

Kelly Donahey

Taiwanese New Cinema

Catherine Liu

June 15, 2018

Material Communities and Mise-en-scène:

The Terrorizers and Dust in the Wind

Now considered masterworks of Taiwanese New Cinema, at the time of their release in 1986, both Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* and Hou Hsiou-hsien's *Dust in the Wind* occupied a precarious position in global film history. Commercially unpopular in Taiwan's local cinema houses and largely shunned by the international festival circuit, Hou's *Dust in the Wind* would gain prominence in retrospect. And while Yang's *The Terrorizers* fared better, garnering accolades in Taipei and at festivals abroad, neither director would be accepted into competition at one of the "big three" festivals until 1989.¹

While they screened at "upper-middle rank" festivals in Europe and North America and outside of competition at the "big three," the ambivalent visibility of Taiwanese directors was a consequence not of artistic merit but rather the geopolitical status of the Republic of China (ROC), otherwise known as Taiwan.² Once recognized as the legitimate seat of government for China, in 1971 the Kuomintang of China (KMT) was expelled from the United Nations in favor of the communist People's Republic of China (PRC) in control of the mainland government. Considered the productions of a territory of China rather than an independent nation, Taiwanese films were only received into competition under "sub-national epithets such as 'Chinese

¹ James N. Udden, "Dust in the Wind: A Definitive Hou/New Cinema Work," in *Hou Hsiao-hsein*. ed. Richard L. Suchneski (Columbia University Press, 2014).

² Chia-chi Wu, "Festivals, criticism and the international reputation of Taiwan New Cinema," in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, popularity and state of the arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Taipei,' 'Taiwan, China,' or 'Taiwan/China,'" or rejected outright as a consequence of pressure from the PRC. However, by 1987 international recognition of Taiwanese New Cinema would begin to change.³ *Dust in the Wind* and *The Terrorizers* would mark the shift.

Having previously screened at the Festival of Three Continents at Nantes, France under the national designation of "Taiwan, Chine," by 1987 Hou Hsiou-hsien's entry *Dust in the Wind* would be accepted under the aegis of "Taiwan."⁴ Perhaps more significantly both *Dust in the Wind* and *The Terrorizers* would be screened at the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the first time Taiwanese films had been accepted since that festival's founding in 1976. At the time of their acceptance, and until 1997 when sovereignty was handed over to the PRC, Hong Kong was a territory of the United Kingdom. All of Yang's international accolades for *The Terrorizers* came in 1987 and that film that, alongside *Dust in the Wind*, marks a confluence of directorial and national status on the global stage. As Hou and Yang gained prominence so too did the nation of Taiwan. As Taiwan became increasingly legitimate, and despite PRC protest, Hou and Yang became increasingly visible at international festivals. Notably, Taiwan became a multi-party state that same year.

One of several New Waves in art cinema since the 1960s, like Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave before it, Taiwanese New Cinema has been described as "a cinema of master shots and mise-en-scène."⁵ Attempts to define New Cinema more precisely have run up against glaring discrepancies in the style of prominent directors, notably Hou and Yang. Indeed, Yang's *The Terrorizers* was called "starkly uncharacteristic" of the "potential sentimentalism" of New Cinema by Frederick Jameson in his influential article "Remapping Taipei." In contrast, Hou's often rural and historical subjects have been frequently deemed nostalgic; his

³ Ibid., 79.

⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁵ Tweedie

characteristic long takes unmatched. While both filmmakers contributed to a “national” cinema that sought to portray the lived experiences of Taiwan’s heterogeneous inhabitants, the territories of Hou and Yang’s mise-en-scènes have been deemed antithetical.

Developing alongside the nation of Taiwan, New Cinema emerged out of a policy shift enacted by the KMT government in 1983. Endeavoring to protect domestic industry against an influx of foreign productions, the KMT would redefine cinema as a “cultural enterprise” rather than an “entertainment business” that year. Relaxing policies of formal control and censorship, the Central Motion Picture Corp. (CMPC), a state-owned studio, would fund a collective of young Taiwanese directors, Hou and Yang among them.⁶ Unlike films made under the preceding state-owned studios China Film Studio (CFS), Taiwan Film Studio (TFS), and Agricultural Motion Picture Corporation (AEFS), which were intended to disseminate national policies to a domestic audience,⁷ films by New Cinema directors were funded with the expectation that they would gain prominence in film festivals abroad. Having lost its diplomatic status, the KMT embarked on a campaign of cultural value and commercial visibility.

