

## **Acknowledgements**

At the local film festival in 2012, Kosmorama Trondheim International Film Festival, I made a life-changing discovery by randomly selecting and watching a film called *The Day He Arrives* (Hong, 2011). This film was unlike anything I had ever seen – scenes repeated themselves over and over with differences in each iteration. The narrative structure and the temporal order of the film threw me off balance as a spectator, and I could not understand what I had just seen. When it was time to select a subject for my masters thesis there was never any doubt – I simply had to go deeper into the structure of this film why these repetitions are present in an otherwise so simple and minimalistic film.

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## 1. Introduction

“When Hong Sangsoo’s debut work, *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well*, was released for the first time in May 1996, the nation’s critics were thrown into a shock.” (Huh, 2007, p. 3) This is how Korean film critic Huh Moonyung describes the arrival of director Hong Sangsoo’s presence in the film scene of South Korea, marking what Huh calls “an event in Korean cinema history.” (Huh, 2007, p. 3) Huh goes on to describe what, in his and other Korean critics’ opinions was so different about Hong and his debut feature film:

“Characters were wandering about while there was no clear suggestion of what was on their minds. Dialogues and situations were drifting around the surface of the text, with no clear psychological motives. Scattered structure made it difficult to distinguish between the main story and the digression. The camera was objectively and motionlessly looking at these circumstances, where everything collided. [...] The cinematic language spoken in this film was unprecedented in Korean film history. Korean movie critics thought of names like Robert Bresson and Luis Bunuel, but they agonized over the genealogy of a movie that was completely unique.” (Huh, 2007, p. 3)

*The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well* focuses on four different characters whose lives all intertwine with each other. The film is structured in four parts, each focusing on one character, but continuously revealing more about the other main characters and what relation they have to each other. This debut film contains many of the same ideas that would manifest themselves in the director’s later works, but it is also the most atypical piece in Hong’s filmography, with a quicker editing pace, use of music and a more expressive style. Eungjum Min, Jinsook Joo, and Han Ju Kwak pointed to how Korean film critics interpreted *The Day A Pig Fell Into The Well* as a postmodernist work:

“*The Day a Pig Fell into a Well* [sic] does not address directly the issue of modernization. Nevertheless, insofar as the social reality of modern Korea is considered the outcome of modernization, the film consistently shows how our lives in the postindustrial society have become fragile, dislocated, and confused. Viewed in the context of modernization, the film is a grim portrait of (post)modernity, filled with symptoms of disruption.” (Min, Joo, & Kwak, 2003, p. 147)

Hong’s film separates itself from the common motif of film found in the 1980s and 1990s cinema of South Korea, where politically charged films often dealt with the remasculinization of the broken man, showing so-called “pathetic men” deal with their sexual anxiety and then overcoming it, becoming a responsible, model citizen. Hong’s characters, in particular his

male characters, are often considered by critics and audience to also be pathetic in nature, but Hong refuses the catharsis provided by these other films, and the characters are never given any resolution, they always stay in a loop of dissatisfaction, never becoming the idealized citizen or finding their remasculinization.

The four-part structure found in *The Day A Pig Fell Into The Well* is, at first glimpse, basic and simple enough to follow, but when analyzed with a closer eye a more complex structure is revealed.

Hong's debut feature is the result of a combination of four different scripts by four different writers. Hong took a character from each of the scripts and followed those characters for a day, and then edited it all together in one multi-plot script which he used to realize *The Day A Pig Fell Into The Well* (Deutelbaum, 2009, p. 203). Each of the four parts in the film center around one character which the film follows over the course of a day or so. Similar to many other multi-character/multi-plot films, the lives of these four characters intertwine in various ways, and several characters cross paths without knowing it. Film scholar Marshall Deutelbaum has also noted that there are hints scattered throughout the film, showing calendar dates at least once per the four parts, which also reveal a more complicated structure as the spectator's first impression will be that all of these four parts take place during a short span of time. However, these calendrical hints scattered throughout the film point to that each part is at least a month a part or so in the timeline (Deutelbaum, 2009, pp. 207-208).

About the success of Hong's debut, Huh writes:

“Hong Sangsoo showed his own distinctive style in his debut work with near perfection. The surfacing of *The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well* was chronicled as an important event in Korean movie history, and a Korean movie magazine, *Cine 21*, compared it to ‘a gunshot that shook Korean film history.’ In 1997, *The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well* won a grand prize at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the name HONG Sangsoo slowly emerged among European film circles. In 1998, his second movie *The Power of Kangwon Province* was invited to Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival and the French critics began to treat him warmly.” (Huh, 2007, p. 3)

Especially noteworthy is the legendary French film publication *Cahier du Cinema*'s fond words of the director: “Hong Sangsoo is unique in that all his stylistic experiments such as double or circular structure, crossing of time, which are distinct in recent Asian films, served exquisitely for exploration of every character presented in the film.” (Huh, 2007, p. 4) Hong's cinema exists somewhere in the space between a wave of or a new breath of fresh air in cinematic narrative after Tarantino's presence materialized with films such as *Reservoir Dogs*

(1991) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), puzzle films such as *Memento* (Nolan, 2000), slow cinema and a newer tendency in Asian cinema with minimalistic films that explore narrative possibilities and the perception and boundaries of time represented on film. Quentin Tarantino can be said to have somewhat revolutionized cinematic narratives in the early 1990s after his two first features, which explored different ways of representing fabula events in the films syuzhet, by having the plot centered around a robbery which the spectator is never allowed to see in *Reservoir Dogs* and by chopping up the timeline in *Pulp Fiction*, presenting scenes out of temporal order. This was a breath of fresh air or so to speak in cinema in the early 1990s and it is easy to notice the influence these films has had on future cinema.

This planted the seed for several narratively challenging films that would emerge in the following years, such as, for example, Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, perhaps the "poster-boy" example of the so-called puzzle film. *Memento* tells its story backwards, with the ending (which is the beginning) revealing a mystery planted in the story from the beginning (which is the end).

Directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky and Bela Tarr have experimented with "slow cinema," which greatly emphasizes the importance of the long take and duration, which is something recent Asian directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien and Apichatpong Weerasethakul have brought to a new level by creating increasingly minimalistic films.

Hong Sang-soo is also exploring some of the same aspects of cinema as these mentioned films. Hong's films are narratively challenging, or, rather, Hong is challenging the boundaries and possibilities of narrative in cinema. Hong plays a formalist game, where he is constantly reinventing his approach to narrative, although he has been accused (somewhat justifiably) by critics and cinephiles alike of making the same film repeatedly.

Two years after the release of debut *The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well*, Hong returned with his sophomore effort called *The Power of Kangwon Province*, which is closer to the style that Hong has honed and refined since – less camera movement, less cutting and longer takes, less use of music and, on a surface level, a simpler structure. In *The Power of Kangwon Province*, Hong uses a split-narrative, telling the story of two former lovers' simultaneous yet separate trips to Kangwon province in South Korea. The story is straight forward enough: an affair between a married man and a younger woman has ended. In the first half of the film, the story follows the young woman, who is going on a weekend trip to Kangwon province with two friends to get over a breakup. They go to the beach, on a mountain hike, befriend a local police officer and overhear some disturbing news about a person who has fallen off a cliff of the mountain and died. The second half of the film follows a married professor who goes to

Kangwon province with his friend and colleague as an attempt to get over a recently ended affair with a younger woman. The film re-treads most of the ground covered in the first half, and it is revealed that not only are these two main characters on their respective trips to get over each other – they are even there at the same time, going to the same places, getting into similar situations, just barely escaping running into each other in the process and without knowing so. In addition to the stories largely following the same paths, there are elements intersecting between the two parts, such as one out of a pair of goldfish from the professor's office space somehow turning up on a trail on the girl's mountain walk, and somehow, when the professor returns to his office in the final scene, only one goldfish remains. This imagery is given importance, taking up the final image of the film.

Hong's third feature, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000) takes this exploration of narrative and temporal structure further, telling the story of a heterosexual romance twice: once from the perspective of the male character and once from the perspective of the female character. During the re-telling of the story from the woman's perspective, several scenes are outright repeated, but with small differences and sometimes contradictions of what the spectator has been told before.

*Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* will serve as the starting point of this thesis, where in Chapter I, I will discuss Hong's approach to narrative structure. Here, I shall go into detail about how the cinema of Hong Sang-soo challenges traditional narrative structures in cinema. Serving as a base, I shall discuss the concept of the *fabula* and the *syuzhet* and how filmmakers can complicate storytelling by manipulating temporal representation of *fabula* events in the *syuzhet*. Following this, I shall also go into how memory influences how a spectator will perceive a film like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, where narrative comprehension relies greatly on the spectator's memory in the latter half of the film. As a result of this puzzle-like narrative, temporal confusion through repetitions force the spectator to actively navigate the film text, and as such, the film encourages a "spectator as storyteller" approach. In this chapter, I shall also investigate narrative trends such as forking-path narratives, the mind-game film, unreliable narration and puzzle films, and argue how a film like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* explore narrative strategies outside of these models and thus requires further narrative exploration.

In Chapter II, I will further explore Hong's approach to narrative by temporal representation and use of repetitions. Here, I shall look at theories of temporal representation in films, and concepts such as movement, duration and intervals will play an important part. Here, philosopher Gilles Deleuze's works on cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement-image* and



*Cinema 2: The Time-image*, will be crucial, especially Deleuze's concept of the *crystal-image*, where Deleuze describes how the *actual* becomes the *virtual* and how the virtual then becomes the actual in its place (Deleuze, 1986, 1989). Throughout this second part of the thesis, I will draw on several examples from Hong's rapidly growing filmography, such as *Oki's Movie* (2010), which presents four short films all telling an over-arching story with three main characters, but at different ages and in a non-linear fashion, and where the final segment appears as a film within the film narrated by heroine Oki telling stories from her past experiences. Another example which will be used is *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015), perhaps Hong's most ambitious film to date, where the film starts with the wrong title ("Right then, wrong now"), tells the story of a director who befriends and falls for a young lady during a visit to a small town hosting a film festival, and after the conclusion of the story, the film jumps back to the very start, the title sequence this time showing the correct title ("Right now, wrong then") and repeating the whole story one more time, scene for scene. These films examples will only serve as a base for discussing some of the arguments I will make in investigating how this temporal ambiguity and repeating scenes contribute to the spectator's reading of these non-traditional narratives. To bring these arguments to a conclusion, I shall analyze the film *The Day He Arrives* (2011) closely and bring all my arguments together in the reading of this one film, which features perhaps the most repetitions and temporal ambiguity in all of Hong's works, such as for example when a scene is depicted *three* times, showing the main characters going to the same bar three nights in a row, but each time behaving as if they are there for the first time. The main character also runs into an acquaintance three times, but here they acknowledge their prior meetings, which contributes to the overall temporal ambiguity of the film.

The main question for this thesis is to define what sort of narratives are on display in these films directed by Hong, explore how they work and are constructed, and how temporality contributes to shaping these narrative structures. To answer this question, I shall bring this thesis to a conclusion by proposing that the films of Hong constitute a narrative model which I have called "fragmentary narratives." To bring this thesis to an end, I shall define this narrative model and lay out some of the rules that make up the traits for the films that fit into this model.



## **2. Chapter I: Narrative**

## 2.1. Narrative: Introduction

This chapter will investigate the first of the two main subjects for this thesis – narrative. To understand how the cinema of Hong Sang-soo confronts traditional film structures and how they challenge the spectator with their unique, confusing, and puzzling representation of time and repetitions, it is useful to first discuss the narrative structures the films make use of.

As a base for my discussion of the narrative structures these films present I will introduce the concepts of the *fabula* and the *syuzhet*. These two concepts are useful for establishing a basic understanding of how narrative can operate on different levels in a film – and how Hong and other directors manipulate the representation of these two levels in their films to make the structures more interesting, challenging or perhaps mysterious, usually to generate importance to the plot, but as I shall go into, Hong does not appear to have an explicit point as to why these two levels are manipulated in the way that they are. In order to investigate these narrative structures in the cinema of Hong, the main film example for this part will be his third feature film, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000), a black and white film telling the story of a relationship between a man and a woman, with several scenes repeated with minor or major differences in their respective iterations.

To further emphasize the importance of the use of repetitions in the films of Hong in general and in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* in particular, I shall discuss how memory plays a great part in the spectator's ability to follow the film and construct a coherent and verifiable story- and timeline. Building on this, I shall propose how an important aspect in these films is the fact that the spectator must become an active part of the interpretation and reconstruction of the narrative structure of the film, where a "spectator as storyteller" approach is encouraged in the meeting of spectator and film.

In order to illustrate how the narratives found in the films of Hong establish themselves as something different from most other films in today's cinema, I shall discuss some of the recent trends in cinema featuring challenging narratives, as a means to discuss how Hong to some extent ticks the boxes that these discussions on narrative provide but at the same time eschews them by going further into unknown narrative territory and by avoiding using these narrative structures for major plot twists or important plot functions. Therefore, I shall investigate and discuss a number of narrative possibilities, such as forking path narratives, mind-game films, puzzle films and unreliable narration which all share traits found

in the films of Hong, but at the same time fails to adequately define the narratives that I will later, in Chapter II, establish as “fragmentary narratives.”

## 2.2. The fabula and the syuzhet

According to the film theorist David Bordwell, during the process of watching a film, “the spectator submits to a programmed temporal form.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 74) The film will control the order, frequency, and duration of the presentation of events. The spectator may, as Bordwell puts it, “skip a dull spot or linger over a rich one, jump back to an earlier passage or start at the end of the film and work your way forward.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 74) In normal viewing circumstances, however, the film is in control over what, when, and how the spectator sees the events, whether the story is presented in a traditional linear manner or in a more experimental way where the timeline of the plot is non-linear. An example of a non-linear timeline is Quentin Tarantino’s major 1994 success *Pulp Fiction*, where the plot was chopped up and presented in a seemingly random structure, starting at the end of the timeline, and constantly rearranging the timeline from there. The manipulation of time can be crucial to the spectator’s perception of a film and its plot. In narrative, we can separate between two different concepts, what Bordwell calls the *fabula* and the *syuzhet*. *Fabula* can be translated as *story*, while the *syuzhet* can be translated as the *plot*. The *fabula* are the story events in chronological order, and the *syuzhet* is the order and presentation of these story events within the filmic narrative.

The *fabula* is the imaginary construct one creates – it “embodies the action as a chronological cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 49) To further use *Pulp Fiction* as an example: in *Pulp Fiction*, the *fabula* is the story which the spectator can understand through the inferences s/he makes throughout the viewing process. *Pulp Fiction* begins with a man and a woman sitting at a restaurant, having a meal, discussing their previous robberies of liquor stores. From this piece of dialogue, the spectator can mentally make an order of story events – yesterday (or several days before), the couple robbes a liquor store, while today they are eating at a restaurant. The couple decide to rob the restaurant, and the film cuts to the title sequence. From there, the film presents another set of characters while the couple from the opening sequence is nowhere to be seen until the final sequence of the film, where the characters the film presents after the title sequence are eating at the same restaurant seen in the opening sequence. It turns out that they are there while the couple from the opening sequence are robbing the restaurant,

temporally linking the opening and closing sequence together, revealing that all four characters are in the same restaurant at the same time. As the two characters the spectator follows for a large portion of the film are revealed to end up in this same restaurant by the end of the film, the spectator can now infer that the actions presented of those two characters throughout the film up until this ending sequence took place *before* the opening sequence in the story line. The film presents the chain of events out of order, and the spectator must piece it together by him/herself by making inferences based on temporal cues picked up during the viewing duration. In *Pulp Fiction*, the presentation of the action does not follow the same order as the fabula. The fabula is the chronological story line which the spectator piece together by making inferences, and may or may not contain several story elements which are omitted in the film. In Bordwell's words, the fabula "is [thus] a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences. It is the developing result of picking up narrative cues, applying schemata, framing and testing hypotheses." (Bordwell, 1985, p. 49)

In Hong's internationally most praised work, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the fabula operates in the same way as it does in *Pulp Fiction*. Similarly to *Pulp Fiction*, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* invites the spectator to construct the fabula through making inferences during the viewing experience. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* begins with a chapter named "Day's Wait," where the male protagonist Jae-hoon telephones an unseen woman, Su-jeong, and persuades her to come to the hotel room in which he is sitting at that moment. The film then jumps back in the timeline with a chapter called "Perhaps Accident." This chapter, seemingly, follows the perspective of Jae-hoon as he meets Su-jeong for the first time through his friend from his school days, Yeong-su. During some encounters between the three of them, Jae-hoon quickly falls for Su-jeong, and the story follows the events that lead up to the hotel room scene where Jae-hoon wishes to make love to the virginal Su-jeong. Following this, there is a central chapter, "Suspended Cable Car," which shifts the timeline back to "the present," where Su-jeong is on her way to meet Jae-hoon in the hotel and receives the phone call that the spectator saw earlier from Jae-hoon's perspective. Su-jeong is getting cold feet about losing her virginity to Jae-hoo, so she takes a detour in which she gets trapped in the chapter titular cable car due to a power outage. After this brief mid-section, the timeline jumps back to the beginning of the romance story, but now apparently from the perspective of Su-jeong, with the chapter called "Perhaps Intention." This part revisits the same key scenes as the "Perhaps Accident" chapter, but this is where the film's timeline, narrative and temporality is getting more complex and challenging. The story is now shown from Su-jeong's perspective, but several details change, one of the reflected in



Figure 1: A shy and reserved Su-jeong during the future couple's perhaps accidental meeting in a park.



Figure 2: A more outgoing and flirtatious Su-jeong during the future couple's perhaps intentional meeting in a park.

the chapter title, "Perhaps Intention." (see Figure 1 and 2) In the chapter which follows Jae-hoon's perspective, Su-jeong is shy and rather inexpressive. She is less enthusiastic and it takes a lot of convincing on Jae-hoon's part to start their romantic relationship. In "Perhaps Intention," her personality is quite different. She is flirting with Jae-hoon from the beginning, and their chance meeting in a park in the "Perhaps Accident" chapter, is, indeed, perhaps intention on Su-jeong's part. In the final chapter, "Naught Shall Go Ill When You Find Your Mare," the story is completed by the expected seduction of Su-jeong in the hotel room shown in the first chapter.

### 2.3. Memories

If one does not pay attention to detail, it is possible to see *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* in the same way as a film like *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950), where several accounts of the same event is recounted from different sources and points of views, and the spectator must decide which stories are "true" and which stories are "false." In *Rashomon*, a samurai is murdered, and the film features several characters narrating their own portions of the film by explaining to the other characters their own accounts of the murder. These accounts are all different and even several different characters claim the murder as something done by them and for different reasons. In *Rashomon*, the spectator is exposed to several different accounts of the same event, but which one is the *real* event, if one of these accounts is even true, is not revealed in the film.

It appears, however, that Hong has a different vision from Akira Kurosawa's classic film, as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* contain several contradictions within the stories presented from the two different perspectives. In one scene, Hae-joon, Su-jeong and their mutual friend Yeong-su are sitting in a restaurant, sharing a meal together. At one point, Yeong-su gets up to go to the bathroom. On his way out from the table, he accidentally knocks over the chopsticks from their table, and Hae-joon loudly requests the waitress to bring some new chopsticks to their table, but Su-jeong notices that there is a box filled with chopsticks at the edge of their table. When this scene is revisited in the "Perhaps Intention" chapter, Yeong-su knocks over the dishes of food so Su-jeong gets her clothes wet. Hae-joon requests the waitress to bring them some tissues so Su-jeong can wipe her clothes, but Su-jeong notices that there is a box at the edge of their table that contains tissues. This is one of the smaller changes in details and contradictions found in the film. A change like this could





Figure 3: Hae-joon asks for more chopsticks.

be explained by the shifting perspectives – in Hae-joon’s version and subjective memory of that evening, he believes that the chopsticks were accidentally knocked off the table, while in Su-jeong’s reminiscence of that evening, she believes that Yeong-su knocked the dishes off the table resulting in her clothes getting wet so she needed tissues to wipe off the food. A rather small detail like this could be thought of as irrelevant, as it could be explained as simply variations of subjective memories per the different perspectives, but it also functions as a play on the spectator’s memory. The spectator may recognize that s/he has seen this scene before, but might not be able to remember the exact details, and thus cannot for sure remember whether it is just a pure repetition of the scene in the “Perhaps Accident” chapter or if this detail did in fact change.

