

## **Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema**

Helen Hok-sze Leung

### **A Queer Undercurrent**

What use is there for me to go on treasuring you?  
Even if I hold you tight this time  
Would it not be yet another empty embrace?  
—Lin Xi, “Undercurrent” [“An yong”] (1997)

If you were in Hong Kong during 1997, you might have noticed someone humming the above song. Stanley Kwan depicts this trivial fact of life several times in the film *Hold You Tight* [*Yu huale yu duoluo*] (1998), whose title refers to the futile yet intensely desired gesture in “Undercurrent.” This popular song was animated by an undercurrent of anxiety that pervaded Hong Kong since the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. The year 1997, when sovereignty over the territory was to be transferred from British to Chinese hands, became a cultural symbol of fear and apprehension.

The feeling that nothing could be “held tight” characterized the political as well as the cultural imaginary of this period of transition. Yet Hong Kong cinema responded to this pervasive milieu of change and uncertainty in a uniquely indirect manner. In the most innovative films of this period, the postcolonial predicament appears at most as an undercurrent, a not-quite-visible force that nonetheless animates what is amply visible on-screen: sex, romance, family conflicts, underworld heroism, teenage gangsters, period drama, martial arts legends, and absurdist humor. It is perhaps appropriate that the anxiety of displacement should itself be endlessly displaced onto an ever-proliferating range of concerns that are contiguous, yet never identical or reducible, to the postcolonial predicament. One of the richest sites of this displacement is that of queer sexuality.

During the past decade, there has been a small explosion of films that, in various ways and to different degrees, challenge the heteronormative understanding of sexuality: *Swordsmen II* [*Xiao ao jianghu zhi dongfang bubai*] (1992); *Swordsmen III: East Is Red* [*Dongfang bubai zhi fengyun cai qi*] (1993); *Oh! My Three Guys* [*San ge xiang'ai de shaonian*] (1994); *He's a Woman, She's a Man* [*Jinzhi yuye*] (1994); *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man* [*Jinzhi yuye 2*] (1996); *Love and Sex among the Ruins* [*Renjian sexiang*] (1996); *Boys?* [*Jia nan jia nu*] (1996); *Hu-Du-Men* [*Hudumen*] (1996); *The Intimates* [*Zishu*] (1997); *Happy Together* [*Chun'guang zhaxie*] (1997); *Hold You Tight* [*Yu huale yu duoluo*] (1998); *A Queer Story* [*Jilao sishi*] (1998); *Portland Street Blues* [*Hongxing shisanmei*] (1998); and *Bishonen* [*Mei shaonian zhi lian*] (1999). Reviewers typically refer to these films as “gay films,” a label that is, theoretically speaking, a misnomer. From the perspective of a gay and lesbian identity politics, many of these films appear suspiciously ambiguous in their portrayal of same-sex desire. They are structured by an “epistemology of the fence,” which Maria Pramaggiore theorizes in relation to bisexuality:

The fence, in its nominal form, identifies a place of in-betweenness and indecision. Often precariously perched atop a structure that divides and demarcates, bisexual epistemologies have the capacity to reframe regimes and regions of desire by deframing and/or reframing in porous, nonexclusive ways. . . . Bisexual epistemologies—ways of apprehending, organizing, and intervening in the world that refuses one-to-one

correspondences between sex acts and identity, between erotic objects and sexualities, between identification and desire—acknowledge fluid desires and their continual construction and deconstruction of the desiring subject.<sup>1</sup>

Although bisexuality is by no means the only way to understand these new expressions of sexuality in Hong Kong cinema, the metaphor of the fence is especially appropriate for describing the ways in which desire appears in these films. Such fence-sitting impulses are understandably troubling to critics who are concerned with misrepresentations of minority groups. For example, Chau Wah-san devotes two chapters in his introductory work on queer theory to a critique of Hong Kong films that (mis)represent sexual minorities. Chau's work has been instrumental in popularizing the term *tongzhi* (comrade), a sly appropriation of the address common in Mainland China during the Maoist years. *Tongzhi* is meant to be a replacement of *tongxinglian* (homosexual) and, as an approximation of *queer*, to provide a more inclusive category of identification for sexual minorities. Chau argues that there are no "*tongzhi* films" in Hong Kong cinema, only "films about *tongzhi*."<sup>2</sup> He is making a distinction between films with queer people as their subjects and films made from a queer perspective. Such a distinction presumes a set of prescribed criteria that authorize a given representation as being legitimately queer. This adjudication over representations logically leads Chau to make a dangerous proposition in a subsequent book: "Homosexuals [*tongxingai zhe*] are not necessarily *tongzhi*. They may be phallogocentric, misogynist, racist, xenophobic, or ageist people who happen to like members of the same sex."<sup>3</sup> Chau's astonishing assumption that he—rather than the ideology of heterosexuality—could determine who qualifies to *be* queer is troubling. His use of *tongzhi* here divests the term of its specificity as a way of naming those marginalized by heteronormative ideology, regardless of their relation to other structures of oppression.

To move away from Chau's position, I analyze these new expressions of sexuality in Hong Kong films not as inferior approximations of an ideologically correct "*tongzhi* cinema," but as queerscapes. I borrow the notion of "queerscape" from Gordon Brent Ingram's study of how public space is negotiated, reclaimed, and reinvented along the fault lines of heteronormative

ideology.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the notion of a ghetto, *queerscape* does not refer to a bounded space where the normative power of heterosexuality is being kept out of its borders. Rather, Ingram defines *queerscape* as “an aspect of the landscape, a social overlay over which the interplays between assertion and marginalization of sexualities are in constant flux.”<sup>5</sup> Queerscapes refer to the contingent and tangential uses of public space by sexual minorities and to public acts and expressions of desire, eroticism, and sexuality that momentarily disrupt what heterocentric ideology assumes to be an immutable, coherent relation between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire. The notion of queerscape encompasses several important theoretical resonances of the much-debated term *queer*. First, as an expansion of the traditional constituency of “gay and lesbian,” *queer* serves as an umbrella term of description for all sexual minorities who are, in one way or another, marginalized by the normative power of heterosexuality. Queerscapes thus refer not only to gay and lesbian spaces, but also to all spaces that challenge heteronormativity. Second, as Judith Butler argues, the reclaiming of *queer* from a term of abuse to a term of self-affirmation involves citing (and hence reiterating and retaining) the injurious history it aims to reverse.<sup>6</sup> In other words, *queer* paradoxically invokes the enemy even as it seeks to undermine its power. As such, queerscapes always also inhabit heteronormative space and can never be understood in isolation from it. Finally, as Annamarie Jagose suggests, *queer* is “a ‘zone of possibilities’ always inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate.”<sup>7</sup> Queerscapes are thus not definitive habitats, but rather emergent sites of possibility, the potential of which cannot yet be properly articulated.

