Scene Analysis of Chungking Express
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ABSTRACT
This article is a formal analysis of a scene from Chungking Express in which the leading female protagonist from the first half of the film exacts revenge upon her lover. This article examines the director's use of mise-en-scene, cinematography, and sound within the scene and how the director uses these stylistic choices to tie this section to the broader theme of love and its effect on people's choices, actions, and lives in general.

Keywords
mise-en-scene, setting, costume, makeup, lighting, staging, space, time, cinematography, sound

1. INTRODUCTION
Chungking Express, directed by Wong Kar-wai in 1994, is a tale of the pains, troubles, and benefits of love. The movie is split into two parts with the main focus of each being a male and female protagonist. The male protagonist in each is a police officer in Hong Kong, while the two female protagonists are very different from each other. The first part of the film tells the story of a police officer who's experiencing heartache while simultaneously telling the story of a woman who deals drugs and is also experiencing a sort of heartache from the knowledge that her lover is cheating on her with another woman. The focus of this paper is the scene in which love drives her to take action and kill her cheating lover.

2. MISE-EN-SCENE
Mise-en-scene is the collective term for a majority of the actor and setting related concepts of a film and/or scene[1]. The term mise-en-scene is French and is borrowed from the theatrical term of the same name that was used to specify the setup of the characters, props, and the stage in plays. In a film, mise-en-scene encompasses all things dealing with the setting, the costumes of characters, the makeup of characters, the lighting of the scene, the staging of the scene, the space created by the images within a scene, and the play with time that may occur within the scene. Because of its broad range of subjects, mise-en-scene is vital to the making of meanings within a film. The mise-en-scene in this particular scene of Chungking Express is used to portray the irony and coldness of the protagonists change of feelings for her lover and her final resolution of the situation.

2.1.1 Setting
The overall setting of this movie is China, specifically Hong Kong. The particular scene that is being analyzed herein takes place in a restaurant and bar where the female protagonist's lover, and the woman he is cheating on her with, works. Outside of the bar it is pouring down rain. Yet the inside is cozy, warm looking and decently filled with people.

The inside is comprised of three areas. There is the full inside with a bar and dancing area near a jukebox and tables. There is a back room where the protagonist's lover is often seen making out with his new lover. There is also the back area which opens to a long hallway leading outside.

The rain outside of the restaurant is very significant. It provides a great contrast with the warm, happy-looking inside. The shots of the rainy outside casts a foreboding feeling on the entire situation. It adds a sort of suspense because the viewer has been watching the protagonists lover with this woman and sympathizes with the protagonist who appears to have had all of her plans go wrong during the movie.

The drab outside of the restaurant, drenched in the pouring rain, expresses this feeling of pain that the protagonist feels, the powerlessness of being in love despite knowing the sins of the lover. The caged gate over the outside door expresses the helplessness the protagonist has been faced with up to this point. It also symbolizes the unreachable former lover who has moved on despite the longing of the protagonist.

The inside is an ironic mesh of Chinese and American cultures. Emphasizing the American lover's need for surrounding Americanization. He has 50's style bar stools and a classic in appearance jukebox. He wants Americanization of everything, even his women as exemplified by the blonde wig worn by both the new lover and his former lover (the protagonist).

The back hallway, which leads to the outside is also drab, like the front. The worn down, gritty backside of the restaurant is symbolic of the grittiness underlying the lover and his want for a facade within his restaurant and himself. The truth underneath it all is that he is gritty, dark, and out of place. He's demanding and wants things a certain way, no matter what the repercussions.

![Figure 1: The gritty, caged back room of the bar and restaurant. The cage, trashed, and scattered surroundings are exemplary of the true personality of the lover](image)

2.2.2 Costume
The costumes in this scene directly express the personalities of each of the characters. The lover is scene at first naked, exposed, foreshadowing the exposure of his personality through the setting of his establishment. He soon changes into a black shirt, as if...
covering his raw, true self with the facade of a professional man. He appears overdressed compared to the other people in most of the shots, especially the costume of his new lover. He also appears dressed for a funeral, ironically signaling his upcoming demise.

