Yip proposes that "hidden flower under the leaves just once, leaves snowy track in my dreams again and again", Gong responds: "A promise that has been made, ten thousand mountains cannot keep us apart". It is worth deciphering their love letters, as a foreign audience might not grasp their underlying meaning. Since Yip's surname also signifies "leaf" in Chinese, and Gong's given name, Ruomei, literally means "like a plum blossom", Yip's "intimate depiction of a flower hidden underneath a leaf explicitly eroticizes the relation" between them in a flirtatious way (Leung 2016: 267). As for Gong's message, her wording of "ten thousand mountains" can be regarded as a trope, because in a poem of parting in the Chinese poetic tradition, a poet might compare "obstacles" and "barriers" preventing a possible reunion to "mountains" (Frankel 1976: 86). Such an understanding of the hidden meaning of their love letters, which seem to illustrate the aesthetic principle of *bi* in traditional Chinese poetics that "uses one word to 'refer' to something else" (Owen 1992: 257), is not *xing* due to its strong reliance on our rational knowledge.

As a result, it is not these title cards but a series of sudden flashbacks which vividly demonstrate both Yip's and Gong's fond memories of their duelling in 1936 in a brothel that is called The Gold Pavilion (Figure 3.8) that become the most powerful motivator for viewers' sensuous experience of their physical intimacy and emotional involvement.



Figure 3.8: *The Grandmaster*: Yip Man's and Gong Er's fond memories of their duelling.

A cursory glance at the critics' rousing reception reveals how the audience is deeply affected by the duel between them. Bérénice Reynaud regards Yip Man and Gong Er falling in love when duelling in the air as "the most alluring moment" of the film, with "their faces almost touching" (Reynaud 2016: 102). In Martha P. Nochimson's opinion, "the combat between Gong and [Yip] is perhaps the most erotic scene ever shown onscreen in Hong Kong" (Nochimson 2016: 458). Ken Provencher identifies their fight scene as "physical proximity" and "emotional intimacy", noticing that Yip and Gong "never kiss", but are "close enough to kiss" and "mesmerized by their respective beauty" (Provencher 2016: 505). The two "never become sexually intimate", but "the practice of martial arts", for Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "forges a bodily bond between them that is intensely erotic" (Leung 2016: 267). From their duelling inside the brothel, Vivian P.Y. Lee can strongly feel "the emotional bond between the two", "a tantalizingly erotic ambience", as well as "an intimacy that far outweighs the sensational excitement of an action sequence" (Lee 2016: 393). For my part, as far as traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics are concerned, I have, in Chapter 1, shown that affections in various treatises designate both emotional states and physical sensations in the sensual world.

Furthermore, *xing* in the Chinese poetic tradition often functions to stir such affections through an aesthetic integration of objective circumstances and subjective experience. The film typifies cinematic *xing* in its outward manifestation of Yip's and Gong's personal recollections of their duel, because its subtle revelation of their infatuation and even sexual desire evokes an overwhelming feeling of physical intimacy and affectional bonds among the audience. We should note that the duelling between Gong and Yip appears twice in *The Grandmaster*. The audience's viewing experience, however, is by no means exactly the same. Whereas the actual scene with suspense still contributes to our eager anticipation of the outcome of their duel, the one shown in Yip's and Gong's remembrance more approximates a poetic investigation of a particular moment that enhances our perception of Gong and Yip's romantic encounter. Such a heightened perception, at a certain level, is materially affected by unexpected upside-down framings, their bodily movements staggeringly captured in low rather than high frame rate cinematography, excessive usage of extreme close-ups of their attentive eyes, affectionate hugs and almost kissing faces, as well as the string-led score once accompanied by Gong's amplified soft moan rather than the music of percussion instruments with piercing sounds of rapid strides and fighting fists. In short, the audience is invited to emotionally engage in a certain sexual contact in an oddly tender way, rather than to spectate a martial arts combat with mounting tensions.

In addition, this sequence, incorporating imagistic associations from the natural world, also contributes to cinematic *xing* which has subtly objectifies these characters' passionate longings and effectively evoked affective resonance among the audience.

For instance, wintersweet blooming in profusion adjoins the lovesick Gong looking out of her window, a few shallow focus shots show the swirling snow and a pine tree swaying in the wind, and a mesmerising slow-motion extreme close-up shot displays rainwater collecting in shallow depressions on the ground of Yip's mansion. As Hans H. Frankel has suggested, when traditional Chinese poetry mentions "the poignancy of separation" and "the painful aspects of parting", these emotions are "so powerful that it affects even animals and inanimate objects, in a sort of pathetic fallacy", as demonstrated by rivers that usually objectify a particular subject's grief, "melancholy" and "the continuity of sorrow and the irretrievable loss of past happiness and position" (Frankel 1976: 79-80, 89). In his reading of Wang Changling's (698–756_{CE}) "Army Song", whose emotional tenor is indicated by the line "Always here on the Pass, feelings of separation", the modern Confucian Xu Fuguan (1903–1982), translating *xing* as "imagery" that goes beyond any "level of rationality", talks about "the unity of subject and object" embodied in this poem, in which "the emotion, the atmosphere, and the mood have undergone a certain purification that the objective scene" of "the autumn moon shining on the Great Wall" perfectly blends with "the subjective idea of border worries" and "a boundless sense of loneliness and desolation" (Xu 1980: 116-117, quoted in Li 1988/2010: 154-155). Much the same could be said of the evocative images of the wintersweet, the snow, and the puddle in the sequence, in that Wong's stylistic devices, in a cosy, intimate atmosphere, foreground the subjectivity of Gong's lovesickness and Yip's private fantasy, but also imbue these various objects with a deep yearning for pure love, intimacy and physical tenderness.

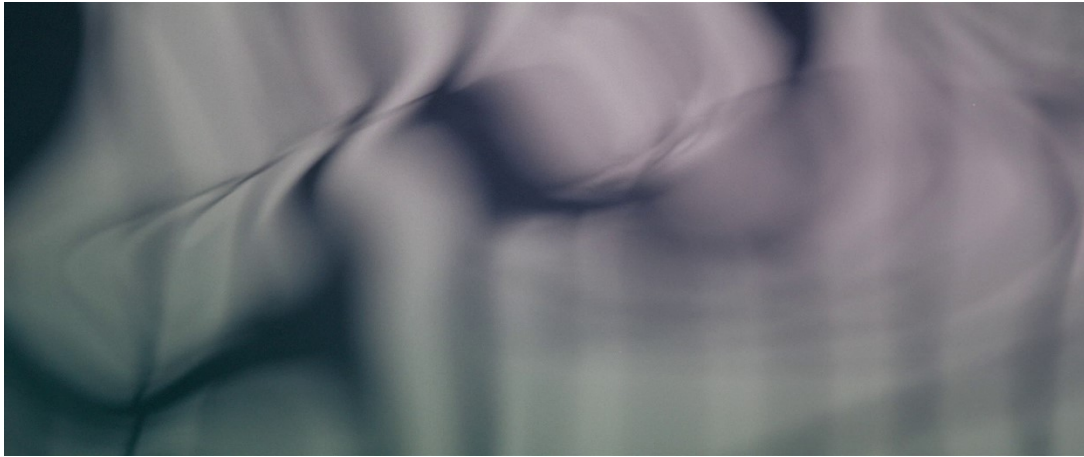


Figure 3.9: *The Grandmaster*: An extreme close-up of the gently undulating water ripples.

In particular, for a viewer conversant with the Chinese poetic tradition, the very imagery of the gentle wind rippling the surface of the puddle (Figure 3.9) is strongly reminiscent of Li Shangyin's (813–858_{CE}) "Night Rain: Sent North". In a poem that "conveys his feelings of isolation, loneliness and helplessness" arising from being "separated from his love and alone in the mountain" (Lavrač 2015: 119), there is a line about Li's subjective perception of the overflowing autumn pools: "night rain in the hills of Ba floods the autumn pools" (Owen 2006: 351; Original Source Li 851_{CE}/2015: 406). Since what we have seen, in one context after another, is simply that Wong often relies on pathetic fallacy to heighten the affinity between subjects and inanimate objects, the gently undulating water ripples in the film, analogous to the autumn pools witnessed by the lonely Li Shangyin, are almost indistinguishable from the surge of emotions of the sentimental Yip recalling the past and anticipating a reunion with the parted Gong.

Intricate Craftsmanship: Passion, Sensuality and Haptics in Patterns



Figure 3.10: *The Grandmaster*: The button from Yip Man's winter coat bespeaks his past love.

In *The Grandmaster*, the burden of lovesickness that urges Yip Man to visit Gong Er in the freezing North causes him to purchase a luxurious, winter fur coat on his own initiative in preparation for a potential trip. As mentioned earlier, this trip has never been finalised because of the Japanese invasion of China and ongoing wars, during which time Yip's family, undergoing unprecedented poverty, even compels him to pawn the coat. However, he tears off one of the buttons and regards it as his most treasured possession, as proven by the fact that Yip nails the button to the wall of his humble abode just after he emigrates to Hong Kong (Figure 3.10). This button from Yip's fur coat, unsurprisingly, exemplifies Wong's consummate employment of pathetic fallacy when he imbues the button with Yip's desperate yearning for Gong. Again, as David Bordwell proclaims, the button as a potent reminder of Yip's longing for love is not unusual for Wong's technique: "as sometimes happens in Wong's films, love tokens are on display" (Bordwell 2013: online). In like manner, Gary Bettinson stresses that "the button motif braids together various plot phases but goes further to represent a

meaningful item for both [Yip] Man and Gong Er”, which ranges from “a vestige of a prosperous existence now lost” to “Gong Er’s romantic hope and desire” for Yip Man (Bettinson 2015: 130-131). Indeed, in the film, when Yip finally meets Gong, now running a private clinic in Hong Kong, again in 1950 on the Chinese New Year’s Eve, and presents the button, which is called “a memento” in his own words to her, Gong’s temporary acceptance of this button apparently manifests their past love and old affections being rekindled.

Broadly speaking, a straightforward equivalence between controlled passion and a diverted fascination with clothing is rather typical in Wong’s late works. Stephen Teo’s close analysis of a dazzling series of elegantly embroidered cheongsams of So Lai-chen’s (Maggie Cheung Man-yuk) in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), for instance, shows how “the sensual pleasure of sex” is both elicited and suppressed at the same time. The cheongsam, which obstructs the view of the neck and breasts but also proffers a brief sight of the thighs, renders the woman both reticent and passionate, as well as both “modest and seductive” (Teo 2005: 123). Wong appears to fully exploit such aesthetic devices in *The Hand* (2004), a film that I will shortly focus on, in which the trustworthy tailor Xiao Zhang’s (Chang Chen) sexual desire and erotic fantasy for his patron Miss Hua (Gong Li), a coquettish Hong Kong courtesan in the 1960s, is almost equal to his meticulous design of gorgeous cheongsams for her. Nicholas Y.B. Wong’s appropriation of Sigmund Freud’s conception of “fetishism” might help explain the way in which the hand as “a substitute of the penis” indicates a certain kind of fetish about “a clothed female body eroticized by the cheongsam and gloves” (Wong 2008: 52). Nevertheless,

from the viewpoint of traditional Chinese poetics, I suggest that the film's particular emphasis on a close unity and strong correspondence between its protagonists' fierce passion and sensual pleasure and its richly patterned, but also sensuously attractive, visual designs of objects, from Miss Hua's stylishly ornamented flat to her luscious, and even shining, cheongsams, epitomises the aesthetic category of "intricate beauty" and "delicate-fresh and rich-lush" in the Chinese poetic tradition. Let us now briefly review these theories before examining *The Hand*.

As noted earlier in Chapter 1, on the basis of the assumption that the affections in traditional Chinese philosophy are often paired with *wen* that originally designates jade ornaments, but later generally refers to patterns, ancient theorist Liu Xie's "Affections and Coloration" chapter of his magnum opus *The Literary Mind and the Sculpting of Dragons* has already proposed an aesthetic linkage between an artwork's ornamental beauty perceived and a deep feeling of affections evoked. In particular, he draws an analogy between a writer's arrangement and presentation of human affections in an article and an embroiderer's careful selection of "coloured threads to make a pattern" or "a piece of brocade" (Owen 1992: 241). Similar to Liu Xie's argument, Lu Ji's (261–303_{CE}) thesis, "Poetry follows from the affections and is sensuously intricate" (Owen 1992: 130; translation modified; Original Source Lu ca. 280_{CE}/2002: 99), also relates delicate inner emotions with intricate aesthetic patterns. Considerable significance, undoubtedly, has been attached to Lu Ji's thesis, as it redefines the art of poetry but also inaugurates "the lyrical tradition of Chinese poetics" (Wang 2015: 8). In general, intellectuals in the Six Dynasties, such as Lu Ji and Liu Xie, give emphasis on "subtle

sensitivity” and have “sentiments about life and the universe as a whole, and also about their own sensitivity and sentiments” (Feng 1948/1966: 237-239). In Lu Ji’s poetics, when he couples the affections with the phrase of “intricate-sensuality” (*qimi*), which originally means “a patterned silk whose patterns (*wen*) were not woven into the fabric”, and which begins to signal “any attractive and intricate pattern” during his time (Owen 1992: 131), he actually proposes a new form of poetic qualities that turns the spotlight onto delicate appearance, sensual temptation, as well as attractive visual order.

Subsequently, Sikong Tu, in his *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* (ca.8th century CE), uses the synonym “intricate-beauty” (*qili*) to classify a particular aesthetic mood that “is often associated with human artefacts” and, specifically, with a distinct feeling of “wealthy, frivolity, and dissipation” and even of “fanciness”; likewise, the category of “delicate-fresh and rich-lush” speaks about “a sensuousness that verges on sensuality and were commonly used together to describe lovely women” (Owen 1992: 310, 322-333). As aestheticians believe that the piercing gaze of sentiments should be deeply entwined with increased sensitivity to an artwork’s outward appearance, an enduring poetic tradition has been a convoluted blend of affectionate sentiments and sensuous feelings in artworks, with a focus on the beauty of women or a life of luxury.

The extravagant brothel known as the Golden Pavilion with its gold-covered walls in *The Grandmaster* which, for Mike Ingham and Matthew Kwok-kin Fung, is “a luxurious and exclusive night club” (Ingham and Fung 2016: 316), exemplifies Sikong Tu’s poetics

of “intricate beauty” defined as a certain sensual pleasure derived from good wine, sweet music, or a delightful companion in a richly ornamented chamber:

The moon shining bright in a splendid chamber,
A painted bridge in the emerald shade.
Golden goblets full of wine,
A companion strumming a lute.
If this is accepted, sufficient in itself,
It will express all the loveliest sensations.
(Owen 1992: 322; Original Source Sikong ca.8th century CE/2013: 34)



Figure 3.11: *The Grandmaster*: A tableau vivant-like shot of the Golden Pavilion.

Sikong Tu’s wording of “golden goblets” implies “the luxury implicit in the category”, while “a splendid chamber” and “a painted bridge” denote “ornamental glitter” (Owen 1992: 323). Without going into too much detail, such aesthetics seem to externalise in the Golden Pavilion in the film, which, thanks to William Chang Suk-ping’s visual design, has been sumptuously decorated with carved beams, painted rafters, lavish tableware, extravagant ornaments, crystal iridescent beaded curtains, and lamps and lanterns in different shapes and sizes, and so on and so forth. Also, if the category of “intricate beauty” has something to do with artefacts, tableau vivant-like compositions of those enchanting courtesans surrounding the protagonists in a magnificent chamber (Figure

3.11), which is captured by graceful camera movements and accompanied by Stefano Lentini's potent oratorio "Stabat Mater" (2013), highlights not only a view of the Golden Pavilion in all its splendour, but also the film itself as an intricate artwork, as Vivian P.Y. Lee maintains: "the oil painting-like shot composition once again draws attention to the film as artifice" (Lee 2016: 389). Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the word "beauty" in the compound "intricate beauty" should not be confused with "the complex history of 'beauty' in Western aesthetics", because the substitution of "intricate beauty" for "intricate sensuality" in traditional Chinese poetics spotlights "a sensuous beauty and allure rather than an aesthetic beauty of form" (Owen 1992: 131, 589). In view of this, it is fairly reasonable for Lee to give an outline of "a pure visual display of female bodies elaborately draped in period-style cheongsams" in the Golden Pavilion that amazes the viewer sensually (Lee 2016: 389). Visual motifs in Wong's works, such as bewitching courtesans, elegant chambers as well as exquisite cheongsams, have been manifest in *The Hand*. Adopting the approach outlined here, in the following sections my analysis will concentrate on the sensuality of this affective film.

Sexual Experience and Visual Charm in Miss Hua's Apartment

If the above-quoted aesthetic statement by Lu Ji signals that a strong emphasis on social-political reality should be counterbalanced by a greater encouragement to poets to capture "the 'quality' of inner life" and to sing "forth one's feelings and innate nature" in the sphere of premodern Chinese literary practice (Owen 1992: 131; Tian 2007: 169),



Figure 3.12: *The Hand*: “Remember this feeling, and you’ll make me beautiful clothes.”

The Hand instantiates such a poetic tradition that encourages a delicate perception of private lives and of the human experience of affections. As can be seen from the film’s synopsis, during their first encounter, Miss Hua uses her long-fingered, well-manicured hand to masturbate Zhang, who is dispatched to make customised clothes for her. Miss Hua fixes Zhang, trembling with feverish excitement for sexual pleasures, with a flirtatious gaze and murmurs under her breath: “Remember this feeling, and you’ll make me beautiful clothes” (Figure 3.12). As the plot unfurls, though Miss Hua, as a sophisticated courtesan, unavoidably mixes with her rich customers, over many years the taciturn but warm-hearted Zhang, who has physical intimacy only with her, has invested his obsession with and kind considerations for Miss Hua in making a great many gorgeous garments for her with his exquisite craftsmanship. The film embodies Wong’s thematic concerns over unrequited love, an impossible romance, fragile relationships, unbearable lovesickness, as well as the persistence of yearning, which appears to be an indication of the polysemous term *qing* in traditional Chinese

philosophy and aesthetics. The meaning of *qing*, as I have indicated in Chapter 1, varies from human instincts to deep feelings, from erotic desires to romantic love, and from bodily sensations to human emotions. More than this, since Lu Ji's wording implies "intricate elegance" but also "strongly suggests a self-conscious patterning of elegant phrases" (Cai and Wu 2019: 2), through a cursory examination of *The Hand*, it is also not difficult to spotlight the aesthetic awareness of Wong and his lifelong collaborator William Chang Suk-ping to draw a striking parallel between its sensitive protagonist's feelings and the film's strong visual interest in the sensuous appearance of various luxuriant objects. To illustrate this, we can refer to the sequence when Zhang visits Miss Hua for the first time on a sultry summer afternoon.



Figure 3.13: *The Hand*: An elegant living room of Miss Hua's ostentatious apartment.

Before being invited to her bedroom, Zhang is required to have a seat at the table in a spacious lounge. Whereas the film's soundtrack mixes the shrill sounds of chirping cicada with the recurrent gentle moans of Miss Hua having sex with her customer, a lateral tracking shot moving rightward, which appears to signify Zhang's sex drive being

evoked in an awkward position, also draws viewers' attention to the elegant living room, showing floral wallpaper, an ornate mirror, a gleaming chandelier and a glass-topped table with a fruit bowl and a vase of flowers (Figure 3.13). Through the film's various stylistic devices, such as fluid mobile framing, compositional strategy and an intricate composite of atmospheric lighting and colours, all these objects are elegantly patterned and rightly point to an ostentatious lifestyle of the showy Miss Hua of great charm. As the camera glides over Miss Hua's apartment, "the very walls of rooms", for Stanley Kauffmann, "seem erotic" (Kauffmann 2005: 24). Following Kauffmann's observation, Bettinson further suggests that "emotion bleeds into the narrative setting", so that "the physical environment becomes an expressive" element. It is by virtue of "pathetic fallacy" that the sequence's "vibrant colors" and "features of décor" expressively reveal the reticent protagonists' "feelings of desire" and "loneliness", whereas the "languorous panning shot skims surfaces like a soft caress" (Bettinson 2015: 62-63). Simply put, this discussion indicates the ways in which the characters' physical desires and emotional states echo with that apartment. And yet, on the basis of traditional Chinese poetics that often attach human affections to an artwork's ornamental patterns, the visuality of this particular shot, which is seductive for us, might bespeak Lu Ji's poetics of "intricate sensuality", for Miss Hua's exquisite, flamboyant, and luxurious apartment and Zhang's growing passion and sexual feelings blend together perfectly.

As soon as Miss Hua's customer leaves her, before showing Zhang standing still in her bedroom with an embarrassed look and an erection under his trousers, the film's camera even lingers on Miss Hua's apartment's enchanting appearance. In one shot,



Figure 3.14: *The Hand*: The intricate appearance of Miss Hua's apartment.

doorframes of different shades of green coordinate with stylish wallpaper of vegetal patterns and vertical lines and stripes. In another shot, by virtue of flat lighting and a long-focal-length lens which concertedly flattens the space, there even seems to be an intricately beautiful piece of tapestry composed of velvet curtains, fabric lampshades, artificial flowers, and crystal vases (Figure 3.14). In consideration of Wong's *The Hand* as a very overt homage to Michelangelo Antonioni's film arts, we are reminded of what Pier Paolo Pasolini has referred to as the "internal law of 'obsessive framing'" in Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964). According to Pasolini, after characters leave the frame of that film, "pure pictorial beauty" often occurs and correspondingly engenders "poetic myth" and "the prevalence of formalism" in that frame (Pasolini 1965/2000: 48). It becomes apparent that those two shots in *The Hand*, which are thoroughly obsessive about the pictorial beauty of Miss Hua's elegant apartment, without the presence of any character, benefit directly from Antonioni's stylistic device and formalist abstraction. Apart from the technique of obsessive framing, Pasolini also suggests that, in order to

present a “formalistic vision of the world” in *Red Desert*, Antonioni totally immerses “himself in his neurotic protagonist”, concluding that a filmmaker of the cinema of poetry can express himself or herself freely “in the first person singular” through the viewpoint of “pretextual characters”, who share the same “culture, language and psychology” with the filmmaker (Pasolini 1965/2000: 48, 53). Put differently, Antonioni’s obsession with and presentation of formalist purity is achieved through, so to speak, a particular pretextual character’s unique vision that allows for his visual experimentation.

