WONG KAR-WAI'S
Happy Together

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Introduction: Approaching the Film

In May 1997, just before Hong Kong passed from British colonial rule to the People's Republic of China — the event of June 30 which turned the colony into an S.A.R. (Special Administrative Region) — Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai released the film *Happy Together* (春光乍洩). Wong Kar-wai was born in Shanghai in 1958 but he was brought up in Hong Kong and began film-making — if a beginning can be located at this point without being arbitrary about his previous work on films — with *As Tears Go By* (1988). This was a fast-paced gangland movie set in Kowloon which is frequently compared in plot with Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973). It portrayed a gangster (Andy Lau) caught between the demands of his partner, Fly (Jacky Cheung), and his girlfriend (Maggie Cheung). As such, it can be seen as remaking a Hollywood formula, where the focus is on a male character proving his masculinity.[1]

Wong Kar-wai's second and more interesting film was *Days of Being Wild* (1990). Again, just as in *As Tears Go By*, the movie is

set in Hong Kong and takes place in 1960. Capturing a moment gone or going by seems not only crucial to the film's director, but also to Yuddy (Leslie Cheung), the hero of the film who says to Maggie Cheung when she has told him the time, 'Because of you I'll remember this minute. From now on we've been friends for one minute.' The minute gains value because of the person, though the person may not last in the other's affection. Yuddy seems fully in control as shown most clearly in his relationships with his girlfriends (Maggie Cheung and Carina Lau) and the way in which he is the idol of his friend Zeb (Jacky Cheung). He is, however, consumed with a desire to know his mother who left him. Yuddy has been brought up by Rebecca (Rebecca Pan) who is about to emigrate to the USA in the same way that his first girlfriend is from Macau and seems likely to return there. Yuddy's sense of not having a secure place is increased when he journeys to the Philippines to find his mother. His quest ends in failure when she refuses to see him — meaning that the most important woman in his life refuses to validate him — and he dies at the hands of Filipino gangsters after having been robbed by a Filipina prostitute. The Philippines in this film has something of the quality of a mythical Wild West. This was the first Wong Kar-wai film that Australian photographer Chris Doyle worked on, relying mostly on a hand-held camera and following Wong Kar-wai in his technique of filming open-ended improvisations. Doyle has been associated with the director's films, except for *Fallen Angels,* ever since. Since Wong Kar-wai can hardly be said to work with a prewritten script — he films and then constructs the film largely on the cutting-room floor — collaboration, especially with Doyle, is essential in the making of his films.

His third film, *Ashes of Time* (1994), was derived from the martial-arts genre and set in mainland China but, again, had something of a western flavour to it. It compared two swordsmen, Ouyang Fang (Malevolent West) and Huang Yaoshi (Sinister East)

and their parallel lives, although more time in the film is devoted to Ouyang Fang, the ascetic figure who wants to remember, as opposed to the womanizing Huang Yaoshi, a swordsman who wants to forget. Could these names be allegories for East and West, as these two bodies of geopolitical power impact on Hong Kong? I shall discuss this notion of allegory in the following chapter. The swordsmen were played by Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung Ka-fai. One of the film's heroes is the Blind Swordsman (Tony Leung Chiu-wai, the star of *Happy Together*) and another is the Shoeless Swordsman, Hong Qi (Jacky Cheung) — both figures of deprivation. Another kind of figure is the ambiguous character Murong Yang who is also Murong Yin (Brigitte Lin), first appearing in the movie in men's clothes. Maggie Cheung played the role of the woman that Ouyang Fang was in love with — but he is unable to tell her and she ends up marrying his brother — and Carina Lau played Peach Blossom, the wife of the Blind Swordsman who is separated from him by distance, while Charlie Yeung played a peasant girl possessing only a basket of eggs who is looking for a swordsman to help her avenge her brother's death. In this film all identities and both genders substitute inadequately for each other, with a sense that no single and complete identity can be maintained, certainly no identity that claims to be masculine and complete in itself.

Wong Kar-wai achieved international renown with *Chungking Express* (1994), drawn in plot and inspiration from the Japanese postmodernist writer Murakami Haruki. It starred Brigitte Lin, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Faye Wong. The two men play policemen whose troubles lie with their love lives, and who therefore give a feeling of melancholia to the film. The violence is associated with the woman — in this case, Brigitte Lin. The motif of the lovelorn policeman follows *Days of Being Wild* where Tide (Andy Lau) was in love with the first of Yuddy's girlfriends (Maggie Cheung) who does not reciprocate, until, possibly, at the end when it is too late. There is a sequence in which a phone rings in a