While the chopsticks versus the napkins repetition is a minor detail, there are, however, other contradictions that are more difficult to ignore from the standpoint of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* simply being a story about a romantic relationship from the side of each gender’s perspective – other key scenes are repeated in the “Perhaps Intention” chapter, but again, there are significant changes.

In a scene from the “Perhaps Accident” chapter, Hae-joon and Su-jeong share a kiss in an alley. This is after the scene that involved the chopsticks, and Yeong-su has left to go home. Hae-joon and Su-jeong are walking together on the street, and Hae-joon suddenly asks



Figure 4: Hae-joon asks for tissues.

Su-jeong whether she wants to “see something funny.” He then makes her follow him into an alley, and proceeds to kiss her. At first Su-jeong appears to enjoy the kiss, but as Hae-joon progressively gets more aggressive in his affection, Su-jeong pushes him away and screams that he should stop. In the “Perhaps Intention” chapter, the restaurant scene, this time involving tissues, ends with apparently all three going home. However, the next scene begins with Su-jeong and Yeong-su, the other male lead, kissing in their office, echoing the kissing found in the “Perhaps Accident” chapter. Later in the “Perhaps Intention” chapter, Su-jeong and Yeong-su are walking down the streets, and suddenly Yeong-su asks whether Su-jeong wants to “see something funny.” He takes her hand and makes her go into an alley with her. This time, the kissing in the alley is absent, however, the scene cuts directly to Su-jeong and Yeong-su in a room which is most likely inside a love hotel, where Yeong-su is aggressively kissing Su-jeong while attempting to take her clothes off. Su-jeong hesitates but Yeong-su keeps trying to specifically get her underwear off, holding Su-jeong down as she is resisting. Finally, she gets him off her and says, “do you realize you were about to rape me?” pointing out the seriousness of the situation.

Based on the changing details in these repeating scenes, it is difficult to see how this could possibly be the same story told from the perspective of Hae-joon and then from the perspective of Su-jeong. If Hae-joon remembers kissing Su-jeong in an alley, it should not be

possible for Su-jeong to mistake this kiss with a much more intimate time in a love hotel with another man. Perhaps it could be argued that Hae-joon remembers a kiss that did not actually happen, and that is why, from Su-jeong's perspective, they all went home after the restaurant meeting that preceded the kiss that Hae-joon remembers. By interpreting the story in this way, one could argue that Hae-joon remembers a kiss that did not actually happen, meaning his perspective is exaggerating the advancement of the romantic relationship between Su-jeong and himself, although it is difficult to imagine Hae-joon then somehow adding the part where Su-jeong screams at him and tells him to stop kissing her. If the kissing scene is indeed Hae-joon's fantasy rather than an actual memory, why would he fantasize about Su-jeong screaming at him and refusing to return his affection?

#### **2.4. Spectator as storyteller**

In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the fabula is difficult to construct on the spectator's end. The film does not present the fabula in a way that makes it easy (or even possible) for the spectator to construct an objective and verifiable timeline. The fabula is the chronological story line the spectator can construct through making inferences, but the narrative structure of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* strongly challenges this. The reason why this is so challenging is the way that Hong has constructed the syuzhet. The syuzhet is the film's plot, or rather the arrangement and presentation of the fabula events depicted in the film. The syuzhet should therefore be seen as a system which controls how the fabula is presented. The syuzhet consists of the same elements as the fabula, but controls the pattern, the order, and the rhythm of such elements – “the syuzhet embodies the film as a “dramaturgical” process.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 50) To return to my previous example – *Pulp Fiction* presents the fabula out of order. The fabula events are shuffled and the spectator is left to rearrange the pieces of the puzzle to fully understand the story. This is because of the syuzhet - where *Pulp Fiction* use the syuzhet to create a narrative puzzle that the film reveals to the spectator during the ending scene. The ending scene binds the opening and ending scene together temporally, and at this point, the spectator can put all the inferences s/he made throughout the course of the viewing process together, and see or form the complete picture.

According to Bordwell, “the temporal relations in the fabula are derived by inference; the viewer fits schemata to the cues offered by the narration. This process affects three aspects of time: the order of events, their frequency, and their duration.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 77) The fabula and the syuzhet gives the spectator different possibilities: in the fabula, events can take

place at the same time, or they can take place one after another. In most cinema, the narration will present the fabula events in chronological order, but exceptions can happen. Many films use flashbacks and flashforwards, for example. The syuzhet can present fabula events in chronological order, or, as evident in *Pulp Fiction*, shuffle the fabula events around in a jumbled order, or even backwards as in *Memento* (Nolan, 2000) or *Irreversible* (Noe, 2002). In a flashback, a commonly used technique which can be observed in for example a TV show such as *Lost* (AMC, 2004-2010), a prior fabula event is positioned later in the syuzhet. This can be done by enactment, which is direct representation, such as often portrayed in *Lost*, or by recounting, which has characters explaining prior events through dialogue. By rearranging the order of the fabula events, the spectator may have to re-evaluate what s/he has seen earlier in the film in light of new information presented about earlier fabula events (Bordwell, 1985, pp. 77-78).

A fabula event is not necessarily a unique occurrence. Fabula events may be represented in the syuzhet one time, two times or multiple times. The syuzhet may also omit a fabula event. Bordwell claims that there are nine possibilities for syuzhet representation of frequency. Of these there are two I wish to focus on: 1. A fabula event represented multiple times in the syuzhet by recounting, represented once by enacting, and 2. A fabula event represented multiple times in the syuzhet by recounting, also represented multiple times by enacting (Bordwell, 1985, p. 79). In general, it is somewhat rare for events to be enacted several times, but there are films which have used this function. In *Enter the Void* (Noe, 2009), the same flashback is enacted several times throughout the film, as a constant reminder of the main character's past trauma. Several modern horror films containing plot twists at the end, such as *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan, 1999) and *Ring* (Nakata, 1998), feature repetition of previous key scenes to remind the spectator of prior events so that the spectator can put the events together and form an understanding of how everything fits together in terms of the plot twist. The aforementioned *Rashomon* shows fabula events several times, but from different perspectives which all contradict one another. This is perhaps the closest one comes to something like Hong's films. In *Rashomon*, there are repetitions of fabula events in the syuzhet just like in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. The difference between the two films is that these repetitions have a clear function in the plot of *Rashomon*, which deals with several characters attempting to find out the truth about a specific event by having each character telling the story from their point of view. Because of this, the repetitions of fabula events in the syuzhet, containing differences in each repetition, are justified as a storytelling device. Although this is also the case of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* on first

glimpse, a keener eye will reveal a deeper structure. The spectator cannot know for sure what the exact function of these repetitions are, and the film's narrative thus gets more complex.

As I have argued, it is possible to see these repeating representations of fabula events in the syuzhet as coming from the two different perspectives, where the "Perhaps Accident" chapter is seen from Hae-joon's perspective and the "Perhaps Intention" chapter is seen from Su-jeong's perspective, but I have shown that there are contradictions which suggest that this might not be the case. Thus, in *Rashomon*, the repetitions have a clear function in the overall narrative because the different enactments of the fabula events in the syuzhet are repeated from different character's perspectives, contradicting each other because the different characters have different memories of the event and perhaps different intentions as well, and the spectator cannot be certain which character, if any, is telling the actual truth about the event. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, there is no clear indication that the repetitions stem from different character's perspectives, even if that is, perhaps, the easiest way to read the film, but the repetitions still contain contradictions.

Viewing time sets constraints on the memory of the spectators, and thus their ability to construct a coherent fabula will depend on the film's repeated references to fabula events. Therefore, most mainstream films repeatedly make references to fabula events to make sure that the spectator can keep up with the story and not become confused. Generally, fabula events will only be enacted once in mainstream cinema, and according to Bordwell, "if the event does get 'replayed,' the repetition is subject to stringent narrational rules. It must be motivated realistically – typically through character subjectivity, as a memory." (Bordwell, 1985, p. 80) In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the repetitions do not follow Bordwell's "narrational rules." It is possible to make interpretations in the direction of the story events being memories of the main characters, but the film itself does not explicitly suggest this, as I have argued. The whole time, it is unclear what function these repetitions have in the overall narrative. Unlike *Pulp Fiction*, the different pieces do not fit together in some puzzle-like structure once the spectator has seen the whole film, nor are the events a presentation of subjective points of view such as in *Rashomon*, featuring several characters telling the same story from their own perspectives, which then challenges the spectator to ponder upon which story was real. Without diving into interpretation, the spectator cannot know what these repetitions mean and why they are there.

In this way, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* will challenge its spectator with its narrative structure. As viewing time generally limits the spectator's memory, these repetitions make it increasingly difficult to navigate where the film is at a certain point in the fabula and

the syuzhet. Bordwell claims repetition can “heighten curiosity and suspense, open or close gaps, direct the viewer toward the most probable hypotheses or toward the least likely ones, retard the revelation of outcomes, and assure that the quantity of new fabula information does not become too great.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 80) However, the repetitions in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* confuse the spectator. They make, perhaps, the spectator more curious and in search of hypotheses. By having repetitions with variations, the fabula information is governed by the conditions of normal viewing circumstances. The spectator is unable to rewind the film back (though this can easily be done at home on a DVD player) and rewatch a specific section of the film. Because the spectator must rely on his/her own memory while watching the film, a film like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* challenges the spectator under these conditions (Bordwell, 1985, p. 80). It might be simple to comprehend that there are repetitions presented, but the spectator’s memory might make it difficult to know whether the repetition is *exactly the same*, or whether it features some variations on the repetition presented.

In a blog posting, Bordwell expands upon the idea of memory’s part to play in the experience of watching a film. Bordwell claims that filmmakers use patterns to give specific elements special significance. There will be patterns that the spectator can notice during the first viewing of a film, and there will be patterns that can only be noticed on further viewings, which invites for analysis (Bordwell, 2012). More rarely is when

“a filmmaker gives us something in between obvious patterns and buried ones. A film might repeat something in such a way that (a) you recognize it as a repetition on first pass but (b) you can’t recall exactly what it harks back to. In other words, the filmmaker deliberately organized the movie so that the things that come back are difficult to place in the film as a whole.” (Bordwell, 2012)

Bordwell points out how some films rely on what he calls a “fact of cinema.” This is that the film “unrolls in time,” meaning that the process of watching a film is one of moving forward. One does generally not stop the movie, rewind it and revisit an earlier scene. One keeps moving forward and what one is seeing moving forward is rooted in ones memory of what has passed (Bordwell, 2012). This means that the spectator’s memory of what s/he has seen up until a certain point may be flawed, which can result in confusion in films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. The spectator can recognize that something is being repeated, but whether it is repeated in the same way is more difficult to decipher.

This is reflected in reviews and texts about the film, where writers are discussing the difference of the repeated scenes. Most reviewers refer to the repeated restaurant scene where Yeong-su knocks something off the table as he gets out to go to the bathroom in saying that in the first scene, Yeong-su knocks a fork off the table, and in the repeated scene, he knocks the chopsticks off the table (Guillen, 2007). Even in the first draft of this very text, I wrote the same thing when summarizing the film. However, this is in fact wrong. As I have previously noted when comparing the scenes, the chopsticks are knocked off the table in the first scene, and in the second iteration, Su-jeong's clothes get wet because Yeong-su knocks the dishes over resulting in some of the food splashing on Su-jeong's clothes, so Hae-joon asks for some tissues. How did forks find their way into several texts written about this film? This is an excellent example of how the spectator's memory is flawed because of the way one usually watches a film. Bordwell challenges spectators: "Halfway through a movie, try to come up with an accurate scene-by-scene list of what you've just watched." (Bordwell, 2012) This would indeed be very difficult for most spectators, casual as well as attentive ones.

In his masters thesis about Hong, Bradley Warren claims that Hong's films encourage the spectator's awareness of his/her role as a spectator as storyteller, through their manipulation of narrative structures and the difficulty of finding the director's intended interpretation readily available in the film text (Warren, 2015, pp. 4-6). The structure of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* support this notion that the spectator becomes a part of the narration itself. The structure in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* does not open up and reveal itself at the end as do other non-linear films. By the end of *Pulp Fiction*, the spectator must use his/her own memory to piece the puzzle together form the complete story, but all the spectator must do is to form the correct timeline to fully understand the events that have been presented. This is more complicated in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* as there are scenes that are outright revised, and even contradictory. This allows the spectator to engage more actively with the film, not only to piece the puzzle together to form a verifiable timeline, but find meaning in the structures themselves. As previously noted, where non-linear timelines and repetitions generally have a clear function within the narrative itself, Hong's films provide no indication as to why his films are structured the way they are. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* make no effort to explain to the spectator why certain scenes are repeated, and why some of these repetitions contain contradictions which hinder the spectator's efforts to create a verifiable timeline that will "complete" or explain the story. In this sense, by obscuring the reasons for choosing this structure, with no obvious function in the story itself, the reader of the film text is invited into the text itself to navigate it through

the function of his/her own memory which will shape the final outcome. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* invites its audience to make inferences throughout the viewing duration which will shape the spectator's own perception of the film, rather than Hong holding the spectator's hand throughout, laying everything out for the spectator to understand.

## 2.5. Forking-paths

In *Film Futures*, David Bordwell refers to a short story written by Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," where endless alternative universes are suggested as a narrative possibility. These alternative universes would open up for the possibility of having an infinite series of times, where endless futures are created (Bordwell, 2008, p. 171). Bordwell then turns to Gary Saul Morsom, who in his study *Narrative and Freedom* objects to these so-called endless narrative possibilities, and argues that temporal openness is denied by conventional techniques, and that the "conception of alternative universes cannot ground a responsible conception of human action." (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 171-172) Bordwell claims that alternative futures in fictional universes are limited and do not come close to the endless possibilities presented by Borges, although *forking-paths narratives* do appear in cinema, particularly recent, or modern, cinema (Bordwell, 2008, p. 172). As Bordwell states, "recent cinema is becoming more experimental on several fronts, particularly in relation to complicated uses of time and point of view, and so we shouldn't be surprised to find forking-path plots turning up more often on our screens." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 172) To illustrate these forking-path narratives, Bordwell names films such as *Blind Chance* (Kieślowski, 1981), *Two Many Ways to Be No. 1* (Wai, 1997), *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998) and *Sliding Doors* (Howitt, 1998). These films share similar patterns, as they all feature a plot which portray different, alternative outcomes from a particular starting point, such as in *Run Lola Run* where the titular character Lola is trying to come up with a certain amount of money in a certain amount of time in order to save her boyfriend's life. The film present the same starting point three times. The first has a certain outcome, then the story jumps back to the starting point and picks up again, showing a different outcome. The third and final time shows what the audience will generally take as the "real ending," and suggests that although these were alternative stories and timelines, Lola still might have learned something from the first two "attempts," even though that would be impossible as they are alternative storylines and universes. Bordwell use these examples to point out that forking path narratives do not really "hint at the radical possibilities opened up by Borges." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 172) By referring



to the cited films, Bordwell points to the fact that these films present only two or three possible outcomes from the same starting point, such as Lola's crisis in *Run Lola Run*. The stories in films such as *Run Lola Run* support Bordwell's position that "the strategy of narrow alternative offers clues to the way forking-path narratives actually work and work upon us." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 173) He claims that these forking-path narratives are based upon folk psychology, rather than philosophy or physics, and therefore the narratives rely on conventions dependent on folk psychology in how the spectator will perceive and be able to make sense of the narrative (Bordwell, 2008, p. 173). The forking path narratives are based upon cinematic conventions and the spectator's perceptual abilities. It is easier for the spectator to keep track of and imagine a few alternative futures or storylines, say two or three alternatives, than it would be to imagine the endless amount that Borges suggests (Bordwell, 2008, p. 174).

Bordwell attempts to define the forking-path narrative of cinema by establishing what he calls the rules for this type of narrative. He condenses it into seven conventions that I will discuss individually to investigate whether or not this forking path model is applicable to Hong's work in general and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* in particular, and through this discussion shed some light on whether this model is appropriate for researching the narrative structures of modern art cinema films that are exploring narrative possibilities.

Let us start with rule number one. Forking paths are linear, Bordwell claims. These narratives are characterized by having one specific and important moment serve as the opening gate to the forking paths, rather than each moment in the whole film being "pregnant with numerous futures." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 175) This is apparent in Bordwell's own example, *Run Lola Run*, where each of the three segments featured in the film start at the same point, and then the story takes different turns from that point in each segment. He further points out that in the forking path narratives, there is a "strict line of cause and effect," starting from each starting point of the splitting into the forking paths (Bordwell, 2008, p. 175). In Bordwell's characterization of the forking-path narratives, everything revolves around that specific starting point, the door that opens the different paths. Thus, everything runs parallel from that point. In *Run Lola Run*, the starting point is Lola, deciding on the course of action on how to save her boyfriend from the criminals to whom he lost a big sum of money. Each of the three segments revolve around this specific opening. The three segments are all in the same timeline, they are simply alternative futures from the starting point of the film. In the examples Bordwell has chosen as the basis for establishing his rules of the forking-path narratives, this statement makes perfect sense. These films exemplify how

the different paths runs parallel to each other. The starting point is the same, but the ending point or the different futures are different, based on the cause and effect structure. If one applies this rule or convention on *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, one could claim that the starting point of the forking paths take place during the binding chapters, “Day’s Wait” and “Suspended Cable Car,” which spark the two different “points of view.”<sup>1</sup> *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* obscure to the spectator where the creation of the forking path actually occurs, and thus makes it difficult to decipher whether the two different syuzhet representations of fabula events are truly running parallel or not. At the same time, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* does not enhance the importance of one specific moment the way these other examples do. The different paths are not all *that different*, they simply feature small variations on the same situations, whereas a film like *Run Lola Run* clearly use the forking path to dramatize the importance of the final outcome.

Bordwell’s second claim regarding his rules of forking-path narratives is that “the fork is signposted.” (Bordwell, 2008, p. 176) He states that there must be a specific point where the dividing of the forking path is explicitly marked. He describes this as a so-called “reset button,” a button which clearly emphasizes the importance of timing. The dividing point of the forking path is highlighted by a narrative pattern, such as in Bordwell’s example, *Sliding Doors*, which reverses the main character’s movement as she fails to catch an important train, which will decide her fate. When her movements are reversed and ready to start again, she manages to catch the train just in time, which brings about the alternative story that the forking-path narrative allows for (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 176-177). This signpost is not so readily available in Hong’s film, and in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* it is more difficult to argue this signpost claim. The opening chapter, “Day’s Wait,” begins with Jae-hoon calling Su-jeong and asking her whether she is coming soon to his hotel room (see figure 5).

When the film, at the halfway point, after the “Perhaps Accident” chapter, jumps back to the same point in the timeline as the opening chapter, we see Su-jeong receive that same telephone call on her end in the “Suspended Cable Car” chapter (see figure 6). While one could argue that this is indeed a signpost, and that the film here clearly establishes a branching point, a marking point of the forking path, based on the interpretation that the film

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<sup>1</sup> Although, which I will return to in response to another of Bordwell’s rules, this does not make sense as these chapters are not temporally the first fabula events, they are only the story events presented first in the syuzhet in regard to sparking the same story told twice from alternative points of view.



Figure 5: Jae-hoon calling Su-jeong in “Day’s Wait.”

shows us the same story twice from two different perspectives, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* challenges Bordwell’s notion of the signposting of the forking path narrative by being less explicit or specific about signposting. Moreover, as the timeline of the film is all jumbled, the “Day’s Wait” and “Suspended Cable Car” chapters are not temporally at the beginning of the story presented in the film. Therefore, it is problematic to call this the branching point of the forking path. The earliest fabula event in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is depicted in the syuzhet in the “Perhaps Accident” and “Perhaps Intention” chapters. Do these chapters, then, function as the signpost?

