

What Time Is It There?

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1. Tim--A. Introduction to Tsai, his work and style; two parallel plot lines; ending: she does not "meet" the Father.
2. Charley -- space of flows vs. home-space--
3. main argument--However, the struggles that they have been through would lead them to break their original concept for space and create a connection between people of different places and time.

Kang -- with low mobility

Mother -- superstitious/religious

Father -- left alone, not getting their love in time

They do not discuss his death, while dealing with his death in different ways.

Mother: shows her affection in daily matters

4. Dean -- different aspects of time -- characters in different time zones

kang -- *constrained in his inner self and his time

--connects with Chyi and then to Paris

Mother -- connects via her religious belief (talking to the fish, watering the plant)

-- *confines herself in her own imaginary world.

Chyi -- Kang's "way out."

-- * wrist watch: two time zones

-- three time zones -- in the theatre *Also the railroad scenes

- 3 sex scenes -- good quote from Ebert to explain them.

Chyi -- "experiment with the other woman?"

Rex -- Time, Space and Human Flows; You also discuss the possibility of Chyi being Kang's fantasy
Multiple Time --> Human flows -- 1) Chyi crossing national boundaries; 2) daily encounters

--Can time be changed? * He changes it first at home and then different spaces of flows and thus connects with human flows.

What does he long for?

--> They want to break through their present constraints.

time-space convergence -- at the railroad scene --> no friction?

Is Chyi part of Kang's fantasy of Paris? Also the Father at the end?

Leo-- Symbols -- the meanings you discuss are all possible in this "minimalist" film.--You are producing stories out of it.

-- Circle, watch, clock -- to change the clock. a romantic act to be in the same time zone with Chyi

-- This is a 2001 film, so maybe mobile phone is not that prevalent.

-- water --also a means of connection, besides being a means of survival

-- plant --the three family members are connected through the plant.

-- '7" -- 3 meanings

Daniel -- filmic techniques --long shot, with dual focus; narrow and stuffy spaces

Outline

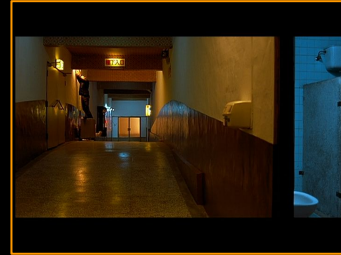
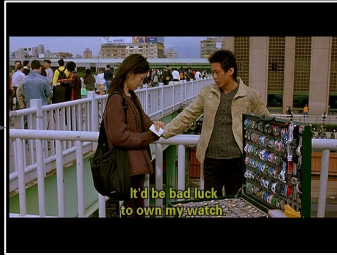
- I. Introduction
- II. Body
 - a. Character and their relationship
 - b. Different aspects of time
 - c. Breaking Point & Significance
 - d. Time, space, human flow (train station's time)/ space of flow
 - e. Symbol
 - f. Film techniques

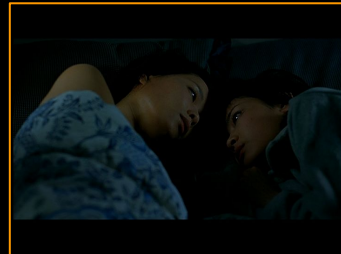
Director

- Tsai Ming-Liang
- Born in Malaysia, Studied in Taiwan
- Rebels of the Neon God, Vive l'Amour, The Wayward Cloud, **The Skywalk Is Gone.**
- Filming techniques:
 1. Long Take
 2. Few Lines
 3. Showing the inner emotional reactions of the characters in the actual time



Plot Summary







Space of Flow


vs.



Home Space



Taipei, Paris



Hsiao-Kang's home,
Shiang-Chyi's hotel

Main Argument

In the movie “What Time is it There?”, the hardship of ordinary citizens are being displayed. Dissatisfied with their difficult situations, they tried to search for a way out.

Some go on a journey, some choose to avoid, and some remained in the sense of lost and loneliness. However, the struggles that they have been through would lead them to break their original concept for space and create a connection between people of different places and time.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored jacket, sits alone in a cafe. She is looking down at a glass in her hand with a thoughtful expression. In the background, other people are seated at tables, including a woman talking on a white phone. The cafe has a warm, dimly lit atmosphere with wooden paneling.

