

2018

## East, west, and gendered subjectivity : the music of Wong Kar-Wai

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## ABSTRACT

### EAST, WEST, AND GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY: THE MUSIC OF WONG KAR-WAI

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This study considers how Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-wai's use of music reinforces a transnational relationship between film and audience. The director's employment of preexisting music offers a compelling view into the psyche of his female characters and privileges their subjectivities, even when male protagonists have narrative supremacy. Through this lens of transnationalism and gendered subjectivity, this thesis examines five of Wong's best-known films, looking at how they employ music in distinctive ways. *As Tears Go By* (1988) displays the beginnings of Wong's "MTV aesthetic," and shows his unique use of music can be seen even in his earliest work. Wong's use of music in *Chungking Express* (1994) is the centerpiece of this study, illustrating how music functions as an extension of female voice and how gendered subjectivity is given primacy through music, subverting and transforming the film's narrative and focus. In an interesting gendered variation, *Happy Together* (1997) uses music to communicate the dysfunctions of a queer relationship and express the dissonance of two gay male characters hopelessly in love. *In the Mood for Love* (2000) goes beyond music signifying a single character's subjectivity, and expresses the shared subtle emotions of a heteronormative couple. Finally, *2046* (2004), Wong's postmodern epic, presents a narrative that is fractured and layered; similarly, the music is layered, complicated, and fractured, yet still narratively significant and communicating characters' subjectivity.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
DE KALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2018

EAST, WEST, AND GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY:  
THE MUSIC OF WONG KAR-WAI

BY

ERIK KERSTING  
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Thesis Director:  
Scott Balcerzak

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While preparing for and writing this project I had help from many people more experienced than I in the process of writing a longer document, and to them I am beyond grateful. I would like to thank my thesis director Scott Balcerzak for meeting with and guiding me through the process of choosing a thesis topic, writing a prospectus, writing the thesis, and editing this document. Professor Balcerzak's courses on film were crucial to the theoretical underpinning of the project; he also helped me contain my many ideas and focus on the connections I could make between music across Wong Kar-wai's films, greatly strengthening this thesis. I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Professors Mark Van Wienen and Joe Bonomo, whose comments on style, nostalgia, and a whole host of other topics have helped me grow as a writer and academic. Finally, I would like to thank my wife for watching these films with me, helping talk through my ideas, and continually supporting my academic endeavors.

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## Introduction

In the 30 years since Wong Kar-wai directed and released his first film, *As Tears Go By* (1988), his films have become internationally praised for how they break boundaries of East and West to reach international audiences. The high quality and success of Wong's work are often attributed to his powerful visuals. In critical response, the role music plays in his films remains underdiscussed. Yet Wong himself writes in *Moviemakers' Master Class*:

Music is very important in my films. Yet I rarely have music composed for my films because I find it very hard to communicate with musicians. They have a musical language; I have a visual one... I use music during all stages of the film process. Of course, I use it when I'm editing. And one thing I particularly like to do is use period music in contemporary films. Because music is like a color. It is a filter that tints everything in a different shade. And I find that using music from another time than the one in which the image is set makes everything a little more ambiguous, a little more complex. (198)

For the purpose of this thesis, I want to highlight two specific functions music has in Wong's works: its emotional evocativeness and its connection to character subjectivity, in particular, female subjectivity. In Wong's films, music often subverts the context of a scene and changes in meaning over the course of the narrative, which as Wong himself puts it, “tints everything in a different shade.” As an internationally acclaimed director, Wong's use of preexisting international music emotionally connects his audience to his films through a common language, despite much of his Western audience's inability to understand the spoken language of his films. Thus, Wong's emotionally evocative use of music is fundamentally transnational, both as communication toward his audience and through creating transnational characters. The director's use of preexisting music offers a particularly compelling view into the psyche of his female characters and privileges their subjectivities. While many of Wong's male protagonists have narrative supremacy or have voice-overs indicating their subjectivity, Wong's female characters often use music as an extension of their voice or emotions. This extension allows them

to communicate to other characters and to the audience. This “overwriting” of the film through music ultimately communicates feminine desire in a way that transcends traditional cinematic language, and as such, deepens Wong's characters.

My methodology for this project is rooted in viewing music as something more than language that acts as communication between a film and its audience. This approach is particularly important because, internationally, Wong's films have won appeal and generated critical discussion despite Western audiences not understanding their language. Music transcends language, as Peter Larsen writes in *Film Music*: “music is *something other than* language and gestures and narrative. It is [used in film] because music is *music*” (218). Thus, it can be assumed that music has something to tell us about transnational connection in Wong's films that goes beyond just narrative. Also, music as communication is perhaps why Wong is often described as a highly emotive director. Russell Lack discusses this kind of use for music in cinema in *Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music*: “Film Music is a highly coded form of emotional message; its tones and cadences seem to appeal to something 'wired in' to us, triggering the appropriate emotional response to the appropriate moment” (174). I intend to do a reading of Wong's films viewing music as communication between film and audience, connecting that use as it may relate to gendered subjectivity and transnational communication.

Just as conceptualizations of East and West overlap in the city of Hong Kong, they overlap in Wong's use of music. Almost all of Wong's films contain both Western and Cantonese music, often mixing the two together, such as in Wong's debut film *As Tears Go By*, whose musical and emotional underpinning is a Cantonese cover of Berlin's Academy Award-winning song “Take My Breath Away.” Yet Western pop hits, such as “Take My Breath Away,” are often

popular around the globe, including Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, and China. The inclusion of popular Western music in an Asian film is common and unnotable, but it is in the kinds of Western music Wong uses and how he uses it that his work often becomes an embodiment of contemporary transnationalism. Rather than simply imitating Western music and films, Wong appropriates them into new emotional situations and pulls from a wide variety of international sources. The soundtrack of a Wong Kar-wai film such as *2046* (2004) includes original music composed for the film by Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi, German music from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films, Italian Opera, Latin music from Cuban Xavier Cugat, Dean Martin's cover of "Sway," the Jazz music of Nat King Cole, New Age Irish-Norwegian music, and more. The incredible diversity of Wong's musical palette places him at the forefront of cinematic transnationalism, with Asian, European, North and South American music blending together within the same films, all to maintain the complex and rich underpinning that makes Wong's films emotionally resonant among critical audiences globally.

In their chapter of *Remapping World Cinema*, "Situating World Cinema as a Theoretical Problem," Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim attempt to "remap" world cinema by creating a new set of criteria for analyzing it. They emphasize the interconnection of international cinema, writing,

Precisely because we live in transnational and postcolonial times, spaces within national boundaries are already hybridised and crossed, though this does not in any way undercut the imperative to continue crossing boundaries of all kinds, including national, political and gender. Insofar as cinematic practices and representations are interpenetrable, the study of World Cinema has to be remapped to fully recognize this hybridity and boundary crossing. (10)

Wong's diverse use of music perfectly fits this interpenetrable pattern. Continually over the course of his career not only does Wong use music from all sorts of genres and nationalities; he

reappropriates it for a Hong Kong-centric plots and characters. A song like “California Dreamin’” may be culturally significant in a film like *Forrest Gump* (1994) because of its Vietnam War connotations, but in *Chungking Express* (1994) it is used as a woman's voice and connected to her desire for travel and change. Thus, an analysis of Wong's use of music from a transnational perspective helps dissolve traditional Western connotations of “World Cinema” that limit nationalities by imaginary fixed boundaries, especially considering Wong subverts Western expectations with his use of music as well as conforms to them, often in the use of a single song.

Gendered readings of Wong's work are somewhat scarce, which is surprising since the director often privileges female characters, their stories, and their subjectivity in his films. Faye Wong's character in *Chungking Express* (also called Faye) may be the most pronounced example of this subjectivity, but it is also clearly present in the female characters of *2046* and Maggie Cheung's characters in *As Tears Go By* and *In the Mood for Love* (2000). As such, female subjectivity is an important aspect of his films that currently lacks critical discussion, especially in relation to discussion of male directors directing the stories of women. Thus, I want to extend this approach to the already dense and interesting conversation about Wong as a transnational filmmaker with one foot in the East and West through the lens of considering his distinctive use of music. This reading of Wong is one of the larger critical discussions on the director, and it is important because it helps dissolve traditional notions of “East” and “West” as separate entities, since, in the modern world of film the two are conjoined both artistically and industrially. By contributing to this discussion, this thesis continues to illuminate the transnational nature of film as popular art and understand the complex relationship between film, music, and gender.

The “male gaze,” as famously designated by feminist scholar Laura Mulvey, is the

dominant way gender is discussed in relation to subjectivity in film because many cinematic techniques privilege male subjectivity. Thus, feminine subjectivities must go beyond traditional forms of communication between spectator and film. Sue Thornham discusses this in *What If I Had Been the Hero?*: “If I [a woman] am not the hero, then, I must transgress some dominant narrative codes, and the psychoanalytic structures they reproduce” (12). Music as emotive communication is an excellent example of transgressing traditional narrative codes. Wong's female characters are consistently paired with music and occasionally, as in the case of *Chungking Express's* Faye, directly choose the music the audience hears. Thornham also writes, “[Narratives] must... articulate a female desire that is both investigative and the mark of an adult subjectivity” (15). Faye dreams of exploring the world and living abroad and ends the narrative as an airline attendant; thus the songs she obsessively presents to the audience, The Mama and Papa's “California Dreamin'” and The Cranberries' “Dreams,” make immediate sense as subjective articulations of her feminine desire. Other uses of music associated with female characters in Wong's films can also be read as potential articulations of desire. Throughout all of Wong's films, music is an important emotional signifier and crucial for understanding narrative, yet often conveys different moods and themes.

In what follows, this thesis will examine five of Wong's most best-known films, examining how they employ music and the variations between them. *As Tears Go By* will be used to display the beginnings of Wong's “MTV aesthetic,” and show how Wong's unique use of music can be seen even in his earliest work. Wong's use of music in *Chungking Express* will be the centerpiece of this thesis, and I will focus on how music functions as an extension of female voice and how gendered subjectivity is given primacy through music and how that subjectivity

subverts and transforms the film's narrative and advocates for romance. In an interesting gendered variation, *Happy Together* (1997) uses music to communicate the dysfunctions of queer relationship and express the dissonance of two gay male characters hopelessly in love, but also hopelessly unable to make their relationship work. *In the Mood for Love* goes beyond music signifying a single character's subjectivity, and instead expresses the shared subtle emotions of the heteronormative couple delicately. Finally, *2046*, as Wong's postmodern epic, presents a narrative that is fractured and layered; similarly, the music is layered, complicated, and fractured, but is still narratively significant and communicates characters' subjectivity. But before analyzing these cultural and gendered variations, I will provide a brief critical overview of how Western critics have understood music in Wong's films.

