The Cartography of Hong Kong Urban Space:
Living and Walking in the Cinematic Cityscapes of Fruit Chan and Ann Hui

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Critical Asian Humanities
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Hong Kong has long been ensnared in the problems of limited housing and soaring land prices, which renders its physical space one of the most visible criteria embodying its social inequalities. Regarding space as an overarching concern and framework, this thesis mainly focuses on the representations and portrayals of Hong Kong’s urban space in Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s films and further examines how the directors engage with social spaces in reality through depicting various cinematic spaces. All of these films explore the grassroots space of the underprivileged and marginalized people, which constitutes the underside of Hong Kong’s glamorous urban space shaped by economic development and globalization.

Fruit Chan’s Handover Trilogy including Made in Hong Kong (1997), The Longest Summer (1998), Little Cheung (1999), as well as the first two installments of his Prostitute Trilogy, Durian Durian (2000) and Hollywood Hong Kong (2000) hence reflect on how economic, political and social conditions are factored into the uncanny mutations and distortions of varying spaces ranging from public housing estates, cemeteries, streets to squatter villages. Ann Hui’s companion films, The Way We Are (2008) and Night and Fog (2009), offer a detailed characterization of public housing estates and discuss the notion of housing in metropolitan contexts. The two directors deploy and recreate these paradigmatic spaces of Hong Kong as a critique of the history and social hierarchy of
Hong Kong, which are intimately involved with the complexity of postcoloniality, neoliberalism, and globalization.

Based on theories of spatiality, psychoanalysis, and urban sociology, this thesis argues that these cinematic spaces can be viewed as a site to negotiate with urban planning, spatial practices, transregional and transnational movements. On the one hand, space registers the hierarchical division of the society that renders underprivileged population more vulnerable. On the other hand, connections and a sense of community can also emerge from the space appropriated by its inhabitants. Furthermore, by engaging with border-crossing subjects, these films explore social spaces beyond Hong Kong and provide possibilities of investigating the broader social reality of post-socialist China, destabilizing the static binaries between local and global, periphery and center.
Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iv

Contents ........................................................................................................................................ vi

List of Figures .............................................................................................................................. vii

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1

2. Chapter 1 Fruit Chan’s Kaleidoscope of Urban Spaces .......................................................... 15
   2.1 A Space to Live, a Space to Die .......................................................................................... 18
       2.1.1 Public Housing Units and Corridors: A Hopeless Life? ........................................... 19
       2.1.2 Cemetery: A Space of Death ..................................................................................... 29
   2.2 Spatial Practices on the Streetscapes .................................................................................. 31
       2.2.1 Streets as an Intimate Space ....................................................................................... 31
       2.2.2 Prostitute on the Streets ........................................................................................... 36
   2.3 Squatter Village as a Transitory Space .............................................................................. 44

3. Chapter 2 Ann Hui’s Mapping of Public Housing Estates ..................................................... 53
   3.1 Ann Hui, Hong Kong Cinema and A Critique of Representations of Space ................. 55
   3.2 The Way We Are: The Mapping of Everyday Life ........................................................... 61
       3.2.1 Flashback as Retrospection of Urbanization .............................................................. 63
       3.2.2 The Construction of Living Space .............................................................................. 66
   3.3 Night and Fog: The Mapping of Gendered Space ............................................................. 70
   3.4 The Apartment Plot as Narrative, Mapping as Spectatorship ........................................ 79

4. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 84
List of Figures

Figure 1: Photo by Romain Jacquet-Lagrèze................................................................. 1
Figure 2: Photo by Benny Lam...................................................................................... 2
Figure 3: Moon and Sylvester are waiting in front of the wrong elevator..................... 23
Figure 4: Ping is walking out from another elevator..................................................... 24
Figure 5: The circular shape of the sky in the public housing building in Lai Tak Tsuen. .................................................................................................................. 25
Figure 6: The platform on which these ex-soldiers are planning the robbery................. 26
Figure 7: Bobby at the brim of the platform.................................................................... 27
Figure 8: The cylinder where they hide the robbed money............................................. 28
Figure 9: The small figure of Ga Yin on the square surrounded by high rises.............. 29
Figure 10: Little Cheung is singing Cantonese opera on the street............................... 34
Figure 11: Protagonists in other two installments of Fruit Chan’s Handover trilogy...... 36
Figure 12: Yan is walking on the streets.......................................................................... 39
Figure 13: The close-up of Yan’s walking...................................................................... 39
Figure 14: Brother Keung in the alley of Tai Hom Village............................................ 47
Figure 15: The mismatched tattoo after surgery............................................................ 47
Figure 16: Hung Hung and Tiny are waving red cloth to each other to locate Chu’s home in Tai Hom Village from her apartment in Plaza Hollywood................................. 49
Figure 17: Tai Hom Village is overshadowed by Plaza Hollywood.............................. 49
Figure 18: Tin Shui Wai before land reclamation........................................64

Figure 19: Tin Shui Wai New Town..........................................................64

Figure 20: The bamboo forests in a dreamlike flashback................................77

Figure 21: The bamboo forest in a flashback right after the murder............77
1. Introduction

Hong Kong’s glaring skyline has always been a splendid spectacle for tourism and consumption with a collection of renowned architecture and landmarks. Its booming economy, together with the history of being a British colony and its current state as a Special Administrative Region of PRC render it an intriguing space to be examined. Due to limited land resources and high population density, high rises and skyscrapers are soaring higher whereas inhabitants’ living spaces become increasingly congested. Numerous photographers have presented stunning images of this city, among which Romain Jacquet-Lagrèze and Benny Lam’s works constitute an antithesis in terms of forms and contents. Interestingly, both of the selected pictures regarding buildings and complexes are shot during 2012, and yet these two photographers approach these architectures with different manners.

Figure 1: Photo by Romain Jacquet-Lagrèze.
While Jacquet-Lagrèze’s portfolio *Vertical Horizon* introduces Hong Kong’s high rises and skyscrapers from the bottom up (figure 1), Benny Lam presents another “vertical horizon” of the living space in subdivided flats (figure 2). The unique perspective of Jacquet-Lagrèze’s work is completely reversed in Lam’s work as the photo is shot from the top down. These two dialectically oppositional angles also shape viewers’ perceptions differently and even endow them with opposing experiences. In a situation resembling the former, viewers constantly encounter or even are enveloped overwhelmingly by the height and density, and such experiences are quite common when one is wandering in a metropolis like Hong Kong. The striking aspect of such visual representations lies in the possibility that spectators are deprived of the privilege of appreciating the horizontal and holistic version of the city’s skyline from a certain distance to maintain a sense of security. Quite the opposite, they are immersed in spatial anxiety.

Figure 2: Photo by Benny Lam.
Lam’s work is carefully composed from a bird’s eye view. On the one hand, this angle creates a condescending position for spectators to perceive every trivial detail of inhabitants’ living space in one take, whereas on the other hand it conveys a generality without directly filming their specific faces. Another interesting spatial dichotomy lies in the juxtaposition of the exterior and the interior of the building. In contrast to the geometrically well-shaped exterior that we see in Jacquet-Lagrèze’s works, Lam’s works capture the interior space of living in which stuff is piled up casually and people jostle together. In this regard, a sense of disruption and displacement is foregrounded through such spatial juxtaposition, and it might also serve as an illustration of a living space that is constantly appropriated by inhabitants’ spatial practices.

Analyzing visual materials, this thesis aims to scrutinize the issue of limited housing and the portrayal of dwelling in Hong Kong cinema since the 1990s, mainly focusing on relevant works of two Hong Kong directors, Fruit Chan and Ann Hui. Films and the cinematic spaces, according to Henri Lefebvre’s tripartite dialectic of spaces, should be included in his notion of representational space since it is a complex and coherent system of symbolism and imagination linked to “the clandestine or underground side of social life,” waiting to be deciphered (Lefebvre 26). When the exterior shown in Jacquet-Lagrèze’s photograph is being subjected to perception, the interior reveals a space belonging to inhabitants and users. The analysis of these
cinematic spaces nonetheless addresses concerns about urban conditions of life as “it overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (39). As a result, an examination of physical constructions is necessary as well when it comes to an analysis of representational spaces.

While Lefebvre’s theoretical model provides a generative overview concerning abstract space, dominated space, appropriated space, contradictory space, differential space, and so forth, Michel de Certeau’s theory of spatial practices from the perspectives of both voyeur and flâneur brings forward a vivid illustration of reappropriating representations of space, which are linked to social engineer and urbanist in terms of design, strategies and administration as the city is frequently conceived through a celestial and totalizing eye. Yet by virtue of users’ tactics and individual reappropriation, the figure of a flâneur on the streets represents “a theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city,” sparking new possibilities of counter space (96).

Following this line of thought, Anthony Vidler’s historicization and theories of relations between psychoanalysis and spaces further shed light on the investigation of representational spaces, revealing inhabitants’ affectivities and mentalities in urban and metropolitan conditions. In his books *The Architectural Uncanny*, Vidler proposes the theme of the uncanny as “a metaphor for a fundamentally unlivable modern condition”
that destabilizes the common perception of home as a secure and serene place, and
further raises questions of “social and individual estrangement, alienation, exile and
homelessness” (The Architectural Uncanny “Preface”). Building on these conceptions, he
expands this discussion in his other book Warped Space and contends that “the warping
of perspectival space is tantamount to the marking of a process of thinking in
architecture, a discursive meditation on the place of the subject and the other in space
and the way in which the architecture might make the reflection on this space” (9).
Anxieties and psychopathologies of urban space as the symptoms of rapid urbanization
and modernization hence problematizes the transparent and utopian ideal of modernist
architecture and space. As such, Fredric Jameson’s notion of hyperspace also
corresponds to this spatial distortion in a way that the human subjects confront a
mutation of the object as well as the built environment, which they are unable to keep
pace with (Postmodernism 38). Teeming with gigantic malls and soaring apartment
complexes, Hong Kong as a metropolis that has the most skyscrapers comes on the scene
as a vivid example to contextualize and contemplate the relations between urban space
and the human subjects.

Based on these theories of spatioty, psychoanalysis and urban sociology, a
series of questions immediately arise in the context of Hong Kong society. Speaking of a
place that is caught between postcoloniality and neoliberalism like Hong Kong, how
could we unpack this temporal and socio-spatial complexity when these factors sometimes entangle and obscure each other? How does the space as a product as well as a process, together with discourses revolving around various social spaces, account for hierarchical divisions and connections at the same time? As a significant site of the exchange of capital, commodities, labor, and cultures, Hong Kong undoubtedly registers its dynamics between local and global, periphery and center with a variety of border-crossing subjects and local communities. More specifically, how do the governmental practices affect the urban space, and how inhabitants reappropriate these social spaces to their advantages? What kinds of relationships are represented when different bodies and subjectivities negotiate with and within these social spaces through the medium of film?

To situate both Hong Kong cinema and the urban space in the social and historical contexts, Ackbar Abbas’s monograph on different cultural forms and the politics of disappearance in Hong Kong, especially his discussion of the new Hong Kong cinema and his categorization of Hong Kong architecture, offers an inspiring account of Hong Kong’s changing cultural landscapes as a whole. Characterizing new Hong Kong cinema with an uncanny feeling of the *déjà disparu*, Abbas points out that the politics of disappearance not only refers to radical historical changes or a disappearing subject. More importantly, the act of looking and the process of viewing are problematized due
to a desynchronization between the increasing generation of images and the regression of viewing. To deal with this dilemma, it might be possible that this emerging cinema and its representatives “are situated in a space between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’” with the attempt to challenge the limits of genre (25-26). According to Abbas, another feature of Hong Kong new cinema lies in its sensitivity to spatial issues since the question of history is spatialized and inscribed in spatial relations. He argues that using “space as a means of reading the elusiveness of history,” films and architecture are thus able to provide better texts to understand Hong Kong’s history and society.

Writing at the juncture of the Handover, Abbas’s argument is not only productive in understanding Hong Kong New Wave cinema but also endows this thesis with insightful perspectives on analyzing the relationship between the space of Hong Kong and films in contemporary contexts. Synthesizing physical spaces and representational spaces, this thesis mainly focuses on investigating the housing and living space of the underprivileged population in Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s works, and how these two directors make their own cinematic spaces out of these physical constructions while developing a critique of space.

The living spaces in Hong Kong fall into two extremes: On the one hand, Hong Kong has extravagant private estates designed by stardom architects with rocketing prices, which either enjoy the sea view or occupy the height of a hill. While such luxury
real estates are not uncommon in other metropolises around the world, the problems of low-cost housing in Hong Kong are far more conspicuous. On the other hand, subdivided units, makeshift houses and “coffin rooms” still exist and thrive in any possible gaps among the dense forest of high rises. Apart from other undesirable living conditions, limited space might be considered as the basic problem to cope with in life. These low-cost houses are often associated with several influxes of immigrants during wartime, and the Kowloon Walled City might be one of the most well-known architecture as a result of the explosion of population. Yet, when these provisional constructions gradually took root here to accommodate the exile and the diaspora, they are inevitably subject to the urban governance.