Hong Kong cinema is a vibrant component of a mass media that is very intertwined with other spheres of public activities, expressions, and debates. Thus the dynamics of cinematic queerscapes should be understood in relation to other forms of public discourse on queer sexuality. Consensual sex between gay men was decriminalized only recently in 1991, when the government, in a rushed battle to ensure the passage of the bill of rights, wanted to remove any legislation that might have been incompatible with the bill. The public response to this minimal legal gesture was fiercely oppositional and resulted in an intense outburst of homophobia.<sup>8</sup> Even though the hostility was directed ostensibly at gay men, the adamant defense of marriage,

family, and reproductive responsibilities clearly suggests that other perceived threats to the ideological structure of the heterosexual family would not be easily accepted. Organized attempts to ameliorate this homophobic climate and to garner further legal rights for sexual minorities were greeted with lukewarm responses even within the *tongzhi* community.<sup>9</sup> Neither traditional lobbying nor direct action activism seems to be a significant preoccupation among Hong Kong's *tongzhi* organizations, many of which are focused on social, cultural, and religious issues rather than on advocacy or activism work.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the politicized act of "coming out" is viewed with ambivalence by many in Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> Because of the combination of impossibly high rent and cultural expectations of filial piety, many adults in Hong Kong continue to live with, or in close proximity to, their parents. It is practically and emotionally traumatic to confront the consequences of coming out; it often means alienation from one's traditional family. In the absence of a strong political, legal, or social identity, sexual minorities in Hong Kong understandably do not perceive themselves as a well-defined "ethnic" group with distinct rights and interests. In such a context, the fence-sitting impulses of recent filmic representations of sexual minorities appear to be less a refusal or inability to represent an existent minority identity and more revealing of a fundamental problem—which is arguably also an interesting possibility—how to understand desire, eroticism, and sexual practices outside of the heterocentric paradigm *without* recourse to a discourse of sexual identity.

It is also important to draw attention to the ways Hong Kong's cinematic queerscapes are embedded in, at the same time that they might be disruptive of, normative culture. In contrast to the new queer cinema of the West, which is primarily the product of independent filmmaking by directors committed to a consciously radical politics, none of the previously mentioned Hong Kong films can be considered "independent" films. Because the industry depends entirely on the market, any experimentation must straddle what Pramaggiore calls the "industrial fence," that is, inroads into minority markets must be made without alienating mainstream consumers.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, unlike the great philosophical visions of the fifth-generation directors in Mainland China or the idiosyncratic experiments of Taiwan's avant-garde auteurs, even the most artistic Hong Kong films aspire first and foremost to

be marketable commodities.<sup>13</sup> Most films enjoy mainstream exposure and circulate long after their theatrical runs on legal as well as pirated releases of video cassettes and DVDs, and reach many parts of Southeast Asia and the Chinese diaspora all over the globe. Thus these films are made for and consumed by a mainstream audience that clearly, as evidenced by the commercial success of most of these films, derives pleasure from expressions of sexuality that deviate from what would be regarded as the norm. How do these films generate such spectatorial pleasure? How does such pleasure displace other problems, contradictions, and anxieties? Do these films disrupt the ideological tenets of heterosexuality, or are they finally recuperable by them? What potential effects might these films have on Hong Kong culture?

#### **A Nostalgic Queerscape: *The Intimates***

In June 1997, only a few weeks away from the handover ceremony, Jacob Cheung's *The Intimates* opened the First Hong Kong International Film Exhibit, an event that, in addition to promoting local films to distributors at home and abroad, was a symbolic assertion of optimism and confidence about Hong Kong's further market leadership in the industry. Cheung believed that his film was chosen because of its "Chinese flavor."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, *The Intimates* is a nostalgic period drama, rich in local color and ethnographic details of southern Chinese village life in the 1930s and 1940s. Considering the nostalgia fever rampant in Hong Kong during the prehandover period, it is not surprising that a film focusing on "local" Chinese culture would be given the honor of representing the industry. What is surprising is that *The Intimates* is a story about lesbian desire. How does the film forge a link between the story of a pair of star-crossed lesbian lovers and the nostalgia of Hong Kong at the juncture of the postcolonial transition?

Set in the Cantonese county Shunde in the years immediately before the Japanese invasion during World War II, the main plot of *The Intimates* tells the love story of Yuhuan (Carina Lau) and Yihuan (Charlie Yeung). Yuhuan is a courtesan who becomes the eighth wife of a silk factory owner. She leaves the marriage after her husband pimps her to a warlord to close a business deal. Yihuan is a peasant woman who, to escape from an arranged marriage to an old man, has joined a "self-combed" sisterhood and taken a vow to

renounce marriage. The two women develop an intense bond and face many ordeals together before they finally consummate their passion. However, they become separated in the chaos during the Japanese invasion. The film's subplot is set in present-day Hong Kong, where a young architect, Hui (Theresa Lee), is going through a painful breakup. Hui must escort a spirited old woman (Kuei A-lei)—the maid who brought up Hui's father—back to Guangdong to reunite with a “relative” from whom she was separated during the war. As the film crosscuts between the plots, the old woman's identity is deliberately left ambiguous. She is known only as Auntie Huan, and the audience identifies her alternately as Yihuan and Yuhuan. The conclusion reveals that she is actually Yuhuan, and the long-lost “relative” she seeks is her lover, Yihuan. The two women are finally reunited after much suspense.