Only in the interpretation of the story as a “he said/she said”-story does this characterization of the film work. If the “Perhaps Accident” and “Perhaps Intention” sections function as the signpost of the forking path, then *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* must be explained by the film merely presenting the same story seen from the perspective of Hae-Joon, and then again from the perspective of Su-Jeong. This would still not make sense, though, as that would mean that the “Perhaps Accident” and “Perhaps Intention” segments are the subjective memories of the two characters, which then would make the “Day’s Wait” and “Suspended Cable Car” chapters the signpost, marking the “real” fabula events, with the other chapters being subjective memories. With *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, Hong



Figure 6: Su-jeong receiving Jae-hoon's call in "Suspended Cable Car."

has created an "unsolvable" web of narrative functions, which clearly challenges Bordwell's claim regarding his rules of the forking-path narratives.

Bordwell's third rule of forking-path narratives is that "forking paths intersect sooner or later." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 177) Bordwell's argument here is simple: the different forking paths are inhabited by the same people, the same places, and the same background conditions, but these elements are now subject to alternative futures (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 177-178). This rule is more difficult to challenge. In both Bordwell's examples and in Hong's films, the different forking paths are largely inhabited by the same characters. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the different scenes generally consist of the same set of characters, where the relationship of the male and female protagonists take the main focus. This rule, however, does feel rather pointless when attempting to investigate the structure of Hong's cinema. These films are distinguished from the films Bordwell mentions *because* they are much smaller in scope, and the remarkable formal aspects of these films lie in the fact that the same situations repeat over and over, unlike the films Bordwell places in his forking-path method, which are characterized by the importance of the split-second, where one situation, a specific starting point leads to a different future, as more of a plot function than a formal game.

*Run Lola Run* is a good example of this. That film takes advantage of the forking-path narrative to create excitement and nervousness regarding how Lola's life will turn out in the

end. Will she manage to save her boyfriend from the crime bosses? Will it end badly or will the film have a happy ending? As I will go into further on, another of Bordwell's rules is that the final ending is the "real" ending, and carries more weight than the previous alternative stories, and *Run Lola Run* therefore takes advantage of the forking path to create a dramatic tension throughout the film (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 181-182). This is exactly how Hong's cinema differs, and how Bordwell's model fails to adequately explain a more challenging approach to the forking-path narrative. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* cannot be simplified by the different paths and alternative futures being a plot device to create dramatic tensions over the question of, say, whether or not Jae-hoon and Su-jeong will go through with the final act of having sexual intercourse as hinted in the film's (international<sup>2</sup>) title. This is part of why it is important to investigate Hong and other recent minimalist directors from Asia, who are formally challenging the spectator's perception and knowledge of narrative strategies.

Bordwell's fourth claim is that "forking-path tales are unified by traditional cohesion devices." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 178) Bordwell refers to the fact that Hollywood cinema, as well as art cinema, traditionally makes use of narrative strategies that are designed to help the spectator understand everything that is going on in the film. Bordwell claims that these techniques are found in the forking-path narratives as well, "usually serving to tighten up linear cause and effect," and he points to two much employed techniques: appointments and deadlines (Bordwell, 2008, p. 178). Here, too, *Run Lola Run* is a fitting example built around a deadline, which again serves as a ticking clock to create dramatic tension. As I have already explained, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* lacks this aspect of the forking-path narratives. What the film does not lack, however, are the cohesion devices Bordwell refers to. The film adheres to Bordwell's observation in that the ending point is indeed a meeting. But to say that the paths are "unified" by the cohesion devices is another matter, as I have argued. While the ending point in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is the same, there is no indication that the two paths are in any way unified.

Likewise, Bordwell's fifth claim is generally fulfilled in Hong's cinema as well: that "forking-paths will often run parallel," and that "certain components emerge as vivid variations of one another." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 180) This fact is unquestionable in Hong's

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<sup>2</sup> The Korean original title *오! 수정* can be translated as "Oh! Su-jeong," hinting more at a comedy film than a more dramatic and archaic title such as "Virgin Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors."

cinema too, to the extent of it often serving as perhaps the main point of the films. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* contains scenes and situations which indeed function as variations of a situation already enacted once in syuzhet. In Hong's cinema, this falls into line with Borges suggestion of endless narrative possibilities. I have argued that reading *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* as a story seen from two different perspectives is a simplified interpretation of the film and cannot adequately explain the narrative form presented. While the film does fall into line with Bordwell's thinking that forking-path narratives only use two or three different paths, I would argue that films like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* actually do hint at the endless possibilities Borges expressed. As I have pointed out, the film does not use the forking-path model to achieve some sort of dramatic tension which is so commonly at the heart of the other films that apply this narrative structure. The narrative oddities at display in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* do not in themselves serve as a particular plot point. The film does not have the ticking time bomb of *Run Lola Run*, where a task must be completed, and the spectator can see different alternatives to how it might turn out before reaching the solution in the final alternative. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, small situations are repeated with no clear indication of why they are repeated in a different manner. What is the importance of the difference between chopsticks falling off a restaurant table in one iteration and the food falling off the table, hitting Su-Jeong resulting in her needing to clean her clothes in the next iteration? Even though there are only two paths presented in the film, the variations on these small details as well as the two paths serving no specific purpose such as in the films mentioned by Bordwell, appear to point in the direction that perhaps, in this forking-path narrative, every moment might be "pregnant with new alternatives" after all. As there is no particularly readable purpose presented in the film text, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, while only presenting two paths in the syuzhet, might hint in the direction that these two representations are only that – two representations, out of endless possible representations. The film's curious form might make the spectator ponder on whether there is for example a third restaurant scene – maybe one restaurant scene where the aforementioned fork *does* get knocked off the table. Perhaps there is also an alternative universe where Su-Jeong and Yeong-ho kisses in the alley, rather than going straight to the love hotel, or perhaps there is an alternative where Hae-Joon and Su-Jeong head straight to the love hotel, skipping the kiss in the alley.

Bordwell's sixth claim is that "the last path taken presupposes the others." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 181) Bordwell argues how these narratives treat replays of earlier events elliptically, and that what comes later in the narrative necessarily modifies what the spectator has seen

before. This I shall discuss further in the next chapter on temporality, investigating the relationship between past, present and future and what this relationship's effect on narratively ambiguous films such as Hong's cinema, is. Briefly put, Bordwell is concerned with how the repeating iterations of fabula events in the syuzhet are treated with the spectator's knowledge and memory up until that point. In *Run Lola Run*, where Lola's first actions in the narrative might be very thoroughly presented in the first part, the second and third part revisiting the same situations might be glossed over more quickly. Further, Bordwell is concerned with the aspect that both the characters and the spectator will have "learned" something by the final forking path. Lola has somehow learned to avoid the mistakes she made in the first two paths taken, and in the third path she successfully manages to complete her mission (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 181-182). Again, this learning process is nowhere to be seen in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, as there is no indication that the characters evolve in the "Perhaps Intention" chapter based on what the spectator has seen in the "Perhaps Accident" chapter. Moreover, the fabula events repeated in the syuzhet are not treated elliptically the way Bordwell describes. The restaurant scene, for example, is treated with the same patience in the second iteration as in the first iteration. This is clear in most of Hong's films, where the repeated scenes and situations are given the same amount of time in each iteration.

Finally, Bordwell's seventh and last claim regarding forking-path narratives is that "all paths are not equal; the last one taken, or completed, is the least hypothetical one." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 183) According to Bordwell, there is something called a "recency effect," which means that the last thing the spectator is seeing will be privileged in his/her memory, and the previous paths are experienced as preconditions for the final path taken (Bordwell, 2008, p. 183). Once again, *Run Lola Run* is a great example of what Bordwell is talking about here. Through the learning process of the first two paths, Lola finally achieves her mission in the third path and this is the path the spectator will remember most clearly once s/he leaves the theatre. Bordwell argues that because of this, this last path taken will stand out in the spectator's memory as the "real" ending and thus the least hypothetical of the three paths. The last path taken is the one that sticks, and will therefore stand as the film's final message. This claim yet again fails to account for the role of the two paths in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. As I argued, there is no indication that any character has learned anything through the first path taken, and it would be peculiar to consider "Perhaps Intention" as the *real* path because the film does not explicitly state this as a final ending, a happy ending or anything similar. Even the chapter names themselves, "Perhaps Accident" and "Perhaps Intention," suggest that these two paths are only two possible outcomes, two forking paths. These are

merely two of the endless possible outcomes suggested by Borges; no one path expresses any lesson learned from the other path, and no one path expresses itself as the correct path or least hypothetical path.

Bordwell has examined the structures of films he perceives to be exemplary of forking-path narratives. However, by using Hong and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, I have argued how this forking-path model does not accommodate recent trends in art cinema and international festival films. From the 90s and onwards, emerging directors such as Thailand's Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and Hong himself have explored narrative and temporal possibilities through their minimalist work. Films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* show how there are new narratives and approaches to filmmaking being displayed in the international film festival circuit, and that the forking-path narratives model is being explored beyond what Bordwell theorizes in his text. These films defy conventions such as signposting, the different paths presupposing the others, and the final path being the least hypothetical one, and prove that there is further need for studies on narrative and temporal possibilities within film studies.

## 2.6. Mind-game films

In *The Mind-Game Film*, Thomas Elsaesser describes what he calls a tendency in contemporary cinema – the “mind-game” film, a term he borrows from Lars von Trier in the director's public statements during the promotion of his 2006 film *The Boss of it All*, where the Danish director inserted a number of “out-of-place objects scattered throughout,” encouraging the audience to play his “mind-game” and look for these objects. These films, described as playing games, can be put in two categories: first, the film playing games with its characters, such as *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), *The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998), and David Fincher's thriller films *Se7en* (1995) and *The Game* (1997), and second, the film playing games with its audience, such as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), perhaps seen as the ultimate mind-game or puzzle film, and others such as *The Usual Suspects* (Singer, 1995), *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan, 1999), and David Lynch's surreal *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) (Elsaesser, 2009, pp. 13-14). In these latter films, information is being withheld from the spectator, which contributes to these games being played.

Films like *The Sixth Sense* can be put firmly in both categories: in M. Night Shyamalan's highly successful plot twist thriller, the spectator as well as the main character is being held in the dark until the revelation in the final scene in which the main character



realizes that he is a ghost and has been dead all along. Shyamalan has given the spectator clues the whole way, which make a second viewing of the film interesting<sup>3</sup>, but the director has also deceived the spectator the whole way through until the end. In the film, a psychiatrist is attempting to help a young boy who is constantly afraid as he claims he can see dead people. Meanwhile, Shyamalan drops several clues such as the psychiatrist's wife not looking at him or answering him when he is trying to communicate with her. The wife is also visibly sad during the film, which gives the spectator the impression that the marriage between the two of them is falling apart. However, by the end of the film, the psychiatrist realizes that while he has been trying to help the young boy, the boy has also been helping him cope with his denial of his own death, and the sadness of his wife demonstrated throughout the film was not an indicator of a bad relationship, rather it was her grief for her dead husband.

Other traits shared by these mind game films is that some of them emphasize the mind itself, and play games with the characters' perception of reality, and by extension, with the spectators' perception of reality as well. An example of these films is the Wachowski sisters' major success action mind-game film, *The Matrix* (1999), in which its main character Neo literally discovers what he has perceived as the world in his whole life is actually the inside of a computer program, and he is "awakened" to see the real world, where human beings are slaves to machines (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 15). Other mind-game films introduce the idea of parallel worlds, such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004), *Primer* (Carruth, 2004), and *Vanilla Sky* (Crowe, 2001). Elsaesser also points out how these films extend beyond the Hollywood mainstream, and are represented in European and Asian countries by films like *Run Lola Run* (Tywker, 1998), *Three Iron* (Kim, 2004), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong, 2000), *Oldboy* (Park, 2003), and *Funny Games* (Haneke, 1997) (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 15).

Although there are clear tendencies such as an "Europe-East Asia-American independents triangle" and a preponderance of recognized auteurs, Elsaesser proposes that the mind-game film transcends aspects such as authorial signature and national cinema, as well as they transcend genre (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 16). Many of these mind-game films are steeped in

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<sup>3</sup> The DVD-era might explain parts of the attraction for directors to make these mind-game or puzzle films, as complex mysteries like *The Sixth Sense* or *Memento* are films that the spectator might get extra pleasure out of by watching twice or multiple times, so that the spectator can retrace the clues given about the mysteries that s/he could not spot during the first viewing of the film. By creating a product that lends itself well to rewatching, there is potential for a greater sale of DVDs.

genre, such as action, science fiction, and the horror film, but certainly transcends them by focusing on these mind-games, disorienting and misleading its audience, playing with them – a trait that ultimately binds these films together into a specific tendency in modern cinema, which, regardless of genre, shares its goals in attempting to play games on both their characters and their spectators.

One of the most typical and perhaps most attractive features of these mind-game films is what Elsaesser refers to as the “oh-my-god feeling.” This “oh-my-god” feeling is something that spectators might experience at the crucial point at which a mind-game film typically revises itself, or to harken back to Aristotle, the point at which the plot is reversed, where a big reveal makes the spectator reconsider everything that has happened up until that point in the film, realizing that the plot has “been based on a mistaken cognitive or perceptual premise,” such as in *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999), for example, where the plot has been based on an insomniac office worker’s chance meeting and befriending of a more free-spirited person than himself, Tyler Durden (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 18). Under the leadership of Durden, these two together build up what they call the “fight club,” something that eventually evolves into something reminiscent of a terrorist group advocating anarchy and chaos. Towards the end of the film, when the main character realizes that everything has gone too far and is trying to stop it, he eventually comes to the realization that there is no Tyler Durden, or, rather, that Tyler Durden is not *another person* – *he* was the main character all along, but embodied as a fiction of his imagination. He needed this external imaginary embodiment of another person to do and act as he pleased.

*Fight Club* culminates in a fitting example of this “oh-my-god” feeling. The spectator has assumed that the main character played by Edward Norton and the Tyler Durden character played by Brad Pitt are separate individuals, and throughout the course of the film, the spectator has read the plot based on this assumption. Thus, the whole viewing experience of *Fight Club* has been based on a mistaken perceptual premise, similarly to how spectators have experienced *The Sixth Sense*, where the spectator also assumes that the main character, the psychiatrist attempting to help the young boy who sees dead people, is a living person. Both these films drop definitive hints that something is indeed “off,” but critic and audience reception indicate that the filmmakers were successful in their attempts at “fooling” the audience – that is, directors Fincher and Shyamalan both won the mind-games they played on their audience.

As Elsaesser demonstrates, a general trait of these mind-game films is that there is a specific point at which this “oh-my-god” feeling takes place. Generally, there comes a

moment in these films in which a revelation is brought to the audience, as well as the characters. A blogger writes: “The viewer gets to have it both ways: have the oh-my-god feeling and watch the protagonist experience it too.” (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 18) The “oh-my-god” feeling is when the spectator realizes that s/he has been fooled all along: the main character in *The Sixth Sense* was dead all along, the Tyler Durden character in *Fight Club* was the same person as the main character all along. These oh-my-god moments generally excite the spectators, and as a main feature it is a good example of why these mind-game films have become popular in modern cinema.

What is interesting about Hong when trying to apply these descriptions of the mind-game films to his films, is how he at the same time fits the criteria and eschews them. In the cinema of Hong, there is no doubt – some sort of mind-game is being played. Take *Yourself and Yours* (2016) as an example. This film centers around a relationship, like most of Hong’s films. A man and a woman, Young-soo and Min-jeong, are in a relationship, and Young-soo is thinking about marrying Min-jeong in the future. One day at Young-soo’s atelier, a friend tells Young-soo that Min-jeong was spotted at a local bar drinking with another man, getting very drunk, and that she even started a fight. Through Young-soo and his friend’s conversation at the atelier, it becomes clear that Young-soo is of the opinion that Min-jeong has a drinking problem, and therefore, he has given her a rule about how many drinks she is allowed to have (two beers and five shots of soju) when she goes out. The next scene shows a man walking into a café. There, he spots a young woman he thinks he recognizes, and sits down at her table. He asks her what she is doing there, and she replies by asking who he is and whether he knows her. The man is confused, claiming that the woman in front of him is named Min-jeong and that they know each other, but the woman refuses this name, and says that he has the wrong person. Later in the film, the woman tells him that she is a twin, and that her sister’s name is Min-jeong.

In the next scene, we see a woman, whom we assume to be the same woman as the one in the café because she is played by the same actress (Lee You-young). She enters a room, where Young-soo is lying on a bed. As she lies down with him, we can infer that this woman is indeed Min-jeong. Young-soo, in an irritated voice asks her whether she loves drinking. Unaware about Young-soo’s intent, she replies that she does enjoy drinking a lot. Young-soo confronts Min-jeong with the rumours he has heard about her drinking in public, but Min-jeong denies everything and says that this is not true. As the fight comes to a head, Min-jeong suggests that they should not see each other for a while and walks off. The next day, Min-jeong is nowhere to be found as Young-soo looks for her both in her working place

and in her house. Later, the woman and the man from the café scene are in a bar having beer together. Some friends of Young-soo are watching close by, gossiping about how Min-jeong, whom they believe is the woman they are watching, is a bad girl to be out drinking with other men like this and how they pity Young-soo.

The next day, another man is seen walking into the same café as we have already seen before. He also thinks he recognizes a girl sitting there (again played by the same actress). He advances to her table and presents her the story about how the two of them once met at an office party and shared a kiss that night. The woman once again responds by saying that she does not know him and that he has the wrong person. The man persists and insists that she is in fact the woman he met that one time, but she keeps refusing, and says that she does not know him, nor does she recall any moment in which she went to such an office party, and that he must have the wrong person. The man remarks, “this is mysterious and fun!” and the woman responds, as if from Hong himself, warning the spectator, “then just enjoy it!” Here, Hong explicitly warns the spectator that this puzzle, this mind-game, might not unfold the way in which most mind-game films do, where the spectator as well as the character gets that final revelation, that oh-my-god moment, where everything falls into place and the spectator and character realize what has actually happened throughout the course of the film. Through the mysterious character of Min-jeong, Hong tells us “don’t try to understand everything.”

After this intriguing chance meeting in the café, the woman who claims to not be Min-jeong and the man who thinks he kissed her at an office party several years ago go to the same bar seen in earlier scenes and have beer together. This time, the other man from the first café scene walks in, and sits down at their table. This time also, the woman says she does not know him. He gets angry which results in the two men fighting, but, seemingly out of nowhere, the two men recognize each other and realize they were high school classmates. The woman runs away, leading to the inevitable meeting between her and Young-soo who has now realized he was not treating Min-jeong fairly when limiting her drinks. Young-soo approaches the woman as she is crying, but once again, the woman claims she does not know him and that she is not Min-jeong. Eventually they end up in Young-soo’s bed, Young-soo satisfied with having what he refers to as a meeting “like meeting for the first time,” with the woman insisting that it is indeed the first time.

In *Yourself and Yours*, the question of Min-jeong’s identity is constantly brought up. There are many questions: are all the women different? Are they doppelgängers? Are all of these encounters in alternative or parallel universes? Does Min-jeong have some sort of psychological problem? Multiple personality disorder? Is Min-jeong just playing games?

None of these questions is answered, and the spectator is left to make his/her own interpretation, with Hong's warning in mind (do not try to understand everything). Like I claimed, there is little doubt there is in fact a puzzle, that a mind-game is being played. But is it a game that can be resolved? Can the puzzle be completed? And, where is the oh-my-god feeling? In *Too Early/Too Late: Temporality and Repetition in Hong Sang-su's Films*, Kyung Hyun Kim touches upon the same point, claiming:

“Hong Sang-su's unorthodox approach to time motivates a departure from the conventional narrative form. He tends to muddle the structure of his films, resisting the order of a beginning, a middle, and an end. [...] *The Power of Kangwon Province* and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (*O Sujong*, 2000) adopt a “forking-path” narrative form where two separate narratives split from the same original point. Normally in these narratives, the alternative story produces an ending that is different from the initial plot. [...] What is radical about Hong's films is not the use of a forking pattern, but that the varying plotlines do not have any impact on changing the ending (nor do they threaten to change the history of the world).” (Kim, 2004, p. 207)

The “oh-my-god” feeling is a good example of how Hong at once can be placed in the mind-game box and at the same time does not fit in. Hong's films generally portray some kind of mind-game, mostly revolving around the concept of time or memory, with certain situations repeating more than once. In the case of *Yourself and Yours*, the identity of female lead character Min-jeong is the question at stake. One aspect that must be considered is also that of the extratextual. A spectator who has seen another film directed by Hong will be more aware of what to expect, and more capable of approaching the film. A casual first-time spectator, on the basis of what the film introduces during the viewing experience, will most likely expect this oh-my-god feeling, where the film will reveal how everything was constructed; perhaps one solution could be that Min-jeong had some psychological problems, and that all the women claiming not to be Min-jeong were in fact Min-jeong all along. But Hong never allows the viewer this sort of insight. *Yourself and Yours* is a mind-game film, but at the same time, it is not. The film introduces the mind-games, but does not reward the spectator by solving the mystery that is presented.

