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CULTURES OF GLASS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN
NOVEL AND CONTEMPORARY SINOPHONE FILM

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultures of Glass in the Late Nineteenth-Century European Novel and Contemporary

Sinophone Film

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In my dissertation, I compare how the novelists and filmmakers utilize glass as a material, medium, and artistic trope to explore the relations between the city and the urban dweller, the public and the private, the perceiver and the things perceived in Western and Chinese modernity. I analyze at length the following English and French novels: Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Émile Zola's *The Lady's Paradise*, Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, as well as Sinophone films: Xia Gang's *As Light as Glass*, Ning Ying's *I Love Beijing*, and Edward Yang's *Yi Yi: A One and a Two*. In these novels and films, glass changes the urban fabric that it also reflects, unsettles existing conceptions of domestic and public spaces, and helps to define urban dwellers' identity, spectatorship, affects, and desires. I associate the appearance of a glass-soaked culture with urban modernity in the West, arguing that the Sinophone world's relatively late use of glass manifests a desire to take on a Western modernity in its own cities. Glass is also frequently evoked as a trope to reflexively examine how these cultural productions are structured in relation to reality. The novel is often compared to a mirror that honestly

reflects the real world; and film, through the lens-framed images, shows life in a series of transitory windows. While the nineteenth-century novel paints one portrait of urban reality in the West, film performs a similar task in the late twentieth-century Sinophone world. We currently lack a comprehensive and cross-cultural scholarship on glass culture and its representation in literary and film studies. My dissertation fills this gap by demonstrating the significant role of glass in shaping both urban experiences and cultural productions in Europe and Asia.

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Introduction

We can surely talk about a “culture of glass.” The new glass environment will completely transform mankind.

–Paul Scheerbart

My dissertation is a comparative study of glass as an urban phenomenon in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural productions. Since glass became a common industrial material in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it has transformed our cityscapes, our perceptions of space, and our interactions with the material world. Glass is not merely a technology with its own industrial history, but also a rich source of metaphors that refract the complexities of modern urban life. Glass can be both medium and barrier; it can function as a juncture or intersection from which narrative contradictions and paradoxes emerge. As such it facilitates our exploration of the relations between subjects and objects, the material and the immaterial, urbanites and urban space, spectators and spectacles, consumers and commodities, exterior and interior, the visible and the invisible, representation and the represented. Glass is a crucial substance which functions as a frame or screen through which we see things, constitute knowledge, and develop tastes.

In the West, glass, once a precious substance limited in quantity, was an expensive luxury that only the upper class could afford. With the declines in the cost of raw materials and advances in the technology of glassmaking, glass secured a ubiquitous presence in urban space, and quickly became an aspect of everyday life we came to expect: mirrors, windows, lenses, glass doors, skyscrapers, automobile windshields, or the exterior of skyscrapers. Glass has turned from luxury to necessity. To this day, glass

continues to transform the spatial fabric of the modern city, alter existing conceptions of private and public spaces, and confront urbanites with unprecedented and at times, disturbing spatial experiences. Ironically, more transparent cityscapes do not always provide more visual accessibility; glass does not always dismantle the social or visual boundaries, make cities more accessible, or bring people closer together. I argue that glass, rather than existing merely as an industrial material, actively reshapes the way urban dwellers see the world and themselves.

Scholars such as Alan Macfarlane, Gerry Martin (2002), and Sabine Melchior-Bonnet (2002) have reviewed the material history of glass in the form of mirrors, windows, and optical instruments. Isobel Armstrong (2009) has dealt with the peculiar materiality of glass as both medium and barrier in Victorian culture from 1830 to 1880, while Anne Friedberg (2009) has examined the conceptual history of framing from Alberti's painting as an open window to Microsoft's virtual "Windows." To date, however, scholars have not yet fully explored the importance of glass to urban cultures and its pivotal role in shaping cultural productions, especially in the cross-cultural dimension. To date, Western scholars who deal with glass in Western novels, such as Andrew Miller (1995) and Elizabeth Outka (2009), have not extended their scrutiny to the non-Western world. Chinese scholars, as far as I know, have also not examined thoroughly cultures of glass in literary or filmic texts in the Chinese context or in Western cultural productions. Thus, we currently lack a comprehensive and cross-cultural scholarship on glass culture and its representation in literary and film studies. My dissertation locates glass as a marker and shaper of Eastern and Western modernity, and explores in depth how glass, in different ways in the two traditions, is employed by artists in both parts of the world to

portray the convoluted relation between the modernizing city and the urban dweller.

My dissertation analyzes the significant role glass plays in urban space and artistic representation by demonstrating its literal and metaphorical centrality in the mid-to-late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century English and French novel and late twentieth-century (turn-of-the-century) Chinese and Taiwanese film. In these novels and films, glass is portrayed as a lens, a screen, a mediation, or a metaphor to reflect and critically examine urban modernity. I juxtapose works from different cultural and temporal contexts to explore different urban mental mappings of turn-of-the-century metropolises. While the nineteenth-century novel paints one portrait of urban reality in the West, film performs a similar task in the late twentieth-century Sinophone world. As urbanizing genres, the novel and film give voice to city residents, who need to make sense of their new surroundings and urban experiences. The task of novelists and filmmakers, in as sense, is to make what is opaque transparent. In these urban narratives, glass is highlighted as an object of critique, a literary or visual device, and at the same time it is also a trope to reflexively examine the urban narrative itself. I argue that glass is not only a main theme or a common setting in these novels and films, but that it also influences how these works are structured in relation to reality. Mirrors and windows are frequent tropes for the work of art as a medium between the perceiver and the things perceived.

To establish the historical framework of glass cultures, my introductory chapter surveys the history of glass as a privileged substance and conceptual trope in urban modernity, West and East. I study how industrial glass reshapes modern urban life, visual culture, and artistic representation. I compare the similarities and differences between

cultures of glass in Europe and China, and analyze how the visual concept such as “framing” emerging from the image of the window changes one’s visual perception. I also examine how glass influences the narrative structures in the novel and film.

My second chapter explores the significance of mirrors and windows in the following novels: Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), Émile Zola’s *The Lady’s Paradise* (1883), Henry James’s *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), and Virginia Woolf’s *Night and Day* (1919), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).¹ In these novels, the characters’ sense of self and city is often reflected or even determined by their encounters with a multiplicity of glass objects and forms. The emerging cultural importance of the window display commodifies the cityscape and unsettles the urban dwellers’ identity and spectatorship. I argue that glass becomes in this period and this genre a privileged trope for exploring the nature of such subjects as selfhood, communication, commerce, vision, and even knowledge itself.

My third chapter shifts the focus to the following Sinophone films on modernizing Shanghai, Beijing, and Taipei: Xia Gang’s *As Light as Glass* (1999), Ning Ying’s *I Love Beijing* (2000), and Edward Yang’s *Yi Yi: a One and a Two* (2000). I argue that these directors, with their urban sensibilities, rely on glass no less heavily than Victorian and modernist novelists to portray the alienation produced by the new urban space. While glass shows, reveals, mediates, and tantalizes, it also hides, distorts, and fragments urban images. As both a building material and a metaphor common to Western and Eastern

¹ *Villette*, published in 1853, does not quite fit in to the category of “the late nineteenth century” novel in my dissertation title, but I believe *Villette* is an important novel to begin our discussion of cultures of glass in European history, since it was produced precisely in the wake of the construction of the Crystal Palace, and it is, as I will argue, Brontë’s response to a new world of transparency. Woolf, whose works were published in the early twentieth century, is often enough perceived as an author who continues certain nineteenth-century traditions.

modernity, glass changes the visual aspect of the world, and also attracts novelists and filmmakers to explore the nature of city life by forming a narrative based on glass.

It is significant that glass in my discussion always refers to industrial glass—mirrors, windows, the exterior of towering buildings, the ceiling-to-floor windows of shopping malls, etc. This dissertation explores those cultural consequences that glass, originally invented for industrial purposes, brings to modern urban life and cultural productions. While it was originally utilized to facilitate modern people's lives and perspectives, it at times produces disturbing visual and spatial experiences, which unsettle the urban dwellers' identity and spectatorship. These changes were not anticipated and might easily go unnoticed, but the novelists and filmmakers under discussion have insightfully noticed these changes brought about by cultures of glass and have vividly illustrated how technology transforms our experiences. The mass production of glass since the nineteenth century has brought, as Scheerbart claims, a new "culture of glass." I aim to investigate the spatial, visual, social, economic, and artistic changes produced by the extensive use of glass in modernizing cities. I use "cultures of glass" to refer both to a new culture emerging in a time and space in which glass permeates every aspect of urban society, as well as the cultural representations produced by this transparent environment—the novels and films that reflect on this new world of glass.

CHAPTER ONE

Cultures of Glass and Urban Narratives

In this chapter, I discuss how glass as both substance and visual device changes the way modern people perceive themselves, space, and objects. Beginning with a brief material history of glass in Europe and China, I discuss two emblematic architectural projects which disseminate cultures of glass in Europe: the Crystal Palace in London 1851 and the Arcades in nineteenth-century Paris. These two glass structures anticipate the emergence of new building types using large display windows, such as department stores and shopping malls. As a building material, glass dematerializes the concept of the wall and introduces new meanings to space. As a transparent screen, glass supports a culture that prioritizes spectacles, exhibitions, displays, and has a profound influence on urban spectatorship. Glass is also commonly evoked as a metaphor. For example, windows and mirrors are crucial conceptual tropes in the realm of representation, though with different and sometimes contradictory meanings. I also explore the window's capacity to frame a view and how this framing is problematic in objectifying and distancing the object of the gaze. Finally, I analyze how cultures of glass structure the novel and film as two genres reflecting modernizing cities and urban experiences.

I. Glass as a Material: West and East

Glass is an ancient material of mysterious origin. Research shows that glass was first discovered and developed in Mesopotamia (now Syria, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq), between 3000 and 2000 BC, though there are also instances of glazing on pottery that date back as early as 8000 BC. No matter when glass was created, what is certain is that glass in its earliest form was not transparent, and it was limited to three purposes: to glaze pottery, to decorate jewelry, and to make small containers for liquid (Macfarlane and Martin 12). At that time, glass was made by casting and grinding.² The Romans developed a revolutionary technique of glass-blowing, which “involved the use of a long iron tube of at least a metre in length which was dipped into the molten glass to pick up a lump,” and then the blower “blew the glass into a bubble” (Macfarlane and Martin 12-13). This new technology made really thin, transparent glass possible, and increased the versatility of glass. The Romans also used window glass, though the panes created were small, between six and eight inches wide. Glass was mainly utilized for its transparency, which allowed sunlight to pass inside the house. With the decline of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, glass windows also disappeared. Anne Friedberg argues that though the term “Dark Ages” originally refers to what was a relatively undocumented period of time in history, the term might also have been used because the Dark Ages “may have been literally dark because there were no glass windows to admit light” (Friedberg *Virtual Window* 107).

Venetian glassmakers dominated the European glass industry between the fourteenth

² Before the invention of glass-blowing, the major technique of glassmaking was “core-formed”: “A stick was covered in clay, then dipped into a crucible of heated glass and withdrawn so that it was covered in glass. The glass was smoothed with a slate and made to cover one end of the clay lump. After cooling, the stick was pulled out and the clay scraped away. Thus a hollow tube of glass, with whatever decorations had been scraped on the surface, could be made” (Macfarlane and Martin 12).

and the seventeenth centuries, and at that time the knowledge of glassmaking was a heavily guarded secret. In order to keep the techniques of glassmaking confidential, in 1291, Venetian glassmakers were forced to move to the island of Murano. Murano glassmakers began to produce a clearer glass, *cristallo*, which is used for making mirrors and glass vessels (Friedberg *Virtual Window* 108). In the sixteenth century, the influence of Murano glass began to spread throughout all of Europe. The demand for flat glass increased in France under Louis XIV. In the 1660s and 1670s, some Murano glassblowers were lured to Paris to work with French glassmakers, and French glassmaking achieved a higher level, as evidenced by the rococo world of reflection of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles unveiled in 1682, where 306 panes of glass gave the illusion of eighteen huge, solid mirrors. At the end of the seventeenth century, over two-thirds of Parisian households owned a mirror. By the 1680s, the French people were capable of producing polished plate glass (Friedberg *Virtual Window* 110). A looking-glass was a common item in nineteenth century French households. In 1827, French economist Adolphe Blanqui wrote, “Today they [mirrors] are within range of the most middling fortune, and whereas there is scarcely a household in France that does not possess at least one or two...” (qtd. in Benjamin *Arcades Project* 539).

Glassmaking in England began in the thirteenth century, but the industry did not flourish until the seventeenth century, when England, like France, also lured Murano glassmakers to advance their own glassmaking technology. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, large mirrors were seen over the mantelpiece, though they came at a higher cost (Ezell 324). Although glassmaking methods were refined during the eighteenth century, glass remained an expensive material (Friedberg *Virtual Window* 111).

Between 1696 and 1851, property tax in England was assessed by the number of windows per household. After the window tax was excised in 1851, and with the advent of advanced glassmaking technology, glass was both more available and more affordable. It thus became widely utilized for scientific and architectural purposes in the West.

Before the nineteenth century, production was restricted to glass that was formed into relatively small sheets. However, the introduction of iron and other supporting materials, coupled with the techniques to mass-produce large sheets, allowed glass to proceed forward significantly as an architectural material. Architects began to explore new possibilities, building conservatories and entire walls of glass, all held together by high-trussed steel. The Crystal Palace and the Paris Arcades are the two iconic architectural monuments which anticipate a new world of refraction, reflection, and transparency.

Almost all scholarship on the history of glass notes a curious absence of glass in the East, as compared with glass in the West. As one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, China has developed arts and techniques of hard stone carving, bronze casting, and porcelain-making, which are noteworthy and have widespread influence throughout the world. In terms of glassmaking, however, development in China was slower and less inventive, and the use of glass was sparse and limited. The earliest glassware found in China dates back to 2500 years ago in the Warring States Period (475-227 BC) (An 1). The art of glass-casting was mastered in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) as a means by which to make ritual objects and jewelry. During this period, glass-blowing techniques were also introduced to China. In the fifth century, China already had domestic glass blowing (Macfarlane and Martin 109). According to *Essays and Criticism* (Shishuoxinyu),

small glass windows and glass folding screens (*pingfeng*) were to be found in the Han Dynasty (An 69-70).³

However, unlike Europe, ancient China did not show much interest in the material. Glass was not favored in China probably because of the weather, food culture, accessibility to other materials, and the cultural significance endowed in the material of glass itself. A warmer climate makes glass windows unappealing to residents. Chinese peasantry houses were not suitable for glass windows, and it was more difficult to glaze glass windows in traditional architecture which was largely made of woodwork and lattice (Macfarlane and Martin 111). The need for ventilation and light was satisfied by using oiled paper, so a glass window was not a necessity.⁴ In addition, Chinese tea culture made glass less popular than porcelain because the latter could bear hot liquid and glass could not. Even though Chinese had a passion for mirrors, as evidenced by frequent appearances in poetry and paintings, these often refer to very polished bronze mirrors, rather than looking glasses.

Culturally, glass was seen as a second-rate alternative to more precious stone. As early as the Zhou Dynasty (1122-221 BC), glass was used to make jade-like figures and jewelry. But it was seen as an inferior substitute for more precious substances, such as mineral turquoise. Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), aristocrats no longer showed interest in glass and dismissed it as nothing more than imitation jade, called “*yao yu*.” For example, in the poem *A Lone Drink Testing a Yao-Jade Cup* (*Du zhuo shi yao yu zhan*), famous poet Su Shi (1037-1100) showed his disappointment in finding his drinking cup

³ *Essays and Criticism (Shishuoxinyu)*, written by Liu Yiqing (403-444), is a collection of anecdotes and character sketches in the fifth century. The book mainly records the thoughts and life style of intellectuals and the upper class in the Wei Jin Nan-Bei Dynasties.

⁴ See Aeneas Anderson, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794* (London: J. Debrett, 1795), p. 92.

was not made of real jade, but glass, “*yao yu*”:

Casting white frits with lead
As jade which deceives
Shaped and ground to be a drinking cup
It looks like a Dingzhou ware...⁵

In contrast with its elevated status in Western history, glass in Chinese history was dismissed as nothing more than a “jade which deceives.” In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), in order to show the official ranks, only the officials with higher rank could wear real jade, whereas the officials with lower rank could only wear “*yao yu*.”