In this view, the very occupation of the highly skilled tailor Zhang in *The Hand* can thus be explained in part by Pasolini’s conception of “pretextual characters”, because Wong’s continuing preoccupation with the lush, alluring cheongsams since *In the Mood for Love* in his career, manifests itself in Zhang’s exquisite craftsmanship. In addition, what is even more important in the context of traditional Chinese poetics is the notion that the visible presence of intricate fabric patterns more or less implies an artist’s skilful manipulation of emotions. As I have mentioned several times, a writer’s exhibition of affections is, for the ancient theorist Liu Xie, directly equated with an embroiderer’s meticulous organisation of coloured threads and richly decorative fabrics. The phrase “intricate sensuality”, in Lu Ji’s thesis that focuses on subtle emotional feelings, is in itself related to a piece of cloth from a patterned silk that is not knitted into the fabric. In the face of this dynamic intersection between emotions and luxurious fabric, evoking both visual pleasure and tactile sensation, I wish to further take into account film phenomenologists’ approach to a film’s materiality and emotional qualities, as well as the audience’s visual and haptic experience of cinema. With the aid of film

phenomenology and the poetic of “intricate sensuality”, I will demonstrate how Zhang’s wistful and passionate yearning for Miss Hua, as his sexual mentor and beguiling patron, is transferred to his total absorption in tailoring and upkeeping her dresses, through which Wong tactfully aligns viewers’ film experience with Zhang’s feelings.

Haptic Visuality and the Sense of Touch in Spectatorship

In a chapter entitled “The Memory of Touch” in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and The Sense* (2000), Laura U. Marks addresses how cinema has the potential to appeal to the sense of touch that is nearly impossible to represent or express on screen due to its technical limitations. In Marks’s discussion on “haptic cinema”, she at first retraces early cinema’s peculiar fascination with “bodily identification” and with “an immediate bodily response to the screen” (Marks 2000: 170-171). This point can be seen from those theories of embodied spectatorship advanced by early cinema theorists, such as Walter Benjamin, Béla Balázs and Dziga Vertov, all of whom are sympathetic towards a symbiotic relationship between cinema’s stylised images and the audiences’ physiological responses. Marks then refers to Gilles Deleuze’s study of *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959). In the film, the hand’s action of “seizing”, “brushing” and “arresting” an object “is specific to the gaze” and, accordingly, “takes on a role in the image” (Deleuze 1985/1997: 12-13), since it is through touching that the hand is integral to the film’s construction of a disconnected, fragmentary space. Marks, however, assumes that “Deleuze’s focus on filmic images of hands seems a bit unnecessary in

terms of evoking a sense of the haptic” (Marks 2000: 171). The reason is quite simple: the sensuousness of haptic images, for Marks, is primarily “medium-specific”, and has more to do with “formal matters” (Marks 2000: 171-176). Therefore, haptic imagery, in Marks’s opinion, can in fact derive from a film’s perceptible stylistic techniques, such as graininess, optical printing, alternations in focus, overexposure or underexposure, and an unconventional frame rate, which can significantly help foster the audience’s multisensory relationship to the film’s tactile medium.

Marks thus asserts that her “definition of visual tactility” concerns how these techniques “make a film look tactile” and compel viewers’ eyes to make contact with “the physical surface of the medium” (Marks 2000: 176). Jennifer M. Barker further develops Marks’s theory in her *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (2009). Barker has analysed the brief prelude to Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* (1975), in which a hypnotherapist’s attempt to cure a young man’s stammer relates vision to touch and depends on the deep and meaningful connection between mind and body. Barker, linking “haptic touch” to “total immersion”, argues that “touch is a ‘style of being’ shared by both film and viewer”, and “particular structures of human touch correspond to particular structures of the cinematic experience” (Barker 2009: 1-2). In Marks’s eyes, cinematic tactility means the capacity of cinema to offer the audience a close, intimate experience that goes beyond a distant observation traditionally attributed to cinema’s pure visuality. Cinema, for this reason, can physically join the film’s body with the audience’s bodily organs through a sensual engagement that is fleshy, muscular and visceral. According to Barker, “the ‘film’s body’ is a concrete but distinctly cinematic

lived-body, neither equated to nor encompassing the viewer's or filmmaker's body, but engaged with both of these" (Barker 2009:7-8). This means that the film's body is not reducible to its filmmaker's human vision, and that the film's perception and expression, constructed through the tripod, camera movements and various distances of framing, among other things, is not necessarily identical to audiences' physical reactions such as concentration, muscular movements, facial expressions, or gestures.

In short, film phenomenologists use "haptics" to examine ways in which cinema's stylistic and technical elements interact directly with spectators' physical and sensuous engagement with cinematic images. In consideration of Marks's and Barker's concepts of haptic visuality, several salient stylistic hallmarks in *The Hand*, such as slow-motion effects, extreme close-ups and shallow focus cinematography, have been significant contributors to spectators' immersive and physical experience of the film's cinematic materiality. The film in itself, however, also brings to the fore skin-to-skin contact and the action of touching and caressing enacted by the protagonists' hands, though Marks is very like to assume that to evoke haptic sensation in cinema, these images of hands are not always necessary. It is important to add that Wong's production of *The Hand* benefited from the temporary suspension of his other project, *2046* (2004), as a result of the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong in 2003. During the epidemic, the fact that people in Hong Kong were advised "to wear a mask", "to wash hands as often as possible with disinfectant liquid", as well as to "avoid any physical contact with any foreign objects", had inspired Wong "to make a short film on touching" (Wong 2008: 47-48). Since the coronavirus outbreak and pandemic, which suppressed the visceral experience of our

bodies and demanded stricter enforcement of social distancing, had provided a starting point for the production of *The Hand*, the film grounded itself in the locus of our bodies, and of our embodied experience of touch and physical contact.

In his examination of Wong's *In the Mood for Love*, *The Hand* and *2046*, Bettinson has noticed Wong's great fascination with close, partial framings of human bodies that hold strong emotional and sensual appeals for the audience. Bettinson reveals how Wong attempts to enchant and seduce his audiences by his films' "sensuous appeals" with "expressive weight" by "a kind of displacement or diffusion of character emotion". The emotion is not shown in facial close-ups, but instead has been thrown onto "bodily attributes (hands, feet), features of setting (landscape, décor), and parameters of style (cinematography, sound)" (Bettinson 2015: 62). In this regard, Bettinson then analyses Wong's partial compositions of his characters' bodies, such as fingers, the nape of a neck and lower abdomen, in these films. Such a compositional strategy, in Bettinson's opinion, on the one hand imbues emotional scenes with sensual force; on the other hand, it invites viewers to engage with the diegetic world. In *The Hand*, a conspicuous display of Zhang's and Miss Hua's hands and forearms through close-ups throughout the film is definitely haptic, whether in the literal sense of the touching and the touched, or in the sense of sensuous spectatorship. This might be best illustrated by the film's masturbation scene, in which the medium shots of Miss Hua, who is now presented as an amazingly flirty and sensual woman, are intercut with the extreme close-ups of her soft hand that gently strokes Zhang's thighs, bottom, and then genital organs (Figure 3.15), before the film finally cuts to Zhang's moaning face damp with perspiration.



Figure 3.15 : *The Hand*: Miss Hua's soft hand strokes Zhang's body.

"The shots of her bright-red polished fingernails against the back of Zhang's upper thighs," as Frank P. Tomasulo understands, "can be construed as erotic" (Tomasulo 2008: 31-32). The idea of haptics has not underlain Nicholas Y. B. Wong's thorough discussion of the film, although his reading, drawing on Raymond Tallis's *The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being* (2003), also indicates that "through the touch", the hand, as "an organ of sensation that gives us pleasure", is reliant on "the apparatus of reciprocity", namely, "the existence of one's body through caressing another's body" (Wong 2008: 50-51). From this, Wong's analysis of this scene justifiably shows that its "sensational touch" is "both seductive and communicative", in that "the intimacy and desire triggered by the carnal hand could only be felt by the hungry skin" (Wong 2008: 48-49, 52). In other words, this sequence's captivating revelation about the sensual reciprocity between the touching and the touched turns the spotlight onto our skin and our keen anticipation of mutual caress and intimate affinity. Tomasulo, nevertheless, believes that, compared with some other overt and bold cinematic representations of

eroticism, *The Hand*'s depiction of such a hand job is apparently "restraint" and somewhat "detached" (Tomasulo 2008: 32). However, his observation about the scene's intricate editing rhythm, the fragmented, yet passionate, framing of parts of the protagonists' bodies, as well as its accompanying euphonious music *Concerto Alevta*, a string-led piece borrowed from the film score of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Veronika Voss* (1982), reconciles with what Barker refers to as the film's body. Such a body is not aligned with the viewer's body completely, but might be vital to, in this scene, a sexually aroused viewer's heart palpitations, rapid breathing, flushed skin, muscle movements in the feet, face and hands, and even the rapid increases in blood flowing to the genitals.

Tactile Feelings of Remembrance: Skin, Fabrics and Threads

In *The Hand*, with the passage of time, Miss Hua's life goes through ups and downs: not only do her physical charms fade, but she also becomes a cheap prostitute infected with a contagious malady and lives in a dreary room in the seedy Palace Hotel, before finally marrying one of her affluent customers. In the scene about their final encounter, Zhang visits Miss Hua in her dingy hotel room and delivers to her the recently patched cheongsam, as she previously believed that she could take "the very last chance" if wearing a decent dress and dating her old client, who had just come back from the United States and who was still fond of her. Accompanied by *Concerto Alevta*, the sequence ends with Miss Hua and Zhang's intimate physical contact: the haggard Miss Hua uses her hand to masturbate him again. Although Zhang feels a strong, irresistible

impulse to kiss her lips, Miss Hua's awareness of her infectious disease prompts her to use her other hand to prevent him from kissing her and, in turn, to caress his face with tender affection (Figure 3.16). Tomasulo regards Miss Hua's "masturbation offer" here as "an act of devotion to his loyalty" and "an expression of what Antonioni once called 'mutual pity'", maintaining that our emotional sympathy "is carried by the music, particularly the strings that well up romantically over this tender yet melancholy act" (Tomasulo 2008: 33). I also assume the film's insistence upon their melancholic, but consolatory, bodily contact through their skins is akin to Barker's description of "the surface of the skin" in the opening sequence of *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), which becomes "the mingling of corporeality, emotion, and human history" (Barker 2009: 57), particularly given that *The Hand*'s production history relevant to the SARS pandemic in 2003 witnessed the public's overwhelming fear to touch the other person through direct skin contact.



Figure 3.16 : *The Hand*: Miss Hua uses her hand to caress Xiao Zhang's face.

When considering the protagonists' skins in *Hiroshima mon amour* as the meeting point of corporeal feelings and emotional states, Barker highlights the fact that the skin "is the surface through which we experience and express feelings, of both physical and emotional varieties" (Barker 2009: 57-58). Barker's phenomenological approach to film criticism, hence, considers cinema's expression of emotional significance tied to its evocation of physical feelings. As her analysis of Tarkovsky's *Mirror* shows, the film "moves and touches us emotionally precisely because it does so physically"; namely, audiences' emotional feelings of "love, desire, loss, nostalgia, and joy" of this film are "inextricably bound up with motion and materiality" and experienced "in fundamentally tactile ways" (Barker 2009: 1-2, 16). That being so, Barker's synthesis of sensations and emotions in her theory seems compatible with traditional Chinese poetics of *qing* in its sensual but also emotional sense, which leads us back to Lu Ji's thesis: "poetry follows from the affections and is sensuously intricate" (Owen 1992: 130; translation modified; Original Source Lu ca. 280_{CE}/2002: 99). In Lu Ji's discussion of a good variety of literary genres, while "intricate-sensuality" is associated with a patterned silk, he actually relies on the Chinese poetic tradition "in which emotions are described in terms of threads", and in which "thread" is a homonym for "longing"; for this reason, he also compares the threnody's "sad emotions" to "all twisted and tied" threads (Owen 1992: 132). I notice that there might be a parallel argument to be made between such poetics and Marks's tactful application of the art historian Alois Riegl's knowledge of textiles to her examination of some videos about silk and carpet.

Riegl's early career as a curator of textile art, according to Marks, enables him to observe the art of ornamental carpets that is excluded in high art in the Euro-American discourse, shaping his ideas about tactile modes of vision and representation. On the basis of Riegl's research, Marks, inspired to "include the 'low' traditions of weaving, embroidery, decoration", also proposes an analogy between woven fabrics and cinema's tactile surface, suggesting that, in some videos, "images of fabric" have been used to trigger "memory", to stimulate tactile "vision" and "caressing gaze", and even "to call upon specific cultural knowledge associated with specific fabrics" (Marks 2000: 168-169). Despite a radical difference in cultural context between traditional Chinese poetics and Marks's adoption of Riegl's research on the weaving of textiles in her analysis of works by video artists from India and Pakistan, I am inclined to believe that, through haptic presentation of textiles in Wong's films, the protagonists' desire, memory and longing are interwoven with the sensual surface of fabrics and the folds of clothing.

While Marks points out the different cultural understandings of weaving, Owen's analysis of Wu Wenying's (ca.1200–ca.1260_{CE}) lyrics for the tune "A Prelude to Warbling Orioles" illustrates traditional Chinese poetics regarding the mutual interchangeability of threads and longing. Since "threads" "are also, in a homophonous character, 'thoughts' or 'longings'", "'tendrils' of sentiment" in this work, whose "writings of memory" are analogous to "a door finely wrought" for Owen, are disclosed by their images of "tendrils of mist" and "tendrils of new willow leaves" (Owen 1986: 114, 117). Likewise, in Wong's *The Grandmaster*, when Gong Er in 1950 on Chinese New Year's Eve receives the button from Yip Man's fur coat and her butler persuades her to accept Yip's devotion,

Gong's wistful sigh about such an unexpected encounter, and their impossible love due to her vow never to marry before the Buddha, is soon cut to Gong's deep contemplation in the terrace viewed through lace curtains that move in the breeze (Figure 3.17), before the film actualises her remembrance of her revenge for the murder of her father ten years ago. Accompanied by the evocative melody "Dreaming of the Sixty-Four Hands", echoing with the scene about Yip's and Gong's fond memories of their combat in the brothel, this sequence repeatedly shows the flutter of curtains, through which the audience sees Gong gripping the button, lost in deep thought and hovering disconsolately on the terrace. The scene then cuts to the front entrance of Gong's flat, where Yip is staring into space with deep emotions, followed by a close-up of the tearful face of Gong, now standing still emotionally in the drawing room, with her monologue: "Mr. Yip, do you know what happened ten years ago?"



Figure 3.17: *The Grandmaster*: Gong Er lost in contemplation is viewed through lace curtains.

In this scene, the lace curtains fluttering in the wind, which are subtly interlaced with Gong's thoughtful reflection on her romantic relationship with Yip, even appear to testify

to Owen's careful analysis of Wu Wenying's lyrics: "love longings' stirred by the spring wind, whipped and shaken by it, are blown out and away into 'threads'" (Owen 1986: 117). In addition to the curtains over the window, the warm sentiment of love can also be felt through shafts of dazzling sunlight that suddenly flash up in the darkness. The murky, bluish, grainy shots of Gong on the terrace, caused by the usage of natural lighting and fast film stock and by the foregrounded curtains out of focus, also prompt the audience to speculate about what Gong is thinking through the phenomenological sense of touch of the film's body, although it is not until the very end of the film that we see Gong return "the button to [Yip] Man at their final encounter" in a teahouse and realise that Gong has already decided to give up "her chance for romantic fulfilment" (Bettinson 2015: 130-131). When analysing the texture of weave in what she calls "the fashioned world of Wong Kar-wai", Giuliana Bruno assumes that, through "the fabric of the red curtains" in the hotel where the protagonists "might have made love" in *In the Mood for Love*, audiences even seem to be able to "feel the airy rustle of their bodies embracing", as "the curtains move in the wind" and "the fabric gently creases" (Bruno 2014: 31, 44). In my opinion, Bruno's analysis of Wong's usage of the layered fabrics in *In the Mood for Love*, *The Hand* and *2046* to evoke love and passion is remarkably similar to Owen's reading of Wu Wenying's work as well: by "the concealing fabric of clothing", "nakedness hides under a garment", which means that love and desire are woven into "the stylized figures of body" (Owen 1986: 121). In *The Hand*, it is by virtue of Zhang's hands frequently weaving and caressing Miss Hua's delicate, appealing

cheongsams with meticulous care that the viewer can feel Zhang's desperate yearning for Miss Hua's love and even his fervent desire for skin-to-skin contact with her.



Figure 3.18: *The Hand*: Xiao Zhang puts his hand and forearm inside Miss Hua's dress.

Early on in the film, not long after the masturbation scene, the audience already sees Zhang in his workshop carefully sewing, ironing and folding up a few of Miss Hua's silk dresses. After Miss Hua is gradually abandoned by her wealthy clients and returns all her dresses to him to pay off her debts, Zhang's heartfelt sympathy for Miss Hua's misfortunes can be perceived by the film's slow-motion close-up shots of Zhang ironing those wrinkled garments, as well as the film's subsequent use of the bitter-sweet music *Concerto Alevta*. Other, similar, scenes about the reticent Zhang occupying himself in taking good care of Miss Hua's dresses occur in the second half of the film, too. In response to her request for a decent garment, arising from her wish to date an old acquaintance, Zhang mends one of the worn dresses conscientiously. What is even more striking is that, after hearing Miss Hua having sex with a customer in the squalid

hotel on a rainy night, Zhang, who thus fails to meet her and comes back to the tailor shop, later puts his hand and forearm into the lining of her dress, fondles and feels the texture of the dress, moans softly, and then kisses and sniffs its cloth fiercely (Figure 3.18). Zhang seems to experience sexual pleasure now, as Nicholas Y.B. Wong properly describes his act as “feeling her skin and body and looking for her body, which is neither present nor absent, visible nor invisible” (Wong 2008: 54). Wong also compares the cheongsam, which “aims to reveal the curved bodyline and form a second layer of artificial skin”, to the wearer’s “outer skin” too: the direct contact between Zhang’s hand and Miss Hua’s cheongsam, which leads to “an orgasm”, reveals his “nostalgic intimacy”, and “there is a slow motion on the action to represent the emotional sublimation” (Wong 2008: 50, 54). To put it another way, although Miss Hua’s body is physically absent in the scene, viewers can still feel keenly Zhang’s intense longing for a deep connection with her, through the camera’s gaze in slow motion to his hand lovingly caressing her dress hinting at her smooth skin, and through the clamour of cicada on the soundtrack.

Other critics have also shown great interest in the interchangeability of Miss Hua’s skin and her dresses in *The Hand*. Tomasulo, who notices “Wong’s use of slow motion”, proposes that Zhang’s frantic caress of “the lining of her garment” “is a subtle sign of his love”, and “his love thrives despite sexual denial” (Tomasulo 2008: 32). For Bruno, the protagonists’ physical intimacy and unrequited love are woven into the fabrics:

For these two, fashion is a permeable, erotic bond, a play of hands. Although they cannot be together, garments connect them. Haptically threaded between bodies, clothes are, indeed, transitive

matter, and fashion is a form of intimate contact. It can ferry much across bodies and spaces and carry the very scent of being in its cloth. (Bruno 2014: 35)

Here, the fabric of clothes not only weaves a sense of time past but binds the cherished memory of things past as an affect. (Bruno 2014: 43)

Scholars' evaluation of their bodily and emotional responses to the film's insistence on the cheongsams' textures tying in with its protagonists' memories of romance and close, sensual proximity, appears to find an echo, in one way or another, in Owen's reading of "that concealing fabric of desire" in Wu Wenying's lyrics: "the secret language of fabric and vestment is the ground on which memory is figured" (Owen 1986: 122). Miss Hua asked Zhang to remember the sensuous feelings of the hand job she offered so that he could become an ingenious tailor; during their final meeting in Miss Hua's sleazy room, their intimate conversation lovingly refers to the truly memorable occasion:

MISS HUA: Do you still remember how we met?

XIAO ZHANG: Yes.

MISS HUA: And do you remember my hand?

XIAO ZHANG: Yes, I do.

MISS HUA: You must have hated me that day.

XIAO ZHANG: No, I didn't. I want to thank you. If it hadn't been for your hand, I wouldn't have become a tailor.

There is, moreover, an inextricable linkage between the film's occasional presentations of Zhang's measurement of Miss Hua's body, because of his very occupation as a tailor to make suitable clothes, and the Chinese poetic tradition, in which the feeling of joy and sorrow might be revealed by the contrast of clothing between tightness and looseness. This is the emotional expression of "clothing and the way body wears it", as proven by Li Shangyin's line: "The sash of my robes lacks all feeling—it may be loose or tight"

(Owen 1986: 121). Falling into prostitution and finding herself caught in the poverty trap, the frustrated Miss Hua realises that she has become so emaciated that she cannot wear the loose-fitting dresses of the past, but she still wants Zhang to measure her body:

MISS HUA: But I can't wear them anymore. I've lost my weight.

You'll probably need to take my measurements again.

XIAO ZHANG: There's no need. I know your figure well. I'll just use my hands.

Immediately, there follows "mutual touches [that] have never happened" before this sequence (Wong 2008: 51): without using a tape this time, Zhang only uses his hands to stroke Miss Hua's shoulders and arms tenderly, and then puts his palms around her waist affectionately, before "their hands clasp in longing and their bodies sway" to such an extent that the audience can feel "the kinaesthesia of their erotic desire" (Tomasulo 2008: 33). Indeed, spectators must be touched sensually and emotionally at the very moment, thanks to the film's body which, in low-key lighting, gracefully reacts to their bodily movements by zooming, tilting up and sliding, all with sweet-sounding music.

Conclusion

In their analysis of Wong Kar-wai's films concerning romantic encounters, wistful farewells and desperate longings, film critics and scholars have preferred to use the idea of "pathetic fallacy" to examine the emotional bond between protagonists and the objects surrounding them. This chapter, nevertheless, began by considering the philosophical notion of *gan* in early and medieval China, an epistemological concept which is generally

understood to mean the affective resonance that is conducive to the mutual process of affecting and responding among objects of close relatedness in the universe. Closely related to such knowledge, *xing*, as an aesthetic concept and artistic device in the Chinese poetic tradition, refers to the evocation of moods among recipients of an artwork in which its sensual display of objects, scenes, and states of affairs have been reconciled with a particular subject's emotional responses to them. In this regard, I have proposed that cinematic *xing* might be compounded from Daniel Yacavone's idea of "sensory-affective expression" and Tarja Laine's concepts of "an emotional event" and "affective glue". *Xing* in films relies upon the expressive potentials of cinema as an audiovisual art to elicit physical sensations and evoke heartfelt emotions among spectators on the one hand, and presents fictional characters' subjective experiences and exhibits the affective correlation they have with their surroundings, so that the spectators can resonate with them, on the other hand.