To mitigate the pressure of overpopulation and reallocate land resources, the Hong Kong government acquiesces to immigrants’ illegal settlements during wartime until the fire in the Shek Kip Mei shantytown broke out in 1953. From then on, the government has initiated city planning projects such as the clearance of squatters, public housing projects and established a relevant department to regulate the resettlement and housing. Throughout the history of public housing in Hong Kong, the government has designed several long-term plans to ensure the provision of public housing, and the development of new towns in suburb areas is one of the efforts to increase the housing supply. The constructions of public housing estates in new towns are divided into four
stages, spanning from the 1950s to now. Even though these social welfare programs to some extent help some low-income families who cannot afford private houses, its application and allocation system receive increasingly severe criticisms nowadays due to the extensive waiting time and the presence of unqualified applicants. Scholars like Alan Smart, Manuel Castells and others point out that the public housing program, apart from being a welfare project, is a governmental intervention to ensure a proper production and reproduction of labor (Castells et al 4) as well as its monopoly over land ownership to achieve long-term revenue potential and a short-term effort to balance the budget (“The Housing in Hong Kong” 327). Besides, the demolition of squatter villages also renders the life of inhabitants more precarious. All these factors together contribute to a myriad of undesirable consequences such as soaring land prices and property prices, perilous housing conditions of some temporary units, and so forth.

Faced with living conditions as such, Hong Kong cinema, especially films that are categorized as social realism, has long been reflecting on housing issues, be it an explicit social critique or the implicit background of the films. Aside from the predominance of market-oriented films for entertainment in the Hong Kong film industry, these films focus on the underprivileged people and their quotidian lives, with a growing expansion of “ordinary people” that includes multiple subjects such as “women, marginalized problem youth, illegal immigrants, youth gangs, prostitutes, and
cagemen” (Sze 14). This exploration of a broader notion of “ordinary people” and a persistent line of inquiry rings true if one teases out a myriad of relevant films and positions them within a larger and more globalized context. The living space of the grassroots society appears to be a generative point of departure to investigate the transforming landscapes and corresponding subjectivities pertaining to radical changes in economy, politics and cultures.

This tendency can be observed in a series of films that deal with living conditions and housing issues, accompanied by increasing awareness of spatiality and a deeper exploration of inhabitants’ subjectivities within their living spaces. For instance, the New Wave filmmaker Allan Fong 方育平 has directed several social realist films that are staged in low-cost houses. His Father and Son (父子情 1981) narrates the story of an impoverished family who lives in the squatter village of Shek Kip Mei. Marking the outset of the public housing program in Hong Kong, the fire in Shek Kip Mei becomes a turning point in the film as the whole family is consequently relocated in a public housing estate. Fong’s other film Ah Ying (半邊人 1983) is also situated in public housing estates, and the female protagonist earns a living by working as a fishmonger in a wet market. In realist films, the presence of low-cost housing can be regarded as a means to achieve the aesthetics of realism. They are also representations of the public housing policies instituted by the Hong Kong government in the 1970s. Even though living
spaces in these films are merely looming in the background, they nonetheless trace the history of low-cost housing in Hong Kong. On the contrary, another film that offers a more straightforward critique of Hong Kong’s housing problems is Jacob Cheung 张之亮’s Cagemen (籠民 1993), which unfolds the story happening in a dormitory building shared by a bunch of male tenants. Each of these inhabitants only owns a space that is equal to the size of a single bed with barbed wires entrapping them. Confronted with the demolition of this dilapidated complex, these inhabitants work together to protest governments’ policies of compensation and relocation plan despite multiple obstacles set by the proprietary, local officials and the mass media.

Another interesting clue to investigate the existence of undesirable housing conditions pinpoints the close relations between physical spaces such as squatter villages, public housing estates and the depictions of crimes and gangsters, which also constitutes a significant element in some of Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s works. Following this thread, the physical living space opens up numerous possibilities in a wide range of genres beyond social realism, frequently appearing in action films, gangster films and even thrillers. The well-known squatter village Kowloon Walled City once provided mise-en-scènes or inspirations for films such as Crime Stories (重案組 1993), Long Arm of the Law (省港旗兵 1984), Kung Fu Hustle (功夫 2004), and so forth. When the remaining squatter villages undergo demolition, the public housing estate seems to become a
stand-in, serving as a site for violent crimes both in reality and in films. Philip Yung’s 
*Port of Call* (踏雪尋梅 2015), Lawrence Lau’s *Besieged City* (圍城 2008) and Ann Hui’s 
*Night and Fog* (天水圍的夜與霧 2009) all deal with severe social problems or even murder 
cases in such living space.

Apart from these films, Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s works continue to depict and 
explore the living space of Hong Kong grassroots society, and further deploy these 
spaces as well as their relations with inhabitants to represent and contemplate cultural 
spaces and history of Hong Kong. Furthermore, their films introduce the audience to 
more sensual representations of the living space by emphasizing the materiality of urban 
space and the subjectivities of characters, which echo what we could see in Benny Lam’s 
photograph at the beginning with all these mundane details and complexities. What’s 
more, through traveling between the exterior and the interior, their cameras are able to 
pose a critique of manifold socio-spatial hierarchies both within and beyond the city.

Chapter one mainly focuses on Fruit Chan’s five films, *Made in Hong Kong* (香港 
*Durian Durian* (榴槤飄飄 2000) and *Hollywood Hong Kong* (香港有個好萊塢 2001), 
analyzing how Chan engages with various physical spaces in a defamiliarizing way to 
question the homogenous space. Through categorizing and scrutinizing a myriad of 
spaces varying from public housing units, squatter villages, cemeteries to streets, this
paper argues that these cinematic spaces in Fruit Chan’s works not only reveal the spatial distortion of architecture and urban space in metropolitan living conditions but also offer a critique of the social hierarchy and history of Hong Kong by destabilizing its spatiality and temporality, subverting the glamorous space shaped by capitalism and globalization. Moreover, Chan’s interests are not just restrained within the space of Hong Kong, given that he also uses varying representational spaces as responses to the radically changing landscapes and broader social concerns resulting from neoliberalism.

Chapter two investigates Ann Hui’s diptych of a particular public housing community Tin Shui Wai, *The Way We Are* (天水圍的日與夜 2008) and *Night and Fog* (天水圍的夜與霧 2009), to analyze representations of domestic space and familial relations. For a community located in new towns, the notion of housing is subject to a state of being isolated and marginalized. Through narrating two antithetical stories from female experiences and subjectivities, Hui explores possibilities of familial relations emerging from the spatial proximity on the one hand, while reveals and criticizes the conundrum faced by new immigrants in Hong Kong society on the other. Her use of flashback in *The Way We Are* spatializes the history of Hong Kong in a critical rather than nostalgic way, to some degree almost functioning as a retrospection of a backstory of the female character in Fong’s *Father and Son*. Similar to Chan’s *Durian Durian* and *Hollywood Hong Kong*, *Night and Fog* also investigates the story of the border-crossing subject, and in this
case, a female immigrant from mainland China who tries to settle down in Hong Kong. By pointing out the visual similarity across rural area in Sichuan Province and Hong Kong urban space, this paper argues that the assimilation foreshadowed by such cinematic spaces instead leaves the female protagonist no space for the future.

What distinguishes Chan and Hui’s films on the agenda from other films that are also related to the living space of grassroots society lies in their attentiveness to the fabric of urban life as well as the critical examination of Hong Kong history and changing reality. In these films, the materiality of these living spaces and architecture seem to gradually gain their own potency, while directors’ cameras frequently linger and reflect on these spaces and constructions, creating distinctive visualities. Even though spaces associated with the operation of power are frequently considered as means of control and domination, representational spaces in films instead register as “a tool of thoughts and of action,” escaping from a homogeneous and condescending perception towards abstract space (Lefebvre 26).
2. Chapter 1 Fruit Chan’s Kaleidoscope of Urban Spaces

In this chapter, I investigate the cinematic representations of certain social spaces in Fruit Chan’s oeuvre regarding Hong Kong urban space and further discuss how these spaces challenge the normal pattern of spatial configuration and destabilize a homogenous and holistic space deriving from the national narrative, neoliberalism and globalization. Cinematic spaces I aim to analyze here are what Lefebvre categorizes as representational space, and yet it is noteworthy that Fruit Chan as a director consciously stages and interrogates the relationship between society and space, as well as the changing socio-economic and cultural landscapes in post-handover Hong Kong and post-socialist China society.

Concentrating on a rather short span of years at the turn of the twenty-first century, this chapter will mainly focus on Fruit Chan’s Handover Trilogy including Made in Hong Kong (1997), The Longest Summer (1998), Little Cheung (1999), and the first two installments of his Prostitute Trilogy, Durian Durian (2000) and Hollywood Hong Kong (2001) to explore how Chan purposefully utilizes a myriad of spaces such as cemeteries, squatter houses, public housing complexes, streets, and alleys to infuse the slice of life in Hong Kong grassroots society with a feeling of uncanny. Instead of organizing these five films chronologically, I tend to develop my argument through various types of spaces from both material and psychoanalytical perspectives. However, it would also be inadequate to simply ignore their chronological order since they to
some extent indicate Chan’s evolving techniques and extending interests in not only the
cultural identification of local community but also the transregional exploration of the
economic and political system.

In order to effectively connects these different cinematic spaces, I argue that
Vidler’s notion of “spatial warping” can serve as a common thread running through
these five films. Continuing his discussion of “the spatial uncanny” in The Architectural
Uncanny, Vidler further develops this notion regarding phobic space, revealing the
projection and introjection of anxious and paranoid subjects (Warped Space 1-14). The
increasing anxiety is intertwined with the emergence of a psychological space since the
late nineteenth century, be it produced by architecture or urban spaces. Films as a space-
conquering technology thus become a generative media to capture such spatial
distortion and its corresponding mentality. In Fruit Chan’s case, his focus on the
underprivileged population as well as his cinematic style that borders realism and
surrealism further distance viewers from the mundane aspect of daily space,
defamiliarizing the glamorous urban space with its touch of the uncanny.

This unique grasp of Hong Kong urban space hence distinguishes Fruit Chan’s
positionality from other Hong Kong directors such as Wong Kar-Wai. For instance, in
contrast to the sense of rootless and glamorous cosmopolitan aesthetics in Wong Kar-
Wai’s works, Fruit Chan consciously and constantly explores Hong Kong as one’s home
and root in his 1997 Trilogy (Lie 60-62), embodying a localism and its accompanying social problems through broken family narratives.

As a key figure of the second Hong Kong New Wave Cinema, Chan represents an alternative mode of production, which also contributes to the development of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s, a period that witnessed both the decline and creativity of cultural production in Hong Kong at once. Chan’s novelty can be read in multiple aspects. Yingjin Zhang points out that Fruit Chan’s low-production model represents one new development to confront the reality of an uncertain future against forgetting in post-handover Hong Kong. Some of Chan’s works not only challenge the established Hong Kong system of superstars and blockbusters by using unprofessional actors but also “redirects cinematic attention to the underprivileged in a kind of deliberately rugged but effective realism” (Zhang 269). The low-cost production model of his independent films also opens up a new possibility for development of Hong Kong cinema on the wane.

Contextualizing Chan’s works at the juncture of the Handover and a more neoliberalized and globalized China, a spatial and psychological reading of his films enables us to delve deeper into the complexity of postcoloniality and globalization. While urban spaces are undergoing radical transformations with their splendid and dizzy spectacle, Fruit Chan’s works discover and encapsulate its uncanniness, on the
other hand, rendering Hong Kong an unhomely house and even further questioning human’s living condition as a whole.

2.1 A Space to Live, a Space to Die

Hong Kong has long been recognized as a transient and temporal space resulting from its colonial history. Confronting the advent of 1997, both mainland China and Hong Kong is overwhelmed by the ceremonial official discourse that advocates the Handover as returning to the motherland, and yet Hong Kong people were experiencing another ineffable feeling of alienation and disorientation, which is constantly repressed by triumphant anti-colonialism and nostalgic call of a reunion and authenticity. In this regard, this moment has already entailed a feeling of uncanny.

In Vidler’s *The Architectural Uncanny*, he conducts a thorough reading of Freud’s theory of the uncanny pertaining to psychoanalytic and aesthetic modes of thinking, which opens up a whole set of dynamics and problems in terms of subject and spatiality:

… of identity around the self, the other, the body and its absence: thence its force in interpreting the relations between the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis…the uncanny has been interpreted as a dominant constituent of modern nostalgia, with a corresponding spatiality that touch all aspects of social life. (*The Architectural Uncanny “Preface”*)
He then continues to explore the feeling of uncanniness in relation to a lack of orientation and attributes the doubleness of uncanniness to the spatial relation between interior and exterior. Following this line of thinking, the spatial uncanny is neither merely dependent on the temporal dislocations of suppression and return nor the slippages between the homely and the unhomely, it is displayed in the “abyssal repetitions of the imaginary void” (*The Architectural Uncanny* 23-37).

