

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

FACULDADE DE BELAS-ARTES
FACULDADE DE LETRAS
INSTITUTO DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
INSTITUTO DE EDUCAÇÃO

Em colaboração com a Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema,
da Escola Superior de Dança e da Escola Superior de Música do
Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa



AMBIGUOUS CHARACTERS IN FILM NARRATIVE

The Synchronistic Relationship Between Similar Characters

Yu Yang

Orientador: Prof. Doutor José Alberto Olivença Duarte

Tese especialmente elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Doutor em Artes

2023

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2023

DECLARAÇÃO DE AUTORIA

Eu, Yu Yang, declaro que a tese de doutoramento intitulada “Ambiguous Characters in Film Narrative: The Synchronistic Relationship between Similar Characters”, é o resultado da minha investigação pessoal e independente. O conteúdo é original e todas as fontes consultadas estão devidamente mencionadas na bibliografia ou outras listagens de fontes documentais, tal como todas as citações diretas ou indiretas têm devida indicação ao longo do trabalho segundo as normas académicas.

O Candidato

Yu Yang

Lisboa, 10 de Janeiro de 2023

Abstract

Ambiguity is a feature unique in complex narrative films. It blocks the viewer's association temporarily or permanently by weakening or abandoning the causal relationship between the plot modules in the classic narrative, rendering it unable to match the appropriate prototypal narrative (temporarily or permanently). This doctoral dissertation investigates the connections between ambiguous characters in complex narratives, with a focus on explaining the principles and methods that generate ambiguity.

Ambiguous characters have narrative non-identity features that are primarily reflected in three aspects: 1) A character mutates (physically or mentally) or produces a *doppelgänger* as the plot progresses from one narrative module to the next. 2) There is a metaphorical relationship between one narrative module's character and another, such as their shared life experiences. 3) Between the characters' ontologies and fantasies, a self-referential fallacy results from the loss of the distinction between genuine and false (dream, illusion, or recollection) narratives. To explain these three aspects, the following five questions must be answered: 1) What does the ambiguous character represent? 2) What film phenomena are associated with character ambiguity? 3) What is the relationship between ambiguous characters and narrative strategies in film? 4) What techniques can be used to create ambiguity in the relationship between characters in a film narrative? 5) How do these approaches (which I refer to as synchronistic approaches) function?

The original goal of this dissertation was to re-examine phenomena that had previously been overlooked in the study of film narrative. This dissertation's structure is based on the "compilation thesis" model and is divided into two parts: five articles and a thesis synopsis. To supplement the complex narrative research of film, this dissertation employs a formalist framework, which has long been widely used in film narrative research, as the primary method and (embodied) cognitive theory as the auxiliary method.

Keywords: ambiguous characters; complex narrative studies; poetic structures; puzzle films; synchronistic narrative premises.

Resumo

A ambiguidade é uma característica única em filmes narrativos complexos. Esta bloqueia a associação do espectador temporária ou permanentemente, enfraquecendo ou abandonando a relação causal entre os módulos do enredo na narrativa clássica, tornando-o incapaz de corresponder à narrativa prototípica apropriada (temporária ou permanentemente). O presente trabalho investiga as ligações entre personagens ambíguas em narrativas complexas, com enfoque na explicação dos princípios e métodos que geram essa mesma ambiguidade.

Os personagens ambíguos possuem características narrativas não-identitárias que se refletem principalmente em três aspetos: 1) Uma personagem sofre uma mutação (física ou mental) ou produz um *doppelgänger* à medida que o enredo avança de um módulo narrativo para o seguinte; 2) Existe uma relação metafórica entre o personagem de um módulo narrativo e outro, tal como através de experiências de vida partilhadas; 3) Entre as ontologias e fantasias das personagens, uma falácia autorreferencial surge da perda da distinção entre as narrativas genuínas e falsas (sonho, ilusão, ou recordação).

Para explicar estes três aspetos, tentou-se responder às cinco perguntas seguintes: 1) O que representa a personagem ambígua?; 2) Que fenómenos cinematográficos estão associados à ambiguidade da personagem?; 3) Qual é a relação entre personagens ambíguas e estratégias narrativas no filme?; 4) Que técnicas podem ser utilizadas para criar ambiguidade na relação entre personagens numa narrativa cinematográfica?; 5) Como funcionam estas abordagens (que defino como abordagens sincronísticas)?

O objetivo original deste estudo era reexaminar fenómenos que tinham sido anteriormente esquecidos no estudo da narrativa fílmica. O tema deste estudo, personagens ambíguas, é um dos tópicos no contexto da investigação narrativa complexa que ainda não foi investigado a fundo. Esta dissertação baseia-se no modelo de “tese compilada” e está dividida em duas partes: cinco artigos e uma sinopse de tese. Para complementar a investigação da narrativa fílmica complexa, esta dissertação serve-se de um enquadramento formalista, que tem sido utilizado com regularidade na investigação de narrativa fílmica, como método primário e a teoria cognitiva como método auxiliar.

No primeiro artigo da segunda parte desta dissertação, a abordagem utilizada foi a da meta-pesquisa, o que me permitiu analisar uma obra fruto da minha prática artística. Nesta investigação secundária, utilizei uma abordagem de oscilação ao invés de confiar apenas na literatura científica, como defendido pela investigação baseada na arte (*Art-based research* – ABR). Esta abordagem deu, de igual forma, origem ao tema da investigação de personagens ambíguas. Subsequentemente, comparei a composição de algumas pinturas famosas na história da arte com as cenas de alguns filmes de culto na história do cinema, utilizando a teoria “efeito de *interface*” de Slavoj Žižek do. Durante a comparação, alargo a *interface* física (meios imageáveis como janelas e ecrãs) como portador da fantasia à *interface* interativa (o grande ecrã em frente ao espectador).

Além disso, concluo que a falácia autorreferencial é necessária para a criação de personagens ambíguas na prática artística. Embora o método de oscilação não seja um método tradicional de investigação científica, é útil uma vez que nos apresenta questões a partir de perspectivas para além de dados científicos.

O segundo artigo volta à abordagem da investigação documental. A primeira metade do artigo é dedicada à ordenação de resultados de investigação relevantes, que vão desde narrativas complexas a narrativas de filmes *puzzle* e à determinação das suas perspectivas sobre (narrativas de) personagens ambíguas. Na segunda metade do artigo, defendo que as personagens ambíguas foram ignoradas ao nível da investigação sobre a narrativa, uma vez que até então não foram consideradas premissas narrativas específicas com base nos resultados das mais recentes investigações sobre narrativas *puzzle* na comunidade académica ao longo dos últimos cinco anos. Em contraste com a premissa determinista do paradigma narrativo clássico, proponho uma premissa sincronística baseada na teoria cinematográfica pós-Jungiana. Examino alguns métodos ambíguos em filmes *puzzle* no final do artigo, especificamente a falta de causalidade entre (narrativas de) personagens que os autores estabelecem sob a premissa sincronística: inclui uma falácia autorreferencial, pistas falsas, e projeções múltiplas. Este artigo serve de base para a minha investigação posterior.

Existem discrepâncias substanciais entre o primeiro artigo e os quatro artigos seguintes. A teoria subjacente ao primeiro artigo é a teoria do Lacanismo, que se insere na área da psicanálise. Embora o conceito de efeitos de *interface* seja instrutivo para o estudo de personagens ambíguas, isto não implica que a psicanálise seja uma base apropriada para esta investigação de doutoramento. Esta abordagem não se aplica à questão deste estudo, pois a relação entre a teoria psicanalítica e os estudos cinematográficos é semelhante à forma como os estudos cinematográficos podem demonstrar os conceitos da teoria psicanalítica. Assim, começando no segundo artigo, a psicanálise foi substituída pelo cognitivismo como a teoria fundamental. Ao contrário da psicanálise, a teoria cognitiva centra-se mais no modo como um fenómeno é gerado, tornando-o mais pertinente ao fenómeno único apresentado na narrativa complexa deste trabalho.

O terceiro artigo utiliza *Long Day's Journey into Night* (地球最后的夜晚 2018) de Bi Gan como exemplo para propor e tentar resolver o problema dos módulos narrativos conflituosos em filmes *puzzle*. Este artigo examina o método de criação de (narrativas de) personagens ambíguas neste filme a partir da perspectiva da temporalidade, utilizando a teoria de Imagem-Tempo de Gilles Deleuze. A primeira metade do artigo explica os conceitos de Deleuze, tais como “imagem-lembrança” e “narrativa falsificadora”, através da utilização de vários filmes como estudo de caso.

Além disso, a “falsa experiência do tempo” de Deleuze é apoiada por dois conceitos filosóficos fundamentais: O “Retorno Eterno” de Nietzsche e a “Incompossibilidade” de Leibniz. Assim, a narrativa de *Long Day's Journey into Night* é analisada usando estes dois conceitos, de forma a explicar porque as descrições da mesma personagem (a heroína Wan Qiwen) na narrativa falsificadora e na narrativa real são contraditórias.

As perguntas deste artigo resultam da consideração da ligação da história entre a memória e a realidade. É impossível determinar se um flashback é real ou falso quando não há nenhum sinal óbvio na narrativa fílmica que relembre o espectador desta questão. Neste caso, os vários flashbacks (módulos narrativos) estão repletos de incoerências causais. O quarto artigo explorará em detalhe as características da estrutura narrativa que está na base desta narrativa ambígua.

Este artigo discute ainda o enquadramento narrativo em que as (narrativas de) personagens ambíguas se baseiam, utilizando como exemplo o filme *Kaili Blues* de Bi Gan (路边野餐 2015). Aqui é examinado o enquadramento narrativo como uma componente essencial da estratégia narrativa utilizando a teoria de metáfora fílmica como uma teoria de base: explico as peculiaridades da estratégia narrativa dos filmes *puzzle*, servindo-me do conceito filosófico de “jogos infinitos” de James Carse. Utilizo a teoria do tempo de Henri Bergson para examinar como um arquétipo (personagem secundária Monk) é dividido entre passado (personagem secundária Crazy Face) e o presente (personagem masculina Chen Sheng), resultando numa relação ambígua entre as três personagens. Trabalho ainda com a investigação desenvolvida pelo Dr. Carlo Comanducci de modo a analisar o enquadramento fílmico em termos de condensação e deslocamento de metáforas.

Esta estrutura repleta de metáforas entre módulos narrativos é referida no artigo como “estrutura poética”. A condensação de metáforas nesta estrutura permite que múltiplas (narrativas de) personagens incorporem coletivamente uma metáfora para um tema (o artigo estende o conceito a uma metáfora para contexto cultural). Em contraste, o deslocamento da metáfora causa a falácia autorreferencial, na qual cada personagem ambígua é o protótipo da outra.

O to artigo explora a lógica filosófica (religiosa) de (narrativas de) personagens ambíguas utilizando como exemplo *Lost Highway* de David Lynch (1997). Partindo das ideias do quarto capítulo sobre o contexto cultural de metáforas, adopto aqui a proposta de Martha Nochimson que estuda as metáforas culturais sem causalidade implícitas em filmes através do Vedicismo e da física quântica. A origem desta metáfora cultural encontra-se no estudo da religião no cinema, que continua a decorrer após a guerra. O benefício deste tipo de investigação comparativa é permitir uma perspetiva para além dos estudos cinematográficos, o que compensa as limitações do enquadramento da investigação formalista. Neste artigo, examino as mutações de aparência e *doppelgänger* das personagens de *Lost Highway* utilizando o conceito budista de reencarnação (também influenciado pelo Vedicismo).

Além disso, este último estudo é uma nova abordagem interativa de dois métodos de investigação académica, a investigação teórica e teoria da prática: por um lado, este fenómeno está enraizado na teoria narrativa cinematográfica e,

por outro, está altamente integrado com as técnicas específicas dos autores cinematográficos em representação visual (investigação baseada na arte). De um modo geral, acredito que as (narrativas de) personagens ambíguas são uma questão essencial e pouco explorada nos filmes *puzzle*.

Palavras-chave: personagens ambíguas; estudos narrativos complexos; estruturas poéticas; filmes *puzzle*; premissas de narrativas sincronísticas.

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This year is my eleventh in Europe and my third in Portugal. Over the previous decade, I have travelled to various countries and been accepted to multiple universities. I lived in Italy for eight years till I was thirty years old. Florence, Milan, Rome, Genoa, and Venice have left a lasting impression on me. During my stay in Italy, I experienced the most significant turning point of my life: the destruction of my goal of being an artist and the consolidation of my decision to focus on academic study. While transferring between various Italian institutions, I eventually realised what I truly desired. Before graduating from the Venice Academy of Fine Arts in Italy with a master's degree, I stumbled into academic material about a university in Portugal. After repeatedly validating the research atmosphere of this university through its official website, I travelled to Lisbon. Then I began my doctoral studies at the University of Lisbon.

My first academic year at the University of Lisbon was stressful. As I do not understand Portuguese and I am unfamiliar with the culture and history, I had to acclimate to living in a completely new place for me. It is worth noting that throughout my first year of college, I received assistance from many faculty members and students. For instance, Professor Fernando Rosa Dias, the administrator of the PhD programme, frequently responds to my questions regarding the doctoral programme. Professor Marta Cordeiro's teaching approach and patience gave me a favourable impression. I was also impressed by the professors in my other optional courses, whom each tried their utmost to assist me in overcoming my language barrier.

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Due to the passage of time and the confines of this page, I cannot mention all of the individuals who have assisted me. I feel so embarrassed since I have even forgotten their names.

I have already returned to China. Today is my first day after being released from quarantine. Throughout the epidemic, from the year 2020 until the present, I have had the good fortune to reside in Lisbon, where I have gotten adequate assistance and care. I adore the atmosphere, people, and liberty of Lisbon.

Farewell, Lisbon.

03 July, 2022.

Yang Yu

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Part I

Thesis Synopsis

This is as much as to say that the connection of events may in certain circumstances be other than causal, and requires another principle of explanation.

Jung, C. G. *Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle*, 1952

1 Introduction

1.1 Structure of the Dissertation

This study follows the guidelines defined by “compilation thesis” structure. Related studies are formatted as scientific papers with relatively independent theoretical frameworks, methods, and conclusions and are published, accepted, or submitted to peer-reviewed journals in related fields. I use this model because the theme of “ambiguous characters” as both a narrative strategy and a cognitive effect is embodied in different fields of film studies, such as film narrative, film metaphor, time theory, and film-philosophy. Discussing and publishing my research separately in these subcategories means a more effective access to feedback from experienced peer reviewers. It can provide a more robust reference for whether this topic has development potential and can expand the dissemination of this research.

In this way, the five independent studies completed to achieve the objectives of this study are presented in the form of five scientific articles either published, accepted, or under review in double-blind peer-reviewed international journals. They are, nonetheless, related thematically.

The main document is structured as follows:

Part I: Thesis Synopsis — It consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of this study, defines the scope of the study, introduces the overall dissertation structure, and raises several critical questions for this study. Chapter 2 focuses on the theoretical framework of this study, as well as the research perspective unique to each article. This study was organised into three time periods in Chapter 3, and the most important contributors were highlighted. Chapter 4 explains the methodology and methods employed in this research. *Mise-en-scène* is examined in Chapter 5, which explains the many types of ambiguous characters as well as their roles in film.

Part II: The Articles — This part contains five scientific articles, arranged in a way that favours the research rather than the publication date. Two have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and three are currently under review.

Article 1: “The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images: The Use of Ambiguous Characters in Moving Images through the Form of Painting.” — This article summarizes my initial views on ambiguous characters in meta-research that began with my artistic practice at the graduate level. Among them, this study uses the interface effect proposed by Slavoj Žižek to analyze the operation of the fallacy of self-referentiality in painting and film, proposing how ambiguous characters are displayed through the interface effect. In this article, I propose for the first time the principle of ambiguity between fantasy (character) and ontology (character) in (moving) images.

Article 2: “Deceptive Retrospective Narrative Strategy and Synchronistic Prerequisite: Case Study on The Design of Impossible Puzzles.” — This article formally discusses the topic of this study: the synchronistic approach. It not only analyzes the necessary contextual conditions for the generation of ambiguous characters but also proposes the methods of creating such characters in impossible puzzle films. This article also examines how the intersection of external and internal meanings causes retrospective attributions by viewers under non-deterministic narrative preconditions. In addition, it identifies the historical distinction between impossible puzzle films and solvable puzzle films.

Article 3: “Projection of Multiple Fantasies: De-subjectivity of Images in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*.” — This article uses Gilles Deleuze’s time-image theory to analyze the projection effects of ambiguous characters in the film, that is, multiple projections. Here, I look at the relationship between recollection and reality in Bi Gan’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (地球最后的夜晚 2018) based on the false narrative proposed by Deleuze. When the boundaries between reality, recollection, and dreams disappear, how should we distinguish between reality (character) and recollection (character), ontology (character) and fantasy (character)? What is the relationship between them?

Article 4: “Metaphors for Puzzles, Time, and Dreams: Ambiguous Narratives in *Kaili Blues*.” — From the perspective of film metaphor, this article takes Bi Gan’s *Kaili Blues* (路边野餐 2015) as an example to analyze how the narrative structure of the impossible puzzle film makes the events experienced by multiple characters overlap to present a reincarnation-like effect.

Article 5: “Reincarnation And *Déjà Vu*: A Case Study on The Dichotomous Narrative Mode in Impossible Puzzle Films.” — This article examines the dichotomous narrative structure of impossible puzzle films. The author discusses how *déjà vu* induces cognitive oscillation in *Lost Highway* (1997)’s audiences and examines the “like a thing of the previous generation” aesthetics in Bi Gan’s *Kaili Blues* (2015).

1.2 Research Questions

This dissertation aims to investigate ambiguous characters within complex cinematic narratives, which is an area still very much underexplored, and in most related studies, ambiguous characters are only regarded as a phenomenon in puzzle films. In this research, I am addressing the problem of analysing ambiguous characters in films (particularly impossible puzzle films). The focus is on the following questions:

1. What is an ambiguous character?
2. What kinds of characters are ambiguous?
3. What is the narrative strategy that leads to ambiguous characters in the film? What methods does it include?
4. How do these methods work?

1.3 Background — Arguments about How to Classify Complicated Narratives

In 2018, Paul Schrader once proposed a diagram at the end of the first chapter of *Transcendental Style in Film*, which suggested different directions for the slow cinema concept derived from the Tarkovski-style.¹ These three directions radiate outward from the narrative core, crossing a line that is characteristic of Tarkovski’s aesthetics. Some films that transcend the routine and provide viewers with a unique experience wander in the space outside the conventional

¹ The 1972 edition of Schrader’s *Transcendental Style in Film* was reissued in 2018 with a new chapter that proposed the Tarkovski diagram.

narrative's core and within the Tarkovski Ring (Schrader 32). Among the two circles, David Lynch's works are classified as located at the midpoint between the narrative nucleus and the Tarkovski ring (fig. 1).

Schrader did not elaborate on the categorisation of narrative in Lynchian works. It is important to note that this diagram highlights the problematic position of Lynch's works: it sways to the left and right inside the narrative category, leaving scholars unsure of its place. Although Schrader's intention is to demonstrate the narrative style rather than the narrative category, this graphic reflects a long-standing debate over the narrative category.

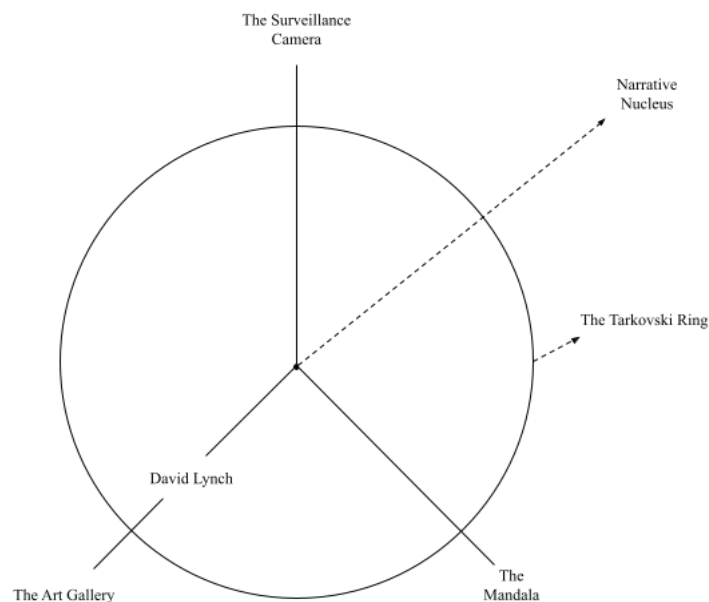


Figure 1

According to Paul Schrader's "Tarkovsky Ring" schema, there are three directions radiating from the narrative core: surveillance camera, art gallery, and mandala; the first refers to the lens without montage, the second to "pure imagery" such as light and colour, and the third to a deliberately slow-paced narrative ².

The origins of this controversy came from a turn in cinema narrative. In the 1990s, many works that were produced possessed complex narrative structures and deviated, to varying degrees, from the classical narrative paradigm. This

² Drawing based on "Tarkovsky Ring" proposed by Paul Schrader

movement, known as the Narrative Revolution in later generations, not only led to the introduction of narratological games, which initially belonged to the field of art films, into the mass theatres and became a part of popular culture,³ but also led to a new direction of cinema — complex narrative research.

Among these studies, the most influential is the narrative research from the perspective of formalism-structuralism, and other research directions include hypertext aesthetics, time theory, and cognitive theory (including psychoanalysis, Jungianism, and embodied cognition).

Although these theories offer unique insights into complex narratives from their respective fields, the debate between them is equally uninterrupted. The main point of contention is the rationale for the taxonomy of complex narratives (fig. 2). Some studies rely on pure formalism,⁴ others lean more towards hypertext and temporality in postmodernist theories.⁵ For the critical question of the debate between the two sides, let us go back to the controversy I mentioned previously about Lynchian films, which can be summed up in one sentence: should complex narratives belong to a variant genre or to a new model?

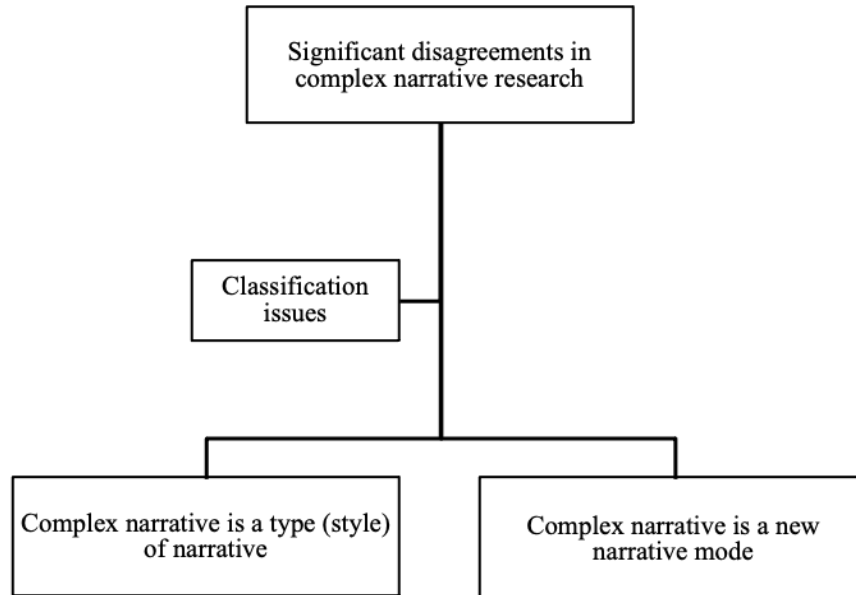


Figure 2

A schematic representation of the categorization controversy over complex narratives.

³ See Parshall, “Introduction: The Potential of Complex Narratives.” *Altman and After: Multiple Narratives in Film*.

⁴ Such as the twelve narratives that “deviate from the Hollywood paradigm” as summarised by Charles Ramírez Berg, María del Mar Azcona’s multi-protagonist narrative, and Peter F. Parshall’s multi-plot narrative.

⁵ Such as Dana Polan’s computer hypertext, Marsha Kinder’s database aesthetics, and Allan Cameron’s modular temporality.

This controversy over narrative taxonomy has put Lynchian films at the centre of the discussion from the start. In this process, the parties that support the complex narrative as a variant genre are mainly formalists, whose approach is based primarily on the narrative research of David Bordwell. For example, in 2006, Berg used objective conditions (the number of characters and plots) as the principle of taxonomy, and he followed the framework proposed by Bordwell, *fabula* and *syuzhet*.⁶ In the section titled “A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films,” he stated that David Lynch’s work (and similar works by other directors) was excluded from these classifications for two reasons: one is that, although some of David Lynch’s films are very curious, their *syuzhet* is standard. For example, the story type of *Blue Velvet* (1986) is a film noir, *Wild at Heart* (1990) is a road film, and *Fire Walk With Me* combines mystery and teen film; the others are his more Lynchian films, such as *Eraserhead* (1977), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001).⁷ This category belongs to the strong auteur, fetish cult films, and they are the same as the films in the first point as they place more emphasis on “Lynch’s primary interest in imagery and his appreciation of formal elements purely and simply as formal elements” (Berg 12). These two points are almost in line with Bordwell’s discussion of Lynchian films, especially for *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, of which he states

Lost Highway (1997) inexplicably morphs its initial protagonist into another character, each played by different actors. The plot eventually folds in on itself, with the new protagonist leaving the message that the original one heard at the film’s start. *Mulholland Drive* (2001) does the same, although now the double is played by the same actor, while some characters from early scenes reappear in different relations to her. If complex storytelling demands high redundancy, Lynch has been derelict in his duty. (*The Way Hollywood Tells It* 89)

⁶ *Fabula* refers to “story,” while *syuzhet* refers to “plot.” They are discussed in length in sec. 3.1.

⁷ While *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* clearly have road movie and film noir elements, they lack the explicitly prototypical narratives of *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*. For instance, *Blue Velvet*’s prototype storyline is a homicide investigation, while *Wild at Heart* details a series of incidents that transpire along the journey of the two characters; nevertheless, they are simply one aspect of *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*.

Moreover, Bordwell (et al.) believes that the complex narrative films that began in the New Hollywood era did not generate new narrative modes, proposing that

[...] the 'New' Hollywood has selectively borrowed from the international art cinema. The category of the art cinema includes the internationally distributed films identified with such directors as Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, François Truffaut, Luchino Visconti, and Bernardo Bertolucci. (Bordwell et al. "The Classical Hollywood Cinema" 614)

At this point, Berg, like Bordwell, sees complex narratives as belonging to a deviation from the classical narrative. Although he admitted "such films were relatively rare novelty pieces that stood out precisely" (Berg 7), in creating his typology, he defined the "alternative narrative as one that diverges significantly—but not totally—from classical Hollywood narration" (10). In this context, the style of the Lynchian films surpasses the narrative itself and does not have the value of narrative research. This view is more intuitively reflected in Kristin Thompson's study in 1999, who believes that Lynch's narrative is Robert Altman-esque, even if his works have achieved "a cult status that is increasingly outside the mainstream of Hollywood" (340), they are still "blips on the radar screen" (340).

Bordwell's framework has been selectively embraced by researchers who support complex narratives as a new narrative mode, acknowledging the validity of this formalist framework and introducing other factors to make a critical point. For example, in the journal concurrent with Berg's article in 2006, Elliot Panek noted the "flexibility" (64) of Bordwell's theory in his article "The Poet and the Detective." That is, whether or not Bordwell later argued that "apparent deviations from the classical paradigm are not the signs of a new paradigm" (64), he did agree that the three narrative properties, "knowledge, self-consciousness, and communicativeness" (Bordwell "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" 57; Panek 63), proposed by Meir Sternberg, compensated for the flaw in the formalist framework. This flaw was later pointed out by Torben Grodal in 2006 as,

The classical division between story [fabula] and discourse [syuzhet] is a useful tool when describing narratives with a very scrambled temporal order, but it is not so useful when describing the canonical film that is linearly progressing in time.

(6)

Bordwell's flexibility also serves as an indirect acknowledgement that the complexity of narrative lies in form and the complexity of the story itself. Thus, Panek considered it a new narrative mode. Since the 1990s, "a rash of narratives has been produced in Hollywood that promote ambiguity and sudden narrative fluctuations over brief isolated fluctuations and clarity of classical narration" (Panek 65).

Earlier, Polan in 2000 and Kinder in 2002, respectively, had noted the zeitgeist characteristic of this "new" narrative mode, namely hypertext. For example, Polan notes that Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is like "a computer hypertext, where one can jump from one screen to another" (35); and Kinder "proposes a new context—the convergence between cinema and new digital media—to explore Buñuel's legacy for conceptualizing interactive data, base narratives and their discreet pleasures" (3). Panek noticed this as well, arguing that "[y]ounger audiences that are increasingly comfortable with the burgeoning interactive medium of video games may find puzzle narratives appealing" since an "element of non-filmic interactive storytelling exists in these films" (87).

For these researchers in favour of the new narrative mode, their attitude towards Lynchian films is very different from that of the formalists. Kinder included *Lost Highway* in this category when he defines database narratives as "narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories" (6); Panek, for instance, used *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* as typical cases for explaining the "ambiguous narration" in (psychological) puzzle films (76–79).

The above two directions are developed independently. There is no right or wrong here, but rather a turn or forking of narrative research in a context where one part of a complex narrative embodies a stylized (some deviation) classical narrative. Another part represents a new model that is different from the

classical paradigm. For the latter (the new model), Panek called it the “psychological puzzle film.” The concept of puzzle films was further discussed and expanded with the publication of two collections of academic articles edited by Warren Buckland, *Puzzle Films* in 2009 and *Hollywood Puzzle Films* in 2014.

The question to be discussed in this research is deeply connected with the puzzle narrative. Before discussing this particular subject, I also need to briefly describe the various studies on the further classification of puzzle narratives. Earlier I mentioned David Lynch’s films, which have been involved in controversy over complex narrative taxonomies and remain a point of contention in discussions of puzzle narrative. Among researchers who acknowledge that some of the complex narrative works fall outside the classical paradigm, Panek classifies Lynch’s *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* as the “ambiguous narration” in puzzle films (68, 76).

However, the “ambiguous” is used here more as a narrative feature than a narrative classification, so this is not necessarily a definition. In addition to this, another researcher, Cameron, provided unique insights into the temporality of narratives in 2008, and he proposed modularity to improve Bordwell’s framework for analysing complex narratives. He further proposed four modes, namely “anachronic,” “forking paths,” “episodic,” and “split-screen” (Cameron 6). Among them, he believes that David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* belong to the forking paths narrative mixed with “lying flashback,” and they are a minority that “venture[s] some way into this territory” (11). The problem gradually emerges whether Bordwell introduces the three narrative properties proposed by Sternberg into his framework, or Panek improves on this later, or Cameron introduces the concept of temporality.

Neither can convincingly explain why *Lost Highway* and most of the other films, which are in the same category (or puzzle films or forking-path narrative) from a formalistic point of view, appear entirely different to the viewer as if they are not in the same category.⁸ The cognitive oscillations triggered by the

⁸ “Within this main category of complex puzzle films, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of complex cinema. On the one hand, there are films that hinder viewers’ narrative sense-making in some way, but which ultimately also offer (or at least allow the viewer to infer) satisfying resolutions to their temporarily ‘puzzling’ scenarios. We will call these disorienting but solvable puzzle films. On the other hand, there are films that do not grant such a way out, but rather evoke confusing effects more pervasively throughout their narration.” See Kiss and Willemsen 52.

former (*Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*) are more persistent than other films. There are still various “rationalised” interpretations from fans on the Internet, who try to find clues in the film(s) to support their inferences. The problem with Cameron’s book is that when he explains the forking-path, he uses the case of Tom Tywker’s *Run Lola Run* (1998), which he classifies as the same narrative category as *Lost Highway*, but ignored that the cognitive oscillation brought to the viewer by the latter was different from the former. The three acts repeated in *Run Lola Run* are more accessible for the viewer to understand in this age of hypertext. If a player’s character fails a task in a video game, it will do it all over again until it succeeds. *Lost Highway*, however, is not so easy to understand.

This problem was not addressed until Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen published *Impossible Puzzle Films* in 2017. This further categorisation introduced the theory of embodied cognition into the framework of formalism, where films like *Lost Highway* were classified as a different kind of narrative — impossible puzzle films, “a specific subset of contemporary complex films that offer pervasive, highly confusing experiences of complexity” (Kiss and Willemsen 27). The research on Kiss and Willemsen will be further analysed in Article 2, as first it is important to discuss the ambiguous characters in impossible puzzle films.

1.4 Context

Since the subject of this study is the synchronistic relationship of ambiguous characters, two fundamental questions are involved: what is an ambiguous character, and what is a synchronistic relationship?

Ambiguous characters as a narrative technique have been used long before puzzle films. In Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L’Année Dernière à Marienbad* 1961), events such as those recounted by the hero do not exist in the recollections of the heroine, one of the parties involved. Another example is the young Spanish woman Conchita in Luis Buñuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire* (*Ese Oscuro Objeto del Deseo* 1977), played alternately by the actresses Carole Bouquet and Ángela Molina in different episodes. This research premise

of ambiguous characters is based on the latest results of Kiss and Willemsen, and the particular narrative strategy of impossible puzzle films (as explained in sec. 3 of Part I). Kiss and Willemsen's questions at the beginning of Chapter 2 to answer the question "What is an ambiguous character?" are essential to understand this study. As they note:

How to find someone's identity in a story that repeatedly changes its characters' integrity? How to tease out the film's various strands when their exact relationship remains underdetermined and if the events presented are cyclically repetitive, interlocked and sometimes contradictory? How (and why) should we distinguish dreams and fantasies from reality? (25).

These three questions can summarise the essential characteristics of ambiguous characters. It can be summed up as follows:

1. The characters lose their identity during the development of the plot, which is the so-called "incoherence." (*Lost Highway*; *Mulholland Drive*).
2. In some cases, there is a reincarnation relationship between the plot module of a discontinuous character on one stage and another plot module of the character version on another stage. (*Timecrimes* [*Los cronocrímenes* 2007]; *Triangle* [2009]).
3. Other times, one character has overlapping life experiences with another character, which results in a projected relationship between the characters, known as *déjà vu*. (*Ulysses' Gaze* [*βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα* 1995]; *Kaili Blues*).
4. When the boundary between the false narrative (dreams, illusions, and memories) and the actual narrative is broken, fantasy (character) has a specious relationship with ontology (character). Then, the definition of ambiguous characters can be summarized as: in some films, the narrative strategy induces incoherence in the character's own identity, or the overlapping of one character's events with another one's, or whether the

character is real is questionable. (*The Double Life of Véronique* [*La Double Vie de Véronique* 1991]; *Long Day's Journey Into Night*)

In addition, the events “are cyclically repetitive, interlocked and sometimes contradictory” (25), as mentioned in the three questions by Kiss and Willemsen above. What is the “exact relationship” they have not determined? In the words of post-Jungian film theorist Greg Singh, it is not only an “unconscious connectedness but also a physical acausality” (176). In other words, the relationship is synchronistic, a Jungian acausal relationship. Especially in the impossible puzzle narrative, the ambiguity of the characters themselves or between characters caused by the narrative strategy, after losing the role of narrative thrust, is subjectively endowed with new meanings by the viewers. In this case, it is an apt choice that synchronicity is used to explain the characters’ relationships, since “[i]ts strength lies in its power to address the subjective side of experience and its value therefore involves the possibility of combining the subjective meaning of phenomena with objective explanations” (Peat 114).

Consequently, in the case that the theme of “ambiguous characters” is based on impossible puzzle films, I introduce the concept of synchronistic relationship to replace the deterministic relationship in the context of classical narrative.

2 Theme Framework

In the scientific articles in the Part II, I have explored and summarized the studies related to the complex narratives of the 1990s. These theoretical frameworks are divided into two categories according to the publication time of the original monographs and the primary analysis objects.⁹

The first category considers the theories put forward by film historians such as Thomas Elsaesser, Edward Branigan, David Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson. Their research on complex narratives was carried out long before the Narrative Revolution, and some of the narrative research frameworks proposed for the

⁹ At the literature review stage, it is undeniable that age is the most recognizable classification of film genres, even if this classification is no longer advocated in later studies.

novel narrative styles presented in the New Hollywood films of the time were far-reaching.