A great deal has been written about Taiwanese New Cinema and the national policies that projected it onto a world stage, the international status of Hou and Yang on the festival circuit no less. New Cinema’s very existence was contingent on KMT policies that sought to define a national identity both internal to Taiwan’s borders and recognized abroad. Yet analysis of Taiwanese New Cinema has often taken the national borders of Taiwan as the established boundaries of New Cinema’s mise-en-scène. Thus in 2012, when the film scholar James Tweedie argues in his book *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*, that New Cinema “is designed to document the emergence of a new spatial order

⁶ Chi Chi Wu 77

⁷ Historical Dictionary of Taiwan Cinema
By Daw-Ming Lee

as it materializes in the cities of Taiwan,” that spatial order is predetermined by a nation that was, in the 1980s, as emergent as the industries that would manifest its capitalist progression from rural to urban space.⁸

Taking up Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community, this paper begins with the proposition that Taiwan’s liminal nationhood is imperative to New Cinema’s mise-en-scène. Expanding Anderson’s theorization, the circumstances of Taiwan reveal a nation constituted not only within its borders, but through inter-national relations abroad. The imagined communities of the nation are thus necessarily plural, forged perhaps less through language than communication and transportation technologies, and subject to the sovereignties of international diplomacy and global capital. Capitalism whose authority functions less like the modern nation than the premodern dynastic realm, with borders that are “porous and indistinct,” where nations are mere centers and sovereignties “fade imperceptibly into one another.”⁹

Imperative to Anderson’s theorization of the nation is the “apprehension of time,” the modern “conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect” and the “radical separation between past and present.”¹⁰ Although their treatments differ, time in the films of Hou and Yang is an operation of critique. Where *The Terrorizers* disrupts the presumed coupling of cause and effect, *Dust in the Wind* refuses to mark lucid boundaries between past and present time. Already identified as “a cinema of space rather than the cause-effect chains of narrative,” New Cinema presents a challenge to the “homogenous, empty time” that regulates the establishment of the modern industrialized nation.¹¹

⁸ 149 Tweedie

⁹ 19 Anderson

¹⁰ 23 Anderson

¹¹ 24 Anderson

Again extending out from Anderson's imagined communities into the social relations of global capital, the spatial multiplicities of the nation will be further considered in relation to capitalist time. Here Moishe Postone's treatment of "concrete" and "abstract" time, as developed in *Time, Labor, and social domination: A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, provides a necessary link between Hou and Yang's formal strategies. Hou's characteristic long-takes will be understood as exemplary of concrete time, time that is a "function of events" rather than a composite of "commensurable, interchangeable segments." While Yang's editing is more rapid, his camera rests in space and waits for movement to enter the screen. Sound bridges link one action to the next, indeed every moment bustles with human action. However distinct, it is human action that constitutes "the movement *of time*, as opposed to the movement *in time*" of each film.¹²

Understanding the spatiotemporal strategies of *Dust in the Wind* and *The Terrorizers* through the dynamics of imagined communities, these films propose an aesthetic of immanent critique. A critique immanent to Taiwan as a nation. A nation that cannot be understood in isolation but only within established and emergent relations of diplomacy and global capital. More broadly, Yang's films largely pivot around contemporary life in Taipei while Hou's extend into the past and as far abroad as France. While the nation is imperative to what follows it would be absurd to consider either director's project as reducible to "nationalist allegory." It is hoped that in understanding the nation as constituent of plural imagined communities, a more proximate interpretation of Hou and Yang's work, including Hou's overseas projects, might be formulated.

Introduced by Frederick Jameson in his 1986 article, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," the idea that "third world" literature and film "necessarily projects a

¹² Moishe Postone, *Time, labor, and social domination: A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 294.

political dimension [onto their narrative] in the form of national allegory,” has been widely critiqued.¹³ According to Jameson’s formulation, while national allegory might persist as an unconscious condition within films of the “first world,” in works of the third, even “the psychological [persists] as allegory or symptom of the mutilation of individual subjects by the system [of the nation] itself.”¹⁴ Although notably criticized by the scholar Aijaz Ahmad for the incoherence and essentialism of his first and third world distinctions, Jameson would carry these concepts into his 1992 analysis of Edward Yang’s *The Terrorizers* (1986) in the article “Remapping Taipei.” Jameson is ambivalent as to which “world” incorporates Taiwan, although he states outright that it will never be the first world, calling Yang a “Third World filmmaker.” Lacking the necessary communist government and Soviet alliance, the implication is unmistakable.

