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ARTICLE

Filming Critical Female Perspectives: Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers*

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From his first film—a twenty-minute short, “Expectations” (1982)—to his last—a three-hour masterpiece, *Yi Yi* (2000)—Edward Yang, one of the leading figures of the Taiwan New Cinema movement, devoted his career to portraying the impact of neoliberal capitalism on the lives of the citizens of Taipei. Interestingly, Yang’s films often employ female perspectives to criticize Taiwan’s education system and transnational corporations for perpetuating neoliberal capitalism’s ideology of self-fulfillment and upward mobility. This paper draws upon feminist film theory to investigate the ways in which Yang’s third feature, *The Terrorizers* (1986), utilizes various innovative cinematic languages to engender a multitude of women’s perspectives to expose male voyeurism and ultimately criticize the impact of neoliberal capitalism in Taipei.

Keywords: Edward Yang; gender; women; Taiwan, Taipei; *The Terrorizers*; feminist film theory

Known for his vivid portraits of Taipei and its middle-class dwellers, Edward Yang was not only among the most important voices critical of Taiwan's market-driven neoliberal economy, but also a thoughtful observer and storyteller of women's experiences, desires, and social conditions. Asked in an interview about his inclination to focus on the perspectives and experiences of women in his films, Yang answered that "the female perspective provides a better angle for understanding what is going on. It allows the audience to keep in better touch with the sensitivity of the subject matter. Traditionally speaking, men in Chinese culture are rather insensitive" (Berry 2005, 288). The questions then arise: was Edward Yang, a male director, able to truly represent the female perspective in his films? Could his so-called "female perspective" be seen instead as an "alternative or sensitive male perspective"? What kinds of subject matter are Yang's films engaged with? How do Yang's "female perspectives" enable the audience to better understand what is going on in Taiwan and even around the world? In this paper, I argue that the female perspectives in Yang's films, especially *The Terrorizers*, are intended to offer a critique on two important subjects: male voyeurism embedded in mainstream Hollywood-style narratives and Taiwan's patriarchal and neoliberal capitalist culture.

To understand the motives behind Yang's filming of female perspectives, we have to first look into his role in the Taiwan New Cinema movement. Born in Shanghai in 1947, Yang emigrated with his family to Taiwan before the communist takeover of China in 1949. Growing up in Taipei, amid a community of uprooted mainlanders, Yang spent his childhood in the world of Japanese comic books, American rock and roll music, and European art films. After graduating from Chiao-Tung University with a bachelor's degree in engineering, Yang left Taiwan for the United States in 1970.¹ Four years later, he graduated from the University of Florida with a master's degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering. He then briefly enrolled in the University of Southern California's film school, but quit after a semester because he found it too commercially-oriented. He moved to Seattle to work as a computer and software

¹ Most Chinese personal and institutional names mentioned in this article follow the Wade-Giles Romanization system, which is the de facto system in Taiwan. All other Romanization of Chinese words follows Pinyin.

programmer for the next seven years. During this period he obtained American citizenship. His experiences in the United States would have a tremendous influence on his career as a filmmaker in Taiwan; as an admirer of European and American films, Yang created a cinematic world different from that of his fellow New Cinema founder and good friend, Hou Hsiao-hsien, especially in terms of subject-matter, cinematography, and narrative structure (Yeh 2005, 92).² Unlike Hou, whose long takes and stationary camera nostalgically depict Taiwan's countryside and bygone history, Yang deployed postmodern, self-reflexive aesthetics to portray the contemporary social issues of alienation, corruption, globalization, capitalism, and familial relationships in the city of Taipei.

After ten years in the United States, Yang returned to Taiwan in 1980 and started working as a screenwriter for television and film, including the Hong Kong TV movie *The Winter of 1905* (1981). His chance to become a director came in 1982 with *In Our Time*, a project produced by the state-owned Central Motion Pictures Corporation (CMPC). Co-directed by Edward Yang, Tao Te-chen, Ko I-ching, and Chang Yi, four young and unknown directors, *In Our Time* marked the beginning of Taiwan New Cinema. The following year witnessed the release of *The Sandwich Man*, another omnibus project based on Huang Chun-ming's nativist stories and directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wan Jen, and Tseng Chuang-hsiang. Similar to French New Wave in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Taiwan New Cinema started with young directors trying to break into the scene and reconnect with society by drawing inspiration from the stories of ordinary people. Before the rise of Taiwan New Cinema, most directors learned their craft under the studio system, incrementally working their way up the ladder over the course of many years. Many directors under this system lacked individual style, making routine productions according to what they had learned from veteran directors. Unlike their predecessors, the four directors of *In Our Time* had little experience of working under the studio system. On the contrary, they all shared a background in academic film education. Tao gained a master's degree at Syracuse University, and Ko received his master's from Columbia College. Chang graduated