telephone booth on what used to be Tide's beat, recalling the words of a famous song: 'A telephone that rings, but who's to answer?' Earlier in the film, Tide tells Yuddy's girlfriend to call him, but when the phone rings he has already left behind the police and Hong Kong and gone to sea (he appears in the Philippines section of the film). *Chungking Express*'s less comic successor, *Fallen Angels* (1995), like *Ashes of Time*, was another film about a hired killer (Leon Lai) and his female agent (Michele Reis) who loves him. However, because she has rarely seen him, she has to work out his identity by going through the sacks of rubbish he leaves at his apartment. These lives are crisscrossed by that of the ex-convict, He Zhiwu (Takeshi Kaneshiro), who is falling in love for the first time with Charlie Yeung. Another girlfriend, Baby (Karen Mok), also complicates the killer's arrangements, contributing to his death while he carries out one last shooting. Both of these last two films were set in 1990s Hong Kong, and both tried, through quick cutting and slicing through different narratives, to depict the city's urban space at the point when it could be most mythicized as the story of a successful city whose colonial days, obviously irrelevant to it, were just disappearing. Both films have something of a celebratory feeling within them. *Fallen Angels*, with its characteristic way of contorting images to make faces grotesque and isolating them by shooting with an ultra-wide-angle lens, makes frequent references to *Chungking Express* — most notably with the fast-food restaurant Midnight Express, fast food with a concentration on waste, and rubbish bags.

Happy Together makes a fresh start by not looking back to Wong Kar-wai's previous films. It does not have a double plot. Unlike *Ashes of Time*, it does not have to be seen at least twice before an initial understanding of it can take place. It is pared to the bone with a cast of barely more than three people. Sections of film which were to include the pop star Shirley Kwan were excised from it, so that the film features no women at all. As his second

film set wholly outside Hong Kong, *Happy Together* won for Wong Kar-wai the Award for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival that year, the first time a Hong Kong director received the award. The film was nominated for the Palm d'Or as well. Since *Happy Together*, Wong has continued with *In the Mood for Love* (2000), set in Hong Kong of the 1960s (returning to something of *Days of Being Wild*), which I wish to compare with *Happy Together* at the end of this book.

After *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, *Happy Together* was perhaps a surprise. Its English title refers to a pop song of the 1960s sung by The Turtles. Its Chinese title (春光乍洩 — Chunguang Zhaxie) is quite different from the English title and awkward to translate. Perhaps 'something sexy's showing,' a cheeky phrase that could be used if a woman inadvertently showed a bit too much when sitting down. Or perhaps the phrase gives the sense of an epiphany or of spring light breaking out. The title has feminine resonances, and in that way it is teasing, given the film's absence of women. It is several things: a Hong Kong film, but one set in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a closing sequence in Taiwan; a version of a North American 'road movie'; a film about homosexuals and homosexuality made by — for what the statement is worth, and not wishing to be essentialist about categories — a heterosexual director; a film about Hong Kong on the eve of the transfer of power, complete with a televised sequence recording the death of Deng Xiao-ping; a film about exile, or nostalgia, or displacement; and, finally, a film about Hong Kong, or, possibly, about Argentina.

Before thinking about the film as any or all of these things, it will be useful to have an outline of the plot, however bare, to introduce the film to readers who do not know it or for those whose memory is hazy. A fuller account of the film's narrative appears in chapter 5. *Happy Together* depicts the experiences of two Hong Kong men: Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing) and Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai). These two characters' names, as is revealed

when the final credits roll, are those of two of the film-crew who worked on *Happy Together* — actually the focus-puller and the gaffer — whose passports appear at the beginning. They are a reminder both of the ordinariness of the names and characters, and of the arbitrariness with which they may be regarded — there is no belief in unique or essential identity subtending this film. The names also imply that the narrative of a Hong Kong team making a film in Buenos Aires replicates a diasporic sense in the film itself. The two men are on the road on the way to see the world-famous Iguazu Falls. Quarrelling, Ho abandons Lai who then finds work in a tango bar in Buenos Aires. Ho later tries to get in touch again with Lai who eventually takes him in again after Ho has been beaten up. Lai responds to Ho's acts of promiscuity by hiding his passport. Lai next begins working in a Chinese restaurant where he meets a Taiwanese man, Chang (Chang Chen), who is travelling the world. Ho ransacks the flat looking for his passport and Lai throws him out. Lai and Chang go to a bar where Lai weeps into Chang's portable stereo. Chang leaves Lai to go to Tierra del Fuego and while there plays the tape recording of Lai weeping that was made at the bar. Lai decides to return to Hong Kong, and works in an abattoir to get more money for the fare. Ho gets in touch again, perhaps to retrieve his passport, but Lai does not see him and leaves for the Iguazu Falls. When Ho arrives at Lai's flat, Lai is in Taipei. Lai goes to find Chang's family's noodle-stall, finding that Chang has left in order to do military service. Lai takes with him a photograph of Chang and boards a train in Taipei, so that the film ends with a sense of that city seen from the train.

The film ends with a sense too that something is about to happen, but refuses to reveal what will actually take place. As the film closes, Hong Kong's hand-over of power from the United Kingdom to China is less than six months away; the future of Lai in relation to his past in Hong Kong or to Chang or to Ho is not discussed; Ho's future is left in the balance.