## 2.7. Unreliable narration

In *Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth launched the term “unreliable narrator.” Booth's description of the term is

”For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not.” (Booth, 1983, p. 158)

Examples of unreliable narration according to Booth are instances such as when the narration of a film is contradictory or deceitful when in combination with the norms of the film (Engelstad, 2015, p. 204) . In *Film og Fortelling* (“Film and story”), Audun Engelstad exemplifies the unreliable narrator by using the Norwegian film *Babycall* (International title “The Monitor” [Sletaune, 2011]), in which the protagonist’s perception of reality is at odds with the realistic environment presented in the film: for example, a lake in the woods is replaced by a parking lot, but through the eyes of the protagonist, the parking lot later turns into a lake again, which functions as a hint that the protagonist (the narrator) is psychologically unstable and makes the spectator question the reality of the protagonist’s world (Engelstad, 2015, pp. 204-205). Engelstad calls this a “projected perspective,” referring to the film projecting the perspective of the protagonist, and questions whether this is an instance of the narration being unreliable or whether it is merely an instance of projecting a reality true to the mind of the protagonist, and therefore not technically being an *unreliable* mode of narration in its essence (Engelstad, 2015, pp. 205-206). As *Babycall* presents a reality true to the mind of the protagonist, it is difficult to claim that the narration is unreliable in its essence, whose world the spectator is inhabiting. Therefore, Engelstad contrasts *Babycall* with another example, Abbas Kiarostami’s *Certified Copy* (2010), which features instances where the film is “referring to two different realities, not apparently showing which is the correct one, or where one ends and the other begins.” (Engelstad, 2015, p. 206) In *Certified Copy*, the relationship between the main character and a woman he meets during the launching of his most recent book is portrayed in a confusing manner. At first, the two of them appear to not know each other, but later in the film they act like a married couple. Engelstad asks:

“How can this change [of the characters’ attitude towards each other] be explained? Is the beginning a game where the two of them act like strangers to each other as an attempt to rekindle the spark in their marriage? Or is the end an occasion for the two strangers to play out their respective frustrations from their individual lives? Or did they have a relationship a long time ago, which is now rekindling after many years apart?” (Engelstad, 2015, p. 206)

Engelstad concludes that *Certified Copy* is a film in which is narrated by changing the premise of the story as it goes along (Engelstad, 2015, p. 207). This does not conform to the

initial proposal from Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction*, where Booth's approach to the term revolved around defining the unreliable narrator as a film which deviates from the moral standard introduced by the implied author in the fiction work (Hansen, 2007, p. 227). In *Reconsidering the Unreliable Narrator*, Per Krogh Hansen outlines how the term has evolved, and that:

“some in contemporary narratology tend to define it as a reader-dependent issue: a narrator's (un)reliability is not a matter of inconsistencies or deviations internal to the narrational structure, but dependent upon the reader's preferences. If reader and narrator share a worldview, a moral standard, values, or beliefs, the narrator will be reliable to the reader. If not, he/she will be unreliable.” (Hansen, 2007, pp. 227-228)

Hansen here refers to mainly A. Nunning, who exemplifies this concept of the unreliable narrator by stating “To put it quite bluntly: A pederast would not find anything wrong with Nabokov's *Lolita*.” (Hansen, 2007, p. 228) It appears that narratologists such as Nunning considers narration to be reliable if the reader of the text “agrees” with the text's moral values or worldviews, and unreliable if the reader “disagrees.” Hansen explains how, according to Nunning “unreliable narrators are not to be understood as a structural nor as a semantic aspect of the textbase alone, but only by taking into account the conceptual frameworks that readers bring for the text.” (Hansen, 2007, p. 228) According to Hansen (and Nunning), the concept of the unreliable narrator can be generalized to solve issues when dealing with an inconsistent text: “When the reader is presented with textual inconsistencies (e.g., self-contradictions, illogical circumstances), one strategy of solving these is to subordinate them the concept of the ‘unreliable narrator.’” (Hansen, 2007, p. 228) Thus, one approach to the concept of the unreliable narrator is when the spectator or reader is presented with an inconsistent text, such as for example in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, when scenes from the “Perhaps Intention” chapter are repeated in the “Perhaps Accident” chapter but with some differences, think of this as “unreliable narration.”

Inspired by these works on the concept of the unreliable narrator I separate this concept into two approaches – 1) a work of fiction which features a narrator whose worldviews are not in alignment with those of the spectator or reader, and 2) a work of fiction which is unreliable in the sense that what the fictional universe presents features contradictions or similar functional problems. Approach number one appears to be irrelevant when discussing the films of Hong Sang-soo, or, at least, irrelevant to the scope of this thesis. Approach number two on the other hand is more in line with the mission for this thesis, and is

one worthy of considering when attempting to investigate the narrative strategies of films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*.

In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, there is no narrator, unlike other examples in Hong's filmography such as *The Day He Arrives* which features voice-over narration by the main character. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* features no such voice-over narration by either of the two main characters, but there is still an implied narrator present in the fashion that the film is assembled, with title cards preceding each chapter suggesting the way in which the spectator will read that chapter – the title of "Perhaps Accident" will shape the spectator's approach to that chapter, as will the title of "Perhaps Intention," especially when the spectator has the previous chapter title "Perhaps Accident" in mind. The way the film is broken into specific chapters, and the temporally manipulated manner in which these chapters are presented, are also indicators of the presence of an implied narrator.

In an attempt to create a taxonomy for unreliable narration, Hansen creates a distinction between four suggested forms of unreliable narration – intranarrational unreliability, internarrational unreliability, intertextual unreliability and extratextual unreliability (Hansen, 2007, p. 241).

Intranarrational unreliability is defined by Hansen as "unreliability established and supported by a large stock of discursive markers," such as for example *The Tell-Tale Heart* (Poe, 1843), where "the narrator continuously defends his sanity but does so with reference to situations and behavioral patterns that most definitely expose insanity." (Hansen, 2007, p. 241) An example of a film here could be *The Sixth Sense*, where the protagonist himself does not know that he is in fact dead, and up until the revelatory closing scene, he acts as if he is alive and normal. The film uses this to its advantage to surprise the spectator by the end of the film, however, further watching reveals, or a keener eye even on first watching will notice the visual cues and hints director Shyamalan places throughout the film. While difficult to notice upon first viewing, the narration is certainly unreliable in its main character being oblivious to the fact of his circumstance yet the spectator being provided several visual markers pointing to this circumstance. This form of unreliable narration does not fit the narratives presented in Hong's films. While it is possible to think of *Virgin Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors* being a story presented from two points of view, and those two points of view may in that case be unreliable, there is nothing in these films that "hint at an uncertainty in the narrator's relating of the events" in the way for example *The Tell-Tale Heart* does (Hansen, 2007, p. 241).



Internarrational unreliability is when the narrator's version of events is different from one or several other narrator's version, best exemplified by a film like *Rashomon*. As Hansen specifies

“in opposition to the intranarrational version, internarrational unreliability is not necessarily marked discursively in the unreliable narrator's discourse, but comes into being by the framing of other voices and a non-correspondence with what is taking form as the factual story on their behalf [...]” (Hansen, 2007, p. 241)

In *Rashomon*, the story revolves around several different characters in the film narrating their accounts of an event where a samurai is murdered. The interesting thing about *Rashomon* is how each narrator presents a completely different version than the former narrator, and therefore the narration is unreliable and the spectator cannot know which narrator is telling the truth about the event. This form of unreliable narration would have been useful in explaining the variations in the repeating scenes presented in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* if there was an explicit presence of two different narrators in the film. Unlike *Rashomon*, there are no characters in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* telling their account of a specific event but with different stories. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, there is no character functioning as a narrator, and therefore there is only one narrator present in the film –the implied narrator. As I have pointed out, the way the film is divided into different chapters marks the film as being touched by the presence of an implied narrator. This narration influences how the spectator will experience the film, how the spectator might even anticipate certain scenes being revisited once the chapter name “Perhaps Intention” pops up on the screen, as it harkens back to the earlier chapter title “Perhaps Accident.” It is also common amongst spectators and reviewers to interpret the film as a story seen from two perspectives, where the “Perhaps Accident” chapter is seen from the perspective of the male character and the “Perhaps Intention” chapter is seen from the perspective of the female character, together showing the story of the blossoming of their romantic relationship but colored by the different perspectives. However, as I have argued, there is no explicit marking of the individual chapters inhabiting such points of view, and therefore the argument of the “Perhaps Accident” chapter being seen from the perspective of the male character and the “Perhaps Intention” chapter being seen from the perspective of the female character is invalid. As I have claimed, there is no explicit hint provided in the film as to why the film should be interpreted in this way. Therefore, there are not enough intratextual

markers indicating that *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* should be read as a work of internarrational unreliability.

The two last forms of unreliability Hansen establishes are intratextual and extratextual. Intratextual unreliability is based on character types that draw the reader/spectator's attention toward the question of their reliability, and extratextual unreliability is when the reader/spectator brings his/her own value or worldview into the world of the work, much in line with Booth's initial description of unreliable narration (Hansen, 2007, pp. 242-243). In relation to the narratives presented in the films of Hong, I consider the intratextual and extratextual forms of unreliability as something which fails to adequately investigate the function of these narratives. One thing that does work to a certain extent is that of the extratextual aspect if one factors in the spectator's previous knowledge of Hong's works going into the film. A spectator which has already seen one or more films by Hong will perhaps be able to suspect some of the "unreliability" one might come across in films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, but this does not have a great effect in explaining the inconsistencies presented in the repeating scenes of said film, only an expectation going in to the work that such inconsistencies might be there.

## 2.8. Puzzle films

In *Puzzle Films, Ambiguity and Technologically-Enabled Narrative*, Claire Molloy writes about how films that have challenging narrative structures such as reordering time and rearranging the sequence of events have gained popularity, pleasing audiences with their unconventional approach to narrative (Molloy, 2010, p. 46). A key example of these puzzle films, aside from *Pulp Fiction* which I have already mentioned is Christopher Nolan's highly regarded 2000 feature *Memento*. *Memento* is perhaps the clearest example of a very famous film with a very challenging narrative structure. The film follows main character Leonard, who suffers from a rare condition in which he is incapable of creating new memories. Leonard got his condition after experiencing a trauma during a home invasion where he was badly beaten and his wife was raped and murdered. Leonard is now trying to find and kill the criminal who did injustice to his wife, but as he is incapable of creating new memories, there are obviously challenges coming with this territory. The characteristic that made *Memento* appeal to audiences as well as critics is the fact that Nolan tells the story backwards, which fits neatly with the main character's condition. In this way, the spectator can discover and process information in the same way main character Leonard does: he cannot remember how

he got to the place he is and must deduct why he is there. The spectator must do the same, and because of this the spectator is taken on a journey where neither spectator nor protagonist knows where they are going.

Molloy points to how “expectations, inferences and hypotheses will be formed based on the film’s adherence to or deviation from the intrinsic and extrinsic norms of the narrational mode.” (Molloy, 2010, p. 50) She argues that understanding a narrative is a dynamic process, a process which has the spectator continually making inferences and testing expectations. These inferences and expectations are generally based on the spectator’s previous knowledge and understanding of narrative norms (Molloy, 2010, p. 50). While the two films are quite different, both *Memento* and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* are narratively both challenging from a spectator’s point of view. The spectator must use his/her previous knowledge to navigate through these film texts. Molloy writes about some characteristics that separate Hollywood films from art films in terms of narrative structure: in the art film, causality is loosened, and the art film prefers chance and causal gaps, in other words, the art film is usually more open-ended and, in one sense, more “random.” These films are more ambiguous and are not concerned with plot in the same way that Hollywood films are, in that the Hollywood films generally prioritize the advancement of the plot before character importance. Generally, the art film does the opposite – character is treated as more important than plot, and as a result, the narrative structure can sometimes be more confusing, loose, and ambiguous. Classical Hollywood narrative is distinguished by having a very tight structure, where cause and effect are the main players. Art cinema, on the other hand, may lack proper exposition, without a causal, linear chain of events, and might not offer a proper resolution (Molloy, 2010, p. 52). While *Memento* is attributed to the art cinema style of narration, the film still follows several of the conventions Molloy mentions. Although films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Memento* do challenge the spectator, once the puzzle is solved, the films will reveal themselves as still embossed by classical narrative standards, such as a strong cause and effect chain of events. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* can be read as a puzzle film, in the same vein as Molloy’s examples, but the difference is that while *Memento* and *Pulp Fiction* use this puzzle effect as a dramatic interest, a way to make the spectator more alert on what the story is trying to portray, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* presents a puzzle where the puzzle *is* the puzzle – the form is not used as a dramatic way to portray the content, the form is used for the sake of form in itself.

Hong’s films, including *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, are difficult to place in a specific movement or tradition. The film’s unique approach to narrative and temporal

structure sets it apart even from other films that challenge the traditional ideas of narrative. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* renders slim to non-existent the possibility of the spectator to create a concrete, definite, verifiable timeline close to non-existent. The film's fabula events are enacted multiple times in the syuzhet, and at first glimpse it appears to be a story told twice from two different perspectives, but upon further analysis the film reveals a structure which is more difficult to decipher. Because repeated fabula events are presented multiple times in the syuzhet with variations, the spectator must carefully navigate the film text through his/her own memory and constantly re-evaluate what came before. The ability or lack thereof to accurately remember previous syuzhet representations of fabula events puts the spectator in a position of "spectator as storyteller," where the spectator is free to read the film text according to interpretation, as the film's structure creates an unsolvable web of narrative threads. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* falls nicely into the category of so-called forking-path narratives, but still manages to eschew several of the normal conventions found within these narratives, which I have argued proves that there is room for more studies on narrative structures and possibilities. By avoiding some of the conventions of forking path narratives, Hong is able to hint at some of the possibilities Borges presented, where there is an endless web of futures and paths available. Finally, because it doesn't use these narrative structures as a means of creating dramatic tension or plot points as most of these narratively challenging films do, such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Memento*, *Run Lola Run* – Hong has in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* created a puzzle film which is not a story puzzle which needs to be solved or even can be solved by applying schemata and narrative understanding which result in some sort of plot point. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is a puzzle film where the puzzle is the puzzle – the puzzle is there for the sake of having a puzzle, not for the sake of solving it, meaning that Hong is playing a formalist game, where form is there for the sake of form, rather than using form for the sake of highlighting content.

### **3. Chapter II: Time and repetition**

### 3.1. Time and repetition: Introduction

In this chapter, I shall attempt to investigate and define the term *temporality* and see how one can relate this term to how a film director Hong Sang-soo operates. As previously mentioned in Chapter I, Hong's films have a unique form of storytelling, use of narrative and structures, and the spectator's perception of time is often challenged by the different temporalities and rhythms presented in the films, particularly through the use of repetitions. In practically all the South Korean auteur's work, there is some sort of play on the concept of time and repetition. One example is the already heavily discussed international film festival circuit favourite *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000), where the story of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman is shown to the spectator twice – the first round, seemingly from the perspective of the man, and the second part, seemingly from the perspective of the woman. But is it so? In Chapter I, I discussed how the film is something more than a mere “he said/she said” tale of love and affection, and how the film gives its spectators some changing details throughout the course of the film by way of repetition.

In this part of the thesis, I will look further into Hong's work and narrative structures, this time more focused on the aspect of time, and the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. In Chapter I, I revealed through an analysis of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* that the narrative structures and patterns found within the film is challenging the general consensus on narrative theory, with the film eschewing narrative models such as the forking-path narrative, mind-game films, puzzle films and unreliable narration. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelor* therefore suggests that narrative theory does not sufficiently cover the experimentation which is present in contemporary art cinema. *Virgin Stripped Bare by her Bachelors* demonstrates how Hong's cinema in general and this film in particular fails to fully fit into the forking-path narrative model, and that it suggests far broader possibilities in narrative cinema. For this second chapter, I shall investigate and analyze further, and see how Hong's ambiguous and unclear representation of time contributes to breaking traditional narrative patterns. To investigate this aspect of Hong's cinema, I have chosen to analyze his 2011 feature *The Day He Arrives*, a film perhaps more complex and challenging than *Virgin Stripped Bare by her Bachelors*, particularly in the sense that *The Day He Arrives* contains more repetitions and ambiguous scenes. Throughout this second chapter of the thesis, I will also look to the whole of Hong's continuously and rapidly growing filmography and use general examples from these films to further build my arguments.

In order to further investigate the type of narratives found in the films of Hong, I shall, in Chapter II, discuss the concepts of representation of time in cinema, looking at both the aspect of cinematic time as well as the time felt by the spectator while watching a film. Therefore, I shall discuss concepts such as temporality, and the duration, pointing to how extended long takes will enhance a feeling of duration, making the spectator feel time itself.

An important aspect in looking into the temporality in the narrative structures in the cinema of Hong is the discussions of cinema by philosophers Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Using Bergson's and Deleuze's ideas on the relationship between the past, the present, and the future proves to be a good approach in attempting to distill the different rhythms and temporalities presented in films such as *Oki's Movie*, *Right Now*, *Wrong Then* and *The Day He Arrives*, where I argue that the layers of time all float into one another, resulting in what I call a crystallization of time. Through this investigation of the temporalities and rhythms present in the films of Hong and an analysis of *The Day He Arrives*, I conclude that the cinema of Hong eschews the narrative models I have discussed so far, and inspired by the temporalities demonstrated in the films through use of repetitions, I propose that these films constitute a type of narrative I term "fragmentary narratives."

### **3.2. Clocks for seeing**

Time is, well, time. Most people will certainly have a relationship with and an understanding of what the concept of time is and represents. Time is existence. Time is what has been, what is, and what is to be. Time is something that is always moving, never standing still. Time is passing as I am writing this very sentence. When I began writing this sentence, that was the present. As I am continuing, the point of starting the writing of that sentence is now something that happened in the past. The point in which I started writing that, now past, sentence, the anticipated time in which I would be writing the sentence that I am writing at this second, was then the future, but now it is the present and surely it will be in the past as time is progressing. Time is something that is continuously progressing, and humans have been trying to measure it throughout existence. If one looks up at the sky, and there is light, one can infer that it is daytime. If one, later that day, again looks up at the sky and it is dark, one can infer that daytime has passed and that evening time has arrived. The next morning, daylight will shine again, and now the darkness of the night has passed and is in the past.



Figure 7: Extended 10-minute long take in *Our Sunhi*.

In *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, Bliss Cua Lim points to the emergence of the mechanical clock in the late thirteenth-century Europe having replaced “traditional, unequal hourly divisions handed down since antiquity with abstract uniform periods severed from the relative length or brevity of daylight, specificities of use, or differences in custom or locale.” (Lim, 2009, p. 10) The mechanical clock has led to what Lim calls modern time consciousness. Lim points to philosopher Henri Bergson, writing that clocks are:

“translation machines, instruments for time measurement and time-discipline that render duration (*durée*) as linear succession, converting heterogeneous temporalities into a series of equidistant, uniform intervals: the seconds, minutes, and hours that make up calendrical days and years.” (Lim, 2009, p. 10)

The clock shows us time as spatial and measurable. On the mechanical clock, we can observe a physical representation of the passing time. The clock hand moves across the circle of the clock, showing us the time passing, or progressing. Lim calls the future a “predictable, empty, uniform series of recurring, measured intervals, waiting to be filled with experience,” such as a Wednesday appearing the coming week, January returning the following year and so on (Lim, 2009, p. 10). The mechanical clock has become our method of measuring time. One can





Figure 8: Extended 10-minute long take in *Our Sunhi* mirroring the scene in figure 7.

look at one's clock and see what time it is, and one can also see the clock hand moving and see time moving. Time is movement, time can never stand still, as every second is passing by.