² Yang's dream of becoming a film director was inspired by German director Werner Herzog's films, especially *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, which he encountered at a cinema in Seattle (Anderson 2005, 6).

from a film program at Shih Hsin University in Taipei and worked as a screenwriter before making *In Our Time*. Although Young did not obtain a degree in film, he studied film production at the University of Southern California for a semester. In contrast to films made prior to 1982, such as those of the so-called “healthy realism” school and Chiung-yao’s melodrama of the 1970s, Taiwan New Cinema used more innovative techniques to portray the real lives of the people in Taiwan, including its use of local, historical material and its exploration of new cinematic languages, such as long takes, non-linear narratives, critical social realism, and collaboration among filmmakers.³

The significance of women’s perspectives to Yang’s narrative was already prominent in his short film “Expectations” (the second segment of *In Our Time*). In this twenty-minute short, Yang vividly captures a teenage girl’s anxiety in regard to puberty and her burgeoning sexual desire. The protagonist cannot stop day-dreaming about the handsome young college student who rents a room in her family’s house, and finds herself competing with her older sister for his attention. In one scene, Yang uses several slow-motion close-ups of the young man’s muscular chest to accentuate the intensity of the female protagonist’s desire for him. The scene ends with a pan shot revealing that the protagonist’s older sister, standing nearby, is also mesmerized by the half-naked male body. More interestingly, the short film contains two plot lines: one involving the female protagonist’s rivalry with her older sister to get the young man’s attention, the other following her friendship with a short, skinny, bespectacled boy with whom she learns how to ride a bike and shares a similar desire of growing up fast. Not only is the film told from a young girl’s perspective, but it also demonstrates Yang’s inclination to create multiple plot lines to expose the conflicts, multiplicity, and interconnectedness of human desires, emotions, and fantasy, especially those of women and children whose voices are often marginalized in Taiwanese society.

³ For a discussion of the complicated historical and artistic transformation of Taiwan New Cinema, see Peggy Chiao, ed. *Taiwan Xin Dianying (Taiwan New Cinema)* (Taipei: Shi-bao, 1988) and Emile Yueh-Yu Yeh and Darrel William Davis. *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Similar to “Expectations,” Yang’s first feature-length film, *That Day, on the Beach* (1983; hereafter, *That Day*), also investigates the complexity of women’s experiences and interiority. Unlike his short film, *That Day* has a fractured narrative that reveals, and at the same time conceals, itself through fragmented memories of two women’s lives in marriage. Told in a series of flashbacks during a luncheon between two female friends in Vienna, the film delineates the different experiences the women have in their respective romances and marriages. *That Day* is one of Yang’s most endearing efforts to “voice” women’s various entrapments, discontents, and pains in marriage and patriarchal society at large. Extremely different from the prevailing stereotypical depictions of “good” and “bad” women in “healthy realism” and Chiung-yao’s melodrama of the 1970s, Yang’s debut feature already explores many of the complex topics that would later define his films about women: their independence, fluidity of narratives/voices, the burden of family relationships, adultery, friendship, and the corruption of the business world.

Yang’s next feature, *Taipei Story* (1985), follows the estranged relationship between a couple, Lon (played by Hou Hsiao-hsien) and Chin (played by Tsai Chin). Lon, a former Little League baseball star, works in a family textile business but dreams of immigrating to America; Chin is an executive assistant in an architecture company. Told through Chin’s point of view, we watch the young woman cope with Lon’s immaturity, an abusive father, and an ambitious boss. The movie ends with Lon being stabbed by a biker Chin had an affair with, and a scene of Chin, unaware of the death of her lover, contemplating whether to join a new company formed by her former boss, Mrs. Wei. As John Anderson argues:

The film is primarily about Taipei, a city of violent contrasts: Chin’s apartment versus her parents’ old home; Lon’s antiquated fabric shop versus Chin’s modern office; westernized bars versus Japanese karaoke; Lon’s more traditional relationships versus the promiscuous ones of Chin’s sister, Ling. The primary dichotomy at work, within the jungle that has become the city, is between those who can keep up, such as Chin, and those who can’t. In the latter category are Chin’s father and, ultimately, Lon. (2005, 37–38)