Using spatial uncanny as an entry point, Fruit Chan’s cinematic spaces register an aesthetic category that is characterized by “a state between dream and awakening” as well as “the very sign of modernism’s propensity for shock and disturbance” (*The Architectural Uncanny* 8). The prominent spatial tropes that evoke the feeling of the uncanny lie in Chan’s usage of public housing architecture and cemeteries, which are precisely two paradoxical spaces in people’s lives. However, the audience can observe that the connotations of these two spaces are to some extent shifted towards each other in Chan’s cinematic representations and create a kind of in-between status revolving around such uncanny experience.

### 2.1.1 Public Housing Units and Corridors: A Hopeless Life?

The public housing estates emerge as an allegorical space which is central to Chan’s portrayal of the plight of Hong Kong’s people, particularly in *Made in Hong Kong* and *The Longest Summer*. Fruit Chan himself as someone who once grew up in a public
housing estate mentions in an interview how such space alludes to a future without prospect and Made in Hong Kong offers a cleaner version than the one in his childhood experiences (Cheung 89). Public housing units and corridors thus occupy a paradigmatic space in Fruit Chan’s works considered both its marginality and ubiquity.

Esther Cheung also interprets Fruit Chan’s works through the notion of “spatial uncanny” based on Anthony Vidler’s conceptualization and analysis in her monograph Fruit Chan’s Made in Hong Kong. She further puts forward the notion of “spectral/ghostly chronotopes” to express the feeling of loss and disorientation, which is a result of time-space dislocation. With an insightful observation of Chan’s cinematic techniques, Esther Cheung categorizes and analyzes how three types of cinematic devices including the use of narrative repetition, the manipulation of light and darkness, and the depiction of warped spaces contribute to Chan’s aesthetics of ghostly and defamiliarization (Cheung 101-107). Building on her theorization, I shall offer a detailed analysis of Fruit Chan’s attentiveness to the public housing complex as well as other similar spaces that are densely populated. Furthermore, these characteristics are also applicable when it comes to the cinematic space of The Longest Summer.

Narrating from an adolescent’s perspective, Made in Hong Kong revolves around four teenagers, all of whom eventually died before arriving their adulthood. The male protagonist To Chung-Chau (or Moon) works for a gangster as a debt collector. He then falls in love with a girl called Lam Yuk-Ping (Ping), and her mother is a debtor whom he
is required to collect money from. Another friend of Moon called Ah-Lung (or Sylvester) is mentally retarded and is often being bullied by other peers as a result, even though Moon has saved him several times. The film starts with the death of a girl called Hui Bo-San (Susan), whose suicide notes are found by Sylvester, and these three youngsters help this deceased girl deliver her letters. From then on, the shadow of death constantly haunts Moon during his sleep through the figure of Susan, together with Ping’s fatal kidney disease. Moon signs an assassination contract with his gangster leader in order to pay off Ping’s medical treatment, but he is too panicked to pull the trigger and fails the task. Even worse, he is severely stabbed by another delinquent youth and hospitalized due to his previous conflict with another debt collector who once came to Ping’s home. After Moon’s recovery, Ping and Sylvester’s deaths immediately throw him into astonishment and anguish, which drives him to revengeful and even irrational violence and devastation.

Most scenes are shot in public housing estates, which Moon and Ping’s families all live in. The structure and materiality of these complexes endow the film with a quintessential atmosphere belonging to a unique Hong Kong image with its density and complexity. Labeled as a “grassroots director,” Chan mentions in an interview that he tried his best to use those housing estates, which are unique to Hong Kong to characterize a corresponding image, and this uniqueness is the whole spirit of Made in
*Hong Kong* (Cheung 132). These high-rise public housing complexes themselves can be regarded as the mass production made in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the architecture also becomes an effective narrative device in those sequences of hand-held camera shots pertaining to gangster activities. Social housing buildings in the early years tend to have long corridors to connect each housing unit, and these corridors have become hotspots for crime over the years (Xue 37). For instance, Moon obtains a pair of guns right before he carries out his assassination. There is a cross-cutting between the injured teenager who is looking for Moon’s help in the dusky corridor and Moon who is dancing with his newly gained guns in a self-indulgent manner at home, indicating Moon’s complacent attitude whereas creating a theatrical tension between the corridor and the unit in a single sequence, implicitly suggesting Moon’s imperception of danger and inability to save people around him regardless of his armament. This sequence also to some degree portends his failed assassination and his impotence in front of Ping and Sylvester’s deaths. Another instance that relates violence to the space of public housing estate is the scene in which Moon is stabbed by a man on the skateboard with a screwdriver. Captured their moving silhouettes in the darkened and long corridor for a rather long period of time, the moment of blood bursts out shortly against the backdrop of a small patch of bright space in this building. After the man wiped his hands soaked in blood casually with a piece of newspaper, the camera moves back to the long corridor where the assailant on the skateboard gradually
fades away, leaving the silent corridor behind. This abrupt interlude happening in the living space of Moon stands in sharp contrast to Moon’s own failed assassination happening on a pedestrian overpass in the open air with a bright bluish shade, in which he fantasizes himself conducting it successfully in a stereotypical action movie.

The certain place in such a high-rise building also allows the melodramatic plot to happen during Moon’s attempt of searching Ping. Failed to find her at her home, Moon and Sylvester are waiting in front of an ascending elevator in the housing estate, believing that Ping is in it as Sylvester can mysteriously and intuitively sense the presence of Ping with a syndrome of nose bleeding. However, it turns out to be a crowd of strangers and two of them embarrassedly enter the elevator while Ping shows up in the elevator right next to them (figure 3 and 4). Despite the melodramatic element in this sequence, it dexterously deploys the space as a narrative device within a single frame, which also can be viewed as a humoristic version of “lack of orientation.”

Figure 3: Moon and Sylvester are waiting in front of the wrong elevator.
Figure 4: Ping is walking out from another elevator.

By the same token, the presence of public housing is predominant in *The Longest Summer*, serving as a critical site to project characters’ surroundings and subjectivities. This second installment in Chan’s Handover Trilogy unfolds the story of several disbanded soldiers of the British Army in Hong Kong. The protagonist Ga Yin is introduced by his younger brother Ga Suen, who is a member of the gang, to work for a gang leader Brother Wing as a driver. Driven by the feeling of uncertainty and a lack of money, these unemployed middle-aged ex-soldiers and Ga Suen plan to rob a bank. However, another group of robbers coincidently go for the same bank first and lead to a series of disastrous accidents. Ga Suen decides to take all the robbed money alone and offers a proposal that Ga Yin should leave with him together. At the same time, one of these ex-soldiers named Zipper distrusts Ga Suen and follows him after Ga Suen retrieves the money from the secret spot, hoping that he can loot the money. However, Brother Wing is the one who gets the last laugh when the ending implicitly alludes that his subordinates kill both Ga Suen and Zipper. Failed to find his brother, Ga Yin in
extreme desperation shot an adolescent in a restaurant where two youngster gangs are fighting. In the end, he is shot by another adolescent and develops amnesia.

This film resembles Made in Hong Kong inasmuch as it also entails certain gangster and melodramatic elements, together with its cinematic space of public housing. Besides, spectators also gain a more elaborate display and manipulation of the unique visuality of public housing complexes as Fruit Chan becomes more aware of this architectural space and urban landscape, utilizing them as a whole cinematic setting.

There is a sequence in this film that captures a public housing building named Lai Tak Tsuen in Tai Hang with its distinctive circular shape, in which a bunch of girls are talking and chasing each other in the corridors. With their sounds echoing and penetrating the whole building, the camera tilts up to locate the circular sky above enveloped by walls (figure 5), generating a claustrophobic sense that precisely speaks to a feeling of trapped without a future. This scene again explicitly brings the “abyssal repetitions of the imaginary void” back to one’s sight.

Figure 5: The circular shape of the sky in the public housing building in Lai Tak Tsuen.
In addition to the interior of the public housing, the exterior of these high rises provides a space to accommodate their hope for the future, even though it is merely a desperate and rough plan of robbing a local bank. The scene depicting their discussion of how to conduct the robbery takes place at a platform aloft surrounded by a collection of worn-out complexes and probably factories (figure 6), which constantly reminds spectators of the alienation and precariousness of their lives with the busy street below as a background. In this sequence, the man named Bobby is walking at the brim of this platform (figure 7) as if he is walking on a string. Bobby works at the local bank they plan to rob, and other people think that he could collaborate from the inside. Banking on the robbed money, Bobby hopes that this can relieve their economic pressure, allowing his wife Rose to quit the job of singing. He proceeds to say indignantly that what they have learned in the military only turns out to be useful in daily life, which instead is the real battlefield. Yet, all his hopes are destroyed as he mistakes those robbers who come in the bank first as his comrades and is shot to death.

Figure 6: The platform on which these ex-soldiers are planning the robbery.
Figure 7: Bobby at the brim of the platform.

On the other hand, the intricate buildings and infrastructures become a suitable secret spot for them to hide their robbed money. This giant cylinder (figure 8) right next to Ga Yin’s home not only functions as a narrative device to reinforce the divergence between Ga Yin and Ga Suan but also presents a deliberate choice of urban setting that originates from everyday details with a striking aesthetics, which immediately evokes a similar effect in Jameson’s analysis of the presence of gas-tank in Edward Yang’s *Terrorizers* (恐怖份子 1986). Both of these architecture resembling “a structural inversion of magic realism” denote “a depressing sign of urban squalor and a science-fictional profile associated with humdrum misery of lower middle-class life” (“Remapping Taipei” 135-136).
The colossal and condensed presence of these architecture are ripped off its monumentality when the character is posed among them in a long shot (figure 9), creating a spectacle that simultaneously speaks of material prosperity and spiritual decline. The cenotaph on the square is a monumental memorial to commemorate dead soldiers in two World Wars, and it is also an exact replica of the original cenotaph in London. Chan frames this majestic architecture together with Ga Yin, who once was a Chinese soldier and yet served in the British Army. This contrast also brings forth another more ironic layer through reminding the audience of Bobby’s funeral and his absurd and meaningless death.

This spatial paradox also shares its commonality with the firework that is mentioned in the Chinese title and used as both a metaphor and a real-life spectacle, given that it only exists ephemerally and vanishes immediately after its zenith. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that each firework displayed in this film is somehow associated with death and violence, which increasingly rebukes the celebratory and monumental connotation of this glamorous spectacle.
In this film, spectators are simultaneously experiencing the space of sublime and claustrophobic space of the uncanny. The juxtaposition as such registers the feeling of the uncanny and suffocation in a doubling effect, even though the former brings forth disorientation whereas the abyssal and uncanny space of public housing generates claustrophobia. Just as Vidler says, “the vertigo of the sublime is placed side by side with the claustrophobia of the uncanny” (The Architectural Uncanny 39).

2.1.2 Cemetery: A Space of Death

Another intriguing space in Made in Hong Kong is the misty cemetery, where Moon, Ping and Sylvester hang out together, shouting Susan’s name among those tombstones. With tens of thousands of tombs, this place haunted by death is associated with greenery that one seldom finds in a metropolitan city like Hong Kong. Moon even comments that it looks like a paradise with its ethereal sight, which is quite ironic given the function of this place. To further understand the relationship between death and
space, Foucault’s analysis of heterotopia provides us with a productive lens. In his lecture “Of Other Spaces,” he discusses the shift of relocating cemeteries in the suburban area instead of the heart of the city in the nineteenth century as a consequence of both the atheistic tendency of civilization and a correlation between illness and death. That said, heterotopia is also intimately related to temporality as well as people’s perceptions of temporality: “the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time,” signaling a spatio-temporal disruption.

The cemetery and these adolescents in Fruit Chan’s camera exactly function as a metaphor in relation to the temporality of Hong Kong society, considering that their idleness can be seen as a heterotopia of deviation whereas their coming of age can be seen as a crisis heterotopia. All these are captured through their presence in high rises and cemeteries that are marked by density. As Laikwan Pang observes in her essay “Death and Hong Kong Cinema,”

They are trapped in the threshold between youth and adulthood, and their deaths can be seen as a willful challenge and refusal to pass through the rite of passage provided by the institution in order to remain infinitely in the enjoyment of “non-identity.” (19)

Moon’s posthumous voice-over reveals to the audience his “luck” of dying young in the last note left by Susan and Ping, which enables him to preserve his youth
perpetually and prevent him confronting a world filled with uncertainty. The film ends with the sequence of these three youngsters shouting at the cemetery, accompanied by an announcer broadcasting a famous speech of Mao to the youth. Consequently, the deaths of these four teenagers sarcastically eclipse the well-known analogy Mao once made between young people and the sun at eight or nine in the morning as a symbol of hope and future.

Nonetheless, the space of the cemetery is also presented in a glimpse in *The Longest Summer* after the death of Bobby in that failed robbery. Fruit Chan creates a disruption between visuals and sounds by infusing the funeral scene with the laughter of Bobby’s children, who have no conception of their father’s death. Such atmosphere registers a blurring boundary or a liminal space between life and death and serves as a powerful metaphor of Hong Kong’s radically changing landscape at the advent of Handover.