In what follows, I shall be drawing on a number of texts, films, novels and forms of cultural critique, but it may be the case that none of the people working on the film had any of these examples in mind. For example, the novels by Manuel Puig, which I refer to, may or may not have been read by Wong Kar-wai. But just as the cult that Wong Kar-wai films seem to have encouraged does not concern or interest me, so nor do the assembled materials made available — or about to become so — from rejected parts of the films, which might encourage the view that it is possible to find a 'true' reading of any of the films. Therefore, I have no interest in tracing the director's intentions, declared before or after making a particular film. Biographies or interviews spill out bits of information which turn the film's contexts back into cliché.[2] This is because the 'intentions' are as much unconscious as conscious, and what enables the making of any text or film is a discourse which the author (or *auteur*) cannot be aware of, as it is, or because it is the very enabling condition forming the text's mode of existence. The author is the reader of the text, not the authority to pronounce upon it, and to discuss *Happy Together* requires placing it in contexts which have formed its discursive range — but also finding contexts that will enable us to talk about it.[3] The value of these contexts, both the obvious ones and the new ones which can be found to illuminate the film, is that they cease to be its 'background'. They are illuminated instead by the film which in this way becomes a context for them and enables a further reading of them. The text, therefore, may be said to create its precursors.[4]

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Epilogue: *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*

Wong Kar-wai's latest film to date is *In the Mood for Love* (2000), scripted by Wong with Chris Doyle and Mark Lee (photography), and Man Lim-chung and Alfred Yau (art directors) and William Chang (production designer). This film gives another context for *Happy Together* by centring on a couple, each married to other partners, who are older, middle-class and more financially secure than the characters in *Happy Together*. Mrs Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr Chow (Tony Leung) discover that each of their spouses is having an affair with the other's spouse. As in *Days of Being Wild*, the action is set in the past, beginning in Hong Kong in 1962 and then moving on to Singapore, where Chow goes in order to work in a newspaper office, and then finishing in French-ruled Cambodia in 1966. The Cambodia sequences use footage of Sihanouk greeting General De Gaulle at the airport outside Phomh Penh, and then showing Chow at the ruins of Angkor Wat, where the film ends. The linear plot and pace contrast with the speed and double narratives of *Chungking Express*, *Fallen Angels* and *Happy Together*.

The film's release coincided with the Merchant/Ivory film by Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1903), which has analogues in plot with *In the Mood for Love*. In *The Golden Bowl*, Adam Verver's wife, Charlotte Stant, is having an affair with a man named Amerigo who is in turn married to a woman named Maggie. Adam Verver and Maggie, who happen to be father and daughter from a previous marriage are thrown into a situation of emotional loss by their spouses' infidelity. In James's film, the question of what to do and how to behave, when there is the awareness of the possibility of behaviour becoming scandalous, is paramount. Danger springs from betrayals by people with whom trust cannot be broken. Such betrayal threatens the very sense of identity that the betrayed person has painfully built up for themselves in relation to their betrayer. It is the same situation in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*, hence Lai's unhappiness which Chang detects. In this film, behaviour covers what runs unseen, below the public sphere. *In the Mood for Love*, like James's novel, focuses on the repressions that must take place for there to be a public sphere at all. So, in *Happy Together* Lai represses himself in order to work and Ho shows little repression at all until he is seen working, clearing up the flat and weeping when Lai has gone.

In the Mood for Love begins with the Chans and the Chows moving into rented accommodation next door to each other. The landlady (Rebecca Pan) eventually emigrates to the USA, fearful at what might be about to happen in Hong Kong: it is the year of the Cultural Revolution when anti-British riots occurred in Hong Kong. The theme of having no home is recognisable. Mr Chan is never seen though his voice is heard talking through a door offscreen, and Mrs Chow is only seen for a moment. Three-quarters of the way through the 1962 part of the film, it is apparent that they are in Japan together, Japan — a contrast to Argentina — being Hong Kong's 'other' in this film, with its fashions and luxury goods. The emphasis is on the couple left behind. At Mrs Chow's office, her

boss (Lui Chun) is having an affair, and as part of her secretarial work, she must keep his mistress secret from his wife. Mr Chow works as a writer in an office where he listens to the things his colleague (Siu Ping-lam) gets up to in the local brothel. His hobby is writing martial arts serials — perhaps the script for *Ashes of Time* — almost the only way in which masculinity is inflected in the film.

In *In the Mood for Love* attention is drawn to social interrelationships through birthdays, indicators of continuity and of being happy together as well as signs of having an enduring relationship in an enduring place. In this film, everyone's birthday is marked by deception, the occasion of rich social comedy. The interchange of presents and doubling of presents (a tie, a handbag), marks the duplicity which adultery both requires and is produced by. The final irony is when Mr Chan wishes his wife a happy birthday on the radio, since he is away in Japan. The song he chooses to be played for her, a form of 'Happy Birthday', is Zhou Xuan's 'Huayang Nianhua', 'Full Bloom' — the Chinese title of the film, expressive of youth and the time for love. Eventually Mrs Chan and Mr Chow realise that their partners are together. They must now either become stylists of their own lives, creating their own narrative, or become like their partners. They play a game showing that 'we won't be like them'. They want to find out how the affair started and answer the question: Who made the first move?

