



***Flight of the Red Balloon and
the Poetics of Urban Flows***

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Outline

1. Urban Flows (see introd ppt)
2. Discussion Questions
3. Hou Hsiao-Hsien & His Films
4. Hou's new poetics after *The Puppetmaster*
5. *Flight of the Red Balloon*
 - *Subject Matter*
 - *Cinematography Layered Reflection*
 - *Sound*
 - *Subjectivity & Self-Reflexivity as Means of "Connections"*
 - *Red Balloon as a symbol of urban flows*

II. Discussion Questions

* Urbanism as a way of life

1. G2 How is **Suzanne** characterized? What are the problems she is faced with?
2. G1 What roles do the people around her play in her life? (**her husband, her daughter Louise, Song, Marc, her lawyer, puppet master, piano movers and tuner**)

* Urban Cultural Flows & Temporal Flows

3. G3 What roles does **Song** play in Suzanne's life and in the film?

* Filmic Techniques

4. G5. How is Louise presented in the film?
5. G7 Meanings of its Frequent Images? e.g. Window Reflections
6. G4 The Red Balloon? 7. G 6 Sound & Music?

III. Hou Hsiao-Hsien

* About Hou Hsiao-hsien

- * starting as scriptwriter and director of comedies in the 70s
- * beginning to make films seriously in the 80s with *Boys from Fengguei* (1983) and a dozen more films about Taiwan's society and history.
- * e.g. *Taiwan Trilogy*: *City of Sadness* (1989), *Puppet Master* (1993), *Good Men Good Women* (1995)
- * Recent films include: **nostalgic**: *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998), *Three Times*, *The Assassin* (2015); **multinational**: *Café Lumiere* (2003) & *The Flight of the Red Balloon* (2006)

* About Hou's Early Style:

- * Set in rural Taiwan of the past
- * long takes and stationed camera
- * non-professional actors
- * non-dramatic narrative

Taiwan Trilogy



《悲情城市》
City of Sadness



《戲夢人生》
Puppet Master



《好男好女》 Good Men Good Women

Recent Films

Three Times (2005)



Assassin (2015)

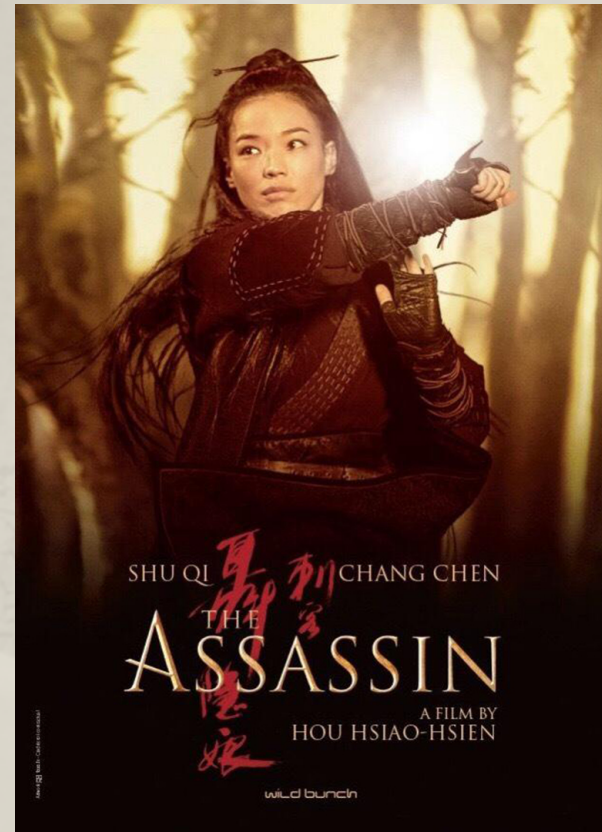


Image sources: [Rotten Tomatoes](#) & [時尚手札](#)

Four layers of meanings in Hou's Poetics

- * Narrative of **individual initiation**
- * Narrative of Taiwan (& Parisian)
family/society/history/nation
- * Narrative of **life/existence**
- * (Self-reflexive) Narrative of **film art**

IV. Hou's new poetics after *The Puppetmaster* (1993)

* Subject Matter:

- * Shift from rural space to **urban space**
- * Juxtaposition of different times or temporalities
- * Interest in **Cultural flows** (replacing landscapes with **culture-scapes**)
- * Emphasis on **human connection** rather than social oppositions

* Form:

- * Complex use of **sound**
- * Creative **cinematography**
- * Greater sense of **self-reflexivity**
- * **Intertextuality** as key narrative strategy

V. Flight of the Red Balloon



& Poetics of Flows



What is the film about?