### **Formalism, Transnationalism, Aesthetics, and Theory**

Western discussions of Wong usually fall into familiar theoretical disciplines such as formalism, transnationalism, aesthetics, and postmodernism. And these critical categories extend to how Wong's employment of music has been discussed as well. For example, Peter Brunette's book *Wong Kar-wai* is a formalist Western take on Wong's work, as Brunette himself writes, "my approach in this book relies on European formal aesthetics" (xiv). His analysis chronologically covers each of Wong's films, concluding with *2046*, and briefly comments on major themes, motifs, and visual ideas present. Brunette is chiefly concerned with the visual component of Wong's films, writing, "I want to emphasize especially the graphic expressivity of so much of what Wong does... I want to focus on the way Wong's films signify in formal visual terms" (xv). Brunette's focus is on visual aesthetic rather than narrative, as he writes that "Wong often privileges audio/visual expressivity over narrative structure" (54). While Brunette notes that the

music of Wong's films has been “largely neglected” (xv) and includes featuring it in his list of aims, he is mostly concerned with how sound “‘activates' much of what is visually brilliant in [Wong's films]” (xv).

Providing a fuller artistic understanding for Wong's musical choices, Gary Bettinson's aesthetic reading of the poetics of Wong's work, *The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-wai: Film Poetics and the Aesthetic of Disturbance*, “treats Wong's films from the perspective of a poetics of cinema” (2). Bettinson extends reading Wong outside of a cultural context, writing, “I aim to show that a poetics can shed light on aspects of Wong's cinema typically neglected by culturalist criticism.” Outside of discussing Wong's aesthetic of disturbance and the poetics of his films, Bettinson does spend a chapter discussing Wong's use of music and gives a thorough review of the critical analysis that has been done. Bettinson critiques analysis of music in Wong's work, writing that

critical reception of Wong's music tracks has been governed by reigning paradigms within academic film studies. To some extent, Wong's musical evolution has been assimilated, by critics, to the emerging trends in film theory and criticism. Consequently, these critical perspectives at times overstate (and oversimplify) certain aspects of Wong's music tracks, particularly at the level of cultural and sociological meaning. By contrast, the ways that music operates formally, narratively, and thematically have been qualitatively neglected. (27)

Bettinson explains that Wong has been described by Western critics in postmodern terms, stating, “authorship, cinephilia, postmodernism, MTV aesthetics—such were the contexts by which Wong's use of music was explicated in the mid-to late 1990s” (30), which then changed as criticism changed: “Now the 'MTV auteur' had emerged as an exponent of nostalgia cinema.” Bettinson also writes, “With a few notable exceptions critics have tended to subsume [*Chunking Express's*] musical strategies to the sociological, postmodernist, and other 'grand theories' of film

and culture” (39). But, for the most part, these readings ignore situating Wong as a Hong Kong filmmaker, which is problematic because, as Stephen Teo notes in his book *Wong Kar-wai*, Wong is a filmmaker “grounded in Hong Kong” (1). As such, Bettinson does offer a smart reading of the music in *Chungking Express*, as he appreciates “how Wong formally integrates music into discrete sequences and how music is distributed across the film as a whole. Not only does a poetics analysis reveal Wong's effort to unify musical style and story; it also spotlights the characters' psychological traits and shifting relationships” (39). Bettinson also understands the importance of music in Wong's films in general, contending, “Above all, Wong makes music indispensable to narrative meaning” (48). If this is true, then one must go beyond postmodern theory when examining Wong's use of music, to understand how music connects to narrative.

Giorgio Biancorosso has done the most significant work explicitly discussing music in Wong's films, in both volume and range of content, publishing multiple book chapters on the subject. While important, his scholarship tends to fall into traditions discussed by Bettinson of viewing Wong through mostly Western theory. Biancorosso's reading of Wong's music in “Songs of Delusion: Popular Music and the Aesthetics of the Self in Wong Kar-wai's Cinema” is an example of this subsumption. Biancorosso's reading discusses subjectivity, as he writes, “Whether used as source or score, the music does not merely project subjectivity; rather, it is an element of image-in-the-making whose roots are traceable to the world of cinema” (123). However, Biancorosso aligns this subjectivity exclusively in postmodern terms, writing, “the songs are not merely heard or simply embraced: They are literally worn by the characters as an essential element of their apparel. The transmutation of musical sounds into elements of an iconography, and the coalescing of the latter back into the former, is of the essence to Wong's

characterizations and points to a long-overdue redefinition of portraiture as a multimedia construct” (123). This kind of reading can be limiting to Wong's films and their characters. Describing the music as clothing or a passive element of characterization removes the music as an extension of the character's actions, specifically as their voice. This is most clear with the character of Faye in *Chungking Express*, who not only has autonomy over the music of the film, as she chooses its diegetic music, but whose loud music is a signifier and form of communication to the other characters and has a direct influence on their decisions. Therefore, the music is not just an element of their apparel or part of their portraiture; it is a form of communication both in the world of the film toward other characters, and outside the world of the film toward the audience.

Biancorosso discusses preexisting music in Wong's films in “Global Music/Local Cinema: Two Wong Kar-wai Pop Compilations.” He writes that Wong's songs “offer a *prima facie* secure, reliable window onto Wong Kar-wai's musical knowledge, taste and ability to probe the global music market” (230), but his overall argument is not trying to assess transnational dynamics in Wong's work. Biancorosso is instead concerned with “how the director's use of pre-existing songs has undergone drastic changes under the strictures of a new working environment” and how “songs are of the essence in Wong's cinema.” I certainly agree with Biancorosso on the importance of Wong's use of music, but I disagree on their function as he describes musical segments of Wong's films as “self-contained entities (like set pieces in opera or musical sequences in a musical)” (230). If Wong's music were just set pieces they would have little-to-no narrative value, but, if, as Bettinson contends, music is “indispensable” to the narrative, then its integration in Wong's films refutes Biancorosso's claim that Wong's music is

just apparel or a set piece. This narrative significance of music in Wong's work can be seen as early as Wong's first film.

### ***As Tears Go By* (1988)**

Wong's first film, *As Tears Go By*, blurs the line between East and West and shows the narrative value of his music. The film firmly fits within Hong Kong genre conventions as a gangster film starring two Cantonese pop stars, but is also an homage to Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973) and Jim Jarmush's *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). The similarity and fusion of these works has been noted in discussion of the film, as Stephen Teo writes, "The permutations in the interchange of the gangster and the romance genres form the experimental basis of *As Tears Go By* and are what make the film interesting" (17). The film stars Andy Lau as Wah, a low-level gangster, and Maggie Cheung as Ngor, a waitress on the island Lantau, who stays with Wah when she is in Hong Kong for a medical appointment. Like Harvey Keitel's relationship with Robert De Niro in *Mean Streets*, Wah looks after a younger gangster, Fly (Jacky Cheung), and unsuccessfully tries to steer him away from a life of crime. The transnational nature of Wong's narratives is obvious in *As Tears Go By*, and as in Wong's later films, such as *Chungking Express*, Wong uses Western music to emotionally connect the audience to his characters. The clearest example of this in the film is its central love scene featuring a Cantonese cover of Berlin's "Take My Breath Away." The song is famously featured in Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986) in a scene in which Kelly McGinnis's Charlie admits she has "fallen" for Tom Cruise's Maverick and the two make love. It is used somewhat similarly in *As Tears Go By*, as both scenes' climactic moments have two lead characters kiss for the first time.

Wong's scene starts with an image emphasizing the importance of music to Wong Kar-

wai, the jukebox, which will be revisited in his other films. As Wah sits in a bar, lonely after a conversation with a past lover, an unidentified woman puts a coin in the jukebox. Wong's camera lingers and zooms in on the jukebox as a record containing "Take My Breath Away" is taken out and played. The physicality of the record mirrors the diegetic nature of Wong's use of music, emphasizing that the music is present in the world of the film. Lack notes that "Pop heard diegetically on a radio or jukebox or from a passing car adds a sense of time and place realism which most films strive for" (227), and this is clearly the case in *As Tears Go By*, as the diegetic "Take My Breath Away" acts as a clear aural extension of Wah's mood. Wah has already tried to call Ngor but was unable to reach her; hearing the song, he makes the decision to take the ferry to Lantau to see her. While "Take My Breath Away" starts as diegetic music in the bar, as Wah travels to Lantau it becomes non-diegetic music over a traveling montage. Just as the jukebox is a symbol Wong will return to, this technique of starting a scene with diegetic music then transforming it into a non-diegetic montage will reoccur in his other films. Because music in Wong's films is often diegetic, its emotional impact is amplified. Rather than hearing music accompanying a character's actions, as is the case with most non-diegetic soundtracks, in *As Tears Go By* the audience is hearing music *with* the character, and is thus invited to empathize with them further. When the music moves from diegetic in the bar to non-diegetic while Wah is traveling, the audience is catching a glimpse into the mind of his character, as the music itself is seemingly coming from Wah's thoughts and emotions. Music presented as such feels less contrived and more natural, which helps give Wong's musical montages the "music video" feel they are often described as having. Yet this scene also transcends the music video format, as David Bordwell writes in *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*:

“Unlike most music videos, this sequence holds each image long enough to permit expressive elements to accumulate and step up in lyrical intensity. It is flashy and ingratiating but also rigorous” (279).