The lover's new woman is scantily dressed in what appears to be a tourist-like flowery dress. The most striking part of her costume is the blonde wig, which mimics the protagonist's wig and further seals the idea of her being the lover's replacement of the protagonist. The warm colors of her dress reflect the irony expressed in the setting. She is made up for the lover alone. His will for Americanization has forced this projection on to the woman, who appears as a slave to his ideals.

The lighting in this scene is used to tie together every meaning aforementioned. The opening of the scene has the two lovers make out with each other surrounded in white light with black to all sides. This emphasizes their anatomy being viewed with no visible emotion and emphasizes how outwardly cold she has become[2]. The audience sympathizes with how she must feel after all that has happened to her in the movie, but she is stone-cold emotionally. A stone-cold killer, yet free, in the end. A symbol of her freedom is the loss of the blonde wig, and in the end we see for more than a moment, just the color of her real hair, black.

2.32.3 Makeup
The most noticeable use of makeup in this scene is on the protagonist. She seems to have nearly caked on the makeup to lighten her skin. She also has the stereotypical Marilyn Monroe red lipstick to go with the blonde hair. All of these elements serve to emphasize her attempts at becoming more American for her lover. Yet, in the end she realizes that she is easily exchangeable. So, in the final parts of the scene she is shown in all blue, making her red lipstick appear a cold blue. A blue as cold as she has become[3].

2.4 Lighting
The lighting in this scene is used to tie together every meaning aforementioned. The opening of the scene has the two surrounded in white light with black to all sides. This emphasizes the naked body of the lover and his raw exposure. The inside of the restaurant is bathed in warm colors that force the costume of the new lover to blend into the environment. This blending of color places the replacement of the protagonist into the same place as the interior of this restaurant, placing the woman as a facade made for the man, just like the jukebox, and the bar stools. She is just an object in the frame, owned by the man, just like her surroundings. This objectification is further driven home by her dancing and the music as well.

The blue lighting of the front and the back areas symbolize the cold end of the relationship between the protagonist and the lover. The blue light surrounds and encompasses everything. Even the bright dress of the replacement becomes monochrome when she steps out front. The blue light also expresses the emotions of the protagonist. Despite her outward cool composure, she is inwardly in a deep blue pain. The use of blue light helps the audience empathize with her sense of helplessness and the coldness that will drive her to violently end the relationship.

The blue light of the back hallway also adds a stark contrast to the violence that is displayed. Somehow the blood being bathed in blue and the sunglasses being bathed in blue turns the violence into an inevitable, sterile act, the protagonist is at a cold peace with herself because she has broken from the facade of Americanism. The final shot of her shows her formerly red lips as cold as death because of the light, with only the red of her sunglasses shining to show any sense of vibrancy or emotion. In the final shot the blue lighting also serves to contrast with the catalyst that set in to motion her final means to an end, the bright yellow cat food can.

There are also a lot of hard edges created by the lights in the back hallways. These combine with the rigidity and grittiness of the outside area which is symbolic of the true personality of the man. It also pulls from and references the film noir genre, which seems to be a strong influence on the film as a hole. The influence of film noir can be seen with the violent solution chosen by the protagonist who can be seen as femme fatale that is dynamically changed to be an emotional attachment of the audience.

2.42.5 Staging
The staging and acting has mostly the actors responding to cues that progress the flow of the narrative. Some particularly appealing parts are the opening with the man making out with the woman. Despite such a passionate engagement her acting, his costume, and the white light, portray the situation as more of an abuse, with the man exposed as a contrasting raw vulgarity, rather than a naked, white innocent person. The mindless dancing of the replacement woman is also interesting as it emphasizes her objectification within the image and the characters lack of self worth. The scene of the shooting is interesting because the camera matches the eyeline of the man, placing the viewer for a moment in his perspective as we see just a blurry image of the woman while she fires, he seems oblivious to his wrongs and the reasons why she is killing him. The running of the customers out past the still dancing woman and into the rain is also an interesting staging moment because they are more or less the faceless symbols of the woman reliving herself of the fake environment within the bar into the cold reality outside.
2.52.6 Space
For the most part this scene creates very claustrophobic spaces. The outside of the restaurant seems very flat, the opening hallway is almost two cramped for the two to fit into, as is the dancing area in front of the jukebox. Even the back hallways seems fairly narrow. The creation of such claustrophobic spaces is complemented with the director's use of framing. He clearly frames the two characters in the hallway with plenty of black surrounding wall. He also gets a tight angle on the woman while she dances, even adjusting the camera to fit in more of her body at one point. The adjustment helps to objectify the woman, and shrink the space she is taking up.