V-1. Subject Matters of *Red Balloon*

1. **Individuals & Society:** About Suzanne, Simon, and Song Fang
2. **Urban/Cultural Flows:** About cultural differences and connection (East/West)
3. **About Arts:** *The Red Balloon* (1956; by Albert Lamorisse); (Museum d'Orsay, puppetry and film, and song)
4. **About life** (fast/slow, heavy & messy/light & tranquil)

The Flight of the Red Balloon

References

Parents?



Musee d'Orsay's 20th anniversary



Windows

Felix Vallotton (1899)

The Flight of the Red Balloon

References (2)

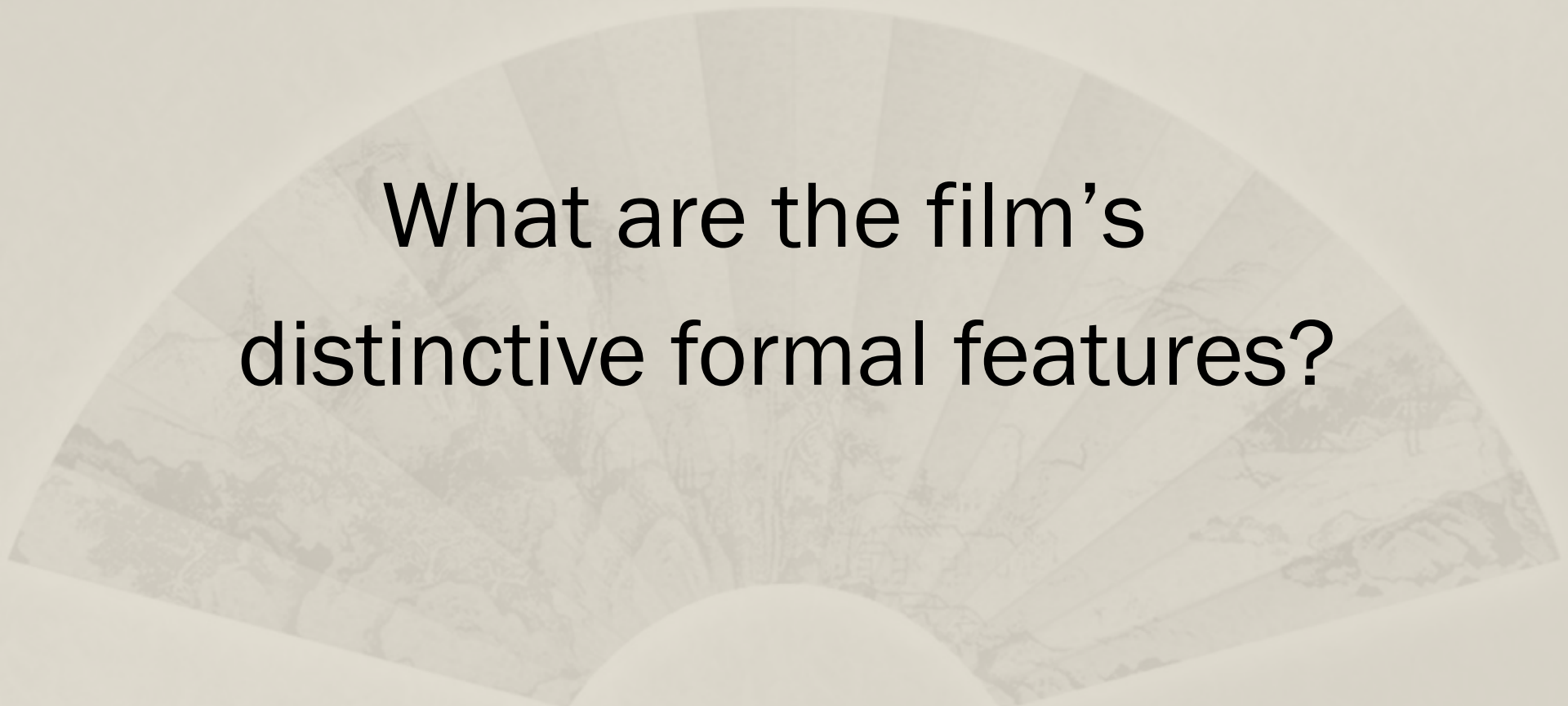


1956 French short [The Red Balloon](#) directed by [Albert Lamorisse](#).

Puppet Master and Puppet Show

- * 張羽煮海 Boiling the Sea for Wife
- * Puppet Master Li's Son: 李天祿之子李傳燦

<https://tinybop.com/loves/videos/the-red-balloon>



What are the film's
distinctive formal features?

V-2. Cinematography of *Red Balloon*

* **Pan shots**

- * Resembling the balloon's movement
- * Adopting the balloon's viewpoint
- * Panning as **link and passage** (or memory)