Yang uses the couple's failing relationship to reflect upon the confusion, uncertainty, and betrayal associated with Taipei's rapid modernization and urban alienation. Chin can be viewed as the archetype of the career woman in Yang's films, and many of her reincarnations appear in his later work. Yang's third feature, *The Terrorizers* (1986), for example, continues the theme of broken marriage, urban isolation, and violence. Interweaving three story lines with a female protagonist's prank calls, the film has been considered "a postmodern film par excellence" by the American postmodernist scholar Frederic Jameson (1992, 128). However, Jameson's interpretation of the film has been criticized by a number of scholars due to his neglect of Taiwan's social and cultural conditions, a point I will discuss later in this article.

After *The Terrorizers*, Yang made four more films—*A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), *A Confucian Confusion* (1994), *Mahjong* (1996), and *Yi Yi* (2000). All feature strong, independent, and ambitious female characters. For example, the thirteen-year-old protagonist in *A Brighter Summer Day* refuses to be loyal and subjugated to the control of her boyfriend; she ends up being stabbed to death by the fourteen-year-old male protagonist. The career women in *A Confucian Confusion* and *Mahjong* are even more independent and bolder than the female protagonist of *Taipei Story* in terms of expressing their sexual desire and unwillingness to sacrifice their careers for their families. As Emily Yueh-Yu Yeh and Darrel William Davis state, "These women desire independence but also crave emotional security; they perform their roles because they wish to be players in control, on top of the career/family/romance game" (2005, 123). Although Yang's last film, *Yi Yi*, focuses on the perspective of an eight-year-old boy, the film actually resembles his first short film, "Expectations," with its multiple plot lines that bring together a wide range of characters, dramas, and emotions. For example, the film's female teen protagonist, Ting Ting, suffers complex feelings of guilt about dating her best friend's boyfriend, and for the coma of her grandmother, who is tripped by one of the garbage bags Ting Ting accidentally leaves outside of their apartment. From teen girl characters to middle-aged women, Yang was consistently attentive to the complexity of his female characters' psychology as they take on various life and societal challenges.

In fact, Yang was not alone in his cinematic representation of strong and independent women. As mentioned above, Taiwan New Cinema emerged out of Taiwan's unique cultural, political, economic, and postcolonial conditions. To understand women's experiences as portrayed in Yang's cinema requires an appreciation of the diversity of local cultures and discourses within which meanings and practices of femininity, masculinity, family values, and national identities are constructed. In light of the current political milieu, one could argue that the retreat of the Kuomintang Party (KMT) from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949 marked the most pivotal moment in Taiwan's history. During the half-century of KMT rule, the Taiwanese people were significantly deprived of their native languages, cultures, and political rights. Taiwan's first opposition political party, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP), was able to legally form only in 1986. A year later, the longest period of martial law in modern history (1948–1987) was finally lifted and a series of grassroots social movements in support of labor unions, feminism, aboriginal rights, environmentalism, and gay rights, among others, began to surface, and greatly changed the political and social scenes in Taiwan. In 2000, the pro-independence DPP, led by Chen Shui-bian and his female running mate, Lu Hsiu-lien, campaigning on a nativist Taiwanese democratic platform, defeated the pro-reunification KMT in the presidential election. In a sense, the surge of Taiwan's democratization and "Taiwanese" identity facilitated the growth of both the women's and gay rights movements of the 1980s and 90s. Taiwan New Cinema responded to this transformational period by promoting social realism against the commercial and government propaganda films of the 1970s and 80s. As Lingzhen Wang points out, although women did not play a leading role in the New Cinema movement, women writers did make significant contributions. Several important films were adaptations of books by female writers. For example, Wan Jen's *Ah-Fei* (1983) is based on Liao Hui-ying's novel, Hou Hsiao-hsien's *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983) is derived from Chu Tien-wen's fiction, and Tseng Chuang Hsiang's *The Woman of Wrath* (1985) is an adaptation of Li Ang's novel. As Wang claims, "With their shared social concerns over ordinary and marginalized people in Taiwan, New Taiwan Cinema directors successfully depicted in their films a group of suffering but strong women figures" (2012, 339).