In this activity, Mrs Chan and Mr Chow are slipping into the identity of the other partner; a husband imagining how his wife behaves and a wife her husband, in a chiastic mode. This is similar to the situation in *Happy Together* where Lai and Ho's identities are not stable, as in a moment referred to previously, when Ho is at the Bar Sur, Lai's workplace, and then he returns to the apartment after Lai has left and cleans up the apartment as if he were Lai. Identity is not singular but is, uncannily, shared. The risk the characters take is to be themselves and at the same time to

find out what their partners think and say. The truly adulterous partners may be glimpsed in this other partnership; that they are both their identity and the identity of the others. Staging an affair, Mrs Chan and Mr Chow risk more than the unsuspected, adulterous pair, for people assume they *are* having an affair even though — as when they have to stay together one night because of a mahjong party taking place just outside their apartments where everyone would see that they had been together if they emerged from the room — they are doing nothing of the kind.

In this game they play roles, such as when Mrs Chan appears to confront her husband — at first, the audience would be convinced that it is indeed her husband, since he sits just out of camera and she faces him, but it becomes apparent that it is Chow — and asks him the question 'Do you have a mistress?' When Chow, speaking as her husband, admits it, she cannot hit him and it is apparent that this is because she is by now in love with Chow. She cannot believe in her own game. They repeat it but she weeps and says, 'I didn't expect it to hurt so much.' The self-fashioning they have tried, creating the self in a mode discussed by Foucault in *The Care of the Self*, has failed. Foucault describes an attempt to construct an ethics for the self, creating an 'aesthetics of existence' comparable to 'self-fashioning'.[1] They simulate adultery; ringing each other at work; he moves to a hotel and she visits him there, leaving things in the hotel — such as cigarette ends — which imply that they have been together. The device of entering and altering the apartment of someone you love appears in *As Tears Go By* and *Chungking Express*, where Faye Wong, in love with Cop 663, breaks into his apartment to clean it and decorate it; and in *Fallen Angels* with the agent of the killer. Ho plays a variant on it in cleaning up for Lai near the end of *Happy Together*. The game no longer works, however, *Happy Together* is not *Chungking Express*.

Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung attempt to rise above the narrative that has been given to them in *In the Mood for Love*.

Everything ends when he says, 'I thought we wouldn't be like them. But I was wrong. You won't leave your husband so I must go away.' She replies, 'I didn't think you'd fall in love with me.' To which he answers, 'I was only anxious to see how it started.' He adds, 'I thought I was in control,' but, 'feelings can creep up. Just like that.' Their belief in their identity betrays them. Tracing the narrative of their spouses to its origins pulls them into that narrative, which seduces them and makes them unable to act freely. *Happy Together* has no interest in origins — how Lai and Ho started becoming happy together — since Wong Kar-wai is not interested in the idea of people in Hong Kong being in a position to initiate something for themselves. This is the non-Hollywood aspect of his thought. Being caught in a narrative not of the subject's own making — which pulls Yuddy back into the past and destroys him — has political implications, for it raises the question: What chances of autonomous action are open to people in Hong Kong, so many of whom leave to 'start over'? As Ho and Lai in *Happy Together*, whose reaction to the way that events bear upon them is to think — perhaps unrealistically and hollowly — how they might 'start over', the characters of *In the Mood for Love* find they cannot go forward with their own narrative. Mrs Chan's unmarried name was Su Lizhen, the name of the woman Maggie Cheung played in *Days of Being Wild*. It is a film apparently intended to have a sequel: it finishes with the appearance of a gambler (Tony Leung), not seen before, in a sequence shot in a low-ceilinged room from a very cramped angle. Perhaps it is an image of the city's otherness because it contains so much more than can go into one narrative. Is Su Lizhen Mrs Chan two years later? Is Wong Kar-wai doubling the space of his own past by making this film as if it was a sequel to another fictional account of pre-modern Hong Kong? Perhaps the film is playing with origins where origins are only fictions.

Mr Chow transfers to Singapore. Four years later, they miss seeing each other at the old apartment in Hong Kong. She has a

little boy; he is solitary. The action moves to Cambodia, where Mr Chow has been sent to cover de Gaulle's visit. Alone, he whispers his love-secret into the walls of Angkor Wat — following a recipe given to him in Singapore that if you must tell a secret, you should go up a mountain, find a tree, whisper into a hole in the tree, cover the hole with mud and leave the secret there. The act compares with Chang's desire in *Happy Together* to help Lai's unhappiness by dumping his sorrow at the end of the world. The romantic gesture is carried out with a sense of the inadequacy of the solution for the problem.