Ahmad notes that Jameson’s examination is oddly bereft of an analysis of “Multinational Capitalism,” as his title suggests. And, Jameson’s insistence that “nationalism, long since liquidated here [in the United States] and rightly so,” asserts a particular valuation and evolutionary break. At best Jameson can perceive a replacement of nationalism with “some global American postmodernist culture.”¹⁵ And, it is through the concept of “postmodernism” that he analyzes *The Terrorizers* in “Remapping Taipei.” Thus, the complexities of Yang’s narrative become some sort of “Westernization” external to the “native” culture of Taipei. Jameson tries to contest the idea that modernization is Westernization as such, and yet what is he doing in assessing the postmodern complexities of Yang’s editing through exclusively European and American models unrelated to the specifics of the film? As I proceed, I am going to suggest that

¹³ Frederick Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text No 15 (Autumn 1986)* 65-88; 69.

¹⁴ Frederick Jameson, “Remapping Taipei” in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World-System* (London: BFI, 1992), 12.

¹⁵ Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” 65.

the spatio-temporal complexities of Yang's editing might be more generatively understood in relation to the multi-point perspective of Chinese landscape painting; ink painting that situates multiple views in relation to a body moving through space. Although this will not be a major focus of what follows it is an important contestation of Jameson's reading of *The Terrorizers* within implicitly "first world" terms.

As the KMT government sought recognition as the leaders of China as a whole, they amassed a large collection of Chinese art. It is not to suggest that there is some sort of "Chinese" or indeed "Taiwanese" national view but rather that the directors of New Cinema, and indeed filmmakers more broadly, are perhaps better understood in relation to visual culture than essentializing concepts. Understanding the structure of Yang's editing within these terms, it is much easier to perceive linkages between *The Terrorizers* and *Dust in the Wind*. Indeed, while Yang's urban subject matter and claustrophobic framing do not immediately recall landscape, Hou's rural subject matter has evoked frequent references to the style. Often associated with a pastoral nostalgia, a more careful analysis of Hou's mise-en-scènes should make the critical perspective, and resonance with Yang's Taipei, of Hou's rural subject more clear. This reading also allows for the spatial multiplicities of global capital to be removed from the evolutionary and thus linear temporality implied by the three world theory.

It has been thirty-two years since the publication of "Third-World Literature" and it might appear to be mere nostalgia to return to Jameson and the idea of "national allegory" now. Yet however much the terms first and third world have fallen out of favor since the collapse of the "second world" Soviet bloc, in relation to the industrialized nation, these concepts are still there. And in 2013, at the outset of his book *The Age of New Waves*, James Tweedie still found it necessary to situate his project in relation to the "imperfect alignment between the 'three worlds' and the 'three cinemas.'" Here, the "first cinema" is made up of Hollywood, major European film industries, and well funded Soviet productions; the "second cinema" is comprised of art house

films of Europe and includes the international new waves; while the “Third World celebrates a form of ‘imperfect’ cinema whose material poverty becomes a marker of its more direct engagement with the reality of the postcolonial condition.”¹⁶ However vestigial, Jameson’s theories continue to reappear.

Firmly situating New Cinema within the second cinema, it is yet unclear where Tweedie situates Taiwan within the “three worlds.” What is clear is that within Tweedie’s theorization, it is assumed that third cinema and the third world collapse. While first cinema, like the first world, is determined through funding and market share. I will return to this later but the foothold of the three worlds theory likely shares some theoretical ground with the conflation of value with material wealth. This continued idealization of first world power has limited the analysis of directors with international prominence who to some degree are easily wrenched out of their context at the same moment that their nationality is fetishized. This will be complicated by Postone’s careful disentanglement of value and material wealth and the continued influence of New Cinema both in Taiwan and abroad. However little Hou and Yang’s films made in ticket sales, their sustained interest to film scholars and clear influence on contemporary filmmakers complicates Tweedie’s assertion that the idealism of New Cinema’s directors, who argued for a cinema against Hollywood, failed.