Critique of Male Voyeurism and Neoliberal Capitalism

Described by Michael Berry as “a true landmark in Taiwan Cinema,” *The Terrorizers* is probably Yang’s most sophisticated and complex film next to his last film, *Yi Yi* (2005, 274). Winning several international awards including Best Screenplay at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival and the Silver Leopard Award at the Locarno International Film Festival, Yang’s third feature encompasses a number of intersecting story lines that connect several isolated Taipei inhabitants. According to Frederic Jameson, Yang’s “narrative of synchronous monadic simultaneity” in portraying Taipei exemplifies a “late-capitalist urbanization” that blends First and Third Worlds together to reveal the city’s identity crisis (1992, 116–117). Rejecting Jameson’s approach for its “geopolitical totality,” Yeh and Davis, on the other hand, analyze the film as “a kind of game or puzzle” of chance relations between humans, which provides its audience the pleasure of “recognizing the intersections between different subplots, relationships, and genres” (2005, 95). Other scholars also disagree with Jameson and opt to analyze the film as a locally based genealogy or comparative case study. For example, Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang argues that the film’s modernist critique of middlebrow literature signals the awakening of Taiwan artists to the evolving genre hierarchy during Taiwan’s transition from the martial-law period to the domination of commercial culture (2005, 17). Flannery Wilson looks into the film’s intertextuality and claims that “Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* and Yang’s *The Terrorizers* contain overlapping themes and plot devices to such an extent that they can be considered analogies for modernism more generally” (2014, 47).

Interestingly, *The Terrorizers* was inspired by the real story of a Eurasian girl whose father was an American Vietnam serviceman and mother was a Taiwanese bar hostess. Introduced by a mutual friend, the girl told Yang about how she used to occupy herself by making prank calls when she was grounded. Once she even called a woman and told her that she was her husband’s mistress, a scene that appears in *The Terrorizers* (Berry 2005, 282). One important characteristic of Yang’s films is his ability to take a few true historical elements from real life and then create a narrative that concerns itself not just with the people involved, but also with their places in

the larger world around them. Instead of making a film *just* about a Eurasian girl's family melodrama and identity crisis, Yang's film investigates a complex network of social forces that affect women's experiences in the city of Taipei. In *The Terrorizers*, as in most of Yang's films, Taiwan's neoliberal capitalist aspirations loom in the background of a middle-class couple's troubled marriage. From Lon's dream of immigrating to America in *Taipei Story* to Zhou Yufen's desire to win a literary prize in *The Terrorizers* and NJ's fight against his own company's short-sighted business decision in *Yi Yi*, we see Yang's characters struggle to become "entrepreneurs" in order to cope with the advancement of a free market economy.

Yang's films vividly portray women's experiences against the backdrop of Taiwan's ever-shifting political and economic landscapes, especially the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Since the end of the Second World War, Taiwan as a peripheral country or non-country has had to cope with external pressures and constantly adopt new market institutions. As Jinn-yuh Hsu observes, in the mid-1980s, Taiwan began to shift from its previous state-guided industrialization model to a neoliberal economy that aims to sustain economic growth through economic liberalization. The key dynamics behind these policy changes came from domestic political struggle and global economic competition (2009, 298). Until 2000, Taiwan was governed by the KMT, an authoritarian party. Utilizing its strong military power and bureaucracy, the KMT government suppressed native Taiwanese political, economic, and cultural identities for many decades. Taiwan's postwar development was based on an economy in which a powerful state guided the private sector to enhance productivity in selective industries in order to compete with foreign countries. The result was rapid economic growth, commonly known as Taiwan's economic miracle. Assimilation into U.S.-style liberal and neoliberal capitalism, which provided Taiwan with financial aid, technological upgrades, and a huge market for export-oriented industries, also contributed to this rapid growth. During this industrialization period, Taipei became the economic center that linked local producers with the global market. As Jenn-hwan Wang and Shuwei Hung's study shows, by 1981 over 90% of international trade and over 80% of business service employees in Taiwan were located in Taipei city (2009, 105).