What makes *The Intimates* a nostalgic film? The sentiment of nostalgia is typically triggered by a dissatisfaction with the present. A film such as Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* [*Yanzhi kou*] (1987) illustrates a nostalgia for the obsessive and decadent love that no longer seems possible in contemporary life. By comparison, the past in *The Intimates* is associated with something far less sumptuous and romantic: a bygone era of severe patriarchal oppression. It is, however, under just such conditions that lesbian love becomes a site of incredible courage. Hui, the figure of the present, has every freedom denied to women in the past. She is educated, sexually aggressive, materially privileged, and unbound by patriarchal marriage. Yet despite such privilege and freedom, Hui is weak and dependent. The film directs its nostalgia toward a time of suffering and adversity not because it endorses such conditions, but because its logic suggests that only under such conditions can one find the kind of love and courage that the film celebrates. The social critique that emerges from films like *The Intimates* is thus always paradoxically caught between a utopian and a nostalgic impulse. Whereas the former anticipates and envisions a freedom from oppression, the latter mourns the loss of what apparently can *only* result from the experience of (and resistance against) oppression. My reading of *The Intimates* analyzes how the film structures its nostalgia according to this paradoxical attitude toward conditions of oppression and the problem such a vision poses for contemporary Hong Kong culture.

*The Intimates* uses a familiar cinematic tactic for articulating nostalgia: the juxtaposition of past and present temporalities. In her discussion of *Rouge*, another film in which scenes from the past and the present are interspersed, Rey Chow suggests that nostalgia is most acutely felt in Hong Kong cinema not as a quest for a definite object in the past but as “an effect of temporal dislocation—of something having been displaced in time”:

Nostalgia is first and foremost a register of the movements of temporality. This is why the narrative structure of *Rouge*, like many films made in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s, is itself nostalgic. These films are not, despite their often explicit subject matter, nostalgic *for* the past as it was; rather they are, simply by their sensitivity to the movements of temporality, nostalgic *in tendency*. Their affect is tenacious precisely because we cannot know the object of such affect for sure. Only the sense of loss it projects is definite.<sup>15</sup>

Chow’s point is that nostalgia is not simply a yearning for the past as though it were a definite, knowable object. Rather, nostalgia involves a “sensitivity to the movements of temporality.” Understood in these terms, a nostalgic subject is someone who sits on the fence of time. In Chow’s discussion, the nostalgic subject responsible for the movement between temporalities is often an “abnormal” character, such as the ghost Ruhua in *Rouge*, whose naive, childlike, and obsessive gaze at the past completely dislocates her from the practical and rational world of contemporary Hong Kong. In contrast, the temporal movement in *The Intimates* is instigated by a different kind of character for a different effect. Unlike the spectral presence of Ruhua, Auntie Huan is not an intrusive figure from the past; she is worldly, streetwise, and adaptable, and has learned to make the most out of an unkind world. She surprises the condescending Hui with her English, her wisdom in matters of love and passion, and her ability to turn a troubling situation to her advantage. Auntie Huan is perfectly adept at tackling contemporary city life. In fact, her adaptability, practicality, and readiness for negotiation are qualities often attributed to Hong Kong society itself, as reasons for the city’s economic success.<sup>16</sup> Asking what a woman like Auntie Huan has to be nostalgic about is also asking indirectly what Hong Kong, despite its great material prosperity and savvy for survival, has to be nostalgic about?



From the beginning of *The Intimates* Auntie Huan is looking for someone. Keeping in mind Rey Chow's point that the nostalgic tendency is more important than the actual object of nostalgia, is important in Hong Kong films, the clue to the peculiarity of the film's nostalgia lies less with the identity of the person Auntie Huan seeks and more with the particular "movement of temporality" instigated by her search. The film intersperses Auntie Huan's eventful journey from Hong Kong to Shunde with fragments from a recollected past. Auntie Huan is clearly the source of this recollection, but because the audience cannot be sure of her identity, the relationship between the perspective that supplies the recollection and the recollected past itself remains ambivalent. For example, the first sequence of recollection is instigated by Hui's sarcastic comment to Auntie Huan after the old woman makes some observations about Hui's boyfriend: "Since you seem so interested in men, what did you become a self-combed woman for!" A shot of Auntie Huan looking in the mirror and picking up a comb cuts to a shot of a combing ceremony during which the young Yihuan is being initiated into the sisterhood. That same evening, Yihuan meets Yuhuan for the first time. The editing of the sequence makes the viewer identify the old woman as Yihuan, because her gesture seems to be a nostalgic reenactment of her past experience. Only in retrospect can the viewer understand that this moment of seeming identification is in fact a moment of desire. Auntie Huan is fondly remembering her lover, not herself, on the evening of their first encounter. It is also only in retrospect that the viewer can understand the significance of this cinematic move to conflate the two women's identities: Auntie Huan explains to Hui toward the end of the film that when Yihuan disappeared during the war, she missed her so much that she assumed her name, vocation, and familial responsibilities. This gesture expressed her wish for Yihuan, rather than herself, to be alive. This curious logic, driven by an intense love, underwrites the entire temporal movement of the film, which, until the end, keeps the viewer guessing whether the past is remembered by Yihuan or by Yuhuan. The conflation of selves defines the love between the two women: they have become each other through their love for one other, and they love each other as they would love themselves. The narrative tactic reproduces this subject-position, which reflects the theme of both women's willingness to sacrifice everything for each other, and neither woman wants her lover to

sacrifice for her. This depiction is also a dramatic interpretation of a popular Shanghai metaphor for lesbian love during the late Qing and Republican period: *mo jingzi* (rubbing mirrors).<sup>17</sup> The metaphor describes erotic acts between women: pleasure is derived from contact between identical erogenous zones. The film extends this metaphor to an emotional dimension, where love transforms the lover into a mirror of the beloved, and vice versa.