**Characters
&
Their Relationships**

Shiang-Chyi

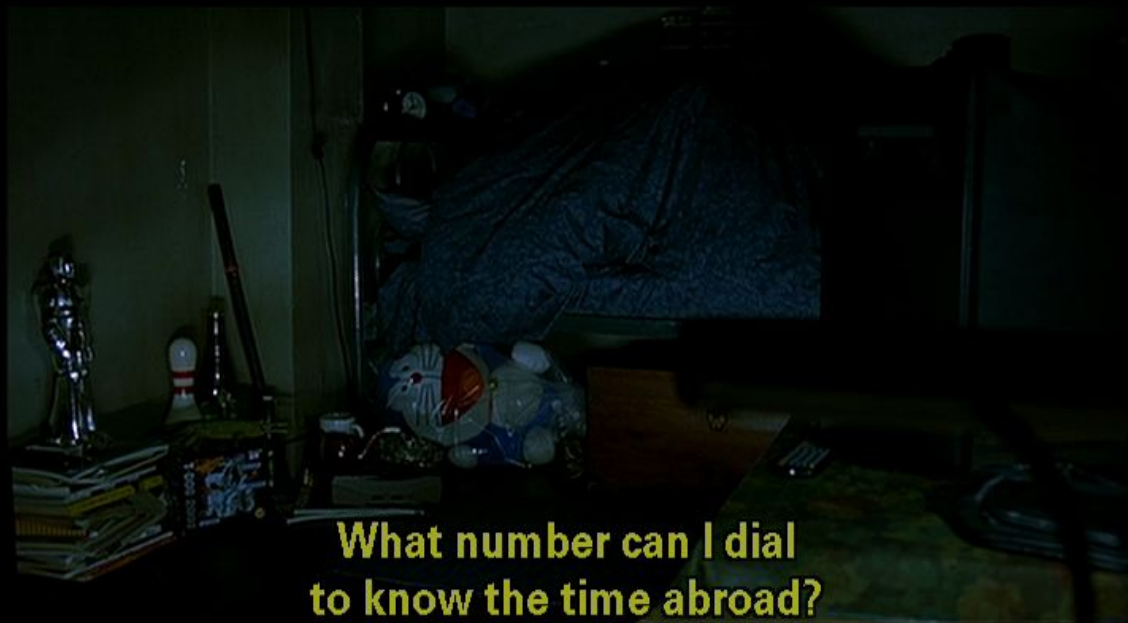


- Helpless
- Scared
- Unhappy
- High mobility

Hsiao-Kang

→ Childish (Doraemon plushie)





**What number can I dial
to know the time abroad?**

Hsiao-Kang



- Childish (Doraemon plushie)
- Afriad of ghosts
- Poor mobility
- Oppressive

Mother

→ Religious/Superstitious



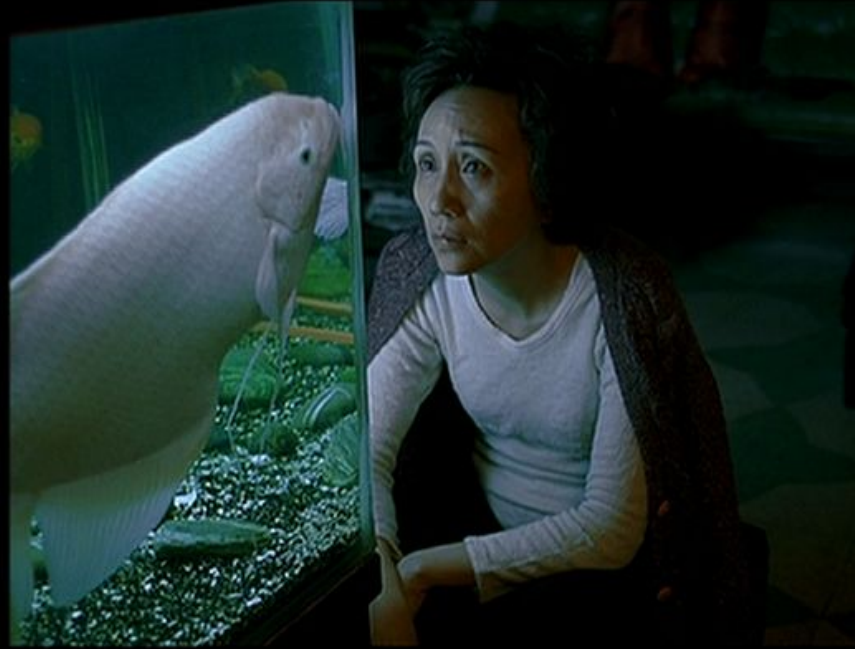


Stop. Don't kill it.

“It could be your father’s reincarnation!”