Despite the proven success of the state-guided economy, the KMT government began to reduce state regulation of international trade in the mid-1980s. According to Ming-Chang Tsai, one of the forces for Taiwan's economic liberation was pressure from the United States. Taiwan's dependency on the U.S. market had generated severe trade conflicts, and Taiwan's trade surplus with the U.S. had escalated to \$12.2 billion during 1986–1990 (2001, 366). The other factor was Taiwan's weak position in international politics. Taiwan's diplomatic isolation due to China's intervention required it to have close ties with the U.S. Therefore, as Tsai argues, neoliberal reform of Taiwan's economy was more a strategic reaction to save the potential trade relationship with the U.S. than an attempt to rescue a troubled economy (2001, 367). Situated as it has been on the receiving end of colonial or imperialist practices, Taiwan never really developed an autonomous "local" or "national" identity. Instead, Taiwan and its citizens have been long intertwined in the cultural, political, and economic nexus of China, Japan, and the United States. It is within this socio-political and economic context that feminism and the women's movement in Taiwan developed. The American influence, particularly, led to a focus on the fields of equal pay for equal work, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, especially after the lifting of martial law in 1987.⁴ It is also within this historical context that Yang's *The Terrorizers* conjures a multitude of interconnected female perspectives that not only defy male voyeurism, but also question the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

The Terrorizers portrays Taipei as a dog-eat-dog world where each character operating under the neoliberal capitalist logic has become a terrorizer of others. The film opens with a high-angle wide shot of the streets of Taipei in the early morning hours. A police car with a loud siren speeds by. Viewers are then introduced to three groups of characters whose lives will intersect as the film slowly unfolds. The first

⁴ The martial law implemented by Kuomintang was one of the longest in Taiwan's history (1948–1987). Taiwan's former vice president, Lu Hsiu-lien, has played a leading role in the development of Taiwan's mainstream feminism in the past four decades. Having received two master's degrees in law from the United States during the early 1970s, Lu's American experience has contributed to Taiwan's women's rights movement in the areas of human rights and workplace equality. For example, the Gender Equality in Employment Act became a law in 2002 during Lu's first term of vice presidency.

group is a pair of young lovers. The boyfriend, a photographer, wakes up to discover that his girlfriend has stayed up all night reading novels. The film quickly cuts to the second pair, a middle-aged married couple. The wife is a writer who suffers from a writer's block and an unhappy marriage, and the husband is a doctor who slanders his friends to advance his own career and who appears to be unsympathetic to his wife's problems. The third group involves a Eurasian girl named "White Chick" and her gangster boyfriend. During a shootout between the police and gangsters at an apartment, White Chick jumps from the balcony with her boyfriend, who is quickly arrested by the police. White Chick is able to escape, and the young photographer happens to capture the image of her fleeing. White Chick later collapses on the side of the street where the aforementioned doctor happens to drive by. The ten-minute opening sequence meticulously reveals to the audience the film's web-of-life narrative. The characters are at first connected through chance encounters and later linked through White Chick's prank calls.

In the beginning, the images of White Chick are constructed in ways that are accessible to the male gaze. Since its publication in 1975, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has become a paradigm that feminist film theorists have both adopted and challenged. Mulvey applies psychoanalysis in theorizing the classical Hollywood cinema's narration of sexual differences in terms of the Oedipus complex, scopophilia, fetishism, spectatorship, and identification. Mulvey argues that female characters in classical Hollywood cinema are coded as visual spectacles with the male positioned as the bearer of the look. She claims, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. . . . [Women] can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (1986, 203). According to Mulvey, women in 1930s to 50s Hollywood films are often placed in a distinct position: they are "to-be-looked-at"—that is, as objects of desire—while men are included as agents of narrative development—i.e., objects of identification. Mulvey concludes her argument by suggesting that the pleasure of popular cinema must be destroyed in order to liberate women from the sadistic voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia of the male gaze. The influence of Mulvey's

article has been enormous. Many women filmmakers took her argument very much to heart and intentionally de-sexualized or made invisible the female body in order to de-erotize the male gaze. For example, Mary Ann Doane suggests that, instead of focusing on “the female figure,” it is more fruitful to look for an alternative film language or “a new syntax” that can “speak” the female body differently than the classical narrative, a point that Mulvey also raised in her essay. Doane praises the circular camera movements in *Riddle of the Sphinx* (dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977) that elude the possibility of fetishizing the female body (1988, 226). In light of Doane’s approach, I argue that women’s experiences as portrayed in *The Terrorizers* constitute a new syntax that is different from the classical narrative and is designed to expose and disrupt traditional male voyeurism.