This selfless love—mirrored in the film’s “movements of temporality”—is thus the projected object of the film’s nostalgia. What are the conditions of possibility (associated with the past) and disappearance (associated with the present) for such a love? It is obvious that Yuhuan and Yihuan’s love demands their resistance against both systemic patriarchal repression (such as arranged marriage, polygamy, and interdictions against female sexuality) and individual acts of male violence and cowardice (such as that of Yuhuan’s husband, the warlord, and Yihuan’s lover). What is less obvious is that the film, contrary to accounts by historians of sexuality, situates this love not only outside of patriarchal marriage, but also outside of the organized resistance against it—the self-combed sisterhood. The sisterhood is typically analyzed by historians as evidence of premodern lesbianism in China, a Sapphic enclave where “some members lived as couples for their entire lives.”<sup>18</sup> Liu Dalin further suggests that this sisterhood is evidence of voluntary and committed lesbian relationships: “These women . . . made a pledge to be sisters, but were as intimate with each other as husbands and wives. . . . Their pledging ceremony was called ‘combing,’ during which the big braids commonly worn by young women were combed into a special hairstyle like those worn in conventional weddings. . . . Women who had been ‘combed’ thus were relieved of their matrimonial obligations. . . .”<sup>19</sup> The film includes many sequences of ethnographic details (such as the combing ceremony) that closely follow historical accounts such as Liu’s. The dynamics of the sisterhood itself are, however, represented quite differently. Even though the sisterhood renounces marriage, the film shows that it also perpetuates its own contradictions and oppressive codes of conduct. An ethnographic sequence shows a ceremony in which a self-combed woman “buys” a place on the ancestral shrine (*mai menkou*) of a poor man’s family to ensure that her spirit will have the man’s name after death. The “groom”—usually a poor peasant who needs the money—is beholden to the marriage as though

it were real. When Yuhuan helps Yihuan prepare to be a bridesmaid in the ceremony, she observes the irony of this practice: the self-combed women are worried about having a patrilineal name in death, but they rebel against it in life! Such a practice mimes the power structure of marriage, at the expense of poor male peasants. The self-combed sisterhood also mimes its oppressor's interdiction against female sexuality. A deceptively comical sequence depicts a chilling ethnographic detail during the *mai menkou* ceremony: all the women involved must have their clothes sewn tightly on them beforehand and carefully inspected afterward to ensure that everyone's chastity is intact. Later, Yihuan risks the penalty of death when she breaks this interdiction and becomes sexually involved with her childhood sweetheart—a male peasant driven by poverty to “marry” Yihuan's self-combed sister. In the film's most curious departure from historical accounts, the self-combed sisterhood is not a lesbian sanctuary. The film's love story does not take place between two members of the sisterhood; it is between a self-combed woman and a courtesan, who is despised by members of the sisterhood. In fact, Yuhuan's close relationship with Yihuan is frowned on by the other self-combed women. Whether historically accurate or not, the film's portrayal of the sisterhood emphasizes that the sexual freedom sought by Yuhuan and Yihuan defies not only the patriarchal family, but also the organized, profeminist resistance against it.

The queerscape in *The Intimates* is thus a nostalgic reconstruction of a lesbian sexuality that remains on the margin of all socially sanctioned institutions, including already marginalized institutions such as the self-combed sisterhood. If the older Yuhuan is associated with a Hong Kong known for its adaptability and pragmatism, then the younger Yuhuan is associated with a more volatile and vulnerable period of Hong Kong history. This is what historian Lu Hongji considers the real beginning of a distinct Hong Kong society: when immigrants fleeing Mainland China during and after World War II—the first generation of immigrants who settled in Hong Kong with no prospect of returning to the “Motherland”—quadrupled the population of the territory.<sup>20</sup> What the film sketches as the formative experience of Yuhuan and Yihuan's love recalls the traumatic origins of Hong Kong society: immigrants and refugees with no political identity and filiation or

sense of a distinct “self” managed to survive under circumstances of extreme privation.

Why, then, has this love disappeared in the present? How can the present benefit from recollecting the past in this way? In the film, Hui is clearly transformed by the past as recollected by Auntie Huan: her attitude toward the old woman gradually changes from insolence to admiration and concern. The relation between the recollected past and the present is, however, arrested at this juncture. The nostalgic structure remains caught in its attachment to the act of recollection and fails to articulate the significance of this act to the present. Rey Chow argues in her formulation of nostalgia that the classic expression of nostalgia—which contrasts the transience of human affairs with the permanence of the physical landscape—is no longer possible in Hong Kong’s urban environment.<sup>21</sup> Constant demolition and rebuilding do not permit anything, least of all the physical landscape, to be a marker of permanence. There is no ground on which to establish any historical contiguity between past and present. Nostalgia must be articulated in “forms that are fantasies of time.”<sup>22</sup> This is exemplified by the ending of *The Intimates*. After a series of setbacks, Auntie Huan reunites with Yihuan in a train station in Guangzhou. The camera does not reveal the face of Yihuan; it shows only the back of a gray-haired woman in a wheelchair. A close-up of their hands reaching out to each other cuts to a medium shot of the young Yuhuan and Yihuan joyfully hugging and caressing each other. This calculated maneuver is meant to generate emotions from an audience that would probably not respond to the unknown face of an old woman introduced as Yihuan this late in the film. The youthful faces also effectively stand in for the old women’s emotional state of mind, which has been brought back to youth by the joy of reuniting. The cut also effects a transformation of history into fantasy, as though the most significant part of the film’s plot—the fulfillment of Yuhuan and Yihuan’s love—is unimaginable in the present. At the old women’s reunion, the queerscape is finally allowed to assert itself in the present. Yet it is represented by the past tense and period costumes. The beautiful “happy ending” erases the relevance of the queerscape to the present. Where is the place in postcolonial Hong Kong for such courageous passion? Where, also, is the place for lesbian desire in urban Hong Kong

society? It is clear from the film's ending that nostalgia cannot provide the answer to either of these important questions.

### **A Dislocated Queerscape: *Happy Together***

Released just a month before *The Intimates*, *Happy Together* was also honored by many as a landmark film for the industry. Its director, Wong Kar-wai, was the first Hong Kong filmmaker to win the best director award at the Cannes Film Festival. At the time of the film's release, Wong made several misleading but interesting claims. First, he was reluctant to admit that *Happy Together* is about Hong Kong's handover.<sup>23</sup> Second, he said that critics "should not view the film from a 'gay film' angle" because it is "a love story between two people [and] love is a word that doesn't differentiate between genders."<sup>24</sup> Third, he claimed that he made the film when he did because he was "not sure that after July 1 [such a film] will be approved [by the Chinese government], because the film is about the relationship of two homosexual men."<sup>25</sup> Wong's first two disclaimers are curiously belied by his third, which suggests that the film's queerscape is the result of an anxiety about disappearance—an anxiety triggered precisely by the postcolonial predicament. In Wong's view, the cinematic representation of a gay relationship is, like much else in Hong Kong, in danger of disappearing because it might not be intelligible anymore in the more austere and homophobic climate of Mainland Chinese film production.<sup>26</sup> Wong's film responds to this anxiety with a moving meditation on whether any modality of intimacy can survive severe conditions of displacement and identity crises. Despite Wong's disclaimer, *Happy Together* is one of the few contemporary Hong Kong films that evokes vividly the milieu of the prehandover period and engages thoughtfully its many contradictions and anxieties.