Based on these theories, I examined the farewell sequences in Wong's *Happy Together* and *The Grandmaster*, all of which, with their clear reference to wet clothes in a damp atmosphere, are reminiscent of classical Chinese poems about parting and separation. My analysis has shown that the audiences have been invited to immerse themselves in the protagonists' affective experiences of tearful farewells. However, it is important to note that, while a few scholars have attempted to interpret the symbolic meanings of the Iguaçu Falls in *Happy Together*, the Chinese poetic tradition, of inclining toward affective images rather than metaphorical signs, prompted me to put much emphasis on the sequence's sensual qualities that have great potential to evoke a low

mood among audiences, who, correspondingly, can experience an emotional engagement in that separation. The principle of the affective image in traditional Chinese poetics of *xing* has also caused me to further consider Yip Man and Gong Er's sweet memories of their duelling in the brothel. I have claimed that viewers' sensuous and emotional involvement with the protagonists' lovesickness and physical intimacy is not based on the interpretation of the tropes as used in their love letters, but rests primarily on the film's expressive presentations of their physical contact through its usage of cinematic techniques, such as extreme close-ups, upside-down framings, slow-motion effects, and through the protagonists' relation to their environments, such as the overflowing pools or snow-covered trees.

Finally, I particularly discussed how *The Hand* benefits from the cinematic aesthetics of Michelangelo Antonioni. Nonetheless, the connection between the protagonists' passion and the film's visual emphasis on patterns, from the fabrics of cheongsam to interior decorations, also mirrors the potential legacy of the Chinese poetic tradition, in which ornamental patterns often interact with *qing*, whose meanings involve emotions, sensations, desires and love. In particular, from Lu Ji to Sikong Tu, the poetic category of *qili*, which designates "a seductive, but essentially frivolous, beauty", has its origin in the aesthetics of *qimi*, which are "strongly associated with 'feeling,' [*qing*]" and which label something as "brightly coloured, intricate, and alluring" (Owen 1992: 131). Similar to such a concern about textile art inherent in the poetics of patterns and *qimi*, the film phenomenologist Laura U. Marks, who draws on Alois Riegl's knowledge of textiles, formulates haptic visuality in spectatorship, directly contributing

to Jennifer M. Barker's investigation into spectators' visceral, sensual and emotional experience of cinema. By applying all these ideas to *The Hand*, I have scrutinised the sense of touch embodied in the film, arguing that its production history pertinent to the SARS pandemic in 2003 provides the film with the principal focus on the touching and the touched through a display of direct skin contact, which, for the audience, is sexually attractive and affecting. Moreover, the protagonists' passion, longing, and unrequited love can equally be felt through the fabrics of those appealing cheongsams being touched throughout the film.

Chapter 4. “Flowing Movement”: Terrence Malick

Terrence Malick’s feature films released in the 2010s are deeply rooted in his own personal life experience: *The Tree of Life* (2011) is almost an autobiographical account of his own childhood in Texas (Woessner 2017: 390); *To the Wonder* (2012) echoes his relationships with one of his three wives (Landau 2019: 137); *Knight of Cups* (2015) spotlights the Hollywood film industry suffused with excessive seductions but devoid of something more meaningful that Malick attempts to search for (Woessner 2017: 393-394; Sinnerbrink 2019: 186-187). The personal aspects in these works by Malick are consonant with Pier Paolo Pasolini’s definition of “cinema of poetry”, which stresses the manifestation of the auteur in terms of his or her “culture, language, and psychology” (Pasolini 1965/2000: 53), and with the fascination of traditional Chinese poetics with an artist’s personality, artistic vision and thematic preoccupations expressed in poetry (Cahill 1960; Bush 1971; Owen 1986; Levy 2001).

In this chapter, however, I am equally interested in ways in which the ontology and poetics of cosmology in China could present a new paradigm to interpret Malick’s renderings of the universe, which, according to his film crew and critics, have been

informed by Daoist thought (Murphy 2012; Lauro 2015; Colon 2016). From *The Tree of Life*, with the microcosm of the O'Brien family in Texas during the 1950s juxtaposed by the footage of the birth and development of the cosmos, along with his documentary *Voyage of Time: Life's Journey* (2016), which presents the universe and the evolution of life, reviews of Malick's cinema have been enchanted with the pre-eminent position of the universe in Malick's cinematic output (Calhoun 2017; Flaxman 2019; Blasi 2020). Among them, S. Brent Plate, for instance, considers "the insertion of cosmic imagery in *The Tree of Life*" as "the contractions of cosmic *time*", evoking other auteur cinema's visualisation of the cosmos, such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), as well as Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) (Plate 2012: 528; emphasis in original). Martin Woessner, who describes Malick's recent films both as "cosmic" and "philosophical", recognises how "our solitary selves" are meaningfully intermeshed with "the cosmos at large" in these films, and then suggests that Malick's "own life experience" and "life history" is further underpinned by his philosophical enquiry into "cosmic interconnection" with "others", "animals", and "the natural world" (Woessner 2017: 393-394, 397). All these auteurist interpretations fit well enough into the last category of *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* (ca.8th century CE) by Sikong Tu (837–908_{CE}): "Flowing Movement".

This category, according to Stephen Owen's reading, grants to poetry the artistic investigation into "the origins", into "the spiritual core of a person or external divinity", and into the universe's "operations" and "subtle motions of change" (Owen 1992: 351). Most significantly, this category's title itself seems to cohere with camera movement and

rhythmic montage as some of the most prominent stylistic hallmarks of Malick's films since *The Thin Red Line* (1998) (Rybin 2011: 17-18; Mules 2013: 9-10; Virvidaki 2017: 194-196; Carruthers 2019: 42-44; Sinnerbrink 2019: 156-157). My discussion of Terrence Malick's cinema of the 2010s will especially consider the traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic concepts of *Dao* (道) and *qi* (氣) in relation not only to the affective category of "Flowing Movement", but also, perhaps more profoundly, to some core beliefs in the Chinese poetic tradition. With these ideas forming a theoretical backbone, I examine how Malick's films become a means of embodying the cosmos and engaging in cosmic processes, how they manifest the interconnection between the human and the non-human unified by the same vibrant energy in the universe, and how its cinematic medium, in a dynamic process, is able to attune *qi* inside the living bodies of its film crew and viewers to the flow of *qi* outside of their bodies. I contend that Malick's films, which feature a great diversity of objects in the universe, highlight a unity of existence behind plurality and difference. Paying close attention to Malick's presentation of the natural world, I also argue that the aesthetics of landscape in both Malick and traditional Chinese art demonstrate the unity of human and the world in a dynamic and reciprocal process of interacting and intermingling. I further point to the retention and presentation of cosmic principles and energies in the cinematic medium of Malick's works, which not only affect the viewers' visceral, emotional and intellectual response, but also attune their living bodies to the universe.

Terrence Malick's Pursuit of *Qi* and The Philosophy of *Qi* in Early China

Daoist Sikong Tu, in the aesthetic category of “Flowing Movement”, evades linking the cosmos’s continuous movement to the abstract conception of the *Dao* (道) (Owen 1992: 351). It is striking that Malick’s visual effects supervisor Dan Glass, talking about Malick’s aesthetic approach, tells us that Malick is “always trying to find the Tao, the beauty and natural aspects to the things he photographs” (Murphy 2012, online). An anonymous member of the camera crew of Malick’s *The New World* (2005), likewise, reveals Malick’s identification of the film-making with searching for and filming *Dao*: Malick “is all about experimentation and ‘finding the Tao.’ This is something he said on set and in post. ‘Film the Tao.’” (Colon 2016, online). Echoing these team members’ succinct summary of Malick’s cinematic pursuit of *Dao* in his works, Reno Lauro, who has quoted the founder of Daoism Laozi (fl. 604–531_{BCE}), maintains that: “A new and radical assessment of this cinematic Tao is especially important” (Lauro 2015, online). In Daoism, such a concept of *Dao*, also spelled *Tao* in Wade-Giles’s romanisation, is equivalent to the primordial *qi* (氣), indicating that *qi* as “vital life energy” and as “the dynamic life force” that runs through “humans, nature, and all existence in the cosmos [which] have *qi*”, as Lin Jing’s examination of Daoist cosmology and axiology explains (Lin 2020: 21-25). Throughout this chapter, my analysis of Malick’s films will particularly draw on the conception of *qi* as used in various philosophical, aesthetic and medical discourses in China. Now, I wish to provide a concise overview of such a term commonly

found among East Asian cultures (Pollard 1978: 45; Owen 1992: 584-585; Ogawa 1998: 322; Cheng 2003b: 615-616; Wand and Ding 2010: 42; Kim 2011: 8-11).

Prior to the philosophical conceptualisation of *qi*, it originally meant the perceptible air, fog, cloud, wind, smoke, steam and breath; and, for this reason, during the era of the Shang and the Zhou dynasties, the dynamics of *qi* had been used to explain natural events, such as an earthquake taking place in 780_{BCE} (Cheng 2003: 616; Li 2008/2015: 30-35; Wang et al. 2011/2020: 177). Subsequently, *qi* emerged as the most ancient and enduring concept in East Asian philosophy after pre-Qin philosophers started to deploy *qi* in their divergent discourses. Confucius (551–479_{BCE}), for example, mentions that human's *qi* is present in one's blood and tone of voice; Mencius's (372–289_{BCE}) term of "flood-like *qi*" implies temperament and psychophysical energies that demand moral cultivation; Xunzi's (ca.298–238_{BCE}) elucidation of nature's *qi* accounts for the physical world's change and transformation (Kasoff 1984: 36; Li 2008: 208-210; Ekken 2007: 13-14; Wang et al. 2011/2020: 178). For Laozi, while "many of his descriptions of *Dao* are likely descriptions of *qi*" (Liu 2014b: 68), *qi* is the instantiation of *dao*, which, with its generative fecundity, is the origin that produces all things and phenomena in the cosmos:

Dao generates One. One generates Two. Two generates Three.
Three generates myriad objects. Myriad objects carry *yin* (陰) and embrace *yang* (陽), while blending *qi* holds them in harmony.
(Ryden 2008: 89; translation modified; Original Source Laozi ca.4th century _{BCE}/2011: 120)

Dao, often translated as "the Way", etymologically means an unobstructed path without crossroads on which humans walk. However, in the *Book of Changes* from antiquity and

the Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi (ca.369–286_{BCE}), *dao* carries ontological and cosmological connotations in that it is the original source of nature as a whole, of the process of change, and of the creation and transformation of things and phenomena (Cheng 2003a: 202-203; Li 2008/2015: 36-37; Wang et al. 2011/2020: 1-4).

The Philosophy of Qi: Cosmic Energy, Material Forces and Vital Movements

Whereas Laozi sometimes equates *dao* with one and sometimes sees *dao* producing one, the above passage, according to Li Cunshan, “is the first instance in the history of Chinese philosophy in which *qi* is referred to as the element that produced all things” (Li 2008/2015: 38). With this in mind, one plausible exegesis of this nebulous passage, on which commentaries still remain debatable (Chan 1969: 161; Roberts 2001: 116-117; Shen 2003: 357-358; Ames and Hall 2004: 143-144; Li 2008/2015: 38; Ryden 2008: 88; Lee 2014: 54-55; Liu 2014b: 68), is that the primordial *qi* is the holistic matter and energy which gives birth to all of the objects, events and phenomena in the cosmos, and the “two” is normally understood to designate *qi* which, in itself, owns the polarity of *yin* and *yang*. Such a *yin-yang* polarity of *qi* indicates interactions between female and male, the moon and the sun, the earth and the sky, dark and light, winter and summer, softness and hardness, internal and external, stillness and movement, withdrawal and advancement, contraction and extension, and so on. *Yin*, hence, refers to *qi*’s receptive, contracting, and feminine qualities, while *yang* refers to its active, expanding, and masculine qualities (Kasoff 1984: 43; Li 2008/2015: Moeller 2006: 33-36). Instead of

constituting two divisible or independent entities, both *yin* and *yang* are the two complementary and interdependent forces of the identical *qi*, whose dialectic interplay and kinetic interaction, called the “three”, generate “myriad objects” grounded in and formed by the one and same *qi* in the universe. The phrase of “myriad objects”, in Hans-Georg Moeller’s eyes, simply means “the different kinds of things and beings” present in Heaven and Earth (Moeller 2006: 34). Zhuangzi, reiterating the thesis that “myriad objects are really one”, continues that “when *qi* condenses, there is life; when *qi* scatters, there is death. [...] The one *qi* pervades the whole universe” (Watson 2013: 177; translation modified; Original Source Zhuangzi ca.3rd century BCE/2010: 359). In this regard, Zhuangzi uses the theory of *qi* to explain life and death and views them as the agglomeration and dispersal of the fundamental elementary *qi*. The vitality of a living being is kept by *qi*, so it is unsurprising that *qi*, “as the animating power that flows through all living things”, also becomes the word for “life energy” (Kim 2011: 13). The ontology of *qi* is embraced by thinkers from the Han Dynasty onwards.

In the *Huainanzi* compiled by Liu An (179–122_{BCE}), its “Celestial Patterns” claims:

Dao is originated in the nebulous void. The nebulous void produced space-time. Space-time produced the primal *qi*. A boundary divides the primal *qi*: that which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; that which was heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth. [...] The inherited essence (*jing*, 精) of Heaven and Earth produced *yin* and *yang*. The pure essence of *yin* and *yang* produced the four seasons. The scattered essence of the four seasons produced the myriad objects. (Major et al. 2010: 114-115; translation modified; Original Source Liu 139_{BCE}/1998: 165-166)

This cosmogonic depiction assumes a self-generating system where the primal *qi* with its *yin-yang* polarity is in the movement of ascending and descending occasions, but also sustains Heaven and Earth, physical phenomenon in nature, as well as all things in the cosmos. Also, in a chapter entitled “Inward Training” about Daoist contemplation in the *Guangzi* edited by Liu Xiang (77–6_{BCE}), the refined *qi* without any bodily form is termed “essence” (*jing*, 精), which fills the whole space between Heaven and Earth, and whose continuous changes, movements and transformations cause the endless creation and destruction of objects, either animate or inanimate (Li 2008/2015: 65-67; Gu 2009: 26-27; Wang et al. 2011/2020: 179). For the philosopher Wang Chong (27–97_{CE}), “the primal *qi*” is the “finest essence of Heaven and Earth” (Forke 1907: 381; translation modified; Original Source Wang 80_{CE}/1990: 975). All material objects in this universe can be accounted for by the primordial *qi*: “when Heaven and Earth unite *qi*, myriad objects are generated spontaneously” (Forke 1962a: 92; translation modified; Original Source Wang 80_{CE}/1990: 775). Such primal *qi* also breeds humans:

It is because of the *qi* of *yin* and *yang* that human is born. *Yin qi* is responsible for bones and flesh, whereas *yang qi* for the vital spirit. (Forke 1911: 249; translation modified; Original Source Wang 80_{CE}/1990: 946)

The dialectic, or interactive, mechanism of *qi* with its basic polarity of *yin* and *yang* here justifies the existence and vigorous life of a person with both body and soul, not as two separable entities, but fused by a single, unified *qi* active inside the person. This way of thinking, I propose, can explain Malick’s cinematic rendering of the cosmos, where human and non-human are interconnected, and his audiences’ viewing experiences.

In short, I have presented the basic outline of some philosophies of *qi* in early China. We can summarise the cosmology and ontology of *qi* as that which considers the primal *qi* as the basic constituent of all the concrete existing things and events in the cosmos that come into being from, and fade away to, the same shared material force. JeeLoo Liu has made a succinct, yet cogent, summary: “all existent things are produced by the integration of *qi*; [...] everything can be reduced to *qi* and all events can be explicated in terms of *qi*’s operation” (Liu 2014b: 66). Moreover, the two forces of and polarities between *yin* and *yang*, which, according to Grace Ji-Sun Kim, “are not competitive dualism as understood in Western philosophy”, but which “portray a holistic and balanced perception of the world” (Kim 2011: 15), cultivate a certain outlook of the phenomenal world with fundamental correlativity and relatedness, a dynamic but also auto-generative process, as well as constant and infinite movements. In terms of the *yin-yang* polarity contributing to comic movements, the philosopher Zhang Zai’s (1020–1077_{CE}) cosmology of *qi* already writes that:

It possess within itself the mutually interacting nature of floating and sinking, rising and falling, movement and stillness. This produces the beginning of the processes of fusing and intermingling, of overcoming and being overcome, and of expanding and contracting. (Kasoff 1984: 36-37; translation modified; Original Source Zhang 1076_{CE}/1978: 7)

Once again, the unceasing, complementary *yin-yang* interaction, what Hyo-Dong Lee calls “a constant process of following and turning into each other” (Lee 2014: 42), turns out to be significantly constitutive not only of realities of the physical world, but also of the plurality of movements and interpenetrations in it. For instance, *yang* is firm, empty,

transparent, giving, ascending, assembling, extending and in motion, while *yin* is soft, full, opaque, receiving, descending, dissipating, contracting and still; these and other oppositional, but complementary, polarities are unified and existing in *qi* (Li 1988/2010: 70; Wang et al. 2011/2020: 184). And, of course, insofar as *qi* is constitutive of human bodies, such a vital energy and generative force is critical to psychosomatic activities.

***Qi* of the Myriad Objects: Interconnectivity and Cosmic Resonance**

Within this ontological framework of *qi*, the proliferation of a multiplicity of objects is constitutive of *qi* as the universal and continuous oneness. Related to such thinking, Malick's cinema, as a few critics have already noted, often features a great diversity and plurality of things in nature. According to Kid Redick's phenomenological reading of Malick's cinema, Malick, whose narratives "are imaginative and poetic", "sets forth a poetic and concrete, a thick and artistic description of the things themselves" (Redick 2020: 66). This is evident in *Days of Heaven* (1978), where the vast expanse of Texas prairie is accompanied by drifting clouds, blowing wheat, the flaming rays of the setting sun, as well as the speeding train with billowing steam and its overloaded migrants. Steven Rybin is especially interested in "how Malick photographs and narrativizes the presence of objects in the landscape, and the relationship of these objects to both the viewer and the character" (Rybin 2012: 53). Rybin claims that Malick's *Days of Heaven* and *Badlands* (1973) are different from conventional narrative cinema, where objects in the diegetic world are deeply bonded to characters' goals and narrative causation. In

Malick's works, the filmed objects tend to have a much more tenuous connection to the diegesis, thus encouraging audiences to attend to and engage with the physical presence of these things. Even though Malick's purpose of inserting these objects into the diegesis of a narrative might remain open to question, the audiences are apparently overwhelmed by such a profusion of innumerable things which exist as a unified whole in the vast world of incredible richness. In "Things to Look Into: The Cinema of Terrence Malick", Adrian Martin acknowledges that viewers are:

captivated by the rustles and murmurs of the world: the wind in the long grass, the sweeping changes in light, the waves of sound over the earth. Human beings exist on the same continuum as all this natural matter. (Martin 2006; online)

For this reason, Martin has described Malick's "poetic ambition" as the one "to film the things of the world (people, animals, flora and fauna)" (Martin 2006; online). I suggest that the ontology and poetics of *qi* can help explain such interconnectivity in the world.

Chiayu Hsu has offered an extensive reading of Zhuangzi's philosophy of objects in relation to the conceptions of *qi*, *dao* and "one". Hsu argues that unlike the Confucian discrimination between humans and non-humans, the distinctiveness and paramount importance of "myriad objects" in Daoism, a term that is "a collective name that refers to all of the existing entities in the universe", "fundamentally connects all things and the innumerable different things that there are, with or without our knowledge" (Hsu 2019: 3). The innumerable different objects all arise from and even manifest the same root of *qi* with vigorous fecundity in the fluctuation between *yin* and *yang*. Therefore, Laozi's conception of myriad objects, but also Zhuangzi's thesis formulated in "On Equality of

Objects” that “the myriad objects and I are one” (Watson 2013: 13; translation modified; Original Source Zhuangzi ca. 3rd century BCE/2010: 31), are helpful in acknowledging the co-belonging of the living things and non-living entities to the identical continuity of *qi* that intertwines our existence and other existences in the same universe. The literary theorist Lu Ji (261–303CE), influenced by neo-Daoist thought, makes the bold assertion that for a poet who infuses all the concerns into words, poetry is capable of:

Enveloping Heaven and Earth in fixed shape,
Subduing myriad objects with the tip of a brush. (Owen 1992:
90; translation modified; Original Source Lu ca.280CE/2002: 60)

As we have already seen, the interplay of the polar forces of *qi* brings about the entire universe and its myriad things and phenomena. Lu Ji’s statement, which, according to Stephen Owen, “is more directly cosmogonic” (Owen 1992: 111), emphasises that an artistic form can encompass the physical world’s totality with its endless, co-existing, and reciprocally connected things, which are all reducible to *qi*. Chiayu Hsu stresses “such a panoramic and all-embracing horizon” behind the philosophy of “myriad objects” rendered 102 times in *Zhuangzi* (Hsu 2019: 4). The poetic density of objects in Malick’s cinema, I argue, shows that the totality of all things in the world is conspicuous, that it can be regarded as the dialectics of plurality and continuity, and that humankind is not separated from other existences, but, together with them, form a unified, organic whole.

***The Tree of Life*: Sensing the Interconnectivity of the Myriad Objects**

“The interconnectivity of all things”, as Adam Daniel has declared, “is at the heart of Malick’s cinema”: such an overwhelming sense of relatedness “is also accompanied by a very human grappling with the boundlessness of this interconnectivity, and how we are situated in relation to it” (Daniel 2020: 29). What is most striking about Daniel’s account is that it highlights the ontological interconnectedness and interdependence of all things of diversity and lushness. In Malick’s cinema of the 2010s, the relation of his protagonists to physical things around them often appears to viewers in the form of an ongoing and intimate correspondence, and when communing with the world, they interact and interconnect with each other’s existence in a harmonious fashion, which is not irrelevant to the philosophy of *qi*.

In the director’s extended cut version of *The Tree of Life* (2018), the film juxtaposes the middle-aged successful architect Jack O’Brien’s (Sean Penn) spiritually barren life in contemporary America and his childhood memories of his family in Texas during the 1960s. Not long after showing the office scenes of the adult Jack, the film presents his journey of encountering and wandering with objects in the world. Beginning with waves lapping and seagulls twittering on the soundtrack, the sequence displays him strolling along a wooden plank bridge on the sea, visiting a botanical garden and even trying to stroke a fluttering butterfly gathering honey from some brilliantly coloured flowers. Together with his girlfriends, he then sees whining elephants and jackals in a zoo, the Foucault pendulum and an exhibition about the origin and evolution of *Homo sapiens* in

a natural history museum, as well as an installation art piece and some oil paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Raphael in a gallery. Medium close-ups of Jack's girlfriends are immediately cut to shots of living and non-living entities in a random order, such as waterweeds swaying in a clear stream, a physically disabled scruffy man seeking help from Jack in a square, a coastal port, a luxury elevator, a trendy and riotous nightclub, and a chemical plant with industrial chimneys and fractionating columns. And then, the newsreel of hippies actively engaging in Beatnik nightlife is followed by two close-ups of the diving reflex in a human baby, and shots from a silent film of steam trains racing at full speed, which is so reminiscent of Jean Epstein's examination of the "astonishing vision of trains swept along on the rails" and "racing wheels" in *The Wheel* (Abel Gance, 1923) (Epstein 1926/2012: 294). Eventually, the footage of alphabets in some printed materials is cut back to an impressive ancient ruin, an abandoned architecture, choking smoke in the adult Jack's flat on fire, a gang of hooligans attacking him in the downtown area, escalators and exotic plants inside a brightly lit building, a streetlamp, a suburb's flooded area, an aircraft cabin where Jack is in a state of panic while other passengers are at peace, and an ornamental tree that Jack stares at while inside his office building.