The second one studies a variety of researchers specializing in the complex narratives that emerged from the narrative revolution of the 1990s. They proceeded further under the framework of narrative research previously proposed by Bordwell et al. Some of them continued to work on the taxonomy under a purely formalist framework (such as Berg, Azcona, and Parshall), while others began to introduce other theories to transform the formalist framework of research (such as Panek, Cameron, and Kiss and Willemsen). The former is described in Section 1.3. The latter, such as Panek, began to focus on the subjectivity of complex narratives; Cameron distinguished the different temporalities embodied in film narratives; Kiss and Willemsen began to introduce cognitive theory to classify puzzle films further.

Part II of this doctoral dissertation, as mentioned in Section 1.1, consists of five separate scientific articles. These five articles are studies centred on the dissertation's theme, "Ambiguous Characters." My research framework is based on theories developed by previous researchers as they advanced from the post-classical narrative stage to the puzzle film stage¹⁰. Under this framework, I broaden the study of ambiguous characters to include narrative premises research, comparative research between art history and art practice research, ambiguous character methods research, and ambiguous narrative framework research. Because of these various extensions, the theory I use in each scientific article is unique, which will be explained in this section.

2.1 Interface Effect

The interface effect is Slavoj Žižek's use of Lacan's terminology to generalise a specific cinematic spectacle in *The Fright of Real Tears*. This spectacle frequently occurs "when the exchange of subjective and objective shots fails to produce the suturing effect" (39). As Žižek pointed out in one scene of speech in *Citizen Kane* (1941), the relationship between Kane and the massive portrait behind him implies the simultaneity of reality and fantasy. In reality, interface

¹⁰ Refer to sec. 1.3 and sec. 3.2.

effects are much more than this, and Žižek introduces another situation in which interfaces sometimes substitute for performances (or lines) to convey the tone of the following (or previous) plot to the viewer (fig. 3; fig. 4; fig. 5).



Figure 3



Figure 4

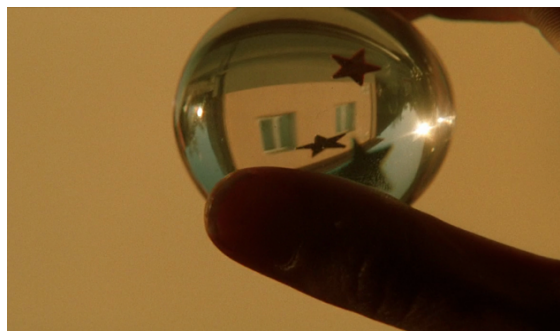


Figure 5

Žižek believes that the visual effect of the scenery being distorted through the window panes conveys Weronika's unease to the viewer in the scene inside the railroad car in *The Double Life of Véronique* (*La Double Vie de Véronique* 1991).

Instead of continuing to discuss all manifestations of interface effects in Article 1, "The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images," focus on a specific problem reflected by interface effects—the ambiguity between the character's ontology and fantasy. This ambiguity is reflected in the interface (glass, screen, and other mediums that present character images) rather than the object

(ontology) that the viewer should recognise directly, and it becomes a new object (fantasy). To further explain the ambiguity between the roles (ontology and fantasy) of interface effects in film, I employ the fallacy of self-referentiality, a specific composition in painting.

Close-ups of Valentine's profile appear in several scenes in Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Red* (*Trois Couleurs: Rouge* 1994), which Žižek describes as "an exemplary case of what Deleuze called the cylindric stasis of compressed time" (52). Furthermore, the portraits of Valentine on three different interfaces can be interpreted as Valentine's forking in time (fig. 6; fig. 7; fig. 8; fig. 9), a phenomenon also seen in *The Double Life of Véronique* (*La Double Vie de Véronique* 1991). In fact, in "Véronique"¹¹, the ambiguity of the characters is dictated by time forking rather than the interface. This discovery prompted me to consider the significance of multiple ambiguous characters in the film from the standpoint of temporal forking.



Figure 6



Figure 7

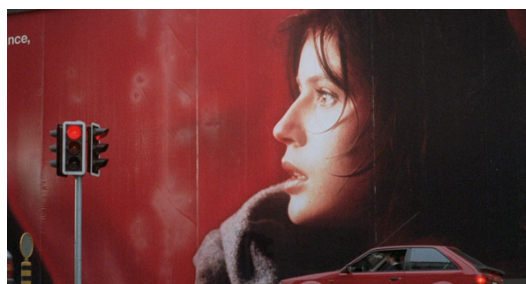


Figure 8

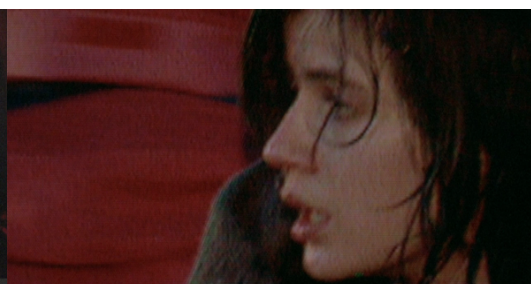


Figure 9

The heroine (ontology) (fig. 6) forks into three different fantasies in *Three Colours: Red*, which are displayed on various types of interfaces (fig. 7; fig. 8; fig. 9).

¹¹ "Véronique" also makes use of interface effects like photographs and windows. There must be an identifiable fantasy-character as long as there is an interface, but the Véroniques of the two entities take the ambiguity of the characters out of the interface and into another level, that is, either both are fantasies or both are ontologies.

2.2 (Embodied) Cognitive Theory of Film

Since the early stages of complex (post-classical) film narrative research, the theory of (embodied) cognition has served as an essential theoretical foundation. In Bordwell, Branigan, Elsaesser, and Buckland's writings on film narrative, the cognitive theory is used to break through the inherently formalistic analysis methods. In the most recent study, Kiss and Willemsen's *Impossible Puzzle Films* embodied cognition theory is used as a core method to distinguish different types of complex narratives.

This dissertation's research is also based on the findings of film narrative research conducted under the influence of (embodied) cognitive theory. In the second article, "Deceptive Retrospectives," I explore Kiss and Willemsen's achievements in further distinguishing complex narrative films from puzzle films in narrative cognition, as well as inheriting and criticising Bordwell's point of view on meaning-making in film narrative with the narrative premise as the starting point. To explain the unique narrative premises of ambiguous characters in this situation, I introduced post-Jungian film theorist Singh's concept of synchronicity.

Notably, the first article in the Part II of this doctoral dissertation differs significantly from the other four. This difference is not only due to the fact that the first article is a meta-study but also because it is grounded in psychoanalytic theory, whereas the other four articles are grounded in cognitive theory. The shift in this research's underlying theory is due to the fact that psychoanalytic theory is useful for explaining the behaviour of characters, but not for discussing why ambiguous characters (as a phenomenon) arise.

Ira Konigsberg has identified three common applications of psychoanalytic theory in film studies:

One approach is to read the film as a psychoanalytic case hour, which means to interpret characters and actions from a psychoanalytic perspective. Another approach is to see characters as creations of filmmakers who impose their own experience and personalities on these fictional beings. [...] A

third approach is to use film to document a psychoanalytic theory itself. (4)

In the first two instances, “the reading of the film is similar to the interpretation and creation of a life story that transpires during the analytic process” (Konigsberg 4). The third way indicates that the film case is intended to better explain psychoanalytic concepts.

Cognitive theory, unlike psychoanalysis, is concerned with the meaning of an argument’s evidence. Briefly, “psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the ‘what,’ [and] cognitive psychology is concerned with the ‘how;’ that is, with the processes and not the content” (4). Consequently, whereas the first article depended on the concept of Lacanism to suggest the concept of ambiguous roles, the examination of how this narrative phenomena develops and functions demands a greater emphasis on cognitivism. In other words, we must comprehend how the characters in the complicated narrative contribute to the viewer’s experience of ambiguity, beginning with the cognitive process. However, it is evident that psychoanalytic thought is frequently intertwined with cognitivism in the subject of contemporary film studies ¹². Even if the last four articles rely on cognitivism, the study of characters must still be based on psychoanalytic theory.

2.3 Time-Image Theory

In the third article, “Projection of Multiple Fantasies,” I discuss an ambiguous character association in the film narrative that Žižek refers to as a “flashback in the present” (Žižek 79). To explain this narrative effect, I employ Deleuze’s time-image theory ¹³. Deleuze’s theory of time-image is instrumental in elucidating how one film character can be projected onto another. This projection mode can be understood roughly as follows: the appearance, character, behaviour, or experience of character A is identical to that of character B (sometimes with character C) on the assumption that A and B (and C) have no causal connection (influence and being influenced). Consider one

¹² See Richard Allen, *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality*, 1995.

¹³ See several scenarios of *Three Colours: Red* mentioned in sec. 2.1 of this dissertation.

prototypical character (A) to be the origin of the time, with the fork into the past and present projected onto the other two characters (B, sometimes with C). This time forking-projection mode gives me another option for creating ambiguous characters.

2.4 Metaphor Theory of Film

Through the arguments for synchronistic relations¹⁴ and the temporal forking-projection model¹⁵, the association between roles is viewed as indirect rather than causal (a-causal). This new relationship suggests that metaphor is essential in this type of ambiguous narrative. How does one character become projected onto another, resulting in the flashback effect in the present? I discuss the metaphorical devices and narrative structure of puzzle films (as the primary vehicle for ambiguous characters) in Article 4, “The Poetic Structure of Film Narratives”. In this article, I will focus on the Center for Advanced Film Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin definition of film metaphor and the two metaphor modes of film, metaphor condensation and metaphor displacement, proposed by Dr Carlo Comanducci in his MPhil dissertation.

2.5 Acausal Philosophical Theory

Based on the findings of the previous four articles (for narrative strategy and structure), I formally consider acausal association a essential prerequisite for studying ambiguous character approaches. So, in Article 5, “Reincarnated Bodies and Figures,” I use Martha P. Nochimso’s reference to quantum physics and Vedic mysticism to summarise and categorise the techniques used to create ambiguous characters in Lynch’s *Lost Highway*.

¹⁴ See sec. 2.2 and Article 2.

¹⁵ See sec. 2.3 and Article 3.

3 Literature Review

The following literature review focuses on summarizing theoretical research frameworks related to the theme of this study, “Ambiguous Characters,” rather than all theories of film narrative. While these related theories do not directly address ambiguous characters, the genres (or modes) of narratives on which ambiguous characters are based need to be analyzed through these frameworks and views. In addition, this literature review introduces these theories and sorts out the context between them so that people can understand how the research on ambiguous narratives is gradually formed with the contributions of researchers in different periods.

3.1 From (Post-)Classical to Complex Narratives

In his book *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell used terms borrowed from critics of Russian formalism in the 1920s to formulate his framework for narrative research—*fabula* and *syuzhet*.¹⁶ Bordwell defines *fabula* as a “story” that “embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field” (49). That is, *fabula* means the original chronological order that a narrative has. Similarly, in his definition of *syuzhet*, Bordwell calls it “plot,” which “is the actual arrangement and presentation of the *fabula* in the film” (50). The relationship between the two can be understood as the *fabula* being the original timeline and the actual narrative sequence being the *syuzhet*. This framework explains the relationship between complex narrative lines and the narrative core.

However, it needs to introduce another theory to explain how the viewer restores the *fabula* through the *syuzhet* presented by the narrative. So, in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell introduced the “knowledge,” “self-consciousness,” and “communicativeness” proposed by the literary critic Meir

¹⁶ “Given the book’s topic, it is not implausible to draw upon the work of the Russian Formalist critics of the 1920s—Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Boris Eichenbaum, and the like. If we except Henry James, these were the most significant theorists of narrative since Aristotle. Concepts like *syuzhet* and *fabula*, motivation, retardation, and parallelism have become all but indispensable to contemporary narrative theory. Not incidentally, the Formalists also wrote sensitively about cinema; the 1927 collection *Poetika Kino* (“Poetics of the Cinema”) offers many insights into film narrative and stylistics.” See Bordwell, “Narration in the Fiction Film” xii.

Sternberg,¹⁷ and he believed that “these characteristics are properly narrational in that they not only shape syuzhet processes but often involve stylistic options too” (Bordwell, “Narration in the fiction film” 57). Through this combination, the formalist framework involves not only the structural analysis of complex narratives but also their narrative strategies.

In Edward Branigan’s *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, the first use of cognitive theory to discuss and analyze the schemas of post-classical (complex) narratives has led to an alternative approach to the analysis of complex narratives. In this book, Branigan focuses on “the way in which spectators cannot help but construe narrative from visual data” (Ruthrof, “Beyond Film: Branigan’s Narrational Word”). One of Branigan’s significant contributions to the study of complex narratives is his distinction between eight different types of temporal relationships in film narratives, which he expresses as,

[...] several varieties of story time created as a spectator relocates the on-screen time of spatial fragment B relative to the on-screen time of spatial fragment A resulting in a new and imaginary temporal order in the story, relationship AB_n. Some of the new relationships that may be created include temporal continuity, ellipsis, overlap, simultaneity, reversal, and distortion. (Branigan, “Narrative Comprehension and Film” 41)

According to this viewpoint, if the spectator is unable to properly bridge the gap between the screen and the plot, they will have to return to the beginning of the narrative to re-understand the film’s “hypotheses about time and causality” (*Narrative Comprehension and Film* 44). Branigan’s perspective affected other researchers’ classification standards for complex narratives: Bordwell’s formalist framework cannot be used as the sole classification criterion, and the viewer’s subjective cognitive variables must also be considered. The creation of this theory also signaled the beginning of two divergences in subsequent research on complex narratives: the simply formalist and cognitive theory viewpoints.

¹⁷ See Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*.

Years later, Branigan's and Bordwell's frameworks became a return to the study of cinema itself, compared to the phenomenon of many psychoanalytic interpretations of Lynchian films. Such is the case of the monograph published by Thomas Elsaesser in 2002. While Thomas Elsaesser has been a key name in film history as long as Bordwell, he is a latecomer to the post-modern cinema or complex narratives. Nevertheless, his contributions to the field are also evident in his co-authored *Studying Contemporary American Film* with Warren Buckland, in which they "set out to organize, clarify, and make applicable various veins of analysis within this area in relationship to a specific cultural product — the American film" (qtd. in Butler, para. 1, sent. 2). In Chapter 6 of the book, "Cognitive Theories of Narration," they analyzed the case of David Lynch's *Lost Highway* using the theories of David Bordwell and Edward Branigan. The authors also criticized the inadequacies of psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework for analyzing the film. This research method continued to be used in the two collections¹⁸ edited afterwards by Buckland, providing a practical framework for researching puzzle films.

3.2 From Complex Narratives to Puzzle Narrative Studies

In Section 1.3, I have analyzed the two paths of complex narrative research after the 1990s and several significant research results of puzzle film research. Based on these studies, I propose a framework for studying ambiguous characters at the end of this section (sec. 3.3).

Ambiguous characters exist in art films and impossible puzzle films. Regarding the principle of distinguishing between ordinary puzzle films and impossible puzzle films, Veerle Ros and Miklós Kiss once analyzed it in the article "Disrupted PECMA Flows". This will be discussed in depth in Article 2 "Deceptive Retrospectives".

However, and specifically in terms of narrative strategy, both ordinary puzzle films and impossible puzzle films are trying to hinder the viewer's schema (prototypical narrative) matching. The difference is that the former only temporarily slows down the matching speed, and the final explanation is often

¹⁸ *Puzzle Films and Hollywood Puzzle Films*.

given at the end, while the latter completely blocks the matching. In greater detail, because each narrative module of the latter corresponds to classical narrative principles in form, viewers will recreate the meaning after the schema matching is blocked, which frequently leads to over-interpretation of the film. Before this study can be conducted, it is necessary to distinguish between art films and impossible puzzle films. Chapter 5 of Kiss and Willemsen's *Impossible Puzzle Films* discussed this distinction and how each works.

First of all, in terms of distinction, art films bring viewers more to a re-identification of the narrative framework. According to their analysis, "art-cinema narration encourages the application of some particular cognitive routines that lead to distinctive strategies of meaning-making" (Kiss and Willemsen 154). Moreover, the narrative frame of art film is not just "a response to narration" (154) (like Berg's taxonomy), but "apprehension frame-switches" (154) between art film and the classical narrative, which are "shifts to viewing strategies, for example to aesthetic, allegorical, associative or symbolical readings that do not belong to classical narratives' referential and explicit meaning-making procedures" (154).

However, impossible puzzle films are almost equivalent to art films in the sense that, as Bordwell states, they "throw us off balance" (Bordwell, "Poetics of cinema" 168). As for how to distinguish the two, Kiss and Willemsen came to another conclusion in their research: from the perspective of matching the narrative frame, people do not regard puzzle films as art films. Much on the contrary, they

keep trying to make sense of these films on the diegetic, intratextual and often immersed level. They investigate 'how the film works' rather than asking 'what it means'; they attempt to 'crack the codes' of complexity, rather than extracting symbolic, symptomatic or meta-fictional meanings of the type associated with art cinema. (Kiss and Willemsen 163)

Second, as far as the principle of this difference is concerned, it is mainly due to the narrative strategy of art film, which is to make the viewer adapt to

the narrative oscillation through “apprehension frame-switches” (Kiss and Willemsen 154). Viewers begin to understand the value of narrative frameworks from aesthetics, metaphors, and allusions. In the process, the viewer gradually develops knowledge of the narrative framework of a particular *auteur*, which in turn serves as a schema to understand similar art films. Unlike art films, impossible puzzle films strategically guide the viewer to understand it as a classic narrative, but the viewer’s detective game cannot reach a clear conclusion due to the lack of causation. In this case, it causes the viewer to carry out meaning-reconstruction according to the plot, which Grodal calls “higher meaning” (Grodal 212).

In conclusion, the differences between art films and impossible puzzle films are resolved by Kiss and Willemsen using cognitive theory, which means that the last part of the complex narrative problem has been sorted out. From the initial controversy over the taxonomy of complex narratives to the now proposed impossible puzzle films, it is possible to highlight the following process:

1. Before the narrative revolution, film historians established the basic theoretical framework of complex narratives by analyzing post-classical narratives in the New Hollywood era influenced by postwar art films.
2. The researchers of film narrative after the 1990s conducted research based on this framework and produced two bifurcations, one is pure formalism, and the other is analytical formalism. The latter attempted to explain further the contradictory parts of the former, during which the puzzle film was proposed and extensively discussed.
3. Unlike other classifications that have been resolved by formalism, as the most controversial of the complex narrative classifications, puzzle films present new contradictions—some of which are cognitively ineffective for matching prototypal narratives. Kiss and Willemsen finally solved this problem in 2017 with the theory of (embodied) cognition. In this process of secondary classification, they classified the works that failed to evoke the viewer’s associative archetypal narrative as impossible puzzle films. Furthermore, they distinguished impossible puzzle films

from art films, which solved problems left over from the era of post-classical narrative studies.

3.3 Art Films and Impossible Puzzle Films: Commonality of Approaches

Kiss and Willemsen mentioned that people often confuse art films with impossible puzzle films, mainly because “[i]n some of the most ambiguous of these cases, the viewing experiences evoked by impossible puzzle films may border on viewing routines that we associate with art cinema” (133). Whether it is Bordwell or Kiss and Willemsen, there is a consensus that they recognize art films as having the characteristics of “ambiguity” in the narrative strategy.

Bordwell has put forward a point where he believes that “we can usefully consider the ‘art cinema’ as a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures” (Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” 56). According to Bordwell, the art film should not be regarded as a narrative genre, and further, as a mode of practice, it has an undeniable direct influence on New Hollywood.¹⁹ Likewise, it impacted the new narrative genres (or modes) that emerged from the narrative revolution of the 1990s, and its ambiguous narrative became one of the main techniques of impossible puzzle films.²⁰ So it is possible to attribute the principle of the ambiguous characters to the following: the art film or impossible puzzle film “defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode, and especially against the cause-effect linkage of events” (Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” 57), while at the same time it “is classical in its reliance upon psychological causation; characters and their effects on one another remain central” (58).

Additionally, in the impossible puzzle narrative, the main characters “have accessible rationals and clear goals, exhibit transparent psychology and relatively unambiguous behaviour, and are emotionally and actively invested in the unfolding story’s concrete actions and events” (Kiss and Willemsen 166).

¹⁹ “As the ‘old’ Hollywood had incorporated and refunctionalized devices from German Expressionism and Soviet montage, the ‘New’ Hollywood has selectively borrowed from the international art cinema.” Bordwell et al. 624.

²⁰ See sec. 4.4.1 of Kiss and Willemsen’s book for a brief analysis of the ambiguous characters in *Mulholland Drive*. Kiss, and Willemsen 131–34.

When “we closely follow one (or a few) protagonist(s) experiencing a strange storyworld” (167), these characters “experience the impossible and incongruent events as puzzling, disconcerting or even threatening — providing a model response for the film viewer for easy identification” (167).

So, from another perspective, this “model response for easy identification” is precisely the reason for the ambiguity because its essence is an anti-classical narrative. Combining the arguments made in Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 above, it is important to point out the following ideas:

1. As a method derived from art film, the ambiguous narrative was inherited by the genre of impossible puzzle films after the 1990s, serving its narrative strategy. Historically, it has long appeared in pre-narrative-revolutionary films. So, we can find some art films in the cases used in Section 5.
2. As the anchor point in the narrative, the character plays an essential role in the viewer’s practical understanding of the narrative, so the study of ambiguous characters must rely on narrative research, and the two cannot be discussed separately.
3. Kiss and Willemsen have already discussed the formation principle of ambiguous roles,²¹ and I do not need to repeat the argument. For this, it is necessary to work with specific methods, such as structural and metaphorical methods.

At the end of this section, the theoretical frameworks for analyzing ambiguous characters includes,

1. Post-classical narrative research frameworks mainly use David Bordwell’s formalism framework and Edward Branigan’s schema analysis method.
2. When researching specific methods, it is necessary to draw on the narrative synchronicity of post-Jungian cinema, the interface effect of Lacanianism, and the theory of film metaphor.

²¹ As I mentioned earlier, they did not analyze the topic of “ambiguous characters” specifically, but they presented substantial results in their case study of *Mulholland Drive*.

3. The premise of ambiguous roles is the reclassification of complex narratives. From the cognitive point of view, the taxonomy and its principles proposed by Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen are the essential theoretical basis of this study.

4 Methodology

The ambiguous character is a peculiar phenomenon in complex narrative films which is the subject of this dissertation's research. The focus of the research for this object is to investigate the narrative carrier, narrative premise, narrative strategy, and technique of ambiguous characters. In the research process, I am using various methods, not only clarifying the context of the study of ambiguous characters vertically but also explaining the generating environment of ambiguous roles from a broad perspective. This study balances the micro (technique research) and macro (narrative research) methods.

This method is suitable for discovering and analysing easily overlooked topics in film complex narratives study. Following that, I will explain the theoretical foundation and research methods used in this study; then, I will introduce the source and collection of documents used in this study; and finally, I will introduce the prominent cases used.

4.1 Methodological Approach

The underlying theories of this study's methodology are epistemology and ontology. As a supplement to the research on complex film narratives, this study attempts to correct a misunderstanding in the field, namely, that researchers regard the special cognitive effects caused by some specific types of film narratives to the viewer as isolated evidence and thus worthless. In Section 1.1.2, I detailed David Bordwell and Charles Ramirez Berg's misreading of Lynchian cinema, Elliot Panek and Allan Cameron's omission of the particular experience David Lynch's *Lost Highway* provides the viewer. After recognising these issues, I attempted to identify the causes of these

misunderstandings or neglect, hoping to discover the factors underlying this phenomenon.

In Article 2, I summarise the factors that contribute to these points—the narrative premises, which are often overlooked in the study of complex narratives — the preconditions for the effectiveness of narrative strategies. The narrative premise determines whether the narrative strategy that follows is meaningful. It also explains the significance of the ambiguous characters that researchers have overlooked as isolated evidence—they are not only a reflection of the director’s style but also a puzzle purposefully created by rigorous scriptwriting. Contingency is a presupposition rather than an unexpected event in this type of narrative. In other words, ambiguous characters are noteworthy since they are created on purpose as a “chance” or “coincidence.” As a result, I will choose several ambiguous character types that are regarded as the director’s personal aesthetic tendency for further research in Part II.

4.2 Methods

This study falls under the category of exploratory research. In this study, I primarily employ “documentary research” and “case study.” Documentary research is “secondary research” involving organising, summarising, and criticising previous related research and raising questions and hypotheses. The case study is a type of “qualitative research” in which relevant data from the case is gathered through observation, including the characters, plots, and symbols that reflect the ambiguity. Then the hypothesis is demonstrated, and a conclusion is reached. “Documentary research” and “case studies” are standard in film research and considered traditional research methods.

4.3 Literature, Cases, and Data Collection

4.3.1 Literature Sources

Academic monographs and scientific articles constituted the primary sources for this study. Among the most important academic monographs are:

In this research, David Bordwell's work is frequently cited. For example, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1991), *On the History of Film Style* (1997), *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006), *Poetics of Cinema* (2008). It also includes books by Bordwell and other researchers, such as *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (2005) and *Film Art: An Introduction* (2012, 10th edition).

In addition to Bordwell, the books of a number of researchers who have made substantial contributions to postclassical narrative research serve as essential theoretical references for this study. Among these are Edward Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992), Kristin Thompson's *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (1999), Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland's *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (2002).

The writings of numerous complex narrative researchers were also crucial to this study. In this study, their primary responsibility is to integrate the various branches that arise when studying complex narratives. These essential books include Allan Cameron's *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema* (2008), Warren Buckland's *Puzzle Films Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (2009) and *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (2014), Mara del Mar Azcona's *The Multi-Protagonist Film* (2010), and Peter F. Parshall's *Altman and After: Multiple Narratives in Film* (2012).

This research is based on psychoanalytic theory and cognitivism; consequently, related works are frequently cited in this doctoral dissertation. Many of these works belong to the discipline of interaction, so no specific classification will be made, such as Leon Festinger's *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957), Christian Metz's *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (1982, trans. Celia Britton et al.), F. David Peat's

Synchronicity: The Bridge between Matter and Mind (1987), Torben Grodal's *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (1997), Slavoj Žižek's *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001), Greg Singh's *Film after Jung: Post-Jungian Approaches to Film Theory* (2009), C. G. Jung's *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (2010, trans. R. F. C. Hull), Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen's *Impossible Puzzle Films: A Cognitive Approach to Contemporary Complex Cinema* (2017).

In addition to the academic monographs mentioned previously, theories of film style studies are frequently used as analytical tools in this research. As mentioned in the previous paragraph: they are difficult to classify as a fixed discipline, so they are listed here without classification. This includes James P. Carse's *Finite and Infinite Game* (1986), Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta), Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (2018), Slavoj Žižek's *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (2000).

Since some cases were used in this study (see sec. 4.4), academic monographs on the study of directors and their works, in addition to the aforementioned theoretical books, became indispensable references. They consist of Dana Polan's *Pulp Fiction* (2000), Marek Haltof's *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (2004), Mark Bould's *Film Noir: From Fritz Lang to Fight Club* (2005), Eric G. Wilson's *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony from Eraserhead to Mulholland Dr.* (2007), Greg Olson's *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark* (2008), Luis Buñuel's *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel* (2013, trans. Abigail Israel), and Martha P. Nochimson's *David Lynch Swerves: Uncertainty from Lost Highway to Inland Empire* (2013).

The majority of the journal articles are sourced from renowned academic databases, including De Gruyter, JSTOR, MDPI, Muse, and Taylor & Francis.

4.3.2 Cases and Data

The case study includes three directors' films, mostly from online streaming services like Amazon and Netflix. Other case films mentioned in the article include some that are older and can be watched for free on YouTube, others that are commercial and require online viewing platforms, and a few niche films available online as well.

The data is extracted through observation of the case. Compare the plot and shots to record the anchor points, which mark the coordinates of the occurrence of ambiguous characters (narratives) in a film, and then list these plots and characters in a table for further research.

4.4 The Case Study

4.4.1 Purpose of Case Study

Film researchers frequently use the method of studying typical cases. Cinema, in the end, is a form of artistic creation. The spectacle in a film cannot be classified by formalism under this attribute; otherwise, it is more likely to be considered unique rather than universal and thus loses research value. In Article 1, "The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images," I quote Professor José Quaresma to demonstrate this point. He believes that because creators will incorporate personal subjective aesthetic tendencies into their creations, art researchers should focus on oscillatory methods rather than scientific literature²². Consequently, I did not prioritise its universality in case selection. On the contrary, it is precisely because of the preconceived notion of universality that this topic has been neglected for so long by several film academics²³.

It is worth noting that the latest research from Kiss and Willemsen answered affirmatively whether the theme of ambiguous characters is valid. According to their book, *Impossible Puzzle Film*, this phenomenon is no longer seen as a film director's style show but as a unique, universal narrative strategy

²² See Quaresma 142. Although the original text indicates that Quaresma is defending the uniqueness of the PhD research method in art practice, his point applies equally to studying practical works.

²³ See sec. 1.3 for my description of the controversy sparked by David Lynch's work.

within a limited range. As a result, I refer more to Kiss and Willemsen's findings and use various cases in this study to analyse and summarise the generation principles and manufacturing methods of ambiguous characters.

4.4.2 Sampling

This study's prominent cases are drawn from the works of directors from three different cultural backgrounds. These include *The Double Life of Véronique* and *Three Colours: Red* by Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Lost Highway* by David Lynch, and *Kaili Blues* and *Long Day's Journey into Night* by Bi Gan. Kieślowski's works are interspersed in five articles as cases explaining the *doppelgänger* phenomenon and the effect of the flashback in the present. David Lynch's *Lost Highway* appears in Articles 1 and 2 as a case study explaining the phenomenon of role splitting, and it is also a separate case of Article 5. Bi Gan's *Kaili Blues* and *Long Day's Journey into Night* serve as cases in Articles 4 and 3, which are used for metaphor and temporality studies.

4.4.3 Case Description

I will narrate the plot of the films of these necessary analysis samples here so that the reader can better understand the case analysis in Part II's scientific article. The following are listed in plot order rather than story order. The main reason for this is that these films have complex narrative structures that make restoring the chronological order of their a priori stories difficult or impossible.

In addition, I will not go into detail about the plots that are irrelevant to this study.

The Double Life of Véronique

Weronika is a young Polish woman in the 1990s with a talent for singing but a failing heart. She will remove a glass ball from her pocket to play when happy. Weronika had a choir audition one day, and as she returned home with her sheet music, she encountered a demonstration in the plaza. She observes a young

French woman who resembles her photographing everything on the square. Weronika ultimately won the interview but died onstage of a heart attack.

The day following Weronika's death in Poland, French tourist Véronique feels sad and distressed. She requests to be excluded from the choir owing to a heart condition. She meets a puppeteer and develops affection for him while working as a teacher. To satisfy the puppeteer's curiosity, Véronique displays the contents of her handbag, which includes a glass ball and a proof sheet of photographs taken in Poland, including an accidental picture of Weronika. Later, based on Véronique's appearance, the puppeteer creates two similar puppets, one being manipulated and the other peacefully lying on a table.

Three Colours: Red

Valentine is a University of Geneva student who moonlights as a model. She longs to see her boyfriend in London, whom she misses terribly. The photographer selects a side portrait of her for a billboard during her job. A law student who lives on the same street as her is Auguste. This day, he dropped his textbooks while crossing the street. Because one of his textbooks is open, he concentrates on that page. Valentine collides with a dog while driving home. She encounters the dog's owner, a retired judge called Kern, while returning the dog.

Auguste eventually passes the exam and becomes a judge, which he attributes to the textbook that had fallen to the ground, as the exam focuses on its content. Auguste has been unable to reach his blonde lover since he graduated, so one day, he climbs up to her floor and discovers that she is having an affair with another man.

The day before she goes to England, Kern is invited to Valentine's fashion presentation. After the concert, the two took shelter in the theatre's lobby due to the sudden storm. During this time, Kern recounts his youth, including how he once passed an exam by inadvertently focusing on the exam's point and how his blonde sweetheart ultimately deserted him ²⁴.

²⁴ Kern's narrative and Auguste's recent experience resemble two versions of the same tale.

Ultimately, Valentine's ferry is involved in an accident, but she and Auguste survive. The side face of Valentine at the accident scene is frozen on television during the newscast.

Lost Highway

Fred is a professional saxophonist. One morning, he receives the following message on his home walkie-talkie: "Dick Laurent is dead." After that, he and his wife frequently received envelopes containing videotapes showing the inside of Fred's residence. Fred and Renee's relationship has deteriorated, and their sexual life stinks, despite this odd occurrence. Andy's buddy Renee hosts a party where Fred meets a mysterious man who claims to be at his residence. When Fred calls home, Mysterious Man answers the phone (this paradox cannot be explained). Fred is led to jail the following morning by a newly obtained video of him dismembering his wife, Renee.

Fred suffers from a severe headache in his cell. At this juncture, an image arises on the iron door, a ripped hole representing a solitary cabin blazing backwards against the flow of time (from burning to before it caught fire). The next day, the guards discover that a young man named Pete has replaced Fred in the cage. Pete is consequently acquitted. In Pete's world, he is an auto mechanic and Mr Eddy's mistress Alice's hidden boyfriend. Alice informs Pete that Mr Eddy is aware of their affair. Alice reveals several truths when pressed by Pete, including that Mr Eddy's real name is Dick Laurent and that she is a pornographic actress. Pete and Alice then devise an escape strategy, but before leaving town, they decide to raid Andy's mansion.

As planned, Pete arrives at Andy's villa. What catches the eye is that a pornographic video of Alice is projected on the villa's hallway walls. Pete discovers a group photograph on the table containing two women, Alice and Renee, who are nearly identical save for their hair colour. Pete is currently experiencing a severe headache. After opening Room 26, he hallucinates that Alice is having sex there as he ascends to the lavatory on the second floor.

After safely escaping, the couple travels to a modest suburban home. After a sex session, Pete's look changes back to that of Fred. The individual then relocates to the "Lost Highway" motel. In Room 26, he discovers his unfaithful

wife and Dick Laurent. Eventually, Fred managed to cut Dick Laurent during the battle. The mysterious man then approaches Dick Laurent and shows him a pornographic film of Renee.

Fred returns home after murdering Dick Laurent, stands at the front door, and announces over the intercom, "Dick Laurent is dead." At the film's end, he drives aimlessly on the highway while being pursued by police cars.

Kaili Blues

Chen Sheng manages a clinic with the help of an old doctor. Weiwei, his nephew, is obsessed with clocks and watches. Chen Sheng adores Weiwei, but Weiwei's father, Crazy Face, is uncaring with his kid and constantly threatens to sell him. Weiwei mysteriously vanishes one day. Chen Sheng is concerned and goes to Crazy Face, only to hear that he has sent Weiwei to Zhenyuan Town to live with Monk.

Monk had lost his son many years previously. Monk now owns a watch shop in Zhenyuan Town because his son was a big enthusiast of clocks and watches. Chen Sheng used to be a gang member, and Monk was his boss back then. Monk once lent money to Chen Sheng to assist him treat his wife's illness. Chen Sheng spent nine years in prison for avenging Monk's son's murder as a result of this relationship.

Chen Sheng chooses to go to Zhenyuan Town to find Weiwei. Chen Sheng's colleague, the old doctor, tells him about her background before he embarks on his expedition. When she was young, she abandoned her boyfriend and departed Zhenyuan. With her boyfriend on the verge of death, she entrusts Chen Sheng with returning the two tokens to him.

Chen Sheng appears to be dreaming as his train travels through the cave. Chen meets Weiwei as an adult in dreamland, a female hairdresser who resembles his wife, and Yangyang, a girl who makes the same life decisions as the elderly doctor.

Chen Sheng eventually tracked down Weiwei. However, he realises that Weiwei is content here, so he abandons the plan to bring Weiwei home and travels by train alone.

Long Day's Journey into Night

Luo Hongwu appears to have just ended a sex trade with a young woman at the start of the film. The official plot begins when this scene is over.

Luo returned to his long-lost homeland after his father died. In a run-down house, he discovers a relic left by his father: a photograph of his mother with a missing face. The image is as foggy as his recollection of his mother. Because his mother eloped with a beekeeper when he was a child.

On the back of the photo, there is a phone number. This is the phone number of a woman who is currently incarcerated. She turned out to be Wan Qiwen's old acquaintance. Luo's girlfriend twelve years ago was Wan Qiwen. However, the female prisoner revealed that Wan's identity was faked. As a result, Luo has decided to pursue the truth through investigation.