As Bordwell notes, the scene reveals itself slowly, with long takes of Wah sitting at the bar and in a bus, traveling to Lantau. When he arrives at Ngor's restaurant he finds that she has ironically been in Hong Kong for the day. Wong waits at the ferry terminal only to find that Ngor is on a date with her doctor. He gets on the ferry back to Hong Kong, but Ngor calls his pager and leaves him a message saying she will be waiting at the next ferry terminal for Wah. The subjectivity of the narrative abruptly shifts to Ngor as she travels to the terminal, even though “Take My Breath Away” is still playing, which should indicate Wah's subjectivity. This is not the first time Wong has shifted to Ngor's subjectivity, the first scene of the film is her experiencing Wah's apartment alone. While music appears in these short moments of female subjectivity, it does not grant much insight into Ngor's mentality or emotional state. As such, Ngor's subjectivity is never truly given primacy in the narrative; instead the film allows just short moments from her perspective. These short moments, featuring her disgust at Wah's bachelor pad or her fear of Wah as he returns home drunk, are small precursors to later, more significant female subjectivities in Wong's films. As she waits at the terminal, thinking Wah will not show up, she is suddenly taken by the hand and Wah rushes her into a phone booth, where they embrace in the confined space as “Take My Breath Away” reaches its climax. This final shot of their embrace lasts almost a minute and ends with a fade to white. While the scene is not objectively shot, the subjectivity of the scene is ultimately ambiguous: the use of “Take My Breath Away” and many of the scene's shots indicate Wah's subjectivity, but the feminine vocals and Wah's romantic act toward Ngor places

her as the one whose breath is being taken away. Regardless, the rhythm of the scene is clear; Wong continually tantalizes the viewer: twice Wah thinks he will see Ngor but his hopes are dashed because she is not at the restaurant and then she is with a new boyfriend; then a third time, Ngor thinks Wah will not show up, yet at the end of the long sequence Wong indulges the viewer with the two lovers' embrace.

Importantly, this scene also establishes another technique Wong often employs, undercranking and step-printing. Teo describes step-printing as “a process that prints selected frames in a sequences to produce a discontinuous, strobing slow-motion effect” (24-5) which

conveys a dreamlike and romantic sensation that we identify with the heroic protagonist. Wah is the bearer and translator of Wong's innermost feelings, and the strobing slow motion shows the process of translation, as if Wong, when relieved of his feelings, draws them out in a blurred form, manifesting the discordance between impression and expression. (25)

Patrick Sullivan, in “Undercranking and Step-printing in Wong Kar-wai's Filmography,” writes, “Undercranking reduces the number of frames capturing the event in front of the camera” (236) and ultimately, “While cinema has always been fascinated and predicated on movement, movement and, by extension, time become the focus of undercranked footage” (236). This technique becomes a staple of Wong's, and Sullivan writes this scene is the “original moment that couples the pairing of undercranking and step-printing with love” (240), which Sullivan views as important to reading Wong: “Wong uses [the pairing of undercranking and step-printing] to reflect the experience of love. The combination visually reflects the way moments of love distort time for the individual” (246). Further, this pairing with time expands the theme of temporality present in many of Wong's films: “Wong's pairing suggests that during moments of love, time is in flux for the individual, alternating between lingering and hastened moments, and

that this perception of time separates the individual from the rest of the world” (246). While Wong certainly places importance on distorting time with cinematic techniques, Sullivan does not recognize the impact music has on many of these scenes. The “Take My Breath Away” scene in *As Tears Go By* is only the first of these moments, as throughout Wong's cinematic career he uses music, as well as step-printing and undercranking, often paired together, to show the distortion of time for those in love. Not only does music work with step-printing and undercranking to reflect the slowing down of time for Wong's characters; it also shows the speeding up of time. In *As Tears Go By* an entire day is condensed into a few minutes with the aid of “Take My Breath Away.”

The use of “Take My Breath Away” fits within Peter Larsen's assertion that music is “something other than language” (218) in film, or for the case of this thesis, something *more* than language. The vast majority of the scene lacks dialogue, and instead Wong communicates to the audience through his long takes and importantly with music. The melancholic sonic nature of the tune, as well as its lyrics, communicates character desire in a way that dialogue cannot. “Take My Breath Away” acts on two important emotional levels. First it helps the audience connect to Wah's feeling of being “lovelorn” (a translated phrase from earlier in the film) as he sits in the bar after seeing an old love. The English version of the song itself easily fits within Wong's canon and *As Tears Go By*, with feelings of lovesickness, “Watching, I keep waiting, still anticipating love,” and lines connecting time and love, “Through the hourglass I saw you, in time you slipped away.” Second, despite initial feelings of love lost, it is the consummation of the relationship that “Take My Breath Away” ends on, transforming a song that, for Wah and the audience, was indicative of his loneliness, into one of excitement and passion. Often in Wong's

films, the meaning of a particular song, as with “Take My Breath Away,” changes over the course of the narrative. This points to how time is in flux when an individual is in love, as well as relating to Wong's desire to show emotional complexities and colors in motion. Just as the characters and their emotions are not static in Wong's films, the purpose of his use of music continues to subversively transform emotionally over time.

Ultimately, this scene from *As Tears Go By* acts like a rough version of similar moments in Wong's later films. The emotional impact of Wah and Ngor's relationship is stifled because it often comes second in the film to Wah's relationship to Fly and the mostly forgettable violent scenes necessary for the gangster genre. Also, while in later films, music will be more clearly connected to specific characters subjectivities, in *As Tears Go By* just whose subjectivity we are experiencing remains vague at times. Yet this scene is useful as a prelude to Wong's later films, in which he will formally use music in similar ways, diegetically, as an extension of character subjectivity, and as a strong, emotive form of communication between director and audience. This scene, with its musical montage and use of “Take My Breath Away,” also appears to be the main draw of the film, at least for Western audiences, as the film's posters feature Wah and Ngor's embrace in the telephone booth and Peter Brunette calls the scene “the most powerful, emotionally convincing one in the entire film” (13). Thus, this scene shows that from the beginning of his career, Wong has understood the emotional effectiveness of music, and sought to use it in his own unique way. As opposed to Wong's later use of international music in his films, in which he often subverts the cultural connotations of especially American and British music, his use of “Take My Breath Away” does resemble how it was used in *Top Gun* (1986) as a romantic overture; both scenes climactically have main characters kiss for the first time to the

song, feature some sort of “chase” between a romantic couple, and mark the beginning of a relationship. Thus, while some hallmarks of Wong's style can be found in his use of “Take My Breath Away” in his first feature-length film, it is also apparent that between *As Tears Go By* and his later films he became more confident in using Western music for his own purposes.

### ***Chungking Express* (1994)**

Wong's use of music is significantly expanded in *Chungking Express*, but the hallmarks of his style as displayed in *As Tears Go By* remain. *Chungking Express* is a film split into two parts. The first section follows Bridgitte Lin as a woman in a blonde wig running a drug-smuggling operation and Takeshi Kaneshiro as the heartbroken police officer, He Qiwu. While the two characters' professional lives are never in conflict, they meet in a bar and He Qiwu falls in love with Bridgitte Lin's character. Almost immediately, *Chungking Express* returns to the image of the jukebox. In an early scene in which Bridgitte Lin's character is sorting out a drug smuggling deal with her Westerner boss at the Wally Matt Lounge, the jukebox plays Dennis Brown's Jamaican reggae tune, “Things in Life.” Like in *As Tears Go By*, the act of a character choosing music and the physical presence of the diegetic music is emphasized with a shot of a woman putting a coin into the jukebox to begin the scene. Yet *Chungking Express*'s jukebox is updated to include rotating CDs rather than the vinyl record in *As Tears Go By*, and just as Wong's camera lingers on the jukebox in *As Tears Go By*, Wong chooses to emphasize the musical device again before transitioning scenes. Once again, Wong wants to emphasize to the viewer that the music they are hearing physically exists in the world of the film.

Unlike the usual way Wong uses music in his films—to give the viewer a glimpse into the emotional state of his main characters and as a voice for those characters—“Things in Life” acts

as a musical denotation of the Wally Matt Lounge, as the song plays in all four scenes that take place there. The song remarks a similar philosophy of change to Bridgitte Lin's character, but it ultimately chooses to accept change rather than fight against it. Lin's character remarks in an internal monologue that "I don't know when I started being so cautious. If I put on a raincoat, I wear sunglasses too. You never know if it's going to rain or be sunny." Similarly, Dennis Brown sings in "Things in Life," "It's not everyday we're gonna be the same way, there must be a change somehow, there are bad times and good times too... Today you're up, tomorrow you're down." Both Lin's character and Brown seem to understand that the future brings change, but the song's laid-back reggae nature is juxtaposed by Lin's character's anxiety over her drug deals and her proactive attitude in her professional life, as she resorts to kidnapping and murder later in the plot. Bettinson views the song as contradicting Lin's worldview:

Like many Wong protagonists, the blonde woman not only recoils from change but inauthentically strives to conquer it.... In resolving to preempt, outstrip, and master change, the blonde woman compulsively repudiates the fundamental nature of the world.... Counterpointing the blonde woman's narration, Brown's song hints at the essential futility of her worldview. (40-41)

Yet it is not completely accurate to describe Lin's character as recoiling from change just because she prefers to be prepared. She works in the trafficking of drugs, which of course brings about many unique challenges and changing circumstances. She is also willing to kill her Western boss, a white man, symbolizing significant change for her life. In some ways, her journey, which is marked by proactive change over the passage of time and is juxtaposed by He Qiwu's narrative, in which he passively waits a month before resolving to get over his ex-girlfriend. It is Lin's character who then takes action and calls He Qiwu to wish him happy birthday later in the film. Throughout the first act it is He Qiwu who resists change, while Lin's character enacts it.

The other characters in the first part of the film also seem to associate the song with Lin's character. In the only scene at the Wally Matt Lounge in which Lin's character is not present, the Westerner plays "Things in Life" on the jukebox. As he walks back to the bar, his Asian lover calls to him from the kitchen with a blonde wig in hand, similar to Lin's character. The Westerner puts the wig on his lover and they embrace as Wong cuts back to the image of the jukebox, emphasizing its importance. Thus, while Lin's character is not physically present in this scene, she is present in the thoughts of her double-crossing boss and his lover while the song is being played. The next morning it rains, evoking Lin's monologue about always being prepared. As the Asian lover plays "Things in Life" and dances by the jukebox wearing the wig, the Westerner heads to an alley out back, finding some kittens. While kneeling down and looking at them, Lin's character approaches from behind, shoots him, and walks away, leaving behind her blonde wig. Brunette thinks this moment is particularly significant: "when Lin kills him at the end of the first half of the film, Lin drops her wig in the foreground of the frame, the climactic final gesture of this section of the film, as though she had merged with her alter ego and was declaring their joint independence from the drug dealer's depredations." Yet instead of Lin's character "merging" with her blonde alter-ego, this scene can also be read as Lin rejecting it. Throughout the latter part of the narrative after her run-in with He Qiwu, Lin's character goes from being anxious to thoughtful and decisive; by discarding her blonde wig she is decisively refuting her old life and moving toward a new future. This declaration of agency, and Lin's character's agency throughout the first half of the film, in contrast to He Qiwu, points to a feminist reading of *Chungking Express* in which women take agency while men are idle.