The film tells a simple story of love between Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung), two men from Hong Kong who, on a trip to revitalize their troubled relationship, become stranded in Buenos Aires when they run out of money. It is a love story with no real beginning or end, only a series of attempts to "start over." The story takes place in 1996–1997, a time when Hong Kong was struggling for what appeared then to be a futile quest for long-term stability. The opening sequence hints at this parallel by

juxtaposing these images: a close-up of the lovers' passports being stamped by Argentinean immigration officials is followed by a sex scene in a seedy motel. The first shot draws attention to the new passports for Hong Kong residents, who will no longer be "British Dependent Territory Citizens." They will become "British Nationals (Overseas)" without the right of abode in Britain. These passports thus confer upon Hong Kong residents a "new" identity that amounts to even less than the old colonial identity. In the love scene, an anxiety lurks beneath the playful sex between the lovers. Lai Yiu-fai's voice-over explains that they "have been together for a long time, but have also been broken up frequently." This current attempt to start over might be repetition of an old pattern. The sequence establishes an emotional proximity between the personal drama of two people's desire and failure to sustain a bond and a political process that also falls short of its promise of stability.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas a nostalgic vision of love is realized in a recollected past in *The Intimates*, a utopian vision of intimacy is anticipated in a future that never arrives in *Happy Together*. Lai's voice-over tells us that, at the beginning of their trip, Ho bought a lamp with a beautiful image of two people standing underneath Iguazu Falls. Mesmerized by the image, the lovers try to find the place but never get there together. Throughout the film, plans of going to the waterfall, accompanied by Ho's mantra "Let's start over," become an endlessly deferred prospect. The image on the lamp shade, shown often, signifies an intimate moment of being "happy together." It is, however, an empty signifier, devoid of any referent. The lovers mistakenly believe that if they can reach the place represented by the image, they can also embrace its promise of intimacy. A poignant sequence toward the end of the film disabuses the characters (and the viewers) of this illusion. After yet another breakup, Lai Yiu-fai finally earns enough money to return to Hong Kong. Before departing, he finds the waterfall by himself. Meanwhile, Ho Po-wing moves into Lai's apartment, waiting despondently for his former lover to return, not realizing that Lai has already left Buenos Aires. The camera crosscuts between the scenes, moving from the image on the lamp, which Ho contemplates longingly, to the image of the actual waterfall, where Lai sadly thinks about his lover. The search for the waterfall turns out to be an empty quest. The movement from the quotidian image of the waterfall on

the lamp shade to the majestic cinematic image of the waterfall at Iguazu becomes merely tautological. Neither image can be “held tight” because each embodies a promise that is always slipping away from one’s grasp.

The English title of the film is thus an ironic reference to an object of desire that cannot be located or realized. In contrast, the Chinese title, *Chun’guang zhaxie* (sudden glimpses of spring [spring conventionally a metaphor for the erotic]), draws attention to the random and temporary appearances of hope (in the form of the erotic) even in such a space of futility. The film’s pervasive mood of tedium is relieved occasionally by lyrical and visually stunning incidental scenes. However, the editing does not allow these scenes to be diegetically connected to the main narrative. For example, the scene in which the lovers dance the tango in the kitchen is the most beautifully shot, tender, and erotic scene in the film. It occurs in a sequence that begins in Lai’s small bedroom, where Ho is impatiently teaching Lai how to tango. The camera cuts to an “empty shot” of an unknown street by a pier, where two bright orange buckets and a long strip of plastic tape shimmer against a pale blue-gray background. The camera then cuts to the dirty kitchen in Lai’s boardinghouse, where the lovers dance. This scene was shot with low saturation film, which is pushed so much for high key colors and lighting that a bleached, overexposed, trancelike effect is created.<sup>28</sup> Only medium shots are used, even though the scene is staged to arouse our desire for close-ups. Lai and Ho tango languidly and playfully; they are uncharacteristically intimate with each other. Lai’s usually taut, tense body looks supple and soft in Ho’s arms, and Ho’s wisecracking, nonchalant demeanor is replaced with an expression of warmth and fulfillment. The empty shot is conventionally used to establish the location for a subsequent scene. In this sequence, however, it establishes emotional location. It is not clear where the street by the pier is, but it is visually and emotionally very different from the urban landscape of Buenos Aires in the rest of the film. The empty shot prefigures the serenity and lyricism of the dance scene that follows. The situation in the dance scene, however, does not follow from the previous narrative thread. The characters look and behave differently. They are even wearing different clothes. Is the scene a flashback? A dream sequence? A fantasy? Or is it an outburst of genuine feelings between the characters? The scene’s editing creates a jarring breath of fresh air (an unexpected “glimpse of spring”), seducing us

into desiring more. Then it abruptly cuts to the oppressive ennui of the city and the couple's failing relationship. The tango scene thus functions like the image of the couple under the Iguazu Falls on Ho Po-wing's lamp shade: it holds a promise of intimacy, of being "happy together," but its fruition remains elusive. It is out of time and out of tune with the rest of the film.