This sequence seems to convey the sense that "humans are by no means superior to any other objects" in relation to "Zhuangzi's critique of 'human essentials'" (Hsu 2019: 6), because its editing pattern, which even manifests how manifold things "participate unvaryingly in this great stream of constant transformation" (Hsu 2019: 6), reinforces not a hierarchical structure of things but an equal sense of all the existence in the vital energy field, human and non-human, living and non-living. In the adult Jack's journey of

feeling things and events in that boundless world with myriad objects, Jack, Malick and his film crew shooting him and the world, and viewers experiencing the sequence, might exemplify Liu Xie's poetic mode of intense engagement and total immersion in the physical world's appearances through sense faculties, reminding us about another thesis also by Liu Xie that "objects come in through ears and eyes" (Owen 1992: 202; translation modified; Original source Liu 502/1986: 246). When Liu Xie formulates the aesthetics of active and enthusiastic participation with objects, he is influenced by the philosophy that the sage, neither viewing things as "mere objects" nor "merely knowing or observing" them, "is 'sharing' in a system of things", and even attempts to make "a tentative association, poised between unity and difference" (Owen 1992: 203). Again, the correlative thinking in regard to the ubiquity of *qi* urges the film's protagonists and viewers to feel and recognise continuity behind difference, and unity behind plurality, so the dichotomy between subject and object breaks down and we, thus, can integrate harmoniously into the cosmos with all things, realising that we are just a part of them.

***The Tree of Life*: Provoking Vibrant Response to Cosmic Resonance**

Robert Sinnerbrink has noted some "quasi-documentary/essay style abstract images" in *The Tree of Life* that involves "stylized visual effects, animated sequence combined with live action footage of animals, plant and biological life, amidst cosmic as well as 'primordial' landscapes" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 132). These images evoke the opening

paragraph of “The Appearances of Objects”, where Liu Xie applies the philosophy of *qi* to the operation of the physical world and human being’s response to such a world:

When *yang qi* begins to ascend, black ants burrow; when the *yin qi* congeals, the mantis feasts. It touches the responses of even the tiniest insects: the four seasons stir objects into movement deeply. Then there is the excellent jade that draws forth the kindly heart-mind, and the splendour of flowers that brings clear *qi* to stand out high. All the appearances of objects call to one another, and how amid all this may human find stillness? (Owen 1992: 278; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 409)

Here, Liu Xie implies that, insofar as the vital energy composes the totality of all things in the cosmos and its dynamic phenomena, it is almost impossible for a human being, dwelling in it but also constitutive of *qi*, not to respond energetically to such a world of loveliness and lushness. The film begins with a young girl wondering at a cool spring breeze, a meek goat and a herd of cattle grazing the meadowland, but also invites the viewers to appreciate sky, thick clouds shafts of bright sunlight and a field of sunflowers, to the accompaniment of choir humming *Funeral Canticle*. While the images identified by Sinnerbrink are always “accompanied by musical scoring with a distinctly religious mood” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 132), the same can be said of sequences about protagonists’ interaction with objects in the world, equally highlighting moments of cosmic resonance.

After Bedřich Smetana’s symphonic poem *Vltava* (1874-1875) spurts out, the film presents gleaming ripples cutting across a fish pond’s surface, a treefrog crawling up the grass, still wet with beads of dew, a drawing illustration of mantis, the O’Brien family participating in Halloween activities, Mrs O’Brien (Jessica Chastain) reading a fairy tale book, Mr O’Brien (Brad Pitt) playing piano, a hare jumping in a garden, Mrs O’Brien, with

her child in her arms, marvelling at the sunset's glow, a grove of trees swaying in the wind, the kids of the O'Brien family being sprayed by their parents and then setting off fireworks at night. As the symphony continues, these kids become teens, and we see the young Jack (Hunter McCracken) and his brothers R.L. (Laramie Eppler) and Steve (Tye Sheridan) climbing a sturdy tree with gnarled branches, kicking off and soon chasing a pop-top aluminium can in the street, and then having great fun with their pet dogs on a verdant hill, rolling in the grass, catching a grasshopper and holding rocks. The film's camera further joins the adventures of these vigorous teens, all of whom find it too difficult to remain still in the world where all things, to refer back to Liu Xie, "call to one another", by its own swift movement, and even participates in their baseball game and running race, just like one of them. In another scene, after Mrs O'Brien tells her sons that their demanding father Mr O'Brien, a severe man who is always with an air of menace in his voice, is on a business trip, the camera traces these teenagers, who tease their mum with a lizard, run around their house, its garden and the countryside, squealing with delight and excitement, and then take a rest with her on the riverbank surrounded by lots of vegetation. Meanwhile, Mrs O'Brien's gentle voice-over, which is accompanied by François Couperin's fast-rhythm *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* (1717), murmurs: "Help each other. Love everyone. Every leaf. Every ray of light. Forgive." Scenes of frenetic activities are intercut with a shot of a gentle and pleasant breeze sweeping through trees in blossom, and a long shot of a sluggish river glistening in the sunlight. Given that "everything that is present somehow consists of Qi", which can be regarded as "the universal or cosmic 'medium'" (Moeller 2006: 36-37), audiences

seemingly can feel the ubiquitous *qi* in the river, in every ray of sunlight, in every leaf blown by the wind, in the lizard, in these spirited teens, in their graceful mother and solemn father, in their houses and gardens, and in their love.

If *The Tree of Life* aims at presenting “a world of universal beckoning, stirring, and attraction” as advanced by Liu Xie (Owen 1992: 278), in particular in its most famous cosmic sequence featuring the sperm-egg fusion, the ebb and flow of the tide, jellyfish swimming amidst seaweed, benevolence among dinosaurs, and meteorites slamming into the Earth and Jupiter, among many other phenomena, the film’s insistence on an organic, dynamic correlation between the O’Brien family’s sons and their surrounding world further embodies Liu Xie’s poetics of humans’ vibrant existence in that cosmos: “the human being, as a physical part of that world, cannot remain ‘still’ and aloof from the cosmic jostling” (Owen 1992: 278). These boys, full of vitality, are indeed very often making grimaces, laughing out loud, being amazed by surprise in the world, frolicking, and running all the way from the parlour and kitchen at home, through lawns, streets, and neighbours’ gardens, to uninhabited hills and thickets. It is identical with Stephen Owen’s interpretation of the term “wander” as used by Liu Xie, which “is to ‘go without direction, purpose, or end’”, and which “strongly implies a freedom and an absence of motive” (Owen 1992: 203). Sinnerbrink has contrasted the “stern, egoist, disciplinarian” Mr O’Brien with Mrs O’Brien, who is a “loving, forgiving, gracious mother” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 138). Yet, in the course of Mrs O’Brien encountering objects, the film seems to utilise the motif of floating to indicate the freedom achieved through cordial interaction with all things in accordance with the cosmic rhythm. In the scene about Mrs O’Brien’s

pregnancy, a long shot of a flock of flying birds is intercut with underwater scenery, insinuating her womb and amniotic fluid, where a kid and bride are diving, whereas curtains, a reading lamp, books of fairy tales and a teddy bear are all suspending in water. After she gives birth to a baby and takes care of him, Mrs O'Brien follows a butterfly and caresses its tentacles and wings. In response to her sons' request for a bedtime story, Mrs O'Brien says something about "a ride in a plane", which "was a gradation present". Immediately, there is a cutaway from Mrs O'Brien's exhilarating flight in a light aircraft to her floating in air under a gnarled tree and dancing in the wind (Figure 4.1), which is evocative of the levitation-like scenes in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975) and *Sacrifice* (1986).



Figure 4.1: *The Tree of Life*: Mrs O'Brien dances in the wind under a gnarled tree.

In Zhuangzi's essay "Free and Easy Wandering", he, while insisting on "embracing the myriad objects and rolling them into one", mentions the very idea of "riding the wind" but also of "wandering through the boundless" (Watson 2013: 3-4; translation modified;

Original Source Zhuangzi ca.360_{BCE}/2010: 3, 14). Like Zhuangzi, the film's rendering of Mrs O'Brien's magic levitation, her flight rambling among the clouds, as well as her sons' freedom and joyfulness of wandering, implies a dynamic and profound unity with the cosmos in harmony with the rhythm of its myriad objects' movements. Chiayu Hsu's detailed analysis of Zhuangzi's philosophy of objects with regard to "the continuity of 'one'" claims that "the myriad things become an undifferentiated 'one' in their unceasing, continuous transformative motion", since they "are related by the identical underlying *qi* (氣), of which they are constituted" (Hsu 2019: 15-17). In terms of traditional Chinese poetics, Lu Ji's thesis of "the heart-mind wandering the heights of the universe" (Owen 1992: 96; translation modified; Original Source Lu ca.280_{CE}/2002: 36), along with that of "the spirit wandering with objects" by Liu Xie (Owen 1992: 202; translation modified; Original Source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 246), have prompted François Jullien to think over the possibility of communicating "with the infinite nature of things":

In opening itself to the utmost at every turn, in attaining this spiritual height, it gains access to a global and serene contemplation that allows it to link with the depths of things, to merge with their flight, to embrace the universe. (Jullien 1995/2000: 159-160)

In *The Tree of Life*, its protagonists' relationships with the myriad objects around them are remarkable in that sense. The family members' constant and vigorous movements in the physical world bespeak their strong and passionate embraces of the whole universe. Additionally, the rapport that they display with all things in the world, but also their freedom derived from wandering aimlessly in it, also testify to the poetics of things in early and medieval China. The film appears to manifest a profusion of objects and the

world's richness, as its montage so frequently juxtaposes objects and events in the diegesis and those out of it; but, rather than being viewed as independent, or unrelated, entities, all of these objects, as I have shown, evoke a strong sense of undifferentiated oneness of the universe of infiniteness.

Malick's Cosmology and *Qi* in Heaven-Earth-and-Human

Voyage of Time is structurally characterised by frequent juxtapositions of the high-resolution 65mm IMAX footage of the cosmogenesis, of the earth's history of life and geographic landscapes, with low-quality home movie-style videos of contemporary life recorded by cellphones. In these videos, the handheld camera captures ritual activities and religious ceremonies practiced in Hindu households and communities, a middle-aged woman cleaning a gravestone, a Jewish wedding, a refugee camp, an urban slum in America, fisherfolk catching fish, herdsman going out to pasture the sheep, the mass demonstration during the Tunisian Revolution, some Chinese pupils learning English in a classroom, senior citizens doing physical exercises of Tai Chi in a square, and Tibetan monks chanting with their prayer wheels. On the soundtrack, Cate Blanchett's voice-over narration, in the form of a devout prayer, occasionally reminds us about the existence of humans in the world, as her hushed whisper speaks to audiences: "What is this world? The stricken ox. The abandoned child. The wound. The old woman. Might we be deceived? The soul. A wish. A dream. And we know nothing. Blind. Oh life. Hear

my voice.” The film’s insertion of these shots into its presentation of the universe and our planet’s natural landscapes has attracted the attention of various critics.

From Richard Brody’s point of view, such montage reveals the very central idea of the whole film, that is, an “effort to encompass social life and, for that matter, human consciousness itself, in the natural realm” (Brody 2016, online). In other words, Brody stresses humans’ conscious experiences in the physical universe. Robert Sinnerbrink has accepted Brody’s reading, further maintaining that “the stark contrast between the sublime images of cosmic creation and the ‘realist’ handheld digital video footage of social suffering and spiritual disorientation” significantly contributes to “a metaphysical-spiritual meditation on the relationship between cosmic evolution and human suffering” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 154). In a similar fashion, Joshua Sikora considers “this pattern of intercutting between the cosmic and the mundane” around the world of “a wide array of pain, joy, destruction, and life” as a contrast between “a sense of divinely ordered, miraculous cosmos” and “the inescapable pain, ugliness, and frailty of our brief human lives” (Sikora 2020: 165). With regard to traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic thoughts, Malick’s juxtaposition in *Voyage of Time* of the IMAX footage of the cosmos and of the Earth with human lives from every corner of the globe, as I see it, is pertinent to the Trinity of Heaven-Earth-and-Human formulated in the *Book of Change*, as well as the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human in the realm of *qi* adopted by philosophers such as Dong Zhongshu (179–104_{BCE}), Zhang Zai (1020–1077_{CE}), and Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692_{CE}). I propose that these concepts can be used to further explain Malick’s fictional protagonists’ intimate entanglement with the natural world in his feature films. What is

more, the poetics of “mountains-waters” in medieval China, which is often translated as “landscape”, is also manifest in Malick’s montage of nature where *yin* and *yang* kinetic interactions contribute to a sense of wholeness of the world.

I have analysed how the protagonists of *The Tree of Life* having correspondence with things around them display a symbiotic fusion with their surrounding world, which, for me, can be further interrogated through the poetics of the trinity of Heaven-Earth-and-Human in early and medieval China. The preface of Zhong Rong’s (ca.468–518_{CE}) *Gradations of Poets* (ca.515_{CE}), “which sees the cosmic function of literature” through the conception of *qi* in its opening words (Wixted 1983: 230), maintains:

Qi illuminates the Trinity and casts a glow on the existence of myriad objects. The spirits depend on dance and song to have sacrifices brought; the hidden beings rely on them to be informed. To stir Heaven and Earth and to move the spirits and gods, nothing is more appropriate than poetry. (Owen 2014: 292; translation modified; Original Source Zhong ca.515_{CE}/1998: 15)

If such poetics claims that the arts of music, dance and poetry embody the operations of *qi* among nature, ritual ceremonies, and artists’ “experience in the social and political world” to which Zhong Rong refers subsequently (Owen 2014: 289), the embodiment of *qi* in artworks might highlight humans’ existence in the world in an organically unified way. Liu Xie’s theory in “Its Origin in *Dao*” uses the phrase “the Trinity” as well:

The positions of high and low were determined, and the two primary forms of Heaven and Earth came into being. Only the human being, endowed with the divine spark of consciousness, ranks as a third with pair. And they were called the Trinity. (Owen 1992: 189; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 9-10)

As earlier mentioned, in reference to *qi* as the vital force which constitutes all things in the cosmos, Liu proposes the resonant interactivity between the myriad objects in the physical world and a human being's heart-mind, by which we can partake in the cosmic resonance through perceptual and conscious experiences. In consideration of Stephen Owen's elucidation of this passage by Liu, which claims: "the position of human beings in the structure of Heaven and Earth had always been a problem for Chinese thinkers" (Owen 1992: 189), let us examine this structure in detail.

The term "trinity" as used by Zhong Rong and Liu Xie appeared in the "Remarks" section of the *Books of Chang* about *dao* manifest in Heaven-Earth-and-Human:

Dao of Heaven is governed by *yin* and *yang*. *Dao* of Earth is governed by softness and hardness. *Dao* of Human is governed by benevolence and righteousness. Each trigram, described in the *Books of Chang*, embraces the trinity of Heaven, Earth and Human. (Legge 1899: 423-422; translation modified; Original Source Zhouyi ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 648)

Each of the trigrams in the *Book of Change*, demonstrating the complex interactions and entangled relationships between human beings and the universe, is comprised of two lines at the top representing Heaven subject to the fundamental *yin-yang* polarity of *qi*, two lines at the bottom representing the Earth with the qualities of mountains' hardness and waters' softness, and two lines in the middle representing human beings dwelling in between Heaven and Earth. The trinity, Tze-ki Hon claims, "share the same essence and shape each other's destiny", and, for this reason, "graphically, the *Book of Change* gives support to the argument that human beings and the universe are interrelated as part and whole" (Hon 2010: 10). The *Book of Change* subsequently leads to "a

comprehensive, systematic cosmology, most conspicuously manifest in the thought of Han Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu” (Li 1988/2010: 70), who, despite a unified political effort to establish imperial authority of Han Dynasty within a broader cosmic framework, proposes organic, dynamic, interdependent relations between humans and the world. Such a way of thinking decisively shapes the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human in early China that “perceives the cosmos as an organic, mutually reciprocal entity” (Chen and Bu 2019: 1130). This dynamic interaction, I argue, can explain the ways the humans in Malick’s cinema coexist harmoniously with the whole universe.

The Oneness of Heaven-and-Human and Its Spatial Implications in Malick

The closing sequence of *Voyage of Time* cuts from a computer-animated simulation of the collapse of the universe to mobile phone videos of contemporary human lives from all corners of the world, where people are celebrating a festival, attending a wedding, holding hands, embracing each other, and playing on the swing. It eventually cuts back to the IMAX footage of trees and clouds on our planet. The montage seems to indicate the resonance, interdependence, and deep connection between human and the entire universe, whereas Blanchett’s final voice-over might be understood as a far-reaching revelation of humans’ affinity with the natural world: “Joined with you. Leaf to branch, branch to tree. Love binds us together. What lives in you can’t die. Oh Life. Oh Mother.” From “this weaving together of different types of footage”, Sikora feels “a unified whole, a single, cohesive cinematic experience” behind “apparent differences” (Sikora 2020:

165). If Malick in *Voyage of Time* attempts not to differentiate our own existence from a wide range of phenomena, but to evoke our passionate attachment to the universe, this holistic understanding of humans' worldly relationships, interestingly enough, is distinctly evident in the philosophy of *qi* further developed by Dong Zhongshu, Zhang Zai, and Wang Fuzhi. In *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (ca.2nd century BCE), Dong Zhongshu, by explaining seasonal changes by the circuits of *yin* and *yang* in the cosmos, asserts the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human:

Heaven also possess happy and angry *qi*, as well as joyful and mournful heart-mind, thus mutually complementing those of Human. Therefore, if a grouping is made according to category, Heaven and Human are one. (Queen and Major 2016: 414-415; translation modified; Original Source Dong ca.2nd century BCE/2012: 445)

In this passage, Dong correlates a human being's emotional existence with the cosmos, which, according to him, has the heart-mind and emotions balanced by the vital force of *qi*, in the same way as human beings do. Humans and the cosmos are of oneness. Elsewhere, Dong also maintains: "the realms of Heaven and Human are united and become one" (Queen and Major 2016: 345; translation modified; Original Source Dong ca.2nd century BCE/2012: 369). For him, the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human, which is due to the fact that the human being and the universe share the same root of *qi*, also means the "correspondence between heaven and humans" but also "the similarity and affinity of nature, the seasons, politics, the body, society, the emotions, and so on" (Li 1988/2010: 71). This line of reasoning has later been developed in late medieval China.

Like all other entities in the universe, humans, according to Zhang Zai, are also born from the combination of *qi* between Heaven and Earth. Our psych-physical nature and capacity for feelings and thinking, furthermore, have roots in this *qi*, out of which our world is constructed. And, as a result, the cultivation of one's *qi*, by physical exercise and spiritual enlightenment, can make one become aware of one's presence in the world in concordance with greater *qi* flowing in between Heaven and Earth (Feng 1948/1966: 279; Cheng 2003c: 866-867; Li 2008/2015: 189-190; Wang and Ding 2010: 50-53).

Subsequently, Zhang's philosophy of *qi* is well accepted by the early Qing intellectual Wang Fuzhi, whose *qi*-ontology regards *qi* as "the fundamental element" of the cosmos (Liu 2003: 749), "the only objectively existing material substance in the universe", and "the origin and the root-body" of myriad objects (Wang et al. 2011/2020: 188). Wang claims that "filling the space between Heaven and Earth, inside and outside of our lived bodies, there is nothing that is not *qi*" (Brasovan 2017: 2; translation modified; Original Source Wang 1665_{CE}/1991: 857), and "the amalgamation of Heaven and Human is just the oneness of *qi*" (Brasovan 2017: 2; translation modified; Original Source Wang 1665_{CE}/1991: 1052). In this regard, Wang considers *qi*, which fills up the entire universe, as the basic constitute of our bodies and of our surroundings, both of which come from the same vital force of *qi* and are, thus, intricately intertwined. Jing Hu's interpretation pinpoints "an ontological interconnectedness, internal relations, and holism" in Wang's thoughts, which lays great stress on *qi* merging together a "person's internal embodied energy" and his "external environmental energy" (Hu 2018: 4). This means that in such interconnectedness, the self, whose body situated in a world, is

deeply integrated with one's surroundings, building up a dynamic flux of encounters between the self and the world. Wang's ontological framework, as JeeLoo Liu understands it, proposes ways in which the realm of heaven and the human world are unified by this single *qi* as the vital energy, so his concept of "Heaven" "is simply the totality of the natural world" (Liu 2010: 360). The terminology of "the boundaries of Heaven and Human" frequently appearing in Wang's works, according to Nicholas S. Brasovan's elucidation, might hint at "the relationships between nature and persons", which can be viewed as an "interstice [that] is necessarily grounded in a fundamental continuum", that is, the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human (Brasovan 2017: 112). The realm of humans and the natural world appear as two disjunctive domains, but they are, fundamentally, interpenetrating, mutually related, and interconnected, accordingly retaining an organic unification in the realm of *qi*.

Hans-Georg Moeller reminds us that the traditional Chinese conception of "Heaven" "does not indicate a transcendental realm where God dwells" but "designates the world in its entirety" (Moeller 2006: 44). Similarly, Roger T. Ames emphasises that, within the ontology of *qi*, the expression of Heaven-and-Earth in early China is translated as "the world" conventionally, but also indicates "worlding" in that it has further referred to "an active, ongoing, autogenerative process *as experienced from within it*" (Ames 2011: 61-62; emphasis in origin). As we have seen, the *yin-yang* polarity of *qi* generates the universe and its movements in an automatic way; besides, our sensory, emotional and intelligent faculties or processes, through which we experience everything in this world, are also endowed with *qi* filling the space and circulating between Heaven and Earth.