### 2.2 Spatial Practices on the Streetscapes

#### 2.2.1 Streets as an Intimate Space

Compared to the first two installments, *Little Cheung* (1999) to some extent detaches itself from a considerable involvement with the gangster, focusing on a more ordinary version of Hong Kong grassroots society through the lens of an eight-year-old boy. Only little Cheung’s runaway elder brother and a ruffian in their neighborhood
who frequently blackmails them for protection racket are associated with some sort of gangster in a restrained manner. This film basically revolves around the friendship between little Cheung and a girl Fan, who stays in Hong Kong as an illegal immigrant from mainland China. Fan helps her mother to earn more money through washing dishes, and she even tries to gain a job at Cheung’s restaurant but is rejected by the little Cheung’s father. The boy who delivers food by bike for the restaurant then decides to recruit Fan as an assistant and shares the delivery fee with her. Little Cheung lives in a broken family in another sense—his father prohibits people from talking about his elder son who left home while little Cheung spares no effort to search his brother. He feels closer to the Filipino maid Ami at his house than his own mother. However, Fan is eventually deported back to mainland China with her family. The loss of his friend Fan, Filipino maid Ami, and his grandma reinforces his feeling of alienation and bewilderment towards the end of the film.

Different from the depiction of public housing buildings, Little Cheung focuses on a local community in a more traditional form, centering around the street and vernacular architecture called Tong Lau (唐樓 in Chinese) instead of modernist buildings in Kowloon district. Throughout the history of architecture, Tong Lau is allowed to be compartmentalized into smaller units for rent. Its multiple functions as both residential and commercial places also endow it with a distinct lifestyle of the local community. The first floor of Tong Lau is usually for commercial use, as we can see in
*Little Cheung* that his father owns a restaurant or Cha chaan teng (茶餐廳 in Cantonese) downstairs while their family lives above. This antiquated picture of architecture and streets in collective memory is anything but an uncritical nostalgic representation. Rather, by foregrounding a broken family diegesis, Chan reexamines the nostalgia and memory that is frequently attached to the metaphor of a house. As the protagonist’s opening remarks suggest, this is a world in which everyone even a child like him prioritizes the value of money. This is a fundamental characteristic of what Georg Simmel calls “money economy” in metropolises, where money itself becomes “common dominator of all values” (411).

In Vivian Lee’s comparison of Fruit Chan’s *Little Cheung* and Ann Hui’s *Ordinary Heroes*, she categorizes these two films as a type of post-nostalgic film in which the past is invoked to be reexamined and interrogated in alternative modes of representation, “as well as the construction of historical and social space as a form of collective memory and resistance to disappearance *en masse*” (Lee 264). The conscious avoidance of nostalgic tone thus frees the representation of old cityscape from inventing “a memorable, ‘decent’ past and a cultural trademark.” As local geographical units, the streets teeming with various ethnic groups are more dynamic and interactive, where little Cheung as a delivery boy plays a “border-crossing” role among these marginalized subcommunities (267-269).
With its openness and fluidity, this particular social space also bears significant meanings in Chinese and Cantonese culture. For instance, the word Gaaifong (街坊 in Cantonese) is frequently used to designate a community or neighborhood that forms along the streets. Riding the bicycle, this little boy traveling through the urban fabric unfolds the complexity of local streets and the communities in a mischievous manner. Since it is a public space, it also creates a plethora of encounters among different walks of life ranging from patrolling police, prostitutes, hooligans, vendors, and immigrants. Sometimes this public space would also border the domestic space as there are sequences in which little Cheung’s father openly punishes him on the street with his pants down. In this regard, a family issue which is supposed to happen within one’s house now turns into a public spectacle for neighbors, and the sense of performance is further strengthened when little Cheung is eventually caught by his father after he leaves home to find his elder brother. In this scene, he starts to sing out loud an excerpt of a song from Cantonese opera (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Little Cheung is singing Cantonese opera on the street.
Also, a sense of intimacy is indicated through details that neighbors all know about each other’s stories, as we can see that little Cheung search for the elders’ help in the neighborhood during his investigation of his brother’s information and location. The boundary between domestic space and streets as public space is further blurred in another detail that when the father is desperately looking for little Cheung who leaves home after the punishment, one of their neighbors comments that it would have not happened if you had not beaten your child. The intimate space of streets is also emphasized in Michel de Certeau’s reading of New York City, through which he vividly contrasts the totalizing and panoptic bird-eye view from the height to the spatial practice of walking on the streets. This space deprived of the pleasure of “seeing the whole” generously accommodates the “microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress” (de Certeau 96). This individual mode of reappropriation of space is impressively epitomized through the boy who is trying to catch up with the police car to say farewell to Fan. In this shaking sequence lasting for three minutes, little Cheung uses every kind of cycling skill and his familiarity with various shortcuts he has learned in the delivery job to compete with the automobile. Yet, he passes by the right car and ends up in a similar ambulance. This coincidental mistake reveals a deeper layer of disorientation regardless of one’s intimate knowledge of his lived space, echoing the previous scene happening in front of elevators in Made in Hong Kong.
Intriguingly, *Little Cheung* itself also functions in a way like streets that connects different sites, associating Chan’s Handover Trilogy and Prostitute Trilogy. At the end of this film, there is a scene on the busy street that includes protagonists in both *Made in Hong Kong* (Moon, Ping and Sylvester are walking in the upper left corner) and *The Longest Summer* (Ga Yin is driving a car), which interestingly alludes to synchronicity in the modern city (figure 11). Furthermore, the girl Fan also serves as a protagonist and narrator in Chan’s following work *Durian Durian*. Chan’s trajectory from *Little Cheung* to *Durian Durian* suggests his navigation through streets and alleys in Kowloon, Hong Kong as well. In one interview, he mentions that he did not have any script for *Durian Durian*, and further discusses how his field research in such a local community renders the structure of *Durian Durian* manifest itself from the physical space.

![Figure 11: Protagonists in other two installments of Fruit Chan’s Handover trilogy.](image)

### 2.2.2 Prostitute on the Streets

Probably on a similar street, the story of *Durian Durian* gradually takes shape with this figure of a prostitute from mainland China, who relentlessly walks her way
through the urban labyrinth of Hong Kong. In *Durian Durian*, Chan’s quasi-documentary filming of the female protagonist Yan as a sexual worker reveals her three-month stay in Hong Kong with a tourist permit, as well as her life in her hometown Mudanjiang after she earns enough money to start up her own business. During Yan’s sojourn in Hong Kong, she befriends a girl named Fan, who is always washing dishes on the laneway where Yan frequently passes by. Using the travel permit to maximize her profits, Yan busies herself with relentless walking to a myriad of different hotels escorted by her pimp, even in the last hour before she is required to leave. In contrast to her marginality of being discriminated against in Hong Kong, Yan is regarded as a model young female who has a successful business and is admired by her friends and relatives in Mudanjiang. While Yan refuses to go back to Hong Kong but earns her living by performing Chinese opera she used to practice in her earlier days, her cousin and some of her friends determine to venture to the South, which is inspired by Yan’s financial success. Fan as an illegal immigrant is also deported back to her hometown Shenzhen, from which she mails a durian to Yan in Northeastern China.

Through depicting both Yan and Fan as border-crossing subjects, Chan hence poses a series of disjunctions between subjectivities and reification as well as socio-economic reality and political system. As Wendy Gan argues in her thorough study of Chan’s *Durian Durian*, this film with two protagonists, two narrative arcs and two distinct locations highlights multiple and fractured identifications, be it related to Hong
Kong, mainland China, or Hong Kong-China as a single entity (Gan 4). This “split and yet conjoined” structure of the film, or even subjectivities and identities, become a powerful vehicle to investigate the current shift in Hong Kong’s post-handover society as well as contemporary Chinese society in the era of neoliberalism. Esther Cheung also argues that Chan’s shifting focus from Hong Kong to mainland China should be regarded as an angle and technique of making strange a ‘familiar’ situation, accompanied by his blending style of documentary realism and dramatic elements (“Durian” 91).

This characteristic has already been brought to the forefront at the outset of this film when the overlapping of river views in Yan’s hometown Mudanjiang and Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong appears, with Yan’s voiceover narrating the act of crossing the river as a pursuit of opportunities and better life. As such, the poster of Durian Durian has already vividly depicted a collision of different geographic locations: a durian that belongs to the tropical area is half-buried in the snowfield. Throughout the film, durian simultaneously stirs up people’s bewilderment, admiration and disgust due to its smell and flavor that paradoxically stinky and fragrant at once. The duality of durian precisely corresponds to Yan’s doubled image in Hong Kong and her hometown—a prostitute (“beigu 北姑”) who is discriminated against by local Hong Kong people and a prospective youth who is admired by her relatives and friends in Mudanjiang because of the fortune she makes. Chan deploys different shifting patterns of the camera depending
on the structure of the film and the different locations of the protagonist. The street view of Mong Kok in Hong Kong is filmed through time-lapse shots and shaking hand-held camera (figure 12) to create a raw and natural quality of Yan’s endless walking to various worksites, endowing the audience with an immersive experience that a pedestrian on the street might have. Apart from these long shots and medium shots recording Yan’s movement, Chan also uses a series of close-ups, particularly close-ups of lower legs, to effectively draw the audience’s attention to Yan’s feet and walking (figure 13), which also corresponds to Fan’s perspective as a little child.

Figure 12: Yan is walking on the streets.

Figure 13: The close-up of Yan’s walking.

These unstable shots and close-ups hence exemplify what Esther Cheung point out as “making strange,” a way of defamiliarizing the ‘real’ as the filmmaker’s crudest
way of facing the ‘real’ and make sense of the urban mutation” (“Durian Durian” 90-91). If we put it in de Certeau’s terms, this filming of a part of the body is also a gesture against the pleasure of “seeing the whole,” rendering Yan’s motions around these streets an unreadable yet more sensual experience. “Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible” (de Certeau 93).

It is not uncommon to observe how the figure of the prostitute is closely associated with the streets in urban space. For example, Goddess (神女, 1934) is one of the prominent films that portrays a woman who works as a prostitute at night and devotes herself as a single mother for her son’s education during the day in the streets of Shanghai. Scenes of a woman putting on makeup and rambling on the streets alone are repetitively introduced to indicate her self-commodification, which discloses a less glamorous facet of urban space that is permeated with social injustice and discrimination. Noting this duality embodied in “fallen angel,” Hansen argues that the figure of the woman functions as the metaphor of the contradiction of modernity whereas prostitution functions as metaphors of a civilization in crisis, figuring the city in its allure, instability, anonymity and illegibility (Hansen 15). If Goddess highlights this duality through a split temporality, it is convincing that Chan achieves a similar effect through a spatial juxtaposition—the juxtaposition of Hong Kong and Yan’s hometown, even though at some moments spectators can still glimpse her private self apart from
her role as a prostitute in Hong Kong. For instance, her genuine friendship with Fan, to whom Yan gives her real address. Gan also observes that Yan’s break between jobs in an alleyway during which she stretches and performs high kicks is accompanied by a soundtrack with conspicuous Chinese opera instrumentation. From this nearly one-minute long take, spectators are given a hint of a past Yan who received Chinese opera training during her early days (Gan 49).

Yan is also frequently captured in putting on makeup, together with her constantly changing fake names and hometowns. Alike her makeup, these variables not only serve as an indication of her self-commodification but also serve as a protection. Furthermore, several of the conversations with her clients involved with these fake names and hometowns are interwoven with Yan’s ceaseless walking on the bustling streets in Mong Kok. These cross-cuttings of Yan’s activities mark her temporal stay in Hong Kong as a neither-immigrant-nor-tourist person more noticeable in a sensuous way. Even though Yan cannot be strictly seen as an immigrant, she indeed shares certain public spaces with other marginalized populations in Hong Kong society. For instance, neither she nor Fan and her mother is willing to call the police when Yan’s pimp is attacked by a durian, afraid that they might be questioned by the police. In Wendy Gan’s analysis, this sense of community is also conveyed through a surreal scene spinning from Fan’s family, illegal immigrants from South Asia to Yan and her pimp, all of whom are marginalized by the society when Yan’s voice-over says in regret that she
and Fan had never been to Ocean Park in Hong Kong (Gan 36). Their spatial association with this alleyway is thus a kind of metaphor linked to their social status. Furthermore, this sequence reinforces my previous point on streets as a community in the analysis of *Little Cheung*, particularly given that people such as illegal immigrants in this space are constantly under the surveillance, regulation and suppression of governance and the urbanist system.

Ironically, Yan holds a travel permit for tourist, and yet she has never been to any place of interest. Instead, she only appreciates the monumental architecture and spectacular skylines such as Tsing Ma Bridge and Victoria Harbor through pictures printed on the calendar she buys. When Yan is asked by one of her fellow workers, she replies that if she had been there, she would not buy it. Shuttling through alleys and streets in Mong Kok, Hong Kong appears to Yan to be more a space constituted by small hotel rooms and narrow alleyways rather than a metropolitan city for consumerism. The mere way she can get a taste for its prosperity is through its simulacrum.