The Terrorizers

As Edward Yang’s *The Terrorizers* begins, the screen fades up from black at the intersection of an urban boulevard at daybreak. The sky is a subtle pink and purple over the darkened buildings while only the gentle sound of early morning traffic is heard. A siren overtakes the sonic landscape as a Police car with flashing lights quickly approaches the camera before performing a u-turn at the intersection and shooting off in the other direction. The

¹⁶ James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

siren will be heard in the scenes that follow and although it will materialize as background, this moment will frame the next five minutes of the film. Yang's camera will proceed to three separate locations, the single room apartment that the young photographer shares with his bibliophile girlfriend; the more affluent apartment of the married couple Zhou Yufen and Li Lizhong; and the scene of a crime only indicated through a still male body lying on the pavement, the sound of gunshots, and the sudden appearance of a man running across the alley with a gun. A woman will do her washing on a balcony throughout and the sound of the agitated water will overlay a shot of the man lying on the pavement next to a water-filled gutter.

Before all of this is seen though, just after the police car performs its u-turn, the film will cut to the title, and then again to a tight shot of Elizabeth Taylor's eyes from a promotional poster for the film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* as the photographer speaks.

Photographer: It's nearly 7 o'clock, almost daybreak.

Girlfriend: I'm about to finish reading it. Did I bother you?

As the girlfriend replies, the film has already cut to Taylor's scowling mouth and Richard Burton's downcast face. The poster will only reappear an hour and twenty minutes later, now visible on the wall of the girlfriend's apartment. Although obscured by flowing curtains through much of the shot, this time the poster of Burton and Taylor is seen in full. It reappears just after the photographer discovers an article announcing Zhou Yufen's novel. A novel that he knows is based on a lie told to her by the Eurasian girl White Chick.

Girlfriend: It's just a novel. And it's driving you crazy. That's mad.

Photographer: I'm the only one in the world who knows what this is all about.

Girlfriend: Novels are fiction. They aren't real.

As their conversation comes to a close the photographer stares with downcast eyes, mirroring the larger than life face of Burton behind him.

Although Jameson references Virginia Woolf, the author, in his analysis of *The Terrorizers* he never acknowledges this moment in the film. A 1966 adaptation of the Edward Albee play of the same title, director Mike Nichol's adaptation *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is notable for several reasons. The story of a married history professor George and his status obsessed wife Martha as they toy with the young academic couple Nick and Honey throughout a long drunken night, Albee once paraphrased the work as "who's afraid of living life without false illusions."¹⁷ The same might be said of *The Terrorizers*, as Yang's characters are met with the very real consequences of their self-deceptions throughout the film. Most will find a way to live without their former delusions. White Chick's mother will be abandoned to hers while Li Lizhong, unable to reconcile himself to the loss of his wife and his promotion, will commit suicide.

In chapter two of his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson suggests that "the novel and the newspaper" were once optimal forms for "re-presenting the kind of imagined community that is the nation."¹⁸ Allowing individual inhabitants to imagine the "steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" of their fellows while yet having "no idea of what they are up to at any one time," the novel and the newspaper suggest a linguistic community both illusory and real.¹⁹ Without proposing that Edward Yang formulated Anderson's 1983 thesis into a film, it is yet significant that much of *The Terrorizers* is framed through Yufen's novel. However, Anderson's formulation is specific to the nation as it developed in Europe in the eighteenth century while Taiwan's nationhood coincides rather with its rapid industrialization in the twentieth century. The novel reconciles White Chick's lie to Yufen's reality, yet most consequential to the simultaneity of human action in Yang's Taipei are

¹⁷ William Flanagan, "Edward Albee: The Art of Theatre," *Paris Review*, 39 (1966), p. 103.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

the technologies that visually and aurally connect characters despite their spatial remove. The novel will resolve these connections into a form, yet it is the telephone and telephoto lens that manifest a material community from an imagined one.

White Chick is introduced at a distance as she leaps from a concrete balcony with her shirtless boyfriend. The scene of the earlier shooting, by this time the photographer has followed the sound of the siren and arrived on site with his telephoto lens. As two police officers approach him and meddle with his camera a reverse shot establishes White Chick and her boyfriend as they make their way from the besieged apartment complex. She falls behind a stack of blue plastic bins injuring her left leg. It is only her boyfriend that is seen by the police and while he is arrested she peers around the bins before limping away. The photographer shoots all the while. These photographs, or more specifically, an image of White Chick's face taken from afar as she peers around the bins, will obsess the photographer and set off a chain of events. He will leave his girlfriend and move into the apartment where the gambling den was once held and White Chick once fled. His girlfriend will attempt suicide. When White Chick appears at the apartment weeks later the photographer has pasted a tiled mural of her face on the wall. Her gaze looms over them as they talk.