Like the classical Hollywood cinema that repetitively inscribes scenarios of voyeurism (i.e., Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*), *The Terrorizers* begins with a young male photographer capturing an image of White Chick fleeing from the police. Before long, the photographer develops an obsession with White Chick. **Fig. 1** is one of the many images of White Chick “created” by the photographer. However, as the film unfolds, White Chick becomes an enigmatic figure—constantly resisting and evading any form of containment. First and foremost, she is Eurasian, and thus looks different from the other characters in terms of her pale skin, a constant reminder of her *otherness* in Taiwanese society. Second, although the photographer is able to capture her image with his camera, he is unable to possess her in real life. Not only does she try to steal the photographer’s cameras, but she is portrayed as an entrepreneur who uses her sex appeal to manipulate men. Third, as seen in **Fig. 1**, the rectangular shapes of the photographs that make up the larger image of White Chick bear uncanny resemblance to the highly compartmentalized urban structures that all the characters inhabit. However, unlike the rigid urban buildings, the photos of White Chick are only pinned to the wall; the way they flutter when the wind blows hints at the undomesticated nature of White Chick. Moreover, the movie camera tilts down from the wall full of White Chick’s images to the photographer sitting motionless below them as if overpowered by his own photos. As the film unfolds, Yang highlights the ways in which the young male photographer has fallen in love not with a real woman, but



Figure 1: The enlarged, mosaic wall photos of White Chick.

with an idealized image of the opposite sex. In light of her being “half-American,” the collage of White Chick on the wall also implies the fragmentation and illusoriness of the American dream. Unlike Laura Mulvey’s critique of classical Hollywood cinema and the male gaze, *The Terrorizers* deconstructs the male gaze by showing how the male photographer is consumed by his own gaze and his fantasy of the other sex and White Chick’s exotic whiteness. In other words, the photographer is the one on display, extracted from his voyeuristic, behind-the-camera position and seemingly transfixed and merged into the images of White Chick. He becomes the object of the viewer’s gaze, against which he is utterly defenseless. Yang’s camera reconfigures the power relation between male and female characters through the intricate framing, reframing, and repositioning of the photographer and the object/image of his desire.

Nonsynchronization of Women’s Voices

In addition to White Chick’s objectified and yet elusive image, *The Terrorizers* also foregrounds the effects of multiple women’s voices connected through the telephone. Despite being confined to her room by her mother, White Chick is able to “escape” by making prank calls. Ironically, one of White Chick’s pranks becomes the inspiration for another woman to overcome her writer’s block and finally decide to break from her husband. Throughout the film, Yang’s camera is stationary, mimick-

ing the rigid apartment structure in which the characters live, but at the same time, the film accentuates the fluid mobility of White Chick's voice despite her physical imprisonment. The telephone enables her to transgress space and connect with other female characters and subsequently change the course of their lives. As Ned Schantz argues, the telephone has long been used by women as a tool for gossip and "female networking," making it "a model of proto-feminist action" (2008, 4). Although women in *The Terrorizers* are not connected in terms of a gossip culture of female networks as conceptualized by Schantz, the telephone, nevertheless, links all three female characters and functions as a cinematic device that facilitates the film's fragmented and circulatory narration, which works against the established chronological pattern of traditional Hollywood narratives. Instead of creating a beginning, climax, and end, Yang's editing strategy plays out almost like the prank calls White Chick makes to strangers, confusing and disrupting his audience's perception of linear narratives in mainstream films.

Besides the prank calls, another important sound editing technique is used to connect the film's female characters. After drinking all night at a bar, White Chick's mother returns home and turns on her record player to play the song "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," by the American band The Platters. In the dark, the mother lights a cigarette with a U.S. army-issued cigarette lighter engraved with a First Cavalry insignia. Then she enters White Chick's room and sits down on her bed. She gently touches White Chick's face, which remains invisible in the dark. The mother's loving gesture can only be seen via the dim light coming in from the living room. Suddenly, the film cuts to a close-up of a black and white photograph of White Chick's face taken by the photographer at the beginning of the film. As the song continues to play, we witness the photographer's girlfriend destroying the photographer's room, stripping his photos from the walls, tossing his camera and film onto the floor, and tearing down his makeshift darkroom. None of her actions or outcries are audible to viewers. This three-minute sequence uses The Platters' song to connect two scenes and two women's reactions to the loss of love: White Chick's mother laments a past relationship with an American serviceman (her unfulfilled American dream), while