Glass was not thought highly of until the Qing Dynasty. Actually the material was not called “glass” (*boli*) until Kang Xi Emperor (1662-1722) showed interest in this substance when he saw Western glass brought to his court and then established a specialized glass workshop in the palace in 1696 (An 172). The brief burst of enthusiasm toward glass occurred under the impetus of the Jesuits between the 1670s and 1760s. Because of its availability of sand, potash, coal, and quartz, Boshan County in Shandong has been the most important center of glassmaking in China. In 1870, the missionary Alexander Williamson observed that glass:

was regarded as an old established craft in the region, with a number of furnaces in and around the main settlement, supplying dealers in Peking with window glass, bottles of various sizes, moulded cups of every description, lanterns, beads and ornaments, as well as rods of plain and coloured glass sold in bulk, presumably for lampworkers and decorative additions. (qtd. in Macfarlane and Martin 123)

Between the 1850s and 1870s, from accounts of the foreign embassies and travelers, we discovered the existence of tiny glass windows glazed in the homes of some aristocratic or otherwise wealthy families in Beijing. Glass, however, was still used only in small scale productions and in few households, compared to its Western counterparts in the

⁵ My translation. Dingzhou, a city in the southwest of Hebei province, is one of the five ancient porcelain kilns.

nineteenth century.

Glass did not become an important building material until China underwent modernization in the early twentieth century. In 1904, the government established a glassmaking company in Boshan and hired technicians from Germany. From that point, the history of making plate glass in China began. In 1916, the Palmer & Turner Group built the first tall building made of glass and steel, Gonghe Yanghang, in Shanghai. By the late 1920s, there were already more than thirty skyscrapers, and in the 1930s there were four major department stores in Shanghai. In this period, many international headquarters were settled in this city, and the overseas investment also brought Western architecture. The large-scale project of urbanization was at one point slowed down when the Communists took over in 1949, but this enthusiasm for high-rise buildings with glassy surfaces was resumed in the era of “transformation” in the 1990s. By 2004, Shanghai was recognized as one of the cities with the most skyscrapers in the world.

Because of the 1949 political split, Taiwan’s modernization took place decades earlier than that of the mainland China. Influenced by Western modernism, a lot of glass and steel buildings, which mixed Western and Eastern features, were built in Taipei. The first department store in Taipei was founded in 1932. In 1945, many skyscrapers were seen in the commercial areas, such as Xinyi District. In 2004, Taipei 101, a landmark skyscraper with 101 floors, was at one point the tallest towering building in the whole world. I will discuss in more detail the use of glass in urban space and its representation in Beijing, Shanghai, and Taipei in my third chapter. Though nowadays glass is already long-established as an essential material in modern urban architecture, the gap between “golden ages” of glass in the West and the East was almost a century long.

The Crystal Palace and the Arcades

The prototypes of modern urban architecture made of steel and glass are the nineteenth-century Crystal Palace in London and the Arcades in Paris. The central spectacle in the Crystal Palace of the London World Exhibition in 1851 was Follette Osler's 27-foot-high fountain made of four tons of pure crystal glass, which "created two kinds of interacting transparency, moving water, static glass," and it simultaneously "sculpted water and made glass mobile" (Armstrong 1). The interplay of glass and water, both reflective in nature, brought new perceptual experiences and put forth new possibilities of materiality and space. Armstrong claims that the Crystal Palace "was the emblem of a glassworld and the sign of a new glass culture" (1).

The panels of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace were made up of 956,000 square feet of crystal glass (Armstrong 4). Blurring the boundary between the exterior and the interior space by "integrating a row of trees in Hyde Park under a heavenly awning made of glass" (Asendorf 26), the Crystal Palace brought unprecedented sensory experience to visitors from all over the world. The vast expanse of glass makes the interior look immaterial and illusory, giving a sense of magical reality. According to *The Times* in 1851,

The vast fabric may be seen, by any one who visits that part of the town, in its full dimensions—an Arabian Nights structure, full of light, and with a certain airy unsubstantial character about it which belongs more to enchanted land than to this gross material world of ours. The eye, accustomed to the solid heavy details of stone and lime or brick and mortar architecture, wanders along those extensive and transparent aisles with their terraced outlines, almost distrusting its own conclusions on the reality of what it sees, for the whole looks like a splendid phantasm.... The vast extent of area covered, the transparent and brilliant character of the structure, the regular and terraced elevations, the light airy abutments, the huge transept, with its arched and glittering roof shining above the vitreous expanse around it, and

reminding one of nothing that he has ever heard of before. (qtd. in Tallis 19-20)

The passage above delineates the air of unreality of the whole structure. Walter Benjamin quotes A. G. Meyer's observation on the Crystal Palace, which gives the new meaning to the wall or the medium: "The increasing transparency of glass in colorless glazing draws the outer world into the interior space, while covering the walls with mirrors projects the image of the interior space into the outer world. In either case the 'wall,' as a container of space, is deprived of its significance" (qtd. in Benjamin *Arcades Project* 541). Architect Richard Lucae wrote in 1861: "As in a crystal, there no longer is any true interior or exterior.... If we imagine that air can be poured like a liquid, then it has, here, achieved a solid form after the removal of the mold into which it was poured. We find ourselves within a cutout segment of atmosphere" (qtd. in Asendorf 28-29). The Crystal Palace achieves the greatest possible transparency of a solid building. As a "permeable solid structure, in which the solid and fluid, the structural masses and the effects of air and light, all seem to exist in a peculiar state of suspension" (Asendorf 28-29), it puts into question the preexisting conception of the material and the immaterial, the solid and the liquid, the public and the domestic.

As the boundary between the interior and exterior dissolved in transparency, glass structures like the Crystal Palace introduce a new visual system. As the German writer Lothar Bucher observes,

In contemplating the first great building which was not of solid masonry construction spectators were not slow to realize that here the standards by which architecture had hitherto been judged no longer held good.... We see a delicate network of lines without any clue by means of which we might judge their distance from the eye or the real size. Instead of moving from the wall at one end to that at the other, the eye sweeps along an unending perspective which fades into the horizon.... If we let our gaze travel downward it encounters the blue-painted lattice girders. At first these occur only at wide intervals; then they range closer and closer

together until they are interrupted by a dazzling band of light—the transept—which dissolves into a distant background where all materiality is blended into the atmosphere. (qtd. in Berman 239-40)

The perspectival viewer no longer secured a position to judge distance or size due to the transparency of glass environment.

The glass environment structures a culture of display and cultivates visual desire. During the Great Exhibition, *The Times* noted, “We want to place everything we can lay our hands on under glass cases, and to stare our fill” (qtd. in Otter 87). Tony Bennett observes that the new visual system of the Crystal Palace creates an “exhibitionary complex.” The structure envisions a self-reflective, self-monitoring spectatorship and mentality, developing an always self-regulating orderly public. For Bennett, museums, galleries, exhibitions, and other popular forms of urban display in the nineteenth century were

involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to the restricted public) into progressively more often and public arena where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society. (60-61).

As a structure of spectacle and surveillance, the Crystal Palace enabled everyone to see, but there was also an imagined vantage point from where everyone could be seen.

Foucault’s comments on the transformative effect of the modern structure of surveillance and discipline, the carceral archipelago, applies to transparent buildings like the Crystal Palace with its

architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space... but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (Foucault 1977: 172 qtd. in Bennett 68)

Graeme Davison argues that the exhibitionary complex (everyone could see) is a reversed panoptical principle (everyone could be seen). Bennett contends that rather than the reversed form of Panopticon, the exhibitionary complex actually incorporates different principles together, “with those of panoramas, forming a technology of vision which served not to atomize and disperse the crowd but to regulate it, and to do so by rendering it visible to itself, by making the crowd itself the ultimate spectacle” (68). He continues, the exhibitionary complex “perfected a self-monitoring system of looks in which the subject and object positions can be exchanged, in which the crowd comes to commune with and regulate itself through interiorizing the ideal and ordered view of itself as seen from the controlling vision of power—a site of sight accessible to all” (69). The glass structure provides a special viewing position both to see and be seen, which is perhaps best epitomized in an instruction note from a “Short Sermon to Sightseers” at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, which tells spectators: “Please remember when you get inside the gates you are part of the show” (qtd. in Bennett 68-69). The new transparent environment promises spectators more to see, including being watched themselves, and produces a visual domain in which no gaze is unidirectional.

The social response to the new structure of glass was ambivalent. Charlotte Brontë wrote about her mixed feelings toward the Crystal Palace in her letters. I will discuss her fascination and bafflement in more detail in my second chapter. Ruskin and Dostoevsky both found the facile transparency of the Crystal Palace maddening. To Ruskin, the Crystal Palace abandons “lusterless matter,” where glass erases the trace of mediation (Armstrong 9). He has distaste for glass’s “simultaneous evidence and avoidance of mediation” (226). Dostoevsky disliked the Crystal Palace because it regulated desire

through the overwhelmingly dazzling spectacle and commodity culture, which “assume transparently obvious universal norms of human want” (Armstrong 163). The sheen of glass quelled and pathologized dissent. While the emergence of glass seems to bring the world one large step closer to the utopian imagination of pure transparency, it also creates a scopic regime to perform power, and generates new problems and challenges to modern spectators, as evidenced in the selected novels and films I will discuss.

The other emblematic structure made of glass and steel in nineteenth century Europe is the Paris Arcades. As the product of industrial-age technology, the iron-columned and glass-covered Arcades in Paris were constructed around the beginning of the nineteenth century and came to an end as a result of Baron Haussmann’s redevelopment of Paris during the Second French Empire (1850-70). Gas lighting and heated shelter from rain, mud, and traffic made walking, shopping, and observing fellow lingerers in the Arcades a new form of urban pleasure. An *Illustrated Guide to Paris* in 1852 neatly summarized the appeal of this new building type: “These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature” (qtd. in Benjamin *Arcades Project* 31).

Walter Benjamin considers the Arcades a center of nineteenth century bourgeois culture and a habitat for the new social type, *flâneur*. He dedicated the last thirteen years of his life to researching the Arcades and drafting his unfinished magnum opus *The Arcades Project*. To him, glass is undoubtedly an important factor in changing the cityscape and spectatorship. In the section titled “Mirrors,” Benjamin traces the material

and cultural history of mirrors in France and discusses how the use of glass in the Arcades demonstrates the way the space and objects are perceived and the way spectator relates himself to the outside world. Glass turns the streets into cafés, interweaving the interior and the exterior, forming “the art of the dazzling illusion” which draws the *flâneur*’s attention (quoting Karl Gutzkow in 1842, Benjamin 537). The glassy surface of the Arcades manifests the fleeting nature of urban gaze and the uncanny returned gaze of the commodity:

A look at the ambiguity of the arcades: their abundance of mirrors, which fabulously amplifies the spaces and makes orientation more difficult. For although this mirror world may have many aspects, indeed infinitely many, it remains ambiguous, double-edged. It blinks: it is always this one—and never nothing—out of which another immediately arises.... The whispering of gazes fills the arcades. There is no thing here that does not, where one least expects it, open a fugitive eye, blinking it shut again; but if you look more closely, it is gone. To the whispering of these gazes, the space lends its echo. “Now, what,” it blinks, “can possibly have come over me?” We stop short in some surprise. “What, indeed, can possibly have come over you?” Thus we gently bounce the question back to it. (Benjamin *Arcades Project* 542)

Glass dematerializes the wall between the interior and the exterior, making more scenes and objects available to passersby’s gaze. The space of the Arcades is specially designed to allure the gaze. With the aid of glass, which is at the same time transparent and reflective, every spectacle in the Arcades competes for the passersby’s attention with its blinking eyes.

In Benjamin’s eyes, Paris is a city of mirrors and reflections, in love with mirror-like perspectives:

A profusion of windowpanes and mirrors in cafés, so as to make the inside brighter and to give all the tiny nooks and crannies, into which Parisian taverns separate, a pleasing amplitude. Women here look at themselves more than elsewhere, and from this comes the distinctive beauty of the Parisienne. Before any man catches sight of her, she already sees herself ten times reflected. But the man, too, sees his own physiognomy flash by. He gains his image more quickly here than elsewhere and also sees himself more quickly merged with this, his image. Even the eyes of

passersby are veiled mirrors... (*Arcades Project* 537-38)

This passage suggests that while glass was ubiquitous in Paris, residents formed a new way of seeing things, and people around them, as well as their own reflections. Even “the eyes of passersby” were like “veiled mirrors,” reflecting (presumably) our own images. This tendency to see things as though behind glass, regardless of the material existence of glass, is symptomatic of modern urban spectatorship which I will elaborate on in my later chapters.

The Arcade’s heyday was brief, but its architectural and cultural influence is widespread, especially on consumer-oriented architecture such as the mid-century department store. Aside from the Crystal Palace and the Paris Arcade, many structures made of cast-iron and glass emerged in the late nineteenth century, such as the glazed roofs of train stations (King’s Cross Station by Lewis Cubitt, 1851-1852), market halls (Les Halles by Victor Baltard, 1853-1858), and department stores (the *Bon Marché* by Boileau and Eiffel, 1869-1887). From mid-century onward, glass was embraced as an essential building and architectural material in modern urban space.

Window Display

The Crystal Palace and the Arcades in Paris prefigure the emergence of the department store. The Crystal Palace is the archetype of the department store’s mirror tricks and systematic arrangement of space and display. In an article, “Shop Windows,” published in the *Queen* in 1866, the window display in London’s shops and the Great Exhibitions were considered interchangeable: “After all, what are the Great Exhibitions but a sort of collective window display?” (qtd. in Rappaport 118). Thomas Richards

argues that the Great Exhibition inaugurated Guy Debord's "the commodity spectacle" for the Victorian world:

Descended from the spectacular masques and allegorical processions that celebrated political and economic triumph in the eighteenth century, the spectacle of the Exhibition elevated the commodity above the mundane act of exchange and created a coherent representational universe for commodities. In the spectacle the various contradictory imperatives of capitalism seemed to fit together beautifully. (4)

The first great Parisian department store the *Bon Marché*, designed by Boileau and Eiffel in 1876, is regarded as "a repetition of London's 1851 Crystal Palace" (Asendorf 98). The department store is viewed as an upgraded version of the Crystal Palace in terms of its promising views of the inexhaustibility of commodities for sale.

Benjamin examines the evolution of the Arcades from a shopping site and architecture of enticement (or even deception) to the department store. As Benjamin notes, "[t]he axiom 'welcome the crowd and keep it seduced,' leads to corrupt architectural practices in the construction of the department store" (40). Johann Friedrich Geist lists seven characteristics of the Arcades in *The Arcade: History of a Building Type* as follows: access to interior of a block, public space on private property, symmetrical street space, skylit space, system of access, form of organized retail trade, and space of transition (qtd. in Friedberg *Window Shopping* 69). These features are also the fundamental and quintessential principles of building a department store. As an offspring of the Crystal Palace and the Arcades in Paris, the department store is a place designed particularly for display and sales of commodities by offering visions of abundance and luxury.

One significant change that the window display brings to visual culture is the relationship between the viewer and the window scene. In the early nineteenth century, it was still considered indiscreet or vulgar to stare into windows, and window watching was

easily associated with voyeurism. However, with the emergence of the show window which is designed to attract, encourage, and invite the gaze, window-shopping became a trendy new pastime in the city.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the large store has become an international trend in retailing, but the development of department stores in big cities in France, Britain, and the United States was not synchronized. Though the Crystal Palace in 1851 London brought the popular perception of manufactured goods and displays, it did not lead to an immediate consumer revolution in the city; rather, it took another two decades to bring about remarkable changes in London's consumer culture. It was Paris, not London, that first developed the qualitative dimension of the department store, by introducing the concept of "democratic luxury" during the 1860s and 1870s (Lancaster 4). Stimulated by the success of the London Exhibition, France was anxious to establish Paris as the centre of European civilization and culture. Inspired by the Grand Exposition in Paris of 1855, Paris draper Aristide Boucicaut constructed the first grand magasin, the *Bon Marché*, which introduced Paris residents to a new shopping experience in a new environment, with an emphasis on easy movement and visual accessibility:

Together they [the designers Boileau and Eiffel] devised a plan that would employ a framework of thin iron columns and a roofing of glass skylights to work to the best advantage of a giant retail operation. The role of the iron was to provide for open spacious bays in which large quantities of goods could be displayed and through which vast crowds could move with ease. The skylights capping what, in effect, was a series of interior courts, were to permit a maximum influx of natural light, which was deemed necessary for display purpose. (qtd. in Lancaster 18)

The culture of glass that emerged in the wake of the Crystal Palace was first burgeoning in Paris, and it was not until the turn of the century that the techniques of the Boucicauts were applied by British stores "slowly, almost reluctantly" (Lancaster 4).