When watching a film, there is also a sense of time passing by. Time is passing as the spectator is watching the film – if the film is 90 minutes long, the spectator will have done the act of watching a film for 90 minutes by the time that film is finished. The process itself of watching the film is therefore inherently linked with time and the reality of time passing by. Time is also experienced in the frame itself: the cinema presents moving images by arranging still images in a way that makes them move, and the spectator experiences these images as moving, as an illusion in a sense. When these frames are moving at speed, the spectator will see movement on the screen. If there is movement, then there will also be a feeling of time – time that is, time that was, time that will be. Today, the dominant tendency in cinema is not actual *film*, but digital cinema, which Hong has moved towards in the latter stage of his filmmaking career, perhaps accounting for the increasingly rapid output in recent years<sup>4</sup>. In

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<sup>4</sup> Hong's first seven films were generally released roughly in two-year intervals though showing a hint of speeding up as the career progressed (*The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* [1996], *The Power of Kangwon Province* [1998], *Virgin Stripped Bare by her Bachelors* [2000], *Turning Gate* [2002], *Woman is the Future of Man* [2004], *Tale of Cinema* [2005], *Woman on the Beach* [2006]). Since 2008, Hong has released a minimum of one film per year,

today's cinema, digital has replaced the film, and as a result, cinema now lacks the indexical relationship to pro-filmic reality (Manovich, 1999, p. 4). Lev Manovich discusses how digital cinema is a different tool from film in how the recorded reality is now simply a "raw material to be manipulated by hand," referring mainly to animation, computer-generated images and special effects, concluding that one of the main differences between film and digital cinema is that much is made in post-production rather than the preparation of the shooting of the images themselves: "each image, regardless of its origin, goes through a number of programs before making it to the final film." (Manovich, 1999, p. 5) By all intents and purposes, it appears Hong does not generally take much advantage of these digital possibilities in the post-production process<sup>5</sup>, instead opting for a more "realistic" style, in keeping with for example the slow cinema tradition. What digital cinema does provide for Hong is the ability to quickly shoot a film, from beginning to end, pre-production to post-production.

In the cinema of Hong, there is much use of extended long takes. Generally, it appears that Hong does not want to cut inside a scene – if two characters are having a meal and some drinks at a restaurant, a typical scene in a Hongian narrative, Hong will rarely cut during this scene of events. Typically, the camera will stay in one place and observe the characters as they are doing their thing. The point I am trying to make still stands even if there is use of cutting within the scene – although the minimal use of cutting will contribute to an enhanced feeling of duration – as the characters are eating and drinking on the screen, the spectator will *feel* time passing. Because there is movement, there is also time on display.

Lim refers to how Barthes and several other theorists have thought of the camera as a "clock for seeing." The comparison is natural in the sense that both the camera and the clock are instruments that "represent time and movement as measurable and divisible into uniform intervals." (Lim, 2009, p. 11) Lim further claims that as the cinema is a clock for seeing, cinema is thus an instrument that "links vision to rationalized time." (Lim, 2009, p. 11) As I have claimed that during the process of watching a film, the spectator will feel the passage of

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sometimes several per year (*Night and Day* [2008], *Like You Know it All* [2009], *Hahaha* [2010], *Oki's Movie* [2010], *The Day He Arrives* [2011], *In Another Country* [2012], *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* [2013], *Our Sunhi* [2013], *Hill of Freedom* [2014], *Right Now, Wrong Then* [2015], *Yourself and Yours* [2016]), and at the time of this thesis, as much as three films are lined up for 2017: *On the Beach at Night Alone*, *Claire's Camera* and *The Day After*.

<sup>5</sup> If anything, it appears the process of editing and post-production is a quick one, demonstrated in a DVD edition (I have not seen this film in the cinema and can thus not compare) of *The Power of Kangwon Province* (1998) where the spectator can clearly see microphones and other production equipment in the edges of the frames in several scenes throughout the film.

time, the comparison of the cinema and the clock makes sense. Whether a scene lasts for 10 seconds or for 10 minutes, the spectator will still feel the passage of time, as there is always movement, always a sense of moving forward. In *Our Sunhi* (Hong, 2013), there are two particularly long scenes of characters drinking in a bar. The first of these two scenes, featuring two men, one who believes that the other is a friend, and one who finds the other annoying, is approximately 12 minutes long (see figure 7 and 8). The second scene, featuring the second man from the first scene and the titular character Sunhi, who had an affair together in the past, is also the same length in time. These scenes are minimal in action, but the passage of time is still undeniably felt: by the time the scene ends and the film cuts to another shot, it is clear that quite some time has passed, that the events the spectator just watched are now something that has passed and is no longer, and there was a clear *duration* to be felt during the scene. The scenes function as a measurement of time. In cinema, there is always duration, there is always movement and therefore there is always a measured time. These scenes can be thought of as intervals of time. It is a fragment of time, of an event, a happening, something that cannot be concretely duplicated again (in a logical fabula), because the time it existed in is no longer. In the films of Hong, time is an essential factor, and therefore it is useful to consider the effect of the use of long takes which is prevalent in these films to form a better understanding of how the temporalities within these films function.

### **3.3. The long take**

When investigating temporality in the films of Hong Sang-soo, one of the key components of the director's work which must be included is the concept of the long take. The long take, is, briefly explained, when the duration of one single take is longer than average. In the typical Hollywood film, a take might only last for a second, or even less, whereas in foreign, art, and experimental films, the duration of a single take before the film cuts to the next take is generally on an average longer than that of the Hollywood cinema.

In Hong's films, a single take will often have a rather long duration. The length of the average take has varied throughout the course of the directors' career, with some of the earlier films having a shorter average take length than some of the later films, culminating in Hong's highest average take length in the 2013 feature *Our Sunhi*, before moving slightly back in the direction of his earlier features again after this highpoint of the average take length, but still maintaining an average take length far greater than that of the mainstream Hollywood film, with the bulk of the dialogue-scenes being takes several minutes in duration.

Magalhaes de Luca claims of the long take that the spectator is “invited to adopt the point of view of the camera and protractedly study images as they appear on the screen in their unexplained literalness,” which directs the spectator more towards the experience of duration itself, rather than narrative interaction (Luca, 2010, pp. 23-24). In discussing the long take in relation to so-called “slow cinema,” in his doctoral thesis, focusing on this subgenre of art and experimental films including films such as *Sátántango* (Tarr, 1994), *Vive l’amour* (Tsai, 1994), and directors such as Lav Diaz, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Abbas Kiarostami, and Gus Van Sant, Matthew Flanagan claims that an undramatic long take is a key factor:

“Undramatic long takes might be used to structure an unconventional form of narration (which is always distended rather than compacted); be punctuated by fragmented narrative activity; or simply stacked end to end, divorced from narrative relations. A combination of these strategies has often led to extreme departures from dominant practice in classical or art film, and a small number of feature-length durational films consists of abnormally few shots that focus on subjects (in particular, landscapes and meteorological phenomena) that are not commonly afforded close attention in other modes of film practice.” (Flanagan, 2012, pp. 9-10)

As I proposed in the introduction, Hong can be thought of as a director within the slow cinema tradition. A film like for example *Our Sunhi* shows the spectator a set of situations, all of them generally played out in a single, long take, except for scenes showing characters walking from one place to another. The camera is generally placed in a fixed location and stays still during the whole duration of the scene, barring the appearance of a sudden and perhaps inexplicable zoom here and there.

One point where Hong’s cinema differs from Flanagan’s take on the slow cinema tradition is the inclusion of and focus on nature. Whereas many other films in this mode of cinema indeed focuses a lot on aspects of nature such as the wind blowing in the trees and grand landscape shots (see for example Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *The Assassin* [2015]), Hong pays little or no attention to this in his films, and even actively avoids it in several of his films. In *The Power of Kangwon Province* (1998), the female protagonist goes to the beach with two of her friends. Here, Hong is more concerned with showing the girls sitting on the beach with the city as a background, rather than making a more traditional slow cinema style scene, which perhaps would be a tableau-like frame of the girls sitting at the

beach, with a glorious ocean filling the screen<sup>6</sup>. In *Oki's Movie* (2010), two hiking trips up a mountain is depicted, with little interest in showing the beauty of the nature surrounding the characters. Likewise, a snowstorm is mentioned earlier in the film, with no attempts to give any establishing shots of the result of this snowstorm.

Rather than focusing on nature such as in a film like *The Assassin*, or on buildings such as in Andy Warhol's infamous art film *Empire* (1964), where Warhol fixes a single take on the Empire State building for 8 hours, Hong's films do not appear to focus much on matters such as these, and appear to be more concerned with capturing the actions and reactions of the characters themselves above all else, with most of the scenes throughout the filmography as a whole being set in cafés, restaurants and bars, focusing on the characters as they have conversations while drinking, eating, and smoking.

Jonathan Romney, using *El cant dels ocells* (Serra, 2008) as an example film, suggests that long takes “highlight the viewing process itself as a real-time experience in which, ideally, you become acutely aware of every minute, every second spent watching.” (Romney, 2010, p. 43) Flanagan expands on this, claiming that “the long take [here] presents us with a vast block of time, clearly directionless and free of dramatic intent, but with a series of gradual modulations upon which we can train our perceptive capacity.” (Flanagan, 2012, p. 13) These claims extend fairly well to Hong's cinema: similar in duration but not in theme to films like *Stalker* (Tarkovsky, 1979), where the duration of a single take is rather long, and definitely *felt*. Here, the duration of the viewing process is clearly being highlighted - time is felt, where duration is felt. Similar to slow moving films such as the works of Tarkovsky, this is also the case with films such as *Our Sunhi*. Particularly in the two, previously mentioned, very extended bar scenes, time and duration will be felt by the spectator. The spectator will become aware of the minutes and seconds being spent, on time progressing. Both scenes feature two characters sitting at a table and having a conversation, but both scenes also feature background action, where the bar hostess orders fried chicken. During the single long take captured by the unmoving camera, the spectator can observe these background events, such as the chicken being delivered to the bar. This portrayal of events in the background functions as highlighting the fact that time is indeed passing – highlighting the *duration* itself.

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<sup>6</sup> This is one of the scenes in *The Power of Kangwon Province* in which the spectator can clearly observe camera equipment in the edge of the frames, further proving the imperfections of the scene, in contrast to slow cinema conventions.

### 3.4. The Coexistence of past, present, and future

In Lim's investigation of temporality, a lot of time is spent looking back on the works and words of Bergson and his ideas regarding time and its relation to the cinema. In Bergson's mind, much because these works were published in cinema's infancy and early stages, focusing mainly on the camera as an instrument of the cinematographer. Bergson writes in *Matter and Memory* that time is coexisting at different rhythms, and is a plurality of durations. Bergson attempted to unseat thinking along the lines of "the future and the past as calculable functions of the present." (Lim, 2009, p. 13) Philosopher Gilles Deleuze points out how, in his opinion, one of the most profound yet least understood aspects of "Bergsonism" is Bergson's concept of the theory of memory, more specifically the survival of the past. Bergson claims that the past *is*, contrary to traditional thinking such as the past as something that has ceased to be. In Bergson's opinion, the past has not ceased to be, it is not dead, it has not elapsed. Rather, the past coexists with the present, even as "the latter's absolute condition for existing." (Lim, 2009, p. 15) Generally, one thinks of temporality as the relationship between the past, the present and the future. The idea that Bergson attempted to push forward is that of the individual parts of that relationship, the past itself, the present, and the future, not being sealed off from one another, as in the past not simply something that is no longer, that has ceased to exist, and that the future not being something that is yet to happen, something in which does not already exist. As Bergson stated, the past is not dead. The past is available in the present, and the present is processed through the past.

The idea by Bergson of how the past is coexisting with the present will be important in how one can approach Hong's cinema and in the upcoming analysis of the film *The Day He Arrives*. This idea of time is important in the reading of Hong's films in general, as they all display a sort of coexistence of the past, the present and the future, such as for example in *Oki's Movie* (2010), which consists of four episodes, or four short films – "A Day for Incantation," "King of Kisses," "After the Snowstorm," and "Oki's Movie." This film is very challenging in terms of the aspect of time, presented as four large intervals of time, which then again, each feature several more intervals of time.

"A Day for Incantation" presents one of the main characters, Nam Jin-gu, who is on his way to a screening of one of his films. His wife nags and is displeased about his drinking, which will be used for comedic effect as Jin-gu gets drunk later in this first short film. Jin-gu, the struggling filmmaker who is also working as a film teacher at a university, goes to a dinner with the rest of the faculty staff, and, while getting drunk questions an older professor

named Song using his status as a professor in a corrupt way – leading to a comedic moment where professor Song request Jin-gu to read books on logic as it would do him good (in social situations). During a Q&A after the screening of Jin-gu’s film, an audience member asks Jin-gu about an alleged relationship he had with a young girl four years ago. The girl was already in a relationship and engaged to be married, but the affair with Jin-gu apparently ruined her life. The woman in the audience insists that Jin-gu is responsible for ruining her friends’ lives and wants him to acknowledge it. Jin-gu responds that he does not remember and that he did not make films for people like this woman in the audience, and has stopped directing films.

The film then jumps to the second short film, “King of Kisses,” which appears to be years earlier in the timeline as Jin-gu is now a student. This short is about Jin-gu trying to start a relationship with a fellow student, Oki, who is secretly in a relationship with an older man.

The next short film, “After the Snowstorm,” features a day in the classroom where only Jin-gu and Oki turns up for professor Song’s class, and the class turns into an interview of sorts, where the two students ask professor Song, who has decided to quit teaching to make more films, for advice on life.

The final short film, “Oki’s Movie” is narrated by Oki and can be seen as a flashback where she presents her memories and experiences as a short film. Oki narrates the story of herself going on a mountain hike on two separate occasions: once with an older man, and a year later with a younger man. Not surprisingly, the older man is professor Song and the younger man is Jin-gu. In a voice-over where Oki is narrating, she compares the two experiences side by side, making her closing statement: “I chose these actors because of their resemblance of the real people. Things repeat themselves over and over with differences I cannot understand. I want to see the two side by side.”

In a blog post, David Bordwell offers two different readings of *Oki’s Movie*. First, that the first short film, “A Day for Incantation,” which he mistakenly refers to as “Specters of the New World,” which presents an adult, now filmmaker and married Jin-gu, is the present, and that the three remaining short films are then in the past, and that they are flashbacks or memories presenting the love triangle between Jin-gu, Oki and professor Song (Bordwell, 2013). Bordwell points out that he is “not sure that we can easily arrange the events in the second, third, and fourth episode chronologically,” and thus this first reading of the film might not have any merit (Bordwell, 2013). Bordwell suggests that these four short films are “free hypothetical variations on the central situation.” (Bordwell, 2013) As he points out, these four episodes are unlikely to be presented from the same “source” as, if the whole of

four individual segments is from Jin-gu's point of view, as the first short film would suggest as the rest of the film, as established, easily can be read as a flashback from that first short, the three remaining episodes contain information that is outside Jin-gu's base of knowledge. And obviously, the voice-over narration from Oki herself in the final short film also renders this option unlikely.

In *Oki's Movie*, Hong clearly has created a rather unsolvable puzzle, just as he did with *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* which I have already discussed. This four-part film is also one of the most complex displays of time Hong has come up with to date, where the relationship between the past, the present and the future is of obvious coexistence, yet difficult to decipher. These four short stories cannot exist on their own, but it is also difficult to see them as merely four individual intervals from a shared, bigger interval, which is reflected in the reception the film got from Western critics and scholars.

Western critical reception of *Oki's Movie* clearly demonstrates time and memory's effect on a film, with several writers making mistaken claims about the narrative as well as unsupported interpretations. Andrew Tracy oddly enough, similarly to Bordwell, refers to the first short film by the wrong name, "A Day for Chanting." (Tracy, 2010) Tracy also assumes that the narrative of the first short film ("A Day for Incantation") is directly linked to the second short film ("King of Kisses"). "King of Kisses" features a younger Jin-gu who is still in film school, where he is trying to enter a relationship with a fellow student named Oki. In his review on *Oki's Movie*, Tracy assumes that this short film is four years earlier and that the girl mentioned in the former short film is Oki – that "King of Kisses" is a flashback from "A Day for Incantation," and tells the story hinted at by the end of that short film. The problem is that there is no support for this hypothesis to be found in the narrative. It is reasonable to assume that "King of Kisses" is a prior fabula event to "A Day for Incantation" as Jin-gu is older and married in "A Day for Incantation." He is a director and a teacher, while in "King of Kisses" he is still a student and clearly younger. By logical inferences, the spectator can assume that this is indeed earlier in the overall fabula timeline. However, the woman in the audience mentioned specifically four years, as well as Jin-gu being married at that time, too. In "King of Kisses," there is no indication that this short film is set exactly four years prior to "A Day for Incantation." Moreover, there is no indication or mention that Jin-gu is married, something which is also unlikely factoring in cultural norms, where Korean students generally



wait until they have finished their studies and found a job to get married<sup>7</sup>. Last, but not least, there is no indication that Oki is in a relationship with another (young) man. She does refer to a relationship with an older man, which can be assumed to be professor Song as they are revealed to be in an affair during a later short film, but this does not support the hypothesis that Oki is the woman whose life Jin-gu allegedly ruined, as Oki and professor could never be engaged to each other when professor Song is clearly referenced to as being married.

Richard Brody refers to the interconnections between the four short films as “canny and droll.” (Brody, 2013)<sup>8</sup> Brody, too, assumes the three short films following “A Day for Incantation” to be flashbacks generated from that first short film. In his review of the film, Andrew Tracy describes the structure of *Oki’s Movie*:

“Hong is even more daring, employing an almost novelistic (in structure rather than scope) narrative frame, which adds intriguing layers to the film’s triangular scenario while also blithely admitting its inauthenticity. ‘Starting with a theme will make everything veer toward one point... It’s no fun pouring all things into a funnel. That’s too simple,’ Hong’s deceptively deployed pseudo-vicar Jingu says at one point; but Hong’s sly double game allows him to have it both ways [...]” (Tracy, 2010)

While Tracy’s review, similarly to other reviews quoted, display the tendency of Western audiences to make interpretations where they perhaps do not belong, Tracy is able to point out the film’s maze-like structure. Because these four short films are difficult to reconstruct into a coherent and verifiable fabula, it is difficult to decipher the film’s true timeline, if there is one, and as such *Oki’s Movie* is an example of a film where the relationship between the past, present and future is highly ambiguous.

### **3.5. Movement-images, time-images, temporalities and rhythms**

Deleuze says of the image, that:

“the image itself, is the system of the relationships between its elements, that is, a set of relationships of time from which the variable presents only flows. [...] What is

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<sup>7</sup> Failing to take cultural norms into consideration when interpreting the comparison Oki makes of Jin-gu and professor Song in the fourth short film (“Oki’s Movie”) can also be found in Edward Champion’s review: “The older man takes Oki inside for a lunch of wine and seafood pancakes, while the younger man uncouthly slurps noodles outside.” (Champion, 2010)

<sup>8</sup> Quoted comment found in the video narrated by Brody on top of the web-page of the sourced article.

specific to the image, as soon as it is creative, is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do now allow themselves to be reduced to the present.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. xii)

D. N. Rodowick explains of Deleuze’s writings on cinema that movement and time are constitutional factors of the cinematic image, therefore, it can never be reduced to a simple unity. Because of this, the relationship between image and thought can also never be reduced to a single present. Rodowick continues, explaining that Deleuze’s two main concepts or ideas of cinema, the movement-image and the time-image, have different functions, offering two different representations of time: the movement-image provides an indirect image of time, and the time-image provides a direct image of time (Rodowick, 1997, p. 8).

According to Rodowick, Deleuze rethinks the concept of the *interval*. The interval is crucial to the understanding of the spatial representation of time, referring to the space between shots and sequences (Rodowick, 1997, p. 8). In Deleuze’s description of the movement-image, time is indirectly represented as the movement-image revolves around linking movements through montage, that is, linking the movement of one shot to another. Therefore, the movement-image represents time through the cut – the cut gives way to the interval between the shots, and this interval is the representation of time indirectly found in these images (Rodowick, 1997, p. 11).