A significant motif in the first part of the film is expiration dates. He Qiwu collects cans

of pineapples with expiration dates for the date a month after his girlfriend breaks up with him, and Lin's Western boss gives Lin's character a can with an expiration date suggesting that if she does not get him the money soon she will "expire." When Lin kills her Western boss she leaves behind a can of food with that day's date on it. This, of course, communicates that the Western boss's time is up, but it also symbolizes the death of Lin's alter ego, as the wig is left behind with the can. Thus, while "Things in Life" begins the film as a juxtaposition to Lin's character's anxiety, as the song plays when she leaves the wig behind, it now represents a new subjectivity. By leaving the wig behind she is no longer trying to conceal herself with the ridiculous outfit of a raincoat, sunglasses, and a wig; instead she is at once incognito, as no one from her previous life will recognize her without the wig, and finally out in the open and vulnerable, with her authentic hair exposed to the rain. Emotionally, "Things in Life" denotes a significant change in Lin's character from anxious to accepting and the care-free nature of the song's instrumentation and melody communicates to the audience this change non-verbally. To emphasize the significance of this moment, Wong returns to step-printing and overcranking as Lin's character shoots her boss and walks away, indicating a distortion of time, though here it is that the boss's time is up. Like in *As Tears Go By*, the first instance of a repeated song signifies one thing, but as the narrative continues, its purpose and meaning shift and often run contrary to previous implications. In this case, while early moments in the film seemed to put Lin's character and "Things in Life" into conflict, the final moments of the first act place Lin's character's subjectivity within the song and represent her agency and narrative arc.

As in the first part of *Chungking Express*, the second section of the film focuses on a lovelorn police officer, Tony Leung's Cop 663, but twists the formula by making Faye Wong's

Faye, who has fallen in love with Cop 663, the primary character. The second story starts with He Qiwu stopping at the Midnight Express, a fast food shop he has frequented over the first half of the film and Faye, a new employee, bumping into him, a frame which Wong freezes. Here He Qiwu remarks in his internal dialogue, "That was the closest we ever got, just 0.01 cm between us. I knew nothing about her. Six hours later, she fell in love with another man." Not only does He Qiwu exit the narrative after this moment of seemingly omnipresence; the opening guitar riff of The Mama and Papas "California Dreamin'," which will come to dominate the latter half of the film, begins to play. As the vocals to the song come in, the freeze frame is broken to cut to Tony Leung's Cop 663 in full uniform writing a note and walking up to the camera. This initially jarring cut not only signifies the beginning of the second part of the film, but also a change in character subjectivity. Both visually and aurally this scene belongs to Faye. As Cop 663 walks up to the camera he speaks directly to it, "One chef's salad, please," and the film cuts to show he is talking to Faye. Thus, the opening shot of the second half of the film is a point of view shot from Faye. "California' Dreamin'" is not just placeholder music, but, like "Things in Life" and "Take My Breath Away," it is diegetic music chosen by a female character, in this case Faye. The song is so loud that Cop 663 spends the entire conversation yelling over it to communicate. It is also key to Faye's initial characterization, as Cop 663 asks her, "You like listening to loud music?" to which she responds, "Yes. The louder the better. Keeps me from thinking so much." Cop 663 then asks her "What do you like?" to which Faye responds, "I'll tell you when I find out. And what do you like?" In their first romantic coupling, Cop 663 signals to Faye to come closer, their faces meet, and he says "Chef's Salad." It is this moment that Faye falls in love with Cop 663, as He Qiwu predicted.

In the film, Wong is reappropriating “California Dreamin’”—a popular American folk rock song from the 1960s—for his own uses. This is in contrast to its use in *Forrest Gump* as the music that plays while Forrest writes letters from Vietnam to his love interest Jenny, which places the song as important culturally because of its connection as a popular song during the Vietnam war. It is also in contrast to the original meaning of the song, which is about homesickness, as Faye's character expressly wishes to leave her home city of Hong Kong and explore the world. Bettinson makes this connection clear by comparing the song's use in *Forrest Gump* (released the same year as *Chungking Express*):

*Chungking Express*, by contrast, is indifferent to its appropriated tune's prior meanings. Not demanding cultural knowledge, it suppresses the song's associations, baggage and historical specificity. It achieves this not only by recontextualizing and defamiliarizing “California Dreamin’” (refusing a narrative context consonant with the song's cultural meanings) but also by throwing weight on the literal meanings embodied in the song's lyrics. (44)

This fits within Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim's discussion of international music as “interpenetrable” and their emphasis on the hybridity of World Cinema, as well as pointing to a decentralization of Hollywood when considering international films. “California Dreamin’” works in *Chungking Express* specifically because it affords the audience the ignorance of not knowing the cultural past of the United States. This decentralizes a Western perspective and allows the song to be reappropriated as a Hong Kong woman's voice.

In the next scene the music of “California Dreamin’” continues to play, skipping around to different sections as the film skips to the next night, but is still diegetic, showing that Faye incessantly listens to it while she works. Faye's interest in Cop 663 and his unavailability is made known here. The manager of the restaurant, Faye's uncle, played by Chan Kam-Chuen, turns off the stereo and takes Cop 663's order. From the back of the restaurant, Faye spies on him

ordering. Cop 663 asks for a chef's salad and reveals it is for his girlfriend. The manager gets him to buy fish and chips and a chef's salad to see which she likes more. As he walks away Faye goes back to the counter and stares, watching Cop 663 walk away, clearly displaying to the audience her interest in him. Over the next couple of scenes, we learn that Cop 663 and his girlfriend break up, all from Faye's perspective. Whenever her uncle is working the counter, music is absent, but whenever Faye is working the counter the music is obstructive and loud. Throughout the film, almost whenever Faye is at the counter, "California Dreamin'" is playing diegetically; in a sense, she stamps these scenes with her own subjectivity by playing music over them. If we consider the song an extension of her voice, then the lyrics of the song, imagining more favorable weather in California, are an extension of Faye's own desire for change, a desire she will act on before the film is done.

As we learn of Cop 663 and his girlfriend's breakup, we get a scene from his perspective for the first time in the film. Like the shift from He Qiwu's subjectivity to Faye's with "California Dreamin'," the audience watches Cop 663 drink some coffee (indicating that he is single) as the film cuts to a plane taking off on a runway. His inner monologue reveals that "On every flight, there's one stewardess you long to seduce. This time last year, at 25,000 feet, I actually seduced one," while Dinah Washington's "What a Difference a Day Makes" begins to play as a non-diegetic soundtrack to his memory. Cop 663 reminisces on his relationship with the stewardess, remembering a time when they spent the day together in his apartment. Wong again uses a Western song to subvert expectations; Bettinson writes, "Wong works against the tune's explicit meaning. No longer does the lyric celebrate the birth of a love affair; now it eulogizes an expired romance" (45). Yet the use of "What a Difference a Day Makes" is also an example of how

Wong's use of music generates complex emotions, for the scene is inherently romantic, reenacting Dinah Washington's joy as she sings, "Brought the sun and the flowers where there used to be rain." But the use of the song is also painfully ironic, as Washington sings, "My yesterday was blue, dear. Today I'm part of you, dear. My lonely nights are through dear. Since you said you were mine." Cop 663's vibrant and lively apartment in this music video-esque scene will soon be juxtaposed with Cop 663's lonely conversations with bars of soap and dish rags. The most emotionally poignant moment of the scene is when the music stops and Cop 663 continues his monologue, "I thought we'd stay together for the long haul, flying like a jumbo jet on a full tank. But there was an unexpected change of course." The stewardess gets up to go and on the escalators outside of Cop 663's apartment waves goodbye and gets up, walking away. If their relationship were still intact to the audience, this ending might be romantic, suggesting future encounters, but since we know their relationship is over, the silence after a long musical montage emphasizes Cop 663's lack; in this way, the lack of music and a direct monologue reflect male subjectivity, while the presence of women introduces music.

As the film progresses, Faye gets a key to Cop 663's apartment through a breakup letter the stewardess leaves at The Midnight Express. Interestingly, this letter leads to one of the most emotionally poignant moments in the film, in which Cop 663 refuses to take the letter. Instead, he orders his customary cup of coffee and leans against the counter and drinks it. Early in the scene, Wong poignantly takes all music out of the scene by having Cop 663 ask Faye to turn down her music, which immediately discomforts her. Wong uses his step-printing and overcranking to show the passing of people quickly, but while 663 drinks his coffee slowly with Faye lying against the counter and watching him, only the sound of an airplane can be heard.

Despite the narrative motivation for the scene being 663's realization that his relationship with the stewardess is truly over, it is Faye's subjectivity that the audience is placed in, as they, like her, are watching him and empathizing with his emotional pain. As 663 walks away from the *Midnight Express*, the audience stays with Faye and watches her watch him leave. When the music, an extension of Faye's voice is playing, it seems as if Faye is the center of attention as an agent of action, but when the music is turned off, it is her ability to listen and empathize that comes through, indicating her femininity and ability to step outside of herself and experience the events of the film like the audience experiences it, as a thoughtful and sympathetic observer. This transcendence importantly places Faye as a female subject capable of "writing over" the plot of the film.

Faye uses the key to clean 663's apartment, get him new fish for his fish tank, replace his canned food, and perform a whole host of other chores for him. Throughout the entire process 663 seems completely unaware. Wong uses culturally re-appropriated Western music in a montage of her remodeling and cleaning with Faye Wong's Cantonese cover of The Cranberries "Dreams." While the song maintains its romantic overtones throughout the scene, the lyrical content of the song is invariably different between versions, not translated directly. In The Cranberries original version, the song is about falling in love with someone who loves you back and how that love is changing the singer's life. Faye Wong's version, rather, is about unrequited love, with Wong singing about a stranger who walked into her heart and set off intense emotions. For instance, The Cranberries' version ends with Dolores O'Riorden singing, "And oh my dreams, it's never quite as it seems, 'cause you're a dream to me, dream to me," while Faye Wong's version ends with Wong singing, "Person in my dreams, this minute I'm waiting. Come

create thrills in my heart, thrills in my heart.” This change better fits the narrative of the film, as Faye clearly has feelings for Cop 663 but he is oblivious to them. Like “California Dreamin” and “What a Difference A Day Makes,” “Dreams” is a popular song and found its way into many films in the 1990s, but unlike its use in romantic comedies like *You've Got Mail* (1998) where it represents the main characters' budding romance or *Mission Impossible* (1995), where it is merely background noise to a scene of narrative resolution, Wong distances himself from traditional Hollywood methods of using music by using it as a representation of Faye's subjectivity and repeats the song to close the film.