The surreal sequence mentioned in Gan’s analysis also registers as an effective element to add to the quasi-documentary style of Chan’s realism in *Durian Durian*. In addition to a series of montages of Yan’s movement around the city, the camera zooms in from time to time to capture every detail of her daily routine: meals she has to finish in a hurry since she is frequently interrupted by a call to go for work, dresses to change and makeup to put on before she slips into the role of a prostitute. One of the banal and
yet telling details of the spatial split lies in the sequence of Yan’s showers, through which spectators can sense the difference between her public role as a prostitute who provides her service and an individual woman who enjoys her own private time. During the shower in these tiny bathrooms in hotels, the camera focuses more on the males’ bodies instead of hers when she helps her customers to clean up their bodies and asks for nicer tips. It is only in the communal bathhouse in her hometown that she is allowed to carefully cleanse her own body without the need of talking.

Nonetheless, Yan’s life is not simply separated into two parts by different locations but sutured together in a haunting way. Yan’s peeling skins due to the frequency of taking a shower thus register as another repetitive reminder of her life in Hong Kong that constantly registers itself and alienates Yan from the most familiar life she once had in her hometown. One of the prostitutes tells her not to take two showers but one during her work to alleviate the peeling skin. After Yan goes back to her hometown, there is a sequence that Yan is washing dishes and asks her mother whether there are gloves to wear at home in order to protect her skin. This sequence again registers Yan’s experience as a prostitute that keeps returning to her life despite the physical distance. Esther Cheung contends that Yan’s home become uncannily unfamiliar through such time-space dislocation and the anxiety and fear of space reveals itself in seemingly oppositional forms: agoraphobia and claustrophobia (“Durian Durian” 95). Even though the filthy and narrow back alleys in Hong Kong is visually
distinctive compared to Mudanjiang, which is depicted in a more slow-paced frame with open sight, the haunting feeling attached to the border-crossing still lingers as a critique of space targeting at a more neoliberal system in post-handover Hong Kong and post-socialist China.

2.3 Squatter Village as a Transitory Space

The story of Hollywood Hong Kong takes place in Tai Hom Village, the largest squatter village in Kowloon, Hong Kong. The Chu family including Boss Chu and his two sons Ming and Tiny lives in this town and sells roasted pork to earn a living. A young man Brother Keung who is also a resident in this town meets a prostitute Hung Hung from mainland China, who advertises her service online. Hung Hung lives in Plaza Hollywood, which is a collection of five apartment complexes and a middle-class shopping mall next to Tai Hom Village. At the same time, Hung Hung also befriends Tiny, the younger son in the Chus, while she goes by another name Tong Tong and induces both Boss Chu and the elder son Ming to have sex with her. The presence of this female figure seems to bring comfort to these inhabitants in Tai Hom Village. However, this agreeable image is overthrown by attorney’s letters sending to all these three males, claiming that they are accused of statutory rape. It turns out that this prostitute from mainland China is trying to blackmail them for financial compensation if they want to get rid of legal sanctions. Brother Keung is tracked down by gangsters as a result of
refusing the payment, which leads to the dismemberment of his right hand. Hung Hung eventually makes it to the real Hollywood she dreams about whereas the Chu family is moving out from this village due to the demolition.

Presenting quite an opposite picture from *Durian Durian*, *Hollywood Hong Kong* introduces a prostitute from mainland China whose goal is to go to the real Hollywood in the United State, no longer focusing on exploring her private life and her past. What’s more, the cinematic style of the film also turns away from the quasi-documentary style into a combination of social realism and surrealism. As Gan observes, “the film extends itself beyond a detailed depiction of everyday reality into an exploration of the realms of the fantasy and illusion that cloak the mutual exploitations inherent in prostitution” (Gan 82). In this regard, surreal elements such as ghostly figures in dreams also generate a defamiliarizing effect that dissolves the sense of security in mundane urban life.

The noticeable trait of this film lies in the various expression of discrepancy and displacement, be it between different parts of human bodies, human bodies and animal bodies, or between different social spaces. Metaphors revolving around bodies are prominent throughout the film. The obesity of the whole Chu family and the opening scene of their carrying pigs on their shoulders might strike the audience first and foremost, which renders their bodies almost indistinguishable from the animals they raise and cook. Plus, their family name Chu 朱 is both a homophone of swine 猪 in Chinese and the surname of the first resident in this village back in the Qing Dynasty.
There is also a myriad of sequences of the cross-cutting between the Chu family’s activities and pigs. For instance, the scene of the family’s dinner is promptly followed by the scene of a female swine named Ma Ma eating its food, which they keep as a member of their family. Furthermore, the sexual desire is somehow portrayed through a parallel between various sex scenes and pigs being roasted on the fire with their oily skins.

Another mismatch that is permeated with black humor appears on the human bodies when a local gang chases down Brother Keung since he refuses to pay Hung Hung money. However, the gang mistakes another man whose name is the same as Brother Keung and chops off his right hand first. When they caught Brother Keung at night, they hack off his right hand in Tai Hom Village. Manipulating the light and darkness, narrow laneways in this shantytown now transform into a stage for theatrical performance, on which Brother Keung is suddenly thrown into the focus of stage lighting with his dismembered forearm (figure 14). In the next sequence, the shadow of a severed hand is cast on the metal roof of Chu’s home, which turns out to be wrongly stitched back on Brother Keung’s arm since it belongs to another Keung. Coincidentally, both of them have different tattoos on their arms so that their tattoos are also mismatched due to the reattachment, which sarcastically results in Brother Keung’s two left hands and a combined tattoo of tiger head and snake tail (figure 15). This tattoo turns the Chinese idiom 虎头蛇尾 into a graphic expression, which refers to an
anticlimactic consequence and becomes an explicit metaphor of the Other as Keung asks Ming to cut off his reattached hand again.

Figure 14: Brother Keung in the alley of Tai Hom Village.

Figure 15: The mismatched tattoo after surgery.

Apart from these bodily displacements, the film is also elaborate in the depiction of this shantytown overshadowed by high-rise apartment complexes, while only offering a glimpse of the real Hollywood with the postcard that Hung Hung sends to Tiny. Those squatter houses in Tai Hom Village might remind the audience of a renowned squatter community in the Kowloon Walled City as they are both constituted by makeshift houses and narrow laneways, not to mention the filthy conditions. The Kowloon Walled City as a Chinese enclave existing within the boundaries of colonial Hong Kong to some extent resembles Tai Hom Village overshadowed by Hollywood
Hong Kong, as Hung Hung compares these five complexes standing side by side as “wuzhi mountain” that suffocate residents in Tai Hom Village. The Chinese idiom “wuzhi mountain,” whose literal translation means “five fingers mountain,” frequently refers to the situation in which one is completely in thrall to another person. In this regard, this spatial allegory also corresponds to Hung Hung’s extortion later.

The striking contrast between Tai Hom Village and Plaza Hollywood constituted by the shopping mall and apartment complexes is constantly surfaced throughout the film as the female protagonist Hung Hung, lives in one of those apartments of the plaza and seduces males in Tai Hom village. Her friendship with Tiny and their interactions in both the plaza and the village connects these social spaces on the one hand but further underscores the split between these spaces on the other. In terms of the connection, there is a sequence that Hung Hung invites Tiny to her home. They look out from the window to search for Chu’s home beneath in the squatter village but fail. To locate their home, Tiny runs back to find a large red cloth and wave it so that it is palpable for Hung Hung to recognize and respond from distance (figure 16). Nonetheless, Chan also consciously and constantly highlights the collision between Plaza Hollywood and Tai Hom Village through combining a panning shot of Tai Hom Village and a pedestal shot to capture the high rise or zooming in to include both spaces into one single shot (figure 17).
Figure 16: Hung Hung and Tiny are waving red cloth to each other to locate Chu’s home in Tai Hom Village from her apartment in Plaza Hollywood.

Figure 17: Tai Hom Village is overshadowed by Plaza Hollywood.

Apart from these striking contrast within the film, it is of great significance to incorporate the social context of this space. The film was released after the government’s demolition plan of this squatter village was complete, which also renders it a visual reservation of this living space and community as home to marginalized people including some mainlanders such as the female charlatan who conducts surgery on Brother Keung’s severed hand and the female helper at Chu’s store. Yet, the forthcoming demolition merely appears at the end of the film when several residents prepare to move out and other people take photos to memorize this place that would be vanished
soon. This demolition in plan adds another intriguing layer to this film if one considers that Plaza Hollywood is only a transient lodging for Hung Hung before she proceeds to the United State while the Chu family loses their home and store. In an article regarding urban governance and the persisting squatter areas in Hong Kong, Smart points out how these illegal neighborhoods are more like “borrowed places” as there is no assurance of their continuing existence (“Unruly Places” 31). The precariousness of inhabitants’ lives in a squatter village invokes a picture of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, especially when it comes to the entanglements and tensions between the authority and inhabitants. Illegal neighborhoods as such are allowed within this particular space since it helps the government alleviate high population pressure, and yet they also bear the brunt of demolition whenever the government decides to reallocate land resources and improve the city’s profile.

With regards to these two films centering on prostitutes from mainland China as a metaphor of the spatial relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China, Chan’s representations and portrayals seem to fall into an oversimplification in Hollywood Hong Kong as it is a relation that is fundamentally exploitative and mutually exclusive. That being said, there still exist some commonalities in terms of depicting these sex workers as border-crossing subjects. For both Yan and Hung Hung, Hong Kong is only a temporal place to stay, symbolizing either an opportunity for a fast buck or a springboard to a better place. As Hong Kong gradually transforms from “a city of
transients” (Abbas 4) to an abode for most inhabitants with an increasing awareness of local identity, it is intriguing to observe a new type of instability and mobility epitomized by immigrants like prostitutes from mainland China, despite their different choices at the end. One can also observe an accelerated pattern of mobility accompanied by Hung Hung’s “guilt-free process of the fluid shifting and shuttling of identity and citizenship” (Lu 94).

From the five films discussed above, Chan’s cinematic intervention also breaks from the synchrony and simultaneity of national narratives, registering what Homi Bhabha discusses as “a spatial disjunction” and “the perplexity of the living” in his article “DissemiNation” (Bhabha 320). Bhabha analyzes the complex time of national narrative and advocates a “double-edged discourse of social territories and temporalities.” A city like Hong Kong, in this sense, can provide the space for these emergent identifications since the migrants, the minorities, and the diasporic can alter this national narrative, achieving a transregional and transnational cultural dissemination. Hence, in Fruit Chan’s works, the urban space of Hong Kong is not only characterized by an increasing fluidity but also a defamiliarizing manner that criticizes the transforming urban space as a result of neoliberalism. Distancing Hong Kong from its image as a well-known mall city and a financial hub, he casts a different light on the supposedly mundane city life and undesirable living conditions, revealing the spatial
and temporal disjunction to present the perplexity and precariousness in both Hong Kong and mainland China’s societies.
3. Chapter 2 Ann Hui’s Mapping of Public Housing Estates

In this chapter, I regard Ann Hui’s companion films revolving around Tin Shui Wai New Town as a mapping of Hong Kong’s urban space in terms of its public housing estates, investigating the dynamics between cinematic space and social space through this particular community. The urban sprawl and building boom of public housing estates in suburban Hong Kong since the 1970s constitute a significant portion of its city skyline, and it also opens up a corresponding social and cultural space. As a part of the third phase of the government’s new town development project, physical spaces as such undoubtedly share features of what Lefebvre calls “abstract space.” Lefebvre’s concept of abstract space as a product of capitalism highly depends on exchange and spatial consensus (Lefebvre 57). Operating negatively, abstract space relies on the silence of the ‘users’ of this space, and it emphasizes exchange value over use value. While such space become the normality of urban living, it also raises questions regarding dwelling and estrangement in metropolises as it is hugely homogenized and congested.

Since the public housing units as a paradigmatic space of Hong Kong are highly visible in both Chan and Hui’s works, it is noteworthy that they handle such visibility in different manners. Compared to some earlier and worn-out public housing buildings in Fruit Chan’s films, Tin Shui Wai New Town is a comparatively new residential area, and its first public housing estate is completed in the 1990s. While Chan is fascinated by
those long corridors and claustrophobic spaces in public housing complexes, Ann Hui portrays these buildings through their down-to-earth details in a familiar and yet disquiet way, consciously reflecting on the process of urbanization as well. The structure of companion films allows her to skillfully juxtapose two opposing stories within the same social space, which further complicates living environments of these standardized and mass-produced units. Ann Hui’s cinematic representations and interventions of public housing complexes as social space hence embody an in-depth perception and knowledge of the housing issue.

Released in 2008, *The Way We Are* (天水圍的日與夜) pivots around the friendship between two women who happen to live in the same public housing complex, unfolding and interweaving the ordinary life of a single mother Kwaijie and her teenaged son Cheung Ka-on, and an elderly woman Granny Leung in a public housing building of Tin Shui Wai. Since these two women also share the same working place at a supermarket, they gradually grow more intimate with each other and even form an alternative familial relationship when the film proceeds. On the other hand, its sequel, *Night and Fog* (天水圍的夜與霧 2009), depicts a dark side of this social space through investigating a familicidal case in this community. The female protagonist Wong Hui-ling marries an elder Hong Kong man Lee Sum and moves into his apartment in a public housing complex in Tin Shui Wai. Constantly suffered from Lee’s domestic violence, she resorts
to governmental assistance, taking refuge in a temporary women’s shelter. However, Hui-ling ends up confronting Lee Sum at home alone and being murdered by him.