At the turn of the century, in comparison with its British counterpart, the United States department store developed more rapidly and thoroughly in metropolises such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. American department stores put more emphasis on the aesthetics of the window display, which was gradually recognized as a work of art, whereas British department stores did not realize the display value of windows, and tended to leave their windows empty in exchange for full light or put out the vast assortment of goods. One key factor that contributes to the different paces of adopting this retailing innovation between Britain and the States is “the lack of clear distinctions between high and low culture” in the States (Lancaster 4). In the golden ages between 1909 and 1939, British department stores began to incorporate American techniques and display strategies. Window shopping soon became a popular form of urban leisure. In a write-up in the *Daily Chronicle* on 20th March 1909, the London department store Selfridge’s “brilliantly lit” and “frequently re-dressed” windows promised “to give pleasure to the artistic sense of every passer-by, and to make the ‘Window Shows at Selfridge’s in Oxford Street’ worth a considerable detour to see” (qtd. in Rappaport 163).

In 1890, L. Frank Baum wrote a treatise on window display, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*, in which he comments on the magical power of shop front windows to turn passersby into window shoppers: “How can a window sell goods? By placing them before the public in such a manner that the observer has a desire for them and enters the store to make the purchase. Once in, the customer may see other things she wants, and no matter how much she purchases under these conditions the credit of the sale belongs to the window” (146).⁶ Christoph Asendorf gives a vivid

⁶ The target shoppers are gendered here. I will talk about gender and gender mobility in the configurations of consumer culture later.

description of how window display in the department store works in making commodity look more desirable by organizing the spectator's desire and passion:

The goods are so arranged that they "enchant" and "captivate" —even the most modest stocking or glove is presented as if it is covering a tempting body, as if it were there only to lend expression to the beauty of every female shopper, a beauty that is completely untouched by the burdens of daily life. An ideal world is spread out behind the glass of the display window; the stocking appears to be lavishing the tender skin of a female leg, the glove the hands of a Byzantine Madonna. The gently shining silk is "folded as if round a pretty figure"; in short, the goods are brought to life "by the clever fingers of the window dressers." The commodities offer themselves to people as a second—and better—nature. (102-103)

In short, window display in the department store visualizes and materializes "an ideal world" by presenting and juxtaposing commodities immersed in a unique aura they have gained as a result of after being placed behind a pane of glass. The window confers on the goods "an aura of shining inaccessibility" (Miller 4). The window display makes good use of the interplay of glass, light, and color to arrange and juxtapose the commodities in a way that enchants would-be shoppers. These people are shown, through the mirror-like windows on which their own reflection may overlap the commodity, a better image of themselves. These virtual images, in a sense, teach the spectator what to desire and intensify their desire for possession. In other words, the window display is likely to create a desire window shoppers did not know they had until they stood in front of the show window. This newborn desire, however, is also restrained, because plate glass is a "material which lets [one] see everything inaccessible to desire," where one can only look without being able to touch (Sennett 1). Distancing the commodity from the viewers' desire heightens their desire for it.

The introduction of glass in consumer culture also brings an entirely new shopping experience. Window display changes the relationship between people and goods, as well

as relationships among people. Items behind the show windows were usually marked with fixed prices, so haggling became unnecessary and vulgar. To engage in window shopping means there is no need to talk to the shopper. The invisible wall of glass is also designed to encourage an increasing distance between people on both sides.

Window Shopping and Gender

It is notable that window shoppers are usually gendered. In 1888, an article in the *Lady*, “Shopping in London” distinguishes between the different effects the window display had on male and female passersby, “Monsieur only sees what is before him in the window, Madame’s more comprehensive feminine glance has at once adapted the draperies and folds to her own requirements.” By gazing at Liberty’s windows in Regent Street, readers could obtain hints “of the very thing required to brighten up the drawing room” (qtd. in Rappaport 128).⁷ Female window shoppers tend to associate the street scenes with domestic rooms, and by observing the window scenes they cultivate a taste for interior décor.

A department store is a mixture of public and private space due to its massive use of the plate glass window which abolishes the wall between street and shop. Benjamin finds the department store a “continuation of the street” with a “kinship with the arcade” (*Arcades Project* 834). Like the arcades, the boulevards, and the cafés, the department

⁷ One reason why male shoppers tend to maintain a distance from consumer culture and window shopping is because they feel uneasy about the effects of capitalism on bourgeois masculinity. In her essay “Why the Impressionists Never Painted the Department Store,” Aruna D’Souza examines the problematic male experiences in public space within the context of consumer culture. To downplay or to simply erase popular consumer culture in the realm of art is symptomatic of male anxiety about women’s legitimate and common entry into the public sphere.

The literature on gender and consumerism includes Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (1985); Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (1999); Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-siècle France* (2001).

store is a space in which the pleasure of looking, socializing, or simply strolling can be satisfied. For the first time in history, shopping is regarded as a leisure activity, rather than a chore or a mission. The department store transforms the spatial perceptions of the public and the private, and the cultural meanings of shopping, and it also reconstructs the pre-existing gender structure in which men are associated with the public and women with the domestic.

Urban spectatorship, or the *flâneur*'s gaze, used to be an exclusively male privilege. It is not safe or commonplace for women to wander around the city without an escort. They also lacked a legitimate reason or excuse to go urban strolling since in doing so they would expose themselves to sexual danger and also put their reputation at risk. After all, the only female social type associated with public space was the prostitute. With the advent of the department store, however, middle-class women have one more place to go where they can enjoy window shopping or actual shopping as a form of urban leisure and negotiate a space in public. The commercialization of the public sphere provided a new opportunity for female passersby to experience urban space with more comfort and less danger.

A department store is supposed to feel like the customer's second home. This quality of department stores as thresholds where public and private meet makes critics like Friedberg think of the department store as "a sheltered refuge for itinerant lookers, a sanctuary for consumption kept separate from the domain of production," and thus it has the potential to be "a site for the empowered gaze of the *flâneuse*" (*Window Shopping* 42). Friedberg claims that the department store is where the *flâneuse* emerges:

Endowed with purchase power, she was the target of consumer address. New desires were created *for her* by advertising and consumer culture; desires elaborated in a

system of selling and consumption which depended on the relation between *looking* and *buying*, and the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye. The department store may have been, as Benjamin put it, the flâneur's last coup, but it was the flâneuse's first. (*Window Shopping* 37, italics original)⁸

Towards the end of the century, the department store became "a safe haven for unchaperoned women" (*Window Shopping* 36).

For women, the department store offers possibilities and opportunities for a sanitized version of the urban experience, a dip into the maelstrom of modernity, without exposure to too much danger. However, it is doubtful how realistic it is to envision a *flâneuse* in public, given that the commercialized space is still a problematic domain due to gender and class. It is, after all, hard to imagine that a female *flâneur* could find similar ease and autonomy to those of her male counterpart in a commercial labyrinth designed by careful calculation and manipulation. Friedberg quotes a poem from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in which the *flâneur*-poet's gaze parallels an unknown woman with the commodity behind the shop windows:

Your eyes, lit up like shops to lure their trade...
Or fireworks in the park on holidays,
insolently make use of borrowed power

⁸ For Benjamin, the *flâneur* is a peculiar nineteenth-century urban type associated with the arcades, which turned the street into an exclusive zone for urban strolling, without the disturbances of traffic or weather. The disappearance of the arcades as a result of Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris brought about the demise of the *flâneur*. When the arcades made way for the department store, it also signified the end of the *flâneur*. In his own words,

On his peregrinations, at a late hour, the man of the crowd winds up in a department store where there are still many customers. He moves about like someone who knows his way around the place... If the arcade is the classical form of the *intérieur*, and this is the way the street presents itself to the *flâneur*, the department store is the form of the *intérieur*'s decay. The department store is the last promenade for the *flâneur*... He moves about like someone who knows his way around the place... If the arcade is the classical form of *flâneur*... if in the beginning the street had become an *intérieur* for him, now this *intérieur* turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth of commodities as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city... (*Selected Writings 1938-1940* 31)

The street was once turned into the arcade, and then the arcade was replaced by the department store as the center of consumer culture. Benjamin thinks that the department store makes the interior like a street, and makes the public space disappear. The *flâneur*'s affinity with the commodity in search for a buyer for his literary production is another reason why Benjamin thinks he would be abandoned and could not survive in the world of commodities.

and never learn (you might say, “in the dark”)
 what law it is that governs their good looks. (qtd. in *Window Shopping* 34)

The unknown woman is almost presented as a shop mannequin, who has the power to lure the *flâneur* as though she were one of the luxury items behind a shop window. In my later chapters, this tendency of the male gaze to commodify female passersby as if they were the mannequins behind a pane of glass is also common in urban narratives. In other words, by equating female figures with the commodity for display behind the show window, male spectators engage in “window shopping” in a similar way that would-be shoppers were lured to get close to the shop window.

Another problem that emerged in the culture of the department store is class. At first, the department store was not open to everyone. For example, while founded in 1872, membership in the Army and Navy Stores was restricted to officers, their families, and friends introduced by them. Moreover, there were no display windows, and from the outside the stores looked more like clubs than stores. By the 1920s, the Army and Navy had opened its doors to everyone and garnered “a loyal but generally unfashionable clientele” (Aldburgham *Shops and Shopping* 218; *Shopping in Style* 148). However, even though the department store embraces the crowd, making no discrimination against those who can only afford to look without buying, this significant change in fact is not as promising as it seems for female urban negotiations. While, for middle-class women, a department store is a protected and enjoyable place half-way between home and the street, for a working-class woman, the department store is still like the public street, offering no equivalent safety and comfort, because they are more vulnerable to be “prey” to the masculine gaze and buyable objects due to their subordinate financial and social status. In my second chapter, I will elaborate more on how the department store, empowered by

plate glass and a culture of display, challenges the class structure and gender relations.

Victorian Glass and Modern Glass

In her encyclopedic book *Victorian Glassworlds*, Isobel Armstrong asserts, “The nineteenth century was the era of public glass” (1). The Victorians were living in a new environment, frequently mediated by glass, which “raises the problem of mediation by its very nature” (12). For her, glass is at the center of what she calls “Victorian Modernism”: “labour, political radicalism, the ‘free’ human subject, spectacle in an industrial society, the politics of evolution in astronomy and under the microscope” (362). Armstrong contends that technology changes experience, and mass-produced glass transforms every aspect of Victorian life.

In the nineteenth century, glass was mostly blown by human breath. The traces of the breath from individual artisans, the residues of the process of creation were tangible in every sheet of cylinder glass. Armstrong argues that Victorian glass culture is peculiar in its dualism as both medium and barrier before the transparency of glass is taken for granted: “Held up to the light a piece of nineteenth-century window glass will display small blemishes, blisters, almost invisible striae, spectral undulations that are the mark of bodily labour and a brief expectation of life” (4-5). The blemishes on glass led Victorians to see it simultaneously as medium and barrier. Glass becomes a middle, or a third term, which interposed an invisible layer between the viewer and the seen. The glassworlds in the mid-nineteenth century introduced “a glass dialectic marked contradiction, a subject in difficulties, rather than a smooth transitivity... not invisible mediation but marks on the surface, scratches, fingerprints” (14). Glass in the Victorian period was still a much

more “visible” material than it is to us, before the advent of modernism in the twentieth century makes glass disappear into transparency. Glass provides a medium and barrier through which the Victorians saw, and how they wrote and thought.

Following a discussion of the physical fabric of the Crystal Palace, Armstrong makes a distinction between Victorian glass and modernist glass: “If late modernism’s obsession was with the transparent curtain wall, nineteenth-century modernism’s obsession was the transparent roof” (143). Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915) thought that we should let the light of the sun in through not merely a few windows, but through a glass wall. In his *Glasarchitektur* (1914), Scheerbart asserts, “If we want our culture to rise to a higher level, we are obliged, for better or worse, to change our architecture,” and “the new glass environment will completely transform mankind” (qtd. in *Virtual Window* 115).

Scheerbart composed aphoristic poems about the material benefit of glass dedicated to Bruno Taut (1880-1938)’s Glass Pavilion, a short-lived prismatic glass dome structure made for the Wehrlund Exhibition in 1914, which was destroyed after the exhibition ended. The building was designed to demonstrate the possibilities of different types of glass as architectural material and to explore the potential of the fabric to orchestrate human emotions and assist in the construction of a spiritual utopia. Armstrong thinks that the glass projects Scheerbart and Taut embraced “differ from the magical fantasias of earlier glass culture in their surrealist extremity and deconstructive urge.” She continues, “The collision of the transcendental and the real in glass structures and the double meanings of glass were irrelevant to these projects. They belong to a later phase of modernist insouciance, when glass becomes a sort of id in opposition to the functional, abstract transitivity of twentieth-century modernism” (165).

Like Scheerbart, architect and writer Frank Lloyd Wright never hid his preference for a transparent city. In a series of essays for *Architectural Record* published in 1928, he wrote about the meaning of different building materials, including glass. He believes that glass is good, and it might be a shame that this material was not more widely used by our ancestors:

Had the ancients been able to enclose interior space with the facility we enjoy because of glass, I suppose the history of architecture would have been radically different, although it is surprising how little this material has yet modified our sense of architecture beyond the show-windows the shop keeper demands and gets. (197)

He embraces the unique fabric of glass to construct a crystal city, imagining an urban utopia of transparency: “Imagine a city iridescent by day, luminous by night, imperishable! Buildings—shimmering fabrics—woven of rich class—glass all clear or part opaque and part clear—patterned in color or stamped... Such a city would clean itself in the rain, would know no fire alarms nor any glooms” (201-202). Like Scheerbart, Wright celebrates glass’s potential to dematerialize space. Large panes of glass transform the cityscape to the extent that the former conception of windows, walls, and floors disappear. Glass has been imagined to occupy a central role in modern urban buildings: “Were glass eliminated now from buildings, it would be, so far as our buildings have gone, only like putting our eyes out. We could not see or see in to the building. We have gone so far with it as to make it the eyes of the building” (198).

Transparency as an architectural ideal is well established in the history of modernism. From Bentham to Le Corbusier, the modern city has been haunted by “a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement” (Vidler 217). Modernists embrace the potential technology of transparency, the flat glass, as an ultimate achievement of abstraction, mostly because

it makes possible to conceive of buildings that are so transparent to seem like they are not there, taking a form that is so neutral to the extent that it almost has no expression.

This pursuit of transparent cityscape parallels a preference for crystallization over opaqueness in Western philosophy and urban imagination. In the eighteenth century, Rousseau's philosophy of the eye fully anticipates the utopian visions of early modernism. Rousseau describes his own confessional heart as "transparent as crystal," and laments that humans have lost the Edenic capacity to see into others' minds (Starobinski 254). Jean Starobinski indicates that Rousseau's crystal is not merely pervious to the gaze, but in its hardness, exemplifies the penetrative power emanating from the Panoptical eye: "The gaze penetrates it, but the stone itself is a gaze, a very pure gaze" which traverses other objects (255). Starobinski emphasizes the status of the crystal not merely as an object to be penetrated, but also as a symbol of an all-seeing gaze.

According to E. M. Cioran, a perfect dream city has been imagined as a sparkling crystal, which is pure, transparent, and permeable, opposing the organic messiness and opacity of the unruly individual body. In Scheerbart's writings, for example, the crystal-glass buildings epitomize "the metamorphosis of the whole society, an anarchist society, which through its exposure to this new architecture, has been lifted from dull awareness to a higher mode of sensory experience and from political dependence to a liberation from all institutions" (32).

The pursuit of transparency in modernism also appears problematic. Foucault links Rousseau to Bentham to show that this idealized transparency may easily mutate into surveillance⁹:

⁹ In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault opposes the concept of "surveillance" with "spectacle" (with a clear allusion to Guy Debord's theoretical formulation). For a discussion on the two theorists, see Jonathan Crary,

What in fact was the Rousseauist dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness... It was the dream that each individual... might be able to see the whole of society, that men's hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that opinion of all reign over each. (152)

Foucault argues that since the late eighteenth century, the Western world has been haunted by a fear of darkness, defined as the negative of transparency, and preoccupied with a pursuit of light, lucidity, and full visibility of things. Moreover, the rationally planned glass metropolis, as Elana Gomel and Stephen A. Weninger point out, is less viable and livable due to its total exclusion of a dark space for human sufferings and pain. A totally crystallized city can, therefore, be nothing more than a romanticized and idealized image (80-81).

II. Glass as a Metaphor

The unique quality of glass, its transparency and reflectiveness, its capacity for specularity and illusion, make it an effective “visual rhetoric.” Since the Renaissance, the mirror has been frequently evoked as a critical site for self-identification, the quest for subjectivity, and the dialectic between authenticity and mimesis. In the mid-fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti drew upon the window as a metaphor for the perspectival frame of the painting. Since then, the window, in both its literal and metaphorical senses, has been a central image in the theorization of the space of vision.