In many ways, “Dreams” represents the character Faye's fantasy of being with Cop 663; this reality is only compounded by the fact that the song is sung by singer-actress Faye Wong herself and played while she is role playing as his partner cleaning and remodeling his apartment. This desire and fantasy is key to her female subjectivity, as Thornham writes that “fantasy is to, in [Judith] Butler's words, 'establish the possible in excess of the real' it must reconnect to the body, its desires and its experiences. Put slightly differently, fantasy must connect to history, embodied experience and memory if it is to transform the sedimented narratives with which it must work” (34). Faye's fantasy, represented in “Dreams,” is pertinently connected to her embodied experience and desires, fitting within Thornham's purpose of fantasy within female subjectivity. It is not Cop 663's desires that are central to the plot of *Chungking Express*, but as the music communicates, it is Faye's desires that are essential to the narrative.

While “Dreams” is not diegetic within the world of *Chungking Express*, it does not fit Lack's description that “Non-diegetically used pop music, that which is simply 'there' on the soundtrack along with the narrator's voice, dialogue and other elements... confirms the slick

interplay between the different divisions of global entertainment corporations” (228). Rather than being part of some capitalist entertainment system's blockbusters like its use in *You've Got Mail* and *Mission Impossible*, “Dreams” has a clear function in the narrative as an extension of Faye's subjectivity. Yet again, in some ways “Dreams” has a kind of small conformity to industry norms because Faye Wong's “Dreams” was a hit single off her own 1994 album *Random Thoughts*, relaying a kind of “interplay” between different divisions of Hong Kong entertainment. This song can also act as a dividing moment between Asian audiences and Western audiences, as most Western audiences will not know Faye Wong's background as a pop singer or that it is her voice singing over the montage. A Hong Kong resident would certainly hear Faye Wong's voice as associated with the song and her character as an extension of her pop persona and subjectivity. Yet Western audiences, despite their inability to understand the song's new Cantonese lyrics, still understand the emotional impact of the song, both because of its musical qualities and because of their prior knowledge of the track, similar to “Take My Breath Away's” Cantonese cover in *As Tears Go By*. Thus, the use of Faye Wong's “Dreams” acts as an extraordinary transnational piece of music, originally written by an Irish rock band, reappropriated by Hollywood, covered and rewritten by Faye Wong, and finally, making its way into a Wong Kar-wai film viewed by an international audience. Wong juggles these numerous contexts with apparent ease, and the song acts as a particularly persuasive articulation of Faye's desires.

Faye cannot keep her secret hidden forever, though; one day Cop 663 catches Faye cleaning his apartment. While she escapes, the next evening Cop 663 asks her out. When he asks her out Wong reintroduces “What a Difference a Day Makes.” While the song was initially part of 663's subjectivity and eulogized a relationship, here the song follows Faye as she works,

indicating her joy. Again, we see Wong reusing the same piece of music for two vastly different purposes. Importantly, here it represents different subjectivities, and its juxtaposition with the earlier, melancholic scene, is made more emotionally impactful when considering the prospect for new romance. Ultimately, Wong chooses to further emphasize the importance of Faye's desires in the film. Cop 663 asks Faye on a date to go to a bar called "The California," but Faye chooses to ditch him and leave Hong Kong to become a flight stewardess and see the real California. She still wants to be with him and leaves him a letter, an imaginary boarding pass dated for one year later, but she also realizes that it is her desire to go out and see the world. Faye's uncle stops by "The California" to break the news to 663 and give him the letter. It is at this point that the narrative shifts to 663's perspective. Just before this, we see him in a classic step-printing shot putting a coin in the jukebox to play music, and this penultimate scene will follow him as he dejectedly moves throughout Hong Kong. He sees his first lover but realizes that he has changed and moved on from their relationship, showing that Faye was not just a rebound for him, but a real relationship.

After this scene, Wong shifts the film back to Faye's perspective, a year later, in which she gives her first monologue of the film, saying, "I actually did show up that evening. I knew it would get crowded, so I got there at 7:15. It was pouring outside. Watching through the window, I saw a rainy California. I needed to know if the other California was warm or sunny. I decided to give myself one year." Not only does this place importance on Faye's desires, but it also answers the question of whose narrative this is. It is not some oedipal narrative focused on Cop 663's desires; instead their desires are considered together as both their subjectivities are given time. But Faye is ultimately the primary subject of the film. Because music helps accomplish this

task, the film fits within Thornham repetition of Claire Johnston's question, "is it possible to found 'a new form of language' and to displace the centrality of the Oedipus myth?" (27). Here the "new form of language" is music, as it communicates Faye's desires to the audience and "writes over" the film as a monologue might. Interestingly, near the end of the film, when Faye finally gives a direct voice-over, she specifically articulates desire, saying she "needed to know" what it was like in California. In this scene Faye has finally returned to Hong Kong and to "The California," and is waiting for Cop 663 (who cannot read the fake boarding pass because it got wet in the rain), Faye tells the audience, "Tonight it's raining as hard as it was then. Looking out this window, there's just one person in my thoughts. I wonder if he ever opened my letter." As Faye looks longingly out the window into the rain, Wong again privileges step-printing and overcranking, and the effect is to disorient the viewer and distort time, as a year passes in the blink of an eye and Faye is waiting at the window in a stewardess's uniform.

In the film's final scene Cop 663 has purchased The Midnight Express and is remodeling it while "California Dreamin'" blasts from the same boombox Faye was using earlier in the film. The song has not just been background music; his choice to listen to it clearly shows a change in his character, that in some ways Faye's subjectivity has not just "overwritten" the film, but also overwritten some part of him (just as Wong perhaps wants to write something upon the audience). In an important reversal of their first meeting, it is now Cop 663 who has chosen to play "California Dreamin'" loudly and he is on the other side of the counter, while Faye is the customer trying to yell over the sound of the music. Faye asks him "Since when do you listen to loud music?" to which 663 replies, "With a little time, I get used to things." While perhaps understated, Faye has had a large impact on 663; instead of being melancholic and morose, as he

was for most of the film, he is now accepting and willing to move on, an instigator of active change for himself.

As the couple reunites, their romance finally seems possible at the end of the film and into the credits. Wong again plays Faye Wong's cover of "Dreams," emphasizing its importance as an emotional signifier of the potential for romance in the narrative. If we consider that "Dreams" was used earlier in the film as a subjective voice for Faye's character, this final moment seems to privilege Faye: she is getting what she desired, and as such, the film is ending with a song representing the fulfillment of that feminine desire. *Chungking Express's* music works on a variety of levels as its use of preexisting songs both makes sense within the narrative of the film and subverts traditional uses, acting as a voice for a female character and an emotional conduit for the audience.

### ***Happy Together* (1997)**

*Happy Together*, for which Wong won the Cannes Film Festival "Best Director Award," represents a general shift from his use of popular American and British music. Despite its English title coming from The Turtles' hit single, Wong begins to experiment with lesser known musicians and songs. The film repeatedly uses music from Argentine tango composer and bandoneón (similar to an accordion) player Astor Piazzollo, who, while immensely popular in Argentina, is relatively unknown outside the country, and Brazilian composer and guitarist Caetano Veloso, again relatively unknown to the rest of the world. The film also features two songs from American experimental rock artist Frank Zappa, and of course, a cover of The Turtles' "Happy Together" by Danny Chung, the film's composer. *Happy Together* follows Tony Leung as Lai Yiu-fai and Leslie Cheung as Ho Po-wing, a gay couple who travel to Argentina to

rekindle their volatile relationship and see the Iguazu waterfalls, but soon after arriving break up. Over the course of the film, which mostly takes place in Buenos Aires, they get back together a few times but ultimately split for good.

If *Chunking Express* generally celebrates heteronormative romance, *Happy Together* acts as a variation on Wong's use of music in that now it is the extension of queer subjectivities. While Martha P. Nochimson argues in "Beautiful Resistance: The Early Films of Wong Kar-wai" that "What makes this one of the best films chronicling gay love ever made is that it never reduces it to merely one of the problems of the straight world; the problems of these lovers are the problems of anyone in love within the terms of a mechanized economic system" (13), the lovers in the film are still exiled queer men. Therefore the direct problems of their relationship may be universal, yet their existence in Argentina as foreigners is, in part, a result of their homosexuality. Thus, while the extent of the "queerness" of *Happy Together* has been debated by scholars, the music of the film reinvents itself in order to accommodate these new subjects; whereas music seems to almost exclusively bring people together in *Chungking Express*, in *Happy Together* it both pushes them together and pulls them apart.

*Happy Together* is perhaps the most directly "transnational" of Wong's films by traditional definitions, as it focuses on Hong Kongers in Argentina. Fredric Jameson, in his essay "globalization and hybridization," uses the film as an example of transnational hybridization, which he defines as a new postmodern process, in which, "what happens is evidently that a single characteristic fragment is selected from one gene and inserted into another one" (316). In this case, "the Hong Kong protagonists are abruptly transported to a setting utterly different from that overpopulated rock on which they have lived their previous lives" (318). Jameson views

*Happy Together* as important because, unlike many other transnational films, it bypasses the United States and Britain in its transnationalism:

On a stereotypical or ideological cognitive mapping of the global system today, everything passes through the United States on its way elsewhere; we necessarily mediate between all the other global cross-relations in the system, like airline flight plans which necessarily stop in Kennedy (New York) or LAX (Los Angeles) on their way somewhere else. *Happy Together* interrupts this stereotype and shows us a mysterious interconnection between cultures which falls outside the conventional scheme and forces us to invent new maps of the current world system. It is thus a far more stimulating representation than one which would simply show us foreigners in the United States or London, or now include Asian and East European actors and characters in the usual international settings and plots. A truly hybrid film like this may be a harbinger of more suggestive representations and mappings to come. (319)

Notably, though the film bypasses the geographical United States, it still contains some of the country's music, and thus, elements of its culture. Still, Jameson's point that showing Asian foreigners in Argentina decentralizes America corresponds closely with the aforementioned shift in Wong's career away from using Western pop music.