A similarity among the films is the displacement of location in both. Hong Kong, the setting for much of *In the Mood for Love*, is no more visible in that film than it was in *Happy Together*, and is different from the contemporary Hong Kong of *Chungking Express*. The apartments have the signs of Shanghainese culture and ways of living but no exterior shots define Hong Kong, though characters are seen standing against exterior walls. Offices are anonymous and the couple dine together outside in a Western-food restaurant — again, oddly displacing, especially with Spanish-sounding music played and sung by Nat King Cole, itself a faint reminder of Buenos Aires. In the same way *Days of Being Wild* uses Latino rhythms. The rest of the music, written by Michael Galasso, is equally Western in style, and the contrast with the Chinese 'happy birthday' song is strong. Anonymity increases with the hotel scenes. The atmosphere is claustrophobic and as exterior shots are often marked by rain, which stands in for weeping, and by British-looking taxis, the sense of a non-definable place is increased. Singapore is just as anonymously presented, though the film makes the place look poorer than Hong Kong and with less sense of a public infrastructure (as with the appearance of Manila in *Days of Being Wild*). The appearance of Cambodia at the end is dual. The appearance of de Gaulle at Phnom Penh echoes the reference to Deng near the end of *Happy Together*. Both world figures imply

the relationship between the political and the emotional lives of people who are situated as they are because of the contingencies of power. In 1966, Hong Kong was doubly positioned in relation to Britain and the PRC, and Cambodia too, between France as the colonial power and the chain of events which were just about to follow with the Americans and the Khmer Rouge. To finish in the ruins of another empire, the Khmer, architects of Angkor Wat, is ironic. The history of South East Asia that is opened up by the date 1966 takes in significant and obvious shifts of power in Singapore, Cambodia, Hong Kong and mainland China which the characters have to live through (and casual reference is also made, in the 1966 sequences, to the Philippines). While there is no comparison between *Happy Together*'s Taiwan and Cambodia, except that both imply forms of exile and indifference to the individual (the same actor) wandering there, both imply displacement, a stalling of narrative. But Angkor Wat has no comparable significance to the Iguazu Falls which were desired and referred to by Lai and Ho and also by Chang, while nothing in *In the Mood for Love* implies desire for Angkor Wat. Instead, it is a reminder of a place with 'history', expressed in niches and corridors in the intricacies of the temple walls and, inside the doors, unprobed dark spaces which serve as places for memory. It is the antithesis to Hong Kong which presents, in comparison, a sense of flatness and apparent lack of history — but it seems that the film tries to give to the character of Hong Kong something of the architectural intricacy of Angkor Wat. Characters move into and emerge from the dark; they walk down dark corridors like the labyrinthine ones of *Happy Together*; often the image on the screen is of brilliant colour which appears as if in an epiphany out of the shadows which frame it. The bright colours of the varied cheongsams that Mrs Chan wears indicate the passage of time. The colours of the hotel's wallpaper with its purples, greens, dark reds, yellows and saffron all deepen Hong Kong's flatness. Repeated images of clocks and the use of telephones arouse

thoughts of other places — more subtly than the image of a mobile phone might — which the camera brings into view as people are seen talking together on the phone, the camera swinging between them.

This attention to Hong Kong implies a further comparison with Henry James (who was also interested in how people become fascinated and haunted by the identity of another, trying to analyse it from rooms and furnishings and, finally, taking it over). James, as a postcolonial writer, left the United States with the sense that the place had no past that could be used to construct the present. He believed that the lack of history would disable America's attempt to produce any literature. But he knew that this was not enough as a response and in *The Jolly Corner* (1908) he imagines a character returning to New York after 20 years away and wondering if he can find the ghost of his alternative self, the self that would have been had he stayed in America.[2] Wong Kar-wai's films set in the 1960s are motivated by the desire to find a ghost; to locate in the past another possibility, denied by the facts. In a different way, *Happy Together* doubles the space of Hong Kong by setting the action in Buenos Aires, an unknowable space, where a history can be written — as Borges wrote the history of the tango, for instance, which works as a counter-history to U.S. imperial history. Wong Kar-wai's films about Hong Kong seem to me like James's attempts to write about America at a time when no one took the idea of American literature seriously, and as James treated Europe as a way to discuss America, so Wong Kar-wai uses Buenos Aires, a place with much to say to Hong Kong.

In the Mood for Love brings out another fascination in Wong Kar-wai, the ability of curtains, veils and fabrics to give depth and forms of concealment, which appeared in the curtain moving before the face of the swordsman Ouyang Feng in *Ashes of Time* and was also apparent in the curtains blowing in the apartment at Buenos Aires in *Happy Together*, which were uncannily associated with

the absence of Ho. Cigarette smoke, associated with Mr Chow, at several points acts like a veil. At one point a window hung with curtains is seen, behind these, net curtains, and behind these, a Venetian blind. Derrida writing on Nietzsche in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* links a fascination with the veil with a feminine concealment or withdrawal which for Derrida and for Nietzsche is the antithesis of the will to truth — that which makes truth flat, singular and unitary in character.[3] The veil as text(ile) doubles space and makes truth plural, unknowable save in momentary flashes which also conceal it. Such veils appearing here are places for memory to haunt, and they make 1960s Hong Kong a strangely evocative place. Wong Kar-wai has returned to a past layered with the present, enriching present-day Hong Kong with the sense that it might have had such a past. Characters move and define themselves against an aesthetic sensuousness, which implies that their ethics of existence is a form of aesthetics; that aesthetics is enriching. In *Happy Together*, the kitsch lamp of the Iguazu Falls, which Lai quite unaffectedly says he likes, and which was given to him by Ho, is similar in effect. It is a form of art defined by colour whose interest grows and literally illuminates the apartment, and does much to keep Lai and Ho together. At the end, Ho restores it and it plays its part in giving depth to his memories of Lai. And because of it, when Lai reaches the Falls he says, 'I thought of Po-wing.'