- * Providing a stronger sense of connection

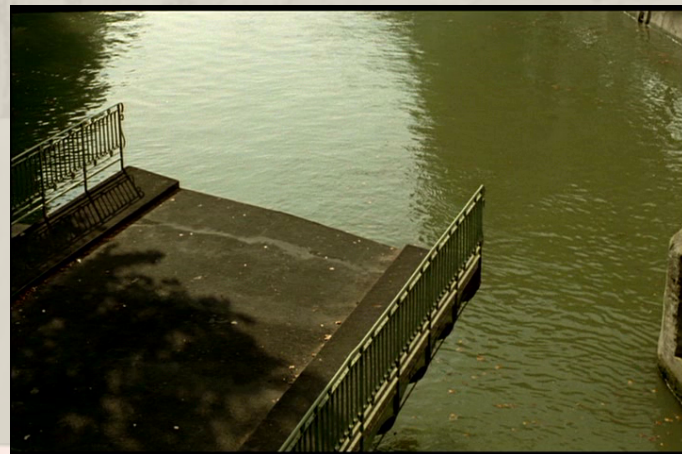
* **Layered shots (glass montage)** for urban realism and symbolism

- * Simon (and Louise) playing pin balls – palimpsest?
- * Song Fang and Simon in the café – **past & present**
- * Ppl on the street; Suzanne in the car – **shadowy, transient existence**

* **Shots of reflection** – **meanings of flows enriched**

- * Song's reflection merged with the balloon as the latter visits
- * Kids talking about the painting: Reflection on the painting of "Le Ball" highlighting the connection of times in culture

Flows in the City



Urban Vignettes



Urban Vignettes



Simon & Song



Simon



Simon & Louise



“Family” Disconnections

Louise

0:35:14

the park



Together in the past
Separated



0:52:22 Louise, Reflection and photo-taking

Family Disconnection



1:22:10

in the car

Family Connection: Past & Present



“Family” Connections

Suzanne & Song: Similar Experience



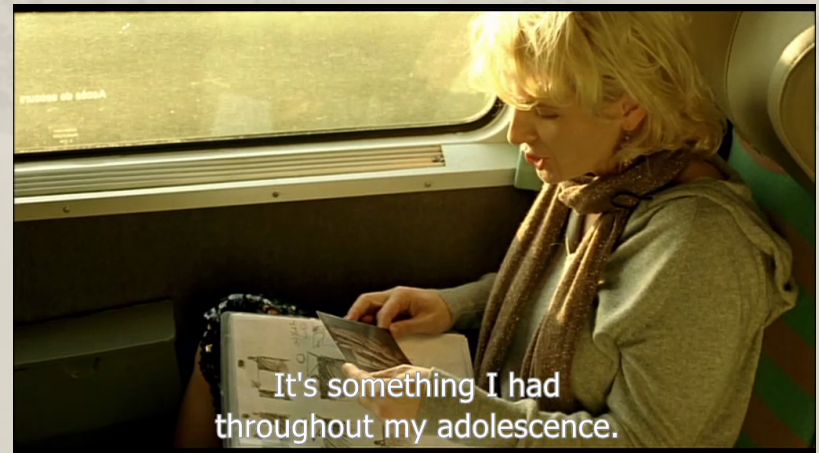
- Understands her work
- both worked/works as a foreign student