3.1 Ann Hui, Hong Kong Cinema and A Critique of Representations of Space

The history of Hong Kong cinema and Ann Hui’s career in the past four decades witness the transformation of Hong Kong’s society, which is radically altered by the 1997 Handover and rapid urbanization. Just as Hong Kong’s spatial and cultural identity is often represented as a hybridity of Chinese and Western, Ann Hui’s works indicate this stylistic hybridity as well. On the one hand, her education and cinematic training allow her to draw inspiration from the aesthetics and techniques of Western avant-garde films and literature. On the other hand, Hui frequently incorporates Chinese and Cantonese cultural practices as a counter discourse to Hong Kong’s modernity characterized by economic success and Western lifestyles (Ho 178). There has been a myriad of scholarship discussing Ann Hui’s cinematic techniques with regards to representations of female and modernity, and positioning Ann Hui’s oeuvre in Hong Kong’s cinema and cultural identity. For instance, Elaine Ho argues in her article that Hui has taken a distinctively feminist turn in her recent film, which profoundly transforms her modernist narrative.

As one of the most renowned Hong Kong New Wave filmmakers, Ann Hui discusses a plethora of social and political issues in Hong Kong society and frequently
narrates stories from the perspective of females. Her continuing preoccupation with female experiences and subjectivities distinguishes her films from works of her contemporaries. One of the predominant themes of Ann Hui’s oeuvre is her concerns about socio-economically marginalized populations as well as familial relations, and her companion films of Tin Shui Wai can also be regarded as a critical exploration of the grassroots space of Hong Kong society.

Two significant axes frequently constitute Ann Hui’s work, and her Tin Shui Wai diptych is no exception. One axis pinpoints temporality, referring to her frequent use of flashbacks, whereas the other axis delineates her persistent interests in the space of home and family. Regarding her preference for flashback, scholars like Ackbar Abbas in his versatile monograph about Hong Kong culture and the politics of disappearance points out that Ann Hui’s use of multilayered flashbacks in Song of the Exile (客途秋恨 1990) emphasizes the contradiction between past and present, which corresponds to the uncanny feeling of déjà disparu that is registered by Hong Kong cinema. Her deployment of flashback actively engages with the historical narrative by introducing female experiences as well as collective memories. Also, Jing Jing Chang specifically discusses Hui’s use of flashback in Tin Shui Wai diptych, arguing that flashback enables a feminist perception by revealing the female protagonists’ subjectivities (Chang 731). Speaking of domestic space, the trope of home also serve as a miniature of Hong Kong’s society given that the city is now perceived by its inhabitants more as an abode for dwelling.
than as “a city of transients.” Ann Hui herself also considers these two films as an allegorical representation of Hong Kong’s cultural identity and awareness¹. Synthesizing these two axes, personal stories and collective memories are hence fused into the urban fabric and history of Hong Kong.

The construction of public housing estates and the development of new towns mark significant milestones in the process of urban planning and governance, and these two projects are also closely associated with each other. Most recently built public housing estates are located in new towns (except for several older estates in central urban areas), which are used to be rural areas distant from the urban core. Resembling other architecture in Hong Kong, public housing complexes are also characterized by height and density. Even though it is not uncommon to see such a phenomenon in the central business district of a city, it might generate new circumstances and problems when it comes to space for living.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre mentions “the replacement of residence by housing” as a characteristic of abstract space (Lefebvre 314). With the advent of slums and ghettos at the edge of the city, the space of traditional residential buildings is gradually dismantled and replaced by the idea of housing, “along with its corollaries: minimal living-space, as quantified in terms of modular unit and speed of access; likewise minimal facilities and a programmed environment” (Lefebvre 316). What

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ensues from these basic units of living are what he calls “threshold of tolerability” and “threshold of sociability,” which separately refer to minimal living conditions and difficulties in having social life. Mostly isolated in new towns that are located in the suburban area, public housing estates in Hong Kong are spaces that merely satisfy the basic needs, not to mention other illegal compartmentalized or subdivided units and even rooftop houses, in which living space is reduced to the extreme. On the other hand, Lefebvre also argues that for a critique of hierarchical space, the word “boundary” is too vague to be used as a critique of such separation of population. By proposing the notion of “fractured line,” he further reveals the invisibility and irregularity of these lines, which delineates “contours of ‘real’ social space lying beneath its homogeneous surface” created by a single power (317).

Located in the northwest of the city, Tin Shui Wai shares the geographical, economic, and social isolation as the other new towns do. However, what renders it stand out as a “failed” urban planning project lies in the following two aspects. The first problem is its lack of community facility and the second is the lack of local job opportunities whereas private developers control and monopolize retail businesses, which are beyond what inhabitants can afford (Yip 4-5). These material conditions might be part of the resources of some social tragedies as the physical location debilitates inhabitants’ mobility and socio-economical positions. The transportation expense to the central area of Hong Kong is relatively high for low-income families who live here,
which indirectly restricts their accessibility to other resources such as medication, education, and so forth.

As some alarming social events such as familicide, suicide and murders cast a cloud over this particular community, government officials and news coverage further dubbed this new town as “A City of Sadness (悲情城市 in Chinese).” Therefore, Tin Shui Wai New Town becomes a stereotypical landmark of the stigmatization of these public housing estates. The Chinese characters in its name Tin Shui Wai 天水圍 also allude to negative images of a “walled city” or “besieged city” that hampers its inhabitants’ mobility.

In addition to these annotations above, there are also some relevant cultural productions such as films and songs revolving around negative implications of this community. For instance, the Hong Kong singer Hacken Lee once recorded a song named 天水圍城, which refers to “a city besieged by sky and water.” The lyrics of this song are written by the well-known lyricist Albert Leung from the perspective of a new immigrant who lives in Tin Shui Wai and finds himself caught in desperation without a way out. The director Lawrence Lau also produces a film named Besieged City (圍城 2008) to criticize social problems of youth crimes in public housing estates.

Similarly, Ann Hui’s plan of filming public housing estates in Tin Shui Wai is initiated by a murder-suicide case that happened in 2004. In an interview, Hui expressed her attempt to strike a balance between the realistic and the fictionalized element
regarding such subjects. Using the event of Tin Shui Wai as a talking point, she wished to approach and reflect on these social issues without exploiting its tragedy. However, Hui instead turned to another script about the daily life of a single mother and her son due to the lack of investment. She then decided to situate this story in Tin Shui Wai as well since she found a commonality between this simple story and ordinary people’s life in Tin Shui Wai, and this led to the success of *The Way We Are*, which constitutes a detour towards *Night and Fog* in terms of Hui’s cinematic depiction of life in public housing estates. This detour instead characterizes and connects this diptych in an intriguing circle: When Ann Hui was initially attracted to the space of Tin Shui Wai by the familial tragedy, she was at the same time endowed with an opportunity to delve deeper into this community in a different light and offered a mundane yet impressive story. It is also because of the success of the former that Ann Hui obtained financial support for *Night and Fog*. Despite her point of departure, *The Way We Are* probably provides the audience with a more universal sketch of the quotidian life of most inhabitants in public housing complexes, while the latter highlights the precariousness of life pertaining to certain populations such as new immigrants from mainland China.

Through exploring and analyzing how Ann Hui’s camera captures the congested space of public housing in Hong Kong, I argue that she cinematically juxtaposes this space with other residential spaces within Hong Kong as well as other spaces in mainland China, which reveals uneven development within the context of globalization.
and multinational capital. Furthermore, the space of apartments or housing units can be read as a productive genre that invites a variety of spectatorship, while offering a critique of representations of space.

Meanwhile, these congested apartments also open up counter space to subvert the glamorous façade of Hong Kong as a financial hub and global city. In Saskia Sassen’s article on cities and globalization, she identifies two circuits of capital, in which the finance and service occupy the upper circuits while the new immigrant workforce takes up the lower circuits. Whereas Hong Kong’s finance and service industries are over valorized, these cramped units spatialize and concretize what Sassen calls “the lower or devalorized circuits of globalization” and allow us to view the city as “a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions” (Sassen 210). If highly visible skyscrapers designed by celebrity architects (e.g., Norman Foster’s HSBC building and I. M. Pei’s Bank of China Tower) house the upper circuit of capital, then these public housing skyscrapers can be seen as material containers for the low-skilled and low-income workforce; those urban inhabitants who are less recognizable amidst Hong Kong’s glitzy skyline.

3.2 *The Way We Are: The Mapping of Everyday Life*

Starting from the dawn of a summer day and ending at a night in autumn, this film exactly corresponds to its Chinese title 天水圍的日與夜 (Day and Night in Tin Shui...
In regard to its cinematic style, this film to some extent acquires the quality of the home video as most of its sequences happen at home whereas outdoor scenes are filmed in a restricted way. Mainly concentrated on the ordinary life of Kwaijie and her teenaged son Cheung Ka-on, the film proceeds chronically while several sets of flashbacks are introduced to provide a glimpse of Hong Kong’s historical transformation.

Kwaijie is a single mother who works at the fruit section of a supermarket to support her family, and her teenaged son Cheung Ka-on is a student who is waiting for his examination result during the summer vacation. Apart from Kwaijie and Ka-on’s daily routine at the beginning, spectators are able to sense the difference between Kwaijie’s life and her brothers’ lives in terms of social classes at the very beginning: They are awkwardly unnerved at Kwaijie’s mother’s birthday banquet when they interact with other family members. Kwaijie then meets an elder woman Granny Leung who recently finds a job at the same supermarket, and Granny Leung happens to live alone in the same public housing building as Kwaijie does. Despite Granny Leung’s indifference and refusal at first, Kwaijie befriends her after she and Ka-on help Granny Leung deliver her newly bought television and change the broken light bulb. Hui depicts their developing friendship through filming their common activities such as commuting, shopping and sharing groceries. Kwaijie’s mother is hospitalized while Kwaijie is caught up in her job and unable to visit her immediately. During this time, Kwaijie and Ka-on also go to the funeral of one of their relatives. Granny Leung’s story
is also gradually revealed as she has to live alone after her only daughter died and her son-in-law remarries another woman. Later, Kwaijie accompanies Granny Leung to visit her son-in-law at the weekend. Disappointed at his euphemistic rejection to take care of her, Granny Leung eventually goes back to Tin Shui Wai when Kwaijie promises to look after her on their way back. The whole film ends up with Kwaijie, Ka-on and Granny Leung celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival together in their tiny apartment.

3.2.1 Flashback as Retrospection of Urbanization

The use of cross-cutting and flashback is noteworthy in presenting the physical and emotional connections between these two women with regards to Hong Kong’s changing landscape and history. At the very beginning of the film, a series of black-and-white shots of natural scenery smoothly transforms into color images of current residential high rises (figure 18 and 19). The fixed camera brings out a spatial-temporal transformation of Tin Shui Wai, where lakes are configured into lands and numerous buildings are constructed. Following this sequence, the camera turns to the congested apartment of Kwaijie and Ka-on. A picture of their daily reality is thus portrayed through the cross-cutting of Kwaijie’s work at the supermarket and Cheung Ka-on’s activities at home. This opening sequence of their daily routine simply involves a two-sentence dialogue between mother and son during their dinner. When the sentimental
music rings after Kwaijie hangs up her washed clothes, the static shot frames and lingers on the drying rack together with those public housing buildings looming behind.

Figure 18: Tin Shui Wai before land reclamation.

Figure 19: Tin Shui Wai New Town.

Granny Leung’s life gradually weaves into the film by another cross-cutting of her daily activities and Kwaijie. The character of Granny Leung is depicted through a series of close-ups of her buying, cooking food and dining alone in her apartment. Besides these necessary activities, she is frequently postured as a silent and static figure either sitting or looking outside the window in her barely furnished apartment. The confined space somehow alters the movement of the camera and its shifting pattern. For instance, characters are frequently captured by medium close-ups or close-ups when they are at home. Also, scenes in a smaller subdivided space such as the kitchen are
filmed through more active hand-held shots. Following their movement closely, the camera thus establishes a sense of immediacy and intimacy between the characters and the audience that resembles home video.

Although the indifference and distance of human relations are frequently highlighted in metropolitan cities and contemporary lifestyles (neighborhood relationships in particular), this film excavates another possibility—a kind of emotional intimacy that derives from the physical proximity between Kwaijie and Granny Leung, which differs from traditional family relations. In other words, an alternative of kinship among these three characters is gradually built up along with their increasingly overlapped spaces. This quasi-familial relationship between Kwaijie and Granny Leung is also epitomized by the sharing of some daily necessities in portions typically designed for a nuclear or even larger family.