Mother

- Religious/Superstitious
- Grieving (Emotional)
- Hysterical



Family Relationship

Hsiao-Kang + Father:

- call Hsiao-Kang but no one answer
- distant father/son relationship



Family Relationship

Hsiao-Kang + Father:

- call Hsiao-Kang but no one answer
- distant father/son relationship
- still show affection to father



Family Relationship

Hsiao-Kang + Mother:

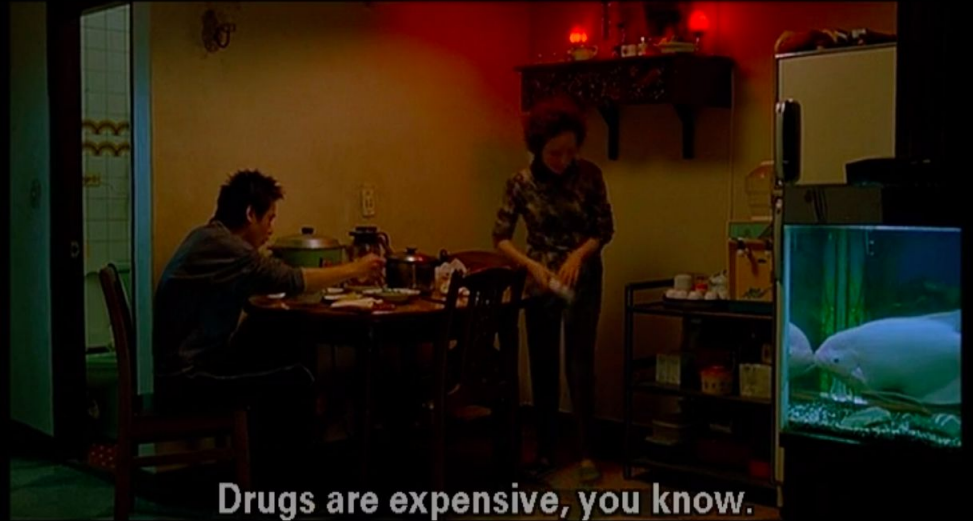
- do not talk about their grief
- deal with father's loss in different ways
- lack of conversation



Family Relationship

Hsiao-Kang + Mother:

→ show affection in everyday actions



Family Relationship

Hsiao-Kang + Mother:

- show affection in everyday actions
- at the end: Hsiao-Kang cover mother with his jacket





Different Aspects of Time

Different Aspects of Time

❖ Different aspects from the point of view of different



❖ Special scene:
➤ “Theater”



Different Aspects of Time

- ❖ Different time-zones for different characters:
 - Hsiao Kang
 - Hsiao Kang's Mother
 - Shiang Chyi
 - (Emotionally disconnected characters)



Hsiao Kang

- ❖ After the death of his father, Hsiao Kang becomes the victim of the tedious daily matters, which further leads him to **constrain himself in his inner mind and time**.
- ❖ Feeling a great sense of **solitude** and **lost**, Kang desperately seeks a way out as he drifts along within Taipei's surroundings.
- ❖ Turning point:
 - One day he sells a watch to Shiang-Chyi
 - Originally, He wants to sell her a watch from his case, but she insists on the watch from Hsiao Kang's wrist, which **displays the time in two time zones**.
 - Links up the relationship between Taipei and Paris.



Time-Zone for Hsiao Kang

- ❖ While Shiang-Chyi travels abroad, Hsiao Kang resorts to a bizarre yet humorous comfort ritual:
 - He compulsively sets all the timepieces in Taipei to Paris time.
- ❖ Depicted his abstract desire to connect with Shiang-Chyi.
- ❖ **Could be explained as a way to comfort Hsiao Kang's own disoriented emotion and his sense of loneliness.**



Time-Zone for Hsiao Kang's Mother



- ❖ Has a hard time adjusting to her husband's death.
- ❖ Becomes obsessed with religious rituals
 - Trying to please and comfort the father's ghost.
- ❖ Would not let go of the past memories.
- ❖ Created herself a imaginary world, as if her husband's spirit is still with her.
- ❖ Urges Hsiao Kang to alternate his lifestyle to the time of the father's spirit.
 - Confined herself in the inner imaginary world.

Time-Zone for Shiang Chyi

- ❖ Served as a psychological dependence for Hsiao Kang. (escape from the predicament)
- ❖ However, not enjoying **Paris**, the “capital of love”.
 - Paris likewise reflects her inner feelings of **loneliness** and **alienation**.
- ❖ Wanders the streets and travels nowhere in particular on the Metro
- ❖ Presents the **detached relationship** to the world as a whole.
- ❖ **Wristwatch** with **two time zones** (reminds Taipei’s time)



The Special Scene

❖ The Theater Scene: Three Time Zones

- Time of the film
- Time presents in the clock that Hsiao Kang holds
- The current time



Paralleled Sex Scenes: Breaking Point & Significance

- ❖ Eventually, all three lonely characters-Hsiao Kang, his mother, and Shiang-Chyi--look for release in sex.
- ❖ Sex is many things, and one of them is a way of reassuring yourself you are alive, that you retain the power to feel and cause feeling (Ebert).
 - Hsiao Kang seeks out a prostitute
 - Shiang-Chyi experiments with another woman
 - The mother masturbates while thinking of her dead husband
- ❖ These three acts take place at about the same time.