The narrative begins twelve years ago. Luo vowed vengeance after his friend White Cat was murdered by Zuo Hongyuan and abandoned in the mine. While tracking, he met Zuo's mistress Wan and fell in love with her. Wan offers fleeing with Luo after this clandestine affair is out, but first he must kill Zuo. As a result, Luo attempted to assassinate Zuo, but Wan escaped on his own.

Luo located the hotel where Wan lives in solitude during this investigation. Wan currently works as a singer at a run-down entertainment complex, according to the hotel owner. Luo, on the other hand, gets confused in identifying Wan in the entertainment complex because he has no notion what Wan looks like right now. Wan's image looks to be from the woman he had sex with the day before in all memories. To pass the time till Wan appears, he can only watch a film in the theatre.

"*Long Day's Journey into Night*" is the title of the film currently playing in theater. Luo developed a trance after watching the film. Luo initially visits a mine, where he encounters a lonely boy. The boy leads Luo out of the mine and into town, where he meets Kaizhen, a young woman. Except for the colour of her hair, Kaizhen is identical to Wan Qiwen. Her dream is to move to the city and pursue a singing career. He also meets an elderly woman who is going to elope. Luo helps her depart the town with her lover. He then returns to the

square in search of Kaizhen. At the end of the film, they fall in love, go into a derelict house, and kiss passionately.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Mise-en-scène Analysis on Ambiguous Character

Kiss and Willemsen argue that “the embodied-cognitive inquiry is advantageous not only in revealing the processes behind the viewing of complex films, but (as a consequence) also in reassessing the findings of more traditional formalist-structuralist analyses” (36–37). So, based on their use of cognitive theory to conclude the sub-category of impossible puzzle films, I reverse this result into a formalist scene analysis to specifically categorize the different types of approaches to ambiguous characters.

In terms of form, as a feature of impossible puzzle films, ambiguous characters are often set as follows in terms of narrative techniques: there are two types of plots²⁵ in the narrative, and the boundaries between them are deliberately broken, resulting in two effects.

One is that although the context is not explained, the viewer can perceive which part is reality and which part is fiction (dreams, illusion, recollection, or paranormal phenomena). Even with the potential for misreading, the viewer perceives that they are two very different narratives.

The other goes a step further, again ignoring context and breaking the boundaries between reality and fiction. Moreover, reality and fiction form a nested relationship, which allows the viewer to either know that this is a narrative game or completely take it as a coincidence in the actual narrative.

In the following five classifications, Section 5.1.1 and Section 5.1.2 belong to the former, Section 5.1.4 and Section 5.1.5 belong to the latter, and Section 5.1.3 exists in both.

²⁵ Even without any clear sign between the two narratives, viewers usually interpret it as either an actual narrative and a false narrative (dreams, or memories), or that the actual narrative contains a small portion of surreal plot (*Mise en abyme*, or *doppelgänger*).

5.1.1 *A Character is Played Alternately by Two Actors (Actresses) in Different Plots*

This pattern was first used in Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*, in which the role of Conchita is alternately played by two actresses, Carole Bouquet and Ángela Molina. It was mentioned in Buñuel's autobiography *My Last Sigh* that this idea was purely a helpless experiment, as he "was in despair after a tempestuous argument with an actress who'd brought the shooting of *That Obscure Object of Desire* to a halt" (ch. 6; para. 22).

Nevertheless, the unexpected effect fascinated critics, such as the *New York Times* chief film critic Vincent Canby at the time, who argued that, in the film, "Buñuel creates a vision of a world as logical as a theorem, as mysterious as a dream, and as funny as a vaudeville gag" ("Film Festival: 'Obscure Object': Buñuel Work Triumphantly Funny and Wise").



Figure 10

Figure 11

The transformation of the character Conchita, actress Ángela Molina (fig. 10), who was changing her nightgown in the bathroom, entered the bedroom but became actress Carole Bouquet (fig. 11).



Figure 12

Figure 13

The alternating performances of actresses Bouquet (fig. 12) and Molina (fig. 13) appear several times in the film. However, this is not the original narrative strategy of the script, but the effect is surprising — the different temperament of the two reflects the uncertainty of recollection.

According to Marsha Kinder, the avant-garde in Buñuel's works left a legacy for following database narratives in the 1990s, particularly the "alternating characters" in *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Such an approach became a source of other variations, such as in Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, in which actress Irène Jacob played two roles, and in Lynch's *Twin Peaks* series (1990–1991), where Agent Cooper splits off another (evil) Cooper.

This "one role is played alternately by two actors" invented by Buñuel was later inherited by other cult film directors. For example, in Wong Kar Wai's "Su Lizhen" trilogy — *Days of Being Wild* (阿飛正傳 1990), *In the Mood for Love* (花樣年華, 2000), and *2046* (2004), Maggie Cheung played Su Lizhen with different ages in three films (fig. 14; fig. 15; fig. 16) ²⁶. Especially in *2046*, Maggie Cheung's version of Su Lizhen is just a writer's fantasy when creating a romance novel, while in the actual narrative Su is played by another actress, Gong Li (fig. 17).

²⁶ Actress Maggie Cheung plays both Su Lizhen. Cheung's age generally corresponds to the age of the character in each film, however both roles are in the early 1960s. In terms of clothes, the married Su Lizhen (fig. 15) in *In the Mood for Love* predates the girl Su Lizhen (fig. 14) in *Days of Being Wild*. This treatment is akin to Buñuel's inspiration, a specific loose character setting that gives the film narrative a poetic relationship rather than a linear one.



Figure 14



Figure 15

Days of Being Wild and *In the Mood for Love* both take place in the early 1960s. However, the former's Su Lizhen (fig. 14) and the latter's Su Lizhen (fig. 15) have an uncertain relationship: Wong Kar-wai has implied that the two Su Lizhens are related.²⁷



Figure 16



Figure 17

In 2046, Wong Kar-wai copied Buñuel's model. He set Maggie Cheung's version of Su Lizhen (fig. 16) in flashbacks, while Gong Li's version of Su Lizhen (fig. 17) existed in the actual narrative.

Similar films to *That Obscure Object of Desire* are Terry Gilliam's *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009), in which the role of Tony Shepard was alternately played by Johnny Depp, Jude Law, and Colin Farrell following the unexpected death of actor Heath Ledger. The film's plot is cleverly set as a real-life conman, Tony (Heath Ledger) (fig. 18), who walks three times through Doctor Parnassus' magical Imaginarium, where he appears as Depp (fig. 19), Law (fig. 20), and Farrell (fig. 21). Whether directed by Wong Kar-wai or Terry Gilliam, their films share Buñuel's ambiguous character setting and reinforce the field in which this method functions — the uncertainty of false narrative (fantasy or memory).

²⁷ "MC&HN: Is the story [of *In the Mood for Love*] between Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung the second part of *Days of Being Wild*? WKW: Over the years people kept asking me, 'Are you going to make a part two?' I thought to myself, 'If I have a chance to make this film, will it be the same story or not?' I know I've changed. The way I see things has changed too, so for me I think the biggest difference is that in this film, we are describing people who are married. It's not like *Days of Being Wild* where they are single." See Ciment and Niogret 85–93.



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21

In *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, for example, Tony shows three distinct faces (fig. 19; fig. 20; fig. 21) in the magical Imaginarium that result from the projection of the inner desires of the various persons he invites into the Imaginarium.

5.1.2 *Mutation*²⁸

5.1.2.1 *One Character Mutates into Another*

In 1997, David Lynch made *Lost Highway*, the narrative logic of which caused much controversy. Unlike Buñuel, who had to generate new character ideas for objective reasons, *Lost Highway*'s narrative frame was intentional. The hero, Fred Madison (fig. 22), mutates into Pete Dayton (fig. 23) in prison, which indicates that ambiguous roles are no longer Buñuel's method — two actors play a character, but a character's identity is directly altered.

There was no sign to prompt before the character mutation and no explanation for it in the following plot. Todd McGowan explained the confusion of this narrative as follows: “[b]ecause the narrative of *Lost Highway* brings the logic of fantasy out into the open, it necessarily strikes us

²⁸ In sec. 6, I use “mutation” directly to summarize the two forms it contains — mutation and schism. As the subject focuses on the analysis of the *Lost Highway* (mutation), no further analysis of the *Twin Peaks* (schism) was carried out.

as incongruous, as a film without a narrative altogether” (155). Unlike ordinary viewers who often saw Lynch’s approach as a dream reappearance, Greg Olson offered his take: “[i]n striving to communicate his characters’ depths, their psychological reality, Lynch often merges their inner and outer worlds into a seamless flow of subjective consciousness” (445).

For this kind of plot frame, especially the two plots separated by Fred and Pete as anchor points, Martha P. Nochimson described the particular logic working principle as follows:

Like Fred and the forces of law and order in, most critics have not read Fred’s metamorphosis into Pete as a sign of a world in which anything is possible, but as part of a dream or delusion. That perspective is based on assumptions about the limitations of matter that Lynch does not share. If we did not have access to his assumptions, the case for considering the metamorphosis a physical event would not be stronger than any other theoretical conjecture about it. (ch.1; para. 8)

Moreover, in the book she refers to modern quantum mechanics theory more than once and cites Professor David Albert’s philosophy of physics to describe the logic behind this role mutation relationship. She is another writer, after Žižek, who proposes the use of quantum mechanics to explain ambiguous roles. This perspective helps us understanding the relationship between ambiguous characters, especially character splits, character mutations, and character *doppelgängers*.



Figure 22



Figure 23

In a closed environment, Fred (fig. 22) mutates into Pete (fig. 23), signaling to the viewer that there is no place for any flexible and sensible interpretation. As a result, it is easier for the spectator to rebuild the meaning from multiple points of view.

5.1.2.2 A Character Splits off into Another Character, or a Character Is Possessed by Some Supernatural Being and Is Then Essentially no Longer that Character

In the *Twin Peaks* series, which aired from 1990 to 1991, there is a supernatural character, Bob (fig. 24), who possessed Laura Palmer's father, Leland (fig. 25), which caused Leland to act erratically at times. However, this is not the usual plot about soul possession. In *Twin Peaks*, Leland was not completely transformed into Bob after being possessed, and this possession is more like a temptation — he was activated by Bob to be an eviler version of himself.

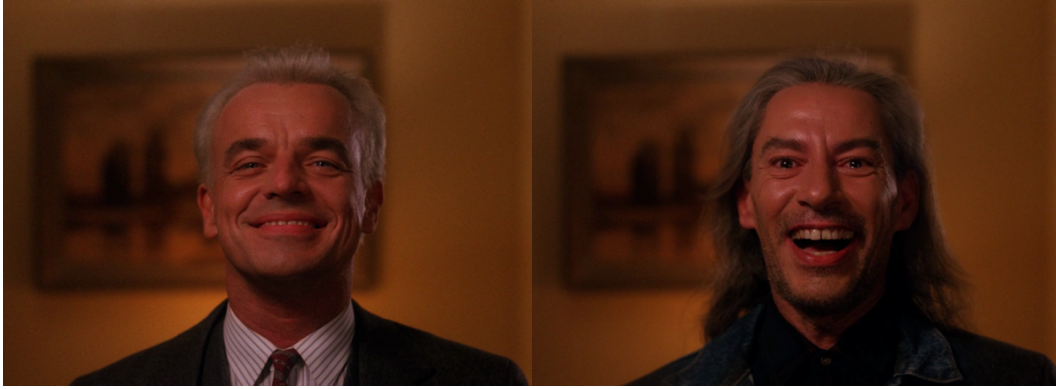


Figure 24

Figure 25

In the seventh episode of *Twin Peaks*' second season, Leland (fig. 24), who is looking in the mirror, flashes the image of Bob (fig. 25).

Another plot shows that this is not a simple soul possession. At the end of the second season of the series, the protagonist, Agent Cooper (fig. 26), splits into another twin (an eviler version) (fig. 27) without being possessed after entering the red lodge.



Figure 26

Figure 27

After entering the red lodge at the end of the twenty-eighth episode of the second season, Agent Cooper (fig. 26) splits or is split into another wicked version (fig. 27).

Mutation and schism are often indistinguishable. For example, can the phenomenon of Fred mutating into Pete in *Lost Highway* also be understood as the split of Fred into Pete? This question needs to be considered in terms of the characters' identity. Fred and Pete are two completely different people, and their relationship is not like the good Leland in *Twin Peaks* becoming the evil

Leland. Even if Bob's interference caused Leland's transformation, the transformed Leland would not claim to be Bob.

It is different from soul possession in the usual occult sense, like the two heroes who often appear in the dark fantasy drama television series *Supernatural*, sometimes one loses his original personality after being possessed by an angel or a demon. Nosachev summed up the possession in this TV series as follows: "Possession becomes the central plot mechanism of the entire series. Demons enter a person to communicate with people, to commit murders and crimes, and to steal souls." (Nosachev sec. 4; para. 4; sent. 1, 2) Not only that, but the angel representing justice also appears in the world in a possessive way. For example, in the fourth season's first episode, the angel Castiel explained that his image (body) came from a person who prayed. On such a role setup, Nosachev mentions that:

A significant part of the series is based on the entry of different creatures, such as angels and demons, into the main characters. The problem of presenting spiritual entities is easily resolved by installing them in the human body (sec. 4; para. 4; sent. 6, 7).

Thus, a comparison between *Twin Peaks* and *Supernatural* reveals that schism is not the same as possession, as the former implies that the character is still essentially "I," rather than some other "spiritual entity."

In a sense, the answer is that loss of identity means mutation, and schism often exists within the realm of psychiatry that is generally understood. The latter is like Satoshi Kon's animation *Perfect Blue* (パーフェクトブルー 1997), in which the heroine Mima exists in two versions, actual and false, each representing the real "I" and the "I" in others' (her own, Sasaeng fan's,²⁹ and female assistant's) delusions. Both versions of Mima show how ambiguous

²⁹ "The cultish devotion to pop stars isn't geographically or culturally restricted; 'stans' is the nifty neologism for crazed fans that's both a portmanteau of 'stalker' and 'fan' [...] That's a fairly predictable, if often lamentable, symptom of a culture driven by celebrity obsession [...] With K-pop, stan behavior carries over into the real world with frequent, alarming consequences. [...] the sasaeng fan, a recently coined term that might as well be Korean for 'stan': 'Sa' means private and 'saeng' means life, in reference to fans' all-encompassing obsessions with their preferred artists." See Lansky, "Hallyu Tsunami: The Unstoppable (and Terrifying) Rise of K-Pop Fandom", <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/k-pop/>

characters transition from recognizable reality and fiction to unrecognizable reality and fiction, as we will see in detail in Section 5.1.5.

5.1.3 Doppelgänger — A Character in One Plot and Another Character in Another Plot Are Played by One Actor (Actress)

David Lynch and Mark Frost used at least two ambiguous character manipulations in the *Twin Peaks* series: mutation (one character) and the *doppelgänger* (other character). In the fourth episode of the first season, a dark-haired character, Maddy Ferguson (fig. 28) appears, and she and the blonde Laura Palmer (fig. 29) were played by the same actress, Sheryl Lee.



Figure 28



Figure 29

Sheryl Lee, who played Laura Palmer (fig. 28) as a corpse in the first episode of the first season, appeared in the fourth episode as Laura's cousin, Maddy (fig. 29), as a *doppelgänger*.

It is reminiscent of the later *Lost Highway* character setting — Fred's wife Renee Madison and Pete's underground lover Alice Wakefield, played by actress Patricia Arquette. In the film, when Pete finds out that Renee and Alice, who are like twins, are in a photo (fig. 30), he asks a question in confusion (line 1) :

Line 1

PETE. *Is that you? Are both of them you?*

Alice does not seem to be disturbed by this comment. She seemed to be looking at a photo that had nothing to do with her, pointed at herself in the photo, and replied (fig. 31; line 2):

Line 2

ALICE. *That's me.*



Figure 30



Figure 31

Renee and her *doppelgänger* Alice appear in a photo.

This inexplicable action of Alice interacts with all the illogical plots above. In this regard, Nochimson adds that,

As we explore the film we shall see that what Lynch shows us is that it isn't the strange events that lead to unfortunate consequences, but a marketplace habit of seeking certainty where there is none. There isn't any certainty that Fred's wife is dead, but the highly dubious videotape is interpreted as if it were conclusive, and Fred is convicted for murder. On the other hand, when large, uncertain energies incontrovertibly manifest

themselves with such vigor that they allow Fred to be liberated from his death-row cell, neither Fred nor the penal system officials ever regard the unexpected mutability of matter with either wonder or the kind of delighted curiosity demonstrated by the incandescent FBI (Very) Special Agent, Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks*. (ch. 1; par. 5)

In describing the character mutation (sec. 5.1.2.1), I mentioned that this analysis by Nochimson also makes reference to the principles of quantum mechanics, and Žižek first used this reference to analyze *The Double Life of Véronique*. In Chapter 5 of *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek likens the relationship between the two Véroniques to electron pairs in Richard Feynman's space-time diagram, arguing that,

this collision produces an electron-positron pair, each of the two going its separate way. The positron then meets another electron, they annihilate each other and create another two photons which depart in the opposite direction. [...] if we introduce the space-time continuum, we can explain the same process in a much simpler way: there is only one particle, an electron, which emits two photons; this causes it to reverse its direction in time. (83)

It is a “realm of virtualities in which the same person travels back and forth, ‘testing’ different scenarios: Véronique-électron crashes (dies), then travels back in time and does it again, this time surviving” (84). As he further explains: “[i]n Véronique, we are thus not dealing with the ‘mystery’ of the communication of two Véroniques, but with one and the same Véronique who travels back and forth in time” (84) (fig. 32; fig. 33).



Figure 32



Figure 33

Polish girl Weronika (fig. 32) and French girl Véronique (fig. 33) share the same looks and talents.

This metaphor of electron annihilation also reflects the cultural origin of the *doppelgänger*. It is examined by Marek Haltof, who argues that “Kieślowski’s narrative borrows heavily from the nineteenth-century stories about telepathic bonds, metempsychosis and *Doppelgängers* (ghostly doubles)” (118). These come from stories as written by “E. T. A. Hoffman and several Russian ‘Hoffmanists’,” which “focus on the darker side of *Doppelgängers*” (118). Therefore, the electron annihilation phenomenon in *The Double Life of Véronique* can be understood as,

According to lore, *Doppelgängers* can cause the physical person to die if they are seen. It is also believed that they appear to steal souls and take their place in life. Perhaps this is the reason why Weronika dies soon after noticing Véronique — the harbinger of death — getting onto a tourist bus on Kraków’s medieval Market Square. It is also probably why Véronique

immediately feels overwhelmed by sadness when she discovers the photograph of Weronika. The film is not, however, a simple play on the theme of doubling or an exercise for viewers to pick up such elements. (118)

In Article 1 I used Žižek's interface theory to discuss the *doppelgänger* effect, the phenomenon in which the fantasy appears as a *doppelgänger* in the plot after the subject is absent. Moreover, from Article 2 to 5, I discuss how this effect occurs in detail.

5.1.4 Flashback in the Present — In an Actual Narrative, One Character Has a Highly Overlapping Life Experience with Another or Several Characters

Another effect of the *doppelgänger* setting used in *The Double Life of Véronique* is the highly overlapping (partial) life experiences between one character and the other one. Even with the above mentions of Žižek and Haltof, who have noticed this in the film, this characteristic of overlapping is not very evident in *Véronique*. In my opinion, the setting of the *doppelgänger* itself does not mean that the two characters will necessarily overlap, but that having the same appearance will create an illusion of overlapping lives.

For this, we can refer to the case in Section 5.1.3. The setting of Laura Palmer and her *doppelgänger* Maddy Ferguson in *Twin Peaks* was temporarily added to the plot by Lynch.³⁰ However, in the eyes of both viewers and critics, this setting produced a meaning-reframing, such as the one cultural historian Brian Cogan's expresses: "Laura Palmer in some ways was the ultimate embodiment of the Madonna/whore complex" (177). In this realization, through the *doppelgänger* Maddy, "the audience is given a chance to view a more innocent, less world-weary Laura Palmer, one that is haunted only by the question of which boy to kiss as she tries to help solve the murder" (179).

³⁰ See "Kyle MacLachlan and the cast of *Twin Peaks*: what happened next?" www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/0/twin-peaks-cast-happened-next/sheryl-lee-laura-palmermaddy-ferguson/

This is probably not intentional, but it is easier for the viewer to substitute Maddy for the Madonna part of Laura's duality. This phenomenon leads me to relate it to the "peaks of present" proposed by Deleuze (ch. 5). Therefore, in Article 4 of Part II, I used Deleuze's theory to analyze the character setting in *Kaili Blues*, particularly how Monk's life experience is highly overlapped with that of the two brothers Chen Sheng and Crazy Face (at a particular stage).

This model deviates two (or more) characters in overlapping lives from the *doppelgänger* setting, the most obvious example being Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Red*. This pattern was already present in the earlier film *The Double Life of Véronique*, where one character had a coincidental overlap of experiences with another. Polish Weronika and French Véronique share a talent for singing that makes at least a certain period of their lives alike.

However, the two Véroniques belong to two universes, and if two (related) characters in these two universes are set in the same universe, they must share the same "present," such as the plot in *Three Colours: Red*. In reality, there are two men: retired old Judge Joseph Kern and a law student named Auguste. Valentine Dussaut and Joseph met because of a lost dog; Auguste did not know Valentine but lived on the same block as her. Similarly, Joseph and Auguste had never met. In this premise, there is a coincidence in the film.

On one hand, old Joseph experienced two things in his youth. One is that he once reviewed the legal knowledge that happened to be the next day's exam under the blessing of fate (line 3), and the other is that he was betrayed by his blonde girlfriend (line 4).

On the other hand, young Auguste dropped the books while crossing the street, and when he tried to pick them up, one of the books turned to a page that would be the subject of the next day's exam (figs. 26–27). He found his blonde girlfriend (figs. 28–29) was having an affair with another man in the flat a few days after the exam (figs. 30–31).

Joseph's past overlaps with Auguste's present. This phenomenon can be understood as a variation of the overlap in *The Double Life of Véronique* — the overlap of space between two Véroniques (Poland and France) became the overlap of time between Joseph and Auguste (past and present). Žižek had a very incisive explanation of the plot, which he called "flashback in the present" (2001, 79).

Line 3

JOSEPH KERN. One day, during the intermission, the elastic holding my books broke. One of them, a big one, fell down...somewhere around here. It was just before my exams. I ran down immediately. The book had opened to a certain page. I read a few sentences. It was the question they asked during my exam.

Line 4

JOSEPH KERN. She graduated two years before me. She was blonde, delicate, radiant, with a long neck. Her clothing and her furniture were all light-Coloured. In the foyer there was a mirror in a white frame. It was in that mirror, one night, that I saw her white legs spread, with a man between them.



Figure 34

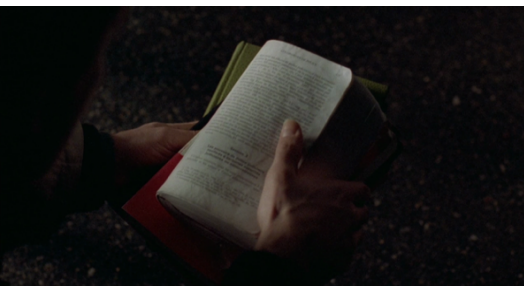


Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39

Aside from time and space, Auguste, a young law student, almost recreates the history described by Joseph Kern.

5.1.5 Mise en Abyme — A Character Simultaneously Appears in a Perceptible but Indivisible Actual (False) Narrative

Like a flashback in the present, *mise en abyme* also exists in a context where reality and fiction cannot be distinguished. The difference is that the “flashback in the present” tends not to indicate that “this could be a fictional plot.” However, the *mise en abyme* provides apparent signs, like the “totem” spinning top used by the protagonist in *Inception* to determine whether or not we are in a dream.

In Article 2 of this dissertation, I use Peter Greenaway’s *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993) as an example to explain the *mise en abyme* technique. Furthermore, in Article 3, I will also look at the *mise en abyme* in the second half of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*.

Mise en abyme seems to be set up for ambiguous narrative so that the viewer is surprised by the spectacle and does not pursue the rationality of the plot, which is especially obvious in impossible puzzle films. This special effect originally came from *mise-en-scène* in the early silent film *Sherlock Jr.* (1924). In the film, the projectionist played by Buster Keaton is framed by his love rival in reality, causing his girlfriend to leave him. The plot of the “film” he projected in the theatre was precisely the same as his experience, so he entered the “film” that was being played and solved the frame-up case as a detective. In his dream, Keaton’s entry into *mise en abyme* presents itself as a visual spectacle (figs. 40–48).

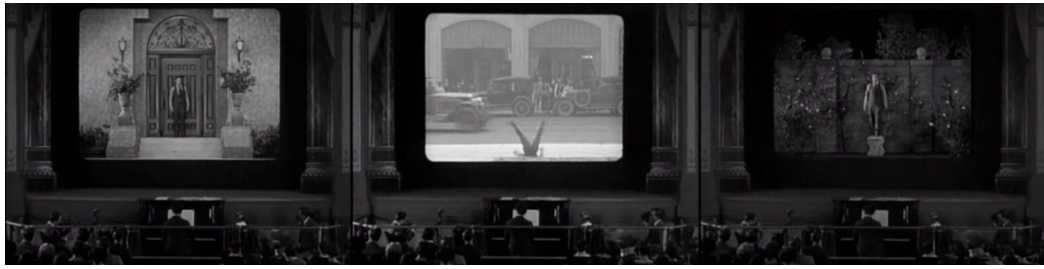


Figure 40

Figure 41

Figure 42

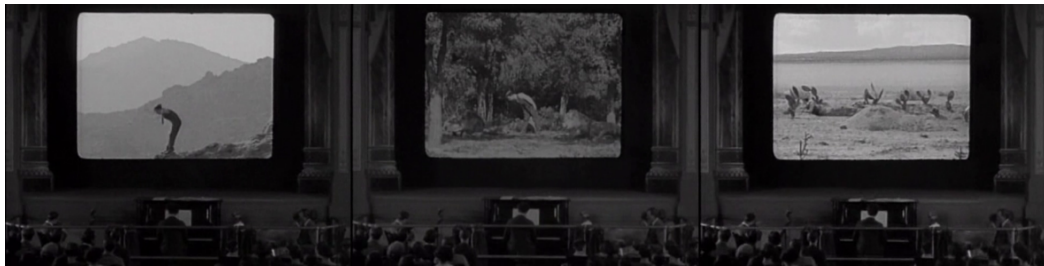


Figure 43

Figure 44

Figure 45



Figure 46

Figure 47

Figure 48

In the film, Keaton goes through seven scenes (figs. 41–47).

Years later, Woody Allen intertextualized the scene in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), and unlike Keaton, he took the protagonist off the screen and into reality. Without wanting to digress from my main argument, what I am trying to explain is that the *mise en abyme* mode has a natural blurring of reality and fiction when it first appeared in films, and it is a clear reminder of “There are two different narratives here!” Nevertheless, there is no clear boundary between them.

A good example of this is what Satoshi Kon did in *Millennium Actress* (千年女優 2001): there was a heroine, Chiyoko Fujiwara, and two supporting characters, reporter Genya Tachibana and cameraman Kyoji Ida. During the interview, Fujiwara begins to recall her past. Tachibana and Ida directly follow

the act of recall into the “past,” and both of them are accompanied by Fujiwara in different life stages but cannot interfere with her history. This recollection is mainly about Fujiwara’s constant search for her beloved. In the plot, Fujiwara often substitutes for her actress identity, so the whole process of chasing a lover is mixed editing of different film roles played by Fujiwara.

It sounds perplexing, but Kon has devised a narrative method in which he subtly replaces actual scenes with fictional ones. Kon begins by framing the entire scenario as a straightforward interview, during which Fujiwara begins to describe her memories. Second, Kon substituted Fujiwara’s performances from the films for the actual scenes she recalled. For example, actress Fujiwara (whose character in the anime is an actress) has memories of trying to find the man she loves all the time. However, in the process of recalling, the actual scene is often represented as the scene in Fujiwara’s films (the fiction replaces the recollection).

Here, the narrative framework for creating ambiguous characters is as follows:

First, the two supporting actors enter the first layer of *mise en abyme* — the heroine’s recollection. Then, in flashbacks, the heroine introduces the second layer of *mise en abyme* — mixed editing of her characters from different histories. In the second layer, the supporting actor Tachibana is transformed into various characters in films starring Fujiwara. The entire animation uses this first layer of *mise en abyme*, and the second layer of *mise en abyme* to switch back and forth as a unique structure to advance the narrative. Every time the second layer of *mise en abyme* goes on, the “fourth wall” will suddenly be broken, thus transitioning to the first layer, so the emotions in the second layer continue to develop to the first layer. The narrative framework of the entire animation is that the three characters shuttle in three levels — reality, the first layer of *mise en abyme*, and the second layer of *mise en abyme*.



Figure 49

Figure 50



Figure 51

Figure 52

The four scenarios respectively mean: reality (fig. 49); first layer of *mise en abyme* — recollection (fig. 50); second layer of *mise en abyme* — Fujiwara's film role-playing in recollection (fig. 51); connection between second layer of *mise en abyme* and reality — reporters begin to intervene in recollection (fig. 52).

This mode is reminiscent of Kon's earlier animation *Perfect Blue* (1997). Like Thomas Elsaesser, Loriguillo-López et al. used David Bordwell and Edward Branigan's framework to study *Perfect Blue* in their article. They argue that the ambiguity of *Perfect Blue* does not reach the point of preventing the viewer from effectively understanding the logic of the narrative.

This phenomenon, such as the *mise en abyme* in *Millennium Actress*, can cause cognitive impairment, but *mise en abyme* in *Perfect Blue* cannot. Does this mean that the *mise en abyme* itself may not necessarily break the fourth wall? In fact, in Kon's interview ³¹, he mentioned that,

³¹ Original text is “前作「パーフェクトブルー」では、虚構と現実の混交による「騙し絵」はドラマの味付け的な部分だったのですが、「騙し絵」自体を最初から目的として掲げたのが「千年女優」というわけです。”See “Interview 14: 2002年3月 国内の雑誌から「千年女優」に関するインタビュー (Interview 14: March 2002 Interview about *Millennium Actress* from a domestic magazine),” trans.the Author of this dissertation, http://konstone.s-kon.net/modules/interview/index.php?content_id=15

In the previous work *Perfect Blue*, “Trompe l’oeil” [騙し絵], which is a mixture of fiction and reality, was a seasoning part of the drama, but “Trompe l’oeil” itself was the purpose of *Millennium Actress* [千年女優] from the beginning. (question 1 “Please tell us how you started making *Millennium Actress*”; para. 2)

Kon’s words deserve our reflection on the research ideas of puzzle films. For example, the narrative study of *Perfect Blue* by Loriguillo-López et al. draws on Buckland’s model of analysis, which he first applied to the analysis of *Lost Highway* in *Puzzle Films*, where it included David Bordwell’s formalist framework and Edward Branigan’s classification of focalization and types of shots. This method is very effective for unraveling chaotic character relationships, but further analysis of the narrative strategies of filmmakers requires the addition of the embodied cognition theory used by Kiss and Willemsen. As the interview cited in the previous paragraph shows, Kon strategically placed *Perfect Blue*’s character relationships within a chaotic but ultimately interpretable narrative framework; *Millennium Actress*’s character relationships were deliberately handled as ambiguous, lacking final interpretation in the film. In this regard, I want to emphasise that the formalist framework is more conducive to analysing narrative structure in the study of puzzle films.

Furthermore, once directly into the study of structure in narrative research, the researcher acknowledges the narrative premise of determinism a priori. However, as Kon said, he had already drawn up the narrative premise before making an animation, whether the whole story should be a puzzle narrative that can be understood or a puzzle narrative that cannot be understood. In this case, determinism is no longer the only premise for narrative construction, so taking the narrative premise into account is necessary for studying narrative strategy to prevent starting directly from a formalist framework.

This study emphasises the premise of narrative and therefore proposes synchronistic relations to distinguish non-causal narrative relations beyond determinism. If one were to analyse strategically ambiguous character settings

in (puzzle) films, using only a formalist framework without prioritising strategy itself would lead to far-fetched conclusions. In this sense, Part I concludes with the necessity of using synchronistic relations to analyse the narrative strategy of puzzle films, as follows:

1. Ambiguous characters have been part of the narrative strategy since Buñuel first used them. Although ambiguous characters give people a feeling of “coincidence,” this is an intentional narrative effect and a method of narrative construction. Such settings cannot be analysed through formalist frameworks such as breaking downtime or character attributes.
2. When the author sets the narrative strategy as a puzzle, the dominance of the deterministic premise decreases proportionally to the degree of the puzzle. When the film is an ordinary puzzle, determinism will maintain a decisive role in the narrative and some fatalistic characteristics. However, when the film belongs to impossible puzzles, determinism ceases to work, replaced by other acausal relationships, such as mysticism or transcendence. These non-causal relationships correspond in the film to the connections between two narrative modules that have no determinate relationship, embodying the meaning of synchronicity: meaningful coincidences.
3. Torben Grodal has pointed out the limitations of the formalist framework in using the theory of embodied cognition to study movies, which is also the premise of Kiss and Willemsen’s subsequent impossible puzzle films. Therefore, when researching the narrative strategy of puzzle movies, it should be appropriate to abandon the method dominated by formalism and use other methods to make up for this gap. As mentioned in the previous two points, synchronicity is a worthwhile breakthrough. Therefore, in Part II, I will analyse the narrative strategy of ambiguous characters in puzzle films under this premise.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The Schema of Ambiguous Characters

Based on the discussion after Part I ³², a clear conclusion can be drawn about the relationship between ambiguous characters and film narratives (fig. 53):

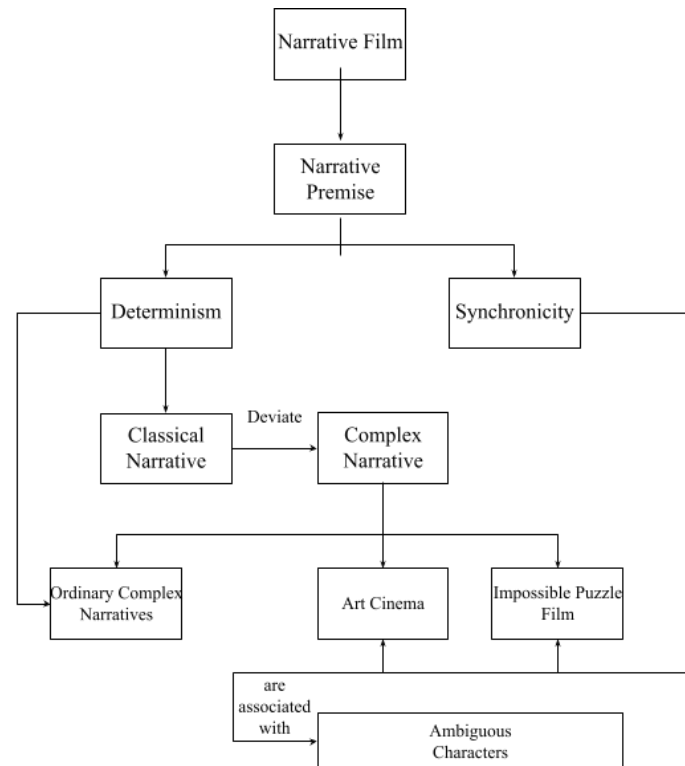


Figure 53

A schema of the relationship between ambiguous characters, synchronistic relationships, and narrative genres.

The prominent cases used in the analysis of ambiguous characters in this study are David Lynch's *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, Bi Gan's *Kaili Blues* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Often cited in the discussion are episodes in Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique* and *Three Colours: Red*, Theo Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze* (βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα, 1995). Occasionally mentioned *Sherlock Jr.* (dir. Buster Keaton 1924), *Last Year at*

³² These arguments are mainly concentrated in Article 2 of Part II.

Marienbad (dir. Alain Resnais 1961), *The Baby of Mâcon* (Peter Greenaway), *Twin Peaks* series, and *Millennium Actress* (2001). Category-wise, these films fall mainly into the category of art films and complex narratives (mostly impossible puzzle films). Even though *Twin Peaks* is not a movie but a TV series, it is fatalistic and agnostic from the perspective of the narrative premise, which also fits the categories in the schema (fig. 53). The above schema explains the relationship of ambiguous characters to the narrative, and in the following sections I will summarize the categories of ambiguous characters.