Both Kwaijie and Granny Leung are somehow distanced from their own relatives, either consciously or involuntarily. Kwaijie frequently withdraws herself from her mother and other relatives, which can be observed from her mother’s birthday banquet as well as Kwaijie’s intentional avoidance and delay of visiting her mother in the hospital at first. The physical locations and spaces they occupy explain this familial detachment and disintegration: Kwaijie and her brothers live in different districts in Hong Kong, which also suggests their difference in socio-economic status. In contrast to public housing estates, the place where Kwaijie’s younger brothers live is called Marina.
Cove 匡湖居, one of the most expensive residential communities in east Hong Kong. Interestingly, Tin Shui Wai, which is the title of the film, is not mentioned in the story whereas this villa community is brought up several times in their dialogues when Ka-on’s cousins invite him to their houses. The physical distance and emotional detachment permeate throughout the film until the very end. When the Mid-Autumn Festival comes, instead of traveling afar and celebrating the family reunion with her mother and relatives, Kwaijie and her son spend the evening with Granny Leung.

### 3.2.2 The Construction of Living Space

The difference in housing conditions is not the only “fractured line” that is drawn among families. Hui deploys other ordinary activities and details to complement the construction of living space. The Chinese idiom “people’s basic needs 衣食住行,” meaning clothing, food, housing and transportation, is immediately invoked as a lived experience and deployed as a significant narrative device to enrich the simple and monotonous storyline. Szeto’s article on the marginality of Ann Hui’s oeuvre identifies Ann Hui’s cinematics of the ordinary as a responsive and tender gesture that serves her subject matter. Furthermore, Szeto argues that Hui’s works should be read against the grain of Hong Kong cinema studies, which constantly adopt the 1997 Handover as a dominant viewpoint. Based on Szeto’s analysis, I want to elaborate more on this cinematic style of everyday life with this Chinese idiom, and how such basic needs
constitute Lefebvre’s notion of “fractured line” that is invisible in a sense that it becomes too mundane and accustomed to being noticed.

With the public housing high-rises of Tin Shui Wai looming in the background, food and clothing are brought to the foreground to indicate slight changes in Kwaijie and Ka-on’s uneventful life. Scenes with food are basically all centered on their dining at home, and the table thus creates an intimate space for dialogue and a stage for ordinary life: various ways of cooking eggs (as a symbol to indicate a continuity in their daily routine) while some special cuisines including mushrooms given by Granny Leung and the leftovers they brought back from family dinner outsides (as clues of some deviations from their routine). Moreover, clothing might again serve as an indicator of social inequality given that Kwaijie and Ka-on have no need of folding their clothes whereas Ka-on’s cousin complains that their housemaid is bad at folding clothes neatly. As for transportation, characters in the movement are framed either walking or taking a bus. Hui includes a pair of detailed point-of-view shots when Kwaijie accompanies Granny Leung to visit her son-in-law but eventually returns to Tin Shui Wai on a double-decker bus.

Another noticeable component of urban life that entails a subtle yet glaring existence throughout the film is the light, or more specifically, the incandescent lamp in the apartment. The lamp not only embodies a physical improvement of Granny Leung’s living space but also suggests the characters’ newly emerged quasi-familial relations.
The presence of kindhearted Kwaijie and her son enhances Granny Leung’s living conditions since they help her set up the television and fix the broken light bulb in the kitchen. Spectators can easily recall the previous sequence of the cross-cutting of Kwaijie and Granny Leung’s daily life, in which this lonely old woman resorts to a makeshift flashlight when she cooks her dinner. Furthermore, it might not be a coincidence that the incandescent lamp even functions as a visual substitute for the full moon on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival. The camera tilts up and moves beyond the scene of the three sharing a pomelo after their dinner, eventually anchoring itself on the window, where the reflection of the lamp is shown on the glass together with a cluster of public housing buildings outside as the backdrop.

Throughout the film, the camera also constantly creates a parallel between the interior of the apartment and the monotonous façade of these public housing complexes, which is quite similar to the comparison of Benny Lam and Lagrèze’s works. There are several scenes in which the camera suddenly turns away from the protagonists and presents these high-rises that accommodate thousands of families, reminding spectators of the commonality of this way of living. Most of these scenes appear at night when the darkness further contrasts those numerous gleaming lights from each household.

In addition to these cinematic representations of space, Ann Hui’s preference for flashbacks adds another reflective layer to the narrative structure by introducing both personal and collective memory accompanied by sentimental music. As Abbas argues,
Ann Hui’s use of flashback does not suggest the stability of the past but rather a “dismantling of nostalgia” (Abbas 19). The temporal disparity is structured through corresponding spatial configuration. For instance, Kwaijie receives a call from her cousin about the funeral while the camera remains in the kitchen when their dialogue happens off-screen. What immediately followed this sequence is a scene triggered by a pair of jeans of Kwaijie’s deceased husband, which she decides to leave on the trash bin in the corridor. This is also another instance of clothing as cinematics of everyday life. The camera moves away from the close-up of Kwaijie, who almost burst into tears but eventually holds it back. With merely one-third of the frame capturing Kwaijie in hesitation and sadness, her restraining emotions stand in sharp contrast to the ensuing flashback of Kwaijie’s own memory of her husband’s funeral, at which she could not help crying.

Another flashback of a younger Kwaijie is introduced through Kwaijie’s hospitalized mother with a series of black-and-white footage of a group of female workers in a textile factory. Kwaijie’s mother’s narration blending into these historical photographs reveals to both spectators and Ka-on the difficulties of a diligent young female who supports her brothers’ education abroad in the 1960s Hong Kong. Kwaijie thus epitomizes one of those anonymous heroines who contribute to Hong Kong’s economic takeoff since the 1950s. The contradiction of past and present presented by a
series of flashbacks thus register a spatial juxtaposition of Kwaijie’s working place, the textile factory and the fruit section of a supermarket.

The story of Kwaijie somehow echoes another female character in Allen Fong’s *Father and Son*, in which the male protagonist’s sister also has to drop out of school to support her brother studying overseas. This intriguing continuation across films offers a critical reflection of Hong Kong’s history as a whole from a female perspective.

In contrast to the opening sequence of the construction of public housing buildings, the ending sequence is somehow reversed when the lively celebrating scene of the Mid-Autumn Festival in a public park fades into static black-and-white footage. These two-way superimpositions of the past and the present serve more as a spatial structure instead of a chronological one, encouraging a reevaluation of memory and experience in personal and collective terms regarding the irreversible rapid urbanization we have seen from the beginning of this film.

### 3.3 Night and Fog: The Mapping of Gendered Space

Adapted from a real murder-suicide in 2004, this film begins with the female protagonist’s acquaintance in women’s shelters watching the news coverage of this murder on television. Using an abundance of flashbacks, the camera travels back and forth between two temporalities—the police’s interrogations of people who know the deceased couple and the personal memory of the female protagonist, Wong Hui-ling.
After marrying an elder Hong Kong man who depends on social assistance and subsidies, Hui-ling is able to reside in Hong Kong legally as a new immigrant from mainland China. Yet her new life gets even harsher due to domestic violence. Her husband Lee Sum always expresses his paranoid suspicion that his young wife would betray and abandon him, and such paranoia drives him to violent abuse towards Hui-ling. During one quarrel and fight, Hui-ling is expelled from the apartment, a neighboring housewife Mrs. Au helps her consult a local council, and Hui-ling is sent to a women’s shelter later. In the temporary shelter, she meets and befriends a co-habitant named Lily, who is also from Sichuan Province. Social workers and organizations try to mediate between this couple and solve the conflict in a less costly way through persuading Hui-ling to reconcile with her husband. All measures turn out to be inefficient and Hui-ling has to go back to Shenzhen with her daughters to stay with her sisters. Lee Sum crosses the border illegally, threatening her with self-injury. However, as soon as Hui-ling returns to their apartment she is injured and sent back to the shelter a second time. This time, Lee Sum intimidates Hui-ling to go home by threatening their daughters’ safety. When Hui-ling asks the police for an escort home, she is discriminated against and refused, which forces her to confront her husband alone. Back to this congested apartment again, Hui-ling is killed by Lee Sum before he proceeds to kill their two daughters and tries to pass as the victim by stabbing himself after he calls the police.
In Doreen Massey’s discussion of space/place and the construction of gender relations, “spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood” (Massey 179). The privacy and interiority of the home ironically render it an effective locus for domestic violence. The limitation of women’s mobility, according to Massey, is “the limitation on identity on the other” in terms of both physical and cultural aspects (179). Warrington also points out in her article that domestic violence is generally regarded as outside the concerns of wider society because it takes place within the confines of private space (Warrington 365). Home, which is supposed to be a space of comfort and security, now turns into a space of sheer violence. Women confined within this space are constantly subject to spatial restriction and structural violence resulting from patriarchy. At the end of the film, the chain hanging on the door further highlights such danger derived from within that is secluded from the public and other’s help.

For Hui-ling, the spatial restriction becomes even more striking given that she has to live in her husband’s apartment in the public housing complex. Having nowhere to go, Hui-ling ends up sitting beside the road after being beaten and raped by Lee Sum. Massey discusses how women’s mobility is restricted by men in different ways: from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply “out of place” (148). Hui-ling not only suffers from domestic violence, but also experiences cultural discrimination derived from her new immigrant identity during their interactions.
Another unsettling sequence in this film follows right after Hui-ling is raped by Lee Sum and sits beside the road, where she meets another woman who is also from mainland China and lives in one of these public housing buildings in Tin Shui Wai. Praising the fresh air from the wetland park nearby, this woman concludes that life in Hong Kong is better than her previous life in mainland China, which starkly contrasts Hui-ling’s life under the menace of domestic violence. More disturbingly, it is merely a nostalgia for Hui-ling to go back to her hometown in mainland China, a backward village she once escaped, not to mention that her parents implicitly connive at Lee Sum’s violence and exploitation towards their daughters.

It is intriguing how Lee Sum’s divided personality is portrayed through the contrasting private and public spaces. The scene in which Hui-ling is expelled from the apartment with her two daughters is shot from one end of the corridor. Initially, spectators can only see some personal items such as clothes and toothbrushes being thrown out fiercely. Then Hui-ling is forced outside while Lee Sum smashes and locks the door. However, when their neighbor Mrs. Au happens to go home and provides help, the cross-cuttings between the anxious and ferocious Lee Sum within the apartment and the helpless Hui-ling outside the door further highlights this spatial demarcation between the private and public space. The exposure to the public forces Lee Sum to maintain a peaceful pretense whereas it also irritates Lee Sum to adopt even more extreme actions towards Hui-ling. In this regard, such spatial demarcation does
not equal a contradiction, given that inhabitants inevitably share certain public spaces with their neighbors in apartment life.

Bidisha Banerjee also discusses the contrasting depiction of private and public spaces in this film. Using Freud’s notion of unheimlich, she argues that Lee’s public masquerade as a loving father and domestic brutality can be seen as a political allegory of Hong Kong’s schizophrenic postcolonial identity in relation to mainland China (Banerjee 525). She further contends that outdoor spaces surrounded by greenery such as the women’s shelter and Hui-ling’s hometown are the opposite of Lee’s apartment by offering a maternal and nurturing environment. While her thorough reading of Hui-ling as the Other to Hong Kong society reveals an insightful parallel between genders and spaces, I would rather provide an alternative reading different from her perspective on the seemingly contrasting rural and urban space by directing the attention to natural scenery, more specifically, the bamboo forest in Hui-ling’s hometown village in the rural area of Sichuan Province, and explore how this mise-en-scène contributes to the film in terms of content and aesthetics. Bearing symbolic meanings of tenacity and uprightness, bamboo is intertwined with the living space in China. For instance, the renowned poet Su Shi 蘇軾 once wrote: “I would rather plant bamboos surrounding my house than have meat in my meal.” (寧可食無肉，不可居無竹。) While the presence of bamboo is

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2 Su Shi 蘇軾. At Secluded Monk’s Emerald Bamboo Pavilion 於僧綠筠軒. All translations are my own.
traditionally related to a positive image of living space, it seems to function as an opposite role in this film.

The sequence of bamboo forest in Sichuan Province appears three times throughout the whole film, interestingly mirroring the forest of public housing complexes, which are not quite amenable to dwell in. When the camera navigates through the bamboo forest as well as the assemblage of residential buildings, spectators can experience a striking visual similarity between these two landscapes in terms of their overwhelming height and density, albeit there is a gigantic gap between them regarding the process of urbanization. Another similar characteristic lies in their fast-growingness. In Ackbar Abbas’s analysis of Hong Kong architecture, he brings up three categories to classify Hong Kong’s buildings and architectures, which are Merely Local, the Placeless international buildings, and the Anonymous urban vernacular. While the first type tells a story, the second type makes a phallocentric point (Abbas 83). These two types of construction carve out the most noticeable part in the skyline and the profile of Hong Kong as a global city. However, it is these indistinguishable residential buildings that constitute the majority of the city by accommodating its inhabitants in either congested or spacious ways. These residential high-rises exactly resemble the forests of bamboo which “replicate themselves whenever there is a site available” (Abbas 85), springing up and constantly changing urban landscape. While Hui presents the “visual anonymity” of these buildings by filming the interior and density on the one hand, she
also detaches these residential high-rises from this anonymity and silence by navigating the camera to approach these negligible voices and subjectivities.