In *The Movement-image*, cinema is defined as “the system which reproduces movement as a function of any-instant-whatever, that is, as a function of equidistant instants, selected to as to create an impression of continuity.” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 5) Rodowick claims:

“as long as this technology was used for the dissection and analysis of motion, it belonged fundamentally to the modern conception of movement. This is precisely Bergson’s point and the reason why the modern misconception of movement is so eloquently described as a cinematographic illusion.” (Rodowick, 1997, p. 24)

What Rodowick refers to here is the idea that cinema, that is, *film*, is often thought of as an illusion of movement as the screen is projecting moving images, although these are still frames that are projected at a given speed to then give the illusion of movement onto the screen projected. Movement is described by Deleuze as “mobile sections of duration,” that is, duration is essential to the concept of movement (Rodowick, 1997, p. 24). In *The Movement-image*, Deleuze attempts to redefine movement on screen as not an illusion, but actual movement. According to Deleuze, a shot can be “decomposed as a series of still images, or

divided into the elements that it gathers within the frame (bodies, actions, gestures, scenery, light, and so on).” (Rodowick, 1997, p. 26)

Deleuze writes that movement should be considered from two points of view:

“On one hand, that which happens between objects or parts; on the other hand that which expresses the duration or the whole. The result is that duration, by changing qualitatively, is divided up in objects, and objects, by gaining depth, by losing their contours, are united in duration.” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 11)

Here, Deleuze is referring to the movement from one image to another, the unity of which represents the whole. The whole is split up into different parts, different objects. This movement contains what Deleuze calls an indirect representation of time.

In *Deleuze og det æstetiske* (“Deleuze and the aesthetic”), Bodil Marie Thomsen clarifies Deleuze’s classification of different images provided in *The Movement-image* and *The Time-image*. Thomsen explains how Deleuze, in his ontological classification of cinema, argued that cinema can represent time without movement – not the illusion of movement or time, but that cinema itself contains time itself. Thomsen points out that Maurice Merleau-Ponty problematized the cinema’s status as an art as he saw film as artificial movement, but Deleuze thinks of film as “an occasion to deal with the specific of movement as power, separate from the human agent and consciousness philosophy.” (Thomsen, 1995, pp. 102-103) Similarly to Arnheim and others, Deleuze considered film as something able to portray moving images, spatialize time and temporalize space. By doing so, spatializing time and temporalizing space, cinema has the unique opportunity to progress independently from chronology (Thomsen, 1995, p. 103).

What separates Deleuze from others like Merleau-Ponty, is the fact that Merleau-Ponty expressed doubt regarding the issue that the spectator watches motionlessly in front of a screen, and that the camera confuses the relationship between subject and object. Merleau-Ponty is therefore negative to cinema’s dissemination of moving time, and that “the relationship between movement and image at the same time will constitute a subjective interpretation of an object.” (Thomsen, 1995, p. 104) Deleuze, on the other hand, is positive regarding this, and consider cinema’s “inhumanity” and the camera’s objectivity to question phenomenology and consciousness philosophy, claiming that cinema offers the spectator an image containing actual movement rather than offering an image to which it adds movement (Deleuze, 1986, p. 11; Thomsen, 1995, p. 104).

Deleuze's thoughts on the cinema are inherently linked to Bergson's ideas on perception, which constitutes, according to Bergson, an "image of the world." To Bergson, perception is the relation between an object and the objects that surrounds that object, and the relation between images is the relation between the objects in the world of the objects. According to Thomsen, the world of Bergson is thus a series of movement-images (Eliassen, 1991, p. 122; Thomsen, 1995, pp. 104-105). Deleuze sought to show that through cinema, the reality of time can be presented in an image, where time is not subordinate to movement and thus indirect but a direct image of time itself, which materialized in Deleuze's concept of the time-image (Thomsen, 1995, p. 105).

To describe and exemplify some of Deleuze's ideas on the cinema, Thomsen uses Orson Welles' masterpiece *Citizen Kane* (1941), which is described as the point where cinema moved from being primarily composed of movement-images to being primarily composed of time-images. Thomsen's prime example is the "Rosebud!" mystery in *Citizen Kane*, which is a representation of what Deleuze calls the "crystal-image," where past, present, and future are bound together, or crystallized, in a single image through the manipulation or interchanging of the actual and the virtual, where it is revealed that Rosebud is a sled from Kane's youth and successfully merges past, present and future, and interchanges the actual (what the spectator is seeing) and the virtual (what the spectator is imagining) in a single image of the sled (Thomsen, 1995, pp. 106-109).

### **3.6. The Crystal-image**

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze says of cinema, that "[It] does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world. This is why, very early on, it looked for bigger and bigger circuits which would unite an actual image with recollection-images, dream-images and world-images." (Deleuze, 1989, p. 68) According to Deleuze, the broad circuits of recollection in dream assume a narrow base, in which the image, the actual image, has been put beside a double which can be immediate, symmetrical, consecutive or simultaneous (Deleuze, 1989, p. 68). Deleuze explains, that, the actual image, has, itself, a corresponding virtual image. This virtual image corresponds to the actual image like a double or reflection: "In Bergsonian terms, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is 'coalescence' between the two." (Deleuze, 1989, p. 68) From there, an image with two sides is formed. These two sides are the actual and the virtual – Deleuze exemplifies this:

“as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 68)

To attempt to make a simple and clear idea of the crystal-image: the image can generate a unity of what the spectator is observing, and what the spectator is imagining. What the spectator is seeing is the *actual*, while what the spectator is imagining is then the *virtual*. This is what Deleuze meant by saying how the cinema early on looked for bigger circuits which would unite an actual image with other images. When an actual image is united with a virtual image, we then see through the *crystal-image*. We then need to keep the concept of time in the back of our minds: time can be represented in three main forms – these main forms are the past, the present and the future. The past is a present which has passed, a present which is not anymore. The past is virtual, in the sense that it is always available in the present. The present is the actual, and a passing present turning into past. The future is what is to be, always visualized through the present. The coexistence of past and present visualizes the future present. The virtual past is accessed by the actual present, and one always perceives through the actual of the present, yet the virtual past the future is part of it.

The crystal-image, claims Deleuze, has “two definite sides which are not to be confused.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 69) These two sides are the real and the imaginary. Deleuze claims that confusing the real and the imaginary is an error of fact, something that is produced in someone’s mind. This confusion does not affect the two sides’ discernibility, but “indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking the other’s role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 69) Because the virtual becomes actual in relation to the actual, and the actual becomes virtual through the same relation, two problems manifest themselves: the structure and the genesis. The characteristics of certain existing images are by nature double. For this reason, the real and the imaginary are not confused in the mind, because these are objective characteristics of the images (Deleuze, 1989, p. 69). The real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, the present and the past are constantly in exchange. They are distinct, yet indiscernible. Thus, the “actual image and *its* virtual image [...] constitute the smallest internal circuit, ultimately a peak or point, but a physical point which has distinct elements [...]” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 70) As the actual and the virtual are in continual exchange, when the

virtual image becomes actual, the actual images then becomes virtual, it is “referred elsewhere, invisible, opaque and shadowy, like a crystal barely dislodged from the earth.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 70) As they are in continual exchange, the two sides are distinct, but they are indiscernible.

“The crystal is expression,” writes Deleuze: it is a circuit which moves through what he calls three figures: “the actual and the virtual, the limpid and the opaque, the seed and the environment.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 74) Deleuze describes this seed as the virtual image which will crystallize an environment, but this environment must have a virtually crystallisable structure. The environment must be virtually crystallisable in relation to the seed, which now plays the role of the actual image. “Once again the actual and the virtual are exchanged in an indiscernibility which on each occasion allows distinction to survive.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 74)

“The crystal-image may well have many distinct elements, but its irreducibility consists in the indivisible unity of an actual image and ‘its’ virtual image. But what is this virtual in coalescence with the actual one?” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 78) Deleuze explains it as the actual always being a present. However, the present must change and must pass. For a new present to arrive, the present must pass, and the present becomes past when it no longer is. The image is, at the same time, both present and past, and the present coexists with the past (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 78-79). “The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 79) Deleuze looks to Bergson, who calls the virtual image “pure recollection.” This is in order to separate the virtual image from images in which it can be confused with, such as recollection-images and dream-images. The virtual image, in contrast to recollection-images which are actualized in the psychological states in relation to a new present, is defined “in accordance with the actual present *of which* it is the past, absolutely and simultaneously.” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 79) The virtual image is strictly correlative with the actual image, and does not have to be actualized. The virtual image forms a small circuit with the actual image that serves as a base for other images. Instead of being actualized, the virtual image corresponds to a particular actual image, and does not have to be actualized in a different actual image. The crystal-image is “an actual virtual circuit on the spot, and not an actualization of the virtual in accordance with a shifting actual.” (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 79-80) In my analysis of *The Day He Arrives*, I shall argue and point to how the cinema of Hong is using crystal-images as an essential part of its narrative structure, by combining different temporalities, past, present, and future in a single image, and interchanging the actual and the virtual through the use of repetitions.

In his article *Funny Valentines*, film critic Tony Rayns writes of Hong: “known for the uncertainty principles in his storytelling but equally for his wry, droll insights into the career paths and mating rituals of men and women.” (Rayns, 2015, p. 55) He exemplifies this by mentioning *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*: “what might have happened is indistinguishable from what could or should have happened, not to mention what actually did or didn’t happen.” (Rayns, 2015, p. 56) This is what the “uncertainty principle” refers to, the lack of a capability on the spectators’ side to construct the objective and verifiable story. In a Hong film, the spectator can never be quite sure whether a scene is in the past, present, future, in a dream, in someone’s memory, or something different entirely.

As Bradley Warren writes, “ruptures with the reality of the story world, manifesting the memories, dreams, and moments of imagination indicated by Hong, are measured against the base reality that we recognize as verifiable.” (Warren, 2015, p. 3) As mentioned, during the act of watching a Hong film, the spectator cannot be fully sure of what is going on. This creates the effect of having the spectator becoming an active part in the construction of the narrative. While watching *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the spectator may find him/herself actively attempting to reconstruct what is being shown, trying to make sense of which scenes fit where in the timeline.

In the attempt to actively navigate through the film, the spectator will be affected by the temporal aspects of this. This relationship between the past, present and future will have a great effect on how the spectator will read “the bigger picture.” Returning to the crystal-image, the past, the present and the future are bound together by the *actual* and the *virtual*. The actual, what the spectator is physically observing (through a screen, that is), and the virtual, what the spectator is imagining. A crystal-image arises once an actual image is combined with a virtual image. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, the crystals will appear during the “Perhaps intention” segment, when the spectator is attempting to decipher what is real and what is not. The two segments “Perhaps accident” and “Perhaps intention” readily contradicts one another. There are variations on the repetitions presented, such as the fork changing to the chopsticks, or the kiss in an alley being shared between different characters in each segment. These variations in the repetitions will make the spectator actively navigate the film text, where the spectator will be aware of the relationship between the past, the present and the future, and their respective placements in the storyline. As Deleuze has noted, the past is virtual and always available in the present. The virtual past is always available to the spectator because it is a present that has passed and is now stored in the memory of the spectator. Because of this, when the spectator is watching the “Perhaps

intention” segment, s/he will have the memory of “Perhaps accident” readily available (although imperfectly, as memory is restricted under normal viewing circumstances, as Bordwell has argued), through the virtual. Thus, the past is always working together with the present. When the spectator is watching a specific scene in “Perhaps intention,” the spectator will access the virtual in his/her mind, and the memory of “Perhaps accident” is actively engaging with the process of watching “Perhaps intention.” The layers of the past, present and future will be crucial to the process of navigating through the film text. What has been seen will shape the interpretation of what is being seen, and what has been seen in combination with what is being seen will shape the expectations of what is yet to see. In the works of Hong, the concept of time is always unclear, as in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* where the development of the romantic relationship is being told twice, or in *The Day He Arrives* where the main character keeps getting into the same situations, seemingly reliving the same day over and over again, or in *Hill of Freedom* (2014), where the narration is navigating through a series of letters, all mixed together so the spectator cannot know the correct order, and with a strong hint that the story of one letter is missing. In Hong’s films, the past is always shaping the present, and the present is reshaping the present, the combination of which is again shaping the spectator’s expectations of the future. The idea of the future is also shaping the interpretations of the present.

A good example of a film exploring the relationship between the past, the present and the future is one of the most recent features directed by Hong, *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015). This feature falls in line with the rest of the director’s catalogue, using a two-part structure reminiscent of Hong’s early films such as *The Power of Kangwon Province* (1998) and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. *Right Now, Wrong Then* revolves around a male film director who visits a small city to attend a Q&A session after a screening of one his films at a film festival. After arriving a day early, strolling around in the city eventually ending up at a temple, he spots a young woman and strikes up a conversation with her. The two of them hit it off and the story follows their day together, going to a coffee shop, visiting the young woman’s studio where the filmmaker watches her paint and gives his opinion on her work. The two of them go to a sushi restaurant and get drunk on soju, where the director tells the girl that he has fallen for her and that he wished he had a ring to give her. The evening takes a disappointing turn as the two of them go to a party that one of the girl’s friends is hosting, where the girl tells the others how touched she was by the director’s words about her paintings. The others, who are aware of the director, then tells her that the director often use these same words in his interviews. The others also talk about how the director is rumoured to



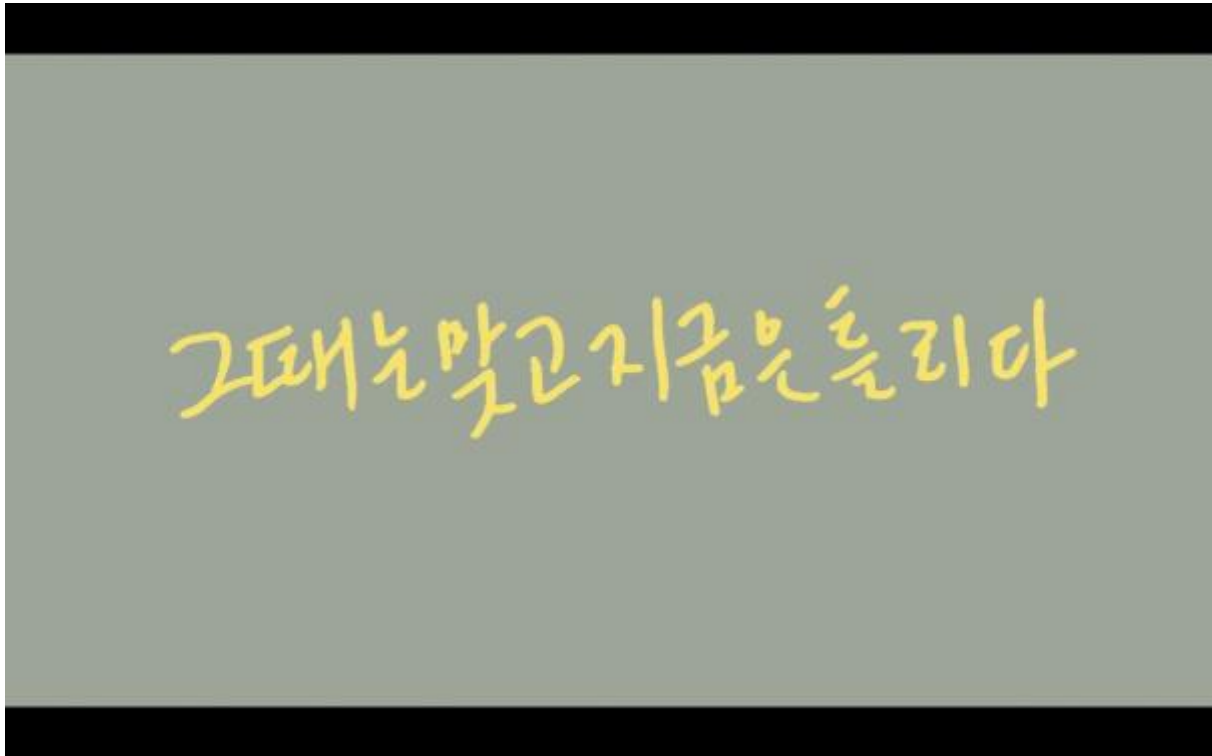


Figure 9: The opening title of *Right Now, Wrong Then*, reads as “Gu-dde-nun-mat-go jigeum-un-dullida” which can be translated as “Right then, wrong now.”

be a womanizer even though he is married. The girl gets drunk and goes home. The next day during the directors Q&A session, his behaviour is angry and upset, and he returns to Seoul after escaping the session early.

*Right Now, Wrong Then* is perhaps Hong’s most ambitious exploration of form to date. The film opens with the usual hand-written title card, but surprisingly, the text does not say “Right now, wrong then,” it actually says “Right then, wrong now,” which already should alarm the audience that something is “off.” After about an hour has passed, after the scene in which the director concludes his Q&A session abruptly and decides to go home to Seoul, the film jumps back all the way to the beginning, showing the title card again, with the same music playing. This time, the title says “Right now, wrong then,” and the whole story starts again, revisiting the same scenes as the first part – of course, this time with some variations on the characters’ behaviour toward each other, such as the filmmaker giving the girl a different response on her paintings (this time more direct and critical), and the evening ending on a more positive note, which makes the directors mood for the next day much better resulting in a more positive Q&A session as well.

*Right Now, Wrong Then* is one big game of challenging the spectator’s memory, where the whole film is more or less duplicated, scene by scene. In doing this, Hong is



Figure 10: The film jumps back to the start, as far as the title card playing again. This time, displaying the true title of the film: “Right now, wrong then.”

demanding on the spectator, forcing him/her to constantly scan their “library of memories,” to adequately compare the repetitions of the situations represented in the film.

In the process of watching *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* or *The Day He Arrives*, or any other film directed by Hong Sang-soo, the spectator is seeing through the crystal. The crystal-image is when the actual becomes the virtual, or when what the spectator is seeing becomes what the spectator is imagining. Hong’s cinema evokes a unique sense of time. Through long takes the spectator becomes aware of time as time is passing. But more than that, the spectator is challenged to navigate through the film texts with the complex temporality on display. The presence of time, past, presence and future, in combination with the variations on the repetitions, makes for a film with ever-changing, dynamic temporal touches. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* and *The Day He Arrives* are exercises in crystal-images, where the images are seen through the crystal. The actual and the virtual are interchanging. The actual becomes the virtual, and in its place, the virtual becomes the actual. The characters and the relationships and stories in Hong’s films are always interchanging between the actual and the virtual. The images are forever trapped in the crystal, or, one could say, that Hong is *crystallizing time*.

### 3.7. The Day He Arrives

*The Day He Arrives* is a story about a man named Seong-jun, who is a film director who has made several films in the past, but moved away from Seoul some time ago to live in the country side. For the time being, Seong-jun has stopped making films and is making a living as a teacher in the country side. The (international) title refers to Seong-jun returning to Seoul to visit an old friend, a film critic. The title refers to one single day, but five days are depicted in the film. During these five days, several situations repeat themselves without acknowledging that they are indeed repeating situations. Because of this, the spectator might wonder if the title may mean that the same day is replaying over and over.

Upon Seong-jun's arrival to Seoul, while casually strolling around the city, he randomly runs into an actress who has worked for him before, but it is unclear whether Seong-jun remembers her or not. Seong-jun enters a bar to get a drink, where three young film students recognize him and invites him to have some drinks with them. After several rounds of makgeolli<sup>9</sup> they are all quite drunk and as Seong-jun lights a cigarette, the young students imitate his behaviour by doing the same and light up their own cigarettes. This leads to Seong-jun suddenly yelling loudly at them, telling them to stop copying him. He runs away from the students, and finds himself knocking on the door of a former lover, Kyung-jin. After apologizing and weeping for past mistakes, he eventually ends up in bed with her, before leaving, telling her that they should remain strong and never see each other again.

The next day, Seong-jun runs into the same actress he ran into the day before. He finally meets his friend, Young-ho, and together with Young-ho's colleague and close friend, Bo-ram, they go to a bar named "Novel." The bar is empty, so the three friends help themselves and have some drinks. The bar owner eventually turns up and apologizes for being late as she was out doing some errands when they arrived at the bar. The bar owner, Ye-jeon, strikes Seong-jun as looking exactly like his former lover (and, in fact, both characters are portrayed by the same actress Kim Bo-kyeong) and Seong-jun narrates in a voice-over: "she looks exactly like her."