6.2 The Representation of Ambiguous Characters in Films

Ambiguous characters are created for the effect of puzzles in narrative strategies, which frequently bring the viewer poetic, dreamy, chaotic, and unreal feelings. Ambiguous characters first appeared in films as a narrative phenomenon rather than as a narrative technique; the former appeared earlier in cinema history than the latter did. The prototype of the “ambiguous character” can be traced back to the silent film *Sherlock Jr.* of the early twentieth century, particularly in the scene of the transformation of the dream, *mise en abyme* and reality.

As a specialized technique, ambiguous characters come from the ambiguous narrative strategies of postwar art cinema. A typical case is Buñuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire*, in which the heroine was played alternately by two actresses, reflecting the subjectivity and uncertainty of memory. This technique was inherited by later directors and developed into different variants, such as Kieślowski’s use of flashbacks in the present to overlap the lives of two people (*Three Colours: Red*); Angelopoulos’ use of one actress to play the different female characters that appear in the different stages of the hero’s journey (*Ulysses’ Gaze*), David Lynch’s use of the parallel universe model to present the characters (played by an actor) as a dichotomy of ontology and fantasy (*Lost Highway*, and *Mulholland Drive*). This approach is summed up here as “formally ambiguous characters” (tab. 1).

Table 1

Principle of Technique	Type of Technique	Effect or Purpose	Case
A character is played by different actors	A character is played alternately by multiple actors; Character schism; Character mutation	Embody the uncertainty of false narratives (recollection, dreams, hallucinations)	<i>That Obscure Object of Desire</i> ; <i>2046</i> ; <i>The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus</i> .
An actor plays different characters	<i>Doppelgänger</i>	Parallel worlds	<i>The Double Life of Véronique</i> ; <i>Ulysses' Gaze</i> ; <i>Lost Highway</i> ; <i>Mulholland Drive</i> ; <i>Long Day's Journey Into Night</i> .

However, this classification does not include all techniques for creating ambiguous characters. Some effects, such as the overlapping encounters between the male protagonist and the Manaki brothers in *Ulysses' Gaze* or the projection of the male protagonist's past, present, and future on different supporting characters in *Kaili Blues*, cannot be described as "formally ambiguous." The ambiguity of these roles is more reflected in the overlapping of history or the coexistence of chronology.

As a result, in addition to "formal ambiguity," the mutual projection of various characters in the film can achieve the effect of ambiguity. The method of projection can be traced back to the *mise en abyme* in *Sherlock Jr.*, where the protagonist was framed by a love rival in reality and was re-projected into the *mise en abyme* in the cinema (the plot of a film shown in the theatre). However, it is Kieślowski who uses this method as a film narrative strategy,

and in *Three Colours: Red*, he uses projection to create the overlap and coexistence of the past and the present.

In some films, this approach is more of a historical overlap, while in others, it is more of a temporal coexistence. It can be seen from this that the boundaries between “overlapping” and “coexistence” are often not so clear-cut. For example, we can say that the lives of the protagonist and the male secondary characters in *Three Colours: Red* overlap, but if we feel that they also embody the coexistence of different historical stages (one’s present is another’s future), it seems reasonable. Overlapping must mean coexistence. The difference is that after receiving the signal that there are similarities between the characters, the first and most straightforward thing for the viewer to recognize is the overlap. Then through reason, they feel the absurdity of the coexistence of different chronologies, like Thomas Elsaesser’s “picture puzzles” (2009), which “appear [to be] perfectly correct but whose largest perspectival representation proves impossible” (Branigan, “Butterfly Effects upon a Spectator” 234).

If the purpose of setting characters is no longer to enhance narrative thrust but to create poetic feelings, this technique is summarized here as “temporally ambiguous characters” (tab. 2).

Table 2			
Principle of Technique	Type of Technique	Effect or Purpose	Case
past and present (or future)	(Multiple) Identity(s)	Embody the illusion of time and space	<i>Three Colours: Red</i> ; <i>Ulysses’ Gaze</i> ;
overlapping or coexisting	Projection(s)	interlaced, reincarnation or déjà vu	<i>Kaili Blues</i> ; <i>Long Day’s Journey Into Night</i> .

Furthermore, in some films, the ambiguity of the characters is also related to the narrative frame. The *mise en abyme* framework is often present in the cases cited in describing “temporal ambiguity,” which sometimes causes a character to travel back and forth between reality and fiction. In this framework, “formal ambiguity” and “temporal ambiguity” often appear in realistic

narratives and false narratives to cause confusion between the two. Going back to the *mise en scène* in *Sherlock Jr.* mentioned above, the actual characters are all projected onto the fantasy characters in a film (which is also a dream). Here (in *mise en abyme*), Buster Keaton's projectionist turned Sherlock Jr., his real-life girlfriend (Kathryn McGuire) turned into a girl waiting to be rescued, and the villains who framed him move here.

There is a self-referential narrative framework that frequently blends ambiguous characters, in addition to the inside-out reference of *mise en abyme*. This framework works by converting time from linear to closed-loop, where the chronological order joins head to tail, resulting in an anchor point that serves as both a starting and an ending point.

These models were further developed in the later narrative revolution as a game that eliminated the real and the fictional. It is a pattern rather than a technique because the ambiguous characters are used here as additional tools to enhance the effect of the narrative framework. Ambiguous roles allow the different narrative modules in the frame to form a mutual metaphorical relationship.

"Formal ambiguity" and "temporal ambiguity" function as connecting narrative modules and serve as anchors for the rhetorical relationship between narrative modules. Therefore, neither *mise en abyme* nor self-referentiality is directly responsible for the ambiguity of the characters. To be precise, not all *mise en abyme* or self-referential films have ambiguous characters, and they were initially developed independently but gradually combined due to the development of film narrative methods. For these reasons, we find that ambiguous characters often appear in the modules of these two narrative frameworks, but sometimes even two narrative frameworks coexist in one film. For example, the *Lost Highway* narrative framework (where we can find character mutation and *doppelgänger*) is a combination of *mise en abyme* and self-referential: Pete's story can be seen as the fantasy (*mise en abyme*) of the protagonist Fred, who eventually escapes the murder scene and arrives at his house, rings the doorbell, and says, "Dick Laurent is dead" (at the beginning of the film, Fred hears someone say the same line while answering the doorbell. There is a fallacy of self-reference between the two scenes).

This style of narrative, which I refer to as the “ambiguous narrative frame” (tab. 3), is one in which the ambiguity of characters is embedded in the self-referential frame:

Table 3			
Mode	Principle	Effect	Case
<i>Mise-en-abyme with ambiguous characters.</i>	Insert ambiguous characters while breaking the Fourth Wall.	Create a structural nesting, reincarnation and repetition relationship between plots (characters).	<i>Sherlock Jr.</i> ; <i>The Baby of Mâcon</i> ; <i>Millennium Actress</i> ; <i>Kaili Blues</i> ; <i>Long Day's Journey Into Night</i> .
Self-referential with ambiguous characters.	Let the self-referential fallacy arise between ambiguous characters.	Create a causal relationship between the character(s) self(ves) or between characters.	<i>Lost Highway</i> ; <i>Kaili Blues</i> .

After the above summary, the film narrative strategies related to ambiguous characters are divided into the following three categories:

1. Formally ambiguous characters.
2. Temporal ambiguous characters.
3. Ambiguous narrative frame.

6.3 Narrative Premise of Ambiguous Characters

On the one hand, in the narrative genre, art films and impossible puzzle films are more suitable for placing ambiguous characters in them to play a role of increasing effect. On the other hand, ambiguity is often given to characters when the subject matter of an art film or impossible puzzle film needs to convey a poetic effect of chaos, uncertainty, romanticism, fatalism, or nihilism. Based on this dialectical relationship, the study of ambiguous characters also means the study of narrative, more precisely, the study of cinematic narratives with (non-)causal relationships other than determinism as narrative premises.

What needs to be clear here is that the narrative premise determines the type of narrative. If the character identity (or the relationship between characters) in a film is judged to be ambiguous without considering the narrative premise, it will quickly lead to the proliferation of definitions of ambiguousness. Therefore, ambiguous characters are more often associated with art films and impossible puzzle films because the narrative premises of these two narrative types are indeterministic, not because the two narrative types necessarily imply that characters' relationships (or identities) are ambiguous. Indeterminism means alternative narrative premises beyond determinism, including what Mark Bould calls "fate, fatalism, cause-and-effect or predictability" (ix). These (non-)causes determine the relationships between modules in the narrative, generalized in this study as "synchronistic relationships." I consider whether narrative premises are deterministic or synchronistic as one of the focuses when studying ambiguous characters.

At the end of this research, the following conclusions are made on the "synchronistic relationship":

1. Synchronicity is a term that refers to a meaningful coincidence. In narrative studies, an alternative narrative premise such as fatalistic, quantum, or reincarnation is used to represent the relationship between narrative modules when the deterministic premise fails (or does not function fully). This alternative narrative premise is referred to as the synchronistic premise.

2. Synchronicity, as a narrative premise, implies the absence of cause-and-effect relationships across narrative modules. The evolution of the story is propelled not by the classical paradigm, but by narrative strategies, such as narrative frameworks and narrative techniques.
3. In art films and impossible puzzle films, the narrative strategy's objective is to hinder the viewer's comprehension of the archetypal narrative, creating fertile ground for the development of ambiguous characters. Ambiguous characters are introduced as part of the narrative approach to provide depth to the story. The interaction between narrative modules anchored by ambiguous characters is frequently "synchronistic" in these films. It relates to the existence of alternative associations in the lack of deterministic linkages between narrative modules, which results in meaning (what Ros and Kiss describe as "a sustained overactivation of association areas" [86]).

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Part II

The Articles

Article 1

The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images: The Use of Ambiguous Characters in Moving Images through the Form of Painting³³

³³ Yang, Yu. “The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images: The Use of Ambiguous Characters in Moving Images through the Form of Painting.” *RIACT — Revista de Investigação Artística, Criação e Tecnologia*, no. 2, 30 Nov. 2021, pp. 14–36. hdl.handle.net/10451/54157.

1 Abstract

Connecting research and production, art research represents a breaking of the barrier between creation and academia. However, there is also a contradiction contained in this kind of research deriving from its methods since the process of art-based practice must, by its very nature, involve the subjectivity of the artist. This article presents the problem I encountered during my artistic practice and research of ambiguous roles. My artistic practice and research have two main points of focus. First, how the fallacy of self-referentiality is presented in paintings and films. Second, I draw on my short film practice to explain how the shots show a continuum about the “absent person” and produce interface effects. The second point is not necessarily the result of the first one. This kind of connection and contradiction between practice and cognition in the process of the art research is what I will analyze and discuss here.

Keywords: Ambiguous characters, art research, the fallacy of self-referentiality, film and painting, meta-research.

2 Introduction

2.1 Sources and Contradictions of the Subject

Art research is the connection between the two fields of art and academics (Borgdorff 143). In fact, the term itself is ambiguous, because an artist always conducts research during its work, and “tries to find the right material, the right subject, as she looks for information and techniques to use in her studio or atelier, or when she encounters something, changes something, or begins anew in the course of her work” (Borgdorff 143). However, “[a]rtistic research in the emphatic sense” which “unites the artistic and the academic in an enterprise” is a breakthrough not only for artistic creation but also for research on artistic development (Borgdorff 143–144). According to Borgdorff’s definition, this type of research is “[the] research in and through art practice” (144), and it can be found in *Practice as Research* (eds. Barrett and Bolt), and *Handbook of The Arts in Qualitative Research* (eds. Knowles and Cole). These studies seem very intuitive. Some authors will write “art-based” directly in the titles^{34 35} or will specify their practice types, such as “Choreography,” “Ethnodrama,” “Documentary,” or “Music lesson”^{36 37 38 39}. Given these existing works, I set out to study my previous art practice-theories. My practice itself comes from my research on the theories and results of other authors, and my subsequent theoretical research comes from my artistic practice. Therefore, this phenomenon is self-referential. Coincidentally, the subject of both my artistic practice and research is about self-referentiality of image.

My PhD project aims to study the ambiguities brought about by the use of similar characters in films. My previous artistic practice likewise inspires this study. In 2017, together with my friends, I made a 20-minute short film called *Miss Tobacco’s Manuscript* as my postgraduate assignment at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts. This film centers around two characters whose relationship is full of ambiguous self-referentiality. The study of ambiguity

³⁴ See McNiff, “Art-Based Research” 29–40.

³⁵ See Finley, “Arts-Based Research” 71–82.

³⁶ See Reid, “Cutting Choreography: Back and Forth Between 12 Stages and 27 Seconds” 47–64.

³⁷ See Saldaña, “Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre” 195–208.

³⁸ See Mitchell and Allnutt, “Photographs and/as Social Documentary” 251–64.

³⁹ See Bresler, “The Music Lesson” 225–38.

runs through my artistic practice during my three years in Venice, as can be found in some of my sketches and a six-minute animation (*Siren and Zatoichi*), which I made between 2016 and 2017. To be precise, this animation opened up my exploration of the fallacy of self-referentiality. I was influenced by the techniques used by György Pálfi in *Final Cut: Ladies and Gentlemen*, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012. I used more than 30 film clips as the prototype for the rotoscoping and completed this work frame by frame. In this animation, the figure of Zatoichi comes from the character played by an actor in the *Zatoichi* series of films. The figure of Siren comes from characters in different films, in which the actresses' appearances are very different.

Similarly, the appearance of the actor playing Zatoichi also undergoes various changes as he ages. According to Pálfi's narrative approach, when the types of characters in the film are very fixed (e.g., the characters consist only of a hero and a heroine), then the differences between the characters do not hinder the development of the storyline. In other words, the viewer can automatically incorporate images of the same type into one role and relies on folk logic to effectively suture the context. It is this practice that spiked my interest in the subject of ambiguous characters. This choice of subject is not the result of reading the literature but instead comes from an intuition that came to me in making the animation. I initially wondered whether this might constitute "real" academic research before learning during my PhD course the difference between "practice-theory" and "theory-practice" (I had previously believed this to be merely a matter of word order). Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone defend "practice-theory" in the book *Arts Based Research* and provide a framework to expand (or reform) the qualitative research field of the humanities by using art as a means to understand better and rethink critical social issues.⁴⁰ In the research process, it is inevitable to "accompany these research modalities that interconnect artistic work, aesthetic pleasure, and argumentation," and produce an oscillating method that is different from previous ones.⁴¹ From this point of

⁴⁰ See Quaresma, "A produção artística como investigação. Exigências em torno de uma tipologia de *Art Based Research*" 141–56.

⁴¹ "tratando-se de investigação em artes a partir da prática artística, não se entrevê nenhuma possibilidade de evitar a ambivalência dos métodos que acompanham estas modalidades de investigação que interligam trabalho artístico, prazer estético e argumentação [...] Sucede que das tipologias [...] que se caracterizam pela ambivalência e que

view, “guiding intuitions and chance inspirations are just as important for the motivation and dynamism of research as methodological prescriptions and discursive justifications” (Borgdorff, 162).

2.2 Questions About Research

The formation of ambiguity can be understood as the subjectivity of narratives that makes viewers automatically suture together figures from different film clips. In this case, other figures all refer to a single character, causing nature to be located within a schism of identity. Another extreme example of this can be found in David Lynch’s *Lost Highway*. In this film, Fred becomes Pete in prison, and Pete becomes Fred once again in the final scene. In this process, different figures (Fred and Pete) collectively refer to the “Fred” (as the husband) and complete a cycle in the changing process. This cycle is self-referential. Because of my interest in ambiguous characters, that is, the self-referential relationship between the character and the figure, I came up with the idea of making the short film *Miss Tobacco’s Manuscript*. In designing the script, I paid attention to several questions:

1. In addition to narration, what other image-related methods make the character self-referential?
2. How is the self-referentiality of static images presented in moving images?
3. What manifestations of self-referencing are unique to moving images?

3 Self-Reference in Painting and Moving Images

Žižek proposed the concept of an “interface effect” when analyzing Kieślowski’s films. The concept refers to the fact that “when the exchange of subjective and objective shots fails to produce the suturing effect” (Žižek 39), the fantasy replaces the absent subject and appears in the scene. At this point, the perspective becomes ambiguous, and it is impossible to determine whether

fazem uso de métodos oscilantes, pretende-se aqui explicitar os riscos e a fecundidade de uma modalidade muito radical [...]” See Quaresma 142.

this is subjective or objective. Žižek discussed several methods for producing interface effects in films, which can be summarized into three main points:

1. The subjective perspective is transformed into an objective perspective.
2. There is a simultaneity of ontology and fantasy.
3. The fantasy replaces the absent subject.

Of these methods, the first is the optical illusion produced by motion shots. For example, in an elevator scene in the film *Cronaca di un Amore* by Michelangelo Antonioni, the subjective shots that should have been from the characters' perspectives become objective shots, looking at the characters from another direction. Hero and heroine are standing on the steps outside of the elevator. In this shot, the hero is looking at the elevator off-screen, and the next shot switches to a perspective shot, in which the elevator is rising. But when the camera gradually zooms out, and the point of view moves upward, the viewer suddenly realizes that this point of view is that of the hero, but a third-person perspective. This subjective shot is transformed into an objective shot that must be in motion rather than stationary.

Kieślowski produced similar effects in *Blind Chance*. He seamlessly transforms follow shots into point-of-view shots in his long takes, without any indication of the movement, and then zooms out from a first-person perspective into a third-person perspective. This method represents a break-away from editing and turns the change of perspective into a coherent behavior. The second and third methods are not entirely dependent on movement and are sometimes static. For example, in the full-shot scene of a campaign speech in *Citizen Kane*, Kane stands in front of a giant portrait of himself in a huge poster. Žižek likens this scene to a live broadcast on a big screen at a concert or a sporting event, where the star's body (ontology) and the image on the big screen (fantasy) are simultaneous. Another example of this technique can be found in the sixth episode of Kieślowski's *Dekalog*, in a scene in which the heroine comes to the post office for the second time. As the heroine is talking to the employee at the counter, the camera faces the employee, but the heroine's face is reflected and magnified by a pane of glass. At this time, the reflected image and the voice-over are simultaneous, which means that the image from

the ontology maintains simultaneity with the ontology. Moreover, this model also leads to the third form of interface effect; this reflected image replaces the talking subject (heroine) that should have appeared in the picture. Žižek refers to this method as the ultimate reverse shot (52), i.e., the “condensation of shot and counter-shot into a single shot”(53).

Although the three methods of presenting interface effects in these films involve different types of shots, their common point is obvious: they are all self-referential. First of all, the transformation of perspective from a subjective to an objective one implies that the gaze initially from the subject is transformed into the object’s gaze. Second, the fantasy element means that the protagonist perceives the object through the image. This kind of image presents an “absent one” who is both the subject of the behavior being observed and the object of cognition at the same time. This kind of self-referentiality can find its roots in some paintings. For example, the subjective perspective is transformed into an objective one in Velázquez’s famous oil painting *Las Meninas*, in which the figures of Filipe IV and his queen are reflected in a mirror. This is similar to the earlier *Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck.

The difference is that the reflection in the *Arnolfini Portrait* comes from a convex mirror, reflecting everything in the room according to a strict perspective, including the image of the painter and the Arnolfini couple. In contrast, the flat mirror in *Las Meninas* only reflects the image of the royal couple. Filipe IV and his queen are the observers of the whole scene, and they are also the absent subjects outside of the frame (off-screen characters). Thus, the image of the absent subject in *Las Meninas* is reflected in the mirror and appears in the scene along with the object (the people observed by the king and his wife). This can be understood as follows: the picture itself is an interface, and the intuitive feeling it brings to the viewer is of an objective scene, but the reflection in the mirror (another interface) in the picture reminds the viewer that this perspective comes from the subjective view of the royal couple. Hence, the perspective in the convex mirror in *Arnolfini Portrait* cannot achieve the same effect because it restores all objective scenes.⁴²

⁴² “Finally, in *Las Meninas*, the mirror is facing the spectator, as in Van Eyck’s picture. But in Velasquez the technique is more realistic in that the ‘rear-view’ mirror in which the royal couple appear is not convex, but flat. Whereas the reflexion in the Van Eyck reconstituted objects and people within a space that was condensed and distorted by the curvature of the mirror, Velasquez’s picture spurns such playing with the laws of perspective. It

Fantasy replacing the subject appears in a significant number of paintings involving mirror reflections. In addition to the paintings mentioned above, another example is Parmigianino's *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*. In Parmigianino's work, the picture itself presents the scene in perspective via a convex mirror, and the interface becomes the object itself (picture=convex mirror). Unlike Van Eyck's convex mirror, the perspective view in the mirror is no longer the objective scene but rather the observer itself. The character in the painting is self-referential and his fantasy from his subjective perspective. He observes himself as both the subject and object at the same time. This is a remarkable example of specular reflection in paintings. What makes the pictures so fascinating is the coalescence of the observer (subject), the observed (object), and the image (the fantasy on the interface); since the object itself is both the subject and the fantasy, it has a complicated and ambiguous relationship. This ambiguity means that the referential relationship between the image and the ontology is transformed into a movement in images, just as in most of Maurits C. Escher's prints, in which a person or animal is constantly circulating within a contradictory space and sometimes changes into another figure in the process before eventually changing back into the original figure again. In the self-referencing framework, the painting is moving.

From this point of view, self-referentiality in painting has the characteristics of moving images. In contrast, self-referentiality in films uses shots to complete the compossibility of the subject, object, and fantasy in another way. Deleuze discusses the "continuum" when analyzing the shots in Alain Resnais' works. Deleuze believes that short montages and wide or tracking shots do not constitute two completely different types of shot ("Cinema 2" 120–121); instead, he argues, the former connects every slice of time, while the latter presents a whole picture of time. If each of the different shots of a montage is regarded as a static image, then the entire montage is an action of piecing together every part of the scene. Thus, a wide shot or a tracking shot can be regarded as a direct representation of a painting scene.

In other words, self-referencing is itself a process of movement, and the film just uses the path of a shot (via moving or editing) to gradually unfold the

projects on to the canvas the exact image of the King and Queen, who are standing in front of the picture." See Dällenbach 11.

superimposed sheets of time. When a scene is thoroughly presented, the viewer finds that a moving image ultimately presents the time and space of a static painting. For example, in a scene in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, set inside Andy's villa, Pete is standing in the lobby, and pornography is projected onto the wall. Here Alice is playing a role while the real Alice is walking down the stairs. In this scene, Pete is the observer (subject), his subjective perspective is watching the pornographic film (fantasy) on the wall, and Pete sees that Alice (object) is coming down the stairs. Alice in the porn film and Alice in reality refer to each other and coexist in the same space simultaneously. Is this not the exact same structure that can be found in *Las Meninas*? The Spanish royal couple is standing in a hall, there is an unobservable "canvas" inside the scene on which Velázquez is painting (logically, the figure on the "canvas" must be the king and queen), and the mirror on the distant wall reflects the image of the couple. They coexist in the same space. The absent observer, the image on the canvas (which the viewer cannot see), and the image reflected in the mirror all coexist within the same space. The only difference between the two works is that, as a moving image, *Lost Highway* can switch the observer (subject) perspective at any time, so Pete can first be the observer and then the observed when the shot switches to Alice's perspective, however, similarly, Velázquez is also in the painting that includes the royal couple, and he stands there observing them (although the canvas blocks part of his body). Thus, it can be seen that self-referencing in images involves motion, whether it be in paintings or moving images.

Furthermore, at the same time that self-referentiality occurs, the fantasy refers not only to the "absent one" but also to the uncertain ontology of the "absent one." The interface effect embodies the transformation of the subject to the object, but a fallacy is produced in this process due to the lack of context. This self-referential fallacy, based on the relationship between characters, can be summarised as follows: a character in reality generates another character, and the generated character cannot in turn affect the original character in reality; otherwise, the viewer will be unable to judge the boundary between reality and fiction, that is, they will fall into chaos. This resembles Zhuangzi's famous

paradox of the ancient Butterfly Dream: Did I dream of becoming a butterfly, or did a butterfly dream of becoming me ⁴³ ?

A classic case can be found in Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, in which Weronika from Poland is very similar to Véronique from France. They have the same figure, the same talent, and even the same disease. As the author provides no context, we have no way of knowing whether the connection between the two characters is due to consanguinity or coincidence. In the film, the death of Polish Weronika mysteriously causes French Véronique to make a decision that leads to a fork in her life. The only contact between the two women occurs by accident when Véronique happens to be traveling to Poland. Before leaving hurriedly, she was spotted by Weronika, although she did not see Weronika at that time. The next key moment in the plot is the sudden death of Weronika. According to a nineteenth-century legend, when a person sees his/her *doppelgänger*, it means he or she is about to die (Haltorf 118). Žižek used electronic entanglement to describe the relationship between the two Véroniques; two electrons still affect each other even when they are far apart, but they would annihilate one another should they meet (Žižek 83–84).

Self-referencing in paintings and moving images is either manifested as an interface effect or as a quantum fallacy. As far as the interface effect is concerned, the fallacy is no longer a one-way relationship, such as an “absent one” being embodied in the form of fantasy on the interface; instead, two similar characters influence or transform each other. Another related case can be found in *Lost Highway* when Fred mutates into Pete in prison. This change and the relationship between the two Véroniques discussed above can be understood as entangled electron-positron pairs. Fred becomes Pete and then returns as Fred again. It is a form of John Wheeler's one-electron universe postulate, according to which there are no two electrons but a single entity moving backwards and forwards in time. This resembles Francis Bacon's *Pope* series of works, created between the 1950s and 1970s, based on Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. While these works all contain variations, the

⁴³ “Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakably Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly, there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.” See Zhuangzi 18.

schemata is derived from Velázquez's painting. For these variations, Bacon calls "orders of sensation," "levels of feeling," "areas of sensation," or "shifting sequences" (Deleuze "Francis Bacon" 36). Deleuze further explained it by proposing that these works have "simultaneity," where different levels or orders coexist ("Francis Bacon" 37). In *Twin Peaks* series, Lynch created two scenes: the Red Lodge and the Glass Box. The prototype of these scenes may be related to Bacon. In an interview in 2012, he mentioned that he had visited Bacon's paintings in 1966, saying that he had been very excited at the time (qtd. Wolfe, "Spot The Reference: Art-related Easter Eggs in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*"). By comparing schemata, the similarities to be found are not only between the Red Lodge and the set in the *Seated Figure*, but also the Glass Box and the white cubic frame, which repeatedly appears in Bacon's series of works. Both Lynch's scenes and Bacon's works contain ambiguous figures, and some of them seem to be in pain (distorted their faces in the dark).

From the above cases, we can provide a general summary of the types of self-referential images used in paintings and films:

Space: The interface produces the fantasy of the absent and the resulting series of ambiguities surrounding the perspective of the "absent one."

Time: Linear time is abandoned in favor of circular or quantum time. This results in a series of ambiguities involving simultaneity, compossibility, or identity.

The above came from my exploration of relevant knowledge when I was doing art research. One advantage of Žižek's theory is that he uses popular culture to explain philosophical concepts to make them easier to understand. From another perspective, when I tried to present concepts in art research, in fact, the concepts have been lost from the appearance of my works. Therefore, in my artistic practice, the concept is no longer important, even if some methods do come from my understanding of the concept ⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Regarding "art's epistemic character," refer to Borgdorff's brief account of the development of non-conceptual knowledge of art. See Borgdorff 151–154.

4 The Practice of Self-Referencing in *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*

In my works, I mainly try to explore the ambiguity of characters. When designing the structure of the short film *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, I referred to the Mobius strip structure commonly used by many authors in their self-referential works, and created two roles: a female writer and a male artist. The overall plot is as follows: The male artist wakes up with a hangover, and his impression of the previous night becomes blurred. As he gradually sobers up, his impression of the previous night's experience seems to span a long period of time. As he starts trying to remember the lady he met that night, his memories become jumbled. He cannot even be sure whether they actually met in reality. He just recalls her identity and that she mentioned that she was writing a novel. As he saw the content of her manuscript, he decides to pursue this scene in his memory to look for clues. In the end, it emerges that all of the many events he recalls happening were merely elements of the plot in the female writer's manuscript. As the writer's work has reached a bottleneck, she decides to delete the role of the artist.

From the perspective of the narrative framework, this is a typical cyclical structure, similar to Fred's experience in *Lost Highway*. At the beginning of the film, Fred hears a message from someone over his intercom: "Dick Laurent is dead." Later, he experiences becoming Pete and then returning to himself, and it is "himself" in his final form who goes to the door of his house and tells someone inside over the intercom: "Dick Laurent is dead."

In the process of researching methods of self-referentiality in *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, besides narrative structure, I also explored fantasies about the "absent one" to express this fallacy. Rather than present the interface medium used by Kieślowski, as in such cases as the heroine's face reflected in glass in *Dekalog*, the doctor's body shape reflected in Julie's full-screen pupil in *Three Colours: Blue* (*Trois couleurs: Bleu* 1993), or in a huge street poster of Valentine and her shipwrecked face on television screen in *Three Colours: Red*.

Instead, I preferred to focus on the use of a fixed camera to render the picture as a static image. I drew on David Lynch's technique in *Twin Peaks*, where a person's shape appears and disappears in an instant, a technique inspired by Francis Bacon's schemata, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the image of the female writer — previously absent from the artist's memory — instantly appears in his living room. In the following scenes, when the female writer tears up her draft, the image of the artist's role she has created also disappears (fig. 1; fig. 2).

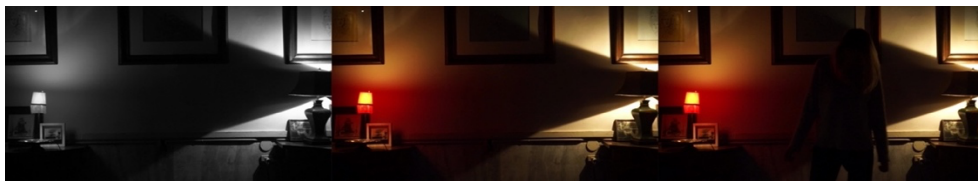


Figure 1

From the perspective of the artist. With the appearance of female figures, the scene changed from Colour to B&W; Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:04:03-00:04:09, 2017.



Figure 2

Indirect subjective view (description) from the female writer. With the appearance of female figures, the scene changed from B&W to Colour; Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:17:11-00:17:48, 2017.

This technique no longer relies on a tangible interface, such as a screen, mirror, or picture, but on nothingness of space. The same is true with the pornographic film projected on the wall in *Lost Highway*. The wall is not actually an interface that can generate images, but a blankness that provides the necessary space for the image. This is closer to the techniques used in modern paintings, which no longer try to create spaces that simulate reality on the canvas, but, instead, use the nothingness in the frame itself as an interface. So, in *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, the figure of the female writer emerges from out

of nowhere into the space of the artist's living room, in a blurred form due to the dim lighting. This scene itself serves as a reference to René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une Pipe* ⁴⁵. That is, the image itself cannot represent the essence, and the fallacy of self-referentiality appears.

In terms of expressing the ambiguity of characters, it is not enough to use the image technique alone. It is also necessary to solve the problem of quantum time; that is, the moving backwards and forwards in time appear to be simultaneous. This often appears in films in the form of "lie flashbacks"; that is, the viewer's first reaction is to perceive the events being shown as a flashback, but it later materialises as a false memory. In Deleuze's *Time-Image*, this is referred to as a "direct time image", whereby the past, present, and future are impossible and are superimposed together. At this point, the role is the coalescence of multiple sheets of the past. To explain this by means of a simple example, in *Ulysses' Gaze*, the Greek producer A, after experiencing different events in multiple flashbacks, eventually becomes the A who is lying in tears on his lover's body in the fog. At this point, A is no longer the A who was looking for a film. Furthermore, each time A enters a new Balkan country in his different flashbacks, he is no longer the A of before. A different female character appears in each of his experiences, all played by the same actress. This also implies that A is no longer the same A in quantum time as it moves backward and forward.

In *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, I used the form of "sheets of the past" to transform the memories represented by flashbacks into false narratives. Thus, I combined the "artist's memories" and the "artist's search for clues in reality" into one scene. In this scene, the fantasy of the absent female writer is constantly fading away, which at the same time reminds the viewer that this is both "a memory" and "not a memory". Therefore, in this short film, I try to embody the fallacy of self-referentiality as the fantasy of the "absent one" appearing in memories or fiction, using a fixed shot to make the scene itself an interface, just as Parmigianino does in *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*, only in this case, the interface is the screen. Hence, nothing=screen=interface, which

⁴⁵ Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's painting *La Trahison des Images*. The painting shows an image of a pipe, but below the pipe, Magritte wrote 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'.

can be further expressed as fantasy-interface=image-screen. I used this technique in three scenes:

1. the image of a lady appearing in the living room;
2. the portrait of a man changing like slides; and
3. the image of a man shaking and disappearing after being disturbed (fig. 1; fig. 2; fig. 3).



Figure 3

Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, screenshots between 00:08:47-00:09:45, 2017.

These scenes “jump out of” the storyline, and consist of a series of static images alone to present the “interface = screen” effect. The presence of the “absent one” is ambiguous (there is no context to explain which character is real and which is fictional), so the fallacy of self-referentiality completes the coalescence of multiple ambiguities here.

In making the short film, I tried to eliminate mimesis as much as possible, and to introduce ambiguity through images. Furthermore, what I call simulation is a simulation of linear time (reality). Is cross-editing not simply an attempt to restore the synchronicity of multiple events in reality? There are parallels here to the perspective methods used in painting to simulate the synchronicity of different events in a scene.

Early film was characterised a peculiar case of the simulating of synchronous occurrences. *Life of an American Fireman* is considered the first film with narrative significance, although there is some controversy regarding the time when the two current versions were produced. Both portray two separate scenes, but one version uses cross-editing (Bordwell, “On the History

of Film Style” 129). Regardless of which version is the original, from the perspective of technique and purpose alone, the cross-editing perfectly achieves the synchronisation of different spaces at the same time, with the events making up the daily life of a fireman portrayed as taking place at the same time of day as the goings-on in the quiet apartment across the street. Up until the moment when a fire breaks out, the acceleration of the frequency of editing gradually transforms the two spaces into one space. At the end of the film, the two scenes combine into one, as the process of fighting the fire is presented. Here, the version without cross-editing shows the two scenes in different spaces in parallel, while the version that uses cross-editing simulates the sequence in linear time, shows the synchronization of every cut of two events.

While I do employ cross-editing in my short films, I treated it as a close-to-static scene to complete the meta-suture. I try to break free from the shackles of synchronisation by using the mutual transformation of roles to reflect the temporality of a cycle. Moreover, the departure from linear time means that the context is no longer important, and the fallacy of self-referentiality arises naturally. It is as if, out of context, any version of *Life of an American Fireman* will appear ambiguous. Without the context, the image no longer expresses the ultimate meaning through expressive behavior. At this time, the real simulation is no longer important, just like modern painting, the picture no longer uses perspective to imitate reality; instead, the picture itself becomes the plane, i.e., there is a return to the picture=interface. Therefore, regardless of whether the self-referencing is portrayed in the image in terms of space or time, the two are ultimately the same- How to set up the interface and produce fantasies.



Figure 4

Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:06:14 (top left), 00:06:33 (top right), 00:06:45 (bottom left), 00:06:47 (bottom right).



Figure 5

The cross-editing synchronizes the behavior of the man with the lady in his memory. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:07:01 (top left), 00:07:06 (top right), 00:07:15 (bottom left), 00:07:22 (bottom right).