The places of memory are not at any stage in Wong Kar-wai's films the public *lieux de memoires* discussed by Pierre Nora[4] — they are not to do with a history which could be memorialized or celebrated in monuments. Angkor Wat as a monument and tourist site exists in the film as a place which has *no* association with any character or event in the film. The film constructs a secret and alternative history — giving expression to the secret which is whispered into the walls of Angkor Wat — by suggesting that there are ghosts which double the space of Hong Kong; people whose lives mean that if they were 30 in 1962, they would be now at the

time of the film's making, part of another Hong Kong to which all their adult lives had contributed. At the end, words from a Chinese text appear on the screen: 'He remembers those vanished years as though looking though a dirty window-pane. The past is something he could see but not touch and everything he sees is blurred and indistinct.' Mr Chow at the end walks away from Angkor Wat, a place of a past which has been home to a thousand incidents, public and private. His black suit indicates perhaps mournfulness or melancholia, which fits with *Happy Together*, but his past is now incorporated into the history that Angkor Wat, itself about to go through scenes of violence, preserves. The confessional act, if it is that, has had its effect. Perhaps it is hardly confessional, but rather an assertion of his own history.

The use of the Chinese text at first and last replaces a typical Wong Kar-wai device — the voice-over. The voice-over in earlier films — most strikingly in *Ashes of Time*, where it is positively garrulous — divides the narrative from the image, in that fracturing noticed earlier in discussing allegory. Its absence here is signalled by the device of the secret being told silently, unlike Lai's audible sobs into the tape recorder. The suspension of a voice-over is a move away from narrative and the past and throws emphasis onto the present. In this way, the film keeps aloof from any sentimentality, and this is different from *Happy Together*. The film is not violent, even if Angkor Wat implies a violent history. To recall the repeated aggression in the relation of Lai and Ho, including the violence of the language used in argument, makes the point that the director's interests have moved on. Violence, as Lacan implies in his essay on 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (*Ecrits*), may respond to a failure in the other to sustain the narcissism the subject requires, or a failure in the subject to be able to maintain narcissism, which requires lashing out at the other. This film implies people who keep a certain narcissism, which the film also maintains in its colours and shapes, and in the curves and enclosed spaces in

which characters are ringed and picked out by the camera. The preservation of narcissism shows its independence, its aloofness from present or past Hong Kong; it is self-fashioning, akin to certain potentialities in Chang's character in *Happy Together*. He too, keeps an aloof quality which means that he is never associated with violence, and the causes of this cannot necessarily be reduced to what Lai says: that Chang has a home. But the title *Happy Together* implies a failure of narcissism and emphasises the melancholia which underlies the later film.

The gay relationship is no allegory of the later film's heterosexual one; no generalisations are possible about a pair in love, except that one pair in love may contain the identities of another pair in love. *Happy Together* is enriched by *In the Mood for Love*, but the latter film simplifies nothing in it, letting it stand as, in my belief, Wong Kar-wai's most thought-provoking film, demanding an enlargement of the critic's modes of thinking through which to consider it.

Notes

Chapter 1 Introduction: Approaching the Film

1 On this film see Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), pp. 34–6. See pp. 48–62 for discussion of later films, not including *Happy Together*.

2 Christopher Doyle has written about making the film in *Don't Try for Me Argentina* (Hong Kong: City Entertainment, 1997).

3 A useful discussion of Wong Kar Wai appears in David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 270–89. See also Tony Rayns, 'Poet of Time', *Sight and Sound* (September 1995): 12–4; Larry Gross, 'Nonchalant Grace', *Sight and Sound* (September 1996): 6–10; Tony Rayns, 'Charisma Express', *Sight and Sound* (January 2000): 34–6; Tony Rayns, 'In the Mood for Edinburgh', *Sight and Sound* (August 2000): 14–7.

4 This is a reference to the essay by J. L. Borges, 'Kafka and his Precursors', *Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), pp. 363–5.

Chapter 2 *Happy Together* and Allegory

1 Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88; quotations taken from pp. 67 and 69.

2 Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 95–122.

3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 208.

4 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1974), pp. 68–9. The citation here omits the italics into which the whole passage is put.

5 Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 268–79.

6 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), p. 175.

7 Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Second Edition: London: Routledge, 1983), p. 207.

