

TIME, SPACE AND MEMORY: CHUNGKING EXPRESS (1994)



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1. Introducing the film
2. Mise-en-scène: everyday settings and the world of fantasy
3. Mise-en-scène: objects, characters, commodities
4. Time, space, history

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KEY THEMES

- The expression of the everyday through naturalistic mise-en-scène
- The role of fantasy and imagination in transforming mise-en-scène
- Culture, commodification and globalisation
- Time, memory/history and political uncertainty

1. INTRODUCING THE FILM

- Production background
- Reception

Distinctive features

- Split narrative
- Genre blending – romantic comedy + *film noir*
- Visual techniques – camera, processing, editing
- Use of popular music
- Intertextuality – the referencing of other 'texts' (written and audiovisual)









1. INTRODUCING THE FILM

Intertextual references:

- Music video/ pop music
- Hollywood genres
- European cinema of the 50s/60s
- Argentinian and Japanese literature (Marquez, Puig, Murakami)
- Commodity culture (from Garfield and Coca Cola to Dole pineapple and Boeing planes)

2. MISE EN SCÈNE: EVERYDAY LIFE + FANTASY

Thinking about

- Setting
- Lighting + colour
- Props
- Costumes + makeup
- Performance + blocking

Corrigan and White

- Theatrical mise-en-scene – “creates fantastical environments that display and even exult in their artificial and constructed nature.”
- Naturalistic mise-en-scene - “appears realistic and recognizable to viewers.”



*Midnight
Express*

Midnight Express

Enjoy
Coca-Cola
Coke.



Midnight Express



2. MISE EN SCÈNE: EVERYDAY LIFE + FANTASY

Settings

- Chungking Mansions
- Midnight Express
- Cop 663's apartment
- Bars
- Convenience stores, etc

Lighting and colour

- Reliance on natural/available light
- Loosely organized colour scheme – splashes of colour





3. MISE EN SCÈNE: OBJECTS, CHARACTERS, COMMODITIES


Corrigan and White:

- Instrumental props – “objects displayed and used according to their common function”
- Metaphorical props - “those same objects reinvented or employed for an unexpected, even magical, purpose”

Metaphorical props

- The cans of food – connected to love and death
- Items in Cop 663's apartment – soap, washcloth, shirt, cuddly toys
- Consumer goods
- Travel + food-related props





that if May hasn't come back
by the time I've bought 30 cans,



3. MISE EN SCÈNE: OBJECTS, CHARACTERS, COMMODITIES

Costume and performance:

- The mysterious woman
 - A *film noir* figure – the glasses + coat
 - But identity remains concealed
- Cop 223
 - The trappings of a *noir* protagonist, but boyish + distracted
- Faye
 - Recalling Jean Seberg (*Breathless*)
 - Exaggerated playfulness/ performance

Blocking

- Distance vs proximity/ loneliness vs sociality















4. TIME, SPACE, HISTORY

Time and memory

- “Few other directors have imbued their movies with such a metaphysical sense of time at work: dilating, stretching, lurching, dragging, speeding by” (Rayns 1995)

Spaces of transience and encounter:

- Cop 223: "We rub shoulders with each other every day. . . . We may not know each other. . . But we may become good friends someday."
- Focus on travel + global culture









Where do you want to go?

4. TIME, SPACE, HISTORY

Spaces of transience and encounter:

- Arjun Appadurai: globalisation as a disjunctive force, which manifests itself at different rates and intensities across cultural, social and economic contexts
- it is not that all places and cultures are becoming the same, under the influence of a single dominant culture (homogenisation); instead, foreign ideas and practices become adapted or indigenized, turned into something different (heterogenization).





4. TIME, SPACE, HISTORY

Politics + history:

- many scholars have viewed the film in terms of the 1997 handover (see Marchetti, Tsui)
- Are the multiple intertextual references a kind of defence mechanism that keep HK global?
- But Bordwell argues that “taking it as an exercise in comparative romance accounts better for its formal finesse—its doubled motifs, its web of parallels, and its echoic time structures.”
- BUT WKW himself fosters political readings (see 2046 – the title referring to the 50th year after the handover)

FINAL THOUGHTS

The transformative power of imagination allows us to think about:

- Time, memory and change
- The city of Hong Kong as a space of encounter
- Cultural expressions of the global in the late 20th century
- Hong Kong's uncertain position (then and now) in relation to China