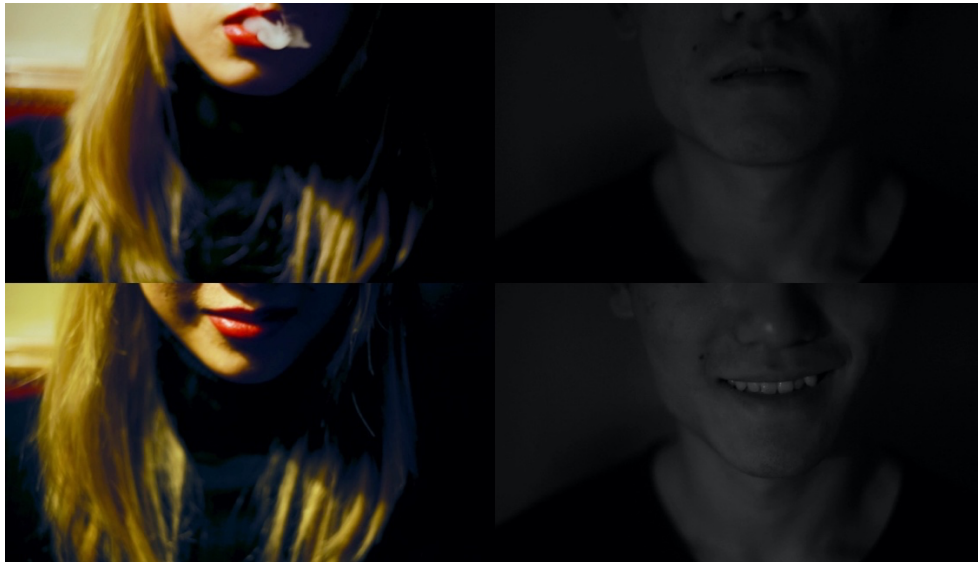


Figure 6

When the dominance is in the woman, she is in sync with the man in her novel. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:17:05 (top left), 00:17:08 (top right), 00:17:11 (bottom left), 00:17:13 (bottom right).

5 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion of the three parts of the film, my research findings on the ambiguous role triggered by the fallacy of self-referencing can be summarised as follows.

In the first stage of my process, I came across Pálfi's artistic re-creation method by chance when editing existing works. I decided to imitate the method without knowing what the results would be from the production process. As Pakes's point of view:

In any research study that pretends to make a difference, it is important to realise that it is hard to determine at the outset whether it will ultimately result in an original contribution. It is an inherent quality of research that "one does not know exactly what one does not know." (qtd. Borgdorff 162).

I found that when two moving images with no narrative relationship are cross-edited, the voice-over (sound effects and soundtrack) can become the

connection. On the basis of this discovery, I began to think about the connections between the two roles that remain even after leaving the context.

In the second stage, I continued to study the relationship between two characters out of context, drawing new inspiration from several films, such as the works of Kieślowski, Theo Angelopoulos, and David Lynch. One of the themes explored in these works concerns the identities of the characters (sometimes there is just one character and sometimes there are two similar characters). Hence, I decided to examine this issue further by creating *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*.

The third stage happened, when, during my production work, I came into contact with interface theory, I turned to study interface issues. This research enabled me to understand that self-referencing can create ambiguous identities. I compared the interface effect in paintings with the interface effect in films, and found similarities between the two, in that they both involve the creation of a fantasy about an “absent one” inside the space, thereby creating an atmosphere of ambiguity. This atmosphere ultimately leads to the fallacy of multiple self-referentiality, that is, multiple interfaces, which can be summarised as interfaces in interfaces or as two interfaces (screen and virtual interface) combined into one.

On the basis of my third discovery, the fourth stage took me to accidentally discover the issue behind the interface: time. Knowing how to express the sheets of time is the key to understanding the interface effect and ambiguous roles. It can be summarised as follows: the issue of character identity is embodied in similarity, which has two forms:

1. ontology and the “fantasy on the interface”; and
2. two similar beings. Ontology and its fantasy try to break the “impossibility” of the sheets of time, while two “similar beings” reflect the simultaneity of time’s moving forward and backward.

In fact, from the second stage to the fourth stage beyond, I tried to do an “original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding” (Borgdorff 162). However, when it comes to knowledge and understanding, the relationship between focal and tacit knowledge has an

unexpected effect on me. This relationship has different concepts: “Sometimes the emphasis lies on propositional knowledge, sometimes on knowledge as skill, and sometimes on ‘understanding’ as a form of knowledge in which theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, and acquaintance may intersect” (Borgdorff 163). As a result, the knowledge and methods brought by art have been transformed into “practical knowledge” subjectively by me. Perhaps my epistemology has not been fully occupied by those who are “literature that indoctrinates the ‘scientificity’ of the ‘object’ and the methods used to be sufficiently explored and internalized” (Quaresma 142).

This process of moving from practice to theory to research the process itself represents a kind of meta-research. Moreover, examining this sample when studying self-referentiality constitutes a form of self-referential behaviour, and prompts self-research in future studies. This research action itself breaks away from the scientificity of object and method, and provides inspiration and aesthetic pleasure and argumentation. And, lastly, this research — with all its contradictions — is the very epitome of controversial art research.

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Article 2

Deceptive Retrospective Narrative Strategy and Synchronistic Prerequisite: Case Study on The Design of Impossible Puzzles ⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Yang, Yu. “Deceptive Retrospective Narrative Strategy and Synchronistic Prerequisite: Case Study on The Design of Impossible Puzzles.” *CINEJ-Cinema Journal*, (under the third round of review).

1 Abstract

The deceptive clues in the impossible puzzle film confirm the viewer's internal expectations and allow retrospective attributing. In the film, a transcendental object negates an internal expectation, causing a retrospective blockage. Retrospectivity does not stop there; the transcendental object reinterpreting deceptive clues in the associative area leads to repeated attribution. This article consists of three parts. First, it discusses impossible puzzle films in the context of complex narrative classification. The following section introduces the Jungian concept of synchronicity and illustrates how it works. The article concludes with a case study of *Long Day's Journey into Night* (2018), which contains more complicated puzzles and explains how mind-game narrative techniques create deceptive clues and induce deceptive retrospective attribution.

Keywords: Bi Gan, cinema narrative, impossible puzzle films, Jungianism, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, mind-game films, narrative prerequisites, retrospectivity, synchronicity.

2 The uniqueness of Impossible Puzzle Films

Since the narrative revolution of the 1990s, there have been several complex narrative films that deviate from the classical paradigm, and their diverse techniques (such as shuffling chronology with editing, using flashbacks to create actual and fake narratives, and nesting stories within stories) make these films the most suitable objects for the study of this movement. As a term coined by researchers after 2000, “puzzle film” categorises different genres of complex narratives, and it can be traced back to the “psychological puzzle” proposed by Elliot Panek (2006), which was further discussed in the collections *Puzzle Film* (2009) and *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (2014) edited by Warren Buckland. Puzzle film is not a uniform term for cinematic classification, and it has different names in the theories of other researchers, such as David Bordwell’s (2002) so-called forking-path, Allan Cameron’s (2008) modularity, and Thomas Elsaesser’s (2009) mind game. These diverse titles overlap in the film genres they cover, but by the definitions of the researchers mentioned above, puzzle films belong to a category of films in which the plot is chronologically disorganised and fragmented, and an episodic act cannot directly serve as a compelling narrative trigger for the next scene.

However, there is an ongoing debate behind the diversification of puzzle film naming — do they belong to a new type of narrative beyond the old paradigm, or is it simply a narrative style?⁴⁷ Various researchers have presented opposing viewpoints on this. For example, Kristin Thompson (1999) demonstrated that complex narrative films from the 1990s did not deviate from the classical paradigm. Dana Polan (2000) shows signs of departing from traditional narratives in his dissertation on the aesthetics of computer hypertext. Marsha Kinder (2002) later proposed a database narrative structure. However, according to Allan Cameron (2008), complex film narratives after the 1990s are distinct from the classic paradigm.

This ongoing controversy in the study of complex narrative classification serves as the study’s first premise. Another premise came from the second

⁴⁷ The controversy initially surrounded the classification of films with intricate plots, which proliferated in the 1990s. Putting the focus on the elements of complex narratives that best fit the hypertextual digital aesthetics that emerged in the 1990s, the subject of this controversy is applicable to puzzle films as well.

controversy, which is about the difference between the cases chosen by researchers in theories that support complex narratives that do not fit into the classical paradigm: in research on puzzle films, many researchers consider some films to be typical cases, and from the viewer's point of view, there are apparent differences between these films.

For example, In terms of cognitive outcomes, the three films (*Lost Highway* [1997], *Mulholland Drive* [2001], and *Inland Empire* [2006]) by David Lynch differ significantly from the films that rely on plot twists to rationalise fragmented plots (such as *Fight Club* [1999]), which are also compatible with psychoanalytic models. For another example, Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) never explains the connection between its disparate plots, whereas Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010) rationalises the first half's a confusing plot with special effects that serve as the clues for the plot twist. The prison scene in *Lost Highway* depicts the hero Fred transforming into another character named Pete, but it is more difficult to comprehend than the two identical-looking heroines in *The Double Life of Véronique* (1994), despite the fact that the latter also appears to lack clues that clearly state causality. These two examples illustrate the differences between puzzle films, which primarily reflect the cognitive hindrance that the narrative segments of the film impose on the viewer.⁴⁸

Before Edward Branigan discovered this issue and attempted to resolve it from a cognitive standpoint, several puzzle film researchers failed to identify this inherent difference, resulting in contradictory findings in some studies. He extended puzzle films into three subcategories: "camouflage puzzles," "flip puzzles," and "impossible puzzles" (Branigan 234). This classification was a crucial step in resolving puzzle films' internal contradictions. Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen took Branigan's classification and reinvented it as "deceptive [and] unreliable films," "disorienting but solvable puzzle films," and "impossible puzzle films" (Kiss and Willemsen 52). Like Branigan, they suggest adopting "a primarily experiential—rather than strictly formal—

⁴⁸ Cameron, when analysing the forking-path narrative (another category of puzzle film previously mentioned), explicitly suggested that this category includes David Lynch's *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. However, when explaining this narrative type in detail, he used *Run Lola Run* (1998) as an example. From the perspective of the degree of match to the prototypical narrative, it is evident that the *Lost Highway* and *Run Lola Run* styles are distinct. However, he did not discuss this.

approach” (Kiss and Willemsen 27) to categorising complex narratives from a cognitive perspective. In a sense, this view subverts the previous research (e.g., Ramírez Berg [2006], Azcona [2010], or Peter F. Parshall [2012]) that relies on structural elements (such as character[s], plot[s]) to classify narratives and another type of research that relies on narrative rules and techniques (e.g., narratology, temporality) — how complex film narratives should be understood (e.g., Panek [2006], Mittell [2006], Cameron [2008] or two collections edited by Buckland [2009] [2014]). Kiss and Willemsen address issues that have not been explored in depth since Bordwell.⁴⁹

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this section, is puzzle film a narrative genre or a narrative style? Kiss and Willemsen’s cognitivist classification of complex narratives, particularly puzzle films, will undoubtedly inspire other scholars to reexamine the controversy. Initially, the study of the taxonomy of complex narrative films that emerged in the 1990s sparked a debate between genre and style. Second, most multiline narratives can be effectively analysed using a formalist framework, indicating that they do not challenge the conventional narrative paradigm. However, a small number of films are still incompatible with formalist analysis. In other words, the study of puzzle films presents taxonomic difficulties. Thirdly, from a cognitive standpoint, complex narrative films include “deceptive unreliable films” and “puzzle films,” which can be subdivided into “disorienting but solvable puzzle films” and “impossible puzzle films.”⁵⁰

The “deceptive unreliable film” in complex narratives and the “disorienting but solvable puzzle films” in puzzle films are complex but fit the classical paradigm, according to the three points above. Frequently, their plot setting is twisted at a crucial clue and returns to causality. The distinction lies in the fact that “impossible puzzle films” weaken or eliminate causality. The portion of complex narrative and puzzle films that adhere to the classic paradigm can

⁴⁹ Bordwell has argued that *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* are narratively unqualified (*The Way Hollywood Tells It* 89). Going further than him, Charles Ramírez Berg has directly suggested excluding Lynchian films from his classification of complex narratives. Panek classified the two as puzzle films but then explained their infinite game without further discussing their specificity to other puzzle films. Especially Cameron, who, as stated previously, has divided complex narratives into several modular types. Even if he differentiated modularity and temporality further, this would not suffice to explain the essential distinction between *Lost Highway* and *Run Lola Run*. In a nutshell, despite being a subgenre of puzzle films (also known as forking-path), why can not the viewer recognise the narrative in films such as *Lost Highway*?

⁵⁰ Kiss and another researcher, Veerle Ros, proposed a similar classification in which impossible puzzle films were explicitly excluded from general puzzle films. (Ros and Kiss 86)

therefore be considered a narrative style, whereas impossible puzzle films can be categorised as an alternative narrative type.

In conclusion, impossible puzzle films are distinct from other complex narratives. It has a fragmented plot that is typical of puzzle films to confuse the audience, but it lacks crucial narrative clues that restore causality.⁵¹ This article's focus, a discussion of the narrative techniques used in impossible puzzle films, stems from this premise.

3 Deceptive Retrospectivity

In his research, Elsaesser distinguishes between puzzle films and mind-game films, arguing that puzzle films are deliberately designed “to have gaps or missing pieces, to be counterintuitive, or [to] pose an enigma” (265). In other words, puzzle films and mind-game films overlap significantly, but puzzle films have a more powerful narrative strategy to create puzzles to solve, whereas mind-game films set up a dilemma without prioritising a solution. The concept of “agency” in narratology can be applied to the majority of mind-game films due to the reliance of film dilemmas on character schizophrenia. Consequently, puzzle films with a high degree of overlap with mind-game films can also be analysed using a variety of psychological trauma and narrative agent. Gary Bettinson investigated the film *The Great Hypnotist* (2014), which features a mind-game's apparent dilemma: the male protagonist suffers from mental trauma. This situation does not prevent Bettinson from classifying it as a puzzle film, as its narrative strategy involves an “oblique treatment of the detective genre” (Bettinson 149).

Therefore, when discussing puzzle films, it is often necessary to revisit the techniques of mind-game that overlap them. This behaviour is not redundant, as its ultimate purpose is to discuss the narrative strategy of puzzle films, i.e. how to design puzzles that impede the restoration of the prototypical narrative.

⁵¹ The primary function of narrative anchoring is to explain cause and effect between episodes to make sense of what was initially puzzling. It is reflected in the plot's incorporation of innate rationality. *Lost Highway* and *The Double Life of Véronique* are not at the same level of ambiguity despite utilising the character's image change (or the opposite) to create an ambiguous plot. In *Lost Highway*, a plot was established to demonstrate the transformation of the male protagonist's appearance, but it could not demonstrate the plot's inner logic. In contrast, *The Double Life of Véronique* does not explain the causal connection between the two girls; however, this does not add to the confusion. A case study is referenced at the end of this section to explain the reasons for this outcome.

3.1 Additional Meaning-Making

Before discussing narrative premises, it is necessary to return to the classification of complex narratives, or more specifically, the narrative strategies of puzzle narratives. While Kiss and Willemsen's views resolve the long-standing internal inconsistency of narrative classification, researchers still face an unresolved issue. Kiss and Willemsen further reformed Branigan's classification of puzzle films according to the different roles and effects each narrative had on cognitive processes, based on Bordwell's four-tiered definition of "meaning-making" in the film.⁵²

Meaning-making is inappropriate as a theoretical foundation for explaining the narrative strategy of impossible puzzle films. Because impossible puzzle films differ from ordinary puzzle films, which use "mind-tricking plot-twist[s]" (Kiss and Willemsen 54) or "curiosity gaps" (Sternberg 244–245) to deceive the audience with false narratives before proposing the final solution, impossible puzzles "refuse to completely close complex curiosity gaps" (Kiss and Willemsen 59). However, Bordwell's research on complex narratives is based on the cognitive premise of "folk psychology," that is, "habits, proclivities, and skills we take for granted," (*Poetics of Cinema* 88) which does not satisfy the need for narrative strategies that block the path of association in impossible puzzle films. Bordwell's framework cannot provide a practical analysis of the narrative strategy of impossible puzzle films because it assumes that only unqualified narrative films are unintelligible to the audience.⁵³

The distinction between a "narrative must be cognisable" and a "narrative that can be recognised" should be emphasised, given that meaning-making is contingent on the narrative being recognisable. As a condition of narration, the former entails that a film's ultimate purpose must be comprehension. It involves recognising that there are only two primary ways for a qualified narrative to

⁵² They are "referential meanings," "explicit meanings," "implicit meanings," and "repressed or symptomatic meanings." (Kiss and Willemsen 37)

⁵³ Bordwell reduces the technique of the impossible puzzle film to "if temporality and causality did not cooperate [...] the spectator could not construct a coherent story out of the narration" (Bordwell et al. 44), which diminishes the distinctiveness of the narrative strategy of impossible puzzle films in comparison to that of ordinary puzzle films (including art cinemas). In terms of cognitive effect, the former differs from the latter due to their (impossible ones) "genuine breach with the 'cooperation of causality and chronology'" (Kiss and Willemsen 61).

influence cognition: through causality or by destroying causality. Bordwell believes that,

[i]n classical narration, style typically encourages the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent time and space for the fabula action. [...] Each scene's temporal relation to its predecessor will be signaled early and unequivocally [...] Momentary disorientation is permissible only if motivated realistically. [...] Stylistic disorientation, in short, is permissible when it conveys disorienting story situations (*Narration in the Fiction Film* 163).

According to this quotation, Bordwell and his fellow critics believe that complex narratives do not depart from the classical paradigm. Essentially a narrative style. Bordwell's narrative research is predicated on the premise that the strategy of film narrative is deterministic. Before utilising Bordwell's theory of meaning-making as a significant reference theory for the narrative strategy of puzzle films, its prerequisites must be understood, and Kiss and Willemsen's research on puzzle films does not make this clear.

In short, the answer to the first question posed in this section is that meaning-making requires a deterministic premise, which Kiss and Willemsen fail to articulate. The classification of complex narratives has generated controversy over narrative types and styles primarily because the distinction between determinism (classical paradigm) and indeterminism has not been clarified (new paradigm). In a smooth, linear narrative, meaning-making is more readily apparent. Due to the core of the classical paradigm, some complex and puzzle narratives can be applied to meaning-making after key clues restore chronology or events sequence. Since the impossible puzzle film is unique and distinct from the traditional paradigm, Bordwell's method of meaning-making analysis becomes unsuited.

Do we, therefore, no longer need meaning-making when analysing films containing impossible puzzles? The answer is no. The difficulty with meaning-making revolves around its final point, which is "repressed or symptomatic." Bordwell's definition of "repressed/symptomatic" states that the audience adds more significance to the film than it expressly or implicitly conveys. This

assertion appears acceptable. However, a difficulty arises when a puzzle film is the object of investigation. Is the viewer's behaviour of continual attribution when watching puzzle films sporadic? Evidently, the founders did not intend for meaning to be uncertain but ongoing.

As established by Veerle Ros and Miklós Kiss, the criterion for determining if an impossible puzzle film lives up to its moniker is the induction of a persistent reductive prototypal narrative. This conclusion also implies that the film's puzzle must not be solved at the finale; therefore, audience interpretation must continue. Other than that, from Kiss and Willemsen's research, impossible puzzle films establish a never-recoverable sequence of events.⁵⁴ This demonstrates that depending exclusively on meaning-making to study unsolvable puzzle films risks overlooking the creator's intentional construction of additional meaning.

James P. Carse's "infinite play" concept helps us understand this additional meaning-making act. Panek contends that the rules of this infinite game are the primary means by which films generate ambiguous narratives. According to his assertion, the strategy of this type of film is to leave viewers searching for (reasonable) connections. In an interview, Damon Lindelof, director of *The Leftovers* (TV series, 2014–2017), provides an accurate description of how infinite games work in films:

if you're going to do a long-form mystery show, you have to have a plan for what to do once you resolve the central mystery [...] there just has to be multiple, multiple, multiple mysteries, so every time you knock one off, there's still two unresolved ones in its wake, and you see how long you can play that game (Lindelof, the answer to the question "Did *Twin Peaks* influence your storytelling? ..." par. 3).

In conclusion, when examining impossible puzzle films, we must evaluate the creator's narrative strategy and meaning creation, as the creator's narrative method is intended to motivate the audience to generate additional meaning.

⁵⁴ Kiss and Willemsen opined, "[impossible puzzle] narrative modes are designed in such a way that they encourage, but do not allow, instant and easy constructions of a coherent and logical storyworld or event sequence" (63).

3.2 Deceptive Retrospectivity

According to the study in the previous section, the infinite delay of meaning-making in the impossible puzzle film is caused by deceptive retrospectivity. Retrospectivity typically occurs in “deceptive unreliable films” and “disorienting but solvable puzzle films” in which the previous plot segments are logically rationalised when the key clue appears, and I refer to this as genuine retrospectivity.

In impossible puzzle films, according to the infinite game strategy, they (deliberately) set up clues that create ambiguous connections between unrelated plots, compelling viewers to constantly search for relationships in the rules of the (infinite) game but never receiving a valid final explanation from the film’s narrative, so they either fall into cognitive confusion or find a way to explain it coherently. This attribution is called deceptive retrospectivity.

In short, in the process of retrospective attribution, impossible puzzle films use (invalid) clues to connect several indeterministic plots so that the viewer’s ability to trace events is impeded and a new meaning is assigned.

It is essential to note that deceptive retrospectivity does not imply that the film’s narrative lacks cause and effect. The impossibility puzzle film mentioned earlier in the article lacks a logical plot, but this merely demonstrates that its narrative lacks a deterministic prerequisite and a priori rationality (so-called “folk logic”). This viewpoint appears vague and requires clarification. To borrow Mark Bould’s apt explanation, the distinction between determinism and causality in films is as follows:

determinism argues that the state of a system at one moment gives rise to the state of that system in the following moment [...] Cause-and-effect is a narrative technique by which we make sense of the transition of a system from moment to moment. It is always a retrospective and partial account, an abstraction which marginalises or ignores the totality of the system (Bould ix).

As such, the author demonstrates that determinism does not equal a cause-and-effect relationship in a film. The preceding discussion further illustrates how retrospectivity functions as a narrative strategy in puzzle films. The terms “deceptive unreliable films” and “disorienting but solvable puzzle films” imply that the plot elements cannot be immediately reassembled. In the viewer’s associative zone, however, the plots of the puzzles function as a compelling retrospectivity due to their reliance on intrinsic rationality. In the process, meaning-making comes into play, allowing the crucial clues (plot twists) to connect previously fragmented secondary clues.

The term “impossible puzzle film” suggests that the plot never returns to normal, but there are puzzling clues that manifest as intuitive sensory connections between characters (or episodic action). In this sensory experience, the viewer intuitively believes that a causal link connects the two plot segments. Frequent confusion between causation and determinism forces the audience to develop new meanings based on their own experiences. In this instance, retrospectivity becomes a perpetual cycle.

In conclusion, any film with a disjointed plot can induce retrospectivity. Genuine retrospectivity restores the chronological order in the association area, whereas deceptive retrospectivity allows clues to circulate within the association. This distinction establishes that when deceptive retrospectivity is employed as a narrative technique, the film’s puzzles are essentially unsolvable. Some narrative experiments in post-World War II art cinema, such as Alain Resnais’ *The Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), can also confuse the audience. The difference is that, while textually sufficient to constitute a puzzle, art films of this type lack an adequate number of episodic segments in formalism. In the New Hollywood period, it is indisputable that art cinema was incorporated into narrative film. After the 1970s, mainly since the 1990s, many fiction films possessing art cinema characteristics have been produced. This category of “artistic” fiction films conforms substantially to the prototypical stories and narrative structures that the formalist analysis method must account for. For instance, the mutation of the male protagonist and the *doppelgänger* of the female protagonist in *Lost Highway* can be viewed as a variation of the method of character establishment in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977) or even *The*

Double Life of Véronique. In order to be an effective strategy, deceptive retrospectivity requires a combination of formalism.

In the same way that Kiss and Willemsen argue that cognitivism can affect formalism, the study of retrospective narrative strategies must also consider formalism. Thus, the retrospective narrative strategy is better understood: it can be applied to all films with fragmented plots. Because some episodic fragments are interspersed with narrative experiments in art films such as *Last Year at Marienbad* or *8½* (1963), this can also result in retrospectivity.

It must be emphasised that the retrospective narrative strategy established an internal expectation before the audience's attribution behaviour.⁵⁵ Some art cinemas may inspire attributive behaviour, but this does not imply that they employ a retrospective narrative strategy. In conclusion, the logic of a deceptive retrospective strategy is as follows: a film contains an internal expectation commonly found in puzzle films, and this expectation establishes a priori plausibility. However, the film creates several intentionally confusing clues that do not restore chronological order but can establish connections between episodic segments. In retrospective attribution, these puzzling clues lead the viewer into a continuous and endless excessive meaning-making state.

4 The Synchronistic Narrative Prerequisite

What is the new narrative prerequisite now that the deceptive retrospective narrative strategy has abandoned the narrative prerequisite of determinism?

Cognitive dissonance can somehow be induced in the viewer by deceptive retrospectivity. According to social psychologist Leon Festinger, cognitive dissonance is reflected in the cognitive process in which “pairs of elements can exist in irrelevant, consonant, or dissonant relations” (Festinger 260).

As stated previously, abandoning determinism in strategy does not equate to abandoning causality, as determinism is commonly confused with “fate, fatalism, cause-and-effect, or predictability” (Bould ix). In the deceptive retrospective technique, deceptive clues in various plot fragments lead to

⁵⁵ The “internal expectation” in this article corresponds to the internal meaning in Jung's synchronicity, echoing the clues that correspond to the external meaning.

excessive association, giving the audience a sense of *déjà vu* or predestination. These preconditions, which reflect fatalism, are synchronistic.

The term “synchronicity” was first introduced to analytical psychology by Carl Gustav Jung “to describe circumstances that appear meaningfully related yet lack a causal connection” (Kerr 1905–1906). According to the two classic cases used by Jung, “rose-chafer” (Jung 22) (Jung 109–110) and “flock of birds” (22–31), the identifiability of synchronistic events can be summarised into three aspects: “meaningful coincidence, acausal connection, and numinosity” (Kerr 1906). In contemporary cognitive science research, synchronicity is seen as a subjective experience that “refer[s] to the subjective evaluation that coincidences between inner and outer events may not be causally related to one another, but connected by some unknown principle” (Sacco 46). In terms of film studies, Greg Singh believes that,

[s]ynchronicity is therefore not a deterministic system in which one state gives rise to another in the following moment, but is meaningful in terms of the retrospective (or spontaneous) attribution of fate, predictability (or unpredictability) and causality (or acausality) (182).

When viewers watch impossible puzzle films, the narrative modules that cannot directly generate meaning lead to cognitive dissonance, and then the viewers begin to engage in interpretive strategies. That is to say, at this time, “[v]iewers actively strive towards making a text or film intelligible, even if the narrative at hand seems to resist their efforts at ascribing meaningful coherence” (Kiss & Willemsen, p. 108). At the same time, “synchronicity involves strong parallels between interior and exterior events that are emphatically endowed with meaning” (Peat 25).

With the prerequisite of synchronicity, the principle of creating impossible puzzles can be summed up as follows:

1. To create a synchronistic effect, it is necessary to satisfy the overlap between the external and internal meanings. Therefore, the film sets up deceptive clues to temporarily satisfy the internal expectation. In this instance, retrospective attribution temporarily satisfies the internal

meaning with the external meaning (the audience believes the puzzle is solvable).

2. When the predetermined transcendental object in the film appears, the first point's internal expectation is broken. Due to its transcendence, the external meaning no longer overlaps with the internal meaning, so the internal expectation is denied.
3. When an internal expectation is negated, the associative area readjusts retrospectivity. Deceptive clues play an additional role in the process, triggering persistent attribution behaviour. The transcendental object is no longer an obstacle but rather a new indicator for attribution behaviour.
4. Even beyond film viewing, attribution may become a topic of public discussion. In further discussion, the synchronistic nature of deceptive clues or the transcendental object itself is obliterated, and the rule of the infinite game is established (that is, all conditions are reasonable).

5 Case Study: *Long Day's Journey into Night*

To illustrate its operation, I will use Bi Gan's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (2018) as an example of deceptive retrospectivity in this article. By analysing its internal meaning, exterior meaning, and transcendental object, its false retrospectivity can be understood.

Long Day's Journey into Night is Bi Gan's second narrative feature film. In contrast to Bi Gan's first film, *Kaili Blues* (2015), the story in *Long Day's Journey into Night* does not have too much-localised context—analysing *Kaili Blues* cannot ignore the locality, such as the folklore about Tuomeng (giving dreams) and the background of the Cultural Revolution and urbanisation movement. This work was chosen as a case study because its puzzle setting is more apparent than those in *Lost Highway*, which is obscured by excessive imagery, and *Triangle* (2009), which includes exceedingly complicated nested puzzles. This article's subject will be more accessible to readers by analysing work with straightforward puzzles and clear false clues than by analysing those

films with extremely complicated problems (although they are more fascinating).

Long Day's Journey into Night is broken into two distinct halves. Most of the first section focuses on the love affair between Luo Hongwu and Wan Qiwen twelve years ago, as well as Luo Hongwu's journey to find Wan Qiwen twelve years later. The second section is a long shot describing a dream that Luo Hongwu experienced following the failure of the investigation. The plot is fractured and can be reconstructed roughly as follows:

Previous twelve years ago. When Luo Hongwu was a child, his mother abandoned him. Luo has yet to do anything after adulthood. His pal White Cat was murdered and thrown into a mine one day. Luo discovered his enemy's lover Wan Qiwen (played by Tang Wei), to get retribution, but he fell in love with her because she resembled his mother when she was young. During their relationship, they likely had a child. Later, the enemy discovered their underground romance, and they made plans to flee. Wan urged Luo to murder his adversary so he would not be threatened again. Wan, however, escaped alone as Luo attempted an assassination.

Now, twelve years have passed. In the film's opening scene, Luo, twelve years later, has just completed a sex exchange with an unidentified woman (played by Tang Wei). Following the news of his father's passing, he went to his long-forgotten hometown. In the wall clock left by his father, Luo discovered a broken photo of his mother, and upon turning the image over, he found a phone number. According to this number, he investigated and discovered that his ex-girlfriend Wan Qiwen had assumed a false name, prompting him to examine Wan's true identity. Along the way, he encounters White Cat's mother (played by Sylvia Chang) and discusses Wan and White Cat's father with her. Eventually, he discovers an inn where Wan (and possibly her children) lives in isolation. Then he found that Wan's identity was Chen Huixian and that she worked as a singer in a dilapidated entertainment complex. When Luo arrived at the amusement complex, he did not find Wan, so he headed to the movie theatre. During the film, he slept off and had a dream.

Luo's fantasy. Luo initially visited a mine. Here, he encounters a child who calls the mine home. Following his departure from the mine, Luo arrived in a tiny town. Here, he met Kaizhen, a young woman (played by Tang Wei) with

red hair. Kaizhen discussed her future ambitions, which resembled Wan's life in Luo's recollection. In the square, Luo sees an elderly "lunatic" (Sylvia Chang) who resembles his mother in behaviour; she is going to elope with a man. In the end, Luo assisted the "lunatic" in successfully eloping and fell back in love with Kaizhen.

The preceding three paragraphs describe the plot of *Long Day's Journey into Night*. It appears as confusing as any other film with an impossible puzzle plot. Then, how does deceptive retrospectivity emerge and function in this film?

To determine whether a film is a puzzle narrative, it must contain at least one apparent puzzle to be solved. Panek considers detective metaphors an essential component of puzzle films, such as who murdered Dick Laurent in *Lost Highway* and the blue box with no key in *Mulholland Drive* (2001), which lead to puzzle-solving operations. *Long Day's Journey into Night* contains the puzzle, "Where did Wan Qiwen go?" which leads to the hero Luo Hongwu's detective behaviour. It also offers the following question, "What does Wan Qiwen look like?" sets off Luo's childhood trauma, similar to the "schizophrenia" when Elsaesser discusses the dilemma in mind-game films; Luo discovers that Wan had different identities when she was a teenager, a young adult, and a middle-aged woman, leading to the final question, "Does Wan Qiwen exist?"

According to the narrative, there are no clues for solving the above puzzles, making this an impossible puzzle film. How do the film's narrative techniques express and negate the internal expectation, given that it is a film about an impossible puzzle?

Bi Gan employs four techniques in this film to set up clues corresponding to the viewer's categorisation experience.

1. Figure projection. In the flashback, Luo believes Wan resembles the young mother in the photograph.
2. Projection of the self-referential fallacy. Luo met a child who lived alone in a mine in his dream. The child represented both Luo (he was left alone at home by his mother) and his friend White Cat (he was murdered and abandoned in the mine). In another flashback, Wan told Luo that she was pregnant with his child, and Luo imagined playing table tennis with the child in the future. However, Wan then revealed that she had an

abortion; this narrative is projected in a dream in which Luo plays table tennis with the child in a mine.

3. *Doppelgänger*. The film's opening scene implies that the middle-aged Luo has just completed a sexual transaction with an unnamed woman portrayed by actress Tang Wei, who plays two roles in the subsequent episodes: Wan in Luo's memories and Kaizhen in his dream. In addition, the actress Sylvia Chang portrayed White Cat's mother in reality and Luo's mother in the dream.
4. Objects with intertextuality. In the father's belongings, the middle-aged Luo discovers a photograph of his mother without a face, and this photograph also appears in subsequent flashbacks. Three abandoned houses are difficult to distinguish in the film's reality, memory, and dream. Kaizhen and an older woman suspected to be Luo's mother have dark red hair in the dream.

This method enables the observer to generate relationships between multiple roles in retrospective attribution. Although these roles lack a deterministic connection, they are projected onto one another. This environment creates a sensual (acausal) link between non-deterministic characters (or plots). First and foremost, figure projection establishes the condition that Wan Qiwen in memory = mother in the photograph; immediately after, the *doppelgänger* creates a visual link between Wan Qiwen in reality and Kaizhen in the dream, and the White Cat's mother in reality and the older woman in the dream. As a result, the *doppelgänger* confirms the premise established by the figure projection. When these strategies are successful, the audience develops the impression that Wan Qiwen and her mother are inextricably linked when attributing, even if there is no (direct) causal relationship between them.

The photograph of the mother when she was young becomes the key to creating the paradox in the retrospective process. This photograph reminds viewers of the film's untrustworthy narrative, making attribution attempts to solve the puzzle difficult. The photo-damaged face reminds us of the unreliability of memories, no matter how much the *doppelgänger* enhances Wan and Luo's mother's physical resemblance.

The puzzle is rendered impossible due to the photo-triggered negation. The audience gradually solves the mystery of “where did Wan Qiwen go” at first, guided by the established detective metaphor. After the audience relied on retrospectivity to investigate and even obtained some clues that could solve the mystery of “what Wan Qiwen looks like,” the clues abruptly ended when it came to the photograph. In retrospective attribution, the photograph (transcendental object) causes the internal expectation to be negated, resulting in the excessive meaning-making.

The photograph is a crucial transcendental object. This category of transcendental object is seen in numerous unclear narratives. In Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), for instance, a transcendent glass sphere emerges in both Poland and France. In *Lost Highway*, a strange group photo takes on a peculiar turn: before Dick Lauren’s murder, it contained four persons, but after his death, it only contained three. In *Triangle*, the entire plot is depicted as a cycle in which the characters repeatedly commit a predetermined slaughter. Through its inherent “impossibility,” the transcendental object overturns all of the audience’s previously drawn judgements.

When the transcendental object prevents the audience from forming a reasonable prototypical narrative in the associative area, supplementary deceptive clues are considered, resulting in additional interpretive behaviour, namely the “repressed/symptomatic” in meaning-making. Elsaesser notes that the online fan community refers to mind-game films that cause persistent confusion as “mind-fuck films” (2009, p. 30) and has enthusiastically continued infinite game discussions throughout the years. In doing so, fans interpret these films’ deceptive techniques as credible hints. In *Lost Highway*, for instance, Fred mutates into Pete in prison, and this surreal approach becomes a new clue when the original narrative cannot be recovered. It could be interpreted as a daydream or a wish, along with another piece of information gleaned from the retrospective process — Fred’s bad sexual experience that he shared with his wife — to solve a mystery that the director may have concealed.

Similarly, when the photograph triggers the denial of an internal expectation, some surreal clues become involved in the retrospective process, leading to the emergence of other mysteries. Unable to locate the reclusive Wan,

Luo went to the theatre alone to watch the film *Long Day's Journey into Night*. This plot was initially a surreal effect caused by Bi Gan's use of nested or self-referential techniques, but it acquired significance under the influence of "repressed/symptomatic." While we have no way of knowing what some surreal techniques were intended for in the first place, we must concede that the technique's original intent is irrelevant when the internal expectation is subverted. They will cause and continue the reconstruction of a nonexistent prototypical story as an infinite game that, according to James Carse, is "[played] for the purpose of continuing the play" (3).