the photographer's girlfriend expresses her anger over her boyfriend's interest in White Chick. Although the lyrics of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" seem to comment on the female characters' shared pain over the loss of love, the continuity of the song from diegesis to non-diegesis, from an intimate moment between mother and daughter to the rage of the photographer's girlfriend accentuates the ironic indifference of the sentimental American pop music to the "real" human dramas on the screen. In addition to relying on "the juxtaposition of images to create emotion" (Wilson 2014, 48), Yang also uses the discrepancy between sounds/voices and images to comment on the complexity of women's emotions and conditions that can't be captured by the male photographer's camera. The juxtaposition of the "faceless" body of White Chick in the intimate mother-daughter scene and her "lifeless" black-and-white photographed face in the other not only exposes the superficiality of the photographer's obsession, but also challenges the spectator's voyeuristic gaze.

Similar to White Chick's enigmatic photographic images and her transgressive voice as facilitated by the telephone, Yang's self-reflexive cinematography also captures the emotional turmoil of the female writer, Zhou Yufen. After cheating on her husband with her former lover, Zhou decides to leave her husband, Li Lizhong. The breakup scene lasts for seven minutes, starting with the couple sitting at the dining room table. When the kettle starts to whistle, Zhou gets up and walks into the kitchen to turn off the stove. She remains silent while listening to her husband rant to himself in the other room. The film cuts from a long shot of Li in the dining room and Zhou in the kitchen to a medium shot of Zhou's back in front of the stove. The cut from room to room can be viewed as a subtle denunciation of Li's voice by first "interrupting" his rant with a whistling kettle and then "excluding" him from the frame with a medium shot of Zhou's back. More importantly, a three-minute long take in medium shot of Zhou's rant against Li immediately follows, thus prioritizing her voice over his.

In **Fig. 2**, Zhou accuses her husband of not being able to understand her. Without a single shot/reverse shot, Zhou's rant appears as a monologue. What is more, Zhou sometimes looks directly into the camera, thus breaking the fourth wall and making

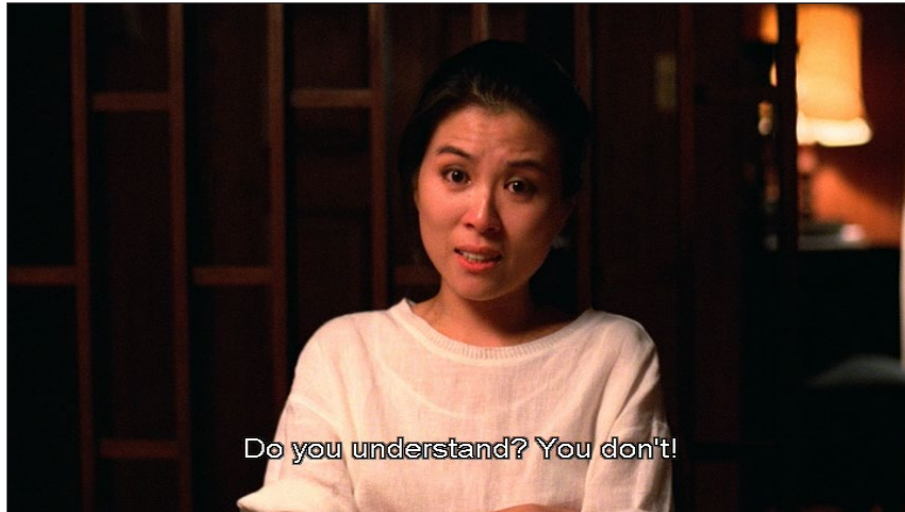


Figure 2: The female writer confronting her husband.

the audience feel like as if they are being watched, inhabiting the position of her husband. In other words, the spectator's voyeuristic pleasure is disrupted by the actress gazing back.

Furthermore, throughout the film, Zhou is often framed off-center to indicate her internal discontent. It is not until this moment that she occupies the center of the frame, speaking directly to her husband and the audience at the same time. Another self-reflexive moment appears when Zhou is interviewed on TV after winning a major literary award. Yang uses a wide shot of Zhou's multiplied faces on a wall full of television sets in order to accentuate the similarity between the photographer's fascination with White Chick and the media's obsession with the award-winning novelist. In this way Yang reveals that the gaze of the camera is not only gender-based, but also imbued with many other social forces, such as fame and money. From this perspective, *The Terrorizers* is a film that looks critically at the operation of commodified bourgeois literature and uses it to show that life is now becoming commodified as well. Zhou's life thus represents a neoliberal capitalist success story. As Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang points out, Zhou is a middle-class wife who sacrifices her marriage "to devote herself full-time to writing stories for the *fukan*