Q Do you regard that each encounter leaves the characters in even deeper desperation and emptiness, or do you think the three characters eventually find themselves spiritual catharsis based on the encounters?

A cinematic still from a film showing two men in a subway station. One man stands in the distance, and another is in the foreground, looking towards him. The scene is dimly lit with overhead fluorescent lights. The man in the foreground is wearing a dark coat and has a backpack. The man in the background is also in a dark coat. The station has a white wall with some graffiti or posters. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

**Time,
Space
and Human Flow**

Time, Space and Human Flow

Significance of time in the film:

1. Kang's altering of time
2. Hsiang Chyi's double timed watch

Human Flow:

1. Crossing national boundaries.
2. Daily encounters



Can time be changed?

Kang's attempt to change the time to Paris time.

❖ Longing for Paris. Ideal Life or longing for Hsiang Chyi?

- Gifting of cake
- Watching French movies
- Escape from current situation

❖ Impact of changing time

- Home
- Railway Station: Failed
- Theatre
- Department store



Controlled clock time -> A central measurement to keep everything in sync:

The controlroom in the railway station. Kang's attempt to change time failed.

Mechanical clock time vs natural time (water in the fishtank)

Q: What if he successfully changed the time? What does Ming-Liang Tsai wants to express through Kang's failure.

Spacetime convergence:

The moving of railway system.

i.e. Leave Kaoshiung at 4:05 p.m. /

Arrive Taipei at 6:25 p.m.



Breaking constriction of time/space:

- ❖ Appearance of Jean-Pierre Leaud ->
 - To Kang as a movie character.
 - To Chyi as real person at the graveyard.



- ❖ Appearance of Hsiao Kang's deceased father in the beginning vs. The old man in the last scene.



Human flow in interpersonal relationship.

Strong sense of disconnection between Hsiang Chyi and people in Paris.









Symbols

Symbols

1. Cricle (Time , Ferris wheel, clock, unbreakable watch, etc
2. Water
3. Plants
4. The number “Seven”

Clock

- Way to escape or to change
- Hope for husband's return
- Connection with Taipei
- Symbol of desire



Ferris wheel

- End
- Death
- Samsara



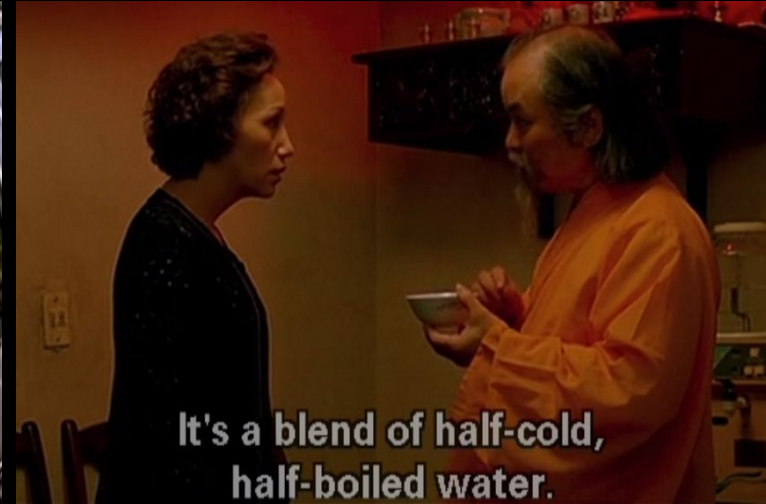
Unbreakable Watch

- Disappointed with reality
- To break the time (subconscious)
- To attract customers
- Sound of temple block



Water

- Element of living
- Superstition



Plants



Number 7

1. Time difference between Taipei and France (7 hours)
2. 30% off (the watch)
3. First seven days after the death



Film Techniques

Composition of Shots

- Consistent
- Narrow/ Stuffed -- Oppression, loneliness
- Focus is serperated and never closely shot