In reconstructing a prototypical narrative, *déjà vu* is frequently employed to encourage the audience to continue playing infinite games. For instance, in *Three Colors: Red*, a retired judge named Joseph Kern tells the protagonist in the film's second half about his youth. Due to a fortunate discovery, he passed the exam the following day, but he lost his girlfriend after the exam. The story of Kern is retold in a plot starring the young judge, Auguste. Similarly, in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Kaizhen states that her dream is to become a singer, which corresponds with the last plot in the retrospective attribution: after seclusion, Wan changes her name to Chen Huixian (an anonym refers to a Hong Kong singer) and works as a singer. The conclusion of the projective relationship between the miner's child, Luo Hongwu, and the White Cat is also supported by *déjà vu*.

6 Conclusion

Kiss and Willemsen's research on impossible puzzle films did not consider this question: In impossible puzzle films, the retrospective attribution used in ordinary (solvable) puzzle films is ineffective. When it is determined that a puzzle film's plot is not deterministic, Jungian synchronicity is required to explain the causes and effects within. Without clarifying the premises, meaning-making fails to answer how the viewer perceives the meaning in the impossible puzzle film. It is because many puzzle-making techniques common in (solvable) puzzle films and mind-game films are also present in impossible puzzle films. In narrative strategy, however, these techniques aim to create

“constitute—destroy—reconstruction” between external and internal meanings, resulting in deceptive retrospective attribution.

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Article 3

Projection of Multiple Fantasies: De-Subjectivity of Images in *Long Day's Journey into Night* ⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Yang, Yu. "Projection of Multiple Fantasies: De-Subjectivity of Images in *Long Day's Journey into Night*." *The International Journal of the Image*, vol. 13, no. 1, 05 May 2022, pp. 63–79. Doi: 10.18848/2154-8560/CGP/v13i01/63-79 .

1 Abstract

Gilles Deleuze demonstrated the key role of flashback in dealing with the relationship between actual image and recollection-image when interpreting the temporality of images. He established two criteria for judging whether a flashback implies a recollection-image by stating that: 1) it serves as some kind of prompt in the narrative to make the viewer perceive that the scene has entered a flashback; 2) it relies on fate or forking time. But Deleuze also mentioned that, if the context or condition disappears, the recollection-image represented by the flashback will lose its support, at which point, the pure recollection will also disappear. In this case, the actual image no longer forms a connection with the sensor-motor, but is suspended, which produces a fantasmatic effect. Bi Gan extends this suspension in his film *Long Day's Journey into Night* by removing the character being referred to in the flashback, stripping it from figure and confining it in the voice-over. The film features an extreme use of several effects in the sensory-motor situations and the flashbacks, as described in Deleuze's *Cinema 2: Time-image*, namely recollection, dream, and falsification. Thus, the boundary between flashback and reality is completely broken. In addition, Bi Gan uses *doppelgängers* in the second part of the film to reconstruct the ambiguity of actual images and recollection-images in the first part, turning them into pure fantasies. This essay will analyze issues relating to the images and characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and show how this film constitutes a typical case of recollection-images transformed into fantasies through the power of falsification.

Keywords: Bi Gan, De-subjectivity, Falsification, Fantasy, Gilles Deleuze, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Recollection-Image

2 Temporality of Recollection-Image

Gilles Deleuze notes in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* that flashback is a concrete manifestation of recollection-image, and discusses how this technique works in films. He believes that a flashback indicates a connection between the actual image and the recollection-image, which is “precisely a closed circuit which goes from the present to the past, then leads us back to the present” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 48). Deleuze proposes two recollection functions of flashback. The first refers to clearly marked flashbacks, whose internal temporality is linear, just like the internal causality based on destiny in Marcel Carné’s works. The second involves forking time. Deleuze cites the works of Joseph L. Mankiewicz to explain this temporality. For example, in *The Barefoot Contessa* and *A Letter to Three Wives*, there are three characters, each with their own flashbacks; but, at the same time, each flashback belongs to all three of them.

The forking of time has become one of the main subjects of recent film narrative research ⁵⁷. Since the narrative revolution began in the 1990s, the exploration of the temporality of images has gone far beyond the practices of Hitchcock, Mankiewicz, and Orson Welles. Flashback has broken away from the framework of the classic narrative to embody non-linear temporality. While Welles and Mankiewicz arranged their narratives as trees, in which forking timelines finally returned to their starting points, perfectly compounding the three-act structure of the classic narrative, films after the 1990s gradually escaped the presupposition of a search for rationality or inner destiny.

Deleuze believes that true narrative is “developed organically, according to legal connections in space and chronological relations in time,” while falsifying narration is different (*Cinema 2* 133). He used the narrative structure of *Last Year at Marienbad* as an example to explain that “there is never a succession of passing presents” in falsifying narratives (*Cinema 2* 101). In this film, there is an emotional entanglement between the protagonist X and the female protagonist that both “has happened” and “is about to happen.” Deleuze believes that this constitutes a simultaneous existence of events in different

⁵⁷ See Bordwell “Film Futures”; Branigan “Nearly True”; Young ““That Fabric of Times””; Berg “A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots”; Buckland “Puzzle Films”.

times and spaces. However, Deleuze also mentions that there is another narrative that transcends simultaneity, that is, it “ceases... to claim to be true,” so that it becomes completely fiction (*Cinema 2* 131). There is a false time experience in this fiction, which is not simultaneous, but “brings together the before and the after in a becoming” (*Cinema 2* 155). However, in works since the narrative revolution, there are cases that can be used to further explain the function of flashback. Among them, Deleuze’s “simultaneity of images” and “becoming” exist at the same time and are not mutually exclusive. If *Last Year at Marienbad* is the simultaneity of the past and the future in the temporality of images, then the key “anchoring” events in *Pulp Fiction*, for instance, all occurred at the same time and in the same space, but each event is treated as a node and their order rearranged. Hence, they are all self-referential structures; however, the flashback in *Last Year at Marienbad* implies the simultaneity of parallel universes, while *Pulp Fiction* is obviously a jigsaw puzzle game with no fiction, but an actual narrative.

The problems caused by the expansion of the self-referential structure in contemporary films can in fact be regarded as problems of narrative mode. For example, although *Citizen Kane* and *Last Year at Marienbad* employ some narrative techniques that would have been considered avant-garde at that time, such as the use of flashback as a recollection-image to realize the jump between the past and the present, they are actually based on the classic narrative framework, which means that these flashbacks will eventually have a reasonable explanation, thus conforming with folk psychology ⁵⁸.

Self-referentiality is no longer limited to images and identities in narratives because images and identities themselves have greater potential for expansion. This should be regarded as a problem of narrative logic: while the flashback based on classic narrative technique will definitely return to the unity of image and character, the narrative revolution has broken this situation. When Slavoj Žižek analyzed Krzysztof Kieślowski, he proposed a concept called “flashback in the present” in which he used the judges in *Three Colours: Red* as an example—the past experiences of the old judge are very similar to what a young judge is experiencing in the present in the film (Žižek, “The fright of real tears”

⁵⁸ See Bordwell “Film Futures”.

79, 82, 83). Although this may be considered the same kind of simultaneity as found in *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Three Colours: Red* provides no clues in the form of a logical relationship; instead, it deliberately obscures the flashback, and even directly substitutes it into the present. By contrast, *Last Year at Marienbad* appears to deliberately let the viewer understand the boundary between reality and flashback. This is the special feature of a flashback in the present: it has simultaneity, but as there is no boundary between actuality and falsity, it cannot be classified as a memory, a lie, or an illusion.

Bordwell designed a classic analytical narrative framework: *fabula* and *syuzhet*. He borrowed these two terms from Russian formalism to propose a theoretical framework capable of solving the problem encountered in Aristotelian mimesis, that is, the “difference between the story that is represented and the actual representation of it” (Bordwell, “Narration in the Fiction Film” 48). Furthermore, this framework is based on Aristotelian logic: either $A = A$ or $A \neq A$. Deleuze suggests using $I = \text{another}$ to replace $\text{Ego} = \text{Ego}$ when describing falsifying narration (Deleuze *Cinema 2*). This also constitutes a typical form of Aristotelian logic. $I = \text{another}$ means that falsifying narration makes viewers doubt whether the character corresponds to the figure, which implies that $\text{Ego} = \text{Ego}$ is no longer valid at this point. But if this suspicion appears in flashback in the present, then “either...or...” no longer holds. For example, in *Three Colours: Red*, both the old and young judges have a connection with the heroine Valentine, and the logic here is that $I = \text{another}$ but at the same time that $\text{Ego} = \text{Ego}$. This is taken a step further in *The Double Life of Véronique*, where the two Véroniques present the problem $I = \text{another}$, but raise the question, which one is Ego? The temporality of the image produces many presents, and the past and future described by Deleuze no longer exist.

Furthermore, this mode is more in line with another time-image concept proposed by Deleuze: the pseudo-story. When this concept was first put forward, the narrative revolution had not yet occurred, and the cases Deleuze used were limited to the avant-garde films of the time. For example, he used the films of Shirley Clarke and John Cassavetes to explain the concept of the pseudo-story, noting that the filmmakers were “forming their combinations, [...] passing the frontier between the real and the fictional, [...] bring[ing] together the before

and the after in the incessant passage from one state to the other” (*Cinema 2* 153).

A more intuitive example of this time-image is the flashback in the present in Kieślowski’s *Three Colours: Red*. The same example can also be found in Theo Angelopoulos’ *Ulysses’ Gaze*, where there is a large amount of transformation between the past and the present. In the process of searching for the legendary film recorded by the Manaki brothers, the Greek producer A traveled through several countries in the Balkans on his own, referring to the Manaki brothers’ documented experiences, and was finally able to track down the film. In this process, the same actress (Maia Morgenstern) appears in a different role in each Balkan country, each with an emotional bond with A. In both *Three Colours: Red* and *Ulysses’ Gaze*, the narratives follow a newer form of forking time, which is different from the pseudo-story to be found in Shirley Clarke’s and Cassavetes’ films, in that it appears to be more random. More intuitively, the so-called “flashback in the present” in this mode relies on the overlap of recollection-image and pseudo-story to complete the conversion between the past and the future. Compared with the pre-narrative revolution films that featured forking time, the more recent films are further removed from the nucleus of the classic narrative.

As the image deviated from the narrative nucleus, “time became an end rather than a means” (Schrader 25). Deleuze’s time-image is based on his analysis of film narratives after World War II, but predicts the direction of the narrative revolution. His pseudo-story is mainly based on Nietzsche’s “eternal return” and Leibniz’s “impossibility” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2”, ch. “The Powers of the False”). In the eternal return, time does not have an ultimate purpose other than to allow a “becoming,” as Deleuze further states: “That the present moment is not a moment of being or of present ‘in the strict sense,’ that it is the passing moment, forces us to think of becoming, but to think of it precisely as what could not have started, and cannot finish, becoming” (Deleuze, “Nietzsche and Philosophy” 48). Becoming “shatter[s] the empirical continuation of time,” and forms the coalescence of different instants of order; this order constitutes a kind of vertical time (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 155) ⁵⁹. This

⁵⁹ Compare Bachelard *L’intuition de l’instant*, qtd. Small 46; Small 64, 65, 70, 71.

can be seen as the coalescence of different dimensions of time, rather than a simple mechanized and cyclical process; that is, it cannot be seen as the return of identity ⁶⁰. Deleuze cites the continuum transformation found in Alain Resnais' works, where two different types of continuums are not "assimilated to the transformation of a single one" (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 119). This can be extended to *Ulysses' Gaze*, in which the Greek producer A, after experiencing several flashbacks in the present, eventually becomes the A who is lying on his lover in the fog and crying. At this point, A is no longer the A who was originally searching for the film. Furthermore, when A enters each Balkan country, he is no longer the A of before. It is worth mentioning that there is also a female character in each experience; although these females are all played by the same actress, each one is different. This also implies that A is no longer the same person when entering the time order of eternal return. For the destruction of identity, Deleuze uses Leibniz's "impossibility" concept to offer a creative explanation: "It is not the impossible, but only the impossible that proceeds from the possible" (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 130).

Following these two concepts, the time-image deviates from the classical narrative; Deleuze called it the "direct time-image" (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 270–279). Just like the Tarkovsky ring described by Paul Schrader, different "slow cinemas" roam around the space outside of the narrative core, spreading in different directions (Schrader 32). In his study of the forking path narrative after the 1990s, Allan Cameron proposed a modular time theory. In discussing the concept of modular time, he cites the views of Dana Polan and Žižek, both of whom point to hypertexts. While analyzing the narrative structure of *Pulp Fiction*, Polan noticed parallels between computer hypertext and the characteristics of "diegetic spaces, narrative segments and pop-culture references" (qtd. Cameron 43). Žižek also put forward a similar view when analyzing *Lost Highway*, highlighting the similarities between the multiple fantasmatic narratives in *Lost Highway* and hypertext (qtd. Cameron 44). This kind of hypertext is almost a reprint of "direct time-image." It can also be said that in his analysis of films after World War II, Deleuze foresaw the trend of the 1990s (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 270–279). This trend involved a form of "futur

⁶⁰ See Deleuze "Nietzsche and Philosophy".

antérieur” (future perfect), as if the novels of Dickens or Emily Brontë could almost be transformed into narrative films using close-ups or flashbacks, and the use of off-screen space in *Madame Bovary* were almost equivalent to a modernist avant-garde film.

The new (for readers in the nineteenth century) narrative techniques in these novels would not be truly understood until the cinematic narrative rules in the next century had matured. People sought to understand their meaning, but it was not until the standardized film narrative appeared that it suddenly became clear that the earlier novels constituted a form of “futur antérieur” (Žižek, “The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime” 42–44).

3 Coalescence of Time-Images in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*

Long Day’s Journey into Night is Bi Gan’s second feature film, which continues the narrative framework of his first film *Kaili Blues*—the filmic narrative is also divided into two parts. Both parts feature characters constantly changing between reality and fiction contained in direct time-image. This narrative pattern began with Kieślowski’s *The Double Life of Véronique* and can later also be found in David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. The schismatic narrative in the films of Kieślowski and Lynch involves the sudden transformation of a character corresponding to a particular figure in the image. For example, in *The Double Life of Véronique*, the death of Weronika in Poland caused Véronique in France to make a new life choice through a mysterious connection. In *Lost Highway*, the husband Fred, who killed his wife Renee, inexplicably, turned into Pete in prison; the other party had a lover, Alice, who seemed to be a replica of Renee. In *Mulholland Drive*, Betty and Rita are transformed into Diane and Camilla.

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, this transformation becomes more complicated. The names of the first part and the second part come from the poetry collection *Poppy and Memory* of the Romanian-born German-language

poet Paul Célan.⁶¹ Bi Gan reversed the word order so that the titles became *Memory* and *Poppy* (Bi, “Interview”, question “How did novelist...”). The structure of these two titles coincides with Deleuze’s “From Recollection to Dreams” (the subject of ch. 3 in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*), and there is an inherently synchronistic relationship. The *Memory* part of this film contains multiple manifestations about the flashback, which Deleuze believes can be used as a recollection-image to show the past.

Deleuze proposed that flashbacks have a short-fiction expression when representing memories, that is, “memory is voice, which speaks, talks to itself, or whispers, and recounts what happened. Hence the voice-off which accompanies the flashback” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 51). He further states that flashbacks will always be accompanied by special effects as a kind of reminder, “like a sign” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 48). This is no longer the norm in films since the narrative revolution, just as there are no special effects to serve as a reminder in *Pulp Fiction*—after one narrative, there is a direct cut to the next narrative, at which point the recollection-image serves more as an instant database. However, in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, classic special effects continue to be used. Some flashbacks use ambiguous transitions, such as a theater scene in the opening shot that switches to a small hotel by means of special effects, accompanied by a voice-over. There is a transition effect of temporality here. Both the special effects transition and direct cut belong to flashback technology, but the former is more ambiguous. So, when the recollection-image begins to show signs of a falsifying narrative, special effects are even more advantageous. For example, when Weronika in Poland died, the shots became a subjective perspective of transcendence, and thus transitioned to Véronique in France. With the use of special effects, the nature of flashback shifts from recollection to fiction. While Bi Gan used voice-over in *Memory*, essentially, this was in fact the same as Kieślowski’s transcendental subjective shots. Thus, the voice-over in *Memory* is transformed into transcendental shots in *Poppy* reasonably by Bi Gan.

⁶¹ After verification, in several versions of Paul Célan’s poetry collections published in China, there is only the German title “Mohn und Gedächtnis,” so perhaps Bi Gan himself translated the English titles—“Poppy” and “Memory” that appeared in the official subtitles.

The two parts of *Long Day's Journey into Night* signify the relationship between recollection and dreams, and possess the various characteristics proposed by Deleuze. The two protagonists, each of whom has a corresponding figure, are cross-edited between reality and flashbacks. In *Memory*, there are two supporting roles, which are mostly present in the voice-over. In flashbacks, the male protagonist and the female protagonist are together. In the real image, only the male is left. In reality, the male protagonist learns that his lady acquaintance cheated him, and the flashbacks turn the corresponding recollection-image into a false narrative. In the *Poppy* part of *Memory*, the two protagonists are transformed. The male protagonist wanders in his dreamland, where he meets the red-haired version of the female protagonist. Just as with the four roles played by the Greek producer and Maia Morgenstern in *Ulysses' Gaze*, "I" becomes a nonidentical "I" in a different world. In this way, the male and female protagonists in *Memory* not only become a nonidentical "me," but they are also projected into two other supporting roles without figures, and become the coalescence of the past, the present, and the future in the eternal return. Unlike the transformation caused by regional changes in *Ulysses' Gaze*, *Long Day's Journey into Night* separates recollection and dreams in the form of chapters.

3.1 Multiple Time-Images Presented in "Memory"

In *Memory*, the male protagonist and the female protagonist guide the narratives of what is real and what is recollection respectively. The two supporting roles mainly exist in the narration (voice-over). Thus, there are four essential narratives in the first part of the film, some directly reflected in the plot (such as the stories of Luo and Wan) and some in the narration of the lines (such as the stories of Mother and White Cat, where they are roleless characters). In order to facilitate the explanation of the key anchors of the projections between these four characters later, I briefly describe them below.

Hero: Luo Hongwu. When Luo was young, his good friend nicknamed "White Cat" was killed by the gangster Zuo Hongyuan. Luo wants revenge and starts to follow Zuo Hongyuan's lover Wan Qiwen. But in the end, the two

become underground lovers. Later, he is found by Zuo, and then persuaded by Wan to assassinate him. After succeeding in this endeavor, he finds that Wan has already left, so he also decides to leave. Twelve years later, due to his father's death, Luo returns to his hometown, hoping to find Wan along the way.

Heroine: Wan Qiwen. She has no real name, only two fake names: Wan Qiwen and Chen Huixian, which are the names of Hong Kong actresses. She closely resembles the mother in Luo's memory. In Luo's memory, her name was Wan, the gangster's mistress who urges Luo to assassinate the gangster. Then, she disappears. In an investigation twelve years later, Luo discovers that she was a thief as a teenager and was later trafficked to the gangster Zuo. After Zuo is killed by Luo, she stays in a hotel and marries the owner. While married, she calls herself Chen. After her divorce, she works as a singer in a karaoke hall.

Supporting actor: White Cat. He is killed by Zuo, and his body is found in a mine.

Supporting actress: Luo's mother. When Luo was a child, she eloped with the beekeeper next door, and set fire to the beekeeper's house that same day.

Of the four timelines along which these four characters exist, Luo's is the only real narrative, with the other three characters existing only in recollection.

3.1.1 Projection between Luo-Wan and White Cat-Mother

As regards the three roles that exist only in the form of memory, the mother exists in Luo's childhood; White Cat exists from Luo's childhood until Luo's youth; and Wan Qiwen enters Luo's life after the death of White Cat. She disappears after Luo goes to murder gangster Zuo. Here, the role of the mother only exists in the (voice-over) narration; she does not have a figure. White Cat is the figure of a teenager in a "purely optical situation." This teenager is not associated with any actual image. He is seen either standing quietly in a train compartment or eating an apple facing the camera. Wan has a more complicated existence. On the one hand, she is the protagonist in the recollection-image, where she has a matching figure (visual persona), while on the other, when there are several versions of her in the other person's narration in the actual, as

a character without a figure (she does not have a visual role in these versions), she presents the characteristics of a false narrative, that is, I = another.

The actual image and recollection-image are twelve years apart. The young Luo and Wan are in the past. The middle-aged Luo exists in the present, and the “real” Wan only exists in the narration of others. Between these two types of images, White Cat’s and Luo’s mothers are interspersed, as “optical and sound situations” running through the past and present. In this structure, the recollection seems to be trapped in a cycle that has been disrupted by the order of time. At first, the mother is just a character without a figure, because she eloped when Luo was only a child, and Luo cannot remember what she looks like. In the recollection-images that follow, Luo has obtained a photo of his mother in her youth, but with her face removed. This setting is not only a figuration of childhood memory loss, but also a strategy to confuse reality and fiction.

Hence, he is relying on some vaguely held impression when he believes that Wan resembled his mother in her youth.⁶² Second, White Cat is Luo’s good friend from his childhood to his youth. He appears in flashbacks in the form of optical and sound situations. The figure of the White Cat of Luo’s childhood is missing, and, just as with his recollections of his mother, what remains is but the vaguest of impressions. The death of the young White Cat was how Luo meets Wan. Third, Luo starts to form a connection with Wan for an absurd reason: he believes that she looks similar to his mother, in spite of the fact that he has no recollection of his mother’s features. Wan is also the mistress of the gangster Zuo. She bewitches Luo, who is already in love with her, and persuades him to kill Zuo and then flee with her. In addition, in the third-person narration, Wan follows Zuo, because Zuo helped her kill someone who had trafficked her. Hence, the Wan of the recollections is the archetypal femme fatale, “her most striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable” (Doane, “Introduction”, para. 1).

Luo’s mother emerges from the past (impressions) into the present to become Wan, and her (the mother Luo imagined) life is full of one murder and

⁶² This seems contradictory, but I explain it later in the comments to Fig. 3.

betrayal after another. The temporality here is forking and the timeline represented by each role constitutes a new forking path. The mother and Wan represent two different stages of Luo's life twelve years earlier, with the former representing Luo's childhood and the latter representing his youth. The time extends from Luo's mother to Wan. White Cat is a very special character in that he connects Luo's childhood and youth, during which time his mother was absent. Just as fate is about to make Luo meet Wan, White Cat dies. The role of White Cat is to connect the mother-recollection with the Wan-recollection. This double recollection is the essence of the eternal return in Memory: Luo needs to eliminate a particular part of himself (so White Cat dies) so that he can go from "losing his mother" to "finding a new mother" (Wan). This is akin to the nihilism of Nietzsche, where "suppress [forcibly end] your recollections, or suppress [forcibly end] yourselves" (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 113).

3.1.2 The Nonidentity and Simultaneity of Eternal Return

When Wan disappears twelve years earlier, Luo enters another stage of the cycle, which involves seeking Wan (his mother's projection). In this new stage, what he needs to eliminate is his own youth stage. Hence, in the process of searching for Wan, he realizes that his previous cognition was false. That is, $Wan \neq Wan$, $Wan = others$. This succinctly represents Deleuze's interpretation of "passage":

How can the past be constituted in time? How can the present pass? The passing moment could never pass if it were not already past and yet to come — at the same time as being present. If the present did not pass of its own accord, if it had to wait for a new present in order to become past, the past in general would never be constituted in time, and this particular present would not pass. (Deleuze, "Nietzsche and Philosophy" 48)

In this cycle, two sheets coalesce in a form of transcendence. As Luo constantly eliminates his past in this cycle and cannot maintain the identity in the eternal return, there is a voice-over that accompanies the actual image and the recollection-image. The voice-over is Luo's voice, but it is impossible to determine to which stage of Luo's life this voice belongs (perhaps, it is Luo in the distant future). At this point, the voice-over represents the transcendent Luo, who, as a specter, separates himself from the temporality of the actual image and the recollection-image, and becomes the narrator. This narrator imbues *Memory* with the characteristics of metafiction, constantly reminding the viewer that the time here is not linear but forking, and that they should not try to find clues to restore the timeline. In the narrative of reality, Luo is split into a youthful version and a middle-aged version, and the transcendental Luo manipulates them both outside of reality. This is similar to *The Double Life of Véronique*, when the puppeteer Alexandre manipulates his marionette. At the end of the plot, he makes a marionette with the appearance of Véronique, which makes Véronique feel that both she and her other Polish self were always controlled by destiny, leading her to collapse. To put it another way, this is another manifestation of Deleuze's "passage": past and present, reality and fantasy, "these two worlds are possible, but are not 'compossible' with each other" (Deleuze, "Cinema 2" 130).

In different images (actual and recollection), Luo can be understood as the schism of the transcendental Luo into different stages, or the different stages of Luo that have always existed in the wheel of fortune. Although middle-aged Luo looks for Wan, she only actually exists (for him) in his youth (the sheet of the past), and the narration in the actual image proves to be false. Wan's loss of identity also means the severing of the connection between the recollection-image and the actual image. At this point, a fork appears in each stage of Luo's life. Ultimately, the middle-aged man is trying to chase after the impression of his youth, but he finally comes to doubt whether the recollection is in fact true. The voice-over (by the transcendental Luo) is constantly trying to suture reality and recollection; but Luo loses his identity in the following cycle, so what middle-aged Luo is chasing is the afterimage of Wan, just as he is chasing his mother whose face is missing in the photo. They belong only to specific (lost) sheets of the past.

The events of the previous stage are reproduced in cycles, as with the life of Eve in *All about Eve*, where she replaces the previous singer, but at the end of the film, is herself substituted by another new “Eve.” And this “reproduction” does not mean “identity.” “In effect, there is neither straight line nor circle which completes itself” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 50). Hence, certain similar events are constantly repeating in *Memory*, some of which appear in the form of recollection-image, and some appear in the actual image. The connection between reality and recollection is broken, thereby forming an overlap of the sheets of the past, as in *Ulysses’ Gaze*. The overlapping events increases the complexity of the eternal return. Moreover, “impossibility” as an excuse no longer serves as an effective explanation, which means that *Memory* becomes what Deleuze calls “a new status of narration”: fiction. “It is a power of the false which replaces and supersedes the form of the true, because it poses the simultaneity of impossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 131).

3.1.3 Self-Referential Fallacy of Recollection-Images

When the recollection transitions to fiction, the viewer finds that the object image that appeared in the previous shot has a reminder function. This is similar to the view put forward by Angela Hague in her analysis of *Twin Peaks*, that through “infinite play,” the author, the character and the viewer are simultaneously all players seeking to solve a certain puzzle (Hague, sec. I). These signs use the fallacy of self-referentiality to remind the viewer that “recollection is false” and even “reality is false.” Reality-recollection is connected and twisted by the objects of self-referential fallacy, such as the glass ball in *The Double Life of Véronique* or the videotape in *Lost Highway* (fig. 1).



Figure 1

Top: The Same Glass Ball Not Only Appears in the Hands of Weronika in Poland, but also in Véronique's Handbags in France (*The Double Life of Véronique*); Bottom: The Video Presents the Past and Future in the Narrative (*Lost Highway*).

Space-image: *Memory* features several frequently recurring scenes of the interior of an abandoned house, where a couple once lived (who they are is not explained in the film). Wan burgled the house when she was fifteen years old, Luo's mother (perhaps there) meets with the beekeeper, the young Luo and Wan have an affair there, and it is there that the middle-aged Luo takes apart a clock left by his father and finds a photo of the woman with her face removed. The scene of the house's interior can be regarded as a Lynchian alien world (e.g., the Red Lodge in *Twin Peaks* and the theater in *Mulholland Drive*). This space is squeezed and folded by multiple sheets of the past, showing the similarities in the "impossible" history of a universe (fig. 2).



Figure 2

Top: Abandoned House (*Long Day's Journey into Night*); Middle: The Red Lodge (*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*); Bottom: Theater (*Mulholland Drive*).

This kind of space is like a zone outside the real world, where time is nonlinear, and connects the past and the future.

Figure-fantasy: Another impossible element of *Memory* is a photo and the figure it shows. When middle-aged Luo opens the clock left by his father, he finds in a battery slot on the back a photo of a woman with her face removed. On the back of the photo is the contact information of Wan's friend when she was a teenager. This prompts the viewer to wonder why the father has the contact information of Wan's friend. When Luo met Wan for the first time, he shows her a photo of his mother when she was young. While the woman in the photo had a face at this point, the viewer, on the other side of the screen, cannot see it clearly. Thus, the situation becomes as follows: there are two versions of

a photo of Luo's mother when she was young.⁶³ One version appears in the actual image as a relic left to Luo by his father. There is no face, but there is the contact information of Wan's friend (his father does not know Wan).⁶⁴ Another version appears in the recollection-image. Luo takes out the intact photo from his wallet and shows it to Wan, commenting that she looks just like the woman in the photo. So, who is the person in the photo? It can be surmised that the figure of Wan is self-referential. Combined with Wan's role as a *femme fatale*, it is not difficult to see that this fallacy means that she represents what is false. Her life is so full of mystery and ambiguity that one might ask what her real name is. Nobody knows the truth; there is a special version of her in each of the roles she plays in the recollections. In the film, even this self-referential figure is false: this figure comes from an unnamed woman who first appears in the opening scene of the film when she has just ended a sexual interaction with the middle-aged Luo. So, it can be said that Wan is just a projection of Luo's mother, and she does not even have a figure, just like Luo's mother. Wan and Luo's mother overlap and take possession of the figure of the unnamed woman. This figure, like Hitchcock's *MacGuffin*, is a kind of "absence," symbolizing the fantasy produced by reason when it tries to know the ontology of mother or Wan (fig. 3).

⁶³ This may seem contradictory, but it reflects the subjectivity and uncertainty implicit in memory, as I will explain in the comments to Fig. 3.

⁶⁴ This is also a paradox, because it might mean that the father knew Wan. But this is not a film about solving puzzles (for related concepts, please refer to the difference between "disorienting but solvable puzzle films" and "impossible puzzle films" proposed by Kiss and Willemsen 2017). "Father" has a metaphorical meaning and can be regarded as a projection of Luo's future.



Figure 3

Top: Middle-Aged Luo Finds a Photo of a Woman with Her Face Removed behind the Clock Left by His Father; Middle: The Young Luo Hands This Intact Picture to Wan Qiwen; Bottom: An Unnamed Woman Who Has just Ended a Sexual Transaction with Middle-Aged Luo. The Photo and Wan Are Self-Referential, and This Figure Actually Comes from Another That Is Outside of This Self-Referentiality.

Image-text: At the end of *Memory*, the viewer finds Luo in a cinema where a film is beginning, the name of which is *Long Day's Journey into Night* (the same title as the off-screen film) (fig. 4). At this point, the viewer realizes that this is a sign that the whole of *Memory* is entirely fictitious. In the recollection-image, Wan and the third-person narration present the “this is not a pipe” concept, which represents the fallacy of self-referentiality between the text and the image.⁶⁵ In falsifying narration, recollection, reality, and fiction “belong to

⁶⁵ *La Trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*) is a 1929 painting by René Magritte. The painting shows an image of a pipe. Below it, Magritte painted: “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (“This is not a pipe”).

the same universe and constitute modifications of the same story” (Deleuze, “Cinema 2” 132).



Figure 4

Top: At the End of *Memory*, Middle-Aged Luo Is Watching a Film in a Cinema;
Bottom: The Name of This Film Appears on the Screen at This Point

This is a typical fallacy of self-referentiality between text and images. Luo cannot watch a film in which he plays a role.

3.2 The Time-Images Ensemble in “Poppy”

The first part of the film (*Memory*) presents the complexity of transforming recollection-image into a false narrative. It is a special sample that can simultaneously be used to analyze the relationship between pure recollection, impossible multiple sheets of the past overlap, and the power of the false. It combines memories, fiction, and illusion in such a way that time is constantly forking within the same universe. *Memory* features the use of cross-editing, while in the second part, the universe is concretized into a small town, which becomes the utopia of all the fantasies produced by Luo’s forking time.

When *Memory* is over, Luo inexplicably walks into a labyrinth-like dark town. This is the point at which the second half of the film, *Poppy*, begins. All

the roles and events Luo encounters here are projections, stemming from the absence of his mother. His experiences in *Poppy* leave the realm of the eternal return and enter what Žižek calls the “fantasmatic lie” (Žižek, “The fright of real tears” 53, 54). This is where the original fictitious scene is created in Luo’s consciousness.

Poppy represents an extreme example of the use of transcendental shots. First, Luo’s voice-over always connects the past and the present, and serves as the inner driving force of the narrative. If there is no such transcendence, then all projections in the narrative will turn into nothingness. The narratives of all characters other than Luo are affected by the power of the false, including those of Wan, Luo’s mother, and White Cat. As Deleuze (*Cinema 2* 127) puts it, the role of voice-over is to serve as “a truthful narration in the sense that it claims to be true, even in fiction.” When *Poppy* starts, there is a continuous switching between follow shots, point-of-view shots, bird’s-eye view shots, and focus. Rather than being edited, these shots constitute an extremely long take from beginning to end, as a transcendent Luo stares at the fantasmatic lie he has created. This can be understood as the “continuum” to which Deleuze refers when discussing the relationship between Resnais’ shots. In this respect, edits and long takes are not completely different from one another. The latter just connects the order of the former, which represents the point in time. From a “futur antérieur” perspective, the kind of long takes made by Fellini, Tarkovski, and Alexander Sokurov, which depict different perspectives, can be understood by drawing an analogy with the virtual camera systems in 3D games, in which the viewer has access at any time to first-person, third-person (fixed and tracking), bird’s-eye, and map views. Combining the above two points, this super-long take indicates that when the recollection-images and text in *Memory* produce the fallacy of self-referentiality, the camera is no longer capturing fiction and reality, but instead is connecting different time sheets.

At the beginning of *Poppy*, Luo is walking through a dark mine, where he meets a boy living alone. The boy likes to play table tennis using a bat engraved with an eagle. After the two of them play a game of table tennis, the boy sends Luo away from the mine with a sense of satisfaction. The boy here is a multifaceted projection of the “son” in Luo’s consciousness, which includes White Cat (his body was found in the mine, and he has a father named Eagle),

the aborted fetus (in Luo's memory, Wan was pregnant with his child), and his childhood self (Luo lived by himself all year round after he was abandoned by his mother). Upon leaving the mine, Luo enters a small town, where the reality, memories, and fiction from *Memory* are all gathered. Two fantasies take place in this town, the prototypes of which come from two characters in *Memory*: Luo's mother and Wan, who has been separated from the figure of the Wan in the recollection-image. The mother and Wan are projected onto two other figures: Kaizhen and the old Luo's mother, respectively. Kaizhen is a red-haired girl in a red jacket and is Wan's *doppelgänger*. Kaizhen is a very rustic name, which is in sharp contrast with the sophistication implied by a name such as Wan Qiwen.

In other words, in Luo's subconscious mind, the idealized version of Wan should be Kaizhen, who is rustic and simple. The only trouble Kaizhen encounters is nothing more than a bit of harassment from a few rogues, which Luo easily handles. This contrasts with the reality that Wan is actually the mistress of a gang member, a problem that Luo can do nothing about. After parting ways with Kaizhen, Luo meets an elderly red-haired woman. Holding a torch, the woman passes through a crowded square to an elderly man on the edge of the town. The elderly red-haired woman is the *doppelgänger* of White Cat's mother in the actual image of *Memory*, and they share the same figure. However, her red hair is the same as Kaizhen's, which means that this figure also has multiple projections—all women who have a relationship with Luo are ultimately projections of his mother. She wishes to elope with the old man, but the man refuses, so she burns down his house.

In the dream described above, the three characters Luo meets are a boy, Kaizhen, and an elderly woman. One of the roles projected by the boy is Luo in his childhood. Kaizhen and the elderly woman are not only projections of Wan and Luo's mother, but they also refer to each other. But why is Luo able to meet the boy, while Kaizhen and the old woman do not meet? This question also arises in Kieślowski's films, such as in the case of the old judge and the young judge in *Three Colours: Red*, who also never meet, while the two Véroniques from Poland and France do in fact have a chance meeting. If the Luo in the dream is removed from the figure, he is actually the same thing as the transcendence that controls the two Véroniques. Hence, he can meet one of his

versions in the dream as it is an out-of-time existence. The two avatars in reality-recollection are like the two judges in *Three Colours: Red*; it is impossible for Wan and his mother or Kaizhen and the elderly woman to meet. This effectively unfolds the overlap of the past and present, the recollection and the fiction.