fiction contest" (2005, 17)⁵ What is more, Yang's self-reflexive film, as Chang argues, demystifies the *fukan* institution's cultural hegemony by exposing it as "a product of the cultural control system of Taiwan's soft-authoritarian regime in a society in the process of market transformation" (2005, 19). It is through the media frenzy surrounding Zhou's success, and the photographer's obsession with White Chick, that Yang's film reveals the complex, multifaceted, and interconnected formations of gender, culture, economy, and politics that push Taiwan deeper into a "society of spectacle," as Guy Debord might put it.

Conclusion

The Terrorizers ends with a killing spree carried out by Zhou's husband. After stealing a gun from a policeman who is also his childhood friend, Li shoots his boss on the street and barges into his wife's former lover's apartment and shoots him to death, too. Zhou is also there, but Li spares her life. We next follow Li wandering the busy streets of Taipei; he spots White Chick and takes her to a hotel room. Soon, policemen arrive at the hotel, led by Li's childhood friend (the one from whom he stole the gun), who kicks open the door. We hear a shot being fired and see blood splattering on the wall. The film cuts to the policeman waking up in his room to find out that his gun has been stolen, and his friend Li has shot himself in the bathroom. The killing spree turns out to have been a dream. This conclusion is similar to Zhou's award-winning novel about a husband murdering his wife after receiving a prank call. Both Li's killing spree and Zhou's book are fiction, but Li's death seems to be real. The fact that the viewer doesn't know for sure is Yang's way of playing with the concept of art imitating life and vice versa. Like the male protagonist of *Taipei Story*, Li is another patriarch who fails to keep up with the fast-changing world around him. The film's ending shows Zhou waking up in bed with her lover. She vomits, and then the screen goes

⁵ According to Chang, *fukan* (literary supplements to newspapers) were the most popular household reading for the educated middle class in post-1949 Taiwan until 1988, when the restrictive press law that banned new newspapers was lifted. Instead of treating literature as a serious intellectual quest, many writers of the 1980s pursued it as a career, and the *fukan* literary prize was a stepping stone to professional success (17–19).

dark. The film's open ending also resembles the end of *Taipei Story*, in which Chin looks out the window of an empty office building, contemplating her future. The indication that Zhou might be pregnant leaves the audience feeling uneasy about the connection between Li's death and Zhou's baby.

Women in Yang's cinema are able to adjust to the changing landscape of Taiwan's modernization and neoliberal economy, while men struggle to cope with the changes and often resort to violence. The male protagonist in *Taipei Story*, for example, is killed by a biker on the street. The 14-year-old male protagonist stabs his girlfriend to death in *A Brighter Summer Day*. In *Mahjong*, a young gang leader guns down his business partner over a money dispute. In *Yi Yi*, a high school boy murders a schoolteacher who has a sexual relationship with his girlfriend. Interestingly, in *The Terrorizers*, before Li embarks on his killing spree, there is a scene of an elementary school girl running down the quiet morning streets of Taipei. A few seconds later, we see her passing Li's first victim, his boss on his way to work. Like the opening of the film, the serenity of the early morning is shattered by a gunshot. However, in this scene, the violence becomes more sinister in conjunction with the previous shot of the rushing schoolgirl. Furthermore, this shot also serves to remind the audience of a similar random scene of a young girl being "shot" by the male photographer while he wanders in the streets looking for White Chick. Combined with the possibility of Zhou's pregnancy, *The Terrorizers* subtly invites the audience to contemplate the potential impact of male voyeurism and violence on young children as well as the future of Taiwan. Using women's perspectives, Yang is able to present an innovative, critical anatomy of male anxiety and violence during Taiwan's rapid transformation into a neoliberal capitalist economy and democracy.

Instead of virgin/vamp/career woman, Yang's portrayal of women may be closer to what Elizabeth Wilson calls "the female Sphinx," a metaphor for female sexuality, autonomy, womanhood out of control, and loss of identity (1991, 7). However, unlike Wilson, Yang does not just celebrate the subversive potential of women's freedom in the city. Instead, his unconventional, disembodied camerawork and editing allow his female characters to represent a multitude of critical perspectives and thus enable the audience to contemplate the violence of male voyeurism and men's inability to cope with women's new agency in the era of neoliberal capitalism.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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