Throughout *The Terrorizers* these tiled images of women's faces become something of a leitmotif. A smaller mosaic of the photographer's girlfriend is visible on the wall of her apartment just behind the bed. It might be tempting to dismiss this as the obsession of a single character but Yufen's face is later shown on a flashing cathode ray tube screen and then in multiple, tiled across a bank of televisions. While in close up on her face Yufen speaks: "The story is about an ordinary couple. I added a plot with an anonymous call. The wife character often hears a woman's voice. A woman's voice. But she's never seen her in person." The shot cuts to the bank of televisions while the interview continues and the photographer is heard saying, "I've seen this person. I must have," just before the image cuts to the photographer and his

reconciled girlfriend in bed reading. The mosaic of the girlfriend's face is just above her head while the photographer stares at an image of Yufen in the paper. Mirroring the composition of his girlfriend's face, these images of anonymous women give the photographer a sense of knowing someone he's never met. The film cuts to Yufen and her husband meeting at a cafe as the photographer's girlfriend relays the plot of the novel. Still unable to accept reality, Yufen's husband asks if she can return home now that she's completed the novel and won a prize. But their marriage is over and she leaves him there. The film cuts back to the girlfriend's apartment, to the photographer's feet on top of the newspaper with Yufen's picture, the novel that his girlfriend has been reading sits just above his feet. As he speaks the film cuts to a medium shot of his face with the photographs of his girlfriend visible in the background. The camera follows him as he walks in front of the poster for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

Although it garners only passing reference in Jameson's "Remapping Taipei," the plot of *The Terrorizer's* like the plot of Yufen's novel, is set into action through an anonymous call. Indeed even while not in use telephones are present behind actor's heads throughout and Yang settles shots onto telephones that attend their next call. The bright orange telephone owned by White Chick's mother is particularly striking as it becomes her only connection to the outside. Bored and sequestered at her mother's house with a cast on her leg, White Chick scans the phone book making prank calls. Yang cuts directly from a shot of the photographer's girlfriend just after her suicide attempt, the rotating tube of her intravenous therapy drip mirrored in the coiled telephone cord that White Chick turns around her finger. While it sets off disaster for Yufen's husband, for the female characters in the film the telephone is a life line. Yufen will reconnect with her former lover and join him at his new company selling telephones. The anonymous call from White Chick will resolve Yufen's novel. Another anonymous call, this time from the photographer to Lizhong will lead him to read his wife's novel and confront her at her new job. They argue in a room full of telephones in display cases.

Yufen: Maybe that phone call made me suspect you. But that's not the point!
Don't you understand? Novels are just novels. Can't you separate fiction from reality?

Lizhong: Stop it!

It is not uncommon to find references to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blowup* in discussions of *The Terrorizers*. Completed the same year as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the release of these two films marked a massive shift in Hollywood. It was that same year that Jack Valenti took over as president of the Motion Picture Association of America and rejected the long established Hays Code which had monitored and censored Hollywood filmmaking since the 1930s. In his public statements against the Code and the intrusion of government on creativity Valenti cites *Blowup* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, films censored for nudity and swearing. Although he never completed his degree, Yang studied filmmaking at the University of Southern California after having already achieved a Masters in Electrical Engineering at an American University. While *The Terrorizers* calls attention to Yang's international training, it might also mark the shift away from government censorship that occurred in Taiwan's film industry in 1983.

Dust in the Wind

As Hou Hsiou-hsien's *Dust in the Wind* begins, an indistinct object floats across the screen. It grows larger and an archway becomes intelligible, a lush green forest and train tracks on the other side of the black. Although it was faint at the outset, the sound of a train grows louder as it becomes clear that the camera's vantage is from a train exiting a tunnel. From black tunnel to lush green mountain walls the train moves through the countryside before the film cuts to the inside of the train car as Ah-yuan and Ah-yun, both teenagers in school uniforms, stand reading. Ah-yun wraps her arm around the center pole, holding the book in both hands. Ah-yuen stands to her right holding the strap from the ceiling as he holds his book in the other hand. As

they read, the train goes black, undoubtedly making its way through another tunnel. When the light returns to the interior of the car they are both still staring at their books as if they have been reading in the dark.