Mirrors and windows are both important conceptual tropes in the realm of vision and art, but with different cultural meanings, implications, and connotations. Mirrors are not transparent, and they produce substitutive vision in reflection, while transparent windows produce direct and (seemingly) unmediated images. Friedberg distinguishes the different epistemological metaphors mirrors and windows respectively stand for as follows,

Just as the mirror emerged in a conceptual system that lay the foundation for the “humanist” epistemologies of the seventeenth century, the plate glass window suggests an equivalent—but opposite—epistemological reconfiguration. If the plane mirror and its reflection was an optical illusion, a *trompe l’oeil*, in the manner of mimesis and the simulacrum, the plate glass window and its transparency suggests its contrary—an optical veracity, an unmediated (yet still framed) view of the world. (*Virtual Window* 109)

While the mirror is associated with illusion and spectrality, the window as a source of light helps reveal the truth.

The window as a trope is closely associated with the concept of framing. The modern visual system is dominated by all kinds of frames: a painting frame, a looking glass frame, a window frame, or a camera lens frame. The frame objectifies the view,

marks a separation in the field of vision, and secures a distance between the object and the viewing subject. Friedberg argues that instead of ventilation, the function of windows at this time is to increase visibility and to frame a view as both philosophical paradigm and aesthetic device (*Virtual Window* 123). Friedberg refers to Heidegger's essay, "The Age of the World Picture," in which Heidegger claims that "the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture." He loosely historicizes the metaphysical shift into the modern age, defining it as a moment when world (*Welt*) becomes picture (*Weltbild*). As a metaphor for "representational thought," the frame (*das Ge-stell*) became a central figure in his portrait of the world "conceived and grasped as a picture" (qtd. in *Virtual Window* 95). Heidegger's frame "organizes perception, sets everything in place, orders the world" (*Virtual Window* 95). Framing is inherent in modern thought and experience in the fields of vision, aesthetics, and philosophy. The frame transforms reality to representation, playing a defining role in the modern visual system.

H. G. Wells's short story "Through a Window" (1895) deals with the problematic function of a window frame to empower one's gaze and produce a detached spectatorship. The story is about a convalescent reporter Bailey, who lies on a couch before a window through which he has a view of the Thames west of London. Unable to move due to his broken leg, Bailey can do nothing but spend his days idly watching the boats passing to and fro on the river through his window. After spending long hours in front of the window, he begins to take the framed view as a particular form of entertainment: "Bailey regarded all this as an entertainment got up to while away his illness, and applauded all the more moving incidents. Mrs. Green, coming in at rare intervals with his meals, would catch

him clapping his hands or softly crying, ‘Encore!’” (75-76). Through a rectangular frame the human drama unfolds itself before his eyes, which makes his window scene as entertaining as any window show. After several days, Bailey gets bored and hopes that his restricted window view can show him some sensational event to break the monotony. One day, his wish comes true. He witnesses an accident: one Malay servant who runs amuck with a *krees* kills one man and wounds two others. Bailey is thrilled to see this scene with his own eyes, and as usual he secretly enjoys his position as a detached spectator. However, to his surprise, the Malay man abruptly climbs into his room through the open window, transgressing the boundary, and in so doing posing threats to both Bailey’s detached spectatorship and his life.

Bailey tends to retreat to his dark room and aestheticize what happens on the other side of the window, as if he were watching a moving picture. He once tells his friend that he finds it intriguing “how these people come from all points of the compass—from Oxford and Windsor, from Asia and Africa—and gather and pass opposite the window just to entertain me” (78). The frame allows Bailey to occupy a privileged and elevated position to gain voyeuristic pleasure. The way in which Bailey thinks of the scene in front of him, distanced by a pane of glass, implies a hierarchy that empowers him as a spectator to objectify the things and people outside.

In the first published version of this story in August 1894, “At a Window,” written as a first-person interior monologue, Wells makes Bailey’s position as a voyeur at the window more explicit: “Here am I, tied to the legs of this couch, and this chequered area of glass is the superficies of the world to me. A world framed and glazed, in which I seem to have little part as if it were a mere painted thing with figures cunningly contrived to

move.” The contrast between the interior of Bailey’s dark room and the outside world, which contains much more possibilities and changes, also attracts Bailey to fix his gaze on the window: “within, in this real world of mine, things are very grey and dull-looking... Do you wonder I prefer this sunlit phantasmagoria on the other side of the glass?” (246) Bailey’s fascination with the window scene resonates with Charles Baudelaire’s celebration of the window’s magic power to attract gazes, “What one can see out in the sunlight is always less interesting in than what goes on behind a window pane” (77).

However, Wells also implies that Bailey’s vision is narrow and restricted by his window frame. At times he is curious to know what happens beyond his vision. What is framed in his window allows him to see, but it is also what he is merely allowed to see. In a sense, the frame facilitates our vision by helping us focus, but it also sets certain limitations. It is a moment of intense suspense when the Malay servant intrudes into Bailey’s room, breaking the frame of safety around the spectator, whose distanced and seemingly elevated perspective as an onlooker is exposed. At this moment, the function of the window to frame a view becomes problematic. In this episode, Wells shows us, as Dennis Potter puts it, not just “the picture in the frame,” but also “the frame in the picture” (36).¹⁰

Bailey situates himself in front of his window in a position similar to that of a movie

¹⁰ As Keith Williams notes, Wells’s window frame is a metaphor for the frame in which the art of fiction is grounded. In Wells’s *Experiment in Autobiography*, he criticizes the illusion of bourgeois realism in British novels:

Throughout the broad smooth flow of nineteenth-century life in Great Britain, the art of fiction floated on this same assumption of social fixity. The novel in English was produced in an atmosphere of security for the entertainment of secure people who liked to feel established and safe and good. Its standards were established within that apparently permanent frame and the criticism of it began to be irritated and perplexed, through a new instability, the splintering frame began to get into the picture. I suppose for a time I was the outstanding instance among writers of fiction in English of frame getting into the picture. (qtd. in Williams 188)

spectator. Thus, Wells's narrative is endowed with cinematic quality.¹¹ As Keith Williams describes the cinematic quality of Wells's narrative, "Throughout, what Bailey sees is referred to as a 'show' and the impression he gets of the segments of others' life stories, passing briefly into view, appears random, like raw actuality footage without explicatory diegesis" (43). Also, how Wells represents the moment of the Malay breaking into Bailey's window resembles the "slow motion" effect used in a film:

It was Bailey's impression that the Malay took about an hour to get his second leg over the rail. The period that elapsed before the sitting position was changed to a standing one seemed enormous—days, weeks, possibly a year or so. Yet Bailey had no clear impression of anything going on in his mind during that vast period, except a vague wonder at his inability to throw the second medicine bottle. (90-91)

Observing the window scene in a dark room, Bailey is not unlike a cinematic spectator, who is fixed and immobilized in front of a screen. The frame of his window is just like his cinema screen.

¹¹ Though Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) is adapted from Cornell Woolrich's short story "Rear Window" (1942), originally titled "Murder from a Fixed Viewpoint," Wells's "Through a Window" could be a prototype for Hitchcock's plot, too, for both contain similar sequences, including one featuring a nurse visiting the protagonist to share his curiosity, and another with a married couple that turns violent. See *H. G. Wells: Modernity and the Movies*, 43. Wells is conscious of the "film-friendliness" in his own narrative. In a 1935 interview, he linked his own practice of writing to cinema's development as a new form of art in terms of their potential for making complex ideas more accessible (Keith Williams 6).

III. Glass and Urban Narratives

The Novel and Glass

Armstrong claims that the novel is a genre deeply embedded in cultures of glass. The window especially plays a central role in the nineteenth-century novel. In her words, “a nineteenth-century novel without a window is inconceivable... some novels would simply not exist without them [windows]” (124). Armstrong discusses several significant window episodes in novels by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Henry James, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. The window is usually an inlet for (female) characters into real or imagined space. A typical window moment “is structured by the physical properties of the window itself.” As a juncture or intersection, the window “insists on the self and what is outside the self, consciousness and another, the window is always about a double experience of self and beholder” (131). A window moment often involves a transitive seeing, a “consuming gaze” of window shopping, a longing gaze, a boundary crossing, or an epiphanic experience in which one feels the connection with the scene outside at the same time one is also aware of one’s own disjunction from it. Confronting a window scene marks a crisis or an epiphany, brining about a character’s existential changes or awakenings.

The window is also fundamental in structuring the novel as an art form. The novel is organized in a way that resembles the rhetoric of windows, which grasps perspectives from both sides. The narrative structure of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1874), for example, is window-like:

Structured as a series of interactive encounters between self and beholder, they are records of individual and social transformation...As if seeing through an invisible

window selves and beholders experience “double change”... double because each changes, double because each is checked by the other’s subjectivity.... The novel calls for what Lefebvre termed a “triadic” reading, where opposition is grasped for itself and its relation. Windows both figure and perform this triadic relation. For the novel the glass panel of a window is the single most important architectural form. (Armstrong 132)

Armstrong asserts that “[t]he novel is founded on glass culture” (132). She supports this claim not only by showing that at crucial moments, the characters always go to the window, but also by indicating that the story itself is delivered to us through a text that mediates and reflects experiences back onto itself, structured in a way that is at once intimate and distant from us, just as glass is seen as both medium and barrier in the Victorian world.

In his *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*, Andrew Miller also asserts that Victorian culture and society, and their representation in the novel, are all embedded in cultures of glass, but here he focuses more exclusively on the culture of window display. In his words:

... among the dominant concerns motivating mid-Victorian novelists was a penetrating anxiety, most graphically displayed in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, that their social and moral world was being reduced to a warehouse of goods and commodities, a display window in which people, their actions, and their convictions were exhibited for the economic appetites of others. (6)

Miller’s book analyzes how the Victorian novelists William Thackeray, Gaskell, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and George Eliot construct their narratives to resist “the fetishistic gaze encouraged by these windows and their economy of vanity” (219).

The intimacy between glass and the novel is closely associated with the implication of transparency as an absolute knowledge. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams indicates that an opposition between transparency and opaqueness is central in imagining the country and the city in literature. The experience of community in the

country is said to be transparent and wholly knowable, whereas the experience of community in a city is fogged, opaque, and unknowable. While the relation between self and the urban crowd is defined by a lack of transparency, the “novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways” (163). The novel is the genre which shows us what Williams terms the “knowable community.” Williams finds the dominant form to be a double condition—the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured—as the true significance of the city in Dickens’s new form of the novel. For him, Dickens’s ultimate vision of London lies precisely in his form of writing, i.e., his realist novels: “... the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the experience of the city. What matters is that the vision—no single vision either, but a continual dramatisation—is the form of the writing” (154). In other words, it is Dickens’s vision and experience of London that inspire his creation of the genre: the novel. The novel emerges in a period of time in which people need to understand their new urban environment and eliminate the opaqueness of society. One may argue that the novel as a genre emerges as a timely response to the cultural appeal of transparency while approaching a city. From this point of view, it is not unusual to see that thematically or structurally, the novel is particularly interested in glass given that they both share the potential to make something transparent.

Mirrors and windows are popular metaphors frequently utilized by writers or literary critics to analyze the relation between art and life, fiction and reality. Stendhal (1783-1842), one of the earliest practitioners of realism, in his novel *The Red and the Black* (1830), famously compares a novel to “a mirror carried along a roadway” (qtd. in Dickstein xiv). Stendhal’s novel-as-mirror has been derided by literary critics as evidence

of the epistemological naïveté of realist theory, as though the novel can simply mirror reality by a mechanical process of reflection, as a carbon copy of the real world. Morris Dickstein defends Stendhal, arguing that the point of his analogy is not the mirror itself; instead, Stendhal's emphasis is the mobility of this mirror. In his words, "...this is not a stationary mirror fixed upon the passing show, observing the parade as from the viewing stand, but a dynamic reflector shifting position as it moves down the road. It must be held or carried by someone, and the images it provides will be framed, constantly changing, a series of partial views contributing to a larger picture" (8). Dickstein further relates Stendhal's moving mirror to a movie camera: "To the modern eye this mirror eerily resembles a movie camera doing a sophisticated tracking shot—some sixty years before movies were invented, and several years before the beginnings of still photography" (8). The novel as a moving mirror is like a hand-held camera, which offers us constantly shifting images.

While Stendhal imagines the novel as a moving mirror, Émile Zola refers to the transparency of window glass to analyze the nature of realism. In a letter to his friend Antony Valabrègue in 1864, Zola defines art in general and realism in particular by also using a window metaphor, with an emphasis on the frame:

Allow me first to make a somewhat risky comparison: all works of art are like a window open creation. A kind of transparent Screen is mounted in the window frame. Through this Screen objects appear more or less distorted, as they undergo greater or lesser changes in their lines and colors. These changes depend on the nature of the Screen. Thus, one no longer sees creation exactly and realistically, but creation transformed by the medium through which the image passes. (qtd. in Schor 38)

In Zola's imagination, the various colors and degrees of opaqueness of the screen represent the individual artist's different temperament or personality. Realism does not presuppose the screen's absence, only its maximum transparency at best. No matter how

transparent the mode of representation may seem, it is impossible to stay faithful to an enduring image of the world. Even though the transparency of the window may make the represented look seemingly unmediated, an invisible medium is still a medium, and thus the texture of any writings should be taken into account. It is important to recognize that the window frame is subjective; it shows us a view, but it also manipulates our gaze by its form and shape. Because the window is not objective or neutral, what matters is not only what we see through the window, but also what the window makes us see.

In Virginia Woolf's imagination, the act of writing and a writer's relationship with readers and public opinion are also related to a window image, though she includes her contempt and complaints about her lack of freedom as a writer under public scrutiny and about the commodification of literature. To Woolf, a writer in the glare of publicity is just "like a trouser mender in Oxford Street, with a horde of reviewers pressing their noses to glass and commenting to a curious crowd upon each stitch" ("Reviewing," *Collected Essays* 213). While expressing her disapproval of the limitations imposed by reviewers and the reading public on the writer's creativity, Woolf's comparison of a writer to a trouser mender illuminates the distance between the representation and the represented, maintained by a pane of glass. It is notable that she imagines a writer as a "trouser mender," instead of a "tailor," so as to imply that a writer is adding or working on some piece of cloth that already exists, rather than making a new one. A writer's creativity is based on something real, something ready to be used. In addition, the readers or reviewers have to press their noses against the window to see what happens inside. Just as Zola suggests, no matter how capable a writer is of restaging the world faithfully in his or her writings, there is always a screen placed between the author and the reader, between

what is created and what is interpreted.

Woolf's metaphor of a writer as a trouser mender working behind a window also foregrounds novel writing as a process of producing commodities. The writer is placed behind the window, and, in a sense, she is forced to display what she produces. Books were among the earliest commodities circulating around the world, and the novel has been said to be a commodity-form of literature. Novels are like other commodities not only in their objective status as saleable goods, but also in the novel experiences they promise (Bowlby 14). This is why Woolf cannot hide her anxiety and uneasiness about her status as a producer of cultural commodities under close critical scrutiny.

It is noteworthy that a large portion of the consumer of the novel, socio-historically, is middle-class women, ladies with leisure and money—the same target customers of the department store. The criticism of the moral danger attached to novel reading, seen as an addiction, is not unlike that of pathological female shoppers in the department store. In this sense, the roles of Zola and Woolf's novels as a critique or a reflection of the world of commodities become questionable. As Rita Felski argues, Zola's *The Lady's Paradise* is “a hymn to consumption, a novel dominated by the materiality of objects,” therefore, “[l]ike the department store that it portrays, the novel displays commodities to readers/consumers, seducing or benumbing them through a monumental piling-up of wares” (67). As an art form that reflects and criticizes culture and society, the novel itself is also a commodity. It is this self-reflexiveness that makes the novel reminiscent of glass.

Film and Glass

Like the novel, film as a form of representation is frequently compared to a window

into the world it represents. As we have seen in “Through a Window,” a window frame is similar to a film screen, which contains the world outside within a rectangular view.

Framing produces a vision detached from the rest of the senses with the primacy accorded to the eye. Robert D. Romanyshyn argues that the window marks the boundary between two worlds of the viewing subject and the object of the gaze:

The condition of the window implies a *boundary* between the perceiver and the perceived. It establishes as a condition for perception a formal *separation* between a subject who sees the world and the world that is seen, and in so doing it sets the stage, as it were, for the retreat or withdrawal of the self from the world which characterizes the dawn of the modern age. Ensconced behind the window the self becomes an observing *subject*, a *spectator*, as against a world which becomes a *spectacle*, an *object* of vision. (42, italics original)¹²

The film experience also marks a deliberate departure from the cinematic world, and requires the spectator to retreat into a sheltered, detached, and dark place inside the auditorium. The emphasis on the visuality and distance of the window and its frame make them adequate metaphors for film studies in exploring the relation between the cinema and its spectator.¹³ In their discussion of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson examine the various “windows” evoked inside and outside the cinema: “The title *Rear Window*, apart from the literalness of its denotation, evokes the diverse ‘windows’ of the cinema: the cinema/lens of camera and projector, the window in the

¹² In his response to Romanyshyn, Ron Burnett contends that this metaphor of the window embodies a visual field where “the body devolves into the eye, and vision shifts from exploration to consumption, from the insecurities of watching to a fixed gaze” (5). Burnett questions Romanyshyn’s dystopic imagination of the immobile and disembodied spectatorship, and he aims to explore the possibility of going beyond the constraints of the frame, and the agency of the viewing subject. See his *Cultures of Vision*.