8 Paul de Man, 'The Concept of Irony', in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 179. The translator adds in a footnote something from de Man's lecture-notes: 'irony is (permanent) parabasis of allegory — intelligibility of (representational) narrative disrupted at all times.'

9 Foucault, Introduction to *Folie et Déraison: L'Histoire de la Folie à l'Age Classique* (Paris: Libraire Plon, 1961), p. v. Not in the English translation.

10 It is relevant to recall his role as the possibly homosexual Peking opera singer in Chen Kaige's film of 1993, *Farewell My Concubine*; where his role is someone who cannot distinguish between art and life, but plays himself all the time. That may be the subject of a trope in *Happy Together*, where, in parodic fashion, he may be acting himself. Audrey Yue suggests that Leslie Cheung acts in a self-parodic mode, and thus '"queers" what is essentially a straight film,' Audrey Yue, in '"What's so Queer About *Happy Together*?" a.k.a. Queer(N)Asian: Interface,

Community, Belonging', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1.2 (2000): 251–264, p. 254.

Chapter 3 Contexts: Why Buenos Aires?

1 For a reading of the city, see Jason Wilson, *Buenos Aires: A Cultural and Literary Companion* (Oxford: Signal Books, 1999): a guidebook aware of *Happy Together*.
2 V. S. Naipaul, *The Return of Eva Perón* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 93–164.
3 I take this point from Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), p. 22–3.
4 Bordwell, p. 272. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990) Prologue, no page numbers given. The Spanish phrase is 'lo real maravilloso' — the marvellous in the real.
5 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 432.
6 Borges, p. 426.
7 Its Chinese title is the same as the Chinese title for *Happy Together*.
8 *City on Fire* suggests *Heartbreak Tango* (1969) as a model, but though I think it is, it is hardly for the reasons given: 'the story of a son discovering his father's gay lover' (p. 269) — this is not the plot of *Heartbreak Tango*.
9 Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, trans. Thomas Kolchie (London: Arena, 1984). For guidance on Puig's novels, see Lucille Kerr, *Suspended Fictions: Reading Novels by Manuel Puig* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
10 Manuel Puig, *The Buenos Aires Affair*, trans. Suzanne Jill Levine (London: Faber, 1989), pp. 83–7.
11 Manuel Puig, *Heartbreak Tango: A Serial*, trans. Suzanne Jill Levine (London: Arena, 1987). In Spanish the title was *Boquitas pintadas* — 'painted little lips' — a quotation from a tango written by Alfredo Le Pera and sung by Carlos Gardel.

12 Cortazar's short story, 'Return Trip Tango' might also have resonances as a title for *Happy Together*. It comes from a volume celebrating the mythicizing of another film actress, this time Glenda Jackson, not Rita Hayworth: *We Love Glenda So Much and Other Stories*, trans. Gregory Rabasa (New York: Knopf, 1983).
13 For this point see Pamela Bacarisse, *Impossible Choices: The Implications of the Cultural References in the Novels of Manuel Puig* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1993), p. 19.
14 Naipaul, pp. 148–51.

Chapter 4 Contexts: The Road Movie

1 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933–1969*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Picador Books, 1971), p. 120. The story relates to another, 'Man on Pink Corner', in *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935) which is about one of the poorest areas of Buenos Aires (Palermo) and another evocation of the tango and masculinity. Both stories can be found in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998).
2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Collumbia University Press, 1985).
3 Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 137–60.
4 Quoted by Steven Cohan from Sharon Willis in *The Road Movie Book*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 12.
5 The point is made by Bennet Schaber in *The Road Movie Book*, p. 42.

Chapter 5 Reading the Film

1 Manuel Puig, *Betrayed By Rita Hayworth*, trans. Suzanne Jill Levine (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 173.
2 Rey Chow, 'Nostalgia of the New Wave: Structure in Wong Kar-wai's

Happy Together', *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies* 42 (September 1999): 31–49.

3 See the study by Gerald Martin, *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1989).

4 On the irrationality of so many of Wong Kar-wai's characters, see Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, 'Trapped in the Present: Time in the Films of Wong Kar-wai', *Film Criticism* (25 Winter 2000–2001): 2–20.

5 Suzanne Jill Levine, *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000), p. 405; see also pp. 210–7.

6 'A History of the Tango', in Borges, p. 396, earlier, p. 395.

7 For Piazzolla, see Maria Susana Azzi and Simon Collier, *Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). They discuss other members of the band: such as the Uruguayan pianist Pablo Zinger, the Cuban saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, the Argentine guitarist Rodolpho Alchourron. Others playing were Fernando Suarez Paz and Andy Gonzalez.

8 For the significance of yellow, see my *Lost in the American City: Dickens, James, Kafka* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 14–6.

9 Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Illuminations* in *Collected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 254–5. My translation.

10 See Donald S. Castro, *The Argentine Tango as Social History, 1880–1955* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1990), p. 175.

11 For discussion of this poem, see Ross Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy: Modes of Opposition in Early French Modernism* trans. Mary Seidman Trouville (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): and see this book also for discussions of melancholia (see chapter 7 notes).