The relation between bamboo and buildings is far more than that: bamboo is frequently used as a construction material in ancient China and other areas in Asia. In the case of Hong Kong, this city has a long history of using bamboo for seasonal Cantonese opera theaters and scaffolding. The well-known skyscrapers such as Hong Kong Shanghai Bank are framed in ancient bamboo scaffolding, and this interesting phenomenon is mentioned by Abbas as “an image of history as palimpsest” (Abbas 27). In Night and Fog, the juxtaposition of bamboo and buildings might be considered as a cinematic palimpsest that simultaneously presents the overlapping of rural and urban scenes.

Does not such correspondence allude to Hui-ling’s tragic and fatalistic dead end? Fog in bamboo forest is akin to the night in the public housing buildings of Tin Shui Wai, both of which symbolize predicaments in which the marginalized such as women are suffocated. The first dream sequence of Hui-ling’s wandering in the bamboo (figure 20) is immediately followed by the sequence in which she is abruptly woken up by Lee Sum and then suffers from his sexual assault in the apartment. The second framing involves a similar mise-en-scène, and yet the walking girl becomes Hui-ling’s younger sister. Lee Sum’s rape of Hui-ling’s younger sisters happens in the bamboo forest whereas his murders of Hui-ling and their two daughters are committed in the public
housing apartment. The third scene appears instantly after Hui-ling is stabbed by Lee Sum and falls on the ground (figure 21). The camera gradually tilts down from a high angle shot of the bamboo forest, but this time in a rather dim and ghastly atmosphere alongside the sound of Lee’s savage beating of animals in a sack soaked in blood. All these sequences clearly indicate how the framing of bamboo is intimately associated with precariousness and violence.

![Figure 20: The bamboo forests in a dreamlike flashback.](image)

![Figure 21: The bamboo forest in a flashback right after the murder.](image)

Staging two contradictory scenarios of a backward village and metropolitan city and yet creating a visual similarity, Ann Hui further reveals and adds another layer of geographical unevenness and social inequality through Hui-ling’s words, “I have never been to Victoria Harbor” (*Night and Fog*). This physical rupture within a city is brought to the foreground at the very end of this film by juxtaposing the marching
demonstration against domestic violence on streets in Central and the ongoing murder in Tin Shui Wai new town. Through constructing hierarchical spaces within a city, the film thus registers multilayered inequalities in terms of economy, culture and gender. For instance, by constantly introducing herself as “Mrs. Lee,” Hui-ling regards herself as a social subordinate to her husband. The deprivation of women’s sociability and emotions is transcoded into a blatant spatial restriction when Hui-ling is rejected by the official to have her own apartment in public housing estates and live independently.

Compared to *The Way We Are*, this film touches upon a variety of spaces, including Tin Shui Wai and the secret women’s shelter in Hong Kong, rural areas in Sichuan Province, and Shenzhen. Yet for a new immigrant like Hui-ling who constantly feels “out of place,” none of these spaces can guarantee her a real abode or a secure home. The prevalent narrative that a new house frequently signifies a better life and brighter future is completely subverted in this film. Lee Sum, a construction worker who renovates Hui-ling’s old house in the village and is able to accommodate her in a metropolitan city like Hong Kong becomes the murderer who ruthlessly deprives her of life.

In addition to those apartments and spaces, there is another interesting thread that not only indicates the very essence of urban life but also ties these two films together through the “cinematics of everyday life.” In both films, the camera constantly frames characters in poverty through their dialogues and movements pivoting around
money and prices. In Simmel’s article about the metropolis and mental life, he contends that an intellectualistic mentality and a money economy construct a reciprocity in the formation of both the modern mind and metropolis. Rather than claiming this fact explicitly through the character little Cheung in Chan’s film, Ann Hui blends this detail into everyday dialogues implicitly. In Granny Leung’s case, she buys gold jewelry for the family of her son-in-law in exchange for some potential caring and support; it’s a transaction that suggests relationships and emotional attachment are frequently assigned economic value. On the other hand, Granny Leung’s action of removing the price tag on a pack of dried mushrooms in order to reciprocate Kwaijie’s kindness can be read as an attempt to eliminate the equation of money with human relations. In Night and Fog, Lee Sum and Hui-ling fight over their daughters’ birthday fee, cheaper meals in restaurant, and so on. These details blatantly reveal the destitution and vulnerabilities of these characters while they also provide another version of Hong Kong in which the alluring gloss of luxury consumption is stripped away. It thus allows a site to reflect on the prevalent value system in a homogenized space that is dominated by capital.

3.4 The Apartment Plot as Narrative, Mapping as Spectatorship

Through studying public housing estates and its cinematic representations in Hui’s companion films, I argue that such space as a genre and narrative device is productive by inspiring us to reflect on Lefebvre’s notion of housing and residence. The
“apartment plot” might be a productive cinematic device to discuss such social space and its representations. This term comes from Pamela Robertson Wojcik’s book on urban living and American film from 1945-1975, referring to “narratives in which the apartment figures as a central device” (The Apartment Plot 3). Although in Wojcik’s studies, she distinguishes the differences between public housing projects funded by the government and her definition of “apartments,” which are privately owned, some spatial configurations are still applicable in the analysis of an apartment in the public housing estates, exemplifying another philosophy of urbanism that might not revolve around the middle class. While not completely complying with the definition, I contend that there are several points that can be drawn from Wojcik’s observations of “apartment plot,” which are more succinctly summarized in her introduction of The Apartment Complex. For instance, the apartment contextualizes urbanism within the apartment by mapping the protagonist’s identity onto his or her spatial location (The Apartment Complex 4-5). In cases of The Way We Are and Night and Fog, apartments in public housing estates are associated with the marginalized and underprivileged population: old people who live alone, new immigrants, people who live off social assistance and subsidies, and so forth. In this regard, Granny Leung’s apartment, Kwaijie’s apartment, or Lee’s apartment function as the microcosm of Hong Kong society that is less recognizable in official narratives, offering a more concrete and realistic mapping of the grassroots space of Hong Kong society.
Another characteristic of “the apartment plots” lies in its partial obfuscation of the private and public space, which also stimulates a variety of encounters, even including voyeurism and eavesdropping. “The urban is defined in the apartment plot via simultaneity and synchronicity. Simultaneity allows us to see characters and apartments as separated but also creates the conditions of encounter” (The Apartment Complex 6). It is in the public space such as the corridor and elevator that Kwaijie and Granny Leung can encounter again and further learn about each other. Such simultaneity and synchronicity are often achieved through cinematic devices such as cross-cuttings, as we frequently observe in these two films. Furthermore, the gaze in the apartment constitutes another important element in urban life, which might suddenly disrupt the clear-cut boundary between private and public spaces. In Night and Fog, it is through neighbor Mrs. Au’s almost voyeuristic gaze that the interrogation by the police can continue. Spectators are also given a glimpse into the Lees’ apartment despite the violence from Hui-ling’s perspective.

Nonetheless, as these encounters between neighbors happen constantly, the question emerges again: Does Ann Hui’s diptych instead offer a counter argument of the notion of “the threshold of sociability?” While admittedly these interactions register a certain degree of sociability, the two films might also inadvertently register a critique of the social hierarchy and segregation engendered by the abstract space. The quasi-familial relationship between Kwaijie and Granny Leung can be conceived as a tactic to
resist such segregation, and in Hui-ling’s case, Mrs. Au’s help eventually fails to change Hui-ling’s life. Hui-ling merely gains limited sociability and independence after moving in the women’s shelter, and yet her inaccessibility to the central area of Hong Kong makes the socio-spatial disjuncture and a critique of hierarchical space more explicit.

Moreover, the two films revolving around Tin Shui Wai further raise questions concerning spectatorship as a spatial experience. Apart from the cinematic spaces, the viewing experience itself resembles traveling across a myriad of places and locations. However, this kind of tourism distinguishes itself from the experience that a tourist usually obtains from a global city renowned for gigantic shopping malls or plazas. In *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno explores the intersection of art, architecture and cinema spanning a variety of academic territories to infuse film theory with new insights. She compares film’s spectatorship with “a practice of space that is dwelt in, as the built environment” (Bruno 62). She continues to pinpoint “a multiplicity of perspectives” embedded in such spectatorship ranging from a panoramic view of the city to a flâneur’s experience of engaging the intricate network of streets. Offering depiction of marginalized people’s lived experience, both Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s films not only investigate from a perspective akin to Benny Lam’s photograph but also expanding it from a flâneur’s perspective to a flâneuse’s one by exploring female experiences and mobilities, not just focusing on men wandering in the city.
This strategy of perception also heavily relies on the narrative of the broken family and domestic space, which serve as another intriguing dimension to investigate both Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s works. In Chan’s films, broken family and estrangement recurs accompanied with the spatial distortions. The claustrophobic living space is frequently juxtaposed with some monumental architecture to create a disruption. Although Ann Hui’s two films deal with broken families as well, *The Way We Are* explores the possible formation of a new type of family premised on spatial proximity instead of an absolute estrangement. In contrast to Chan’s sarcastic use of monumental architecture, the audience can seldom see a renowned landmark of Hong Kong in Hui’s films except for a plain and undecorated living space in the continuation of quotidian life.
4. Conclusion

Both Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s films aim for neither a nostalgic reconstruction of Hong Kong’s old cityscapes nor a complete subversion of representations of space. The lived reality of the past is not evoked through an uncritical lens but an unstable perspective that deliberately unsettles the memory. Also, what they have revealed through their visual representations brings forward a disruption of the binary opposition between “global (or conceived) space to one side and fragmented (or directly experienced) space to the other” (Lefebvre 356). Inhabitants’ lived experiences are interwoven with the homogeneous space that is characterized by urban planning and monumental architecture, which resembles fragmented pieces of a map to approach a broader picture— “for space ‘is’ whole and broken, global and fractured, at one and the same time. Just as it is at once conceived, perceived, and directly lived” (356). By featuring various types of spaces and contradictions, Fruit Chan and Ann Hui capture and visualize the dynamics between center and periphery, production and everyday life on a transregional and even transnational scale, connecting those seemingly fragmented and contradictory spaces and realities. It is through using space as a thought and action can the contradictions of space make the contradiction of social relations operative (Lefebvre 365).

Hong Kong as a social space undoubtedly poses multiple questions in terms of the notion of housing and dwelling in a metropolitan context. The sense of transitory
and precarious does not simply vanish with the disappearing space eclipsed by the advent of the Handover, instead, it might be reinforced by the complicity between the neoliberal way of governance and the development of globalization. The hierarchical relations produced by colonial space continue to transform and are replaced by a new set of social ladders as a result of the division of labor and the influx of immigrants. “The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity, implying the possibility of accumulation,” and such characteristics confirm the dialectical centrality of the place of dwelling, especially urban space (Lefebvre 101). Zooming in to explore the marginal space in contrast to official discourses, Fruit Chan and Ann Hui’s cameras foreground a varying range of subjects, which also envisage a possibility of the production of new social spaces that counter against representations of space, offering a vantage point of narrating between strategic and tactical level, between marginality and centrality.

Therefore, this thesis has tried to tease out different representational spaces and locations throughout these films to grasp a unique perspective on Hong Kong’s urban space, especially its underprivileged population that is less recognized compared to its glamorous spectacle. Space, as well as architecture with their own materialities and visualities thus become a powerful entry point to probe a great variety of discourses and social problems. While the proliferation of high rises casts shadows on the Enlightenment’s utopian ideal of transparency, it also should be noticed that such architecture also generates living bodies and users with its own distinctive traits and
lived experience, which opens up a new space for subjectivities to negotiate with and use their built environment.

Apart from the long-lasting housing issue, more recent incidents also radically change inhabitants’ perspective on urban space, and they are still shaping people’s lives now. For instance, protests on the streets constitute another type of networks that function against the city’s usual operation, which renders daily encounters impossible even before the outbreak of pandemic. During the pandemic, the housing difficulties in Hong Kong are becoming more dreadful whereas the living conditions also fuel the transmission of the virus. Spatial practices like quarantine register another layer of complexity in addition to this already homogeneous and hierarchical living space. Moreover, the angst and fear are no longer merely produced by claustrophobic space and its influence on the corresponding disoriented subjects but increasingly embodied and amplified through these congested and cramped living spaces that substantially increase the risk of being infected. Living spaces such as subdivided flats, coffin homes, or cages expose their inhabitants to danger without any physical protection once someone in this room is infected, further exacerbating the living circumstances of underprivileged people.

Space associated with the operation of power again clearly marks out the dichotomy between inside and outside on top of all social hierarchies, which is not an uncommon practice of biopolitics. The regulation of population and the spatial
distribution of living bodies are essentially problems of regulating the urban space and its deriving organizations and institutions. Confronted with the imbrication of representations of space, representational space and spatial practices, it is through forming an epistemological framework of space that we are able to approach the relations between these newly emerging spaces and human subjects in new historical realities.
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