1:25:57 reflection: tuner

1:36:50 red balloon, music & Song Fong

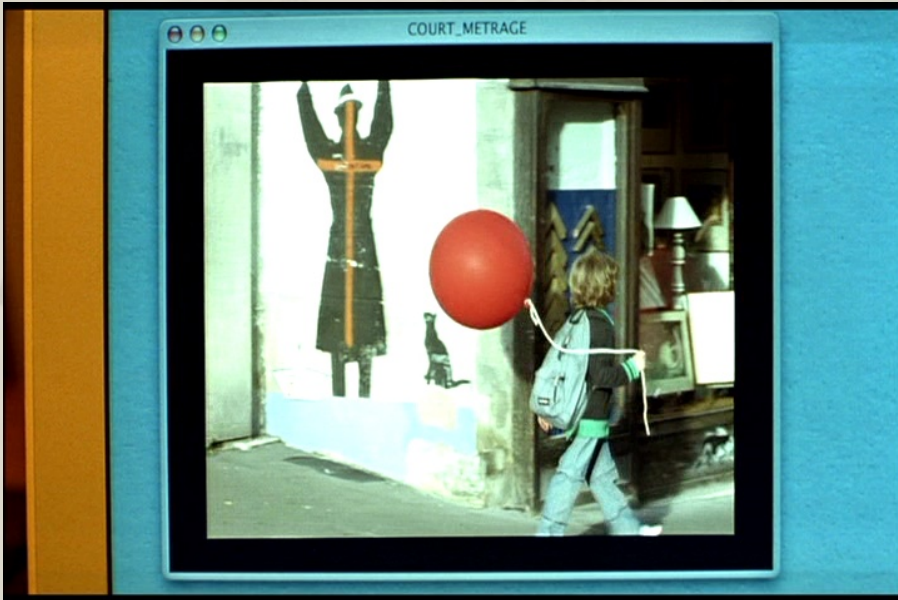
- Suzanne & puppet master

Dinner Table w/ lawyer, babysitter, mother & son





Cultural Connections



Cultural Connections



V-3. Sound in *Red Balloon*

* Voice

- * Contrast of Suzanne's dramatic voice-over and Ah Zhong's poetic voice-over
- * Contrast of Suzanne's high pitch fast speed and Song Fung's low and slow voice

* Piano (mainly Li Guo-yuan's theme piece)

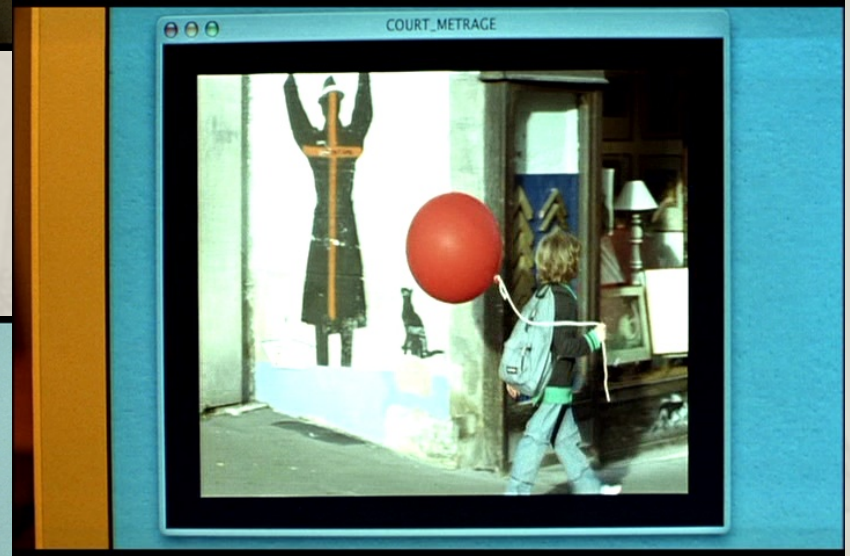
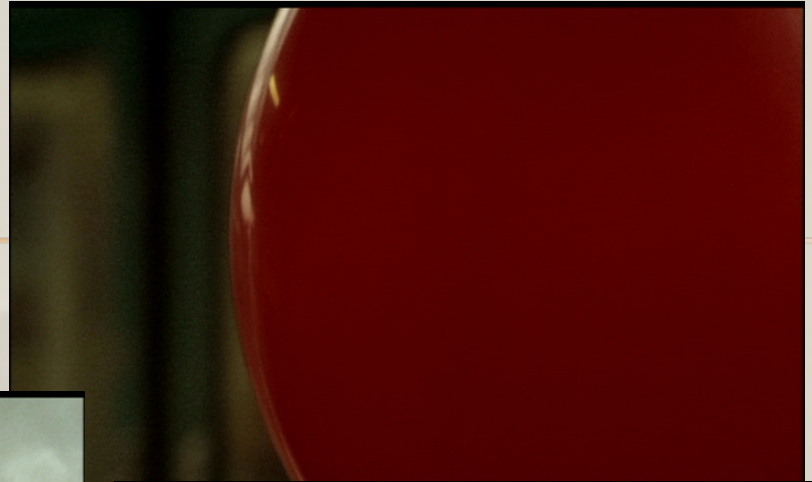
- * Slow temporality (vs. urban fast temporality)
- * Passage to personal/inner world
- * Link to memories
- * Sonic representation of the flight of the balloon
- * (The tuning as) Metonymy of Suzanne's (**out-of-tune**) life