¹³ Vivian Sobchack uses the frame, the window and the mirror as representational devices in classical film theory. The frame and the window represent two opposite poles: the frame as a concept comes from modern painting which emphasizes signification, the alteration, and manipulation of filmic perception, and is crucial in formalist theory, led by Rudolf Arnheim and Sergei Eisenstein; the window, on the other hand, defines the essence of cinema in its ability to record reality, which is central to realist film theory, led by André Bazin. The mirror is a third term, which “represents the synthetic conflation of perception and expression that characterizes most contemporary film theory” (15). The metaphor of mirror is pertinent to psychoanalytic film theory. See her *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of the Film Experience*. pp. 14-25. Also see Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality*. New York: Oxford UP, 1960, and Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.

projection booth, the eye as window, and film as ‘window on the world’” (200).

The notion of windows in film studies focuses on the way the cinema represents the world to the spectator. Like a window, the film as a medium erases itself completely to be invisible. This cinematic style, generally known as classical or Hollywood, “achieves its effect of transparency by the concerted development of filmic means (montage, light, camera placement, scale, special effects) which justify their profuse presence by “aiming at being noticed as little as possible,” in so doing it not only conceals the traces of manipulation and artificiality, but also creates “a transparency that simulates proximity and intimacy,” which draws the audience’s attention to the on-screen story and leads them into a diegetic world (Elsaesser and Hagener 18). The transparency of film seeks the minimum attention of itself as a medium between the cinematic world and the real space of the spectator. As an invisible witness, the spectator’s existence is usually not acknowledged by the cinematic narrative, similar to a viewer on the other side of the window.

Another reason film is frequently compared to windows is probably because it emerges precisely in a time when the window display and other forms of exhibition are dominant in visual culture. In her *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Friedberg theorizes cinema as an offspring of the nineteenth-century Arcades and the display window in the department store. She argues that it is similar stimulation—mobility and transition—that develops modern architectures (arcades, department stores, exhibition halls) and cinema. Both modern metropolis and cinema are defined by their status in transit or transportation. Friedberg refers to the *flâneur*’s spectatorship as a model for a perambulating camera, since both are embodiments of a

virtual and mobilized gaze. What motivates a *flâneur* to loiter in a city also sends a moviegoer to a theatre: “the same impulses that sent flâneurs through the arcades... sent shoppers into the department stores, tourists to exhibitions, spectators into... cinema” (94).

Film and the city share an intertwined, illuminating intimacy, and they mutually construct each other. Siegfried Kracauer further equates cityscapes with screenscapes, asserting that the affinity between the cinema and the city street pertains to their common confrontation with the transient. Like film, the city is the site where fleeting impressions take place, along with a fluid sense of life, “the medium’s affinity for the flow of life would be enough to explain the attraction which the street has ever since exerted on the screen” (qtd. in Kruth 72). Cities are said to have cinematic qualities, and vice versa. Cinema, which is formed with endless succession of shocks, 24 frames per second, offers a similar experience to that urbanites moving in traffic. As such, film not only reflects a city, but also actively helps shape how the spectator observes the city. The encounter with “series of shocks and collisions” numbs individuals but can also educate or train viewers to form a new way of seeing, similar to how the window display instruct window shoppers in how to admire a window scene. As a form of popular entertainment, film produces moving images for consumption, and soon becomes one dominant form of urban narrative. Both the window display and film produce images for spectators to consume, offer the luxury of visual intoxication, a montage of attractions, and sell a kind of imaginary pleasure. Film in the twentieth century shares a similar status with the novel in the nineteenth century, in the sense that both genres had been employed as a mainstream form of representation which tends to delineate urban experience. As the two

modernizing genres closely associated with consumerism and urban culture, like mirrors or windows onto the real world, the novel and film are imagined to reflect represented reality.

Tati's *Playtime*

I conclude this chapter with a film about Paris as a city of glass, which is a striking example exemplifying many themes I have discussed, including the confusion brought on by the new glass environment and framing in urban narratives. The city of glass brings new challenges and frustrations to urban dwellers, as we can see in Jacques Tati's film *Playtime* (1967), a tongue-in-cheek critique of a futuristic Parisian landscape mainly constructed of straight lines, modernist glass, and skyscrapers. The film describes Hulot and a group of American tourists getting lost in a world of transparency and reflection. Throughout this humorous film, Tati criticizes the unpleasant uniformity of the cityscape, in which glass, rather than a modern material which broadens one's vision or makes the world more accessible, functions more as an unwanted obstruction to daily life and interferes with natural human interaction. For example, when Mr. Giffard comes along the long glassed corridor to meet the awaiting Hulot for the first time, we see Hulot try to reach Giffard, but both of them are deceived by their own reflections. They fail to meet each other because they are confused by the simultaneously reflective and transparent glass, unable to tell that the person they see on the other side of pane of glass is in reality in the same space. As an ultimate symbol of modernism, glass contributes to further the ambiguity of space and produces false impression and misrecognition.

Tati is concerned about how this glass-soaked civilization brings about profound

changes in modern people's lived experience. In a restaurant scene, after Hulot accidentally hits a glass door which shatters into nothing, the waiter still insists behaving as if there were a door. The customers also wait obediently while the doorman ushers them through an imagined door. Tati shows how people habituate themselves in a city of glass boxes, making us conscious of lived experiences with ubiquitous (or excessive, in Tati's sense) transparent doors, windows, and thresholds.

The transparent wall in the city also marks a sense of alienation among urban families. At one point Hulot visits his friend's completely glass-fronted flat, which looks identical to the other three flats on the same floor, with the same television-screen-like windows, symmetrical layouts, furniture, and a TV recessed into the wall. Tati's camera only stays outside the picture windows and presents the four apartments like a television reality show might. We see people moving, talking, watching TV, just like we are watching them. We cannot hear what they say to each other; all the audience can hear is the traffic and street noise outside the flat. In this way Tati emphasizes the visual accessibility of glass at the expense of other senses. It is also surprising that the passersby pass the streets indifferently, without showing any concerns as to what happens in the flat. In Tati's imagination in 1967, the Paris dwellers in the future take the transparent environment for granted, but a city of glass does not guarantee more communication or reciprocity. A glass-infused civilization anticipates a more aloof, cold, and hard modern urban life, as glass itself.

The flat scene mentioned above is also a scene of multiple frames. We are watching a film in which a ceiling-to-floor window serves as a television screen, and then on the other side of the window, there is a real television screen. This makes a

frame-within-a-frame-within-a-frame. Tati notices that we consciously and unconsciously frame ourselves in glass structures, and he complains about that: “I don’t claim to have the right to pass judgment on architecture today. I content myself with making a film on my epoch. Enormous buildings are constructed in our time. Of glass, nothing but glass: we belong to a civilization that needs to encase itself in glass!” (qtd. in Ockman 193).

Tati’s self-reflective film about a city of glass is also like a large window scene in itself. His frequent use of the long shot in 70mm wide-screen format seldom focuses on the main characters alone; rather, he allows the audience to choose what to focus on themselves. François Penz indicates that Tati’s filming techniques make his camera frame like a window frame: “What Tati was doing with long shots is opening up a large window onto the world with actions taking place in more than one spot in order to let the spectator’s eyes track across the whole screen very much as in real life” (65). The window frame becomes a metaphor for the camera lens, and window aesthetics also influence how film is structured.

CHAPTER TWO

Spectacles, Window Displays, and Commodified Cityscapes in English and French Novel

In this chapter, I explore how the use of glass in urban space and consumer culture determines literary characters' sense of self and city in Victorian and modernist novels, including Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Émile Zola's *The Lady's Paradise* (1883), Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* (1919), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). I have selected these novels based on the thematic and aesthetic importance of glass shown in the urban context.

I argued in the previous chapter that the Crystal Palace of 1851, as one of the most monumental glass structures of the period, anticipates a culture of exhibition and introduces new meanings to space and visibility. *Villette*, written in the wake of the Great Exhibition, is precisely Brontë's literary response to this new transparent visual culture and its profound influence on the urban subject's identity and spectatorship. In discussing Zola, Dreiser, and James's novels, I focus on the function of glass in creating and manipulating the female shopper's desire, especially how window shopping and the consumer culture change the heroine's sense of self and the city. In analyzing Woolf's writings, I examine how Woolf privileges glass as literary device and metaphor to explore themes such as the formation of (female) identity, the possibilities and limitations of visibility, reciprocity and alienation in modern cities, consumer culture, and the relation between reality and representation.

I. Glass Encounters: Identity, Spectacles, and the Spectatorship in *Villette*

In this section, after briefly discussing Brontë's constant interest in the urban themes and her visits to the Great Exhibition, I argue that *Villette*, as a novel about the relation between glass and visibility, is the novel we cannot omit in my project on cultures of glass and modernizing cities. I focus on several important episodes involving mirrors which represent Lucy's unsettled identity through her reflection, and her important encounters with scenes observed through windows, which reveal her attempt to control the object of the gaze and her tendency to frame what she sees. Finally, I discuss the exotic scene in *Villette*'s park in Chapter XXXVIII "Cloud" as a spectacle placed imaginatively behind a pane of glass, represented according to the principles of display from the Great Exhibition.

Brontë and the Crystal Palace

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) showed a keen interest in the city and cultures of glass. Prior to the Great Exhibition, in 1827 Brontë had written about "Glass Town," a fictitious city she invented with her brothers and sisters as a child. When Brontë visited the Crystal Palace, her fascination with the dazzling phantasmagoria of works of art from different nations in a crystal frames would have invoked her recollection of Glass Town.¹⁴ Brontë visited the Great Exhibition in London no fewer than five times, including one trip with the Scottish physicist David Brewster as her personal guide. Brewster was the inventor of

¹⁴ Several commentators have noticed this interesting connection between Brontë's early imagination (or prediction) of a crystal world to come in her Glass Town writings and her personal encounters with the real glass structure of dazzling display. Isobel Armstrong even contends that Glass Town is a "proleptic" vision of the Crystal Palace. See Armstrong's "Charlotte Brontë's City of Glass." The Hilda Hulme Memorial Lecture, 2 December 1992, and Anita Levy's "Public Spaces, Private Eyes: Gender and the Social Work of Aesthetics in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*."

the kaleidoscope and the pioneer of optical research at that time, and his knowledgeable company obviously benefited and inspired Brontë's further exploration and contemplation of the new world under glass.

Brontë's response to the new glass world was ambivalent. She was equally fascinated and disturbed by the overwhelming transparency and phantasmagoric juxtaposition of exotic displays in the World Exhibition, as she reveals in the following letter to her father:

Yesterday we went to the Crystal Palace—the exterior had a strange and elegant but somewhat unsubstantial effect—The interior is like a mighty Vanity Fair—the brightest colours blaze on all sides—and ware of all kinds—from diamonds to spinning jennies and Printing Presses are there to be seen—It was very fine—gorgeous—animated—bewildering—but I liked Thackeray's lecture better (*Letters 2*: 265)

Brontë's impression of the Crystal Palace is a shrine to commodity fetishism, “a mighty Vanity Fair.” In another letter to a friend Miss Wooler, written on 14th July 1851, she mentions her increasing reluctance to visit the place which offers a feast to the eye with excessive richness and splendor:

I went there [the Crystal Palace] five times, and certainly saw some interesting things, and the “coup d'oeil” is striking and bewildering enough; but I never was able to get up any raptures on the subject, and each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than of my own free will. It is an excessively bustling place; and, after all, its wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye, and rarely touch the heart or head. (qtd. in Gaskell 337-38)

Brontë found the display less than delightful because it is a world that overemphasizes the visual. It is an empire of things and commodities, which lavishly offers more than one can take in at once. Brontë's encounters with glass structures in London influence her ways of perceiving the material world as well as her strategies of creating characters and cities in her novels.

Heather Glen refers to one of Matthew Arnold's lectures, "On the Modern Element in Literature" (1857) to indicate that the Crystal Palace, as an overarching defining structure of glass, brings out the special mind-set of Brontë's contemporaries in 1851:

An intellectual deliverance... is perfect when we have acquired that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us; when we have lost that impatient irritation of mind which we feel in presence of an immense, moving, confused spectacle which, while it permanently excites our curiosity, perpetually baffles our comprehension. (261)

Arnold's imagery is strongly suggestive of how visitors to the Crystal Palace would feel. Overwhelmed by a vast multitude of spectacles, individuals experience bafflement, bewilderment, and disorientation, compulsively seeking to make sense of the spectacles which lie beyond their control. This desire to control the object of the gaze and the frustration brought on the failed attempts are two main themes in Brontë's fictions.

***Villette* as a Glass Novel**

Brontë's personal experiences in the World Exhibition and the Crystal Palace motivate her to rethink and imagine a world of glass and modernity. She began to sketch her last novel *Villette* in the late spring and summer of 1851, the same year she visited the Crystal Palace, which was opened that May. *Villette* is Brontë's literary reflection on and a critical response to the new culture of glass and its influence on the visual domain and urban space. Published in 1853, *Villette* tells the story of a young orphan, named Lucy Snowe, who after an unspecified family disaster travels to London and finally to the fictional city of Villette to teach in a boarding school for girls. Brontë takes pains to illustrate the heroine's constant struggles to negotiate a space of her own between the public and the private, between looking and being-looked-at.

Canonically *Villette* is not categorized as an urban novel, for the spaces the protagonist Lucy mainly occupies are mostly domestic: classrooms, dormitories, courtyard gardens, and attics. However, the importance of urban space in this novel can never be overlooked. First of all, the title of the novel “Villette” insists on the significance of city in this story. Brontë bases the fictional city “Villette” on the French word “ville” (“city”).¹⁵ At one point, Brontë also considered to use “Choseville” (“thing city” or “city of things”) as the novel’s title. Whether Villette or Choseville, Brontë is determined to write a novel about a city. Moreover, *Villette* is an account of Lucy’s wandering from city to city—beginning from the heaven-like town Bretton, to London, and finally to the foreign and alienating city of Villette. Brontë’s portrayal of Villette, “the great capital of the great kingdom of Labassecour” (61), draws heavily on her personal experience in Brussels, where she was trained and employed as a teacher in the early 1840s. In order to distract herself from grief after the loss of her sisters, she visited London a few times during 1848 to 1851, in response to an invitation from her publisher, George Smith. Brontë was thus deeply attracted to urban culture and city life, and write about them constantly. The urban scene is also significant in *Villette* in the sense that it provides Lucy with opportunities to participate in public occasions (the concert, the gallery, and the theatre) in which her gazes are problematized.

Villette is also a novel about glass. In Armstrong’s *Victorian Glassworlds*, *Villette* is selected as one of the two representative “Glassworld Fictions.”¹⁶ Glass appears everywhere in *Villette*. The mirror plays a significant but ambivalent role in Lucy’s

¹⁵ Brontë simply literally names a city “City” in its diminutive form. As Kate E. Brown notices, “[Villette] names and derides a city characterized by its lack of particularity; it names any city and no city” (367-68). This naming implies that Villette is a city that is neither contextual nor referential. It can be anywhere, but this lack of particularity also makes it a nowhere.

¹⁶ The other novel is Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-1853).

spectatorship because while it can facilitate Lucy's desire to see, at times it also obstructs or confuses her gaze on others and her self-image. Looking through a window frames a view outside and suggests a desire to control what is seen and what lies beyond one's vision. Interestingly, even the heroine's name makes references to glass: her name, Lucy/Luce, "puns on the common nineteenth-century usage of 'lights' for windows," and her last name Snow/e is said to imply "the nature of glass as frozen liquid" (Armstrong 240).

As a literary response to the new visual culture after the World Exhibition, *Villette* is composed of a hyperactive scopic life: the look, the glimpse, the surveillance, the casual gaze, voyeurism, and self-display are all central activities in the novel. Verbs of visual action such as to "eye," "observe," "take notice," and "gaze" saturate the first several chapters. Questions of visibility and visibility often perplex the heroine and other main characters. "How do I look?"—a question asked by Lucy's student Ginevra about her own appearance—also expresses the fundamental ambiguity and subtlety of Lucy's gaze. She frequently wonders about the legitimacy of her act of seeing; at the same time she is also uneasy about being an object of the (male) gaze. As a female observer-narrator, Lucy's gaze is often regulated by social conventions, and she needs to mediate a position where she is simultaneously gazing and is (not) gazed upon. Lucy's visual experiences in domestic and public settings also express Brontë's concerns about and reflections on a world of spectacles in the wake of the Crystal Palace.