12 On these points, see Eduardo P. Archetti, *Masculinities: Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); see p. 46 for the date, and pp. 182–9 for Maradona.

13 Rimbaud, pp. 255–6.

14 I refer to Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *The Penguin Freud vol. 11* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 283–7.

15 See Wilson, pp. 205–7.

16 Quoted from Luis Roldan, 'Blame that Tango' in Puig, *Heartbreak Tango*, p. 45. Savigliano (p. 57) translates it as 'Maldito Tango', as follows: 'Blame it on that cursed tango/that my lover taught me to dance/ and that later mired me in the mud.' She cites it as composed by Osman Pérez Freyre in 1918.
17 Bordwell, p. 272.

Chapter 6 *Happy Together* and Homosexuality

1 For discussion of this film, see *City on Fire*, p. 85 and *Planet Hong Kong*, pp. 153–4.
2 For this film and its sequel, *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man?* (1996) see *City on Fire*, pp. 229–37.
3 For masculinity: see Norman Bryson, 'Gericault and Masculinity' in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds.) *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), pp. 228–59.
4 Foucault barely discusses lesbianism, and leaves it open how his account could be applied there. My silence on it here relates to this and to the content of the film.
5 On this film, see Phillip Brian Harper, '"The Subversive Edge": *Paris is Burning*, Social Critique and the Limits of Subjective Agency', *Diacritics* 24 (1994): 90–103.
6 Quoted, *City on Fire*, p. 275
7 Lacan's discussion of the symbolic order, derived from his reading of Levi-Strauss, appears 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 61–6.
8 Bisexuality seems to be at the heart of psychoanalysis: see Freud, 'the motive force of repression in each individual is a struggle between the two sexual characters. The dominant sex of the person, that which is the more strongly developed, has repressed the mental representation of the subordinated sex into the unconscious' — 'A Child is Being Beaten', *On Psychopathology: The Penguin Freud* 10 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 188. This suggests an

undifferentiated sexual nature prior to entry into language (identifiable, for Freud, with the Oedipal phase), but in Lacan things are different. Male and female positions are both existent within a symbolic order which defines male and female alike in relation to the phallus, so that desire does not coincide with gender positions as defined there. 'The vacillation psychoanalytic experience reveals in the subject regarding his masculine or feminine being is not so much related to his biological bisexuality as to the fact that there is nothing in his dialectic that represents the bipolarity of sex' — as there perhaps cannot be when both sexes are so defined. 'Position of the Unconscious' in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Bruce Fink, Richard Feldsten and Maire Jaanus (Albany: SUNY, 1995), p. 276. There Lacan says 'there is no access to the opposite sex as Other' in the symbolic order, and Fink adds (p. 280) that this could also be translated as 'the Other of the opposite sex'.

9 Jacques Lacan, 'On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis', *Ecrits*, p. 200.

10 Jacques Derrida, 'Le Facteur de la Vérité', in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 479–80. It is Derrida's critique of Lacan's reading of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'. See the discussion by Barbara Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', in Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 225–43.

11 Lacan's Seminar XX ('God and the *Jouissance* of the Woman: A Love Letter' in *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose [London: Macmillan, 1982], pp. 137–61) and the seminar of 21 January 1975 (seminar XXII) discusses most the question of the 'otherness' of the feminine; that this does not enter into phallocentric discourse.

12 Freud, 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love', *The Penguin Freud: vol 7: On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 258.

13 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 59.

14 Chow, p. 41.

Chapter 7 *Happy Together*, Hong Kong and Melancholy

1 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), pp. 203–23.
2 Quoted, Pamela Bacarisse, *The Necessary Dream: A Study of the Novels of Manuel Puig* (Yotowa, NJ.: Barnes and Noble, 1988), p. 37. Bacarisse also quotes Sábato that the tango is 'often accompanied by desperation, rancour, threats and sarcasm' (p. 240) — features of resentment.
3 Quoted in Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder; Westview Press, 1995), p. 45.
4 The expression of Harley Dean Oberhelman, *Ernesto Sábato* (Boston: Twayne, 1970), p. 45.
5 Chow, p. 45.
6 Chow, p. 44.
7 Bordwell, pp. 280–1.
8 Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 203.
9 Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Penguin Freud vol. 11* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 254.
10 Fredric Jameson discusses nostalgia in this way in *Postmodernisn, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 19.
11 Ackbar Abbas, 'The Erotics of Disappointment,' in *Wong Kar Wai* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1998), 39–81; pp. 45, 46.
12 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 263.
13 Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', trans. John Shepherd, *October 31* (1984): 17–31 (p. 30).
14 Stuart C. Aitken and Christopher Lee Lukinbeal in *The Road Movie Book*, p. 369.

Chapter 8 Epilogue: *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*

1 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality vol. 2*, trans. Robert Hulery (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 11.
2 See my *Henry James: Critical Issues* (London: Macmillan, 2000) for these issues.
3 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
4 Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman and trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3 vols.