While *As Tears Go By* and *Chungking Express* featured extensive diegetic music, diegetic music as emotive communication is mostly absent in *Happy Together*, save for the final scene. Instead, like his next two films, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, music is still extremely important, but mostly seems to act as an extension of a character's mood or thoughts, rather than their physical surroundings. The first song featured in the film, Caetano Veloso's cover of "Cucurrucú Paloma," a ballad for a "mourning dove," is both connected and disconnected from the narrative. Early in the film, when Lai and Ho break-up for the first time after getting lost on their way to the Iguazu falls, which the couple will never reach together, Wong cuts from a dejected Lai to a helicopter shot over the falls while playing "Cucurrucú Paloma." This shot of the falls is the first color shot of the film and lingers over a minute while Veloso sings of a sad

man waiting for his lover to return. This shot makes sense as a romantic extension of Lai's subjectivity because he associates the falls with Ho, and the deeply emotional Veloso acts as a conduit for Lai to channel his sadness while establishing the Latin America setting. The song also subverts Lai's narrative primacy because he is not physically at his falls. The dreamlike sensation of the helicopter shot perhaps instead indicates that he is imagining the falls. Thus, "Cucurrucú Paloma" sets the tone of the film for the audience while also evoking the most common emotion of Wong's oeuvre, lovesickness.

In the next scene Wong introduces one of the musical motifs of the film, Frank Zappa's "Chunga's Revenge." The song appears in multiple scenes, each emphasizing Lai's difficult relationship with Ho. Specifically, the song juxtaposes Ho's volatile, flamboyant nature, which is represented early in the song with a loud, crashing guitar chorus, with Lai's more contemplative, emotionally sensitive, and steady nature, which is represented in the song's verse which features a somber trumpet and slower beat. While this music is not diegetically part of the world of the film, it clearly acts as an extension of Lai's subjectivity and the duality of his desire. The song, in a sense, also works with the title of the film, as it emphasizes Lai's loneliness and desire to be "happy together." If the heteronormative *Chungking Express* used "California Dreamin'" to show that its male and female leads were on the same romantic page, in *Happy Together*, "Chunga's Revenge" does the opposite, to show that the queer lovers are moving away from each other emotionally.

The emotional touchstone of the film is clearly Astor Piazzollo's "Finale (Tango Apasionado)" and similar songs off the same album. The bandoneón tune plays frequently throughout the film, paradoxically both when the pair is together and apart. It is also present in

the film's most romantic scenes, such as in the taxi when Ho lays his head on Lai's shoulder and when the pair dance in the kitchen. Unlike other songs in the film, which are mostly attributed to Lai's subjectivity, "Finale (Tango Apasionado)" is also an extension of Ho's subjectivity, as it portrays his desire for Lai after he leaves Buenos Aires. Near the end of the film Ho dances with an Argentine man to the song, but imagines and remembers himself dancing with Lai. He then goes outside, sits on the sidewalk, and breaks down. He returns to Lai's now empty apartment, which they shared for a long portion of the film and, similar to Faye in *Chungking Express*, cleans it. This connection to Faye reinforces some critiques of the film, which view Ho as the "female" partner in the relationship. While the scene is mostly silent after the dance, "Finale (Tango Apasionado)" returns as Ho stares into the lamp displaying the Iguazu falls, which inspired them to go to Argentina in the first place. Knowing that by leaving behind the lamp Lai is leaving behind their relationship, Ho weeps on the couch holding the blanket they shared. As he cries, Lai's voice-over comes in and Wong cuts to Lai at the falls. Lai says, "I lost my way and wandered around for awhile, but I finally reached Iguazu. I felt very sad. I felt like there should be two of us standing here," as the falls rain down on him. Mirroring the beginning of the film, in which a helicopter shot of the falls acted as a transition from Lai and Ho's break-up, again Wong lingers on a long helicopter shot of the falls for two minutes, this time set to "Finale (Tango Apasionado)." Like the shifting meaning of music in Wong's other films, "Finale (Tango Apasionado)," shifts throughout the film. Initially a song emphasizing the romantic moments of Lai and Ho's relationship, like "What a Difference a Day Makes" in *Chungking Express*, it now eulogizes that relationship. As the music fades out, all that is left of Lai and Ho's relationship is their dream to see the falls, which roar with no musical backing track for an extended period of

time before the scene fades to black.

While that scene eulogizing Lai and Ho's relationship will be the final use of “Finale (Tango Apasionado)” in the film, Wong chooses not to end the film at the falls. Instead, Lai heads to Taipei on his way back to Hong Kong, the home city of Chang, a friend he met in Argentina, and visits his family's night market restaurant. Lai steals a photo of Chang and rides the elevated train, listening to music in his headphones while Danny Chung's cover of “Happy Together” plays. It is unclear whether the music is diegetic and being played in Lai's headphones or nondiegetic and an extension of his mood. Either way, Wong is emphatic that the scene is not meant to be pessimistic or ironic, saying in an interview with Khoi Lebinh and David Eng,

In this film, some audiences will say that the title seems very cynical, because it is about two persons living together, and at the end, they are just separate. But to me, happy together can apply to two persons or apply to a person and his past, and I think sometimes when a person is at peace with himself and his past, I think it is the beginning of a relationship which can be happy, and also he can be more open to possibilities in the future with other people.

Thus, Wong's use of “Happy Together” could be read as a subversion of traditional Western tropes and use of music, which would indicate that a song like “Happy Together” be used to celebrate a budding romance or as an ironic commentary on the lack of such a romance. Instead, in its Eastern context, Wong uses the song to show that Lai is at peace with their relationship, making it a crucial narrative device denoting the meaning of the film, acting as communication between director and audience. Once again, Wong's use of music is the emotional corner stone of *Happy Together*, crucial for understanding the film's narrative, and transnationally subversive, perhaps even more so, due to its queer subjects.

### ***In the Mood for Love (2000)***

While Wong's most critically acclaimed film, *In the Mood for Love*, eschews popular

Western music, key songs are the emotional center of the film, as Peter Brunette writes, “The moments of greatest expressive intensity come when the visual track is reinforced by music” (94), and Wong's soundtrack borrows from a wide variety of nations. Set in 1960s Hong Kong, *In the Mood for Love* follows Tony Leung as Chow Mo-wan and Maggie Cheung as Su Li-zhen, neighbors who discover their spouses are having an affair with each other. Desperate for human connection, Mo-wan and Li-zhen begin to spend time together, but despite trying to resist “becoming like them” and wishing to avoid the suspicion of their conservative neighbors, they fall in love. Yet they never consummate their relationship.

*In the Mood for Love*, and its sequel, *2046*, are often read through a postmodern lens by Western scholars. For instance, Nancy Blake writes in “‘We Won't Be Like Them': Repetition and Compulsion in Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*”: “Repetition in Wong Kar-wai is not reproduction in the sense of representation of a referent or of a simularum, a pure image, a detached signifier. Rather, repetition serves to screen the real understood as the traumatic. At the same time, this very need points to the real, and it is at this point that the real emerges on the screen of repetition: A subject is touched by an image” (353-4). While these postmodern readings touch on important thematic concerns in Wong's work, they eschew aesthetics and privilege postmodern theorists. Even Bettinson, whose book is on the “aesthetics of disturbance,” spends his chapter on *In the Mood for Love* discussing genre, writing, “*In the Mood for Love* poses advanced perceptual and cognitive challenges to its viewer, complicating narrative comprehension. The 'false bottoms' of the film's role play sequences, for instance, preclude the viewing passivity so often attributed to both melodrama and Wong's cinema” (124). As such, the music of the film has been largely ignored. Yet it works as a significant variation on *Chungking*

*Express and Happy Together's* musical strategies: while the former uses music to express female subjectivity and move the plot toward consummated romance and the latter uses music to express the dissonance of a relationship, *In the Mood for Love's* music seems to express collective emotions in a shared relationship between two characters, revealing their shared subjectivities and overtly expressing subtle emotions otherwise lost on audiences.

The most prominently featured track in the film is Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi's "Yumeji's Theme," originally composed for Seijun Suzuki's *Yumeji* (1991). Like how music repeats often in Wong's other films, "Yumeji's Theme" is played many times throughout the narrative and is usually the only audio present for its scenes. The waltz, performed by a string quartet, acts as the film's refrain, playing as a transition between scenes and time periods, while also emphasizing Chow-wan and Li-Zhen's emotional state. A common motif in the film is the loneliness of eating alone, which both Li-zhen and Mo-wan must do because their spouses are often traveling abroad. Every time the pair see each other getting noodles at a local noodle shop for dinner Wong plays "Yumeji's Theme." Wong elevates the everyday, eating alone, into an artistic act by pairing his fluid camera with Umebayashi's melodramatic tune. Biancorosso argues in "Songs of Delusion: Popular Music and the Aesthetics of the Self in Wong Kar-wai's Cinema," that "Yumeji's Theme' plunged the audience into a sphere separate from the everyday, a sphere shared presumably by the lovers themselves, oblivious to their surroundings and entirely absorbed by their sense of an absolute present" (118). Like with Wong's other films, the nature of "Yumeji's Theme" also changes with the narrative. In scenes of solitary eating, "Yumeji's Theme" accentuates the two character's loneliness, yet near the end of the film, when the two have admitted their feelings for one another, its purpose

changes, Biancorosso writes,

For the first time, Mo-wan's attempt to hold her hand is not met with rejection; she rests her head on his shoulder and whispers to him, "I don't want to go home tonight." For the first time in the film too, "Yumeji's Theme" is synchronized to the action in the manner of a standard Hollywood score, poignantly underscoring Li-zhen's words and heightening the impact of the action as it takes place in the immediate present of the image (rather than projecting a sense of pastness, as it does practically throughout the entire film, onto slow-motion images of the protagonists' comings and goings). (118)

This shifting function of the dramatic "Yumeji's Theme" reinforces the song as the emotional center of the film, as it communicates to the audience the complex emotions of the characters. Instead of music being "fixed" and singular in its purpose, relaying only one particular mood, the layers of Wong's use of music act as a reflection of the complex emotions of the film, where the characters are falling in love with one another but don't want to be like their betraying spouses. As a potential extension of Mo-wan and Li-zhen's subjectivity, the song reinforces their emotional state, but despite its repeated use does not feel contrived or out-of-place.