For our spatial experience, we and our everyday worldly environments, to quote Hu, “are constituted and connected through *qi*—the psycho-energy stuff” (Hu 2018:4). It is this spatial discourse of *qi* that has prompted “the unified event/experience of persons-in-the-world” as suggested by Brasovan: “As persons and their environments are both constituted by *qi*, the event/experience of persons-in-the-world is an event/experience of *qi* interacting with and transforming itself” (Brasovan 2017: 65). That is to say, our concrete life events and experiences are conditioned by, but also frequently responsive to, what surrounds us, as though humans and the experienced world become entangled as an indissoluble unity. Our existence in the world is continuously in a dynamic flux in the field of *qi*, where we attend all experiential events in an interactive process between our lived bodies and our surroundings. In this sense, the poetics of Malick’s cinematic spaces regarding holistic relations with the world demonstrates to us the circulation of *qi* between fictional characters and environments.

To The Wonder: A Holistic Worldview in the Natural World

In *To The Wonder*, an environmental toxicologist Neil (Ben Affleck), as “a twenty-first century self-absorbed and distracted nihilist, who has ‘no faith’ as he confesses to Jane (Rachel McAdams)” (Blasi 2020: 135), has some relationship problems with Jane, his childhood friend but also old flame in Oklahoma, and with Mariana (Olga Kurylenko), a French woman that he encounters in Paris. Nevertheless, the film frequently situates Neil’s romantic love with Mariana and Jane in nature, such as a tidal island with rising

tides near the Mont Saint-Michel Abbey and the open field of a herd of bison in one of the largest bison habitats in America.

In the scene that first introduces Neil's occupation to us in *To The Wonder*, the film first intercuts a quiet night at Neil's house in a pleasant suburb of Oklahoma, where he silently stares at Mariana dancing, who has just migrated to America, and Neil checking an operating drilling rig at dawn in an open field with the rising sun from afar. Several tracking shots then follow Neil walking around a construction site, in which excavators are banking the earth up into some mounds, on a dry day with sunny spells elsewhere, and visiting an old man, a resident living in a poor community of Bartlesville, to acquire information about toxins and tar leaking from the patio's cracks in that area. Later on, along a dry creek bed, Neil, after having a business call about "reports from the lab", "dust in the schoolyards" and "the presence of lead and cadmium in the surface soil", comes to a shallow stream that is surrounded by bare winter trees. This is then immediately followed by a series of six shots of the surface of a clear river, which is occasionally lit by warm sunshine, and whose smooth flow is sometimes obstructed by rocks. After the disappearance of Neil from the diegesis, these shots of the free-flowing river are then accompanied by Mariana's gentle and soft monologue in French: "What is this love that loves us? That comes from nowhere. From all around." An extreme close-up that zooms in on a succulent plant suddenly emerges from the screen, with Mariana's ensuring murmuring to Neil: "The sky. You, cloud. You love me, too", but is then cut back to three shots closing this sequence: an extreme long shot of the river

glistening with sunbeams, an extreme close-up of its surface dimly lit, and shot of a sewage outlet.

The first half of this scene, with its particular focus on environmental issues caused by and having repercussions for human activities, is by no means pleasant, so that critics from the viewpoint of ecocriticism have increasingly paid attention to Malick's concern over ecological crises. Consider, for example, Ted Geier who proposes potential links between Malick's work and "the environmental disasters in cinema today" (Geier 2019: 4) and, from Malick's constant "preoccupation with natural elements and environments", Lee Carruthers formulates "the framework of ecocinema" (Carruthers 2019: 38). Blasi, who has offered comprehensive ecocritical interpretations on Malick's cinema, argues that its contemporary settings, such as water pollution in regional Oklahoma in *To The Wonder*, become startling disclosures about "the dysfunctional relationship humans and nature in the deeply alienated worlds" (Blasi 2020: 130). However, this sequence's editing pattern can be seen as a cinematic manifestation of a correlative worldview of *yin* and *yang* energies in China, implicating an indivisible totality of the world. Its editing pattern shifts rapidly from nighttime to daytime, from the earth of a gravel pit and wet soil to waters with or without rocks, and from Neil, in a documentary fashion visible to viewers, giving us "a first-hand account of the gravity of the situation from the people he talks to", and his "visit to the old, poor, and sick people of Bartlesville" (Blasi 2020: 134), to the visually absent Mariana ruminating over her romantic encounter with Neil in the diegesis. Even Mariana's voice-over, which narrates on their relationship, mentions the cloud in the sky, which is visually counterpointed with natural phenomena on Earth with

a harmonious interplay between the succulent on dry land and the flowing river, dim or sparkling.

Blasi's analysis of *To The Wonder* mentions Mariana's voice-over narration in the film referring to "two forces in her, one pulling her up towards the sky and another down towards the earth"; the two forces in the sky and on the Earth, as Blasi maintains, "are not clear-cut and continue to mingle and cross". Blasi, furthermore, claims that the film's editing style, which often presents a "seamless flow of images", "suggests flow and continuity of time and space", the result being that viewers "are left unsure of time-lines and causes and effects are intertwine, blurred, and deliberately confused" (Blasi 2020: 136-137). We might extrapolate from Blasi's interpretation to say that the sequence's editing pattern also constructs the world as a vibrant, unified whole through relational dynamics, thus epitomising the worldview of correlative, interdependent, reciprocating movements featuring two forces of *yin* and *yang* with various slight variations between the sky and the Earth, the land and the river, rocks and waters, sunlight and shadows, and even between the actual documentation of residents in Bartlesville through Neil's interview visible to us and the fictionality of Neil and Mariana's erotic love, momentarily invisible but clearly audible through Mariana's soft voice-over. The film's seamless flow of audiovisual elements, to borrow from François Cheng's analysis of a Chinese poem, in which its images, such as lights in mountains and shadows in marshes, are always arranged by diverse complementary relations, "through their 'face to face,' maintain a subtle but lively relationship" (Cheng 1977/1982: 54). Behind such spatial configuration

that expresses the totality of our being in the world, it is the *yin* and *yang* forces that create a kinetic, organic holism with *qi*'s holding of two circulating polarities as a whole.



Figure 4.2: *To the Wonder*: A flowing river meandering through rocks.

There is a long shot in the scene symmetrically displaying a row of barren trees taking roots in fertile soil below the bright sky and above the flowing river, while a few other shots zoom in on streams meandering through rocks (Figure 4.2). These images, together with the sounds of gurgling water on the soundtrack, are implicitly reminiscent of two lines in “Autumn Nightfall at My Place in the Hills” by Wang Wei (699–759_{CE}):

The moon is bright and shines between pines.
Over the stones the spring-fed stream runs clear. (Seth 1992:
9; Original Source Wang ca.740_{CE}/1961: 122)

“In these two lines”, as Cheng’s analysis indicates, “a correspondence is established” (Cheng 1977/1982: 54), through the dynamics between the clear moon and the clear stream, the pines shone by moonlight and the rocks in darkness, and that between the hard stones and the flowing waters. In general, this poem is a representative piece of poetic arts of “landscape” in medieval China, which is in fact called “mountains-waters”

in Chinese that corresponds to the polarities of *yin* and *yang* interactions in the cosmos. Cheng has also pointed out that “through the richness of their content and through their relationship of contrast and complementarity”, this “vitalistic conception” of mountains-waters embodies “a relationship of reciprocal becoming” and “the universal process of transformation” (Cheng 1977/1982: 84-85). More specifically, this relational dynamics of mountains-waters, embodying the *yin-yang* polarity in continuous movements in the universe, should not be viewed as a static state, or complete contradiction, between two independent entities. Rather, each of them continually attracts and being attracted by, and complement and being complemented by, the other. In this process, *yin*, which contains *yang*, is becoming *yang*, and *yang*, which contains *yin*, is becoming *yin*; accordingly, mountains, representing *yang*, are virtual waters through their embrace of waters, and waters, representing *yin*, are virtual mountains through their infiltration into mountains. Consider, for instance, the official name of the calligrapher and landscape painter Shi Tao (1642–1707_{CE}), which literally means “Waves of Stones” and sums up the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting: the dynamic parallels, exchanges, correspondences, and transformations between the solid state of “mountains” and the liquid state of “waters” (Cheng 1991/1994: 112; Jullien 2003/2009: 122-123).

This is the reason why the *yin-yang* polarity of *qi* is the governor and agent of harmonious unity, the energy that brings into being a holistic view of the world. In these extreme close-ups of the surface of the stream in *To The Wonder*, rocks and waters, and lights and shadows, are exemplary manifestations of such worldview. With waters circulating around rocks, and rocks structuring the path of the stream, and with lights

agitating shadows and shadows absorbing lights, they all manifest cosmic energy; they interact in a mutual and kinetic fashion, and they behold the continuous, generative *qi* in the world. A seamless flow of fusions and interactions of *yin* and *yang* in dynamic harmony, hence, permeates cinematic frames, fashions the film's spatial configuration of a unified world's energy flow, and leads to a pervasive sense of its intermingling.

The Montage of “Mountains-Waters” and a Sense of Wholeness

Robert Sinnerbrink's examination of Malick's *The New World* (2005) argues that there is a reason why the audiences' "experience of nature remains a poetic evocation": "It aesthetically discloses the sublimity of nature understood as elemental earth" and, because of this, "acknowledging this unity with nature is what makes possible—were one inclined to put it in the form of a thesis—the kind of plural coexistence or marriage between worlds" (Sinnerbrink 2011: 192). By extrapolation from Sinnerbrink's reading, this aesthetics of nature also refracts the Chinese poetic tradition: *qi* is the foundational element of the whole world; with the unifying function of its *yin-yang* polarities, all entities, events and experiences in the universe are one and the same, as they are differentiated from but also integrated into the field of *qi*, where infinite cosmic interactions and interconnections happen. The arts of "mountain-waters", embodying the two polarities of *yin* and *yang*, as François Jullien claims, "hold the world in tension, and the infinite exchanges that result from them"; for this reason, the Chinese artist, rather than "paint a corner of the world", tends to figure and exhibit "the process of things as a whole, the

entire, infinitely diverse play of its polarities” (Jullien 2003/2009: 122). The implication is that a holistic feeling of the whole world in a piece of artwork can arise from multifarious exchanges between *yin* and *yang*, so that its individual elements are not autonomous but correspond to and complement each another, constructing the dynamism of the world as a whole. In fact, the film theorist and director Sergei Eisenstein has already observed that:

the Chinese picture of the world is based [...] above all on the mutual interaction of ‘*two principles*’—the notorious opposite principle of yin and yang. [...] the world is built, maintained, and moves through the interaction of two opposite principles, permeating the whole universe. All phenomena is classified into a series of corresponding opposites that, in their interaction and conflict, create all the phenomena of reality out of themselves. (Eisenstein 1987: 235; emphasis in original)

For Eisenstein, Wang Wei’s painting about the waterfall captures the primordial *qi* in the world and the principle of *yin* and *yang* in the cosmos through the interconnection between flowing waters of softness and immobile cliffs and mountains of firmness. Lee Carruthers has the impression that the aesthetic effects of Malick’s editing style in his latest works “recalls the montage theory of Sergei Eisenstein” (Carruthers 2019: 39), although the extent to which Malick is familiar with and then influenced by Eisenstein’s works, very often informed by the Chinese poetic tradition, might remain unclear to us.

These dynamics of *yin* and *yang* principle, nevertheless, are typically employed in Malick’s cinema of the 2010s to spatially construct a unified vision of being in the world. In another sequence in *To the Wonder*, after displaying Neil and Mariana’s physical intimacy in their bright bedroom, the film then cuts to a somber corner of the room with

a window, through which we can see the scenery in warm sunshine outside. The interior is intercut straight away with the exterior, in which Mariana roams around a golden field with a herd of wild horses, all being bathed in brilliant sunlight. There is an unexpected cutaway from the parched earth to a close-up of an eagle soaring in the blue sky overhead, and to a shot, suffused with the sun's rays suddenly becoming so strong that it almost dazzles the viewers, of that eagle flying behind Mariana shot in slow motion. More abruptly than we might expect, this is followed by a few shots of the submarine landscape, of cool colour-tone dappled with shafts of sunlight, with coral reefs, a sea turtle and shoals of fish. This sequence features a plurality of interactive complementary elements: the dim interior and the bright exterior, the strength of sunlight at different levels, from Mariana rambling in the golden pasture, through the eagle hovering high in the sky, to the turtle diving deep in the ocean, gradations of blues from pale, bright, to dark, and so on. These animate, dynamic and transformative realities evoke how the aesthetics of "mountains-waters" have engrossed "an endless play of interactions between contrary factors that pair up, forming a matrix through which the world is conceived and organized" (Jullien 2014/2018: 16). Malick's spatial configuration of multifarious events in transformation, through fast cutting, presents the vitality and totality of the world in which kinetic and complementary entities, driven by successive polarities in the tensional and generative field of *qi*, are constantly pairing, interacting and being intertwined.

Similar editing patterns can also be found in *Knight of Cups*. The film focuses on the disillusioned Hollywood screenwriter Rick's (Christian Bale) personal reflections on

his life, revolving around his family relationship and erotic encounters in Hollywood. In Rick's lonesome flat at night, as his meditative voice-over asks himself: "Where did I go wrong?", a rapid succession of six shots shows a ceiling fan rotating, and yet being illuminated by blinking, dim lights from a television, Rick enfolded by total darkness but watching some overexposed footage from the television, a wild land with tropical plants and distant mountains under the sun, a woman, viewed through crystal-clear water in three shots, diving into a swimming pool, pulling the water and climbing out of the pool.

Its montage, cutting from darkness to brightness, and from firm lands to fluid waters, once again demonstrates the two complementary poles of *yin-yang* matter-energy of *qi* at play, what Jullien calls "the exceedingly general logic of pairing" beneath the arts of "mountains-waters": "The 'mountain' assumes—necessarily calls forth—its partner: the 'water'", denoting "the instantiated global framework" (Jullien 2014/2018: 20-21). In this way, the series of shots in less than half a minute evoke a world with its totality by various incessant interplay of polarities of matter and energies, which are also mirrored in the sequence's materials, such as interactions between high-resolution images on land and low-quality GoPro footage underwater, and even among the static shot of the fan, the drone shot of the wilderness, and fluid viewpoints in the pool totally devoid of any fixed direction. Another sequence, about Rick's encounter with his ex-wife Nancy (Cate Blanchett), begins with such extraordinarily mobile shots of Nancy, together with others, swimming underwater (Figure 4.3). After it fades out, a GoPro shot shows Rick embracing Nancy passionately on a beach with turbulent waves, which is soon cut to high-definition images of the silent Rick on the sand and then to the exuberant Nancy

facing the vast sea on bare feet; on the soundtrack, Rick's soliloquy speaks: "You gave me peace. You gave me what the world can't give. Mercy. Love. Joy. All else is cloud. Mist. Be with me. Always." The scene, when continuing to show Rick and Nancy going for a drive near an airport and looking up at airplanes in flight, by editing and handheld camera movements, repeatedly alternates between the blue sky and the earth of highways, a wasteland far from runways, and an abandoned road nearby. It ends with an aerial shot overlooking Rick's insignificant silhouette amidst bare rocks (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.3: *Knight of Cups*: A GoPro shot of Nancy diving in a swimming pool.



Figure 4.4: *Knight of Cups*: A high-resolution long shot of Rick standing amidst bare rocks.

From the swimming pool water, the undulating sea waves, the sand in the blowing wind, the vast sky, the solid earth to the jagged rocks, there once again demonstrates serial correlations and correspondences between “mountains” and “waters” often being paired in the Chinese poetic tradition so as to embody the incessant exchanges of *yin-yang* polarity in the energy field of *qi* which constitutes the operation of the world in a unified manner. The sequence beginning with waves and ending with rocks is resonant with the landscape poet Xie Lingyun’s (385–433_{CE}) two lines analysed fully by Jullien:

through variation of pairing [...] “Rock(s)” and “wave(s)”
simultaneously condense and localize—metonymize—the
fundamental tension of mountain and water. The one’s
compact anchoring responds to the other’s slight undulation.
(Jullien 2014/2018: 24)

In a similar way in Malick’s cinema, its montage forms a tangled and seamless web, or what Jullien terms “this reticulate play of correlation” (Jullien 2014/2018: 24), of myriad entities and events, in which each of them inclines towards attracting, calling forth, and responding to the others, which are opposite but mutually dependent. Eisenstein’s theory, as Dudley Andrew’s elucidation points out, would suggest that montage, “while providing the mechanical energy” for cinema, on Earth, “is formally isomorphic to the organic structure of nature”: “the entire film is of a piece, even though operating through conflict and collision”, because “the basic themes of life itself are reducible to conflict” (Andrew 1976: 67). As demonstrated, the interactions between *yin* and *yang* should not be viewed as conflicting dualisms, but contribute to a holistic vision of the universe in constant motion. The spatial configuration through montage in Malick’s films, by linking a train of complementary opposites, and by placing them into an animating and

responsive process, intermingles the characters' existence with the completeness and wholeness of their world. It is precisely because of the dynamic principle of *yin* and *yang* that the shattered fragments from the world cease to exist in a state of autonomy; instead, they integrate into an organic unity in which any dualism is subtracted so that ongoing interactions take place, and energies of *qi* among all things coordinate.

***Qi* as the Vital Momentum for Malick's Aesthetics of Flow and Movements**

Beyond traditional Chinese arts, the aesthetics of *qi* has been quite conspicuous in works by the contemporary Catalan Spanish painter and art theorist, Antoni Tàpies. Familiar with Chinese philosophies, art history and aesthetics, he "believed that the quality of each work of art depends on the artist's and the appreciator's psychosomatic and heuristic dedication as well as their attunement with *qi*" (Chen 2020: 84). In this regard, I will, in this section, consider how Malick's cinema can engage with realities undergoing continuous transformation, and how its vital cinematic medium builds up the reciprocal rapport between *qi* which flows in the physical world and *qi* as the vital energy that flows inside the living bodies of film crew and audiences. For ancient theorists in China, the aesthetic dimension of *qi*'s constant movements, their expressive values deeply rooted in the vital force of the cosmos, and their experiential embodiment of the vigour of bodily organs, always carry considerable importance. Liu Xie's "The Appearances of Objects" chapter begins with the following assertion:

Springs and autumns follow on in succession, with the brooding gloom of dark *yin* and the easeful brightness of *yang*. And the

appearances of objects are stirred into movements, so the heart-mind, too, is swayed. (Owen 1992: 277; translation modified; Original source Liu 502_{CE}/1986: 409)

In other words, Liu accepts the philosophy of *qi* concerning the kinetic and productive interchange and alternation of the two polarities of *yin* and *yang*, which, for him, result in the continuous succession of spring and autumn and of darkness and light, all the movement in the universe, and our physiological responses to the phenomena of the world. Such thinking, which views the two modalities of *qi* as the law governing motion, is common in traditional Chinese poetics. Zhong Rong's theory, likewise, claims:

Qi stirs objects into movements, and those objects move human beings. Human nature and affections, once swayed and swept along, take shape in dance and song. (Owen 2014: 292; translation modified; Original Source Zhong ca.515_{CE}/1998: 15)

The defining characteristics of arts, for Zhong, is the retention of the movement of *qi* energy manifest in all phenomena. And movement, according to these passages, is a process that refers both to the reciprocal interactions of *yin* and *yang* forces of *qi*, and to some kind of responses taking place in our inner bodies. Hu Xiaoyan's thorough research into the aesthetics of *qi* advances "the dynamic connection (or resonance) of the artist's *qi*, the *qi* of the depicted object in the universe, the *qi* manifested in the work, and even the *qi* of the audience", which also means that "the flowing *qi*" embodied in artistic mediums is capable of "immediately and intuitively arousing and exciting the audience's feelings, emotions and vitality" (Hu 2021: 22). On balance, the energy flux of *qi* in motion designates a unified whole and a process of connections, flowing from the

universe, across artists and their mediums, and down into audiences' lived bodies, actively participating in aesthetic experience and attuning to that cosmic energy of *qi*.

Flickering Light in *The Tree of Life*: The Moving Cosmos under Transformation

Malick's cinema often features the flow of life in profusion on the Earth. Ron Mottram's analysis of *Badlands* suggests: in contrast to the protagonists' murderous journey and industrial landscapes "are the bits of the natural world that survive", in which "animals still live in the grass" (Mottram 2007: 15). In *The Thin Red Line*, "images of animals or vegetation provide pauses between scenes of combat or struggle" (Peebles 2007: 161). The natural environment of Powhatan village in *The New World* is characterised by "its bounty of plants and animals" (Walden 2011: 201). Both *The Tree of Life* and *Voyage of Time* unfold the evolutionary processes creating the diversity of life. In what Gregory Flaxman calls "a biomontage that takes us through long ages of evolution" (Flaxman 2019: 93), extreme close-ups in these two films zoom in on a lichen, a salamander, trumpet animalcules, a live chicken embryo, and blood vessels in the body, while long shots present a cast of crabs, a dolphin pod gliding through waves, as well as zebras, giraffes, elephants and leopards in some veld grasslands in Africa, just to name a few. All these images conjure up Ye Xie's (1627–1703_{CE}) poetics ascribing the impressive variety of plants and animals, and "the budding, growing, and flourishing of grass and trees", to "the function of *qi*" (Gu 2009: 39). His *The Origins of Poetry* (1686_{CE}) indeed correlates an artwork's physical vitality governed by *qi* to flora and fauna on our planet:

In their largest sense, these three terms—principle, event, and circumstance—are how *Qian* and *Kun* fix their positions, how the sun and moon revolve. Even down to every plant, tree, bird, and beast, if even one of the three is lacking, then the object is not complete. Literary works are the means by which the circumstances and the manner of Heaven and Earth, and the myriad objects are manifested. To complete these three, however, there is something else uniting and sustaining, ordering and threading through them: this is *qi*. (Owen 1992: 505; translation modified; Original Source Ye 1686_{CE}/2014: 135)

In this passage, *Qian* and *Kun* are the first two hexagrams in the *Book of Change* with a series of sixty-four hexagrams. The *Qian* hexagram is entirely comprised of six solid *yang* lines, while *Kun* hexagram is comprised of all the broken *yin* lines (Legge 1899: 348: 57-61; Original Source Zhouyi ca.3rd century _{BCE}/2011: 1, 25-26). They are, thus, still concerned with the dynamism of the *yin-yang* modalities of *qi*. “Through continuous, recursive and reciprocal influences”, the two interacting and correlative forces of *Qian* and *Kun*, or of *yin* and *yang*, according to Nicholas S. Brasovan, present “a vision of a changing world” and create momentum for “transformation of things, transformation of energy, and the creation of novel life and experience” (Brasovan 2017: 135, 141). This world in constant transformation is, thus, full of forces, energies, vivacity, and vitality.