Therefore, this dream can ultimately be explained as follows: *Poppy* is Luo's reconstruction of a false recollection in *Memory*. Luo tries to recognize his absent mother throughout his life. Hence, Wan Qiwen becomes a fantasmatic lie about his mother, because Luo is not sure whether her figure might in fact be his absent mother. At the beginning of the film, the viewer is told that this Wan figure actually comes from an anonymous lady who is engaged in the sex trade. At the end of *Poppy*, Luo's ultimate fantasy (the ultimate fantasmatic lie) is revealed. Here, he transforms Wan Qiwen into Kaizhen, projects Kaizhen as a teenage Wan Qiwen, and borrows the figure of White Cat's mother to represent his elderly mother. In the end, he arrives at the most reasonable excuse for his mother's absence. And after completing the fantasmatic lie about his mother, Luo returns to Kaizhen and they go to the ruined house together. When they make love in the space where the sheets of the past are superimposed, Luo completes his other fantasmatic lie.

4 Conclusion

Long Day's Journey into Night transforms recollection-images into false narratives. It features several cases that fully demonstrate Deleuze's analysis of recollection, crystals of time, sharp points, and falsities. These cases include two uses of flashback for recollection-image, forking time, the transformation of a recollection-image into an illusion after a failed recognition, the simultaneity of a direct time-image, and the power of the false. Drawing on the developments since the narrative revolution, this film successfully combines fantasy and false narrative to construct a new type of narrative that is different from flashbacks in the present and forking paths. The first half of this experimental film expands Angelopoulos' role projection and the overlapping of different time sheets. It complicates the projection of different figures by

experimentally applying Kieślowski's flashback in the present to multiple characters.

The second part of the film explores the use of *doppelgängers* and technically combines Tarkovski's long takes, which express pure optical and sound situations, with Alexander Sokurov's super-long takes. When expressing direct time-images, *Long Day's Journey into Night* transforms the time-images from recollections to fictions, and then uses fantasy to express the fiction. The recollection-image, the falsifying narration in *Memory*, and the fantasy in *Poppy* all come from the mother and son prototypes. The complicated projection makes this plot seem familiar, allowing the viewer to ponder the details. This actually surpasses the inherent motivation of the narrative and becomes the subjective power that drives the development of the plot. In the end, the film's false flashbacks and its multiple projections and fantasies transform it from being a short fiction into a form of poetry (the intertextuality of the film's titles to Célan's poetry collection is finally revealed), which embodies the dissolution of linear time and the becoming of simultaneity or coexistence.

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Article 4

Metaphors for Puzzles, Time, and Dreams: Ambiguous Narratives in *Kaili Blues* ⁶⁶

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1 Abstract

In the film *Kaili Blues* by Bi Gan, intricate clues create intricate connections between the plots steered by various characters. This relationship manifests in splitting time and alternating between dream and reality. This article analyses Bi Gan's approach to temporality and dreams by focusing on how he employs various film metaphors to deal with poetic narratives in his films. The article consists of three sections: First, it introduces the (puzzle) storytelling form of *Kaili Blues* as a promising area in many Chinese films. Second, it examines how puzzle films contribute to the ambiguity (plots) between characters from the perspective of infinite games. Moreover thirdly, discuss the two levels of metaphors in *Kaili Blues* that result from the condensation and displacement of metaphors, including the mutual projection of roles caused by the time forking effect and the audience's associations caused by the significance of dreams in Chinese tradition (or local) culture.

Keywords: ambiguous characters, Bi Gan, film metaphor, *Kaili Blues*, metaphor condensation and displacement, puzzle films.

My film is only talking about time, memory and dreams.

(Bi, “Interview: Director Bi Gan Talks ‘Kaili Blues,’ The Influence of Tarkovsky, Sleeping through Movies & More” the answer to the question “This is a China I’ve never really seen...”)

The 2015 Chinese film *Kaili Blues* has a unique presence, reflected in its narrative style, which is distinct from the Chinese academy film tradition. Bi Gan has no direct or indirect ties to the sixth generation of Chinese filmmakers, which has undoubtedly dismayed Chinese film historians. From a different perspective, this severed relationship simply reveals *Kaili Blues*’ concealed ambition. According to researcher Huadong Fan, the film “embodies the desire to break through the hegemonic paradigm of realism in Chinese cinema” (Fan 24).⁶⁷

Bi Gan has stated in various interviews that the film aesthetics of former Soviet film master Andrei Tarkovsky (Bi, “Lubian Yecan”) and Chinese Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien were his primary influences (Bi, “Lucid Dreams: A Conversation with Bi Gan”).

However, he denies having borrowed specific cinematic techniques from them, describing the inheritance relationship as methodological rather than formal.⁶⁸ Even if there are scenes in *Kaili Blues* that are reminiscent of Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979) and Hou’s *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996), these intertexts do not reflect Bi Gan’s true intentions.⁶⁹ If Bi Gan’s inheritance of other masters of art film is studied in terms of style, it will inevitably fall within the scope of discussing art films, thus failing to demonstrate its uniqueness. Although some researchers have thoroughly analysed *Kaili Blues* from the standpoint of film aesthetics, the film’s narrative rather than

⁶⁷ China’s film academy system has caused researchers to classify directors by the era in which they entered the film academy, and the college Bi Gan attended is not a film academy. His accumulation of film viewing at the Communication University of Shanxi resulted from self-study during college (Bi, “Lubian Yecan”).

⁶⁸ In an exclusive interview with ifeng.com, Bi Gan described his understanding of Hou’s influence on him as a relationship such as “after observing Hou plant grains, he considered planting fruit trees” (Bi, “Bi Gan: Hou Hsiao-Hsien Had A Direct Influence on Me”). Moreover, Bi Gan believed that Tarkovsky’s availability of resources during the Soviet planned economy era was beyond his reach, so Tarkovsky’s influence on him was limited to aesthetics (“Bi Gan: Hou Hsiao-Hsien...”).

⁶⁹ Several scholars have discovered this similarity. For instance, Andrea Termini described in his review how certain scenes in *Kaili Blues* intertextualize certain scenes from *Stalker* and *Goodbye South, Goodbye*. Huadong Fan also discovered this in his master’s thesis, but he stated that this does not indicate that Bi Gan imitated Tarkovsky or Hou Hsiao-hsien (Fan 24).

aesthetics is unique. Shelly Kraicer stated in her film review, “[t]his isn’t standard art-cinema-approved social realism” (Kraicer sentence 8 par. 1). Fan believes this deviation from “social realism” results from Bi Gan’s distinctive hometown aesthetics (4). However, Kraicer believes that Bi Gan’s defining characteristic is poetry, not local aesthetics (referred to in the article as “social realism”).⁷⁰ Like the audience’s initial reaction, Kraicer emphasised that *Kaili Blues* has “intricate skeins of narrative [strands]” that result in complex character relationships (Kraicer sentence 1 par. 2).

Researchers should reassess the complicated plot of *Kaili Blues*. Kraicer argues that these intricate narratives have numerous entry points, but he does not elaborate on them in his remarks due to space constraints. Andrea Termini enumerates the objects that appear in the film, but he stops further analysis after comparing them with the others in the works of other film masters. The complex narratives triggered by these entry points (or objects) are characteristic of puzzle films, which are uncommon in China, but scholars have not addressed this.

“Puzzle film” is a subgenre of postclassical narrative. Eliot Panek first proposed this concept in his article “The Poet and the Detective: Defining the Psychological Puzzle Film.”⁷¹ In the article, Panek defines puzzle films as “possess[ing] narratives in which the orientation of events in the plot to diegetic reality is not immediately clear, thus creating doubt in the viewer’s mind as to how reliable, knowledgeable, self-conscious, and communicative the narration is” (65). *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, edited by Warren Buckland, honestly treats puzzle films as a particular research topic. Buckland defines puzzle film in the introduction by stating, “[t]he puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events” (5). For instance, *Lost Highway* (1997) by David Lynch is a typical puzzle film. It is divided into two parts, with Fred’s transformation into Pete in prison serving as the dividing line. The plots of the two parts are nearly unrelated, except for this inexplicable character mutation. How Fred’s marital

⁷⁰ “While it is clearly deeply embedded in contemporary culture, its poetry—not its politics—makes meaning” (Kraicer sentence 6 par. 15).

⁷¹ The term “puzzle film” was coined by Norman N. Holland in his 1963 article titled “Puzzling Movies” (Kiss and Willemssen 19). However, based on research conducted after the Hollywood narrative revolution of the 1990s, the puzzle films mentioned in this study differ from Holland’s theory.

crisis in the first part transitioned into Pete's love adventure in the second part is confusing to audiences accustomed to conventional storytelling.

In *Kaili Blues*, Chen Sheng's entanglements with multiple friends and relatives in the first part and Chen Sheng's daydreams in the second part have a Lynchian relationship, that is, an ambiguous narrative relationship. In a film, this manifests as a tenuous connection between the narratives of characters A and B. Specifically, the following conditions must be met for a story to be an ambiguous narrative,

1. A's life (or a particular stage) resembles that of B. It indicates that the events in A's life are similar to those in B's life.
2. Additionally, an object (or person) in A's life is strikingly similar to one in B's life.
3. This double similarity allows the audience to connect characters A and B mentally, but there is no other intuitive evidence in the story to confirm the audience's association.

In *Lost Highway*, for instance, Fred's crisis of confidence in his wife also occurs in Pete's narrative, and the actor who portrays Renee, Fred's wife, also portrays Alice, Pete's underground lover.

This relationship is further complicated in *Kaili Blues*. The lifestyles of the young Chen Sheng and the middle-aged Crazy Face are comparable. Like the elderly former gang leader Monk, the middle-aged Chen Sheng aspires to be an ordinary person. Monk and one of Chen's fellow physicians share the loss of a child. Chen Sheng had a childhood experience similar to that of his nephew Weiwei. Chen Sheng and Weiwei have a mirror disco ball in their residences, and Weiwei and Monk each have a clock in their homes. In Chen's dream, the actress who played his wife in real life was a hairdresser.

Ambiguous narration is an essential feature of puzzle films. Panek argues that in such films, "the smaller mystery is only related to the larger mystery thematically. Possible answers to these larger mysteries are never made especially clear" (Panek 77). If the mysteries develop in such a pattern, as if chaotically, what is the inner dynamic of the plot within the framework of this narrative? An ambiguous narrative uses puzzles to create identity projections between characters to elicit (excessive) associations in the audience.

2 Setup of Puzzles — Simulation of Infinite Games

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
(T. S. Eliot, sec. “Burnt Norton,” ch. “Four Quartets”)

In Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), there is a narrative which can be summarised as Mr X (Giorgio Albertazzi) and Ms A (Delphine Seyrig) may or may not know each other. There may or may not have been a passionate love between them. There does not seem to be a helpful plot here at all. Still, this abandonment of thrust and purpose reinforces the narrative’s complexity, making viewers obsessed with explaining complex character relationships rather than watching a complete story from start to finish. Marsha Kinder classified it as a database narrative. In her view,

[d]atabase narratives refers to narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language: the selection of particular data (characters, images, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales. (6)

Moreover, she classified narratology-influenced art films like *Last Year at Marienbad* together with the cyberfiction-influenced mainstream independent films produced in the 1990s as this narrative aesthetic emphasised their “arbitrariness of the particular choices made, and the possibility of making other combinations which would create alternative stories” (Kinder 6).

Panek proposed the concept of Psychological Puzzle Film to try to analyse this atypically complex film narrative. In his view, the standard narrative features of these films are that they “promote ambiguity and sudden narrative

fluctuations over brief isolated fluctuations and clarity of classical narration” (Panek 65). Panek sees David Lynch’s two films, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), as the ideal case studies for ambiguous narratives. In analysing these cases, he cites an illuminating point made by Angela Hague (1995) while studying David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* series (1990–1991). In the plot of *Twin Peaks*, a mysterious murder fully aroused the spectator’s enthusiasm to solve the case, but no substantive clues appeared until the end, which made the spectator confused and frustrated. “Postmodernism’s reaction against the psychological and mythical structures of modernism inevitably led to its appropriation and exploitation of the detective narrative as a parodic model [...],” “an operation which denies the ability of the human to solve problems through ‘syllogistic order’” (Hague 132) Hague likened this narrative mode to an infinite play. For the concept of infinite play, its creator, philosopher James P. Carse, described it as,

[t]here are at least two kinds of games. One could be called finite, the other infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play (3).

It is like the Card Game scene in *Last Year at Marienbad*: Mr X and Ms A’s husband are in the game; whenever X thinks he has discovered the law of the game and intends to get a quadra to kill in the next round, he is always greeted by defeat. He keeps finding new rules but still loses the game again and again. This is an excellent example of the visualisation of an infinite play.

In the same way, Hague thought the chess game in *Twin Peaks* meant “Carse’s metaphorical interpretation is literally true” (Hague 134). The spectator in front of the screen, like Mr X, tries in vain to find connections between clues in the film or TV series. Still, the author’s real intention is to continue the filmic narrative as an infinite game, as the creative principles revealed by *Twin Peaks*-influenced director Damon Lindelof,

[y]ou have to have a plan for what to do once you resolve the central mystery. And the answer has to be, there just has to be multiple, multiple, multiple mysteries, so every time you knock one off, there's still two unresolved ones in its wake, and you see how long you can play that game. (Lindelof, the answer to the question "Did *Twin Peaks* influence your storytelling? ..." par. 3)

Lindelof's creative method is precisely what Panek has summed up,

[t]hese films prompt the questioning of the qualities of their narration by exhibiting one or more of the following: unusual story structure, violations of causal logic, or flaunted, unresolved gaps in the causal chain of the story. (Panek 65)

These "questioning" in the narrative effect are reflected in the similarities between events and events, characters and characters that create confusion, which Isador Coriat called reduplicative paramnesia (Coriat 1904), Henri Bergson called false recognition (Bergson 1975), or Gilles Deleuze called "the illusion of *déjà vu* or already having been there" (Deleuze 1989, 79).

For example, in Theo Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze* (*To Vlemma tou Odyssea* 1995), the protagonist A and the historical figures-Manakis brothers are subtly overlapped in different plots, making it easier for the spectator to perceive that he has found some underlying connection. However, he cannot connect to A's mission in the plot. Thus, Producer A can be classified as an ambiguous character who sometimes goes beyond the category of an individual and seems to be a coalescence or projection of multiple individuals.

Not all projections between individuals fall into ambiguous roles. The plot of some films explicitly presupposes schizophrenia so that all clues effectively serve the puzzle, such as *Perfect Blue* (1997), *Fight Club* (1999), and *Black Swan* (2010). An ambiguous relationship means that all character settings are not for the plot but instead rely on the imitation of the rules of the infinite game in narrative mode. In this case, there are often unsolved puzzles in the plot, and

there are lying flashback-like techniques to make one character seem like the shadow of another. However, those spectators who are used to the three-act structure of the classic narrative are often reluctant to explore these clues and thus fall into the trap like the card game in *Last Year at Marienbad*.

Following the preceding discussion, it is clear that setting puzzles generates ambiguous narrative effects. Returning to the point made at the beginning of the article, the distinctiveness of *Kaili Blues* in Chinese cinema lies in its narrative style rather than its aesthetic style, as it exemplifies the ambiguous narrative of puzzle films. In this film, Bi Gan set up a large number of puzzles that reflect the *past* similarities between multiple characters in order to encourage *collating* behaviour in the audience's association area. Similar to putting together a jigsaw puzzle, you "can get hints about the general groupings of the differently coloured pieces — those blues will represent water, these blues are the sky, these buildings are brown and tan, and so on" (Gozzi 448). This type of collating, which resembles putting together a jigsaw puzzle, causes the audience to become detectives off-screen.

In well-known cases of ambiguous narratives such as *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, or *Ulysses' Gaze*, their authors build narrative structures by simulating film elements with valuable clues, often detective tropes. As Panek argues, ambiguous narratives "use the detective trope to provoke the audience into looking for answers that the film doesn't provide" (76), and if there are no actual detectives in the play, "the protagonists play roles comparable to detectives throughout the narratives" (76).

Ambiguous narration advances the plot by establishing detective metaphors, so this type of film is typically not considered a narrative genre but rather an alternative film style. In the same way that Bordwell believed these films with intricate plots were appropriations of European styles,⁷² *Kaili Blues* researchers preferred to examine the film within the context of Chinese art cinema. They tried to identify Bi Gan's aesthetic style by researching the genealogy of the Chinese Film Academy, but they ignored the significance of *Kaili Blues* in film

⁷² "The strongest argument for a New Hollywood rests upon the claim that the directors' works constitute a non-classical approach to narrative and technique. [...] narrative structure had splintered, genre conventions had dissolved, linearity had been replaced by ambiguity, and the individual protagonist could no longer be seen as heroic.[...] As the 'old' Hollywood had incorporated and refunctionalized devices from German Expressionism and Soviet montage, the 'New' Hollywood has selectively borrowed from the international art cinema." (Bordwell and Staiger 614)

narrative research. This paper attempts to refocus attention on *Kaili Blues*' narrative research for this reason. Describe the film's narrative techniques and analyse its intricate puzzle settings.

The plot of *Kaili Blues* is based on a seemingly loose narrative structure. The connection between each narrative module has shifted from hints to coincidences: after being released from prison, the protagonist Chen Sheng began a new life. He interacted with an old doctor, Crazy Face, and Weiwei on an everyday basis. These characters' histories are strikingly similar. When Chen learned that Weiwei had been sold, he boarded the train to track him down. During this process, Chen had a daydream in which everything that transpired mirrored reality.

The story is divided into two parts in the narrative structure, and they respectively use different types of metaphors to make similarities between the narrative modules. In the first part, Bi Gan used cross-editing to express the daily life of Chen and his relatives and friends, and there is a sense of *déjà vu* between these characters. In the second part, a highly long-take records Chen's daydreams. "Dream" is simultaneously a metonymy (or metaphor) for the reality of the first part and a metaphor for the cultural significance of the dream. The second part enhances the first part's multi-projection effect, making the projection more layered and bringing more complex feelings to the viewer.⁷³

3 Metaphors in *Kaili Blues*

3.1 The First Level of Metaphor — Time Forking Caused by Metaphor Condensation and Metaphor Displacement

In his paper "Metaphor and Ideology in Film", Dr Carlo Comanducci studies metaphors in film. Comanducci observes that when attempting to use the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) to analyse filmic metaphors, the lexical units of the film cannot directly apply the conventional meaning of the metaphor in the text. He believes all metaphorically identifiable elements can

⁷³ In the first part, several actual narrative characters project to each other, as evidenced by Chen Sheng and Crazy Face sharing Monk's life. The second section depicts a dream, implying that the actual narrative is projected into the false narrative

be lexical units because they can be split shots and sequences and corresponding actions, objects, or characters in the same scene, even sound, light, and angle.

After some adjustments, Comanducci proposes two metaphor modes — metaphor condensation and metaphor displacement — based on Noël Carroll’s description of the two processes “fusion and fission” in the construction of symbolic formations (Carroll 18). Condensation means “different conceptual metaphors can be present in the same element of the film discourse” (Comanducci 31), and displacement means “different elements of the discourse may concur to determine a single conceptual metaphor” (31). A further explanation of these concepts is: Condensation is “a result of the interaction of all condensed implications” (32), and it tends to take the form of metaphor clusters that are “all grounded in the same conceptual metaphor, or a specific group of conceptual metaphors that are linked together” (32). As for displacement, like Carroll’s fission, it “can regard emotions or parts of an individual’s personality” (33), and it is often used to show a different ending of a narrative “by representing as different behaviour of multiple characters, what could be interpreted as different choices of the same individual” (33).

The first part of *Kaili Blues* can be analysed as follows, based on Comanducci's two metaphorical modes:

1. Several primary characters exemplify the metaphor condensation of the concept “regret.”
2. The projection between multiple main characters can be understood as a metaphor displacement that anthropomorphizes the personality.

Therefore, we can conclude that the reason *Kaili Blues* is valuable for narrative research is because the narrative structure's ingenious and complex character relationships add more complex techniques to the metaphor of puzzle films.

The first part of the film uses cross-editing to describe the daily life of Chen and his relatives, colleagues, and friends. These narrative fragments can be roughly summarised into the stories of four characters (tab. 1).

These stories were split into multiple segments by Bi Gan. From the perspective of character combination, the plot can be roughly summarised into four: Chen-Old doctor, Chen-Crazy Face, Chen-Weiwei, and Weiwei-Crazy Face. Among these four sets of narratives, the story of Chen-Old Doctor explains Chen's mother's last wish: she (mother) hoped that Chen could live an ordinary life, and the old doctor's past: she (doctor) left her boyfriend when she was young; The story of Chen-Crazy Face explains the irreparable contradictions between the brothers, including the preference for Chen in the mother's will (but during Chen's sentence, Crazy Face took care of mother alone) and Crazy Face's indifference to Weiwei in reality; In Chen-Weiwei's story, Chen takes exceptional care of his nephew Weiwei; and in Weiwei-Crazy Face, Crazy Face seems to care about his son — he worries about his son's future and does not want him to be a gang member.

Just like X and A in *Last Year at Marienbad* have or have not been in a relationship, there are contradictions between the four sets of plots in *Kaili Blues*: Crazy Face is both indifferent and caring towards his son; while Chen, a former gang member, was serving his sentence, his brother Crazy Face took care of his mother alone until her death, but the mother thought that Crazy Face had nothing to do, then she gave the entire estate to Chen. In a similar manner, not only are there inconsistencies in the narration, but there is also an incompatibility between the various plots: Crazy Face has never appeared with the old doctor; similarly, Chen, Crazy Face, and Weiwei rarely coexist in the same scene;⁷⁴ moreover, at the moment, Monk only had contact with Crazy Face but never interacted with Chen. With the above question in mind, all the characters in the story are placed in the past-present structure to re-observe their relationships to obtain the situations in Table 2.

⁷⁴ Except for the scene in the playground. Even though three characters appear in the same scene (playground), the director compositionally separates one of them from the other two (see fig. 1).



Figure 1

The only scene where Chen, Crazy Face, and Weiwei appear simultaneously. They are separated by composition and cannot coexist.

Table 1

Characters	Past	Present	Related roles
Chen Sheng	Former gang member, nine years in prison. While serving his sentence, his mother and wife each passed away.	An ordinary middle-aged man.	Deceased ex-wife; Deceased mother; Brother: Crazy Face; Nephew: Weiwei; Former gang boss: Monk; Colleague: The old doctor.
Crazy Face	Chen's half-brother cared for their mother alone until her death while Chen was in prison.	He is idle all day and (probably) sold his son for lack of money	Son: Weiwei; Friend: Monk.
Monk	Former gang leader. His son died in vendetta.	An older man who owns a watch shop and likes children very much.	Deceased son; Friend: Crazy Face; Friend's son: Weiwei; Former subordinate: Chen.
Old Doctor	She had a	An old doctor jointly	Ex-boyfriend;

boyfriend when she was young, but she chose to leave him.	runs a country clinic with middle-aged Chen.	Colleague: Chen; Friend: Chen's late mother.
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There is a contrast between the past and the present in the film (tab. 2). Some of these are the result of the same event, such as the fluctuating relationship between Chen and his mother. The remaining portion derives from various events with apparent similarities, and the viewer subjectively connects them, such as the current Weiwei and the childhood Chen, the son of Monk, or the son of the old doctor, who are linked by their typical son identity.

Table 2

Past	Present
The young mother left Zhenyuan Town and abandoned her child Chen.	Chen's mother died, and he got the whole inheritance, but Crazy Face got nothing.
The young doctor left Zhenyuan Town, and her boyfriend stayed there to live.	The old doctor misses her ex-boyfriend and wants to give this dying man a tape and a shirt.
Monk's son loved clocks during his lifetime.	Monk returned to Zhenyuan Town to open a watch shop. He liked Crazy Face's son Weiwei very much. Weiwei also likes clocks.
The old doctor's son died in a car accident.	Chen took good care of his nephew Weiwei.
Chen met his ex-wife at a disco.	Chen's ex-wife died before he was released.
Chen was jailed for revenge for the monk's son.	According to his mother's last wish, Chen is now working with the old doctor in the clinic.
Chen has a half-brother, Crazy Face, who has lived with his mother since	Crazy Face's son Weiwei is often left at home alone.

childhood.	
The fate of the former gangster: Chen was jailed for nine years; Monk lost his son.	Crazy Face reprimanded his son Weiwei who painted on his arm, saying that this is a mark of a gang and warned him not to be a gang member in the future.

Similarly, by comparing the experiences of several vital roles, several sets of parallel connections can be obtained:

Table 3	
Similar roles	Similar experiences
Mother - Old doctor	They both left Zhenyuan Town when they were young and gave up another close person.
Chen - Monk	They were all gang members and paid for it.
Crazy Face - Monk	They each have a son who likes clocks.
Monk - Old doctor	They both lost their sons.
Crazy Face - Mother	They are all ruthless towards their sons.

As shown in the relationships in Table 3, these characters have a coincidence of experience — they all have regrets. At the same time, this regret comes from denying one's past, centred on relationships with one's spouse or son. For example, the dialogue between Old doctor-Chen explains the mother's guilt towards Chen and the doctor's nostalgia for her old lover.

Combining this coincidence with the contrasts in Table 2, a phenomenon can be observed, characterised by an ingenious connection within the entire narrative framework. The different characters have a metaphorical relationship — a metaphor for regret. The old doctor mentions two regrets in her recollection: leaving the town where her ex-boyfriend lived and losing her son in a car accident. This is a metaphor for the experiences of others: the mother left Chen alone in the town; Chen's wife died when he was in prison; Monk lost his son. The Monk can also be divided into different stages: a former gang member who lost his son; he likes children very much now that he is old. These

are metaphors for Chen's identity as a former gang member. Continue to expand the scope, Crazy Face is a metaphor for Monk, who did nothing when he was young, and Weiwei is a metaphor for Chen's unfortunate childhood.

The events in each narrative are metaphors for a character's past, so the first part of the film deals with the regrets of different characters. Metaphorical condensation comes into play here — different roles work together to embody metaphors for the same theme, so there are similarities between other narrative modules. In addition to the similarities between the narrative modules of the film triggered by metaphorical condensation, there is another metaphorical quality of ambiguous characters. Condensation means that the theme is shared by multiple characters, while displacement represents the split within a character. This split is often manifested in the personification of one individual into two or more other characters.

Before discussing this, let me continue with the two questions raised earlier: first, why are there logical contradictions in the four plots? For example, Crazy Face loves and ignores his son. Second, why do some stories have impossibility? Chen-Crazy Face, Chen-Weiwei, and Weiwei-Crazy Face are three narratives independent of each other in the play, but it is evident that they coexist in the present.

These two contradictions recreate the contradictory accounts of Mr X in *Last Year at Marienbad*. Gilles Deleuze refers to this phenomenon as “the simultaneity of peaks of present” (Deleuze 101). This means “there is never a succession of passing presents, but a simultaneity of a present of past, a present of present and a present of future” (101). Therefore, if combining the summaries of the characters in *Kaili Blues* in the three tables mentioned above, the conclusion is that the rules of the narrative game precisely cause these contradictions, “narration will consist of the distribution of different presents to different characters, so that each forms a combination that is plausible and possible in itself” (101). Crazy Face, Chen, and Weiwei are metaphors for one individual in different periods. For example, in the narrative of Chen-Crazy Face, Chen cares about Weiwei, and Crazy Face ignores Weiwei. The two brothers have irreconcilable contradictions and even almost cause a conflict. This is a metaphor for Monk's attitude towards his son at different stages of life: as a gang leader, Monk once ignored his son's passion for gangsters, and in his

old age, he showed self-blame for his son's death. There is a strong contrast between these two stages. In another example, Crazy Face-Weiwei's narrative indicates that Crazy Face loves his son — when he is bathing him, he warns him not to draw a gang mark (tattoo) on his arm. As Deleuze once pointed out,

since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past (81).

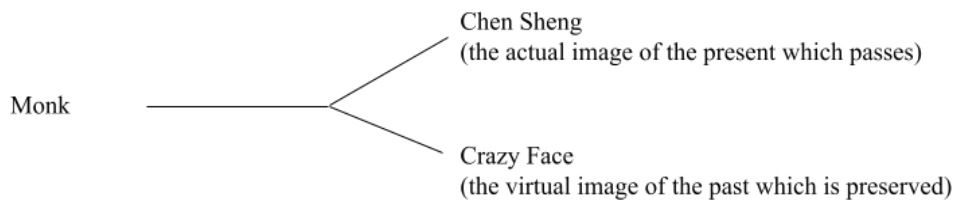


Figure 2

According to Deleuze's description of crystals of time, here past and present are not chronological but coexist.

After splitting the past and present of Monk, they became Crazy Face and Chen (figure 2). As a result, the spectator always finds each other's shadows in Monk, Chen, and Crazy Face in the film. This constitutes another kind of similarity besides thematic similarity. The former is reflected in that several characters' regrets between parents and sons or between a pair of lovers. In contrast, the latter is reflected in overlapping a particular life stage of one character and another at the moment.

Then Chen and Crazy Face can be regarded as displacement metaphors for Monk. Similarly, displacement is also reflected in other roles. For example, the old doctor can also be another origin to fork into Chen's mother and Chen. The contradiction between Crazy Face's different attitudes towards his son and the impossibility between Chen, Crazy Face, and Weiwei are resolved because these two are false propositions. Some characters are bifurcations of an

individual, and they are initially personifications of different probabilities or stages. In addition to Monk being the object of the metaphor, so is Weiwei, who can be seen as an agglomeration of metaphorical displacements of multiple characters — as a prototype for metaphors for sons, such as childhood Chen, son of Monk, and son of the old doctor, the relationship between the three of them is both a metaphor for the past (parents do not love their sons) and for the present (parents regret losing their sons). In this way, the first part of the film continues the cycle of A metaphors B, B metaphors C, and C metaphors A again.

When the two metaphors of condensation and displacement are combined, a unique narrative framework is further obtained, in which the narrative modules both reflect each other and the same concept. This framework replaces the three-act structure of the classic narrative. Following this line of thinking, the film's first part can be classified into a narrative framework that includes several sets of metaphorical modules — mother and son, father and son, husband and wife, lovers. Mother and son and father and son are more similar, and couples and lovers are closer. Each group of modules has a corresponding role, and these roles are branched in time, and each branch is a displacement metaphor for the origin, thus enhancing the connection between the modules. In addition, some red herring clues in the film visualise the metaphorical process, prompting the spectator to start thinking about the rules of the jigsaw puzzle.

Assuming that the protagonist Chen is the core of the narrative, this framework includes,

The narrative of Chen includes mother and son, and husband and wife;

Weiwei, Crazy Face, and Monk are metaphors for Chen's childhood, youth and old age, respectively; A disco ball will appear in different scenes (flashbacks) related to Chen.

When Chen and other characters appear together in a scene, there will be a corresponding metaphor (condensation or displacement) and an object clue. Continuing to expand according to the above assumption and shifting the core to any role metaphorical to Chen's displacement, such as Monk, it will be:

The narrative of Monk includes father and son;

Crazy Face and Chen are metaphors for the Monk who is a gang member and the Monk who loses his son;

Other accounts show that Monk's son liked clocks during his lifetime. The clock serves as a clue connecting Monk and Weiwei, who also enjoys them.

In this sense, the core of the narrative automatically shifted to Weiwei: Weiwei is in the narrative module of father and son. Still, because Weiwei is a metaphor for childhood Chen, the narrative module is connected from father and son to mother and son.

The topic seemed to return to Chen again.

At this time, in the module of mother and son, the pain of the old doctor's loss of his son and the pain of Monk in the module of father and son made the spectator have a *déjà vu*.

The film has a structural metaphor because the characters constantly reflect on each other in this rhythm. The spectator is caught in the constant pursuit and exploration of metaphors.

3.2 The Second Level of Metaphors — Cultural Metaphors for Dream

3.2.1 *Dream — Alternants for Metaphor and Metonymy*

In T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the scene described at the end of the last poem, "Little Gidding", is a metonymy for the rose garden, which appears at the beginning of the first poem, "Burnt Norton". Thus, a relationship is formed — the first poem and the last poem form a new structure in which "[w]hat appears to be the end — it may be a climactic effort, it may be the end to a poem — becomes [...] a new beginning" (Gordon 341).

This approach also appears in *Kaili Blues*. The second part of the film mainly describes Chen's dream with a long shot of more than forty minutes. Some of the characters appearing in it correspond to several real characters in the first part.

The relationship between multiple similarities is metaphorical in the first part, and the difference is that the characters appear in the second part.

Although there are similarities to the first part, the association is metonymic. The relationship between dreams and reality determines this. Mark J. Blechner, who studied this relationship, believes that the elements in the dreamer's dream correspond to his real life, such as "one person or object is substituted for another" (Blechner 117), thus reflecting the meaning of metonymy — "[It] is the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant (the fundament)" (Blechner 111).

However, the figurative relation of dreams to reality is more than metonymy. Edgar A. Levenson believes that "dreams may be interpreted along the two basic linguistic axes — that is, metaphorically and metonymically" (Levenson 120). To a certain extent, the object in the dream is metaphorical or metonymic, depending on whether its link to reality is direct or indirect. According to Levenson, metaphor is "the story line of the dream, accessible to any listener's interpretation" (120). The metonymy of reality by the dream image requires the interpreter to understand the dreamer's associations: "It is the reservoir of the idiosyncratic experience of both participants. It is nonlinear and doesn't tell a story, as does the metaphoric line" (120). For example, a canary in a purple weskit has no meaning unless it relies on association.

Nevertheless, the barriers between metaphor and metonymy in a narrative are often not clear-cut. In this regard, Roman Jakobson's point is that "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination" (Jakobson 704). Here, the selection means metaphor, and combination means metonymy: "[s]eparated in their foundation, metaphor and metonymy are joined at the level of function" (Ropare-Wuilleumier 11). Jakobson illustrates this point with examples from different literary schools and suggests that the two elements (metaphor and metonymy) interact in literature, poetry, painting and film. Within the works of these other art categories, there are "various motives which determine the choice between these alternants" (Jakobson 255). Christian Metz further believes that the distinction between the two should not be based solely on film elements but should also consider the configuration of similarity and continuity inside and outside the narrative. Therefore, metaphor and metonymy do not appear singly in most cases but appear in the form of interaction or mutual suggestion (Metz 200).

To sum up, it can be seen that the projection of dream images to reality is difficult to summarise with pure metonymy or metaphor. They often work together. In the film, it starts from the moment Chen enters the dream. Bi Gan uses hallucinatory images to imply that this is a dream. The specific operations are as follows: two scenes with a shared hallucination are set in the film. In the first scene, Crazy Face's home, a clock drawn by Weiwei is running on one wall, and a moving train image is shown upside-down on the other. Another scene at the film's end depicts Chen sitting on a train with a running clock outside the window drawn by another Weiwei in his dream.

Because of the fit of the hallucinations in these two scenes, the entire second part is a metaphor for dreams. At the same time, the fantasy characters in this dream are metaphors or metonymies of reality.

As to whether fantasies in dreams are metaphors or metonymies, this lies in “while metaphor establishes connections between different domains of experiences, metonymy operates within the same experiential domain” (Müller and Kappelhoff 110). For example, the fantasy character Weiwei can be understood as a metaphor for the real Weiwei. At the same time, his girlfriend Yangyang is a metonymy for the old doctor in reality. Furthermore, Yangyang functions as both metonymy and metaphor because the doctor's other meaning is a metaphor for Chen's mother.

Table 4	
Dreams	Reality
Characters	
Teenage Weiwei	Weiwei, Chen
Yangyang (Teenage Weiwei's girlfriend)	Old doctor, Mother
Hairdresser	Chen's late wife
Events	
Chen put on the shirt that the old doctor wanted to give to her old lover and gave the tape that the lover gave her to the hairdresser.	The old doctor asked Chen to help her send her old lover a shirt and a tape that lover once gave her.
Yangyang is about to leave the town	Mother had left town;

Table 4 shows that the fantasy characters project the real, forming a more complex connection with the metaphorical relationship between the characters in the first part. Likewise, events in dreams have similarities to reality because the spectator's associations are also required, so this relationship is also metonymic.