The next day, Seong-jun and Young-ho have dinner with their friend Jung-won, a former actor who has been doing successful business in Vietnam. The three men are joined by Bo-ram and they go to the same bar they went to the night before. However, in a voice-over narrated by Seong-jun, he refers to their bar visit without acknowledging that he has been

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<sup>9</sup> Korean rice wine.



Figure 11: Seong-jun, Young-ho and Bo-ram entering the bar called “Novel.”

there before, as if it was the first time he ever visits this bar. In the scene from the first bar visit, Seong-jun explains in a voice-over, as they are walking towards the entrance of the bar, that they “came to a bar named ‘Novel’” (see figure 11). In the repeating scene the night after, there is also a voice-over as they are walking towards the entrance of the bar, once again, where Seong-jun explains that they “came to a bar named ‘Novel’” (see figure 12). The voice-over by Seong-jun talks as if both times are the first time he is visiting this bar, and his behaviour once entering the bar reflects this as well. As the first time, the bar owner is late, and the shot of her entering the bar from outside is duplicated from the previous bar sequence. This shot is an exact repetition of the shot of her entering the bar from outside the day before. After the bar owner enters, Young-ho presents her to Seong-jun, just as he did in the first bar sequence, as if it is the first time they meet. Seong-jun goes outside to have a cigarette, and the bar owner is on her way out to buy some ingredients. Seong-jun joins her and the two of them eventually end up kissing.

The next day, Seong-jun and Young-ho are outside walking, and they run into the same actress that Seong-jun is now meeting for the third time during his short visit to Seoul. The three students from the first evening can be seen further down the street, and Seong-jun clearly attempts to avoid running into them, dragging Young-ho with him in the opposite direction that they initially were walking before running into the actress. There is also a



Figure 12: Seong-jun, Young-ho, Bo-ram and Jung-won entering the bar called “Novel.”

repetition of a lunch scene from the day before, where Seong-jun, Young-ho and Jung-won had a meal the day before. This second time, Seong-jun, Young-ho and Bo-ram are the ones having lunch in the same location. Later in the evening, the three of them goes to the same bar for the third time (see figure 13), but they still behave as if it is their first visit there together. Seong-jun joins Ye-jeon to buy some groceries like in the previous bar sequence, and once again they end up sharing a kiss, as if it is for the first time.

The fifth and final day depicted in the film, Seong-jun leaves Ye-jeon’s house, telling her that they have to stay strong, and that they should never see each other again. These are the same words he told his former lover on the first day. The film ends with Seong-jun walking around alone. In the very final sequence, he is approached by a fan of his films, who asks to take a picture of him. Seong-jun says he does not like being taken a picture of, but eventually agrees to her request as she said kind words about his work as a filmmaker. The film ends with Seong-jun awkwardly posing for the picture.

Viewing time will set constraints on the memory of the spectators, and thus their ability to construct a coherent fabula will depend on the film’s repeated references to fabula events. Therefore, most mainstream films will repeatedly make references to story events to make sure that the spectator can keep up with the story and not become too confused. Generally, story events will only be enacted once in mainstream cinema, and according to



Figure 13: Seong-jun, Young-ho and Bo-ram entering the bar called “Novel” for the third time in *The Day He Arrives*.

film theorist David Bordwell, “if the event does get “replayed,” the repetition is subject to stringent narrational rules. It must be motivated realistically – typically through character subjectivity, as a memory.” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 80)

In *The Day He Arrives*, the repetitions do not follow the “narrational rules” that Bordwell writes about. It is possible to make interpretations in the direction of the story events being memories of the main character, Seong-jun, but the film itself does not explicitly suggest this. In *The Day He Arrives* there are several repetitions: Seong-jun runs into an actress on the street at random three times during the course of the film. These encounters can be explained by normal plot advancement. Seong-jun is visiting Seoul and spends a lot of his time walking around, and it is possible to run into an acquaintance three times. In all three scenes where the two meet, they act as if the scenes are in linear order; in the first scene, the woman introduces herself (as Seong-jun does not appear to remember her all that well, even though they have worked together in the past), in the second scene they acknowledge their prior meeting and the woman advances by asking him for his phone number, and in the third and final scene depicting a meeting between the two, the woman even says “why do I keep running into you?”, clearly referencing their two prior encounters.



Figure 14: Young-ho introducing the bar owner, Ye-jeon to Seong-jun.

The second repetition is Seong-jun and his friend Young-ho with Young-ho's colleague Bo-ram going to the bar named "Novel." They go to this place three consecutive evenings in the film, but each time, it is presented as if it is the first time they are there. Here, the shot of them entering the bar is duplicated in a near exact manner, with Young-ho giving a friendly pat on the back to his friends while entering, while a voice-over is playing where Seong-jun is narrating that they "wanted to have some drinks, so we came to a bar called 'Novel.'" Inside the bar, the same shot is also duplicated. The first time, we can see Seong-jun on one side of a table, and Young-ho and Bo-ram on the other side (see figure 14), having drinks and some snacks together. The second time, they are sitting at the same table, in the same positions, but a fourth person, Jung-won is added, sitting at the same side of the table as Seong-jun (see figure 15). The third time, they are three again, and they are sitting in the same positions as the first time (see figure 16).

In all of these scenes, Seong-jun sees the bar owner for the first time. The sight of the bar owner reminds him of his ex-girlfriend and brings the same reaction and facial expressions in each iteration. In the last two bar sequences, Seong-jun joins the bar owner in stepping out to buy some groceries for the bar. In both of these situations, the two of them end up kissing. The second time, they do not remember sharing the kiss the day before. On the first day, after running away from the three students, Seong-jun goes to see his ex-girlfriend.



Figure 15: Young-ho introduces Ye-jeon to Seong-jun and Jung-won.

He apologizes for past mistakes and for abandoning her when he left Seoul to work in the country side, and he tries to make amends. However, after bedding her, he once again abandons her, acting as if his visiting her that night was a mistake and a sign of weakness. He tells her that they must remain strong, and that they must never contact each other again. The ex-girlfriend appears to agree, although she is a bit more flexible in her approach to this issue, asking him for his phone number, suggesting that she sends him text messages occasionally, something Seong-jun denies her. Nevertheless, they agree on not seeing or contacting each other again, and Seong-jun leaves, while both are smiling, as if in harmony and agreement. During the fourth night of the five days depicted in *The Day He Arrives*, Seong-jun joins the bar owner to her house. The morning after, he gives her the same speech that he gave his ex-girlfriend on the first night. They should remain strong, and they should never contact each other again. Once again, the woman (played by the same actress as the ex-girlfriend character) appears to agree, and she is smiling as Seong-jun is leaving.

The whole time, it is unclear what function these repetitions have in the overall narrative. Unlike a film like for example *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), the different pieces do not fit together in some puzzle-like structure once the spectator has seen the complete film, nor are the events a presentation of subjective points of view like in a film such as *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950), which features several different characters telling the same story from their





Figure 16: Young-ho introducing Ye-jeon to Seong-jun.

own perspectives, which then challenges the spectator to ponder upon which story was real. Without diving into interpretation, the spectator cannot know for sure what these repetitions mean and why they are there. In this way, *The Day He Arrives* will challenge the spectators with its rather unorthodox structure. As viewing time generally challenges the spectator's memory, as Bordwell has pointed out, these repetitions will make it more difficult to navigate where the film is at a certain point in the fabula and the syuzhet. According to Bordwell, repetition can "heighten curiosity and suspense, open or close gaps, direct the viewer toward the most probable hypotheses and toward the least likely ones, retard the revelation of outcomes, and assure that the quantity of new fabula information does not become too great." (Bordwell, 1985, p. 80) Through heavy use of repetition, *The Day He Arrives* proves to be a narratively and temporally challenging film. As a result of the complex and non-linear structure Hong has constructed for the film, it can be difficult to decipher where in the film text one is temporally at a given point.

In Chapter I, I discussed how *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is an example of a film that challenges traditional narratives in film, and how it reaches beyond models such as the forking paths narrative model as described by David Bordwell. In *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* it is instinctively attractive to attempt to construct the narrative as two possible paths where one path is through the perspective of one character (the male lead) and another

path is through the perspective of another character (the female lead). While I have argued that *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is a narrative that cannot be reconstructed in a coherent, verifiable fabula timeline, the fact that the film is divided into parts that are presented as if they are from the perspective of each of those two characters, makes such a reading a stronger possibility, a stronger contender for a “two-path” narrative than what is possible in *The Day He Arrives*. In this way, *The Day He Arrives* perhaps sheds a light onto *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, as well as other two-part structured films in Hong’s filmography. As the different chapters in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* contains blatant contradictions and access to subjective memories that renders some of these (if one attempts to read the film as two sides presenting their memories of a shared story) subjective memories impossible, which suggest that the puzzle cannot be solved by assembling pieces from two perspectives to see the full picture. *The Day He Arrives*, as most of the films in the latter part of Hong’s filmography, is focalized through only one character, which renders the common reading of his earlier work impossible. In *The Day He Arrives*, there is only one character in which the spectator perceives the situations through.

In *The Day He Arrives*, time appears to function in similar ways to how Henri Bergson described it in his opposition to the thinking that the future and the past are “calculable functions of the present.” Rather than forming a strict and calculable line, time functions as a coexistence of the past, the present and the future, while all affecting each other, they also exist at different rhythms in a plurality of durations (Bergson, 1911; Lim, 2009, p. 13). In *The Day He Arrives*, there are several examples of time existing at different rhythms, like for example, the three scenes in which protagonist Seong-jun runs into an actress who he has worked with in the past but cannot remember during the scene depicting their first encounter while Seong-jun is visiting Seoul. This encounter between Seong-jun and the actress, which is depicted three times in the syuzhet, separates itself from the other scene which is depicted three times in the syuzhet: the bar scene. The scene depicting the encounter between Seong-jun and the actress acknowledges the traditional thinking of time, where the first scene clearly depicts their first encounter, and the two following depictions of the same scene acknowledge the fact that they did indeed meet in that first scene, with the third depiction acknowledging both of the prior scenes. This is completely different from the bar scene which is also depicted three times – here, each scene is portrayed like they are in the bar for the first time, as if the two second depictions are true repetitions (a repetition of time itself – where everything is the same or similar) and not a false repetition (a repetition which only mirrors or echoes past events – a repetition which is fully functional in the traditional linear sense of time). The three

scenes depicting a chance meeting between Seong-jun and the actress acknowledge time in its traditional form, where a beginning (scene 1), middle (scene 2) and an end (scene 3) is presented. The choice to present one event in this manner and another event (the bar scene) in another manner, is a telling sign that Hong is aware of the way he is challenging the spectator in his portrayal of movie time with the complex temporalities portrayed in *The Day He Arrives*.

Interestingly, the three depictions of the scene between Seong-jun and the actress are all shot from different angles – in the first depiction, the spectator is presented a typical two-shot from the side, showing the profile of Seong-jun and the actress, in the second depiction, the spectator is presented the same type of two-shot, showing the profiles of the characters, but this time from the *other* side, and in the third depiction of the scene, the spectator is presented a shot where the camera is placed behind the back of Seong-jun (and Young-ho which is accompanying his stroll in this third depiction of the encounter), showing the face and front side of the actress. The way these scenes are depicted, with a different camera angle in each iteration, echoes a playful approach to Barthes' sentiment that the camera is a "clock for seeing" – where, in the three depictions of this scene, the camera literally moves like a clock hand, as if it is an acknowledgement on Hong's part that he is using film as a medium for playing with the concept of temporality through the use of these repetitions. This is also a useful way in which the director makes a distinction between what I have already dubbed a "true repetition" and a "false repetition." The so-called "false repetition," is as I have stated a repetition which works logically in a linear sense of time, and the key example of Hong's use of a false repetition is thus the encounter scene between Seong-jun and the actress. *The Day He Arrives* reveals itself as perhaps the greatest example of Hong's unique portrayal of temporalities, especially when true repetitions and false repetitions are juxtaposed as one can see in the duality between the encounter scene and the bar scene.

The bar scene is treated more like a "true repetition." The shot of Seong-jun and his friends entering the bar is shot from the same angle in all three iterations, with Young-ho giving one of them a friendly pat on the back in each iteration. The angle of the camera placement is similar in each shot inside the bar, and the shot of the bar owner approaching the bar from outside is exactly duplicated in each iteration. In the cinema of Hong, a false repetition which would function in a traditional narrative structure is portrayed with a playful acknowledgement of its placement within a larger structure with more complex temporalities at display through the placement of the camera in each iteration. The true repetitions of the bar scene, on the other hand, are portrayed in a more restrained manner, largely following the

same blueprint for each iteration, underlining the notion that each of these three iterations of the bar scene are similar and thus more difficult to place in a logical, verifiable and linear timeline.

By juxtaposing true repetitions and false repetitions, Hong is clearly orchestrating a timeline that is one of the coexistence of past, present and future, but more in line with the arguments of Bergson and Deleuze in that the past and the future are not calculable functions of the present, in the way they are in traditional narratives, or even in puzzle films, mind game films, and other types of narratives that play with and push the boundaries of narratives, in films such as *The Sixth Sense* where the twist makes the spectator re-evaluate the entirety of the narrative, *Pulp Fiction* which makes the spectator make inferences in order to reconstruct the timeline, or *Memento* where similarly to *The Sixth Sense* the spectator will re-evaluate everything s/he has seen, but by presenting the order of events backwards and including flashbacks, the spectator is already evaluating and calculating every move the film makes in order to advance the plot, like a chess game between film and spectator. These films are very much narratives that adhere to the thinking that the past and the future are calculable functions of the present, and as such are these films not only portraying narratives where the past, the present and the future are coexisting, but one where the past, the present and the future are in a relationship of *co-dependency*.

In contrast to narratives such as *The Sixth Sense*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Memento*, Hong's cinema, best exemplified in *The Day He Arrives* but also descriptive of films such as *Okki's Movie*, *Right Now*, *Wrong Then*, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, and *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well*, the relationship between the past, the present and the future is one of coexistence but not one of co-dependence. In *Memento*, where the timeline is presented backwards, with flashbacks inserted throughout the course of the film, the past, the present and the future are in co-dependence, because they cannot function without each other. In *Memento*, when the spectator discovers that the main character has led the spectator through a journey and a chase which is based on a lie, essentially turning the main character from a protagonist to an antagonist, the spectator cannot process all this information without keeping the details of the timeline presented in the film in the back of his/her mind. In *Memento*, the narrative makes heavy use of the coexistence of the past, the future and the present, fitting of Bergson's idea that the past, the present and the future exist because of each other, and could not exist without each other, and that the past is something that is, and not something which is dead (Lim, 2009, pp. 13-15). In *Memento*, the past is not dead, and the past, present and future are not sealed off from each other. The past is not something which is no longer in existence

and the future is not something which is not yet in existence. Rather, they exist as conditions for the others to exist, as Bergson put it (Lim, 2009, p. 15).

What separates *The Day He Arrives* and the cinema of Hong from that of puzzle films like *Memento* or traditional narratives, is the fact that Hong brings the concept of temporality further but sheds the idea of codependency. In *The Day He Arrives*, Hong operates a narrative consisting of multiple rhythms and temporalities, not a basic narrative where the past, the present, and the future coexist in an exclusive codependency which excludes multiple temporalities across different rhythms and wholes. The codependency of the past, the present, and the future is one of absolute necessity to the plot of *Memento* and other puzzle films, mind game films or narratively challenging films. In the cinema of Hong, what is presented is more like loose strands of different temporalities, which are not employed to serve an advancement of a plot, for shock effect, or anything similar. In the cinema of Hong, the different temporalities merely *exist*. They are not there for any conceivable reason, but for being explored through this unorthodox approach to narrative. Rather, these different temporalities are *fragments*, loose fragments which may or may not be part of a bigger image, but never exposed as being such, something I shall explain further in my discussion on what I have chosen to call “fragmentary narratives.”

These fragments that Hong presents in films such as *The Day He Arrives* are largely made up of crystals of time, or crystal-images as Deleuze has coined this type of images. Instead of presenting a narrative containing temporalities of codependency of the past, the present and the future which is exploited for plot advancement, Hong is more concerned with exploring multiple temporalities by crystallizing time. Earlier in the chapter, I made the claim that Hong is *crystallizing time*, based on my claim that *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* and *The Day He Arrives* are exercises in crystal-images, because on the interchanging spirit of the actual and the virtual. In contrast to narratives of codependency of the relationship between the past, the present and the future, Hong’s cinema explore the relationship between the past, the present and the future by generating a unity of what the spectator is watching and what the spectator is imagining.

### **3.8. Fragmentary narratives**

After thoroughly investigating the concepts of Hong’s cinema, how these films are structured and how the spectator might experience them, I have demonstrated that Hong eschews most of the narrative forms currently being theorized in the debate regarding

narrative and temporality in cinema. In light of this dilemma, I propose that the cinema of Hong Sang-soo, as well as other recent works in the region, fall under a category called *fragmentary narratives*. These narratives are not forking-path narratives, nor are they multiple draft narratives, or typical puzzle films or typical slow cinema. These narratives are something new and fresh in the world of cinema, and are distinct from puzzle films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Memento*, nor are they multiple draft narratives in the vein of *Run Lola Run*, nor do they quite fit in with traditional or typical slow cinema such as the films of Andrei Takovsky, Bela Tarr, or Lav Diaz.

I propose that fragmentary narratives are made up of and can be described by five general rules. These rules are:

1. Fragmentary narratives encourage the spectator to actively take part of the construction of the narrative, a spectator as storyteller type of approach;
2. Fragmentary narratives are non-linear in some fashion;
3. Fragmentary narratives feature “paths” in a similar way to Bordwell’s forking-path model, but where Bordwell suggests that certain paths are more important than others, the paths featured in fragmentary narratives are equal;
4. Fragmentary narratives are unsolvable puzzles which lack what Thomas Elsaesser described as the “oh-my-god feeling”;
5. Fragmentary narratives are crystal-images where the past, present, and future are unified in a single image.

I shall now discuss each of these rules in a bit more detail to explain more clearly what characterizes these fragmentary narratives. The first rule of fragmentary narratives is that these narratives encourage the spectator to be active in her/his navigation of the narrative. Therefore, I suggest that fragmentary narratives are approached by their filmmakers with a sort of “anti-auteur” frame of mind. By this I mean that while Hong Sang-soo is clearly an auteur, a director who has established his own style which is highly specific or unique and undoubtedly recognizable, films such as *The Day He Arrives* fail to present an intended reading, an intended interpretation and the spectator is left to make up her/his own mind regarding how the film text should be read. The concept of the *auteur* is one established by French film critics like André Bazin and Francois Truffaut who presented the idea that the director is the person who brings the script to life, and the person who is responsible for the film being what it is. The director was, and should be, felt as a presence in the film text, as in, there should be a clearly defined *author* of the specific work. In an auteur’s film, such as for example Jean Renoir, there was a specific perspective or unique worldview presented which

was an effect of the authorship of the director. These French film critics valued the director above all else and judged a film's merits by whether the director is present and provides the spectator with a unique "look" and an individual style.

As already stated, Hong Sang-soo is clearly an auteur in the sense that a specific and individual style is present. Hong's presence is noticeably felt during a film such as *The Day He Arrives*: his typical hand-written title card with simple music playing in the beginning of the film, voice-overs narrated by the main character, long takes of two or more characters having conversations while drinking and eating at restaurants and bars, short takes of characters walking from one place to another to establish the framework of the situations, and repetitions of scenes or scenes similar to scenes the spectator has already seen prior in the film. The point in which Hong and other directors operating in fragmentary narratives depart from the auteur-style of directing is when a specific intention or worldview should be presented, which the French critics wrote about. A film should represent a director's vision, a statement, an opinion, an argument, a worldview. This is an ingredient a film like *The Day He Arrives* does not contain. As I have argued, the films of Hong encourage the spectator to take part in the interpretation of the film as the film does not explicitly portray an intended interpretation, an intended statement or morale on behalf of the director. Hong's films present puzzles to the spectator. These puzzles, unlike other films which use similar tactics, are not solvable and the key to solving the puzzles are never given from the director to the spectator. As a result, the spectator must navigate the film text by their own ability, and as such, the narratives of films like *The Day He Arrives* use the anti-auteur approach, where the director refuses to make an intention available for the spectator in the film text and the spectator must put effort into the film and perhaps even make up her/his own intention for how to interpret the work at hand.