Three other concepts critical in Ye Xie’s poetics are “principle” (*li* 理), “event” (*shi* 事) and “circumstance” (*qing* 情), which, for him, are subject to *qi*. I have, in Chapter 1, pointed out that the term *qing* in traditional Chinese philosophy referred to both objective outer circumstances and subjective inner feelings. While Ye in *The Origins of Poetry* occasionally employs *qing* in the sense of “mood”, “emotions” and “feelings”, he usually “places *qing* into the external material realm” (Pohl 1992: 12), therefore highlighting an

objective dimension of the world rather than a subjective disposition. The two terms “principle” and “event” owe much to the Tiantai and Huayan schools of Buddhism: “event” implies actual and particular occurrences in the outer worlds of nature and humans, and “principle” refers to the underlying principle of an event, object, situation or experience; it is also noteworthy that neo-Confucianism, adopting such Buddhist thoughts, promotes “principle” as its most fundamental concept (Liu 1975: 85; Owen 1992: 589, 591; Pohl 1992: 19; Cai 2002: 66; Liu 2003: 366; Wang et al 2011/2020: 167).

Luo Qinchun (1465–1547_{CE}), unlike Zhu Xi (1130–1200_{CE}), insists that “principle is nothing but the order displayed by the opening and closing, rising and falling, movement and stillness, and coming and going of *qi*” (Zhang 2021: 461). The idea that principle is the way *qi* moves in accordance with the two modes of *yin-yang* interactive forces is adopted by Wang Fuzhi as well, despite the long-standing controversy, among neo-Confucian philosophers, over “whether *li* and *qi* are one or two” (Liu 2003: 367). Following Zhang Zai and refuting Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi (1033–1107_{CE}), Wang believes that “*li* is not a static principle” (Brasovan 2017: 56), and that “*li* is the pattern of *qi*’s movement” but also “emerges as the pattern of interactive energies” (Hu 2018: 7). “Principle”, according to these views, is not any static entity or abstract rule, but inheres in the dynamic flux and ongoing movement of *qi* itself, designating all the phenomenon’s constant change and transformation in the midst of the energy flux of the cosmic *qi*.

Let us now consider a few shots of the light-sculpture “Lumia” *Opus 161* (1965-1966), by the American-Danish artist Thomas Wilfred, occurring throughout *The Tree of*

Life (Figure 4.5): the first shot of the film is a flickering flame of bright red light revolving in the darkness; after showing Mr O'Brien, who takes a walk in the woods to release grief caused by the sudden death of his beloved son R.L., the film cuts to that abstract imagery of light seemingly flapping in the breeze, immediately “followed by an abstract sequence of blurred motion, coloured lights, suggesting rapid movement and the passage of time” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 141); the sequence of cosmogenesis begins with the undulating Lumina light; the film ends with Wilfred’s light-sculpture, before two static shots of the glass skyscraper under the clear sky with white clouds floating past, and of the Golden Gate Bridge with a swooping seagull above the bay’s gentle waves.

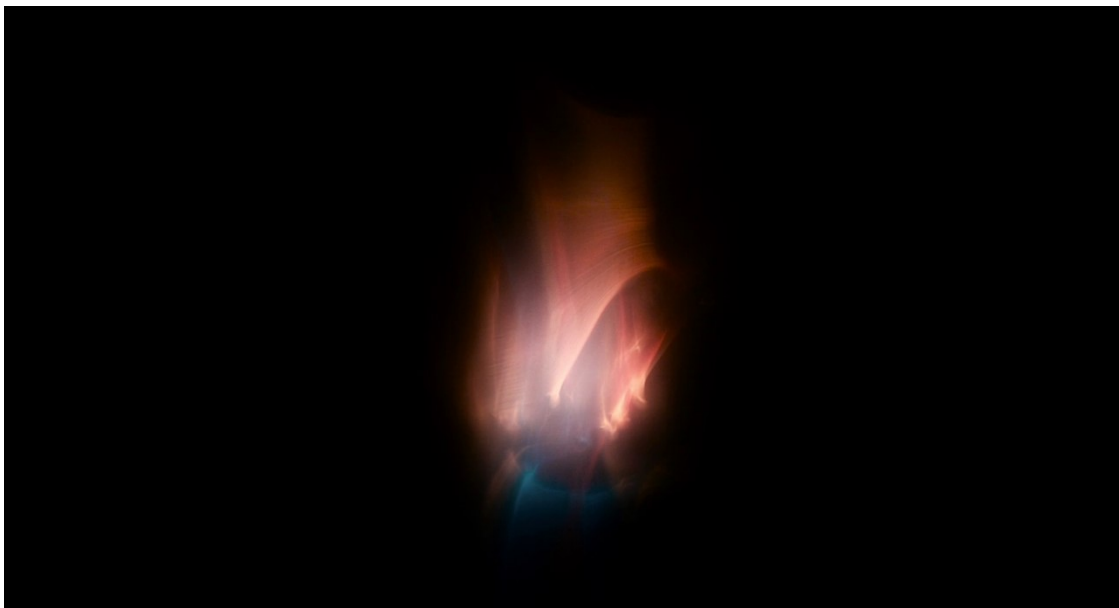


Figure 4.5: *The Tree of Life*: Thomas Wilfred’s light-sculpture “Lumia” *Opus 161*.

“The mysterious light”, for quite a few scholars and commentators, can be viewed “as an expression of a divine or theological presence in the film” (Blasi 2020: 114). In a like manner, Robert Sinnerbrink assumes that the abstract Lumia imagery, opening and closing the whole film “in circular fashion”, represents “a world both natural and human

transfigured through a spiritualized vision of love” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 150). *The Tree of Life*, with its clear reference to the biblical doctrines and God’s presence in the world, undoubtedly prompts these critics to interpret Malick’s usage of “Lumia” *Opus 161* as the embodiment of a Christian vision of grace and universal love. Nevertheless, this light-sculpture, which is continuous, variable and constantly revolving, along with that abstract sequence that features the great fluidity of light and colours in motion and indicates continuous movements in the phenomenal world (Figure 4.6), also remind us about the scholar Su Shi’s (1037–1101_{CE}) discussion on the concretisation of “principle” in paintings through loose, fluid images of water flowing and smoke whirling around:

Once when I discussed painting, I said that humans and animals, palaces, buildings and utensils, all have constant forms. As for mountains, rocks, bamboo, trees, water, waves, smoke and clouds, although they lack constant forms, they have constant principles. (Bush and Shih 2012: 220; translation modified; Original Source Su 1070_{CE}/2009: 186)

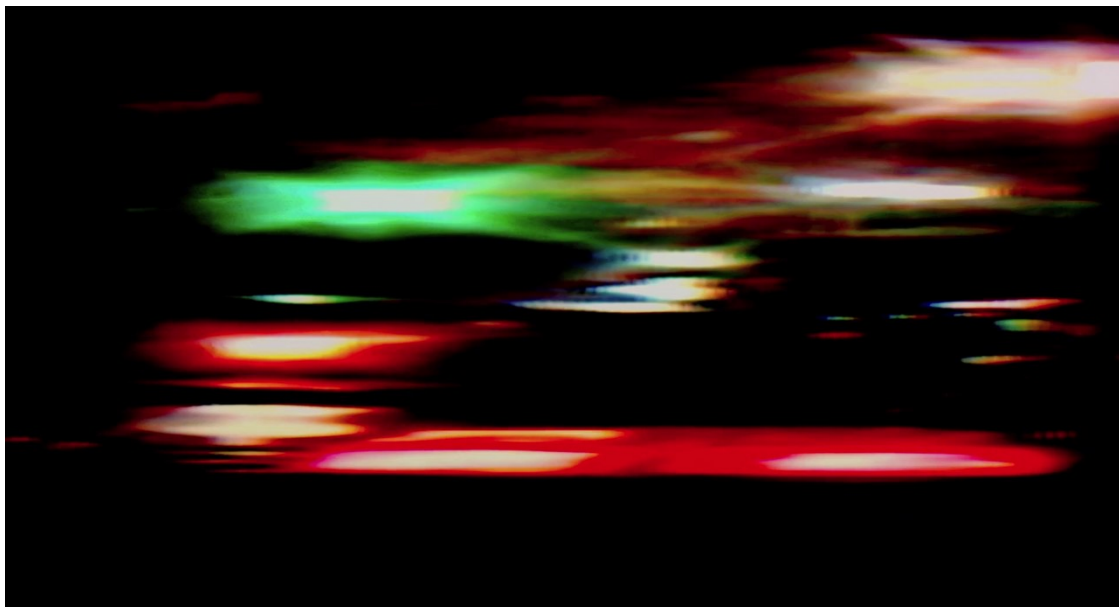


Figure 4.6: *The Tree of Life*: The flow of light and colours in motion.

Human figures, birds and beasts, everyday objects, as well as architectural buildings, for Su Shi, have strict forms; but, from mountains through waves to clouds, their greater variety of changes of shapes seem to better reflect the cosmic *qi*'s energetic movement and the world in a state of flux, thereby embodying the "principle" inherent in *qi* visually. These mutable images, according to François Jullien's interpretation of Su's argument, capture the lively "process that engenders the world" and "the endless animation of the world" (Jullien 2003/2009: 124; 2014/2018: 29). In this respect, "Lumia" *Opus 161* by Wilfred, who "sought to represent 'the universal rhythmic flow' in his art" (Zinman 2011: online), is such imagery without any constant forms; but its free, swift and unceasing movement, as well as its extraordinary variety of colours, appearances and luminance, appear to epitomise the incessant transformation of all events and phenomena driven by the active vital force of *qi* in the universe, whose movements are constant.

Originally commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1963, and later invited by other exhibitions in galleries around the globe, Wilfred, interestingly enough, never allowed his "Lumia" light performances to be filmed. This is because:

He felt that even projected at 24 fps the lumia's continuity of motion would be destroyed if recorded as separate, still images. He also believed that "the intensity range of a lumia was too vast for any known reproduction process". (Wees 2007: 187)

Wilfred is well-aware of the fact that cinema creates the illusion of movement through twenty-four still frames per second, which acts against his intention of displaying the continuous movement of light in the real, physical world. Gabriella Blasi's interpretation of Wilfred's work shown in *The Tree of Life*, thus, stresses such a stark difference:

In this, the cinematic approach to the light-sculpture fundamentally alters the temporal structure of the object observed [...] The distance between the filmed object and the observer would increase, and thereby shatter the sense of immediacy and continuity of motion of the original Lumia light experience. (Blasi 2020: 115)

Aesthetic discrepancies, in Blasi's opinion, occur between Wilfred's original work and Malick's recording and piecemeal insertions of Wilfred's light-sculpture into *The Tree of Life*. This is because the cinematic apparatus fails to copy the continuity of actual movement completely, but also because the film's fragmentary placement of "Lumia" images in its various scenes provides viewers of Malick's film with an absolutely different experience. I would not continue comparing and contrasting Wilfred's work and Malick's cinematic relation to it. The ever-changing manner and appearance of the Lumia light presented in *The Tree of Life*, together with other images of variable nebulae, nevertheless, are evocative of Ye Xie's lengthy description of his observation of the clouds of Mount Tai where he stayed around half a year. These unpredictable clouds, for him, are "supreme patterns" and "supreme achievement", and imply the cosmic dynamics of literary works:

The greatest patterns of Heaven and Earth are the winds and clouds, rain and thunder. Their transformation cannot be fathomed, their origins and ends cannot be known. They are the supreme divinity of Heaven and Earth, the supreme pattern. [...] The forms of the clouds are countless: no two are the same. And likewise in their colours and countenances, in their natures and circumstantial manners, no two are the same. (Owen 1992: 509; translation modified; Original Source Ye 1686_{CE}/2014: 138-139)

I have, in the preceding discussion, argued for the aesthetic continuity and equivalence between patterns in Heaven and Earth and the cinematic medium of Malick's cinema. If

this passage indicates that the supreme poetry should “be as animate and changing as the clouds of Mount [Tai]” (Owen 1992: 510), and if the quintessence of Ye’s poetics lies in its advocate for the “intense engagement with cosmic processes” (Cai 2002: 66), the image of “Lumina” light in *The Tree of Life* is a sign of realities undergoing continuous transformation, but also discloses the cinematic medium’s potential for engaging with cosmic energies continually flowing throughout the physical world and human bodies. At this point, I am going to uncover the cosmic energy flux of *qi* and its resonance in movements of Malick’s flow cinema and the lived bodies of film crew and of viewers.

A Medical Understanding of the Living Body through the Conception of *Qi*

So far my treatment of *qi* in this chapter has largely focused on *qi* as the dynamic forces of all events, phenomena and experiences in the universe, but also as the constituent element of all objects, animate and inanimate, human and non-human. Furthermore, I have also considered theses such as the Trinity of Heaven-Earth-and-Human and the Oneness of Heaven-and-Human, suggesting a holistic worldview of close relationships and reciprocal interactions between the cosmos and human beings. Now, I would like to present a quick overview of *qi* as the vital substance and energy in our lived bodies, before discussing and analysing the physical bodies of Malick’s characters, camera crew and audiences in depth.

As Kevin V. Ergil and Marc S. Micozzi’s concise introduction to traditional Chinese medicine asserts, “there is no concept more crucial to Chinese medicine than *qi*” (Ergil

and Micozzi 2011: 67), because such an alternative medical practice primarily hinges on the conception of *qi* to comprehend the living human body sustained and pervaded by the material, energetic and fluid *qi* that maintains a person's vitality and bodily organ system's physiological functions. The *Inner Cannon of the Yellow Emperor*, the classical treatise traditionally dating back to the second century BCE on health and disease, states that the so-called "Five Organs" (*wuzang* 五臟) of heart-mind, spleen, lung, kidney and liver house different forms of *qi*, each corresponding to the "Five Phases" (*wuxing* 五行) of fire, earth, metal, water and wood; more generally, on the basis of source, location and function, multifarious types of *qi* in the lived body are classified into various categories, so as to understand how our bodies are warmed, nourished, protected and channelled by different forms of *qi* (Chen and Liu 2010: 56; Chen 2011: 5; Ergil and Micozzi 2011: 67-68; Mayor 2011: 26). Insofar as humankind in early China is understood to be related to the cosmos, "the image of the body" is also considered, as Nancy N. Chen maintains, as "a microcosm of the broader environment", and as "a reflection of cosmological order" (Chen 2011: 10). Consider the "Quintessential Spirit" chapter of *Huainanzi*:

Heaven has wind, rain, cold and heat; humans have taking, giving, joy, and anger. Therefore, the gall bladder parallels the clouds, the lung parallels the air, the liver parallels the wind, the kidney parallels the rain, and the spleen parallels the thunder. In this way, human beings form a triad with Heaven and Earth, and the heart-mind is the ruler of this. Therefore, the ears and eyes are the sun and moon; the *qi* of blood are the wind and rain. (Major et al. 2010: 242; translation modified; Original Source Liu 139_{BCE}/1998: 508)

This passage details ways in which the body's internal and sensory organs partake in the macrocosm of the universe, and thus dovetails with the philosophical underpinning for the vigorous correspondence between the world of humans and the cosmic world.

Like the cosmos, driven by the energy of *qi*, in constant motion, the conception of the human body through the theoretical framework of *qi* stresses dynamic movements, fluid flow, and transformational process. As Elisa Rossi and Laura Caretto claim: "We know that movement is intrinsic to *qi*—the *qi* of the universe, just as in the *qi* of humans" (Rossi and Caretto 2007: 19). Nancy N. Chen's reference to acupuncture techniques lays stress on the circulation of *qi* in bodily channels and organs, as well as "its flow or movement within the body" (Chen 2011: 6). With regard to the relation among *qi*, blood and body fluids, *qi* gives life to blood and fluids but also moves them, while blood and fluids house *qi* and further carry it to all parts of the living body, which means that fluid loss, such as vomiting, diarrhoea and night sweats, can weaken a person's *qi*, and that the blockage of the flow of *qi* inside the body is likely to lead to pathological impairment of organs (Johnson 2002: 220; Clavey 2003: 19; Ergil and Micozzi 2011: 68-69).

The term "*qi* transformation" in traditional Chinese medicine's medical literature, according to Steven Clavey, "can refer broadly to all of the movements and changes of the *qi* in its circulation around the body" (Clavey 2003: 2), which include fluid metabolism, the movement of *qi* within bodily organs and channels, as well as all of the functioning of the living body. Angelika C. Messner's reading of *Inner Cannon of the Yellow Emperor* confirms that "the flowing, processing, and relational character of every single bodily

element, including the emotions, is clearly exposed” in this treatise (Messner 2006: 57). More precisely, bodily sensations of feeling pain, warmth and cold, as well as emotional and mental activities, such as rage, terror, happiness, sadness and abstract thinking, are presented as the flow of *qi* in the process of continual changes and movements. It is worth mentioning that, for a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, the circulation, distribution and characteristics of a patient’s *qi* can be significantly sensed by attending to his or her pulse, complexion, body odour, manner of speaking, emotional responses, and personal life story, among other symptoms. With respect to “sensing *qi*”, different approaches are available for different physicians: “some are especially sensitive to the movement of breath, others to the tongue, the pulse, the hands, or to ‘listening’ with their whole being” (Cassidy 2011: 168).

In short, traditional Chinese medicine has predominantly drawn on the conception of *qi* to unveil how the lived body is interconnected with the world around it, how the internal energetic *qi* plays a vital role in physiological functions, and how the body’s dynamic flow of *qi*, perceivable in experience, contributes to processes of physical and mental activities.

Bodily Experience of Mobile Framing and the Cosmic Movement in Malick’s Films

Malick’s cinema of the 2010s, apparently, turns the spotlight on characters’ vigorous bodies in motion. As the preceding analysis of *The Tree of Life* already showed, Mrs O’Brien, whose slender body suspended in air, is dancing gracefully under a tree, while

the vitality of her kids is also manifest in their living flesh's deft, fluid, swift movements. "The overflowing energy of childhood", as David Sterritt has perceived, "surges through a number of briskly presented scenes" (Sterritt 2011: 55). Indeed, the overflowing vital dynamism of these teens gushes out of their kinetic bodies, which sweep out of their house, speed through a back road, hurtle down slopes, and plunge into rushing rivers. Their impetus, vibrating with the surrounding world of their local community, infects the camera with kinetic forces, bringing about the flow of energy within the film's frame and across its spectators. Audiences of Malick's recent films are frequently overwhelmed by animating energies emerging in the vital cosmos, released from characters' bodies, and embodied in the camera movement and even in editing patterns.

The characters in *The Thin Red Line*, as David J. Gilbert notes, "echo the camera and montage movements toward a recognition of the supernatural nature of the world" (Gilbert 2020: 50). The energetic movement of those teenagers in *The Tree of Life*, in Sterritt's opinion, displays an intense "awareness of the possibilities for connection and exaltation that the world reserves for humans" (Sterritt 2011: 55). Energy permeates the world where the living human bodies inhabit, and the bodies of viewers resonate with those of Malick's characters, whose energetic forces are captured by the mobile frame. Both Andrei Tarkovsky and Malick provide "film experiences summoned by the call of beauty" in the world. However, Anthony Parisi's comparison of poetic cinema by these two filmmakers contends that, while the "slow", "quiet" and "austere" aesthetic quality of Tarkovsky's works substantially, Malick's aesthetics, which "is energetic and sweeping", "immerses the viewer in movement and music" (Parisi 2020: 137). Similarly, Robert

Sinnerbrink proposes that one of the key features of Malick's late style from *To the Wonder to Song to Song* is "an evident fascination with movement":

the dynamic, flowing camera, questing restlessly through the lived space of the characters, roaming freely across nature and landscape at will, relativizing particular subjective perspectives via a revelatory disclosure of the world. Life itself in its contingency, its dynamic expressivity, its revelatory glory, animates all of Malick's cinematic works. (Sinnerbrink 2019: 171)

Sinnerbrink's summary of the aesthetics of movement in Malick's cinema suggests that its flowing camera movement, which holds heterogeneous elements together but also conveys the interactive dynamics between characters' living bodies and their milieus, vitalises the whole work. Extending these findings, and drawing on the notion of *qi* in relation to the human body's kinetic forces in particular, I further analyse how the fluidity of camera movement in Malick's cinematic works resonates with cosmic energies, how the bodies of his viewers and film crew, by their bodily experience of the mobile framing, participate in the cosmic process, and how the flow of *qi* circulates around all of them.

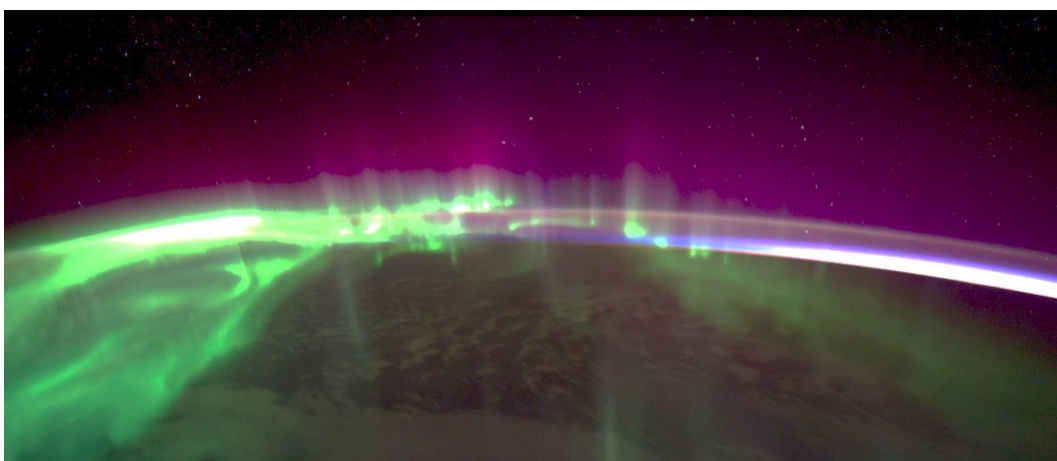


Figure 4.7: *Knight of Cups*: Polar lights covering the spinning earth.

