

In the mood for love

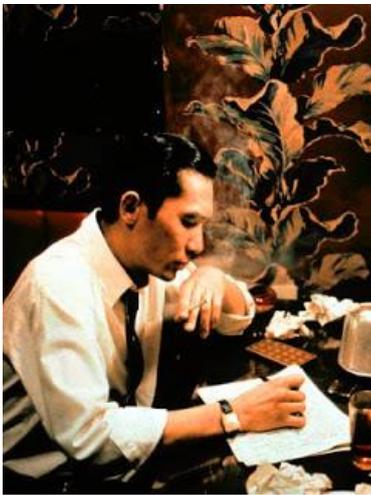
Director: Wong Kar-Wai

Country: Hong Kong/China

Date: 2000

A review by Peter Walker of *The Guardian*:

In the Mood for Love was released when I was living in Hong Kong, albeit a very different city to that of the film's 1962 setting. Like Tony Leung's Chow Mo-wan, I was also working there as a journalist. Sadly, that's where my resemblance to his almost absurdly handsome, mournfully dapper character begins and ends.



My tenuous geographical connection to Wong Kar-Wai's 2000 masterpiece is, ultimately, a bit immaterial. Unlike many contributors to this series, my favourite film doesn't reflect something particular in my own life. On the contrary, *In the Mood for Love*'s glory is its universality. A seemingly slight plot – man and woman move into the same cramped apartment building, gradually realise their respective spouses are having an affair and develop their own halting romance – is the platform for profound and moving reflections on life's fundamentals. It's a film about, yes, love; but also betrayal, loss, missed opportunities, memory, the brutality of time's passage, loneliness – the list goes on.

There are many reasons to adore the film, most obviously its almost unworldly, dream-like beauty. As a lead couple, Maggie Cheung (in a succession of figure-hugging cheongsam dresses), and Leung, with the slicked hair and hangdog face of a silent movie star, are among the most gorgeous in film history. Wong's camera, guided by his regular cinematographer, Christopher Doyle, lingers lovingly on them for minutes at a time, saturating the screen with heat-muggy colours and light. For some critics the beauty seemed almost a distraction and – in a fate shared more recently by Tom Ford's grossly under-rated *A Single Man* – many dismissed *In the Mood for Love* as little more than a bauble, an ultimately unfilling treat for the eyes.

I find this bizarre. I can't think of a more moving, or more cleverly-told film, one which uses the whole lexicon of cinema so effectively. The camera lurks in doorways, down passageways, through windows, almost spying on Chow and Su Li-zhen (Cheung) as they seek solace with each other amid the paradoxical loneliness of a crowded city. Wong also uses music to brilliant effect, most obviously Yumeji's Theme, the recurring, mournful cello refrain which follows the couple around the rainy streets. Never has popping out to get some noodles seemed more glamorous, or more sad. Elsewhere, Nat King Cole's familiar tones become mysterious, almost mocking, as he croons "Quizas, quizas, quizas" ("Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps") at them in Spanish.



Deliberately limited in scope, the plot, supposedly worked out over a year of part-improvised filming, is hugely clever, not least for what it leaves out. We never see the cheating spouses, just feel their impact.

The few other characters – mahjong-mad landlady Mrs Suen, Chow's buffoonish friend Ah Ping, and Su's philandering boss, feel abrasively coarse against the lead pair's quiet grace. Chow and Su's relationship, in particular, is wonderfully ambiguous. Do they simply choose not to take the relationship further ("We will never be like them," Su's character says, bitterly, of their spouses), or are they both waiting for the other to act? For all the heartbreaking decisions and coincidences which, ultimately, keep them apart, could their romance even have thrived outside the counterpoint of their shared betrayal?

In lesser hands, the finale, where Chow whispers his unheard regrets and feelings into a stone hollow at Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple complex, before sealing them inside with mud, could be absurd, melodramatic. Wong makes it heartbreaking.

In the Mood for Love is so good that it's baffling how hapless Wong has seemed since. The half-follow-up, 2046, was similarly lustrous but terribly thin. Then came My Blueberry Nights, starring (God help us) Norah Jones, Natalie Portman and Jude Law. Here's hoping his next film, bringing back Leung, is a return to form.

From: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/dec/19/in-the-mood-for-love>

Sunday in Peking
Director: Chris Marker
Country: France
Date: 1956



Extracts from an essay by André Bazin, film critic and historian:

"I think Chris Marker must have taken into consideration the inherent difficulties involved in trying to get a film distributed that only lasts just over twenty minutes. ... *Dimanche à Pékin* does not leave us dissatisfied, but intrigued ... it seems to reflect a new concept of documentary filmmaking. The term 'documentary' is too banal to describe this kind of film... The report Chris Marker brings us from China is at once a body of information, an expression of poetry and a critique. What truly distinguishes this film from predecessors produced with the same intent is the means by which it was made. *Dimanche à Pékin* is without a doubt a montage film, but Chris Marker imbues this generic term with radically new meaning. In a traditional sense, montage is based on what supports the images and the meaning expressed by their sequence. Whatever the function of montage editing, its power comes from the images chosen and the rhythm with which they are shown. It is in a way adding another dimension to the flatness of the screen. If it is further able to evoke feelings and ideas, it is by induction, like electro-magnetically induced current.

In Chris Marker's films, the montage process relies on three elements: the images, the relationship between the images and their relationship to the commentary, conceived as an explanation of the images and as a constitutional element of the film, which could not be defined without reference to these three components. We could also say that *Dimanche à Pékin* is essentially as much a literary piece of work as it is a cinematic one... displayed frozen in an album, the images offered here are often very beautiful, and other times extremely banal, but the text rubs against them like the steel wheel of a lighter on the flint, producing sparks."

André Bazin, 'Sur les routes de l'URSS' et 'Dimanche à Pékin', "France-Observateur", June 27, 1957

From: <http://anttialanenfilmdiary.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/dimanche-pekin-sunday-in-peking-2013.html>