Another of these "glimpses of spring" is expressed in Lai's friendship with a young Taiwanese, Xiao Zhang. The film draws attention to the erotic tension between the men but is ambiguous whether or not their relationship is sexual. At the end of the film, Lai Yiu-fai spends an evening in transit in Taipei, where he comes across the noodle stall owned by Xiao Zhang's parents. He steals a photograph of Xiao Zhang when he leaves. His voice-over says, "If I want to find him in the future, at least I'll know where to look." Lai is implicitly comparing Xiao Zhang's sense of belonging to the flightiness of Ho Po-wing, who is rooted nowhere and cannot be counted on to stay. Xiao Zhang's groundedness is tied to his family and to Taiwan, which has a much stronger, if no less anxiety-ridden, political identity than Hong Kong. It is also in Taipei that Lai hears the news of Deng Xiaoping's death. Deng was the engineer of the political concept One Country, Two Systems that was originally intended for solving the Taiwan question but became the blueprint for the postcolonial governance of Hong Kong. Deng's death marks the closing of an era, the legacies of which are uncertain. Lai's closing voice-over hints at the possibility that the relationship between Xiao Zhang and him might develop in the future. Yet what kind of relationship would it be? The film's deliberate ambivalence hints at what Alan Sinfield calls a "post-gay" understanding of relationships. Sinfield points out that the boundary between the sexual and nonsexual never stays constant; it shifts dramatically between different historical and cultural contexts.<sup>29</sup> Marjorie Garber calls this ambivalent border area the erotic.<sup>30</sup> For Garber, eroticism overlaps with, but is not reducible to, sexuality. It permeates intimacies that do not necessarily find sexual expression. For instance, intense emotional bonds, casual physical contact, or fantasies not acted on can all be erotic and still be nonsexual. An honest recognition of this ambivalence jettisons the idea that all relational bonds can be clearly demarcated as either *sexual* or platonic, and that people can be categorized as either straight or gay, according to their sexual preference. Carl Stychin suggests, in the context



of Quebec, that such queer insights might be suggestive for thinking about national identity as well:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer politics and culture can bring to a study of national identities a framework in which identity is self-consciously contingent and in process, characterized by reinvention and an ongoing questioning of borders and membership. A consideration of sexual identities can also bring to the reinvention of nation a sense of excitement that comes from “the perpetual inventiveness of a collective sexual politics which stretches towards different ways of being.” Queer politics in the 1990s, in some of its manifestations, exemplifies this excitement.<sup>31</sup>

The undefined relationship between Lai and Xiao Zhang signifies the possibility of reinventing the boundaries of (sexual) identity. It points to the many intense and valuable experiences that cannot be properly accounted for by existing rules of demarcating identities. Likewise, the same possibility exists for configurations of political borders and identities that are not reducible to existing discourses of nationalism and might offer a less antagonistic, alienating, and anxiety-ridden understanding of the shifting relations among what we now call China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

### **An Open Queerscape: *Hold You Tight***

The idea of a “post-gay” conception of queerness—merely hinted at in *Happy Together*—is a central preoccupation in *Hold You Tight*. Because the director, Stanley Kwan, is one of the few openly gay filmmakers in Hong Kong, there are expectations that his films should reflect “authentic” gay experiences. *Hold You Tight* deflects these expectations in two interesting ways. First, Kwan explains in an interview that the film’s *raison d’être* is purely commercial: Golden Harvest Studio asked him to make a film with the actress Chingmy Yau, who is known for her soft-porn roles in Wong Jing’s films.<sup>32</sup> *Hold You Tight* is a brilliant example of a film that straddles the industrial fence by turning what is intended as a vehicle for female sexuality in a heterosexual framework into a film about queer desire. Second, the film delineates a queerscape that is radically open to new modalities of intimacy and undefined erotic possibilities. It is thus appropriate that the film should

be accused of being “not gay enough” by a viewer when it was shown at a gay and lesbian film festival in San Francisco in 1999.<sup>33</sup> *Hold You Tight* is indeed not about gay identity but about the ambivalence and fluidity of desire and its capacity to weave disparate people together during a time of crisis.

*Hold You Tight* tells the story of five people whose lives have unwittingly become intertwined. A computer programmer, Fung Wai (Chan Kam-hong), mourns his young wife, Moon (Chingmy Yau), an ambitious executive who dies during a business trip to Taiwan. Wai accidentally befriends gay real estate agent Tong (Eric Tsang), who helps him through his grief. A young Taiwanese, Xiao Jie (Ko Yu-lun), is a lifeguard at the pool where Wai swims frequently. He seems interested in Wai, but it turns out he has been having an affair with Moon. Unaware of Moon’s death, Xiao Jie insinuates himself into Wai’s life, hoping to find Moon. News of her death devastates him. He returns to Taipei and befriends Rosa (also played by Chingmy Yau), a divorcée from Hong Kong who owns a boutique in Taipei. Rosa encourages Xiao Jie to tell Wai the truth about his affair with Moon and prompts him to explore his desire for Wai at the same time that she becomes his lover.

Whereas the queerscapes in *The Intimates* and *Happy Together* are temporally or spatially distant from postcolonial Hong Kong, *Hold You Tight* interprets the postcolonial city as a queerscape. This formulation is established during the first ten minutes of the film. A scene at the sauna, where Tong cruises and has sex with another man, takes place between a scene at Kai-Tak Airport and a scene on Hong Kong’s Mass Transit Railway (MTR). When juxtaposed with the other scenes, the space of cruising takes on a particular significance. In a study of the emergence of queer spaces in European and American cities during the twentieth century, Aaron Betsky characterizes the space of cruising as follows:

It was a space that could not be seen, had no contours, and never endured beyond the sexual act. Its order was and is that of gestures. What makes this space of cruising so important is that it shows that you don’t have to make spaces to contain and encourage relations between people, because they will just appear exactly at the moment where they are least expected—or wanted. These spaces, moreover, have a sudden sensuality that belies that anonymous emptiness of the modern city.<sup>34</sup>

In stark contrast to the cruising scenes in *Happy Together*, where the public bathroom and porn theater Lai Yiu-fai visits are filmed as spaces of loneliness and melancholy, the sauna scene in *Hold You Tight* is shot without pathos. It is visualized in the spirit of Betsky's formulation as a place where connections are made and terminated spontaneously, a place that is both contained within and yet belies the loneliness of the modern city. Unlike Lai Yiu-fai, Tong does not cruise out of pain. For him, cruising is simply a fact of life, one of the many ways he reaches for connection in an alienating city. The scenes preceding and following the sauna sequence situate the space of cruising within the dynamics of Hong Kong during the postcolonial transition. The scene that opens the film takes place in Kai-Tak Airport during its last months of operation. A group of Japanese tourists take pictures of the airport "for the last time" because the new airport will open imminently. The camera cuts between Moon as she embarks on what will be her last journey and Rosa, whose life will soon become involved in Moon's, although at this juncture the two women (played by the same actress) remain unconnected. The old airport signals a place caught up in the flux of change, but it also provides the anonymous ground on which strangers are open to unexpected forms of connection. Following the sauna scene, the film delineates a fragmenting city life. Tong is riding on the MTR, and the camera follows his random, wandering gaze. He first notices two men, obviously lovers, quarreling. The well-dressed, middle-class man talks about his plans to emigrate to Vancouver, while his younger, materially less-privileged lover bitterly reproaches the older man for abandoning him. Then Tong listens to a conversation between two women next to him, who are either mother and daughter or mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The old woman, who has recently moved from Mainland China, sits, stone-faced, in silence, while the middle-aged woman complains that the old woman has ruined her life by coming to Hong Kong. These two shots convey the stressful, disintegrating effects on families and relationships caused by large-scale emigration (to cities like Vancouver) and immigration (from Mainland China). Juxtaposed with these scenes, the space of cruising is literally a part of the postcolonial cityscape and metaphorically like this cityscape. Like the space of cruising, the alienating and rapidly changing space of the postcolonial city reflects a loneliness that prompts unanticipated intimacies. The relationships in the