Brontë delineates Lucy's anxiety and struggles as a female observer mainly through her encounters with glass, usually in the forms of mirrors and windows. I will read the significant mirror episodes to explore how Brontë relies on glass to represent Lucy's

attempts to explore her identity and spectatorship. Lucy shows desires to frame a view even outside a gallery and to obtain a sense of control over what she sees. In addition, Villette's park in Lucy's eyes is curiously presented as a world exhibition without glass, which invites more commentary on Brontë's rumination on the influence of glass in the visual domain.

Mirroring Lucy's Identity

The mirror is frequently employed to explore, validate, represent, and (un)settle one's identity in works of art. Looking in a mirror is the only way for the subject to observe one's self-image clearly and minutely, which often involves a shift from one state of emotion and signification to another. One may look for resemblance or difference, kinship or foreignness in a looking-glass. Such is the ambiguity and richness of the reflection, at once identical to and different from the original—a sense of the “uncanny.” This is why a mirror has long been considered a significant site of identity formation.

One can find the presence of a mirror in almost every important scene in *Villette*, especially when Lucy has self-doubts concerning her identity and her ways of looking. One of the most important encounters with glass in *Villette* occurs in Chapter XVI, “Auld Lang Syne,” when Lucy is rescued by the Brettons after she makes her confession to a Catholic priest and loses consciousness on the street. When she comes to, she tries to recognize where she is. Here what is presented is not a room with actual furniture, but a reflected space: “A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows... In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in a bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It

was obvious... that this was an unknown room in an unknown house” (186). Lucy is lying in an unfamiliar space and confronting an uncanny image of herself. It is notable that throughout the novel, Lucy is frequently presented to the reader as a reflected, mediated image, rather than a direct representation.

In her discussion of Victorian boudoir mirrors, Armstrong refers to a famous design for a mirror, singled out in the Official Catalogue of the Exhibition—“Toilet Glass” for the Duchess of Sutherland. There are two porcelain nymphs, seated on either side of the dark bronze frame, paired with one another and with their reflections, peering inwards at their own reflection. Armstrong indicates that looking in this mirror involves quadruple acts of looking: “Our gaze is mediated by the nymphs, theirs by us, as we intervene between body and reflection... There is a fusion of reflected and reflecting body that produces Grotesque double bodies” (236). Spectators see both the front and back of the nymphs’ bodies; the nymphs are seeing their own reflections, and then spectators see nymphs seeing themselves. The reading experience of the mirror episode in *Villette* is similar to what one experiences in looking at the “Toilet Glass” for the scene presents multiple acts of looking. We see both Lucy and her reflected image; Lucy is looking at herself, and we read/see her looking at herself. The fusion of reflected and reflecting bodies reinforces the sense of the uncanny, especially when the two bodies are not identical. The intensity of meeting a self that is foreign to oneself reveals that a looking glass does not always “mirror” one’s true self, as one believes it does. It is a medium, but it can also be a barrier to Lucy’s work at identity formation or self-recognition. The mirror, which shows an alienated spectral self-image, further unsettles Lucy’s already

unstable identity, creating grotesque experiences.¹⁷

Lucy has a hard time identifying with her own image even when the mirror honestly reflects her appearance. As a young woman, Lucy is not as attractive or feminine as Paulina or her student Ginevra. Lucy is never the focus of a party, nor does she bother to overly groom herself or improve her appearance. Whenever she is in a gathering, she intuitively occupies “a quiet nook, whence unobserved [she] could observe” (142). For Dr. John, who is Lucy’s godmother’s son, Lucy is “a being inoffensive as a shadow” (351). In Chapter XX, “The Concert,” she goes out with her godmother Mrs. Bretton and Dr. John, who stand for middle-class plenitude and decency. Lucy is not conscious of the presence of a great mirror which fills a compartment between two pillars in front of them, and mistakes the images of their party of three for another one approaching from the opposite direction. In that glimpse, she first notices the handsome and fine figures of the Bretton family. Then she finds that the impression of “the third person” is “hardly felt and not fixed” after she realizes that she is actually facing her own reflection, standing next to her godmother and John. She painfully admits that her public image is not pleasant at all: “Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the ‘giftie’ of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse” (234). Lucy is appalled by her unassuming appearance in the mirror at the concert. She tends to see herself as a stranger in the mirror, experiencing a self-split.

Lucy habitually relies on the mirror to explore and confirm her identity. However,

¹⁷ Later in the same chapter, Lucy is looking at the same mirror with a different result. She is compelled to recognize the revenant past in a boudoir mirror, which makes Bretton’s bedroom a dream-like, submarine space of reverie: “Bretton! Bretton! and ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror” (189). Armstrong reads this second mirror episode as “a magical encounter with plenitude and experience remade” (239). In this sense, glass is endowed with a magic power of recalling things past.

her exploration of self-identity in looking at her own reflection is interrupted in Chapter XXIV, “M. De Bassompierre,” when she is invited to Mrs. Bretton’s house in La Terrasse. This time a spectral figure abruptly obstructs her gaze on her own image: “Repairing to my own little sea-green room, there also I found a bright fire, and candles too were lit: a tall waxlight stood on each side the great looking glass; but between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself—an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit” (304). The white spirit blocks and displaces Lucy’s vision. The scene reinforces Lucy’s failure to validate who she is through the aid of glass. Later the readers are informed that this spirit is actually Paulina, the little girl who used to stay in Mrs. Bretton’s house. As a woman, Paulina is everything Lucy is not. She is beautiful, feminine, and attractive. She is also the object of Dr. John’s gaze and love. Visually and symbolically, the process of Lucy’s search for her own identity is constantly interrupted by a more feminine figure. In a sense, the other female characters in *Villette*, such as Paulina, Ginevra, and Mrs. Bretton, function like mirrors. Similar to her previous mirror experiences, the character-as-mirror does not show who Lucy is, but quite the opposite, it reflects what is foreign to her, what she lacks, what she is not. A mirror is supposed to convey a neutral reflection of the looker, but in *Villette*, a mirror often reveals uncanny and confusing experiences.

Windows and Frames: Lucy’s Spectatorship

The space in *Villette* is depicted as an enclosed confinement where surveillance, voyeurism, glimpsing, spying, and counter-spying are ubiquitous. The prevalence of mirrors and windows facilitates these acts of seeing. As a result, gazes in *Villette* are

usually mediated by glass. One representative scene occurs when Dr. John catches Lucy's stare deflected in a mirror: "... and I only recovered wonted consciousness when I saw that his notice was arrested, and that it had caught my movement in a clear little oval mirror fixed in the side of the window recess—by the aid of which reflector Madame often secretly spied persons walking in the garden below" (108). Dr. John asks why Lucy is staring at him. Lucy's status as a secret observer is exposed and threatened. With the aid of a mirror or a window, a spectator can observe without looking at the object of the gaze directly. At the same time, one is also more liable to become the unwitting target of others' observation.

Characters in *Villette* tend to hover at windows, which facilitate their covert gaze. A male teacher at Madame Beck's school, Paul, tells Lucy that he habitually stays at a window overlooking the garden that serves as his covert "post of observation": "That... is a room I have hired, nominally for a study—virtually for a post of observation. There I sit and read for hours together... My book is this garden: its contents are human nature—female human nature. I know you by heart. Ah! I know you well..." (403). Likewise, as the previous quote mentioned, Madame Beck often secretly watches people in the garden below "in a clear little oval mirror fixed in the side of the window recess" (108). Anita Levy discusses the spatial significance of this window recess at the Rue Fossette. While the garden grants Lucy time by herself, the garden can only be seen from a particular household spot, which "weds interior and exterior scenes but only through a stationary, single vantage point" (185). In other words, windows are where the interior and the exterior meet, a point of transition. The recurring depiction of such a vantage point which can peep into every unnoticeable corner illustrates the Victorian spectator's

desire to own an all-seeing, totalizing, Panoptical gaze.

Another function of the window in *Villette* is to frame a view. After the World Exhibition, Victorians develop a different mindset while looking at the images of the world. Living in an empire of images, they are anxious about making sense of what is in front of them. Lucy's spectatorship is characterized by this visual anxiety and a keen desire for a sense of control. The very first sentence Lucy utters in the novel, "Of what are these things the signs and tokens?" foregrounds her eagerness to attempt to decipher what she sees (8). She also recognizes her own desire to unveil the world, to decode the signs, to seek the truth, to make the opaque transparent: "I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth; I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance" (514). At the same time, Lucy expresses anxiety over her dependence on vision: "... I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind" (470).¹⁸ Indeed, it is no exaggeration to claim that the narrative of *Villette* is essentially motivated by this strong desire to look and to make sense of what she sees.

Motivated by this desire, in her visual preoccupation, Lucy tends to "frame" the images she sees. A frame's edge holds the view in place, opens a space between the object of the gaze and the spectator, and creates the possibility for distanced observation.

¹⁸ Jessica Brent rightly relates Brontë's severe myopia to the rejection of the visual that figures in her novel. In an 1844 letter to Constantin Héger, Brontë reveals her worries about the bad influence of her poor eyesight on her ability to write:

I would not experience this lethargy if I could write... but at present my sight is too weak for writing—if I wrote a lot I would become blind. This weakness of sight is a terrible privation for me—without it, do you know what I would do Monsieur?—I would write a book and I would dedicate it to my literature master—to the only master that I have ever had—to you Monsieur. (qtd. in Brent 91)

This letter shows that "Brontë's preoccupation with vision is both prohibitive and facilitating; it prevents narrative and, at the same time, by taking the place of the unwritten novel, gestures toward a passion that cannot be explicitly articulated" (92). Brontë's personal anxiety about her ability to look is reflected in the narrative breakdown in *Villette*, most observable in Lucy's inability to put her vision of Dr. John's real identity into words.

Framing produces a space that is “set off from its surroundings; the observer or audience’s involvement becomes more speculative, set off from reality, perhaps relegated to the imagination” (Piehler 60). The viewing subject has the optical power to mark off the boundaries of the image from the outside. Lucy has a great time enjoying the paintings in the gallery, where she can simply “[i]nk supine into a luxury of calm before ninety-nine out of a hundred of the exhibited frames” (222). The paintings hung in the gallery are meant to be seen; therefore, a gallery is a space where Lucy can temporarily secure and enjoy her position as spectator. What is more intriguing is that even when Lucy is observing the world around her outside the gallery, she still tends to frame what she sees in the real world. When Lucy observes “calmly from the window” Paulina’s last meeting with her father before he embarks on his trip (16), she describes the scene as if it comes with a frame: “It was a *picture*, in its way, to see her, with her tiny stature and trim, neat shape, standing at his knee” (18, italics added). Here the window frame is also the imagined frame of the picture in Lucy’s eyes.

Even when Lucy does not see things from a window, she still forms the habit of framing her vision as if there were a virtual one. While she watches the party-goers, she becomes a non-participating observer: “Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe—the ball, its splendours and its pleasures passed before me *as a spectacle*” (156, italics added). The term “spectacle” suggests that the view is meant for exhibition and thus subject to Lucy’s visual consumption. The frame of these images turns Lucy’s target of vision into an object of art, separated from the viewer’s space, though Lucy is physically present in the same space with these people. Virtual or imaginative framing offers Lucy a comfortable distance from the object of her gaze.

The image in the real world, however, is not a motionless picture. It is mobile, ever-changing, and full of possibilities and uncertainties. In the aforementioned scene, while she tries to approach the “picture” of Paulina and her father, Lucy feels uneasy because she finds no interpretative access to their emotions. She describes that the intensity of this peculiar inexpressiveness makes her hold her breath:

... it was a scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously overflow, only oppressed one the more. On all occasions of vehement, unrestrained expansion, a sense of disdain or ridicule comes to the weary spectator's relief; whereas I have ever felt most burdensome that sort of sensibility which bends of its own will, a giant slave under the sway of good sense... I wished she would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease. (17)

Fortunately, Paulina finally breaks the silence by asking for her father's kiss, and her gesture allows Lucy to maintain her observational position. In this passage, this crisis for Lucy's position as an observer implies that Lucy lacks omniscient control over what she sees. Lucy's tendency to frame the mobile vision is symptomatic of her obsession to control what she sees, and she has to engage in an endless search for a secure point of observation which is frequently interrupted or kept in suspense.

Villette's Park: An Exhibition without Glass

Published in the wake of the Great Exhibition, *Villette* is produced in the milieu of exhibition and commodity culture. The prevalent use of glass introduces a new way to perceive and interpret space and visual images. Perhaps the most compelling literary effect under this influence is that urban images are juxtaposed in a way as if they were exhibitions under glass. Interestingly, just as Lucy forms the habit of “framing” a vision even when she is not looking at a real picture, in Chapter XXXVIII “Cloud,” Lucy tends

to see a scene outside the Crystal Palace *as if* it were exhibited under a pane of glass. The sedative Madame Beck, the proprietress of the school, gives Lucy in order to make her sleep puts her into a curiously energized and hallucinatory state. She embarks on a daring escape to wander alone in a night of fête at Villette's park. The park scene in Lucy's eyes resembles the exotic images in the Crystal Palace:

In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette. (500)

Here we confront a metropolitan festival, a glamour constructed by means of wood, paint, and paste-board. Brontë seems to transpose the image of the World Exhibition to the phantasmagoric scene in Villette's park. Armstrong gives an insightful interpretation of this scene: "What Charlotte Brontë does here is to produce the Exhibition without the mediation of glass, she quotes it rather than literalizing its presence; here is not the actual spectacle behind glass as much as its epiphenomena—images of exotic display" (241). Brontë refers to glass when she describes the stone basin Lucy sees, beside which she habitually stands in the park: "Amidst the glare, and hurry, and throng, and noise, I still secretly and chiefly longed to come on that circular mirror of crystal, and surprise the moon glassing therein her pearly front" (501). Under the effect of the drug, Lucy refers to the water in the basin as "rippled glass" (501-502). Brontë does not copy the conservatory made of glass that she sees in London, but represents the essence of the display without the mediation of glass. Glass disappears in Villette's park, but it makes its reappearance elsewhere throughout the novel.

Armstrong does not further discuss why Brontë stages this exhibition without glass,

but it is important to examine what effect this representation gives rise to. In Villette's park, Brontë illustrates a crystal world with dream-like qualities, which make people easily mix reality with reverie or hallucination. Brontë suggests that visual consumption makes one vulnerable to losing oneself, as if one were drugged. Brontë notices that the introduction of glass to the visual domain complicates and influences the contemporary ways of seeing and one's relation with materials and images. To dramatize and highlight this phenomenon, in her narrative Brontë erases the appearance of glass but still makes one "see" its effect.

Moreover, in Lucy's urban adventure, there is still a vivid sense of anxiety about the personal visibility. First, Lucy as a young female spectator obtains her sense of security by staying with the crowd. She finds herself "plunged amidst a gay, living, joyous crowd" (499). After all, a woman wandering alone without a chaperon at night is not common or safe at that time. Furthermore, the security of staying with the crowd anonymously empowers Lucy's gaze and makes her want to embrace the scenes she sees: "I fancied I should like to try, and once within, at this hour the whole park would be mine—the moonlight, midnight park!" (497). As we have seen, her desire is to capture the scenes of life that perplex her through the safe, distanced, and totalizing gaze. Nevertheless, even though the park is a public place in the city of Villette, it is shown as an enclosed space, the park gates shut: "the place cannot be entered" (497). The space of the festival park is separated to "confines" and "narrow irregular aperture" (497). Once Lucy tells the readers that her position is "on the farthest confines," where she can hear well but see little (502). This visual anxiety is soon dismissed after a gentleman recognizes Lucy and offers her a seat with a better view, but we can confirm that among other senses, Lucy

always values and worries about her vision most. The enclosure of the park represents the object of view's resistance to her attempts at an all-encompassing vision.

Villette presents a world that is at the same time fascinated and disturbed by a world of glass. Rather than a reliable medium to reflect one's image, the mirror draws Lucy closer as a potential site for identity formation but makes it difficult for her to identify with her own image. The spectators are attracted to the window side because windows and their frames facilitate one's gaze, but this framing is not unproblematic. Lucy's gaze is mediated through, constructed by, and deeply embedded in the culture of glass, as most evidenced in her vision of the park scene as an extended view from the World Exhibitions without a real pane of glass. Through her socially and spatially marginalized governess's life and vision, Brontë characterizes the worries and anxieties that the urban dwellers experience in the new social milieu created by glass.