* Song (Camille's "Tchin Tchin")

- * Expression of the film's message
- * Cultural translation (from a Taiwanese song 被遺忘的時光 "Forgotten Time")
- * Reversed *mise en abyme* (French jazz-styled song version of Hou's film; juxtaposition of multi-temporalities)
- * Exhilarated "flight" of the balloon (as birds)

V-4. Self-reflexivity as **Cultural Enrichment** in *Red Balloon* (1)

- * **Song Fung's filmmaking vs. the Boy's, neither passive**
 - * Making "Red Balloon"
 - * The camera and shooting scenes
 - * Green balloon/Red balloon (digital processing)
- * **Many versions of "Red Balloon"**
 - * "Red Balloon": the French short film by Albert Lamorisse (1956)
 - * The street painting in Paris
 - * "Red Balloon" the Chinese DV film by Song Fung (in the making)
 - * Song Fang and Louise with Simon
 - * "Tchin Tchin": the French song (adaptation of the Taiwanese song "Forgotten Times")
 - * "Der Ball/Le Ballon": the Swiss painting by Felix Vallotton (1899) – **the kids' interpretations**
 - * ***Flight of the Red Balloon*: the film by the Taiwanese director (2007)**



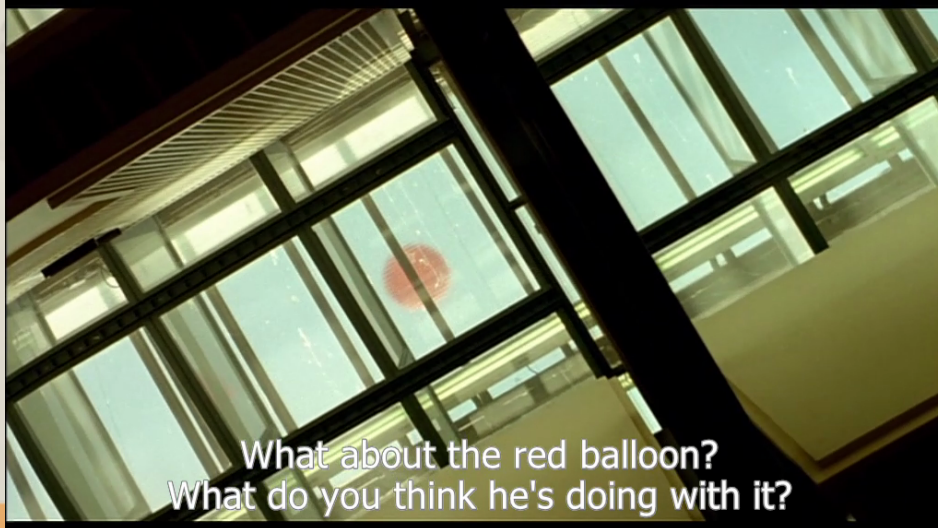
Painting and Reflections



A happy one.