Like in *As Tears Go By* and *Chungking Express*, one of the most poignant, emotional scenes in the film features diegetic music, in this case, Zhou Xuan's song "*Hua Yang De Nian Hua*" (roughly "Flowery Years"), which is also the Chinese title of the film (the English title "*In the Mood for Love*" is taken from a different song, not featured in the film). The scene begins with a shot of a radio, evoking similar shots of jukeboxes from *As Tears Go By* and *Chungking Express*, over which Li-zhen receives a birthday message from her traveling husband accompanied by the song "*Hua Yang De Nian Hua*." As Li-zhen leans against the wall the camera pans to the left to reveal Mo-wan on the other side of the wall listening. Biancorosso writes on this scene as a pivot point of the film, "The completion of this perfectly symmetrical shot structure clarifies its logic. Its goal is to underline the two protagonists' separation despite

their physical proximity—the sustained black screen renders their distance both metaphorical and unquantifiable—while at the same time, it demonstrates the convergence of their states of mind toward a point of absolute equivalence” (120). Ultimately, Biancorosso writes that “They meet halfway in the 'meta-space' of absorbed listening” (120). Yet what is most important emotionally in this scene for the audience is not symmetry of the shot or “meta space” between the two, but the fact that the audience is listening to “*Hua Yang De Nian Hua*” with the characters and they are experiencing the emotions it conjures together. Unlike in *Chungking Express*, the music gives the audience an intimate window in the emotions of the characters but it is not an extension of their voice. Instead, it is the circumstance of the music and the characters' physical and emotional proximity and relationally distant reality that create this intimate space for the audience to empathize with Wong's characters. Subjectivity and experiencing the music are still paramount to the emotional understanding of the scene, but the kind of subjectivity experiencing the music is radically different.

Wong's affinity for American Jazz pianist and vocalist Nat King Cole manifests itself in both *In the Mood for Love* and its sequel *2046*, as songs from the Jazz artist appear in both films. *In the Mood for Love* features Cole's “*Aquellos Ojos Verdes*,” “*Te Quiero Dijiste*,” and “*Quizás, Quizás, Quizás*.” The first of these is directly associated with Li-Zhen and Mo-wan's relationship by playing over their first conversation when they go out for tea to ask if the other knows about their spouses' infidelity. The song appears to play diegetically in the restaurant as the two characters talk. This love song, about falling in love with “those green eyes, calm like a lake” seems juxtaposed to Li-Zhen and Mo-wan's predicament and their disappointment at confirming their spouses' adultery. As the two walk out of the restaurant dejected and wondering how this

happened, Wong transitions from “Aquellos Ojos Verdes” to “Te Quiero Dijiste.” This second love song is again juxtaposed ironically with their predicament. On a narrative and thematic level, these two love songs hint at the potential for love between Li-Zhen and Mo-wan, but on an emotional level they act like a dagger to the character's hearts, knowing that that kind of love is not for them. As the curious duo eat out and attempt to reenact how their spouses started the affair Wong repeats “Aquellos Ojos Verdes.” The irony is palpable, as the love song plays as the two try to figure out why their spouses are no longer in love with them.

“Quizás, Quizás, Quizás,” plays near the end of the film when Mo-wan admits to loving Li-zhen but also decides to leave for Singapore, asking her if she would come if he had an extra ticket. Mo-wan waits for her in the apartment they had used to write together, but she doesn't show up and he leaves. She arrives late, desiring to see him and leave with him. The song's refrain, “quizás, quizás, quizás,” meaning “perhaps,” is a direct translation of their emotional state. As Nat King Cole sings, “The days pass this way and I am despairing, and you, you always answer, perhaps perhaps, perhaps,” the lovers barely miss one another, but ultimately their expired romance is not sealed merely by a missed passage of a few minutes, but more crucially by waiting too long to tell each other how they feel, and even more crucially, then waiting too long to act on those feelings. Emotionally, the scene and the use of “Quizás, Quizás, Quizás,” is entirely justified, as it perfectly sums up their problematic romance. Wong repeats this song and motif in two of the final scenes of the film. When Li-zhen visits Mo-wan's apartment in Singapore and finds him absent, she calls him but doesn't say anything and decides to leave. The song again plays when Mo-wan visits their old apartment looking for his old landlord and learns of a lady living next door (Li-Zhen, who has bought the old apartment). But he chooses not to

knock on the door and find out who, again missing her. Thus, the song acts as the emotional anchor to these scenes, indicating that, as Wong's poetry (inserted in a slide before the final scene of the film) puts it, "That era has passed, nothing that belonged to it exists any more." As such, this song connects itself to two different characters' subjectivities, as it follows Mo-wan as he waits for Li-zhen, and follows Li-zhen as she waits for Mo-wan. This mirroring of the song's purpose reinforces its meaning in the narrative while connecting the audience to the characters; interestingly, instead of favoring a particularly gendered subjectivity, "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas" seems to represent that mood of waiting as it exists between two different gendered subjectivities.

The lovers are thus never meant to consummate their relationship, yet the secret continues to eat away at Mo-wan, and in the film's final scene, he visits Angkor Wat and tells his secret to a hole in the wall and covers it in mud, a ritual he had explained earlier in the film for how those in ancient times dealt with their secrets. Specifically composed for the film, American composer Michael Galasso's "Angkor Wat Theme" plays as Wong's camera floats around the ancient temple. The otherworldly stringed instrument piece initially evokes a similar musical feel as "Yumeji's Theme" in that they are both in 3/4 time, but whereas Umebayashi's tune is composed, yet emotionally resonant, "Angkor Wat Theme," which closes the film loudly and abrasively, fills its aural atmosphere, as if Mo-wan's emotions are so vivid the instruments trying to translate them are strained in their attempt. While this music is non-diegetic, it demonstrates Mo-wan's subjectivity. As we cannot hear his voice as he tells the secret, the music communicates his emotional state as he tells it and walks away. These continual musical interludes that fill *In the Mood for Love* act as important emotive communication between director and audience and

elevate the film's sparse plot with intense emotions. Considering music as an extension of character subjectivity, I find that *In the Mood for Love's* use of music is often not male or female dominated; rather, it often feels like the music is an extension of Mo-wan and Li-zhen's collective mood. If *Chungking Express's* music was overtly communicating character subjectivity, *In the Mood for Love* takes a more subtle approach, but perhaps reveals more about the characters and how genders share emotions in the process.

### **2046 (2004)**

*2046* continues where *In the Mood for Love* left off and follows the character of Mo-wan, while Li-zhen is for the most part absent. Instead, a host of female costars take her place. Mo-wan, relatively reserved and humble in *In the Mood for Love*, becomes jaded by his failure to begin a true romance with Li-zhen and begins dating many women, hoping to find one that can replace Li-zhen. Wong again pairs with Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi, but instead of just adopting an Umebayashi piece from another work, Umebayashi composed much of the music in *2046*. Yet despite working with a composer for much of the film's music, the film has perhaps Wong's most diverse and far reaching soundtrack. Like in Wong's other films, music repeats itself over many scenes, with the majority of songs present being played at least twice, often three or four times, usually indicating a particular character or narrative thread. Unlike Wong's other films, there is not as much of an emphasis on a single song within the narrative, which makes analyzing the film's music more expansive.

Like *In the Mood for Love*, *2046* is a layered film often considered through postmodern theory, which makes sense, as the film is at times non-linear and contains within it a story within a story, a futuristic landscape which acts as a way for Mo-wan to express his emotions to the

viewer. In “Viewing Sinophone Cinema Through a French Theoretical Lens: Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* and Deleuze's *Cinema*,” Flannery Wilson writes, “We have now shifted from an ancient, spiritual state to a posthuman state; this new city is so artificial and mechanical that androids often substitute for humans” (162) and “In Wong's cinematic environment, time is split into the past (1960s) and future (2046); the past is established as the central narrative while the futuristic sequences constitute the *mise-en-abyme*, or story within a story. In the film, time and space, future and past, become such unstable concepts that they are almost totally interchangeable” (164). If Wong's other films used music to display a unified emotional vision and express complicated, but understandable character subjectivity, *2046* is “postmodern” in the sense that its musical strategies, like its narrative, are fractured and layered—complicating potential readings, reducing their emotional impact, and generating a more abstract emotional state. This music is not, in a sense, “unheard,” but like many of the film's abrasive but beautiful shots, overtly present, even if obfuscated by its fractured nature. While in some senses, Wong's music has thus far fallen into “modernist” tendencies by fusing aesthetics and narrative, this film is the sum of fractured parts, not quite creating a full narrative, not quite arriving at the “*gestalt*” of *Chungking Express*.

In the first scene of *2046*, a voice-over from Mo-wan's fictional story “2046” is spoken and Wong plays Secret Garden's “Adagio” as images from Mo-wan's story of the future year 2046 are shown. This meta-story, set in a future world in which there is a mysterious place called “2046” that people go to on a train and never come back from, is a thinly veiled tool for Mo-wan to tell the story of his unconsummated love with Li-zhen. These initial moments in the meta-story act as a mirror reflecting the end of *In the Mood for Love*. The year the story takes place

and the fictional place of “2046” are both homages to the pair's shared apartment in *In the Mood for Love*. In this first scene, Faye Wong's future character (an android) speaks a secret into a large, reflective, spherical object, similar to what Mo-wan does at the end of *In the Mood for Love* at Angkor Wat. Mo-wan's narrator, Tak, in a voice-over, reminisces, “I can't stop wondering if she loved me or not. Maybe her answer was like a secret that no one else would know.” “Adagio” also reflects the main musical choices of *In the Mood for Love*, in that like “Yumeji's Theme” and “Angkor Wat Theme,” it is performed mostly by stringed instruments and is decidedly melancholic, but unlike those songs evolves to use an entire orchestra. Initially, this melancholic tune is meant to remind the audience of Mo-wan's relationship with Li-zhen and his dissatisfaction with his current life.

While “Adagio” may initially seem connected directly to Mo-wan's subjectivity, it becomes clear throughout the narrative that it is Faye Wong's characters, Wang Jing-wen and the android, for whom the song is an extension of their voices. Interestingly, while the two characters do not exist in the same “reality,” as one is a member of a fictional story within the film and the other is the daughter of the owner of the hotel Mo-wan's stays at, they share a musical subjectivity. Both characters lack a voice within their individual narratives. Jing-wen is in love with a Japanese man, played by Takuya Kimura, but her father bars her from seeing him because he is Japanese. Initially Jing-wen lacks the strength to go against her father, which is so debilitating that she seems to lose her actual voice. After a fight with her father over marrying her Japanese boyfriend, Jing-wen and he talk, but while he asks her, “Can you tell me what you feel? Do you like me? Or not? I'm scared to hear your answer. But I have to ask anyway,” Jing-wen does not respond and he leaves. This scene is clearly from Jing-wen's perspective, as the

audience watches her cry as she watches him leave. Wong sets a montage of Jing-wen's drama to Angela Gheorghiu's rendition of "Casta Diva," from Vincenzo Bellini and Felice Romani's opera *Norma*. The context of the song relates fairly directly with the plot of *2046*. In *Norma*, it is a song from the titular character asking the gods for peace between the Romans and druids, because Norma has fallen in love with a Roman. Similarly, Jing-wen has fallen in love with a foreigner and wants peace between her father and her lover. Thus, this montage privileges Jing-wen's subjectivity, and while she cannot speak to her lover or her father, she is able to communicate her trouble to the audience through "Casta Diva," almost as if she were Norma and this was an opera.