rest of the film erupt, like spontaneous sexual encounters, out of unexpected and contingent spaces, weaving queer connections amid anxiety and crisis.

The narrative structure of *Hold You Tight* also offers a way of apprehending Hong Kong in transition. The story is told in a series of unchronological episodes. An incidental scene recurs at a video store around the time its owner (Sandra Ng) gives birth. Her pregnancy dates the action and binds the disparate episodes into a diegesis. Many scenes make sense only in retrospect. Some scenes are filmed more than once, shot from a different perspective and placed at a different point in the narrative, thus producing a different meaning. This idiosyncratic structure reproduces the experience of living in uncertainty, when the illusion of life as being an orderly tableau that unfolds linearly must be replaced by the more accurate depiction of life as being incoherent fragments of delayed knowledge, startling discoveries, irreparable losses, and random delights.

In contrast to *The Intimates* and *Happy Together*, which respond plaintively to loss (of a past) and lack (of a future), *Hold You Tight* suggests hopefully that loss and lack are both inextricably woven into the process of change. Its queerscape signals the new possibilities that emerge from mourning and desiring. Fung Wai and Xiao Jie both mourn the loss of Moon, and their grief propels them toward a desire for new intimacies. In turn, the people who take care of them have also mourned the loss of loved ones and desire new connections. In a touchingly understated scene, Tong sits forlorn in his apartment after learning that the partner of his former boyfriend has died in London. Tong immediately arranges to send help anonymously. This short incidental scene gives a nascent sense of a transnational Hong Kong gay community that maintains care and connection beyond the bounds of a committed sexual relationship. It also depicts the emptiness in Tong's life despite such a community. Another incidental scene illustrates Rosa's painful decision to give up custody of her only daughter when she leaves Hong Kong for Taiwan after her divorce. Her bitter and antagonistic long-distance conversation with her ex-husband betrays the intensity of her loss. Thus, Tong's and Rosa's respective acts of kindness and generosity toward Wai and Xiao Jie also help them redeem their lives from loneliness. Tong's jovial remark to Wai as they drive along the Tsing-Ma Bridge at the end of the film illustrates this incessant process where loss and beginning intertwine: "It's

strange. We lose and gain things for no apparent reasons. It's like waking up in the morning and finding that a burglar has taken away all your belongings and replaced them entirely with new things." In this interpretation, loss can be an enabling condition and the lack of permanence does not have to be crippling. A tracking shot follows Tong's car across the bridge while a new rendition of "Undercurrent" plays on the soundtrack. The journey signifies a passage into an uncertain future that is also a space of survival, one in which the longing to "hold tight" gives way to a resilience toward change.

In the film, such a space of survival is characterized by an openness to relational bonds that cross established ideological boundaries. Ponderous long shots of Xiao Jie's erotic gazes at Wai at the swimming pool are followed by sizzling love scenes between Xiao Jie and Moon. Wai's deep mourning for Moon is accompanied by his intense bonding with Tong. There is no sexual relationship between Xiao Jie and Wai or between Wai and Tong. However, an intricate web of erotic connection is woven between them throughout the film. As Xiao Jie is seducing Moon, he gives her a bottle of his favorite cologne because he wants to "smell himself on the person he loves." One night after Moon's death, Wai gets drunk. Tong drives him home, and Xiao Jie helps him to his bedroom. He finds the cologne he gave Moon in the bathroom and sprays it on the unconscious Wai before leaving. When Wai wakes up in the morning, he mistakenly believes that it was Tong who sprayed the fragrance on him, and the thought pleases and moves him. The film's refusal to sexualize the erotic connection between Tong, Wai, and Xiao Jie does not recuperate a heterosexual framework. In fact, it unhinges the heterocentric fixation to demarcate sexual from nonsexual relationships. Like the fragrance that wafts through the air heedless of boundaries, eroticism permeates these characters' lives, crossing the boundaries conventionally drawn between friendship, sexuality, love, jealousy, and guilt. It fosters new modalities of intimacy that flourish in a world where strangers need to, and do, take care of each other.

**Queer-Sighted Visions**

On a queer day you can see forever. —Gever, Greyson, and Parmar, *Queer Looks*

I have a sense of foreboding about everything  
And then I cannot open my eyes to see fate arrive  
And then clouds gather around the skies.  
—Lin Xi, “Undercurrent”

Juxtaposed in this way, the vision proffered by the editors of *Queer Looks* seems particularly relevant to the predicament delineated in the song “Undercurrent.” The substitution of “clear” with “queer” suggests a way of looking at the world that forgoes the prerogative to see straight. To see “on a queer day,” one must look out of bounds, beyond what is legitimate, appropriate, or proper. Such a queer-sighted vision allows one to “see forever” because it is an inconclusive field of vision that continues to look for what cannot yet be seen. In “Undercurrent,” a song that brilliantly evokes the milieu of Hong Kong in transition, the crisis is precisely one of vision. The inability to “see fate arrive” at a time when “clouds gather around the skies” is a poignant reference to the predicament in which one’s ability to apprehend change has been outstripped by the pace of change itself. In such a context, queer-sighted visions offer an immensely important survival strategy. In the face of heteronormative ideology, queer desire has always demanded that its subjects negotiate in a world that refuses to legitimize their intimate relations and forge connections that often remain unintelligible in mainstream discourses. Hong Kong’s people, both at home and in the diaspora, faced similar demands during the postcolonial transition, when their sense of identity was eroding, their familial structures and relational bonds were undergoing severe changes, and their prospect of fully participating in envisioning their own future was dimming. By welding these two predicaments together, the films present queer relationships as a paradigm for imagining more creative ways of living together in a time of change and crisis. The success of such films in a city with a recent history of homophobic intolerance illustrates the efficacy of the strategy at this particular historic juncture. When nothing much can be taken for granted, even the most recalcitrant ideologies betray

some signs of vulnerability. Despite their evident limits, these films signal the emergence of vibrant queerscapes in Hong Kong culture that might, at their best, show how and why a population caught in a volatile juncture of change could indeed benefit from queer ways of looking, loving, and living together.