Ah-yuen: What's wrong?

Ah-yun: I couldn't do the math.

Ah-yuen: Why don't you ask me before?

Here, the scene cuts to the railway semaphore signal outside. The signal changes and the arm of the signal shifts its position, telephone poles and electrical wires surround it. Once the train arrives at the station the two teenagers begin their walk home, following another track. A mining town, it is likely that the smaller track they follow home brings coal to the station. The camera faces them as they approach it and a reverse shot establishes that they are in front of a canvas movie screen being tied down across the tracks. A long shot underline's the beauty of the mountain town as the two climb uphill along the path. The sky grows dark but their path is illuminated with electric lights.

Co-written with writer Wu Nien-jen, *Dust in the Wind* takes place in Taiwan of the 1960s and travels back and forth along the train lines between a rural mining town and Taipei. The story of Wu's adolescence, the film is one of several to be called sentimental for its evocation of the past and rural Taiwan. It is a sentimentality the film resists at every turn yet this resistance, written in telephone wires and electrical lines, whose supporting poles quit literally bisect Hou's frame, is so ubiquitous as to go largely unnoticed. Yet in scenes shot just outside Ah-yuen's family home, a pole sits just outside the door in the center of the frame. Like the telephone itself, the wires that connect telecommunications and electrical power are such a common sight on the landscape that the rural mountain town is easily seen without it and thus segregated from urban Taipei. Yet as ubiquitous as it is there is no escaping the infrastructure of industrialization.

The passenger train takes Ah-yuen and Ah-yun back and forth between the city and the rural town, the electricity and telephone wires run along the train line and connect to the mining town that supplies the coal which is taken on another rail down to the train-yard to fuel Taiwan's electricity. Long before the telephone was developed, in industrializing Britain, telegraph wires ran along the train tracks between stations. Even contemporary fiber optic cables run along these lines. And the semaphore signal that Hou returns to in isolating shots throughout the film requires both this electrical infrastructure and standardized time.

Only ten minutes into *Dust in the Wind*, Ah-yuen waits for another train as he and his grandfather meet his mother and injured father at the station with a handmade crutch. They make their way home across a railway bridge that spans the valley beneath the village. The film cuts to Ah-yuen's father seated and smoking, his crutch leaning against the wall in front of him as his medicine is discussed by the family around him.

Ah-yuen: Dad, your watch. School report card. Dad, I don't feel like going to senior high.

Father: Then what do you want to do?

Ah-yuen: I want to go to Taipei and work. I can go to night school if I want.

Father: It's up to you. If you want to be a cow, there will always [be] a plow for you.

Leaving for Taipei Ah-yuen will find a job in a print shop. Before this is seen though, he collects Ah-yun at the train station. She too has arrived in Taipei for a job. A middle aged man has taken hold of her things and as Ah-yuan struggles to get the bundle away from him, he drops the lunch pail he is carrying to his boss's son at school. Hou focuses the camera on the fallen lunch pail, its contents spilling onto the train tracks. The film cuts to a ten second medium shot of the station's railway signal with the ambient sounds of the station. Ah-yun stands peering into a doorway next to a military trunk in the next scene. Ah-yuen has taken her to a friend's painting

studio in the back of a movie theatre. When he returns to the studio later to meet Ah-yun and his other friends for dinner she gives him the watch Ah-yuen's father entrusted her with. The scene is filmed in one long take, the camera facing Ah-yuen, his friend's back is most prominent in the frame, obscuring much of the interaction between the friends at the table.

Ah-yun: I almost forgot your father brought you a watch.

Boy 2: It's brand new.

Boy 1: It says "World Famous Watch."

Boy 2: Let me see. It's Timex. I heard it's very famous and tough.

Girl: Let me see. I can hear it. It's automatic.

Boy 1: That's right. Automatic.

Girl: 100% waterproof

Boy 2: "100%"...You read English?

Girl: Come on. Who can't read "A, B, C"?

Boy 2: 100% It must be very expensive. Do you know how much it cost?

Ah-yun: I don't know. His father bought it on installment.