II. Mirroring Desire: Window Displays in *The Lady's Paradise*, *Sister Carrie*, and *Princess Casamassima*

More than just a place for shopping, the department store is the emblem of middle-class visual culture, capital consumerism, urban experiences, and class/gender relations. It soon becomes a quintessential setting and element in many urban novels. In this section, I focus on the following three novels: Émile Zola's *The Lady's Paradise* (1883), Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), and Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). The eleventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, *The Lady's Paradise*, tells the story of a twenty-year-old girl, Denise, who comes from the country to Paris to work at the department store The Lady's Paradise as a shop-girl. Denise's story plays out against the narrative of the department store's owner, Octave Mouret, who successfully manipulates female desire by attracting the would-be shoppers to dazzling window displays. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is also about a young country girl looking for a job in the big city. Carrie Meeber, who takes the train to Chicago to realize her American Dream, finds it tough to make a living. We see how Carrie rises from a low-paid wage earner, to a mistress of her suitors, and finally to a famous actress in New York. Finally, James's *The Princess Casamassima*, published in 1886, tells the story of an intelligent young London bookbinder, Hyacinth Robinson, who is involved in radical politics and an assassination plot. The socio-political background is the revolutionary working-class movements of 1880 London, but my discussion focuses on Hyacinth's lively childhood playmate, Millicent Henning, a shop-girl who begins to gain more access to the public sphere in late-Victorian London.

While I am aware of the different cultural-historical contexts in which these works

were produced, I found that no matter in which cities the department store in the novel is located (Paris, Chicago, or London), rather than just a surface or a building material, glass invariably plays an active role, as if it is a character itself, shaping the urban dwellers' imagination of themselves in relation to the city, materials, and crowds around them. I argue that the mirror or the window in these texts functions as a critical site where the character's identity is contested and her desire is constituted. By openly courting the strollers' gaze, the shopping window not only responds to their visual and material desires, but also creates new desires they did not know they had until their encounters with glass. In the following section, I analyze how glass actively functions in the convoluted mechanism of desire, the mirror-like nature of shopping windows, and its production of ambiguous space in the department store.

Glass and Desire in Window Shopping

Glass not only reflects the viewer's desires, but also produces new desires in the viewing subject. A shop window first seduces the strollers' gaze, and entices them to undergo a convoluted process of reflecting, sustaining, arousing, and creating their visual, material, and even erotic desires. The utilization of newly available steel and plate glass techniques as well as artificial lighting transforms merchandise into a spectacle. The frame presents the commodities behind panes of glass in an exhibitiv style, as if it was a work of art meant to be looked at, ready to be visually consumed.

This unique aura the commodities obtain after being placed behind a shop window is what makes Zola's eponymous department store, *The Lady's Paradise*, such an efficient commercial machine. While the owner Mouret successfully utilizes several modern

marketing techniques (including drastic reductions on select items, the promise of immediate refunds, and re-organization of the layout of the store in order to disorient and entice his customers), it is the artistry of Mouret's displays that makes the customers vulnerable to the temptations of alluring goods. The de-familiarization and conglomeration of everyday feminine objects invest them with ideological values, compelling the customers to go inside and purchase them.

The following passage vividly illustrates the auratic and uncanny power of The Lady's Paradise's dazzling window display to animate store dummies:

Denise felt that she was watching a machine working at high pressure; its dynamism seemed to reach to the display windows themselves.... Now they seemed to be warm and vibrating with the activity within. A crowd was looking at them, a real mob, made brutal by covetousness. And these passions in the street were giving life to the materials: the laces shivered, then drooped again, concealing the depths of the shop with an exciting air of mystery; even the lengths of cloth, thick and square, were breathing, exuding a tempting odour, while the overcoats were throwing back their shoulders still more on the dummies, which were acquiring souls, and the huge velvet coat was billowing out, supple and warm, as if on shoulders of flesh and blood, with a heaving breast and quivering hips. (16)

As a mixture of art, fashion, design, and marketing, Mouret's window display presents a good for sale as something more than a good. It magically gives life to the inorganic. The relation between the spectator and the spectacle is interestingly depicted as reciprocal. The desire planted in the overwhelmed crowd miraculously gives life to the mannequins behind glass, as if this "real mob" is unwittingly complicit and reflective in a process of nourishing and sustaining their newborn desires.

Thus, it is a curious and complex feedback loop in which both the source and the target of the "dynamism" of The Lady's Paradise are "Woman." With the mastery of window art, Mouret conquers Woman's heart and orchestrates her desires:

It was Woman the shops were competing for so fiercely, it was Woman they were

continually snaring with their bargains, after dazing her with their displays. *They had awoken new desires in her weak flesh*; they were an immense temptation to which she inevitably yielded, succumbing in the first place to purchases for the house, then seduced by coquetry, finally consumed by desire. (76, italics added)

Woman consumes the commodities, and at the same time the new desire also consumes her. It is also intriguing that, in these shopping scenes, Zola tends to use words which feminize the commodity and place the woman in the masculine position. The verbs “snaring,” “yielding,” “succumbing,” all sound traditionally feminine, especially with the signal “weak flesh.” Moreover, the expression that being “seduced by coquetry” turns this scene into the kind of temptation and trap that men are vulnerable to fall into—feminine seduction. These scenes in which the female shoppers are “consumed by desire” implicate a masculine lust and involve an active gaze on a passive object (which is usually the power relation of the male gaze). This strange mix of female/male erotic language makes for an interesting and queer erotics, all mixed up with reflections and glass. This scene shows the complication of the narcissistic/same-sex nature of desire in female shopping.

So how does the window display produce the new desire in this way? The key is glass. While visually the transparent glass promises the accessibility of the commodities on display, its materiality makes it a barrier, maintaining a distance between spectator and spectacle. This ambiguous quality makes the spectacle of commodities a powerful merging of distance and desire. The products behind glass, as Rachel Bowlby argues, become unreal in that these images are set apart from mundane life, but at the same time they appear real in the sense that they are available to be bought and taken home as long as one pays the stipulated price (Bowlby 2). The pane of glass makes one feel the distance, making the product look distant enough to seduce buyers, but the distance is

balanced with the sense that it can be reached for a certain price. It is precisely this distance between the seducer and the seduced, the possessed and the potential possessor, that gives rise to the mysterious aura of the goods, nourishes and sustains the new desire the customer did not know until this moment, face to face with show windows.

The convoluted mechanism of desire also involves a dialectic of mirrors and windows. It is noteworthy that the mirror is a multi-layering trope in the relation between people as well as between consumers and materials: commodities mirror commodities, women mirror women, and women mirror commodities. In other words, the capitalist consumerism is constructed by a series of mirroring relations. The value of a material in a capital society is not determined by its use value, but by its exchange value; that is, how much they are worth compared to another commodity. According to Marx, commodities define themselves based on their mirror images reflected in other commodities. The mirroring relation between women in a shopping environment is represented in many episodes in *The Lady's Paradise* in which a shop-girl serves as a mannequin, displaying the clothes or jewelry for the potential female shoppers. On those occasions, the shop-girl's body is used for display, as if she were a mirror to further sustain the female customer's desire to buy the commodity.

What is even more intriguing is the mirroring nature of the shop window itself. What the window display sells is not merely commodities; rather, it sells a dream, a fantasy, an imaginable and seemingly accessible better self, represented by the mirror image one recognizes while fixing one's gaze on shop windows. These show windows are said to have "educated" the public taste of female shoppers, shaping their imagination, showing them what they can desire, and what items they need to picture a better future. Dorothy Davis notes that "The sight of all sorts of other items, ornaments, pictures,

mirrors, aspidistras, would suggest ideas they had never thought of, tempt them to a diversity of semi-luxuries, educate them in the pleasantest manner imaginable into wanting a higher standard of living” (29). In a sense, the shop window plays a fundamental and influential role in constituting their taste and identity, telling consumers what to desire.

A woman in front of a show window is comparable to a woman in front of a mirror. Rachel Bowlby describes the experience of window shopping as sensual and narcissistic: “women and commodities flaunt their images at one another in an amorous regard which both extends and reinforces the classical picture of the young girl gazing into the mirror in love with herself” (32). Consumer culture, in this sense, transforms the narcissistic mirror into a shop window, “the glass which reflects an idealized image of the woman (or man) who stands before it, in the form of the model she could buy or become. Through the glass, woman sees what she wants and what she wants to be” (Bowlby 32). It would be more accurate to say that by window shopping, a woman is shown what she wants and what she lacks in this moment, and then recognizes the fulfillment of those lacks in the ideal image on the other side. This (mis-)recognition of the difference between one’s original self on one side and the idealized self on the other side behind a pane of glass invents a new desire. It is notable that the window shopper’s viewing experience is unlike that of Narcissus’s because the model in the window is both real and other, both original self and altered self. The previously presumed distinctions between reality and illusion, fact and fantasy, genuine and fake images of self, therefore, are temporarily dissolved. Moreover, this experience does not merely involve self-love; rather, it is usually a bittersweet experience. After all, not every window shopper can afford what they desire.

The window display, therefore, involves a superimposition or overlapping of one’s

improved image onto the real one. The mechanism of desire is made more complicated because this process of distancing involves a kind of self-alienation. As Peter Brooks argues,

While this might seem to suggest a primal narcissism of women, or an invitation to them to possess their own bodies, there is rather an alienation of women from their bodies, which have been taken over by the (male-owned and –managed) market economy, defined and fetishized by that economy, and offered back to women in piecemeal form, through the cash nexus. (154)

In short, female bodies are commodified and fetishized, not unlike the products for sale. Ironically, the alienation of the female body is performed for the purposes of manipulation: to provoke her to buy more. Using a calculated entrepreneurial scheme, it is designed to mesmerize their minds, alienate their bodies from themselves. Moreover, it is an interesting contrast that in this dynamism the dummy is brought to life, whereas the real human body is objectified. The window display of the department store convolutedly triggers a dynamic mechanism of seduction, which involves the reflection, superimposition, self-alienation, fetishization, objectification, and commodification of female bodies, and thereby uncannily produces a never-ending loop of idealization, desire, and dissatisfaction.

Women and the Department Store in *The Lady's Paradise*

The dominant image of the female customer in a department store is a group of crazy shoppers unable to resist the seduction of the display and squandering money with abandon (Parsons 45). Indeed, in *The Lady's Paradise*, Zola's crowd in front of the window display is depicted as "a real mob, made brutal by covetousness" (16), and a typical scene that describes the crazy shoppers is as follows: "There was the continuous roar of the machine at work, of customers crowding into the departments, dazzled by the

merchandise, then propelled towards the cash-desk” (16).¹⁹

It is unfair, however, to ignore the different temperaments and attitudes the female urban dwellers have and just reduce them to a “mob.” In fact, Zola makes an acute observation about the different types of Mouret’s female customers as follows:

Madame Marty, carried away by her mania for spending, taking everything indiscriminately from the Ladies’ Paradise, simply buying at random from the displays; Madame Guibal, walking round the shop for hours without ever making a purchase, happy and satisfied by merely feasting her eyes; Madame de Boves, short of money, constantly tortured by some immoderate desire, bearing a grudge against the goods she could not take away; Madame Bourdelais, with the sharp eyes of a careful, practical middle-class woman, making straight for the bargains, using the big shops with such calm housewifely skill that she saved a great deal of money there; and finally Henriette, who, because she dressed with such extreme elegance, only bought certain articles there, such as gloves, hosiery, and all her household linen. (79)

Madame Marty seems to match the typical image of a crazy shopper who cannot differentiate her needs from wants, becoming an uncritical recipient of signs and messages that urge her to make unnecessary purchases. Both Madame Marty and Madame de Boves are portrayed as victims of commercial advertisements. While the former cannot resist her impulse to buy things she does not need, spending pennies from her husband’s meager salary, the latter is cruelly forced to realize the gap between browsing and buying. Madame Bourdelais seems to be a wise consumer, who is capable of domesticating the department store, acting and bargaining in a “housewifely” way. Henriette is a more sensible and calm customer who consumes selectively. They are equipped with the ability to accept, modify, and re-constitute the constantly changing

¹⁹ However, in *The Lady’s Paradise*, while being enraptured by the commodities on display, becoming “aggressive,” and showing “no civility to each other,” the female customers are acquiring a (false) sense of privilege as if they were conquering new territory: “In this final hour, in the midst of the overheated air, the women reigned supreme. They had taken the shop by storm, camping in it as in conquered territory, like an invading horde which had settled among the devastation of the goods. The salesmen, deafened and exhausted, had become their slaves, whom they treated with sovereign tyranny” (265). Mouret’s trick works precisely because he makes the female customers blind to their loss of self-control but rather feel that they are being treated like royalty, enjoying a life of luxury.

styles and appearances of the spectacle. Among these different types, Madame Guibal, as a devoted spectator of commodity culture seems to have the potential to be a *flâneuse*, who feels content to window shop, “merely feasting her eyes.” She reminds us of Virginia Woolf’s female window shopper who enjoys a feast of visual spectacles halfway across London for hours upon hours with the excuse of buying a pencil in “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” (1927). Zola’s categorization of different types of female shoppers re-affirms that *The Lady’s Paradise* will be truly a “paradise” for the “lady” with some money, good taste, and a sense of fashion. The poor and the lower-class customers, however, will not fit into this world of ever-changing and dazzling display.

Deborah L. Parsons indicates that Zola’s illustration of the shopping crowd in Paris frequently shifts: from the support of “those who recognize the progress of modernity and can adapt to it” to “nostalgic sympathy for the values of those who cannot,” and then “voyeuristic delight yet moral outrage at the unleashing of fanatical female desire” (48). Rita Felski shares a similar view, arguing that one can observe the opposition between celebration and pathologization of consumption in *The Lady’s Paradise*. This opposition is gendered: Mouret is characterized “as an admirable and rational ideal, an embodiment of the awesome, unstoppable progress unleashed by capitalist development,” and while the female customers’ compulsion to consume is equally powerful, they are represented as “the regressive dimension of modernity as exemplified in its unleashing of an infantile irrationalism of unchecked desire,” rather than a symbol of progress (69).

In this context, the heroine in *The Lady’s Paradise* seems to be unique. Though at first she too is transfixed by the dazzling window display of Mouret’s department store, Denise is not a respectable married woman (a real consumer, a woman who buys), nor is

she a prostitute or a mistress (a female body for sale, a woman who is bought). As a poor shop-girl, Denise's body cannot avoid being utilized to display new clothes for middle-class customers. Even though Denise reluctantly lends her body to model for her customers, making her body mannequin-like, this masquerade produces a sort of class confusion, in which a working class female body wears borrowed clothes to sustain and mirror the idealized image of a middle-class woman. Her body is used to display commodities without a pane of glass in front of her, but still serves as a mirror that reflects her customers' desire and fascination with the commodities.

In the end, Denise is the only woman who successfully resists the seduction of commodities, refuses the commodification of her body, and eventually wins Mouret's heart, marrying him, and securing a stable position in this giant commercial machine in Paris. This happy ending is a rose-colored fable of the domestication of the masculine-dominated economy, a transcendence over the allure of the commodity, or a triumph of femininity. While Mouret's ultimate ambition is to conquer Woman, he is eventually conquered by one woman—Denise.

Mirrors and Windows in *Sister Carrie*

Both Denise in *The Lady's Paradise* and the heroine in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* are small-town girls who move to the big city to seek a more promising job and life. As soon as Carrie arrives in Chicago, she finds herself, like Denise, transfixed by endlessly dazzling spectacles of commodities behind a pane of glass. Window displays form Carrie's first impression of the new city's plentitude and abundance: "She realised in a dim way how much the city held—wealth, fashion, ease—every adornment for women,

and she longed for dress and beauty with a whole heart” (22). With the new desire created in her, she cannot resist imagining how beautiful she would look in the clothes and jewelry on display: “Her woman’s heart was warm with desire for them. How would she look in this, how charming that would make her!”(67). The department store in Chicago showers the country girl with “the remarkable displays of trinkets, dress goods, stationery, and jewelry” when she walks by the window: “[t]here was nothing there which she could not have used—nothing which she did not long to own... [A]ll touched her with individual desire” (21). The window display not only courts Carrie’s gaze, it also “touches” her, which reminds us of the sensuous implication of the French term “*lèche-vitrines*” (licking windows) for “window shopping.” However, Carrie’s first encounter with glass not merely arouses new desire; it also makes her painfully aware that these ideal images produced by glass are not within her reach: “she felt keenly the fact that not any of these things were in the range of her purchase,” because at that time she is nothing but a job-seeker (21). The lack of desired clothing is equal to the lack of a desired self. Window shopping engenders unfulfilled wishes and desires.