Earlier in *Knight of Cups*, the film displays some dynamic patterns of polar lights, appearing as dynamic flickers and multicoloured rays, covering the upper atmosphere of the spinning earth (Figure 4.7). Whereas the auroral light of varying colours brings to mind the equivalent of patterns in the astronomical world and the aesthetic patterns, the movements of the polar lights themselves and the Earth further conjure up the first hexagram in the *Book of Change*, *Qian*, which declares the movement of Heaven and of humankind: “Heaven, in its motion, gives birth to strength. In accordance with this, the superior man nerves himself to ceaseless activity” (Legge 1899: 267; translation modified; Original Source Zhouyi ca.3rd century BCE/2011: 8). Sikong Tu, inspired by this hexagram, relates “the operations of Heaven” with “a force that cannot be stopped” in artworks (Owen 1992: 305). In a more general sense, because “the universe and all that is in it exists in continual transformation and flux”, Chinese art forms, from dance, painting to calligraphy, stress “motion, power, and rhythm” (Li 1988/2010: 68). Insofar as the film has provided a tremendous sense of movement inherent in the operation of the universe, its following sequence is bursting with a multiplicity of energies: a ray of blinding sunlight, shot from a vehicle running at great speed in a tunnel, absorbs us; a series of cellular phone video clips, shaking unsteadily but lively, display a baby in a state of excitement facing an oncoming tide lapping on the shore, seagulls soaring on the wings, a boat rocking from side to side in the waves, and a kite drifting violently across the sky; then a GoPro camera traces, closely and vigorously, some children swaying and dashing with their pet dogs, which is evocative of the vibrant childhood full of energies shown in *The Tree of Life*. The contemporary philosopher Li Zehou, who

has explained how traditional Chinese aesthetics are influenced by *The Book of Change*'s hexagrams, points out that "the positive value of the sensuous world" is accepted, in the sense that:

people can use their emotions, thoughts, and energy to work in concert with the cosmos and all that is in it. And all human laws and forms (including the laws and forms of art) echo the universal laws and forms of nature, including for example the laws of motion, flux, dynamic equilibrium, the unity of correspondences, and so on. (Li 1988/2010: 68)

That is to say, forces and energies existing in the universe can be transferred to artistic mediums, which can in turn attune to those in spectators' living bodies. The dynamic reverberation between our bodies and the physical world of vitality and vibrance takes place, when boundless energies radiate from an artwork and exert on viewers' bodies.

Sinnerbrink, in truth, views "handheld GoPro/DV footage of children" in the above sequence as "expressions of playful delight in existence", because he can strongly feel "a sense of freedom and joy, of sensuous enjoyment, physical connection and wonder at the world" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 188). This is true of Malick's insistence on the camera movement in his works, which is able to align the energetic flow of *qi* in the audiences' bodies with the energies of the universe in constant motion. The camera movement in *The Thin Red Line*, for Amy Coplan, "elicits feelings of chaos and disorientation", but also "allows for a vivid sense of subjective movement, which enables us to observe the events in the story world" (Coplan 2009: 75, 77). These sensual, immersive and potent forces felt through mobile framing are typically one of "the sensuous aspects of Malick's cinema", which present "the world as one that requires that we reintegrate bodily with

the world and with other bodies” (Daniel 2020: 25). Lee Carruthers has the impression that the style of movement in Malick’s films “is demanding and breathless”, since “the mobile content of the shot [...] is doubled and intensified by the accordant movement of the camera, acquiring a purely cinematic energy” (Carruthers 2019: 43). By means of the editing pattern and of, particularly, the handheld camera, which tilts up, tracks, sways, rotates, vibrates, freely moves and is even being teased and soon stared at by a girl in a pool of sunlight (Figure 4.8), everything in motion in that sequence also brims with the camera’s mechanical energies, which intensify the audience’s perception of movements. Jennifer Barker’s analysis of the powerful effects of cinema’s “muscular movements” on the spectators argues that: “the film’s body and the viewer’s body are irrevocably related to one another” (Barker 2009: 77). In Malick’s films, this reciprocal correspondence between the movements of the camera, that captures and retains the lively world’s animation and the viewers’ sensory feeling of energies and various forms of motion evinces the cinematic medium’s activation of the circulation of *qi*.



Figure 4.8: *Knight of Cups*: The camera is being touched by a girl.

Moreover, the movement of the film's body performed by the cameramen also relates the *qi* energies of the film crew with the *qi* circulating around the physical world being filmed. Malick's cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki, reports such connections:

When we were shooting, we were extra aware of how everything in nature is constantly shifting. We became aware of the earth moving, the shadows changing, the color temperature constantly shifting, the rivers changing color, and the tide shifting, and all of that happens really fast. When you're distracted, you don't notice those changes [...] we wanted to capture life. The moment we embraced life, we turned our backs on artificial light. I think the flow of nature became a theme. (Benjamin 2006: 48)

Steadicam cinematography in Malick's films, which involves the cameramen's steady flow of bodily movements, but also their acute awareness of subtle changes in the world in terms of light, smell, colour, shadow, temperature and atmosphere, resonates with traditional Chinese painters' grasp and control of their brushes. Their act of painting has been facilitated by a constant communication and mutual exchange between "his vital breath" and "the great respiration of the world" (Jullien 2003/2009: 136). With the aim of capturing and embracing life on the Earth, the film crew's use of the camera, through their physical bodies' skilful operations of the tool and their minds' active participation in the world, need to coordinate with nature's dynamic momentum. Thus, their bodily motions guided by *qi* flow are attentive to the pulsation of cosmic energy.

Flow Aesthetics and The Concept of “Flow Cinema” in Film Studies

Apart from movement, critics of Malick’s cinema of the 2010s often mobilise the term “flow” to characterise its aesthetics. Gabriella Blasi simply mentions “flowing and casual aesthetics” without any further explanations (Blasi 2019: 24), although Anthony Parisi asserts that “Malick’s rapid flow of images [is] in marked contrast to the long stretches of time favored by Tarkovsky” (Parisi 2020: 137). Lee Carruthers is conscious that the audience “can discern an insistence upon flow rather than fixity”, and that “this stance forms a consistent principle of his cinema” (Carruthers 2019: 49), an aesthetic stance underpinned by a seamless integration of montage, mobile framing as well as unique compositional structures that defy conventional expectation in spectatorship. Robert Sinnerbrink clearly connects movement with fluidity: “vertical sky-reaching movements stand in contrast to the flowing horizontal earth-hugging movements of the camera as it follows characters walking along streets, across fields or within domestic spaces (*To the Wonder, Knight of Cups*)” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 185). Sinnerbrink’s comment, to some extent, is reminiscent of the interactive alternation of the two modalities of *yin* and *yang* of the primal *qi* contributing to the unified, energetic and functional trinity of Heaven-Earth-and-Human in traditional Chinese philosophy. As I have pointed out earlier, the image of kaleidoscopic clouds in Ye Xie’s poetics is used as a metaphor for the transformative nature of all events and phenomena due to the ever-changing patterns of *yin* and *yang*, and for the animate dynamics of an artwork. This idea closely resembles Sinnerbrink’s remark about the technique of editing in *Voyage of Time*, and Joshua

Sikora's reading of Private Bell's (Ben Chaplin) voice-over in *The Thin Red Line*, which is symptomatic of Malick's flow aesthetics. "Malick's rhythmic montage of images, each following the other in a smoothly flowing stream", as Sinnerbrink claims, "carries our consciousness for ephemeral intervals, like the flow of time itself" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 156). This means that the editing patterns in Malick's films, similar to a meandering stream, capture the quicksilver essence of realities unfolding in the flow of time. Private Bell's monologue has mentioned the flowing water: "We. We together. One being, flow together like water, till I can't tell you from me." Sikora relates this to the flowing images "in cosmic terms":

Physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually—this life can be born at any level. Even in art, a work becomes enlivened when the separate, distinct elements come together, finding a cohesive unity. A film becomes effectual and beautiful when the cuts no longer create division, but the cinematic images flow smoothly one to the next, like a river, unified and complete. (Sikora 2020: 169)

What Sikora does not clarify clearly might be that fragments from the world cohere into a unified whole through the film's animate montage that is able to offer the audience a vigorous flow of experience involving physiological, psychological and mental activities.

It should be noted that the concepts of "flow cinema" and "flow aesthetics" have proliferated in film studies in recent decades. The French poet Stéphane Bouquet first coin these terms in 2002 in an essay published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* to label a group of films made since the late 1990s (Bouquet 2002: 27); audiovisual narratives in these films, according to Vieira Erly's summary, "inviting viewers to immerse themselves in

scenic space-time”, emphasise “corporeal reinsertion into the time and space” but also “a sensory experience mediated by audiovisual language” (Vieira 2016: 513). Specifically, in films such as *Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000), *Shara* (Naomi Kawase, 2003), *Café Lumière* (Hou Hsiao Hsien, 2003), and *Tropical Malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2005), the audiences are invited to immerse themselves in the sensory and emotional currents of everyday experiences, which are transferred as and presented in the cinematic medium’s flow of audiovisual information which elicits viewers’ sense of bodily presence. Vieira’s analysis of “these examples of contemporary cinema” maintains that audiences, “guided by subtle modulations in sound, movement, and light”, can “perceive the multidimensional wealth of a world in constant motion” (Vieira 2016: 516). This also means that, through perceiving subtle changes in perceptual attributes displayed in these films, audiences can experience an overwhelming feeling of continual fluidity, and become aware of the world in constant change. Joseph G. Kickasola’s comprehensive and detailed research into Wong Kar-wai’s cinema, proposing “the phenomenology of flow”, argues:

It is plausible that such Eastern philosophy inspired Wong and has influenced him in numerous ways, but one need not argue that so rigorously to see that there are cognitive, perceptual, and physiological reasons why “flow” is perceived as meaningful in human experience. (Kickasola 2016: 73)

In Kickasola’s opinion, in Wong’s *In the Mood for Love* and *The Grandmaster* (2013), the cinematic pattern of flow, constructed by fluid and rhythmic dynamics of audiovisual elements, narrative information and emotional contours, channel the viewers’ various activities—sensual, perceptual, emotional and cognitive—into the flow of experiences.

Vieira's research, without reference to Asian aesthetic thoughts, largely discusses films from Asia. For Kickasola, Eastern philosophy that has affected Wong seems negligible, though he lightly indicates the philosopher Judy Saltzman's analysis of the martial arts based on "the Dao of the body": "mind and body working as one [...] it is spontaneous and flowing" (Saltzman 2010: 171-172). While scholars' treatment of flow cinema often involves Asian arthouse cinema, but overlooks traditional aesthetics in Asia, I think that the aforementioned notion of bodily *qi* in traditional Chinese medicine might lead to a better understanding of the viewer's experience of flow cinema. In what follows, I will consider a thesis in *Excavated Guodian Bamboo Manuscripts*, dated around 300BCE, regarding similarities between music and the flow of *qi*, before analysing the way in which the audience can have audiovisual experiences of *qi* flow in Malick's cinema.

Malick's Flow Cinema: A Confluence of the Living Body and the Vital Cosmos

The full discussion of the relationship between mind and body in *Excavated Guodian Bamboo Manuscripts*, scattered around various chapters, provides inconsistent claims. Its contentions, according to Lisa Raphals's extensive reading of the treatise, vary from a mind-body dualism, either strong or weak, to a robustly holistic viewpoint of the unity of mind and body. Its "Nature Derives from Endowment" chapter, acknowledging "*qi* 氣 as unifying body and mind" and "similarities between the 'flow' of *qi*, sound, and music" (Raphals 2019: 241), offers such a holistic understanding of the living body.

Raphals explains its argument as follows: the permeability between body and the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is grounded in the flow of *qi* characterised by fluidity and extensibility; on the basis of this rationale, “Nature Derives from Endowment” then proposes music’s extraordinary ability to guide the flow of *qi*. This active and flowing process begins with stimulation of sensations and evocation of emotions, and which is immediately followed by the heart-mind’s thought, reflection and other activates that bring up further affective states. When examining the usage of the heart-mind, intelligence, emotions, body, and physical strength successively, “Nature Derives from Endowment” concludes:

The eye’s fondness for colours and the ear’s delight in sounds evoke the *qi* of melancholy and intoxication. (Cook 2012: 732; translation modified; Original Source Guodian ca.3rd century BCE/2005: 90)

This passage acknowledges our sensory organs’ inclination for sensual experience, but also pinpoints the interconnection between bodily sensations and the *qi* of emotional states. By the energetic flow of *qi*, the heart-mind moves along with, as Raphals outlines, “the faculties of creatures composed of blood and *qi*” (Raphals 2019: 253). Additionally, “Nature Derives from Endowment” has also inspected the heart-mind’s contemplation on affective responses to sensory stimuli:

Anxious thoughts generally lead up to grief; joyous thoughts generally lead up to delight. In general, all thoughts use the heart-mind profoundly. Sighing is the orientation of pensive thoughts. Sound changes, thus the heart-mind follows. When the heart-mind changes, the sound also changes correspondingly. (Cook 2012: 723-724; translation modified; Original Source Guodian ca.300^{CE}/2005: 90)

The psychological content of a thought, so to speak, is in itself coloured by emotive qualities and further intensifies the feelings of emotions; and, more than that, physical

activities such as lamentation and vocalisation interact with the heart-mind reciprocally. Drawing on the flow aesthetics proposed in “Nature Derives from Endowment” as well as the theoretical framework of *qi*, let us consider how the closing sequences of *To the Wonder* and of *Knight and Cups* provide the spectators with a dynamic experience of the overflowing stream of *qi* circulating around the physical world, and flowing from our sensory organs into the heart-mind and, thence, through our whole living bodies, which undergo a chain of sensory, physiological, emotional and reflective processes.

After implying the dissolution of the relationship between Neil and Mariana, which is shown by “an arresting shot of Marina entering a darkened airline boarding bridge, fringed with blinding light” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 181), *To the Wonder* displays a series of five static shots of the Gardens of Versailles, in which firm steps and stone sculptures contrast vividly with the fountain’s surface water in the breeze, during the process of sunrise. There is an abrupt cutaway to Neil’s new family in his house with an unnamed woman and two children frolicking in the garden. Sinnerbrink observes “a prominent water feature flowing conspicuously in the garden”, particularly from which he is able to feel the emotional states of Neil, who “has found peace” (Sinnerbrink 2019: 181). The film instantly cuts to Mariana in the wilderness: she at first lies on the ground, then walks across grassy slopes, a sullen wood where she even licks dewdrops seeping from the branches, a golden pastureland with distant livestock, and a log house under the sun. After the sky gradually becomes dark and threatening, Mariana breaks into a trot; her face is nevertheless illuminated by a flash of warm light (Figure 4.9), in striking contrast with the film’s last shot of Mont Saint-Michel immersed in the twilight of blue tone.



Figure 4.9: *To the Wonder*: Mariana's face is illuminated by a flash of warm light.

Viewers' spectatorial response to Mariana's wanderings in the closing sequence of the film can be described as the free, direct and instant flow of subjective experience intricately associated with bodily sensations, subtle emotions, and profound thoughts, which are seemingly propelled by the vital *qi* flowing seamlessly into every part of their lived bodies. Blasi senses "discomfort and pain" of the earth, perceives "a shining light" on Mariana's face and the "evening light" enshrouding Mont Saint-Michel, and is also impressed by Mariana's "gestures" which "so closely echo Linda's in *Days of Heaven* and Rebecca's in *The New World*" (Blasi 2020: 137-138). Sinnerbrink also mentions "a dazzling golden light briefly illuminates her face", and refers to "the wet, empty fields" in which Mariana is "wandering alone, solitary but at peace" and, further, to the last shot of Mont Saint-Michel "inviting us again to contemplate" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 181-182). Kathleen E. Urda, proposing "a contemplative medium" beyond "seeing", argues that the final shot of the film "is presented directly to the audience", because it "works both as a dedication to the beauty of the film portrays, but also as a direction to the audience" (Urda 2016: 144-145). The film's rapid flow of images appear to attune to audiences'

living bodies perceptually, emotionally and intellectually, as if the cinematic medium, through slight changes in nature's lights, colours, humidity and hardness, and in the characters' moods, gestures and facial expressions, guides the smooth flow of *qi* among viewers, spontaneously affecting them psychophysically.

Furthermore, audiences' bodily *qi* also resonates with the cosmic *qi* in the world presented on the screen. For Sinnerbrink, there is "an evocative background of natural environs and creaturely life" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 181), while, for Blasi, the closing scene stresses "earthly things" with Mariana as a "human being closer to Earth" (Blasi 2020: 137). Again, the polarised, but harmonious, interplay of *yin* and *yang* in the surrounding world gives rise to our holistic appreciation of humans' relationship with the world, with nature and the universe. In terms of the perceptual qualities of landscape in this scene, in a way like "the energetic tension passing through form that the Chinese painter tends to paint", with the result that "the landscape he paints is cosmic" and the "breath-energy circulate like its 'pulse'" of the universe (Jullien 2003/2009: 183), the complementary *yin-yang* aspects in environmental factors, as in dawn and dusk, the earth and the sky, stiff stones and rippling waters, and shafts of brilliant sunlight above the slopes and the sunless depths of the woods, contribute to the strong feeling of a symbiotic fusion with the world. This sequence's configuration of the sensual parts of landscape through the exchange of two opposite and yet reciprocal attributes strongly resembles the aesthetic approach of traditional Chinese artists, as summarised by François Jullien: to "gather, condense, and raise into the realm of sensibility" of the totality of the cosmos in its vibrancy, they like exhibiting the free, lively, and continuous interaction "between High

and Low, the immobile and the undulant, the opaque and the transparent, the solid and the fluid” (Jullien 2014/2018: 16). This summons up a more elaborate example from the closing sequence of *Knight and Cups* as well.

Towards the end of the film, Rick strolls round a lush garden with cacti, bougainvillea and other tropical plants, stares at a solid rock outside of the garden attentively, and then plays tennis with Isable (Isabel Lucas). Its following shots closing the film evokes Sikong Tu’s poetic account of cosmic energies:

The changing appearance of wind-blown clouds,
The spirit and essence of flowering plants,
The waves of the ocean,
The jaggedness of mountains—
All are like the great *Dao*,
Match their subtle beauty, share their dust.
(Owen 1992: 344; translation modified: Original Source Sikong
ca.8th century CE/2013: 76)

The whole film’s ending, in a similar way, oscillates between a bewildering variety of polarities of opposition and complementarity at play in this phenomenal world: from a swimming pool, where Isable swims naked late at night, to a rolling, rocky hill where Rick rambles across in the bright daylight; from sheer, exposed, jagged rocks to fast-moving dense clouds; from the sky through desertscape to a turbid current, where Rick is diving; from Rick on the beach looking up at the blue sky, to a flock of seagulls overlooking the ocean and hovering high in the sky; from Rick’s neat, minimalistic flat, through a tunnel with sunlight shining in, to a transmission tower in the moonlight, to a highway with dust swirling in the air. This fast editing brings about the viewers’ flowing perception of the world.

Blasi notices how the closing sequence's jump cut performs a dazzling display of "an arid mountain", "a beach", "the desert" and "the road", with "the ascent towards the sky" and the descent "to underwater images of Rick swimming in murky waters" (Blasi 2020: 142). The perceptual dynamics of these movements, which revolve around the interplay of energetic tensions of ascending and descending, are in fact ubiquitous in *Knight and Cups*, as Sinnerbrink formulates "a series of related figurative movements of ascent and descent": "the camera titling upwards toward the sky and light", but also "shooting low" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 185). These movements can also be understood as the embodiment of the two opposite, but complementary, energies of *yin* and *yang* in the universe, and concur with Zhang Zai's vivid description of *qi*:

the starting point of *yin* and *yang*, of hard and malleable.
Floating and rising: such is the limpidity of *yang*;
Lowering and descending: such is the disorder of *yin*.
[...]
wind and rain, hail and snow are formed:
both the flow of the multitude of existents
and the union and fusion of mountains and streams.
(Jullien 2003/2009: 135)

The audience's perceptual experience of descent and ascent, of the opaque and the limpid, and of the malleable and the stiff, therefore, co-ordinates with the movement of *yin* and *yang* in the cosmos, so that their bodily *qi* coheres with the cosmic *qi* circulating around the Heaven and the Earth. This is why Arlene Landau can feel that "the earth's greenery and oceans support life everlasting", by sensing the closing scene's flowing images alternating between "empty landscapes" and "sterile cityscapes" (Landau 2019: 137). Malick's recent films, as Lee Carruthers has observed, "do more than picture the

world: they animate a striving toward it, framing a charged and irrepressible movement whose energies are set to work upon the viewer” (Carruthers 2019: 44). Through our bodily experience of Malick’s flowing cinema, through immersing ourselves in its audiovisual information in a state of flux, *qi* in our living bodies resonates with *qi* in the universe with endless energies and myriad objects, all becoming an indissoluble unity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Malick’s cinema of the 2010s, particularly through the concepts of *qi* and *Dao* in China, suggesting that these ideas can unlock the holistic sense of the world in Malick’s works that embody ontological interrelatedness, a dynamic process, and the interactive, complementary and ongoing polarity of *yin* and *yang*. My analysis of the entanglements between the animate and the inanimate, the human and the non-human in these films argues that Malick’s protagonists’ interaction with the myriad objects evokes an overwhelming sense of undifferentiated oneness in the universe, thus bespeaking the resonance, interdependence and deep connections between humans and other entities. Malick’s fascination with landscape, I also argue, exemplifies the Trinity of Heaven-Earth-and-Human and the Oneness of Heaven-and-Earth. More specifically, its montage of the natural world often accords closely with the correlative structure of *yin* and *yang* modalities of *qi* in traditional Chinese aesthetics of “mountains-waters”. Such editing patterns, which usually interlink and place a train of complementary opposites in the reciprocal process of intermingling, create an animate

impression of the world of entirety and the existence of humans in this world under a unified, energetic field of *qi*.

As the editing pattern of Malick's cinema in part displays the interplay of the cosmic energies of *yin qi* and *yang qi*, its cinematic medium becomes external and processual manifestations of *qi*'s patterns in the universe as well. The linkage between its images of the celestial and the terrestrial, and the medium's formal patterns and technologies, demonstrates that the film's apparatus is immanent in the cosmos, but also celebrates the machine's outstanding abilities to observe the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. The light sculpture "Lumina" *Opus 161*, along with other images of nebulae in motion, is a symptom of the energy flux of *qi* of fluid movements and constant transformation, and of the cinematic medium's forces and flow aesthetics. The fluid camera movement in Malick's films, resonating with cosmic energies, significantly calls forth the vigorous reverberation between the universe of vitality and vibrance and the living bodies of viewers and film crew: while the bodily movements of cameraman and performers coordinate with nature's dynamic momentum, the camera's machinal energies intensify the audiences' perceptual experience of forces, energies and movements in the cosmos. I also argue that the audiovisual experiences of flow in Malick's films build up the reciprocal rapport between *qi* flowing in the physical world and *qi* circulating around the viewers' living bodies, which also resonates to the medium's rapid flow psychophysically.