The time forking in the first part is continued here, and the fantasy characters here correspond one-to-one with reality, so the metaphor in the first part still exists here. It is as if the fantasy character hairdresser directly is a metonymy of Chen's wife. Because of the metaphor of continuation, when Chen handed the tape (clue) to the hairdresser, she was the wife and the old doctor at the same time (tape as a clue to the old doctor).

3.2.2 Cultural Metaphors of Dreams

According to Hong Kong scholar Mei Gao's research, some plots in *Kaili Blues* are metaphors for "giving dreams" (tuomeng) in traditional Chinese folklore (Gao 51). It refers to several scenes in the film's first act (in the first part of the film) in which the deceased deliver messages to the living through dreams. The second part of the film, which is also a metaphor for dreams, is not mentioned by Gao. However, the point of this metaphor (in the second part) is not "giving dreams" but rather an allusion to the effect of dreams on a person's spiritual enhancement or self-liberation in traditional Chinese religion.

Discussing this undervalued profound dream metaphor must return to the subject of metaphor research. There are currently two opposing positions: the cognitively informed conceptual metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and the philosophical metaphorology of Hans Blumenberg. As for how metaphorical meaning is constructed, the former believes that meaning is contingent upon universal cognition, whereas the latter believes that it must be rooted in historical culture. Current researchers (or institutions) in film metaphor, such as the Center for Advanced Film Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, advocate combining the two theories. Their research takes an eclectic

approach between two prominent metaphor theories, which are not only based on a universal cognitive schemata of neurocognitive approach but also “necessarily entails taking the historicity of metaphorical meaning-making into consideration” (Greifenstein et al. 3). The dream metaphor in *Kaili Blues* necessitates such analyses.

On the one hand, “dream” stands for “giving dreams,” while on the other hand, “giving dreams” has a solid folkloric background in China. If the audience consists only of native Chinese speakers, the combination of the dead-dream-living can easily lead to people’s associations with “giving dreams.” Because it is part of the Chinese-language circle’s everyday cognition (folk belief), it can be seen from this that, while native Chinese speakers may not be able to point out specific prototypes for more profound dream metaphors directly, they can have appropriate interpretations of such metaphors.

The methodology utilised by Fan and Mei is consistent with these “appropriate interpretations.” The former compared *Kaili Blues*’ dream plots to Jia Zhangke’s films, while the latter compared it to *The Widowed Witch* (2017). These reflect the cultural association audiences native to the Chinese language would make regarding dream-related scenes. In Jia Zhangke’s *A Touch of Sin* (2013), Xiaoyu enters a van filled with snakes while evading pursuit. In *The Widowed Witch* by Cai Chengjie, Erhao can suddenly predict the future one day accurately. These plots resemble the mystical scene in the second instalment of *Kaili Blues*, in which Chen Sheng meets the avatars of several significant people in his life in a fictitious town.

The metonymy of dreams causes the second part of *Kaili Blues* to have a structural reaction to the first part. The metaphorical cluster previously formed in the first part is readjusted, the theme is changed from regret to nothingness, and a new group is created. This comes down to the meaning of the concept of dream in a particular culture. The passage from the *Diamond Sutra* that appeared in the opening of the first part is echoed here,⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Kraicer views this Buddhist scripture as the key to deciphering the *Kaili Blues*’ narrative.

[t]he Buddha said the living beings in all these world systems have many different minds, which are all known to the Tathagata. Why? Because the minds the Tathagata speaks of are not minds but are (expediently) called minds. And why? Because, Subhuti, neither the past, the present, nor the future mind can be found. (Excerpt from ch. 18, *Diamond Sutra*. Refer to the English subtitles of *Kaili Blues*.)

The implication of this verse for the entire film is highlighted in the dream part. The mirror relationship between reality and fiction makes the narrative frame asymmetrical style. In reality image, a character becomes a metaphor for the past, present or future of another character (just as Weiwei means Chen's childhood), and the fantasies set in the dream are also metonyms for the corresponding characters (the hairdresser looks like Chen's ex-wife), which transforms the entire narrative into an aesthetic of nothingness. This corresponds to another famous sentence in the *Diamond Sutra*,

All conditioned dharmas
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, or shadows;
Like drops of dew, or like flashes of lightning:
Thusly should they be contemplated.
(Excerpt from ch. 32, *Diamond Sutra*. Refer to the translation on lapislazulitexts.com)

The dreams in the film are metaphors for the underlying cultural meanings and acquire deeper meanings. There is a solid metaphorical relationship here with the allusions to dreams in Buddhism and Taoism. Comanducci said, "metaphors have consistent meaning only within a given culture" (25). Some of the plots in *Kaili Blues* have a solid metaphorical connection to the references to dreams in traditional Chinese culture.

There are often reflections on the connection between dreams and reality in Chinese literary works. For example, in the famous paradox of Zhuang Zhou's Butterfly Dream, it is impossible to determine who the noumenon is between the dream of the self and the butterfly's dream (Zhuangzi 18). Or, in the

allusion to Golden Millet Dream, a person completed his life in a short dream, so he gave up the pursuit of worldly success after waking up (Fuller and Lin 536–42). Alternatively, in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*), the protagonist enters a dream and reads a collection of prophetic poems that herald the ultimate fate of every female character in reality.⁷⁶ In addition, this metaphor for the cultural meaning of dreams makes this part a metaphorical cluster with the first part, and every event in the first part produces a metaphor for dreams with religious connotations

In the film's ending, after the day in the dream is over, Chen finally finds Weiwei in Zhenyuan, the town where his mother abandoned him. Weiwei has begun to integrate into his new life with the elderly Monk. This ending makes it impossible to know whether it is a dream or reality, and it is the effect of the metaphorical structure — the metaphor of dreams continues off-screen. From another perspective, this situation also means the end of the metaphor — Weiwei, who symbolises Chen in his childhood, and Monk, who embodies old Chen, finally live together, which ends all the time-forking games. The metaphorical meaning of dreams in Buddhism and Taoism is highlighted at this time — the beginning and the end of life are superimposed, and it is unclear which the before and the after are. As T. S. Eliot describes in the last part of the final poem of the four quartets:

What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

(T. S. Eliot, 1942, "Little Gidding" in *Four Quartets*)

⁷⁶ See Ferrara, "Patterns of Fate in 'Dream of the Red Chamber.'"

4 Conclusion

When we create a puzzle with a clear solution, there is a robust causal relationship between each step of the puzzle-solving process. In contrast, a puzzle without a solution is analogous to a tarot card game in which each stage is replete with metaphors and transcendently connected to the player's history and future.

The metaphor condensation and displacement employed by *Kaili Blues*, as well as the time forking effect and the mapping of dreams to reality, are techniques that were once prevalent in complicated film tales. In this film, unlike others, Bi Gan successfully mixes all three elements. Bi Gan eliminates the causal relationship between the plots by utilising the essence of the impossible puzzle, the infinite game. As a result, metaphor replaces cause and effect as the reference object for assigning logic to the plot.

This technique has been utilised in Kieślowski's *Three Colors: Red* (1994) and Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995), but it has not been applied to the entirety of a film due to the films' obvious storylines. The contribution of Bi Gan's *Kaili Blues* is that he eschewed solvable puzzles in favour of impossible ones as narrative criteria. One episode no longer determines the next in this scenario. In contrast, the metaphor substitutes the deterministic relationship between the plots and becomes the narrative's driving force, compelling the spectator to make continual attributions via association, creating a unique poetic effect.

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Article 5

Reincarnation And *Déjà Vu*: A Case Study on The Dichotomous Narrative Mode in Impossible Puzzle Films⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Yang, Yu. "Reincarnation And *Déjà Vu*: A Case Study on The Dichotomous Narrative Mode in Impossible Puzzle Films." (Under review).

1 Abstract

This article aims to discuss the traits of the dichotomous narrative structure used in impossible puzzle films. In order to introduce the theoretical background of this article, the author uses David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) as an example. According to the author, this impossible puzzle film causes the audience to experience continuous cognitive oscillation. The author then explains how the narrative device of *déjà vu* connects various narrative modules and discusses why viewers tend to overinterpret puzzle films from the perspective of narrative structure. Finally, the author suggests that the dichotomous narrative structure of impossible puzzle films is a universal phenomenon and examines the sense of reincarnation brought on by the “like a thing of the previous generation” aesthetics using Bi Gan's *Kaili Blues* (2015) as a case.

Keywords: Bi Gan, David Lynch, *déjà vu*, dichotomous narrative structure, impossible puzzle films, *Kaili Blues*, *Lost Highway*, sense of reincarnation.

2 Introduction

Beginning in the middle of the 1990s, a considerable number of films with intricate narrative structures began to emerge. These films are not limited to multiple storylines but also exhibit characteristics of hypertext; the sudden insertion of another episode into one episode no longer signifies the narrative entering the reminiscence phase; instead, they jump randomly between episodes, similar to DVDs and video games. Since entering the twenty-first century, the taxonomy of complex narratives has been the subject of ongoing dispute. Scholars from several scientific fields participated in the conversation. There are primarily two sorts of individuals: those who defend the classic story as the foundation of all cinema tales and others who feel that these modern and complicated films do not exceed the framework of the classic narrative. The opposing side claims these films include novel narrative models that transcend the traditional paradigm. This form of complicated film narrative is named “multiple draft narrative” (Bordwell *Poetics of Cinema* 184), “database narrative”⁷⁸, or “forking-path narrative”⁷⁹ according to their respective theories. From 2000 to 2008, the argument on complicated film narratives became more centred on the Hollywood narrative paradigm.

In this debate over narrative taxonomy, David Lynch’s 1997 film *Lost Highway* is frequently used as an example; hence it has a tight association with the development of narrative theory. Initially, several academics advised excluding it from works having narrative research value. For instance, David Bordwell believes that the film is narratively unqualified,⁸⁰ while Charles Ramírez Berg believes that it is rich in imagery and so inappropriate as a subject for narrative study. Later, other academics began to view this film as a

⁷⁸ See Kinder “Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever.”

⁷⁹ See Cameron *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema* ch.1.

⁸⁰ “One can, however, imagine differently, as two of David Lynch’s experimental narratives indicate. *Lost Highway* (1997) inexplicably morphs its initial protagonist into another character, each played by different actors. The plot eventually folds in on itself, with the new protagonist leaving the message that the original one heard at the film’s start. *Mulholland Drive* (2001) does the same, although now the double is played by the same actor, while some characters from early scenes reappear in different relations to her. If complex storytelling demands high redundancy, Lynch has been derelict in his duty. The films’ phantasmagoric body-switches occur without explanation in a milieu soaked in dread and threatened violence. The eerie mix of horror-film atmospherics and radiant *naïveté* may urge us to construe each film as presenting the fantasies of a possessed protagonist, but the cues are not nearly as firm as they are in *A Beautiful Mind*. Instead, the absence of definite reference points allows Lynch to rehearse a few obsessive scenarios of lust and blood without settling on which are real and which are imagined.” (Bordwell *The Way Hollywood Tells It* 89)

genre (or style) peculiar to the era: Marsha Kinder and Slavoj Žižek saw it as the personification of hypertext in the twenty-first century, while Allan Cameron (2008) studies it from the standpoint of temporality.

Although *The Lost Highway* has become a significant case study of complicated tales, academics frequently need to pay more attention to its unique distinctions. This neglect is the consequence of scholars relying too much on formalist analytical frameworks, focusing too much on the narrative structure of films, and grouping films with varied degrees of confusion together. Relying on narrative structure analysis does not explain why certain structurally equivalent complicated narratives cause more complex bewilderment for the audience. For instance, *Run Lola Run* (1998), which is likewise a famous example for studying forking path narratives, presents an entirely different level of cognitive difficulty than *Lost Highway*.

The issues mentioned above result from an over-dependence on the formalist research paradigm. Torben Grodal argued that Bordwell's framework of fabula (prototypical story) and syuzhet (plot order) is only valid when the temporal order of the story is broken.⁸¹ However, formalist analysis is susceptible to errors if a film's narrative chronology is haphazard. Similarly, the framework of *Lost Highway* is comprised of numerous tales, but the storyline is chaotic; it is ambiguous if Fred and Pete's stories are parallel or crossing. They appear to have no relationship with one another. This inconsistency is the primary source of audience bewilderment.

In response to the confusion presented in Lynch's works, critic Sean Murphy once noted that the audience is divided into three categories:

the good (those who claim to "get it"), the bad (those who don't, or can't), and the ugly (or, the angry; those who tried to get it, failed, and then, upon repeat viewings, determine that they are unworthy and, most importantly, uninterested) (Murphy par. 2)

⁸¹ "The PECMA flow model suggests that the fabula (the 'story') is not primarily the end-result of processing the syuzhet (the 'discourse'), contrary to the narrative theory proposed by David Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film*. The classical division between story and discourse is a useful tool when describing narratives with a very scrambled temporal order, but it is not so useful when describing the canonical film that is linearly progressing in time." (Grodal "The PECMA Flow: A General Model of Visual Aesthetics" 5)

This phenomenon indicates that, when confronted with Lynch's filmic narrative mode, the audience is not only unable to restore the plot order instantaneously but also generates persistent cognitive oscillations.

Grodal states that, from a cognitivist perspective, when individuals see a puzzle film, they swiftly match the schema inside it in order to get the concealed emotional meaning.⁸² In addition, individuals will reconstruct the narrative's original look based on contextual information. According to Veerle Ros and Miklós Kiss (2018), audiences can rapidly identify recognisable schemas when they see puzzle films, but it takes longer to recover the prototypical story. In this instance, the delay can result in one of two outcomes: either an eventual resolution will be reached, or the situation will persist indefinitely, "resulting in a sustained overactivation of [audiences'] association areas." (86). By Edward Branigan (2014), this type of film that causes the second effect is dubbed Impossible Puzzle Film. It frequently employs overinterpretation by the audience as its distinctive narrative strategy, which Damon Lindelof, a director whose narrative style was influenced by Lynch's, described as continually presenting "multiple mysteries."⁸³ To borrow the words of philosopher James Carse, it is "an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play." (3)

In the majority of narratively complicated films, there are hints that can restore time. Even if audiences are unable to reconstruct the prototypical narrative, using these attribution indications, they can effectively recreate the story. Bordwell stated, "when we respond to cues in the film, we call on our experiences of life and other artworks" (Bordwell and Thompson 56). Audiences frequently rely on folk psychology to comprehend the meaning of cinema narratives. Audiences categorise some storylines as belonging to the same category and establish narrative conventions via experience. When a convention is established, it directs the audience to a quick and efficient

⁸² See Grodal *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture and Film* ch.8.

⁸³ "The minute you resolve the mystery, the show is over. *Twin Peaks* became a cautionary tale for that. Whether it's true or not, fair or not, the perception is that once they revealed who killed Laura Palmer, there was no reason to watch the show anymore. I don't agree with that premise, but I do think if you're going to do a long-form mystery show, you have to have a plan for what to do once you resolve the central mystery. And the answer has to be, there just has to be multiple, multiple, multiple mysteries, so every time you knock one off, there's still two unresolved ones in its wake, and you see how long you can play that game. This can become even more complex when the mysteries of your show are supernatural in nature or just plain weird." (Lindelof, the answer to the question "Did *Twin Peaks* influence your storytelling? ..." par. 3).

interpretation of a tale of a particular genre that is complicated. However, the absence of narrative conventions in films like *Lost Highway* makes them difficult to comprehend using folk psychology. *Lost Highway* audiences typically over-interpret the storyline. The reason why Lynch's audience is divided into "the good, the bad, and the ugly" (Murphy par. 2) is that people are used to seeing determinism as a prerequisite for film narratives and then come up with more advanced abstract information, to use Grodal's metaphor, a feeling of "higher meaning" (*Embodied Visions* 212). Audiences are prevented from recovering the prototypical story and rely on connections to keep trying, frequently resulting in extra confusion.

3 Dichotomous Narrative Mode

The direct cause of the audience's bewilderment in *Lost Highway* is that Fred and Pete belong to storylines that are both related and unconnected. This appears to be a contradiction. In *Lost Highway*, Lynch utilised a dual narrative structure to represent truth and fantasy. This pattern is quite prevalent in classic narrative films. In contrast to traditional storylines, films like *Lost Highway* lack apparent determinism. Therefore, the dichotomous structure of this film is unique; the two storylines it includes lack the logical relationship of "who decides who," necessitating the use of a different type of logic to establish a causal connection between the plots. *Life of an American Fireman* (1903), a narrative film from the silent cinema period, has such an intervention. One version of this film has cross-cutting, whereas the other does not.⁸⁴ In the version sans cross-cutting, the firefighter's plot and the fire victims' plot are pretty distinct. Because both occurrences fall within the same category, a causal relationship is established between them. Cross-cutting deepens this cause-and-effect relationship by providing it with a shared timeline. Furthermore, in the dichotomous narrative structure of a film, there might be many techniques for connecting two narrative modules. Other connection strategies, such as self-reference (fallacy), projection of desire, and intertextuality, may be substituted for shared chronology in traditional narrative

⁸⁴ See Bordwell *On the History of Film Style* 129.

films. In impossible puzzle films such as *Lost Highway*, the chronology between the two stories is frequently weakened or abandoned, leaving various connecting techniques to establish causal linkages. These techniques may be summed up as follows:

There is no deterministic connection between narratives a and b.

Moreover, object a belongs to narrative a; whereas object b belongs to narrative b.

On the basis of the preceding requirements, if the two plots desire to build a causal link, one of the following conditions needs to be satisfied:

The link between narrative a and narrative b is self-referential.

The desires of the person (subject) in narrative b are reflected in narrative a, (or vice versa).

Object a is related to object b, and they either belong to the same category or share a similar appearance.

On the basis of the preceding relationship, I will now investigate the approach used to create *déjà vu* in the *Lost Highway*.

First, the echoes of Dick Laurent's death in *Lost Highway's* opening and closing words lead to a self-referential fallacy. At the beginning of the narrative, Fred is in the home and hears someone outside the door telling him, "Dick Laurent is dead", via the intercom. At the end of the narrative, Fred walks to his house and rings the doorbell, leaving the message "Dick Laurent is dead" on the intercom. These two repeated sentences generate a sense of *déjà vu* from the narrative structure, which critics refer to as a Möbius strip. This approach has also been used in other Lynch films, such as *Mulholland Drive*, in which Betty discovers a body in a rental property that belongs to her *doppelgänger* Diane. When Betty sees her own dead corpse, a distortion between two parallel realities occurs, giving the audience the appearance of approaching reincarnation.

Second, in *Lost Highway's* two narrative modules, what happens to Pete is a projection of Fred's desire. In the dichotomous narrative structure of impossible

puzzle films, the method of one narrative module being a projection of another is frequently employed. In *Mulholland Drive*, for example, Lynch complicates this projection by generating a desired projection between the Betty/Rita module and the Diane/Camilla module. Lynch's followers have several interpretations of the link between *Mulholland Drive*'s narrative modules. Some believe that the plot of the first half projects the subject's pleasant desires in the second half, while others believe that both sections belong to the embodiment of dreams.⁸⁵

In addition to the previously stated settings, there are further intertextual aspects in the film's two narrative modules that may induce *déjà vu*. On the one hand, these themes are reflected in the visual link between the characters, such as the likeness in appearance between Renee and Alice, the film's two female protagonists. This is a variant of the technique used by Luis Buñuel in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), in which he casts two actresses in the same role. Initially, it just served to illustrate the uncertainty of memory. In his film *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), Krzysztof Kieślowski utilised this technique for the first time by casting Irène Jacob as two different characters. Researchers refer to Kieślowski's character setup as a *doppelgänger*. Consequently, Patricia Arquette portrayed Renee and Alice in *Lost Highway*, who belonged to Fred and Pete's separate storylines. According to the evidence presented in the film, we know that Fred and Pete are two distinct persons with distinct identities. Even when Fred quietly mutated into Pete in prison, the two had no shared memories or personalities. However, there is a relationship between Fred and Pete's storylines, and one of the reasons for this is that the setting of the *doppelgänger* visually connects the two plots: Pete and Alice's passionate, clandestine romance looks to be the polar antithesis of Fred and Renee's staid marriage. Fred is a middle-aged guy in the role setting, whereas Pete is younger and livelier. Fred believes that his wife Alice is disappointed with his sex performance, and Pete's youthful physique reflects this.

On the other hand, the categorical property of the individual product can also generate a relationship, which is represented in the film with regard to the video's associated objects. There are videotapes, videotape players, televisions,

⁸⁵ See Sherlock "10 Interpretations of *Mulholland Drive*".

handheld DV, and portable video players in Fred's plot. There is a movie projector and pornographic flicks shown on the wall in Pete's scene. Both of the elements in the two narrative modules fall under the category of audiovisual equipment. There is a connection between the two narrative modules due to the overlap of categories to which these technological devices belong. The video equipment is readily suggestive of the notion of voyeurism, allowing us to feel the crisis caused by Fred's mistrust of his wife and Pete's dread of the coming discovery of their affair.

In addition to those mentioned above, the film contains other symbols and indications of information. Pete got a horrible headache after discovering Alice's film in the villa, so he raced to the restroom and entered Room 26 by accident. This scene creates an intertextual connection with Room 26 of the motel where Fred is staying. Regarding the meaning of 26, the film does not explain it. Notably, Pete hallucinated that Alice was having sex with another person in Room 26, and Fred observed Renee's derailment in the same room. These two moments highlight the inherent relationship between Fred's and Pete's plots.

4 Sense of Reincarnation

There is no chronological relationship between the two narrative modules in the dichotomous structure of impossible puzzle films. The spectator links indeterminate storylines by virtue of the setting's (or characters') *déjà vu*. Elliot Panek argues that *Lost Highway's* narrative is ambiguous because its narrative technique is designed to keep the viewer engaged in the director's puzzle game. Therefore, we may conclude that inducing *déjà vu* in the audience is part of the narrative approach. In many complicated narrative films, *déjà vu* is a very prevalent technique. It is commonly mentioned by Thomas Elsaesser while discussing mind-game flicks. From Elsaesser's perspective, *déjà vu* is a distinct narrative style. *Blind Chance* (1987), for instance, established a precedent for many repetitions of the same filmic scenario, and subsequent films such as *Groundhog Day* (1993), *Run Lola Run* (1998), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004), *Déjà Vu* (2006), *Source Code* (2011), and *Edge of*

Tomorrow (2014) updated this narrative technique. This plot of rebirth and witnessing a prior occurrence becomes a particular narrative mode based on the fact that the primary narrative agent directs the audience to justify the story's conclusion through *déjà vu*.

However, repeating a particular scenario is only one of the filmic narrative techniques used to induce a sense of *déjà vu*, which has become a popular technique for rescuing catastrophe films following the 9/11 attacks.⁸⁶ Before this, films frequently employed the method of dream reflecting reality to produce *déjà vu*. This approach may be traced back to the silent cinema era, such as in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), in which the male protagonist had a dream in which he was falsely accused of theft but was later proven innocent. The method of dreams mirroring reality emerges along with the classic dichotomous narrative structure and complements it. Therefore, *Lost Highway*'s method is not novel, but it is more subtle than the intuitive *déjà vu* evoked by the classic Hollywood paradigm. *Lost Highway* abandons the determinism between the stories of the classic narrative, which prevents the viewer from explicitly understanding that the two narratives depict the link between reality and dreams (or imagination). Furthermore, the ability to reconstruct the original story's chronology is not a prerequisite for dichotomous narrative structure. Self-reference, desire projection, and intertextual objects can be used to construct unique causal linkages between two indeterminate plots.

Comparing impossible puzzle films with solvable puzzle films reveals that the logic of *Lost Highway*'s alternative dichotomous narrative structure is not Aristotelian. Regarding this, Martha Nochimson offers a really distinct viewpoint. She argues that Vedicism inspired Lynch's mysticism: "[Lynch's] protagonists move beyond the illusion of a certain physical here" (ch. Introduction The Perplexing Threshold Experience, section Reaping What We Sow, par.1) Due to this "illusion of a certain physical here," *Lost Highway* causes bewilderment among the audiences. For instance, Fred transcended his physical limits in prison, and his body entirely transformed into Pete. For Fred, he is "here," but Pete is "there," the antithesis of "here." The fact that Fred

⁸⁶ See Akser "Memory, Identity and Desire: A Psychoanalytic Reading of David Lynch's Mulholland Drive"; Elsaesser "On Mind-Game Films As Tipping Points: The Challenges of Cinema in the New Century," in *The Mind-Game Film*.

morphed into Pete, however, compelled us to view them as the same individual, which also indicates that “here” is “there.” “Here” transcends the tangible and eventually becomes transcendental. This non-Aristotelian reasoning can be clarified by the ancient Zen koan, “Looking at mountains as mountains.”⁸⁷ The logic of this koan can be expressed in three points:

Is the “mountain” that one sees actually a mountain? This logic is sound when viewed as the link between a symbol and its referent. If the mountain is understood as the subject’s emotion at a particular time, the mountain at this time cannot be the mountain at that time. Alternatively, if the subject of the action achieves the state known as moksha (means liberation; freedom in this life or the next),⁸⁸ then the mountain represents the self, which no longer differentiates between now and then or between here and there.

The relationship between Fred and Pete in *Lost Highway* can be characterised in the following three ways using the argument presented above:

In the cell scene, Fred mutates into Pete, but it is evident that they are still two distinct individuals.

In terms of love experience, Pete’s tale can be compared with Fred’s story, and they may be viewed as the relationship between reality and fantasy.

Pete ultimately transformed into Fred during his escape. We found at this time that Pete is Fred and that they are opposite sides of the same tendency: Pete is the manifestation of Fred’s concealed personality.

In conclusion, Fred and Pete have a complicated connection of “negation of negation.” A sense of reincarnation—one universe and character evolving into another, with a karmic connection between the two—is what will give the audience *déjà vu*. For instance, Renee appears to be dissatisfied with her sex life, but in another module, her lookalike Alice is an underground porn performer, and she also maintains an underground romance with Pete as Mr Eddy’s mistress.

⁸⁷ The English translation of this Zen koan reads: “Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it’s just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.” (Watts 126)

⁸⁸ See “Moksha,” in *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*.

In *Lost Highway*, David Lynch employed a dualistic narrative structure and generated a sense of reincarnation that befuddles the spectator. He repeated this approach with *Mulholland Drive*, creating a unique structural paradigm. In 2015's *Kaili Blues*, Chinese filmmaker Bi Gan utilised a dichotomy approach similar to that of David Lynch. There is no indication that Bi Gan was directly affected by Lynch. However, there is no question that he was able to produce the esthetic impression of “Huang Ru Ge Shi (恍如隔世),” which means “as if it were from the previous generation,” in his film, shows the dichotomy model universally applicable. The following section describes how this dichotomous narrative style functions in *Kaili Blues*.

5 Case Study: *Kaili Blues*

The film *Kaili Blues* by Bi Gan expresses poetic aesthetics. Since its inception, this film has been intensely controversial: some people emphasise its locality, such as Hong Kong scholar Mei Gao, who believes that the film embodies the dream of Chinese folk occultism,⁸⁹ and Huadong Fan, a master's graduate, who believes that the film uses the lyrical tradition of Chinese classical aesthetics to eliminate the conflict between traditional civilisation (China) and modernisation (Western). Others believe that it lacks a solid regional character, such as contributor Shelly Kraicer, who suggests that the film embodies personal dilemmas with a specific temporal dimension, and Italian film critic Andrea Termini, who believes that Bi Gan has broken away from the influence of Chinese academic directors and provided intertextual examples of his works with Andrei Tarkovsky and other international literary film directors. These disputes do not alter the study of *Kaili Blues*' narrative mode in this article because the film's narrative has a clear dichotomous structure, and the subject of this article is how the filmmaker causes the two plot modules to generate causality.

⁸⁹ Mei Gao talked about *Kaili Blues*' folklore. For instance, she thinks that two dream narratives must be related to Chinese folklore that holds that the dead inform living relatives of the world of the undead through dreams, including the desires or hatred of the deceased. “Tuo Meng (托梦),” which translates to “sending dreams,” is the name given to this phenomenon. See Gao 51.

Before analysing *Kaili Blues* in this article, it is essential to describe the film's general plot, which is as follows:

The first section—four narrative modules:

1. Chen Sheng was a gang member in the past. For his involvement in the act of gang revenge, he served nine years in prison. While he was incarcerated, his wife and mother died successively. After being released from prison, he followed his mother's dying wish by opening a clinic with an elderly doctor, and he did so while caring for his nephew Weiwei. Now Weiwei has vanished, so Chen Sheng begins to embark on a journey to find him.
2. Monk was formerly a gang leader and Chen Sheng's mob boss. His son was killed in a gang brawl. He moves to Zhenyuan Town to live in seclusion because he mourns his son's death. Monk supports himself while living in seclusion by operating a watch store, as his son was fond of timepieces during his lifetime.
3. Crazy Face is the half-brother of Chen Sheng. In the days following his brother Chen Sheng's imprisonment, he cared for his mother until her passing. However, the mother only left the inheritance to Chen Sheng, resulting in a future conflict between the two brothers. Crazy Face has a son named Weiwei, but he rarely shows much concern for him. He sent his son to Monk's town one day.
4. When she was young, the doctor decided to leave her boyfriend and hometown in order to move to a new city. Shortly after relocating to a new city, her boyfriend visited her and gave her a tape; they had not been in touch since then. She endured the suffering of losing her son in her lifetime. Now that she is old, her boyfriend informed her that he is in poor health and facing death. Therefore, she hopes that Chen Sheng, who is about to embark on a journey, can assist her in returning the tape to her ex-boyfriend in order to fulfil this long-held desire.

The second section:

On his way to Zhenyuan Town to find Weiwei, Chen Sheng spent a half-day in another village. However, this brief period of time proved to be an extraordinary experience. Here, Chen Sheng encountered a young man named Weiwei (same as his nephew). Immediately after that, he arrived in the village's

residential area, where he met (adult) Weiwei's girlfriend, Yangyang, and a barber who resembled his ex-wife. Yangyang wishes to move to the city, while Weiwei desires to retain her. Chen Sheng gave the barber the old doctor's cassette, said his goodbyes, and left the village. Chen Sheng discovered that his nephew Weiwei lived very happily in Zhenyuan Town upon his arrival. Therefore, Chen Sheng abandoned the idea of accompanying him back to the city and departed alone by train.

The preceding is the plot of *Kaili Blues*. It is evident that the plots of this film are fragmented, making it difficult to tell the entire story in chronological order. Also, there is insufficient motivation between the plots in this film, such as why Chen's mother wants him to work with the old doctor. Or, why did Crazy Face send Weiwei to the residence of Monk? These unexplained motivations render the determinism between plots tenuous. It also shows that this is not a conventionally complex narrative film; instead, it falls under the category of impossible puzzle films.

According to the preceding text, *Lost Highway* established the dichotomous narrative mode of the impossible puzzle film, in which narrative modules lack deterministic relationships and instead use substitute methods to create causal (or non-causal) relationships. So, how does *Kaili Blues* utilise these unique techniques to connect disparate plot elements?

In the first portion of the film, each character's strong relationship is fragile, and they rely on historical projections to create *déjà vu*. Monk's past embodies the identity of a father who is indifferent to his son, and this identity is projected onto Crazy Face, whereas Monk's present embodies the identity of a reformed and child-loving individual, and this identity is projected onto Chen Sheng. In addition, the film contains additional historical projections. Chen Sheng's mother left him alone in Zhenyuan Town when he was young, which projects the old doctor, who also left Zhenyuan Town when he was young, and Crazy Face, who frequently left Weiwei at home alone. Monk, who runs a watch shop in remembrance of his son, and Chen Sheng, who misses his late wife, are reflected by the behaviour of the elderly doctor when he thinks about his deceased son and her boyfriend, respectively.

Furthermore, Chen Sheng's performance prior to his imprisonment is identical to Crazy Face's current performance. Weiwei's lack of paternal

affection is reminiscent of Chen Sheng's childhood devoid of maternal affection. Although the first portion of the film is comprised of indeterminate plots, the historical projection setting allows the audience to associate with different characters.

Kaili Blues, like *Lost Highway*, employs intertextual objects. In contrast to the former, the latter does not utilise these images to connect the dichotomy plots in the film. Various plot points contain intertextual objects that have metaphorical meanings, including images of train cars and clock faces. The scene in which Weiwei draws a clock on his bedroom wall is symbolic of Monk's deceased son. This metaphor explains why Monk sent Weiwei to live with him. At the conclusion of the story, in the scene where Chen Sheng speaks with Monk, the window glass reflects an image of a running clock. This reflection is also symbolic, resembling what (adult) Weiwei did in the second half of the film to keep his girlfriend — depicting a backwards-running clock on each train car. As a result, when Chen Sheng boards the train and returns, audiences are able to observe the animation of the clock running backwards as the train moves, which, like the metaphor reflected in the window, signifies going back in time (fig. 1).

Similarly, images of trains appear frequently in various plot fragments. Chen Sheng's journey echoes a scene in which his ride on the miniature train at the amusement park. In the living room of Weiwei's home, an inverted video projection of the exterior of a moving train car appeared; this is the same metaphor as the previously mentioned painting of a clock running backwards on a train.



Figure 1

The *Kaili Blues*'s final scene combines the clock dial and the train carriage, two objects frequently appearing in plot fragments.

Notable also is the fact that the film designs an object that transcends the physical “here.” A disco ball appears in various film scenes across time and space (fig. 2): The ballroom where Chen Sheng (before he went to prison) met his wife for the first time; The room where Chen Sheng (before he went to prison) had his first sex with his wife; Weiwei’s home; and Chen Sheng’s new residence (after he was released from prison). Since it appeared in Weiwei’s home, it is illogical for it to also appear in Chen Sheng’s home.



Figure 2

A disco ball breaks through the boundaries of time and space in *Kaili Blues*.

In Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, a glass ball appears first in the hands of Weronika in Poland and then, mysteriously, in the handbag of (another) Véronique in France. This film is an early example of the use of this transcendental object. The transcendental glass sphere demonstrates that the two identically-appearing Veronicas are neither identical twins nor coincidentally similar. This object embodies the logic of Vedicism, reminding the audience that the coexistence of two Véroniques is the result of two distinct consequences resulting from a girl's change of thought—while the girl in Poland perished as a result of ignoring her condition, the French Véronique gave up an unhealthy career in order to survive. There are comparable settings in *Lost Highway*. There is a character in the film, a mysterious man with a pale face, who, in Fred's narration, demonstrates the ability to transcend physical location by simultaneously appearing at Andy's banquet and Fred's home. Later in the episode, this mysterious figure appears in Pete's scene and aids him (he mutated into Fred) in killing Dick Lauren. This character imparts a strange atmosphere to the film, and each time he appears, a crisis is imminent.

According to the preceding examples, it is clear that the scene in the film where the transcendent object disappears from one location and reappears in another has a divine significance; it contains profound but difficult-to-explain meanings, similar to religious scriptures. The transcendence of the disco ball in *Kaili Blues* reminds the audience that Weiwei and Chen Sheng may not exist at the same time and place. As previously mentioned, Weiwei is a metaphor for Chen Sheng's childhood; therefore, this disco ball suggests that the scene of Weiwei and Chen Sheng appearing together is fictitious. Weiwei is more of an fantasy created by Chen Sheng in an attempt to compensate for his childhood trauma, which is reflected in multiple scenes in the film:

Chen Sheng took care of Weiwei, whose father neglected him, and attempted to bring the child happiness.

Chen Sheng immediately embarked on a journey of discovery upon learning that Weiwei, like himself, had been abandoned in Zhenyuan Town.

Chen Sheng abandoned his plan to return Weiwei to the city after he learned from the Monk that Weiwei was happier than he had ever been.

6 Conclusion

In light of the preceding argument, the dichotomous narrative structure would change in impossible puzzle films. The narrative strategy of impossible puzzle films is to present the audience with a multitude of puzzles and prevent them from reconstructing the prototypical narrative. Consequently, this type of film weakens the determinism between plots and establishes causal relationships through various suggestive techniques. These techniques are distinct and can be utilised in a variety of ways, but their narrative effect is consistent; they are distributed in various plot modules to create a *déjà vu* effect in the audience. Rather than replaying a specific scene, intertextual hints are used to make the relationship between two parallel universes (narrative modules) feel like reincarnation. In the end, audiences become dependent on this kind of infinite game, continuously trying to discover a nonexistent “truth” and are unable to escape.

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