The second rule of fragmentary narratives is that fragmentary narratives are non-linear. This rule is very simple – fragmentary narratives present scenes out of order. The fabula events are non-linearly depicted in the syuzhet, and thus the timeline is out of order and perhaps confusing. Many, or most, of Hong's films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* and *The Day He Arrives* are non-linear, some of the films more explicitly non-linear than others: *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is even at first glimpse very clearly a non-linear film, where the opening chapter ("Day's Wait") is towards the end of the fabula timeline, and the next chapter ("Perhaps Accident") is earlier in the fabula timeline. This is similar to films like *Pulp Fiction*, where scenes are presented out of order and the spectator must make inferences to understand how all the pieces of the narrative fits together in a bigger

picture. A film like *Oki's Movie* is another example of a Hong narrative very explicitly being non-linear, consisting of four individual short films which are still all a part of the same overall narrative, the opening short film "A Day For Incantation" features one of the main characters clearly older than in the succeeding three short films. In this first short, the character in question is marked as older by the film referring to his wife, and the fact that he is a film director. In the three succeeding films this same character is a student and chasing after the titular character Oki with no mention of a wife in his life. Other films in Hong's catalogue is not quite as explicitly non-linear, such as *The Day He Arrives* and *Right Now, Wrong Then*, which are repetition heavy films but scenes appear to be presented in mainly linear order. However, the repetition makes this more complicated and by making inferences the spectator can conclude that these films are non-linear, or even that a concept such as linearity does not even exist in a film like *Right Now, Wrong Then*, where every fabula event is presented twice in the syuzhet. *The Day He Arrives* raises the question of whether the main character is reliving the same day over and over, and very clearly blurs the line between a straight linear timeline and a more complicated one. Repetition is therefore a considerable contributor to the concept of non-linearity as it contributes to confusing the spectator by obscuring the specifics of a film's timeline. When Seong-jun and his friends enter the bar called "Novel" for the third time in *The Day He Arrives*, the spectator will debate whether they are now going to this bar for the third night in a row, or whether the same day has repeated itself or perhaps if these are even alternative depictions of the same evening in different universes or memories from the mind of the main character. *Right Now, Wrong Then* presents a full repetition of the first half of the film in the second half, going back as far as the title sequence (which had similar but different names), which even more explicitly suggest that the narrative is non-linear and that these two sections are different paths rather than even belonging in the same timeline, truly different fragments.

The third rule of fragmentary narratives is that all paths are equal. In the fragmentary narratives, the paths that can be found, the paths in the sense that Bordwell described regarding the forking-path narratives, are all equal, unlike the forking path model, where Bordwell claims that the paths presuppose one another, and that the last path depicted in the films is the most important path, and the *final* path. As an alternative to the forking-path narratives, fragmentary narratives are all equally important or unimportant hypothetical takes on a specific situation. *Right Now, Wrong Then* features no explicit hint that claims that the second half of the film is more important or more final than the first half. Moreover, the spectator cannot know if these two paths are the only two paths. As these two paths are equal,



this opens up the possibility presented by Borges of the endless number of paths possible. There is no reason there would not be several more takes on the situation presented in *Right Now, Wrong Then*. Bordwell would probably argue that *Right Now, Wrong Then* could fit into the forking-path model, as it is split in two parts, one called “Wrong now, right then” and the other called “Right now, wrong then.” It is possible to interpret this as the second half being the “correct” half, and the most important one. However, I would argue that both halves of the story are equally (un)important, as they repeat the same situations with rather minimal differences. The second half might end on a slightly more positive note, but still not in any sense like a “happy ending” or similar. *Right Now, Wrong Then* present two hypothetical takes on a specific situation, with some minor details changing, showing how things can be different from time to time. It does not present different paths leading up to one final path, like in *Run Lola Run*, where the two first of the three paths are simply alternate fates and more importantly learning experiences of sorts leading up to the completion of story in the third path, where the mission finally succeeds and the film have fulfilled its purpose. In *Right Now, Wrong Then*, there is no completion, there is no purpose, there is no success, there are only fragments. This is what separates films like *Right Now, Wrong Then* and *Run Lola Run*: in the latter, there is a specific purpose, a specific mission that must be completed, and the paths are paths similar to a video game in which the player attempts to succeed in whatever mission must be completed before completing the game, and several attempts might be necessary. In *Run Lola Run*, two attempts are necessary before the mission can be successfully completed. In fragmentary narratives there are no missions, only fragments. *Right Now, Wrong Then, The Day He Arrives, Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* and *Oki's Movie* are all filled with fragments, with paths that are equally important or unimportant, and in that sense independent from one another. These fragments or paths do not presuppose one another, and the final path taken is no more relevant or correct than the first path taken.

The fourth rule of fragmentary narratives builds on the third rule, which was that all paths are equal and the respective paths do not presuppose one another. The fourth rule is that fragmentary narratives are unsolvable puzzles which lack the so-called “oh-my-god feeling.” In fragmentary narratives, there is no solution, no path greater than another, and no specific intended reading which stems from the anti-auteur approach described in the first rule. Therefore, the spectator will experience these fragmentary narratives as unsolvable puzzles which lack the “oh-my-god feeling.” (Elsaesser, 2009) The “oh-my-god” feeling is a simple concept. This is the feeling that many spectators experience when watching a film which

solves a certain puzzle or mystery, especially the films often called puzzle films, forking path films, multiple draft films, smart films, and so on. One example of this is the film already used several times as an example of puzzle films and narratively challenging films: *Pulp Fiction*. With *Pulp Fiction*, director Quentin Tarantino presented a fresh type of narrative where the scenes are presented out of order, so that the spectator must construct the timeline as s/he watches the film. Films with challenging narratives like this might be varying degrees of challenging, so the point in which a spectator “understands” the story might be different from person to person, film to film, but let us generalize and say that the final scene of *Pulp Fiction*, where the characters from the opening scene reappear, is the point in which the spectator can fill in all the blanks, assemble all the pieces of the puzzle, and see the whole picture. Inspired by a post on an internet forum, Thomas Elsaesser dubs this as the “oh-my-god feeling.” The feeling where one finally understands everything. This feeling is generally considered to be a big part in why films with unreliable narration such as *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999), mystery films like *The Sixth Sense*, and a puzzle film like *Memento* have been so successful and popular in the years of modern cinema. In fragmentary narratives, this “oh-my-god feeling” is absent. In these films, the puzzles never really get solved, and therefore, that sensation at the end never appears.

The fifth rule of fragmentary narratives is that all fragments are crystal-images. Fragments are linked to memories and durations. The fragments are crystals of time, where in the fragments, the actual becomes the virtual, and in its place the virtual becomes the actual – the actual and the virtual are interchanging and as such all fragments are seen through the crystal. Deleuze uses *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941) as his example for the time-image and more specifically the crystal-image: in *Citizen Kane*, past, present and future is bound together by the images and by particularly the “rosebud” aspect of the film. In Hong’s filmography, there are, as I have argued, several examples of time being “bound together,” where the past, present and future are one and the same, linked and unified in a single image, such as the bar scenes in *The Day He Arrives*, where the scenes of the main characters being in a bar recalls the past scene where the same actions have taken place, and echoes memories of past while also shaping the spectator sense of the now and of the future. The same thing happens in *Oki’s Movie*, where the final segment “Oki’s Movie” is a perfect crystal-image, unifying the past, the present and the future in a single short film.

Other films which I would place in the fragmentary narratives category would be particularly the films of Thai director and festival favourite Apichatpong Weerasethakul, with films such as *Tropical Malady* (2004), *Syndromes and a Century* (2007), and *Uncle Boonmee*

*Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). These films evoke some of the same feelings and aspects of cinema. *Syndromes and a Century* features a first half in a rural hospital and a second half in a city industrialized hospital with some of the same characters present in each part. This film portrays crystal-images in a similar way to Hong's films with the past, the present and the future unifying in each image. The same goes for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, where the titular characters' long lost son returns as a monkey-like creature explaining what has happened to him and why he was gone for many years. Here, a continuum of time is captured in the images, forming Deleuze's crystals of time, the crystal-images.



#### 4. What does it mean? Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate narrative structures and temporality in films through the films of South Korean director Hong Sang-soo. Hong's films are filled with unique narrative structures which confuse the spectator's sense of time, and usually feature repetitions of scenes already seen without any explicit explanation revealed in the end. The mission for this thesis has been to find out what sort of narratives are on display in these films, and how temporality contributes to shaping these narrative structures.

In Chapter I, I discussed Hong's approach to narrative structures by looking at some of the theories presented on narrative in cinema. By discussing the basic concept of the fabula and the syuzhet I could investigate how Hong's films and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000) in particular construct its story by having fabula events depicted in the syuzhet multiple times and how the temporal ordering of the syuzhet contributes to this film eschewing traditional narrative structures. I have also discussed how the spectator's memory will play a large role in the narrative comprehension of this film as the film repeats many scenes in the second half and it might make the navigation of the narrative difficult for the spectator as s/he is most likely not to recall 100% correctly what s/he has already seen, and what is the same and what is slightly different in the repeated scenes. Because of the confusion Hong causes the spectator by showing the same story twice but with minor and major details changed along the way, I have argued that these films require the spectator to take an active part in the reading of the films. One example of the memory of the spectator actively shaping the interpretation or reception of the film is how different reviews of *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* have reached different conclusions because the critics place importance on different aspects of the film depending on how they perceive the repeated scenes and how well they can remember the details of said scenes. In many cases, importance was given to an erroneous summary of two scenes in a restaurant where in the first iteration, a character knocks some chopsticks off the dinner table, and in the second iteration he spills food on another character. In most summaries of the film, the second iteration is referred to as featuring a fork being knocked off the table rather than the spilling of food, and this functions as an example of how the ambiguous nature of the changing details shape the spectators' role in navigating the film itself.

In order to get an idea of which type of narrative the films of Hong can fit into or to establish how the films do not fit into any particular narrative trend, I have discussed narrative concepts such as forking-path narratives, puzzle films, and mind-game films.

I have placed a great importance on discussing David Bordwell's claims regarding what he calls the forking path narrative. Bordwell's model is based on Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Garden of Forking Paths," which suggest the possibility of having an endless amount of alternative universes in a narrative. The suggestion made in Borges's story is one I claim is important when investigating narrative possibilities in film and could possibly explain some of the narrative structures explored by filmmakers such as Hong and other contemporary Asian filmmakers in particular. Bordwell however, suggest something smaller in scope by establishing a number of rules for his forking-path model, which I have thoroughly discussed in an attempt to point out how this model is too narrow for investigating some of the narrative explorations made by filmmakers today. By placing *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* next to the seven simplified conventions explained by Bordwell, I have pointed to how there are films that explore similar narrative structures but are able to escape the model that Bordwell suggests.

Likewise, I have discussed what Thomas Elsaesser calls the "mind-game" film, which is another narrative model which at first glimpse looks like something which could function as an explanation for Hong's approach to narrative but in the end proves how the narratives presented in films like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* eschew narrative models. The cinema of Hong most certainly play tricks on the mind of the spectator, in the same way that Elsaesser describes the films he places in his mind-game film category. The difference that separate a film like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* from a mind-game film like *Fight Club* which plays mind-games on the spectator (as well as the characters themselves) but features what Elsaesser calls the "oh-my-god" feeling. This "oh-my-god" feeling is the description of what happens when the film finally reveals the truth of the mind-game like when the spectator realizes at the same time as the main character in *Fight Club* realizes that the Tyler Durden character was in fact a figment of his imagination and that the actions the Durden character took during the film was the actions of the main character. In a similar way to mind-game films, Hong's films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* present a mystery of what the repetitions mean, how the story fits together temporally and perhaps who among the characters is telling the truth or whether the narration itself is telling the truth. The difference lies in the lack of the "oh-my-god" feeling which *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* and other films by Hong does not feature. Similarly, Hong's cinema at first glimpse appears to fit the description of the puzzle film, another variation of the mind-game film, where a film is presenting its narrative structure like a puzzle, such as films like *Memento* where the story is told backwards, and the solution to the puzzle lies at the end of the film,

which is the beginning of the story, which sheds light to the beginning of the film which is the end of the story. As the films by Hong lack the “oh-my-god” feeling, this means that they also lack the solution to the puzzle that the film presents. The films are very much presented like puzzles, like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* which tells the story of a romantic relationship twice, or *Right Now, Wrong Then*, which tells a story, then restarts from the beginning of the film and starts again, or *Hill of Freedom* where the narration is based on a jumbled pile of letters, where a zoom-in on a letter lying on the floor suggest that there might be more to the story. The films are puzzles in nature, but the puzzle is never completed. What Hong gives us is merely pieces of the puzzle, but never the full picture.

In Chapter II, I focus more on the aspect of temporality on how this complements the narrative structures. By maintaining a cinematic style grounded in what is called “slow cinema,” with an emphasis on long takes and extended conversations as the main driver of the plot, Hong is able to emphasize the aspect of time in the process of watching his films. In addition to a clear manipulation of time in a non-linear narrative, attention is drawn to time itself, where spectator time is linked to movie time as the spectator is seeing the duration of a scene play out in mostly the same time as the scene is playing (most of the scenes are in “real-time”). By bringing attention to duration in the scenes themselves through this slow cinema aesthetic, Hong brings attention to temporality by making the timeline very complex such as in *The Day He Arrives* where there are two examples of scenes being repeated three times each. Hong further complicates the timeline by having one of these scenarios be what I have called a “false repetition,” where the two repetitions of the initial scene is acknowledged in the narrative (the characters remember meeting each other before), and then having the other scenario be what I have called a “true repetition,” where the repetition is not acknowledged and the characters do not behave as if this scenario has happened before, and certain shots are exactly duplicated and similar in approach, as a contrast to the false repetitions which are more different in approach (different camera angles).

In terms of temporality, I also point to exercises in what Gilles Deleuze calls “crystal-images,” an advancement of his concept of “time-images.” In this section, I point to how the past, the present, and the future inhabit a relationship of coexistence, where they are always affecting each other, always shaping each other. In Hong’s films, temporalities exist in different rhythms, where the relationship of the past, the present, and the future are in a state of coexistence, but not in a state of co-dependency which I have discussed that other films which can be placed in narrative categories such as forking path films, mind-game films and puzzle films use in their narratives. These films employ a temporality where past, present and

future are co-dependent because they cannot function without each other, which again underlines the concept of the “oh-my-god” feeling or the completion of the puzzle. These films present temporalities of co-dependency because they need it in order to create or highlight this completion of the plot, the completion of the puzzle, the revelation of the mind-game. In the cinema of Hong, temporalities are in coexistence, but as Hong is not interested in completing the puzzle or revealing the mind-game, these temporalities are more like loose strands of narrative, or fragments. Hong’s films are exercises in crystal-images, where time is bound together in a single image. Through Hong’s manipulation of temporal ordering and repetition, the actual (what the spectator is seeing) is always interchanging with the virtual (what the spectator is imagining). By repeating scenes multiple times, and by separating these repetitions by having both false and true repetitions, Hong is crystallizing time by bringing the different temporalities into a single image, where the actual and the virtual are in a state of interchanging, where the actual becomes the virtual, and in its place, the virtual becomes the actual.

I have argued that by manipulating temporal order and different temporalities, and by presenting forking paths, puzzles or mind-games that does not lead up to a specific revelation which is used for plot effect to achieve the “oh-my-god” feeling, the narratives of Hong are more like loose strings than a sophisticatedly tied knot, or, rather, the narratives are fragments. As the films never give the full image, never show the completed puzzle, I argue that it is more descriptive to label the pieces not as pieces of a puzzle, but loose fragments. The spectator can never complete the final picture because there are only fragments – fragments of time, fragments of histories, fragments of plots. Therefore, I have suggested a narrative category which I identify as fragmentary narratives. Fragmentary narratives can be identified as films that present narratives where the spectator must actively take part in the construction of the narrative, narratives where temporalities are non-linear, narratives which feature paths similar to the forking-path model but where the different paths are of equal importance (or lack thereof) and none is more likely to be “real” than another, narratives which lack a solution which brings a sensation such as the “oh-my-god” feeling, and finally, narratives where time is united in crystal-images, showing crystallized fragments of time. I therefore conclude that the narratives found within the films of Hong Sang-soo can be categorized as fragmentary narratives, based on the temporalities found within these films. I also propose that fragmentary narratives is a type of narratives found in other contemporary films, mainly but not necessarily exclusive to Asian filmmakers such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Anocha Suwichakornpong.



In Hong's cinema, the spectator can find puzzling narrative structures, with repeating scenes and situations. Scenes are repeated with differences and I have argued that these differences as well as the complex structures never add up to a full picture, a full puzzle which reveals itself by the end of the film, making the spectator receive the "oh-my-god" feeling. Hong's films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, *The Day He Arrives*, *Oki's Movie*, and *Right Now, Wrong Then* all lack that important moment of the spectator finally "getting it" and feeling the crucial "oh-my-god" feeling. Therefore, the question regarding Hong's cinema should not be "what does it mean?" Rather, the appropriate question to be asked is "*does it mean?*" – perhaps the answer can be found in a dialogue between Min-jeong and a man taking interest in her in *Yourself and Yours*:

The man: "This is mysterious and fun!"

Min-jeong: "Then just enjoy it!"

## 5. Literature

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## 6. Films

*The Assassin* (Hou, 2015)  
*Babycall* (Sletaune, 2011)  
*Blind Chance* (Kieślowski, 1981)  
*The Boss ff It All* (von Trier, 2006)  
*Certified Copy* (Kiarostami, 2010)  
*Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941)  
*Claire's Camera* (Hong, 2017)  
*The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (Hong, 1996)  
*The Day After* (Hong, 2017)  
*The Day He Arrives* (Hong, 2011)  
*Empire* (Warhol, 1964)  
*El Cant Dels Ocells* (Serra, 2008)  
*Enter the Void* (Noe, 2009)  
*Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004)  
*Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999)  
*Funny Games* (Haneke, 1997)  
*The Game* (Fincher, 1997)  
*Hahaha* (Hong, 2010)  
*Hill of Freedom* (Hong, 2014)  
*In Another Country* (Hong, 2012)  
*In the Mood For Love* (Wong, 2000)  
*Irreversible* (Noe, 2002)  
*Like You Know It All* (Hong, 2009)  
*Lost* (AMC, 2004-2010)  
*Lost Highway* (Lynch, 1997)  
*The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)  
*Memento* (Nolan, 2000)  
*Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001)  
*Night and Day* (Hong, 2008)  
*Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (Hong, 2013)  
*Oki's Movie* (Hong, 2010)  
*Oldboy* (Park, 2003)

*On the Beach at Night Alone* (Hong, 2017)  
*Our Sunhi* (Hong, 2013)  
*The Power of Kangwon Province* (Hong, 1998)  
*Primer* (Carruth, 2004)  
*Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994)  
*Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950)  
*Right Now, Wrong Then* (Hong, 2015)  
*Ring* (Nakata, 1998)  
*Run Lola Run* (Tywker, 1998)  
*Sátántango* (Tarr, 1994)  
*Se7en* (Fincher, 1995)  
*The Silence of The Lambs* (Demme, 1991)  
*The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan, 1999)  
*Sliding Doors* (Howitt, 1998)  
*Stalker* (Tarkovsky, 1979)  
*Syndromes and a Century* (Weerasethakul, 2007)  
*Tale of Cinema* (Hong, 2005)  
*Three Iron* (Kim, 2004)  
*Tropical Malady* (Weerasethakul, 2004)  
*The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998)  
*Turning Gate* (Hong, 2002)  
*Two Many Ways to be No. 1* (Wai, 1997)  
*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul, 2010)  
*The Usual Suspects* (Singer, 1995)  
*Vanilla Sky* (Crowe, 2001)  
*Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (Hong, 2000)  
*Vive l'amour* (Tsai, 1994)  
*Woman is the Future of Man* (Hong, 2004)  
*Woman on The Beach* (Hong, 2006)  
*Yourself and Yours* (Hong, 2016)