As his friends discuss the watch, passing it around the table, Ah-yuen sits silently eating his rice. The discussion turns to the expense of the watch and as it continues Ah-yuen leaves the table. The camera remains and Ah-yun slowly bows her head staring down at her food. The film cuts to a crosswalk and the front of a building at night. Then to the inside of a school room where Ah-yuan is taking night classes, writing and wearing the watch. Next the watch is seen in close up, submerged in a glass of water. Ah-yuen's voice is heard reciting a letter that he is writing his brother. he wonders how expensive the watch is each month. "I remember when I was in junior high, every important exam I would borrow Dad's watch. It was too big and would fall from my wrist. So I tied it with a string." At this moment the light explodes.

Labor for Ah-yuen is not regulated by the watch which seems rather to hypostatize moments of connection between Ah-yuen and his family, Ah-yuen and school. Although the Timex can be glimpsed throughout the film it is largely visible in moments when he writes. The watch is seen prominently for the last time near the end of the film while Ah-yuen lies in bed. At first Ah-yuen is shown laying on his back with his arms crossed behind his head. He is still in the military and the sound of his brother's voice recounts the story of Ah-yun's marriage to someone else. A fifteen second shot cuts away to a close up of the top of the electrical pole outside of Ah-yuan's family home, then cuts to the steps at the front of the house where his siblings sit with his grandfather, the electrical pole to the right of the frame. When the camera returns to Ah-yuen the watch is centered in the shot, hanging loose around his wrist as he weeps. There is a cut to a landscape at dawn, half darkened silhouette of trees and half purple and gold sky as the camera pans sideways to a non-diegetic melody of flute and guitar. Another cut is made to a medium shot of the semaphore signal in the mist, birds chirp in the background. The watch does not direct Ah-yuen's life but the train does.

Despite the chaos of electrical wires that often fill the sky, it is still rather easy to visually reference Chinese landscape painting in relation to *Dust in the Wind*. Indeed there are no shortage of long shots of the mountains of Taiwan. What is less obvious perhaps is the relationship between Edward Yang's urban Taipei and a tradition that has long documented the natural world. Yet I want to suggest that the key to understanding both *The Terrorizers* and *Dust in the Wind* in relation to the tradition of Chinese landscape painting has less to do with their urban and rural subjects than their relationship to concrete and abstract time. Returning to Moishe Postone's concepts, concrete time is a "function of events," of human action, while abstract time is a composite of "commensurable, interchangeable segments," a linear progression.²⁰ "The key to understanding a traditional Chinese painting is the breakdown of the

²⁰ Postone, 294.

fundamental space-time thinking mode lurking behind a picture, and the introduction of time, not the kind of narrative time as many classic historical painting would use to organize its spatial relationship, but experiential time.”²¹ Here the art historian Siying Duan argues that the temporality of the European history painting in single point perspective is a linear abstraction while the temporalities visible in a Chinese landscape painting are “not a perfect moment but a space-time continuum” contingent on a body moving in space.²²

Steering clear of Frederick Jameson’s convoluted attempt to discuss “modernity” and “postmodernity” in relation to Westernization and the first and third worlds, the simultaneity of *The Terrorizers* might rather be understood in relation to the experiential time of a body moving through space. A linear medium, there is no way for film to escape narrative time. Yet where Hou Hsiou-hsien emphasizes experiential time through filming an entire dinner or meeting of friends in a single take, Yang expresses simultaneity with sound. Indeed the first five minutes of *The Terrorizers* occurs in relation to the police car’s siren moving through the city. Each space encountered along the siren’s trajectory constitutes a distinct view. Each space awaits a body, and Yang’s editing more often than not does the same. Rather than move with his characters in a series of cuts meant to mimic their point of view, or watch them at a distance while an event unfolds, Yang’s camera cuts to empty or immobile space where it anticipates human action.

There is a great deal more to be said in relation to the themes proposed at the outset, more specifically on the relationship between New Cinema’s international status and Taiwan’s nationhood. That the films themselves function as a form of immanent critique within the specific history of Taiwan will require further work and yet it has felt necessary to focus on technologies so fore-fronted in the films themselves, so necessary to the industrialization of Taiwan as a

²¹ Siying Duan, “From harmony to intensity: the reconstruction of “body” in Chinese New Ink Art,” in *Proceedings of A Body of Knowledge Embodied Cognition and the Arts Conference*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9956k3v8>.

²² Ibid.

nation, and yet so little referenced in their analysis. To remove the telephone or the train from *The Terrorizers* or *Dust in the Wind* would be to remove the modes of connection through which these stories are told. To remove *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* or the Timex watch would be to eradicate from the mise-en-scènes markers of global capital and return to the essentialized nationalisms of the three worlds.