Composition of Shots



Narrow Space

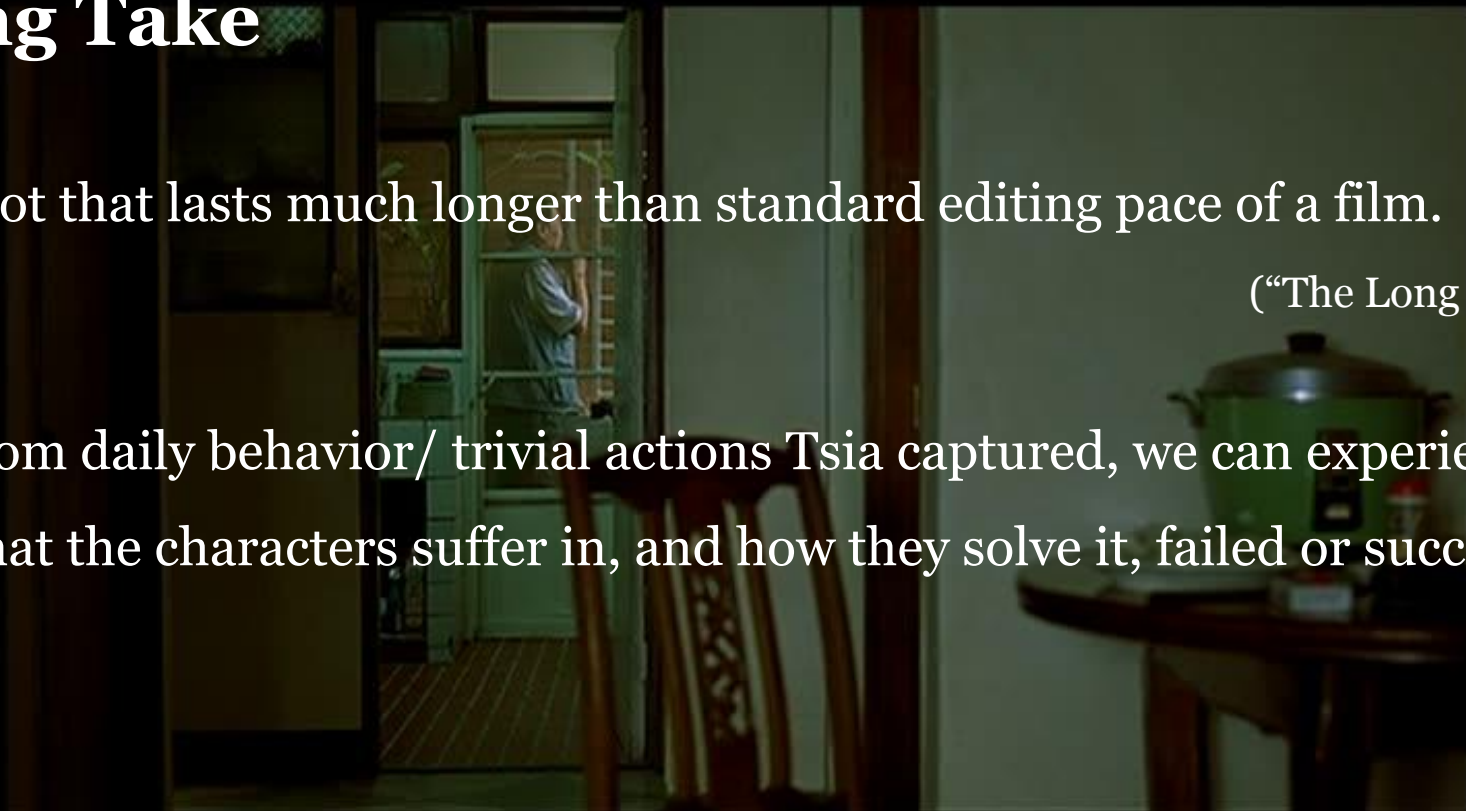


Long Take

- Shot that lasts much longer than standard editing pace of a film.

(“The Long Take”)

- From daily behavior/ trivial actions Tsia captured, we can experience what the characters suffer in, and how they solve it, failed or succeed.



Coexistence of Humor and Sadness



Coexistence of Humor and Sadness



Color



Ending Scene



Discussion Questions

1. What you can tell about Hsiao Kang's family via the depiction from Tsai's camera shots?
2. What is the significance of long takes in the film? (ex. urinate scene)
3. When Hsiao re-sets all of the clocks, is that a grand gesture of romance, or a pathetic fixation?
4. Do you think Mother finally overcome her grief for father in the end?

Works Cited

“The Long Take: Creative Uses of Camera Movements, Shots, Angles.” *StudioBinder*, 1 Nov. 2018.

Ebert, Roger. “What Time Is It There? Movie Review (2002) | Roger Ebert.” *RogerEbert.com*, 1 Mar. 2002, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/what-time-is-it-there-2002.