Conclusion

From Jean Epstein to Maya Deren, a good variety of theories of poetic cinema have highlighted subjective feelings, both depicted and elicited, in poetic cinema. Traditional Chinese aesthetic vocabulary has featured an extensive range of terms applicable to personalities, physiology, “psychology, or more transient ‘moods’”, so that critics and theorists were able to unveil activities and aesthetic qualities in poetry, painting, music, dance, and calligraphy (Owen 1992: 299). Robert Sinnerbrink’s critical reflections on the significance of mood in film studies argue that a cinematic world is disclosed and expressed by mood, and that “distinctive cinematic worlds have their own specific kinds of mood” (Sinnerbrink 2012: 147). As some major aesthetic terminologies in the Chinese poetic tradition are concerned with the “descriptions of various poetic styles”, with each corresponding with “a poetic ‘mood’ or ‘world’” (Liu 1975: 35), I have examined how some specific fictional worlds in films by contemporary auteurs, such as Alexander Sokurov, Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick, are evocative of particular types of moods in traditional Chinese poetics’ aesthetic categories. I have argued that the moods of the “lofty and ancient”, “intricate sensuality”, and “flowing movement” in the Chinese poetic tradition also emanate from the secluded, the erotic, and the cosmic, worlds in films by

Sokurov, Wong, and Malick. I further consider how an auteur's expression, a film's aesthetic and stylistic aspects, and the audience's experiences shape those affective qualities on screen, which have been valued highly in traditional Chinese poetry. In China, ancient aestheticians had often been particularly interested in the "interaction between different internal and external processes" (Cai 2001: 69). This means that their theories incline to explain the physiological, psychological and intellectual experiences of poets and recipients engaging with the artistic medium. To summarise the different threads of my discussion of poetic cinema in this thesis, I want to review the places of filmmakers, the cinematic medium, audiences, external worlds as raw materials, and the subjective states of a subject with the lived body, in poetic cinema.

Auteurism, Acts of Subjective States, and Lived Experience

It has become clear from the preceding discussion that my treatment of poetic cinema confines itself to looking at films by filmmakers, whose authorial voices permeate, but are also embodied on screen, in an auteurist and self-reflexive way. I admit that the conception of single authorship in cinema has been criticised by some scholars, as represented by Berys Gaut's robust defence of collective authorship in cinema that considers films, with multiple artists involved in production, as "highly collaborative" (Gaut 2010: 99). Nevertheless, John Belton sees the author as "the mesmerising figure that the field of film studies has been unable and unwilling to exorcise" (Belton 2005: 60). From Pier Paolo Pasolini to David Bordwell, their particular discussion surrounding

arthouse cinema indicates ways in which an auteur's distinctively personal voice could be communicated expressively through the cinematic medium. Pam Cook, who has illustrated experimental films by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, and Chantal Akerman, among others, also justifies avant-garde cinema as an alternative mode of film production characterised by "self-expression" and "a high level of personal investment in the films" (Cook 1977/1981: 279).

In the Chinese poetic tradition, the thesis regarding the articulation of "intentions" (*zhi* 志), as I see it, might best be interrogated through the arguments put by Alexandre Astruc and Amédée Ayfre, who have stressed the indissoluble alliance between an auteur's lived reality and his or her personal vision manifested in cinema. Insofar as "intentions" is comparable with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of "intentionality" and the related concept of "life-world", I also stress the filmmaker of poetic cinema as a conscious subject that engages closely with the subjective experiential life-world through the process of filmmaking.

In *The Hand* (2004) by Wong Kar-wai, "a highly recognizable auteur" in widespread areas of film criticism (Biancorosso 2016: 182), his fictionalisation of the protagonists' passionate, uncontrollable, but also intimidating, acts of touching and being touched by each other insinuates social distancing measures taken during the 2003 SARS epidemic in Hong Kong, resulting in the suspension of *2046* (2004), Wong's other auteurist film project that he had conceived in 1997 to ponder over "the implications of Hong Kong's return to China" (Teo 2005: 134). In the *Elegy* film series, Alexander Sokurov's avant-

garde filmmaking practice patently evinces his usage of the cinematic medium to exhibit his sensual, emotional and intellectual access to his everyday life-world under investigation, from his perennial fascination with the arts, through his personal journeys to Japan and across the Continent, to his careful and unremitting scrutiny of the turbulent history since the dawn of the twentieth century in Europe and in Russia. Sokurov, as “one of the most widely distributed Russian auteurs of the post-Soviet era” (Beumers and Condee 2011: 1), reveals his physical presence in the world in a cinematically self-reflexive manner to us: the insertion of found footage, his distinctly personalised voice-over commentary that describes his lived experience, and his framing of himself as a filmmaker encountering others, are just a few examples of Sokurov’s overarching manifestation of his being-in-the-world through filmmaking. Within traditional Chinese poetics, Ye Xie’s (1627–1703_{CE}) clear explanation of the “intents” links it with a poet’s personal and mental qualities of “talent”, “judgement”, “courage” and “strength”, so that such a paradigm of the poetic subjectivity points to the fact that, in response to the universe, the poet needs to be equipped with an individual mind which facilitates a subtle understanding of the outer world (Liu 1975: 85; Owen 1992: 512-513; Pohl 1992: 12-14; Cai 2002: 66). While Terrence Malick, throughout a body of films made in the 2010s, undertakes to comprehend underlying principles immanent in the cosmos, he also alludes to and even quotes philosophical and literary works that he has absorbed, such as Plato’s the *Symposium*, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, Søren Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* and *The Sickness unto Death*, and novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, as Robert Sinnerbrink’s interpretation of his films unveils (Sinnerbrink 2019:

174). Malick's own structure of knowledge that comes into play in these works testifies to his conscious life required for poetic compositions and engagement with the world.

The Engagements of Body and Mind with the Cinematic Medium

Also central to my rigorous investigation into poetic cinema is the formal components of the cinematic medium constitutive of an auteur's stylistic hallmarks, which usually figure as a pivotal, sometimes dominant, theme in critics' and audiences' appreciation, reception, and evaluation of films by Wong, Sokurov and Malick. In agreement with most scholars, who identify Sokurov's avant-garde exploration of the medium's aesthetic potentials, but also unique execution of a range of medium-specific modes of expression, Eva Binder's close analysis of his documentaries, similarly, argues for "a kind of laboratory, a space for experimentation with new techniques and unconventional forms of media experience" (Binder 2011: 37). A convergence of Malick's "artistic intentions, unorthodox production techniques, unique cinematic style, and personal beliefs" always engrosses his audiences, as asserted by an introductory section of a book devoted to Malick's oeuvre (Sikora 2020: ix). Their preoccupation with and innovative use of the medium definitely coincides with the definition of "courage", in Ye Xie's poetics, related to an artist's bold strategies for mastering an artwork's materials and techniques and for expressing what is essentially unique to the artist: "if courage is lacking, brush and ink will shrink back in fear; if courage has hidden itself, then how is talent supposed to make headway?" (Owen 1992: 519; Original Source Ye 1686_{CE}/2014: 168).

When Gary Bettinson traces Wong's stylistic obsessions with film form back to "the modernist generation of European art filmmakers, including Antonioni, Godard, Truffaut, and Fellini" (Bettinson 2015: 24), it is also immediately reminiscent of Pasoli's defence of "the technical/stylistic tradition of a cinema of poetry [which] is born within the bounds of neoformalistic research" (Pasolini 1965/2000: 53). A bewildering range of cinematic devices mentioned by Pasolini, that are irregular, provocative and subvert conventions, such as irritating shots, atypical lighting, incorrect but expressive editing, shaky hand-held camera movements and different lenses on the same face, are apposite for Wong's stylistics employed as well. Bettinson describes Wong's formal experimentation as the disturbance of "visual schemas of legibility" dominant in Hong Kong's popular cinema (Bettinson 2011: 37). In terms of film form standing out in cinema of poetry, the neo-formalist standpoint of Pasolini and Bettinson tallies with Ye's poetics, as Owen's reading of it implies a deep concern to go "beyond the norms" and to create "a new sense of how one 'ought to' write" (Owen 1992: 520), which encourages artists with a poetic mind to experiment with the medium's technical properties.

As discussed, the conception of "heart-mind" (*xin* 心), occupying an integral role in sensing, feeling emotions and thinking, occurs throughout traditional Chinese aesthetics. The poet and painter Yuan Mei's (1716–1797_{CE}) theory of poetry once summarised a holistic experience of seeing, hearing, touching and even tasting, arguing that, in terms of our evaluation of "good poetry", "it is enough to look no further than one's body", since "poetry is nothing but human's nature and affections" (Liu 1962: 73; translation modified; Original Source Yuan 1790_{CE}/1982: 565). I have maintained that the poetics in relation

to “affections” (*qing* 情) in China are practically tantamount to cinema as an embodied medium of sensations, emotions and thoughts, as film phenomenologists like Laura Marks and Jennifer Barker propose. As the terms “affections” and “pattern” (*wen* 文) in several classic treatises in traditional Chinese poetics are usually paired, taking ideas from both ancient Chinese theories of poetry and film phenomenology into account, I highlight the affective medium of poetic cinema as the pillar of the bodily, psychological and intellectual experience. A film’s auteurist expression through the audiovisual medium can involve the dynamics of psychosomatic faculties. Sokurov in *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001), as we have seen, “gives account of his feeling, impressions, and reflections” (Rascaroli 2017: 26), but also often frames, through painterly effects, his own body wandering, perceiving, smelling, touching, shivering, and meditating.

More importantly, in audiences’ encounter and engagement with poetic cinema on screen, the centrality of physical and mental experience is pivotal. In the face of Sokurov’s *Oriental Elegy* (1996), the viewers’ perceptual experience of the film’s monochromatic colour scheme, indiscernible music and sounds, and dull, and even distorted, scenery precipitates them into contemplation of its inscrutable realities of individual sufferings, transmigration, and life after death. In Bettinson’s opinion, Wong’s films are “visually sensuous” and “tend to depict and arouse more diffuse emotion states” (Bettinson 2011: 23-24). My examination of the spectatorship of Wong’s cinema reveals how viewers’ lived bodies’ response to its audiovisual combinations can stimulate their emotional reactions, and vice versa. For Joseph G. Kickasola, “Wong shapes and presents flow to us”, a flow comprised of “modulation, control, and alignment of various

perceptual, cognitive, emotional and sensual energies” (Kickasola 2016: 48). I maintain that the aesthetics of flow cinema should best be conceptualised as the flow of *qi* 氣 in the Chinese aesthetic tradition, where the relevant *qi* theories of human bodies validate the poetic being “psychologically and physiologically ‘natural’” (Owen 1992: 43). In terms of the audiences of Malick’s cinema of the 2010s, their bodies, immersed in the medium that functions expressively, kinetically and dynamically, undergo a chain of physiological and psychological processes. If the camera in the cinema of poetry for Pasolini must be “felt for good reasons” (Pasolini 1965/2000: 52), I further argue for the cinematic medium as the site of sensuous, emotional, and thoughtful experiences.

Humans, Objects and Landscapes in Entangled Worlds

Gilles Deleuze’s reading of “an empty or landscape and a still life” in Yasujiro Ozu’s films pinpoints “the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I” (Deleuze 1985/1989: 16). Although Deleuze advises us not to confuse objects with landscapes, to some extent he admits similar and shared functions behind them. In this thesis, I particularly consider the interconnection between “objects” (*wu* 物) and “heart-mind”, as well as between “scenes” (*jing* 景) and “affections” in traditional Chinese poetics, suggesting that not only do these correlated structures deal with how mood is evoked in poetic cinema, but they also manifest some certain values and ontology of the world being experienced.

The emotions captured and triggered in Wong’s works, according to Bettinson, are

not as “saturated, specific, and unambiguous” as those in Hong Kong popular cinema; “drenched in mood”, as Bettinson maintains, “Wong’s cinema elicits powerful yet diffuse emotional responses” (Bettinson 2011: 23). Throughout the thesis, rather than align the traditional poetics of “affections” in China with the cognitive approach to emotions in popular films, which foregrounds genre expectations and psychological responses to stories, characters and dramatic effects, I adopt a phenomenological framework of cinematic moods as advanced by Sinnerbrink, who suggests: moods “contribute to the aesthetic composition of cinematic world” affectively charged (Sinnerbrink 2012: 154).

Moods diffuse and permeate in poetic cinema in that, as the above two intentional structures proposed in traditional China poetics are concerned with the evocation of moods, objects and landscapes in the diegesis, they incline to resonate with characters’ perceptual, sensual and emotional lives. More than this, film devices are deployed to express such subjective relationships, construct atmospheres, and build up the kinetic bodily and affective attunement between characters and viewers. The philosophical concept of *qi* 氣 prevailing in East Asian cultural spheres helps explain such a deep, pervasive and overwhelming sense of connectedness between humans, objects and landscapes. Consistent with this notion, I further reveal the myriad objects and natural landscapes presented in Malick’s cinema existing in a unified and energetic field of *qi*, in which human and nonhuman are entwined together. Poetic cinema viewed through traditional Chinese poetics, eventually, is this manifestation of the bond between subject and object, and subjective feelings and objective circumstances in the universe.

Future Research

Referring back to a series of films examined in this thesis, I have primarily focused on feature-length fiction cinema, except Malick's *Voyage of Time: Life's Journey* counted as "an experimental poetic documentary" (Sinnerbrink 2019: 151), and Sokurov's *Elegy* film series with *Elegy of a Voyage*, which is recognised as "a hybrid, intentionally puzzling, deeply unorthodox work" (Rascaroli 2017: 26). The hybridising nature of works such as *Elegy of a Voyage*, *Oriental Elegy* and *Francofonia: An Elegy for Europe* might lead to future research that can further confirm some hypotheses that I formulate by applying them to documentary, avant-garde cinema, essay film, expanded cinema, artists' moving image, among other genres. Bill Nichols lists six major modes of documentary filmmaking, one of them being the poetic mode, which approximates "experimental, personal, and avant-garde filmmaking" and "stresses mood, tone, and affect" (Nichols 2010: 31, 162). In *The Bridge* (Joris Ivens, 1928), *Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright, 1934) and *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955), the expressive quality of these documentaries, Nichols argues, renders lived realities affective and encourages audiences to perceive and experience the world in a particular way. While there are interesting parallels between Nichols's summary of the aesthetics of the poetic mode of documentary and my conception of poetic cinema, it has potential for future scholars to investigate other more contemporary documentaries with personal and experimental elements. Even though my focus on the cinematic medium has included theories by experimental filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Germaine Dulac and Maya Deren, a

systematic theorisation of avant-garde cinema might also constitute the objective of future research. As the junction of documentary, art and experimental cinema, the essay film in most recent decades attracts growing scholarly interest, often underpinned by theories of essay advanced by Michel de Montaigne, Theodor Adorno, and György Lukács, as evidenced by *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (2009) by Laura Rascaroli, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (2011) by Timothy Corrigan, and *The Essay Film after Fact and Fiction* (2018) by Nora M. Alter. The fact that, in China, “prose is an independent literary genre privileged (with poetry) over fiction and drama” (Cai 2020b: 338), it also invites scholars to reflect on the diverse practices of essay film from the viewpoint of the Chinese poetic tradition. On a larger scale, more research in the future is needed to explore ways in which other theories from traditional Chinese aesthetics might shed new light on some crucial issues relating to cinematic aesthetics in film studies in the Euro-American discourse.

The structure of my thesis has been, in part, informed by some aesthetic categories in China, Sikong Tu’s *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* in particular. In this regard, a number of other categories, such as “Transcendence”, “Subtle Reserve” and the Daoist term of *ziran* 自然 translated as “naturalness”, “spontaneity” or “self-so”, shall present innovative ideas for scholars interested in transcultural criticism. Stephen Teo’s revisit of Paul Schrader’s notion of transcendental style in cinema has interpreted Robert Bresson’s and Carl Theodor Dreyer’s works from the Eastern concept of transcendence. It would be useful to extend the range of Teo’s research scope to analyse contemporary cinema, such as that of Angela Schanelec influenced by both Bresson and Yasujiro Ozu.

“Subtle Reserve”, as the aesthetic principle of ambiguity and suggestiveness essential in Chinese literary thought (Owen 1992: 328; Gu 2005: 63), might contribute to scholars’ ongoing critical discussions on ambiguous cinema (Hven 2017; Law 2021; Fuery 2022). Ecocinema theory and criticism will benefit from the Daoist ecological framework as well, as contemporary ecocriticism has initiated this alliance (Wei 2018; Xu 2021; Wei and Li 2021). Apart from specific affective categories in traditional Chinese poetics, we have seen more broadly that versatile artists in China often participated in poetry, painting and calligraphy, the so-called “three perfections [...] practiced together in single works of art” (Fong and Murck 1991: xv). Because these practices all involve ink, brush, and paper, for Peter Rist, their theoretical principles of media, comparable to medium-specific modernist art where “the representational content of painting, photography and cinema becomes less important than the medium itself” (Rist 2016: 52), are still relevant in terms of cinematic experiments with narrative and visuality. Pushing Rist’s comment a step further, it is also possible to conceive that future scholars’ investigation into film and the other arts might adopt a point of view from the interrelationship between poetry, calligraphy and painting in China. Of course, insofar as my treatment of poetic cinema revolves around merely a few selective terms in traditional Chinese aesthetics, other concepts, like “spirit” (*shen* 神), “image” (*xiang* 象), “momentum” (*shi* 勢), “flavour” (*wei* 味), as well as *yi* 意, “the most difficult technical term” (Owen 1992: 594), that implies “the lived experience of consciousness” (Jullien 2003/2009: 221), are promising too for future in-depth research in film studies. I have, in the thesis, endeavoured to fill the gap of the understandings of the poetic in cinema between the East Asian and the Euro-

American, which I hope will open up opportunities for transcultural observations on film.

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Filmography

2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, USA/UK, 1968)

2046 (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/France/Italy/China/Germany, 2004)

8½ (Federico Fellini, Italy/France, 1963)

A City of Sadness (Hou Hsiao-hsien, Taiwan/Hong Kong, 1989)

A Humble Life (Aleksander Sokurov, Japan, 1997)

A Sixth Part of the World (Dziga Vertov, Soviet Union, 1926)

A Woman Is a Woman (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1961)

Alexandra (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/France, 2007)

Ashes of Time (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/China, 1994)

Au Hasard Balthazar (Robert Bresson, France/Sweden, 1966)

Badlands (Terrence Malick, USA, 1973)

Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, Soviet Union, 1925)

Beau Travail (Claire Denis, France, 1999)

Bicycle Thieves (Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1948)

Blow-up (Michelangelo Antonioni, UK/Italy/USA, 1966)

Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, United States, 1967)

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, United States, 2005)

Buenos Aires Zero Degree (Pun-Leung Kwa/Amos Lee, Hong Kong, 1999)

Café Lumière (Hou Hsiao Hsien, Japan/Taiwan, 2003)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Tim Burton, USA/UK/Australia, 2005)

Chungking Express (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong, 1994)

Days of the Eclipse (Aleksander Sokurov, Soviet Union, 1988)

Days of Heaven (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978)

dolce... (Aleksander Sokurov, Japan/Russia, 1999)

Elegy of Life: Rostropovich, Vishnevskaya (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia, 2006)

Elegy of a Voyage (Aleksander Sokurov, France/Russia/The Netherlands, 2001)

Empire (Andy Warhol, USA, 1964)

Eniaios (Gregory Markopoulos, USA, 2004)

Eros (Michelangelo Antonioni/Steven Soderbergh/Wong Kar-wai, USA/Italy/Hong Kong/China/France/Luxembourg/UK, 2004)

Father and Son (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/Germany/Italy/The Netherlands, 2003)

Faust (Brakhage, USA, 1987–1989)

Francofonia: An Elegy for Europe (Aleksander Sokurov, France/Germany/The Netherlands, 2015)

Germany, Year Zero (Roberto Rossellini, Italy/France, 1948)

Happy Together (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong, 1997)

Hero (Zhang Yimou, China/Hong Kong, 2002)

Hidden (Michael Haneke, France/Austria/Germany/Italy, 2005)

Hiroshima mon amour (Alain Resnais, France/Japan, 1959)

House of Flying Daggers (Zhang Yimou, China, 2004)

Hubert Robert. A Fortunate Life (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia, 1996)

In the Mood for Love (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/France, 2000)

Knight of Cups (Terrence Malick, USA, 2015)

L'Eclisse (Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/France, 1962)

Local Hero (Bill Forsyth, UK, 1983)

Melancholia (Lars von Trier, Denmark/Sweden/France/Germany, 2011)

Mirror (Andrey Tarkovsky, Soviet Union, 1975)

Mother and Son (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/Germany, 1997)

Mothlight (Stan Brakhage, USA, 1963)

Mournful Unconcern (Aleksander Sokurov, Soviet Union, 1987)

Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, USA/France, 2001)

Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, France, 1955),

Nostalgia (Andrey Tarkovsky, Soviet Union/Italy, 1983)

Once Upon a Time in America (Sergio Leone, USA, 1984)

Ordet (Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark, 1955)

Oriental Elegy (Aleksander Sokurov, Japan/Russia, 1997)

Peasant Elegy (Aleksander Sokurov, Soviet Union, 1978/1988)

Pickpocket (Robert Bresson, France, 1959)

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960)

Raiders of the Lost Ark (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1981)

Red Desert (Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/France, 1964)

Red Sorghum (Zhang Yimou, China, 1985)

Robert. A Fortunate Life (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia, 1996)

Russian Ark (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/Germany, 2002)

Sacrifice (Andrey Tarkovsky, Sweden/UK/France, 1986)

Save and Protect (Aleksander Sokurov, Soviet Union, 1989)

Shara (Naomi Kawase, Japan, 2003)

Solaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, Soviet Union, 1972)

Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright, UK, 1934)

Soviet Elegy (Aleksander Sokurov, Soviet Union, 1989)

Spiritual Voices: From the Dairies of War (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/Japan, 1995)

Spring in a Small Town (Fei Mu, China, 1948)

Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, Soviet Union, 1979)

Strike (Sergei Eisenstein, Soviet Union, 1925)

Stranger Than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, USA/West Germany, 1984)

Summer with Monika (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1953)

Talk to Her (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 2002)

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (James Cameron, USA, 1990)

The Bridge (Joris Ivens, The Netherlands, 1928)

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Julian Schnabel, France, 2007)

The Grandmaster (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/China/USA, 2013)

The Hand (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/China, 2004)

The New World (Terrence Malick, USA, 2005)

The Thin Red Line (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998)

The Tree of Life (Terrence Malick, USA, 2011)

The Sun (Aleksander Sokurov, Russia/Italy/Switzerland/France, 2005)

The Wheel (Abel Gance, France, 1923)

To the Wonder (Terrence Malick, USA, 2012)

Tropical Malady (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand, 2005)

Ugetsu Monogatari (Kenji Mizoguchi, Japan, 1953)

Un Chien Andalou (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, France, 1929)

Vampyr (Carl Theodor Dreyer, Germany/France, 1932)

Van Gogh (Alain Resnais, France, 1948)

Veronika Voss (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1982)

Voyage of Time: Life's Journey (Terrence Malick, USA, 2016)

Voyage to Italy (Roberto Rossellini, Italy/France, 1954)

Wild Strawberries (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1951)

Winter Light (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1963)

Yellow Earth (Chen Kaige, China, 1984)