The back hallways also seem very cramped. They are even vertically cramped as the protagonist walks towards the white nothingness near the end of the scene. The director uses framing and space to flatten all of the areas into cramped or 2 dimensional areas. A good example of the two dimensional area is the pan shot down to the zoom in on the cat food.

The creation of such cramped spaces emphasizes the extreme buildup of emotional energy that is hidden within the protagonist. It assists in showing the viewer the emotional buildup that she hides behind her makeup, sunglasses, and wig. This is why, when the emotion is finally blasting out with the gunshots the camera pans around the corner showing a more robust space. This is also why the protagonist appears to be walking into a white infinity of space at the end, yet the camera comes back to focus on the cramped space and catalyst for the emotion as a referential echo to what has just occurred by showing the cat food can.

2.62.7 Time
Anachronisms are only experienced three times in this scene. As she is shooting the man it is shown in slow motion. The slow motion here contrasts and emphasizes the quick violence of the gun shot because it is immediately followed with the man being shot and collapsing in real time. This shot also shows the slight realization the man has that his killer is his former lover. After the gun shot the woman is shown walking away in a jittery slow motion. This walking away is juxtaposed with the real time leaving of the patrons creating a contrast that shows the woman's cool attitude, as if this event had to occur for her to progress in life. Also, time freezes for a moment as the woman is walking away, freezing a steal frame of the woman's black hair for a few moments. This freeze frame shows that the woman is now free to be herself and live without the man.

3.CINEMATOGRAPHY
Most of the camera work serves to create a cramped space within the frame. The camera work also helps create the juxtaposition necessary for the anachronisms within the scene. Framing is very important in this part of the film as well because of its influence on the mise-en-scene and its ability to add realism by being shaky and handheld, giving the gritty realism of a documentary film.

The director mainly frames the lover in the middle of the screen and the many surrounding hallways. He also frames the replacement woman in the middle of the frame using the environment and extras as well. This creates a noticeable change when the final parts of the scene are shown because, with the introduction of the protagonist into the scene, the framing changes to a full frame with characters and areas taking up the entire frame and the final shot of the woman having her head taking up the entire frame and ending up with just her hair on the right side of the screen.

The freezing of time with her hair on the right side of the screen creates an abstract composition of blue to the left and a black triangle on the right. This abstraction of blue and black helps to emphasize the inner emotions that reality is bringing to the protagonist and the outer coldness that is shown to the camera. It makes her return to the freedom of her self be not a joyous moment, but one gained through great strife[4].

![Figure 3: The frozen composition above is the last image of the protagonist. The abstract representation of her with this frozen image helps to drive home the pains that had to lead her to her inevitable freedom through violence.]

4.SOUND
The sound of this section is mostly non-existent at first and all diegetic. The beginning is filled solely with dialog. This is soon contrasted with the sound of the rain while outside which brings to mind the inner turmoil of the protagonist. Soon the jukebox is playing a beach tune that greatly contrasts with the emotions of the lover and the protagonists. Yet, the lyrics fit perfectly as an ironic foreshadowing of the man's coming death, “It's not everyday we're gonna be the same way, there must be a change somehow.” This shows the inner state of the protagonist. The lyrics are broken at this point in the song by the sounds of gunshots. The three gunshots are also confusing because he appears to only really get shot once, leaving the viewer disjointed because of the sudden to the slow-motion and otherwise silence of the actions within the scene.

The other significant sound is the kittens calling the man to his doom. These sounds echo the idea of the prowling feline. This helps to portray the protagonist as a classic femme fatale, yet when shown the cats are merely kittens. This change from prowling cat to innocent kittens is also a contrast to the violence coming from the emotionally cold protagonist. Yet, the kittens are also symbolic of the innocence the woman feels and deserves because of the man's mistreatment of her.

5.REFERENCES