Now, where do you think the painter was when he painted this picture?



What about the red balloon?
What do you think he's doing with it?

Song & the Red Balloon



V-3. Self-reflexivity as **Cultural Connection/Translation & Family Connection** in *Red Balloon* (2)

- * Puppetry

- * Suzanne's puppetry
- * The puppetry sculpture on the pillar in the park
- * Taiwanese glove puppetry
- * Suzanne's father's puppetry

The red balloon as a symbol of global urban flow

Motifs of Flows & Translation

- * “Movies” capturing flows (Song Fung’s DV film, the balloon in Hou’s film, and Hou’s film)
- * The moving bridge
- * Memories
- * Baby Sitting/motherhood
- * Teaching
- * Life in the city

V-5. Other Symbolic Meanings: The **Flight** of the Red Balloon

- * **of childhood**: a toy, a companion (Song Fung, Louise), bright color, unbound,
- * **of memory**: nostalgia of the good old time, Tsai Chin's song "Times Forgotten, "Chin Chin"
- * **of history**: the past that is no more but lingers as cherished memories (a French film, Chinese Culture , family history)
- * **of city (space of flows)**: a perspective from the sky, lifted (space), from outside (culture)

Other Symbolic Meanings: The **Flight** of the Red Balloon ②

- * **of urbanism as a way of life:** a reflection on urban life style through contrast (movement), the migratory nature of modern life (translation), the (lost) lightness and tranquility of being (existence; red balloon vs. red traffic/car lights and signs of restriction)
- * **of temporality:** progression of time (change), continuity of time (the past that lingers in the air), **multi-temporalities** (birds and airplanes, balloons) ,
- * **of art & its reflexivity:** an old film, a painting, a DV film, art and technology of movie making, a form of puppetry, the translation of art/culture
- * **Of cultural flows:** translation, visits,
- * **Of life:** symbol of happiness

Time Marks: Red Balloon, Artistic Reflexivity & Trans. to the Past

Time	Note
0:01:07	The boy: talking to the balloon
0:03:36	subway station
0:05:56	bridge
0:09:16	puppet show
0:14:38	Red Balloon, the film
0:15:11	Song video-recording something
0:24:17	window reflection
0:35:14	the park
0:36:29	Louise
0:37:39	reflection again
0:39:00	drawbridge--when they talk about the past
0:39:12	the past with Louise
0:38:05	pinball
0:41:56	reflection w/ Louise

Time Marks: Red Balloon, Artistic Reflexivity & Trans. to the Past

* 0:47:22	reflection during the train trip w/ Puppet Master	
0:48:40	puppet master	
0:49:46	translation + reflection on the train	
0:50:20	gift exchange	
0:52:22	Louise, Reflection and photo-taking	
0:54:13	train station again & the balloon	
0:55:10	the boy recording Song & balloon outside	
1:01:52	lease & grandfather's tape	
1:09:59	video project	
1:13:40	boy in video	
1:15:41	reflection: boy in front of a window pane	
1:16:17	reflection--train	
1:16:38	puppet show-Suzanne	
1:20:24	video in the car	
1:21:53	grandfather	1:25:57 reflection: tuner
1:37:31	balloon	1:36:50 red balloon, music & Song Fong
1:39:15	balloon & Song	

Time Marks: Relation Problems

Timecode	Note
0:06:58	bus w/ children of man
0:16:33	coffee shop, outside and inside
0:22:13	Simon practicing the piano
0:21:14	room messy
0:33:50	Marc & friend
0:38:05	pinball
0:42:39	music carried on to their room with the mother
0:43:44	Suzanne in distress
1:01:52	lease & grandfather's tape
1:04:29	piano--moving
1:22:10	in the car
1:25:38	piano tuner
1:29:13	argument, piano

Ending

1:40:39 children in a museum;

1:41:31 reflection: the painting

1:43:49 balloon

1:41:44 painting, kids and reflection

1:43:24 red balloon and the song