In Mo-wan's "2046" narrative, "Adagio" is clearly connected to Faye Wong's android character. Later in the film, Mo-wan's narrator, played by Takuya Kimura, the same actor as Jing-wen's boyfriend, embraces Faye Wong's android, but while she clearly enjoys the contact, she leaves. Again, this may initially seem connected to a male's subjectivity, but as the scene continues and the music continues to play, the audience follows Faye Wong's android out to the hallway as she reminisces about the sexual experience. Tak later asks the android to leave the train with him, saying, "I kept on asking, but she never answered. I began dreaming up excuses for her silence." Similar to Jing-wen's silence, the android's silence indicates a shared subjectivity, and the use of "Adagio" extends that subjectivity. Tak comes to the same conclusion as Jing-wen's Japanese boyfriend, believing that Faye Wong's character must not love him due to her silence. Yet as "Adagio" serves to point out, as an extension of her subjectivity, the android does love him, but has no way to communicate it. Later, as Mo-wan helps Jing-wen call her boyfriend, his voice-over says, "I was so happy to see her happy," which marks a turn in his

jaded character. But more importantly, as the narrative turns back to Faye Wong's android, we watch as she waits by a window on the train, watching the lights roll by silently. Wong again sets this scene to "Casta Diva," continuing this shared subjectivity between the android and Jing-wen. This also directly indicates that the android was indeed in love with Tak, even if he didn't realize it.

Complicating this privileging of female narrative is Mo-wan's place in the diegesis. While these scenes, and the music, seem explicitly an extension of Faye Wong's characters' subjectivity, that subjectivity seems filtered through Mo-wan, who is the narrator of both the main story and the "2046" story. Yet if all of this only came from Mo-wan's subjectivity, then it would not help him realize his own flaws, which it does, as he says in an internal monologue after helping Jing-wen marry her Japanese boyfriend: "Love is all a matter of timing. It's no good meeting the right person too soon or too late. If I'd lived in another time or place my story might have had a very different ending." As if an extension of Faye Wong's android looking out the window, this monologue is also set to "Casta Diva." As Mo-wan looks back and remembers Jing-wen's face, it becomes clear that he has empathized with some aspect of her subjectivity, and that empathy has allowed him to understand something crucial about love and himself, that it is about timing, and also about Li-zhen, that her silence regarding him was not because she did not love him, but because she didn't have the voice to express that love. This turn in the narrative is brought about exclusively because music is an extension of female subjectivity in the narrative, because it acts as their voice when Faye Wong's characters cannot speak. From an intertextual standpoint, this narrative echoes Tony Leung's Cop 663 and Faye Wong's Faye from *Chungking Express*, with Faye Wong's subjectivity influencing Tony Leung and the music of the film reflecting it. Unlike

*Chungking Express*, in which Faye Wong's character was full of energy and seemingly optimistic, both her characters in *2046* face obstructions so debilitating it mutes them, making the music even more crucial to understanding their emotions.

The most prominently featured female character in *2046* is Zhang Ziyi's Bai Ling. Bai Ling is a cabaret girl and prostitute who moves into the apartment next to Mo-wan, mirroring his relationship with Li-zhen. While at times Mo-wan treats her rather poorly, their romance becomes central to the plot of *2046*. Wong introduces Bai Ling with Connie Francis's "Siboney," a song that fits well in Wong's repertoire about unrequited love and waiting, as Francis sings "I wait for you with anxiousness" and "If you don't come I'll die from love." This song foregrounds Bai Ling's narrative, as she will fall in love with Mo-wan, but he is still not ready for love after Li-zhen. The scene also represents the complicated subjectivities of *2046*, as initially the scene appears to just be Bai Ling in her apartment getting ready for an evening of work, indicating her subjectivity, but Wong then cuts to Mo-wan watching her through the stained glass between their apartments. This act of voyeurism is perhaps Wong's most obvious homage in all his films to the "male gaze," but its obviousness is almost ironic in context. It is hard to tell whether Wong is playing with the idea of the "male gaze" or conforming to traditional cinematic practices. Francis's "Siboney" returns after Bai Ling has a confrontation with a client. Similar to Jing-wen earlier in the film, Bai Ling smokes a cigarette at the top of the hotel while "Siboney" plays, indicating that like "Casta Diva" was integral to the characterization of Jing-wen, "Siboney" is importantly connected to Bai Ling's subjectivity. Yet, like with Jing-wen, Mo-wan is never too far from the action as he views her from below as the song plays.

After spending a pleasant Christmas together, Mo-wan and Bai Ling take a taxi back to

their hotel. Wong chooses to play Georges Delerue's "Julien et Barbara" from François Truffaut's *Confidentially Yours* (1983). Truffaut's film has no obvious connections to the plot of *2046* or Bai Ling's character; the song was used as Barbara Becker's theme, and both characters can be read as strong independent women. Primarily, the music in this scene shows that Bai Ling knows more about Mo-wan than he lets on. As they drive to their hotel, Mo-wan puts his head on Bai Ling's shoulder, reenacting a moment with Li-zhen from *In the Mood for Love*. Yet as Mo-wan rests his head on her shoulder and closes his eyes, Bai Ling does not embrace him, but looks out the window, seemingly knowing that Mo-wan is not thinking about her in this moment. As the scene's primary focus is on her reaction to Mo-wan's advance, "Julien et Barbara" is thus linked to her perspective and subjectivity and acts as the emotional anchor to this scene, which again intertextually echoes earlier scenes of character subjectivity in *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*. The song is used a few more times in the film when the pair are having sex and go out together, each time seeming to focus more on Bai Ling's perspective than on Mo-wan's. Its melancholic tone betrays the joy that Bai Ling outwardly shows in her relationship with Mo-wan because she seems to always know it is temporary. In particular, later in the film when they break up, it is her emotions that are privileged in the scene, and as such, Wong chooses to reframe "Julien Et Barbara." After this scene, Bai Ling tries to get back at Mo-wan by sleeping with multiple men in her apartment so Mo-wan can hear, but, ultimately, she is left disappointed. Wong again plays "Siboney," and as its lyrics of lovelorn indicate, the scene and music exclusively focus on her subjectivity as she sits in her apartment desiring him.

Near the end of the film, as Mo-wan helps Bai Ling secure a job in Singapore, Mo-wan walks her back to her new apartment. At the door Mo-wan says he will see her off at the airport,

but she declines, saying it would make her “terribly sad.” She then asks Mo-wan, “Why can't it be like it was before? Please don't go. Stay with me tonight. Let me borrow you.” Yet Mo-wan tells her he cannot lend his love and leaves. As a song by Shigeru Umebayashi, composed for the film, “Polonaise” plays and Mo-wan walks away, the camera lingers not on him, but on Bai Ling as she cries in the doorway. In her final moment in the film, Bai Ling is still connected to music and her subjectivity is privileged.

Throughout *2046*, female characters have specific songs associated with them that play multiple times. In Faye Wong's characters' case, the music acts as her voice, articulating Jing-wen's desire for a foreigner through “Casta Diva,” or articulating the android's desire for Tak. While this music is not diegetic, it is inextricably linked to Faye Wong's characters' subjectivity. Unlike Faye Wong's characters, Bai Ling has a voice in the narrative—but she hides her true emotions from Mo-wan and others—the music, about lovesickness, betrays her diegetic voice and represents her emotional voice, articulating her desire for Mo-wan. In both of these cases, Wong privileges female desire and women are the subject of these moments, not to solely be objectified by Mo-wan. While the music here is repetitive, it is nowhere near as repetitive as *Chungking Express*, *Happy Together*, or *In the Mood for Love*; instead it trades in familiar-sounding preexisting music for more daunting and emotionally veiled tracks, and fractures them. This relays the complicated emotional state of the characters and their often obfuscated subjectivities.

## **Conclusion**

Some may look at music in film in simplistic terms, imagining that a director chooses sad music to make the audience sad and that is the extent of the power of film music. But in many

ways, Wong's use of music is not just some signifier of emotions, but it is an extension of the emotions, often directly coming from his characters and their subjectivities. The shifting dynamics of the narrative purpose of music indicates a different understanding of time and music; its meaning is not static. Wong expands his music's potential meaning by exposing it to a variety of contexts, each subverting expectations and eliciting authentic emotional responses. Whether music acts as a romantic overture in *As Tears Go By*, as an extension of female subjectivity and as an advocate for romance in *Chungking Express*, as the signifier of a dissonant queer relationship in *Happy Together*, as an extension of a collective mood in *In the Mood for Love*, or as an extension of postmodern themes in *2046*, music is an important tool in Wong's cinematic arsenal, always important and always necessary for a fuller narrative understanding. Thus, throughout all of Wong's films discussed in this thesis, music is the emotional underpinning and part of the narrative itself, both diegetically and non-diegetically. Beyond just being an extension of emotions, the complex relationship between character subjectivity and music transforms an aesthetic transnationalism into narrative transnationalism. This subversion of the Western meaning of these songs and their use, as Bettinson argues, "indispensable to narrative meaning" (48), shows how Wong's work crosses boundaries and helps redefine "world cinema." But perhaps most importantly is Wong's privileging of female subjectivity in his films. Female subjectivity is not rooted in narrative, as nearly all Wong's films heavily privilege male narrators, but instead, this subjectivity is rooted in music. Music acts as a voice for some female characters and as an extension of emotions for others, but in all cases it articulates those character's desires: desires for love, acceptance, and to be heard. These universal desires affect not just women, but also men. These desires, and their articulation through non-traditional and

transnational means, point to a broader, global context, in which nationality plays less of a role in the construction of identity and desire. Through music, Wong touches upon a desire paradoxically unique but universal—the desire to love another individual and be loved.

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