## Notes

- 1 Maria Pramaggiore, "BI-ntroduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence," in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, ed. Donald Hall and Maria Pramaggiore (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.
- 2 Chau Wah-san, *Tongzhi lun* [Theories of *tongzhi*] (Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiu she, 1994), 292.
- 3 Chau Wah-san, *Xianggang tongzhi gushi* [Hong Kong *tongzhi* stories] (Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiu she, 1996), 5.
- 4 Gordon Brent Ingram, "Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(nations)," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne Marie Bouthillette, and Tolanda Retter (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 27-52.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 40-41.
- 6 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 225.
- 7 Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory, an Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 2.
- 8 For a succinct account of the public response to the decriminalization act, see Rozanna Lilley, *Staging Hong Kong: Gender and Performance in Transition* (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1998), 213-216. For a brilliant analysis of the complex discourses that frame such public response, see Petula Sik-ying Ho, "Policing Identity: Decriminalisation of Homosexuality and the Emergence of Gay Identity in Hong Kong" (Ph.D. diss., University of Essex, 1997).
- 9 *Ibid.*, 224-239.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 224. There are recent signs that this might be slowly changing. A pressure group that boasts representations from fifteen *tongzhi* organizations was formed in the months before the legislation election in September 2000 with the explicit purpose of challenging candidates on their accountability toward sexual minorities. This was the first time in Hong Kong election history that the "pink vote" was organized in any visible way.
- 11 See, for instance, the interviews conducted on the subject of coming out in Chau, *Xianggang tongzhi gushi*, 164-175. Similar concerns have been debated at length by sexual minorities in the Asian diaspora. See Mark Chiang, "Coming out into the Global System: Postmodern

- Patriarchies and Transnational Sexualities in *The Wedding Banquet*,” in *Q & A: Queers in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 391–392, n. 5.
- 12 Maria Pramaggiore, “Straddling the Screen: Bisexual Spectatorship and Contemporary Narrative Film,” in Hall and Pramaggiore, *RePresenting Bisexualities*, 275.
- 13 For instance, even experimental films such as those by Stanley Kwan or Wong Kar-wai usually use big-name stars, a tactic that secures box-office appeal for films that might not otherwise be commercially viable.
- 14 “News of the Week,” *Hong Kong Cinema*, 11 June 1997, Internet edition (<http://egreto.stanford.edu/hk/reports/97jun11.html#6>).
- 15 Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 147.
- 16 Lu Hongji, “Xianggang lishi yu Xianghang wenhua” [Hong Kong history and Hong Kong culture], in *Xianggang wenhua yu shehui* [Hong Kong culture and society], ed. Elizabeth Sinn (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1995), 71.
- 17 See Samshasha (Xiaomingxiong), *Zhongguo tongxingai shilu* [A history of homosexual love in China], rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Rosa Winkel Press, 1997), 304–305.
- 18 Fang Fu Ruan, *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991), 135–136.
- 19 Liu Dalin, *Xing yu Zhongguo wenhua* [Sex and Chinese culture] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 597–598.
- 20 Lu, “Xianggang lishi,” 68.
- 21 Chow, *Ethics*, 160.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 23 “News of the Week,” *Hong Kong Cinema*, 21 May 1997, Internet edition (<http://egreto.stanford.edu/hk/reports/97may21.html#7>).
- 24 “News of the Week,” *Hong Kong Cinema*, 14 May 1997, Internet edition (<http://egreto.stanford.edu/hk/reports/97may14.html#15>).
- 25 “News of the Week,” *Hong Kong Cinema*, 18 June 1997, Internet edition (<http://egreto.stanford.edu/hk/reports/97jun18.html#19>).
- 26 For a discussion of the difficulty surrounding the production of Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* [*Donggong Xigong*] (1996), which is “the first feature film from Mainland China to deal with gay life there today,” see Chris Berry, “*East Palace, West Palace*: Staging Gay Life in China,” *Jump Cut* 42 (December 1998): 84–89. Liu Bingjian’s *Man Man Woman Woman* [*Nan nan nu nu*] (1999), which portrays an emergent queer culture in Beijing, is being shown in film festivals worldwide but remains underground in Mainland China, with very little hope of a public release in the foreseeable future.
- 27 In Chow’s reading of the film, she rejects any suggestion that the love story is related to Hong Kong’s postcolonial condition because “a ‘national allegory’ type of reading . . . [would]



confine the film work within an ethnic ghetto." See Rey Chow "Nostalgia of the New Wave: Structure in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*," *Camera Obscura* 42 (September 1999): 48 n. 17. Although I appreciate Chow's insightful reading of the film, I disagree with her contention that to heed the textual evidence that clearly connects the love story to the political milieu is necessarily to confine the text to an "ethnic ghetto." To approach the film text as though it were hermetically sealed from the historic moment of its production also seems to me an untenable tactic.

- 28 For a discussion of the lighting and mise-en-scène in *Happy Together*, see the cinematographer's account in Christopher Doyle, *Don't Try for Me Argentina: Photographic Journal* (Hong Kong: City Entertainment, 1997).
- 29 Alan Sinfield, *Gay and After* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998), 194.
- 30 Marjorie Garber, *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 90.
- 31 Carl F. Stychin, *A Nation by Rights: National Cultures, Sexual Identity Politics, and the Discourse of Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 113–114.
- 32 Stanley Kwan, interview by Daniel C. Tsang, *Subversity*, radio station KUCI, Orange County, Calif., available on <http://go.fast.to/sv>. I am grateful to Dan Tsang for calling my attention to this interview.
- 33 Kwan, interview.
- 34 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 141.