So how does a young girl who cannot afford the goods on display make her way in this world of seduction and intoxication? As Dreiser boldly points out in the beginning of this novel, a young girl like Carrie needs either a job to support herself or a man to patronize her: “Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse” (1). As the story unfolds, Carrie tries both methods. She meets two men to support her financially, and later earns a living and supports herself. Carrie is hesitant to accept financial support from her first suitor, Drouet. Dreiser gives a vivid description of Carrie’s shifting

thoughts as to whether she should use the money Drouet gives her. Holding twenty dollars in her hand in a department store, Carrie is tantalized by the thought making those beautiful items her own, but her conscience holds her back. When Carrie passes a long window display in the Fair, she notes that: "...there is nothing in this world more delightful than that middle state in which we mentally balance at times, possessed of the means, lured by desire, and yet deterred by conscience or want of decision. When Carrie began wandering around the store amid the fine displays she was in this mood" (67). Carrie oscillates between unfulfilled desire and possible satisfaction as a shopper and spectator surrounded by the irresistible displays of goods. Carrie in this scene learns the importance of money, and gives in to its power and charm: "Ah, money, money, money! What a thing it was to have" (66). When Drouet persuades her to make use of his money in a department store, she tries on a new jacket and observes herself in a mirror with pleasure: "Carrie turned before the glass. She could not help feeling pleased as she looked at herself" (70). This is an entirely different experience than her previous miserable "window shopping," because this time Carrie has the money to turn her virtual and imagined mirror image (reflected in the show window) into a real mirror image (the mirror inside the department store).

A woman's mirror image is significant in terms of her self-identification and negotiation of her space in a patriarchal society. After Carrie is persuaded by Drouet to use his money to get new clothes, she contemplates her choice to be his mistress, while standing alone, staring at her own mirror image. At this moment she experiences a self-split in her mirror image: "She looked into her glass and saw a prettier Carrie than she had seen before; she looked into her mind, a mirror prepared of her own and the

world's opinions, and saw a worse. Between these two images she wavered, hesitating which to believe" (91-92). In this episode, glass not merely reflects, but also "speaks." She then hears a voice that represents her conscience, with which she "argued, pleaded, excused" (92). This scene delineates a significant discrepancy between what one sees and what one feels in Carrie's own gaze reflected in glass. Even though the woman in the mirror is dressed luxuriously, at this moment, the real Carrie cannot identify her inner self with this idealized image of herself. Her mental mirror "represented the world, her past, environment, habit, convention, in a confused way" (92). Carrie feels a sense of conflict about her shameful status as a mistress, exchanging herself for money, shelter, decent meals, and luxuries. Her acceptance of Drouet's money means that her body is commodified. Caren J. Town rightly argues that in order to become a subject in a world of commodities, Carrie "abandon[s] herself to her mirror image, by making appearance pay, and perhaps she sacrifices some personal happiness in the bargain" (51). Indeed, *Sister Carrie* is a story of a girl who abandons her former self to embrace her mirror image. Drouet wins Carrie's heart by bringing her to the dazzling display, indulging her with women's apparel. This romance is essentially mediated by materials, manipulated through spectacles and glass.

In the novel, Chicago is depicted as a city of glass. Plate-glass walls were one of the distinguishing features of the Chicago School of Architecture at the turn of the century, responsible for rebuilding the commercial district after the great fire of 1871. A glass building is a symbol of progressive modernity. Early in the novel, Dreiser describes one such glass building in Chicago:

It gave an imposing appearance to most of the wholesale houses, whose offices were upon the ground floor and in plain view of the street. The large plates of window

glass, now so common, were then rapidly coming into use, and gave to the ground floor offices a distinguished and prosperous look. The casual wanderer could see as he passed a polished array of office fixtures, much frosted glass, clerks hard at work, and genteel business men in “nobby” suits and clean linen lounging about or sitting in groups. (15)

Not only the commercial buildings, but also the transparent walls of office buildings transform streets into an arena for self-display, challenging the separation of public and private spheres. The show windows in department stores sell, but in *Sister Carrie*, other windows also sell. At her job hunt at the beginning of the novel, Carrie feels confident that her new firm is a good institution simply because its “windows were of huge plate glass” (27). Here what the ceiling-to-floor windows sell, to be sure, is not the luxury item, but the dream of prosperity. However, the windows produce different impressions on spectators of different classes and financial backgrounds: “The entire metropolitan center possessed a high and mighty air calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant, and to make the gulf between poverty and success seem both wide and deep” (16).

Carrie frequently occupies a rocking chair by her window, dreaming and watching the streets. Her state of mind parallels the different scenes outside the window. Carrie’s image of Chicago and New York is also framed by the display behind a pane of glass, which produces and sustains her desire to chase wealth and beauty. While Drouet is talking her into staying in his apartment (with the implication of being his mistress): “Carrie looked out through the window into the busy street. There it was, the admirable, great city, so fine when you are not poor. An elegant coach, with a prancing pair of bays, passed by, carrying in its upholstered depths a young lady” (69). Carrie sustains her image of a better life in the future, though in conflict with her own conscience, through the promising view of the street from the window. Not only is this vision of her better

future constituted by endless images of plenitude and abundance, her ultimate goal in the big city is, in a sense, to make herself part of the commodities and spectacles bedecking the street.

This commodification of the body culminates with her walk to parade herself with her upper-class friend, Mrs. Vance, on Broadway in New York, where both women and men in the daintiest and most fashionable of outfits display themselves as if they were walking mannequins behind commercial windows:

The walk down Broadway, then as now, was one of the remarkable features of the city. There gathered, before the maitinee and afterward, not only all the pretty women who love a showy parade, but the men who love to gaze upon and admire them.... Women appeared in their very best hats, shoes, and gloves, and walked arm in arm on their way to the fine shops or theatres strung along from Fourteenth to Thirty-fourth streets. Equally the men paraded with the very latest they could afford. (297-98)

The beautiful crowd engages in the walking and watching with a perfect sense of street fashion and self-display, for they are not just passing to a theatre show; rather, they show up there for the same reason as Carrie, “purposely to see and be seen, to create a stir with her beauty and dispel any tendency to fall short in dressiness by contrasting herself with the beauty and fashion of the town” (298). Carrie soon realizes that the street on which she is walking is not just a common pavement for pedestrians; instead, it is a space for displays and spectacles, a fact that is highlighted by the parallel shopping windows on both sides: “she was in fashion’s crowd, on parade in a show place—and such a show place! Jeweler’s windows gleamed along the path with remarkable frequency. Florist shops, furriers, haberdashers, confectioners—all followed in rapid succession” (299).

The smartly-dressed women have a similar influence on Carrie as the dummies behind shop windows in the department store, for both bring Carrie to realize what she

lacks and broaden her horizons by showing her what could be achieved if she could afford more. Carrie's state of mind on this show parade is similar to that of her first experience of the department store—painfully acknowledging her lack and awakening her need and desire for better apparel: "Carrie had gotten herself up charmingly enough, but this woman pained her with contrast... Carrie felt that she needed more and better clothes to compare with this woman, and that any one looking at the two would pick Mrs. Vance for her raiment alone" (297). At her first sight of the window display in Chicago, Carrie understands that she cannot afford anything she sees, signaling that she does not belong to the world of spectacles and commodities. Here, in New York, she has a similar frame of mind: "The whole street bore the flavor of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it" (299). Nevertheless, this sight of "living dummies" invariably arouses her new desire and plants a seed in her mind which probably motivates her to her path of fame and wealth, as we see in the second half the novel: "at the same time she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal" (299). In the end, this strong desire for self-display and commodification is consummated and fully epitomized in Carrie's poster as a leading actress on the street in New York.

A character's relation to the window in *Sister Carrie* frequently reflects one's social status. While dining out, Drouet consciously prefers a table close to a window, "where the busy rout of the street could be seen," because he "loved the changing panorama of the street—to see and be seen as he dined" (57). While the city invites people to see what is behind a window, it also mercilessly shunts them back into its busy streets. This is best observed in Carrie's second lover, Hurstwood, and his life of degeneration in the second half of the novel. Hurstwood first realizes that the scales have tilted against him when he

hesitates before a shop window, reluctant to enter because he knows he can no longer afford the displayed items.

There is an interesting parallel between Carrie and Hurstwood in terms of class and their relation with the window. Carrie, as a character on the rise, is always attracted to the window, either looking in or looking out. She frequently stays in front of a window, as if she attempts to both see more things and gain more visibility (which she does achieve in the end by rising to become a successful actress in New York). What Carrie sees in a window also parallels her social and financial status at each stage. Hana Wirth-Nesher indicates that Carrie's view from the window "reflects her privilege and shelter, for with wealth comes height and distance from the street" (75). In contrast, Hurstwood, as a degenerating character, tends to seek invisibility and avoids windows as much as possible.

Hurstwood seems to embody the same position as both the narrator and the poor, separated by a pane of glass in Baudelaire's "The Eyes of the Poor" (1869). When he is first introduced to the readers, Hurstwood is like the gentleman who proudly brings his lover to dine in a fancy restaurant, enjoying his meal as well as the spectacle formed by the cityscape and the urban crowd behind the window (at this moment, the diners inside are also commodified as part of display as an advertisement for the restaurant), but as he gradually falls for Carrie and falls into bankruptcy, he ends up with the poor on the street, on the other side of the window. Dreiser thus dramatizes Hurstwood's feeling of exclusion in front of a window just before he commits suicide. He peers in "the windows of an imposing restaurant... and through the large, plate windows of which could be seen the red and gold decorations, the palms, the white napery, the shining glassware, and

above all, the comfortable crowd” (477). In this sense, window functions as an invisible wall, literally and symbolically, dividing social classes. This idea is emphasized as Hurstwood gloomily contemplates his degeneration: “He began to see as one sees a city with a wall about it. Men were posted at the gates. You could not get in. Those inside did not care to come out to see who you were. They were so merry inside there that all those outside were forgotten, and he was on the outside” (317).

The novel *Sister Carrie*, then, both begins and ends with a scene of glass. In the beginning Carrie marvels at the window display, and in the end, when Dreiser sympathetically remarks that Carrie is an emblematic character of “blind striving of the human heart!” (486) The author makes his final judgment of the heroine, and pictures Carrie once again as a woman occupied with her dreaming and looking out the window from her rocking chair. The small-town-girl-turned-celebrity who seems to have it all now looks out at the city that is at her feet but does not fulfill her: “In your rocking chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In our rocking chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel” (487). The cityscapes in Chicago and New York under Dreiser’s pen are composed of copious sites of identificatory mirrorings, from the display windows of department stores in which one’s own reflection is superimposed on those of the mannequins to the fancy restaurants like Sherry’s, where “in every direction were mirrors—tall, brilliant, bevel-edged mirrors—reflecting and re-reflecting forms, faces, and candelabra a score and a hundred times” (309). Carrie’s fascination with window scenes and window displays determines and transforms her understanding of her own identity and her place in the consumer society, and finally leads to the commodification of her own body.

The Shop-girl in *Princess Casamassima*

Millicent Henning, the childhood friend of the protagonist Hyacinth Robinson in Henry James's *Princess Casamassima*, is portrayed as a woman who is bright and confident in her ambitions, with a shrewd knowledge of the working of the city, "perfectly acquainted with the resources of the capital" (59). She has the gift not only to fit into, but also to benefit from urban life:

She was, to her blunt, expanded fingertips, a daughter of London, of the crowded streets and hustling traffic of the great city; she had drawn her health and strength from its dingy courts and foggy thoroughfares, and peopled its parks and squares and crescents with her ambitions; she understood it by instinct and loved it with passion; she represented its immense vulgarities and curiosities, its brutality and its knowingness, its good-nature and its impudence. (61)

Like Carrie, Millicent has a passion for window shopping. She will not give up "any tolerable pretext for wandering through the streets of London and gazing into shop-windows" (65-66).

Walking around the street without a specific aim used to be a privilege enjoyed exclusively by male. A female figure in public inevitably faced doubts about her sexual integrity. In the past the female streetwalker was a synonym for prostitutes. Women were discouraged from walking around the city without a chaperon. Dreiser's heroine Carrie, for example, in her short journey to take a walk alone in Chicago in 1889, is soon interrupted by the advances of a man who has likely mistaken her for a prostitute on the street (53). However, how people think about gender and space is challenged after the emergence of the department store, in which the prevalent use of glass produces a more ambiguous space.

A shop-girl is one of the significant new urban types created by the culture of the

department store. As a reviewer Lady Mary Jeune writes in 1895: “Although women had worked in shops for many decades, if not centuries, preceding the late Victorian period, often helping out in family businesses, the widespread employment of young, single, self-supporting women in the new department stores was a recent innovation on both sides of the Atlantic” (*Fortnightly Review*, qtd. in Mullin 200). The shop-girl was one of those “new social actors” thronging both the late-nineteenth-century metropolis and its fictions (Walkowitz 71). The army of shop-girls, with their newly-gained freedom and the opportunity to work and live in the public shopping environment, threatens to disrupt the Victorian structure of gender primarily due to their ambiguous role and status in commodity culture.

The discourse of modernity tends to identify shop-girls with prostitutes because of their visual appeal. A shop-girl is often hired for her good looks, and is expected to adorn department store counters and model goods for sale. In James Jacques Tissot’s 1883 painting *La Demoiselle de Magasin*, for example, the shop-girls behind show windows mirror the two mannequins on display. The painting shows a male spectator who gazes from the other side of the window. The male gaze is more likely fixed on the shop-girl’s body than the headless dummy. There is a curious tension between the refinement of the goods on display and the questionable respectability of the working girl that inevitably taints the allure of female bodies alongside the goods they sell. The heaps of pink ribbon on the counter suggest a boudoir disrobing, making public a private scene, with erotic implication.

The male gaze on the shop-girl’s commodified body is a popular motif in the narrative of urban modernity. It makes explicit that the shopping scene, which frames the

shop-girl, is often gendered and eroticized, but this is only one way to interpret the story. As Parsons and other critics indicate, these discourses are problematic and partial because the narrator's point of view is usually masculine.²⁰ Not every shop-girl, however, is a passive prey to male gaze without any agency. James's Millicent in *Princess Casamassima* would be a good example.

Millicent's job and life are both closely embedded in Victorian consumer and visual culture. She is a shop-girl who "had a high position at a great haberdasher's in the neighborhood of Buckingham Palace; she was in the department for jackets and mantles" (66). Millicent is well aware of the fact that she is hired thanks to her good looks: "...she was used to that sort of surprised admiration, being perfectly conscious she was a magnificent young woman" (59), and she is an expert in showing and selling the clothes to the customers, seemingly adept at manipulating customers' desire: "she put on all these articles to show them off to the customers, and on her person they appeared to such advantage that nothing she took up ever failed to go off" (66). Her body is used as a living dummy to sell the product, a mirror to reflect the would-be shoppers' ideal image if they make the purchase. James makes a clear transition from the dummy in the window display to Millicent-the-shop-girl's body:

... *she* wore mantles and jackets and shawls and the long trains of robes exhibited behind plate glass on dummies of wire and drawn forth to be transferred to her own undulating person, and had never a scrap to do with making them up, but just with talking about them and showing them off, and persuading people... of their beauty and cheapness. (341, italics original)

This passage reminds us of the mirroring between the dead dummy and the shop-girl in

²⁰ Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, and other critics have tackled the issue of why a *flâneuse* is (im)possible in the discourse of urban modernity. Though there are disagreements as to what extent a new urban milieu in the nineteenth century allowed women freedom of movement, they all acknowledge that the new shopping experiences and shopping environments, in many aspects, redefine the relation between the public and women, space and body.

Tissot's *La Demoiselle de Magasin*. The uncanny transformation of the dummy to shop-girl-as-model suggests the process of objectification or commodification of Millicent's body that we expect. However, throughout the novel, Millicent is not described as a victim vulnerable to the overwhelming phantasmagoria of commodities and spectacles; rather, she seems to know what she is doing and views her displayed body as a site for urban negotiation in a patriarchal society. Millicent refuses to be a passive dummy whose body is commodified and consumed visually, like the vulnerable Denise who is forced to model for customers.

Millicent's non-passive status as an urban woman is also represented in her ability to look. Millicent acquires the skill to judge people at a glance, exemplified in her assessment of the occupants of the boxes and stalls:

She had the pretension of knowing who every one was; not individually and by name, but as regards their exact social station, the quarter of London in which they lived, and the amount of money they were prepared to spend in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace. She had seen the whole town pass through her establishment there. (189)

She develops a "free off-hand cynicism" which "gathered during her career as a shop-girl." It is a must-have skill for a shop-girl to differentiate people, and this ability helps Millicent to secure herself a space in the public. Dreiser's Carrie also forms a tendency to judge a book by its cover—she believes that people *are* what they wear. Carrie first deduces that Drouet, one of her pursuers, comes from a better social class by observing his clothes, and she tends to equate clothes and morality, assuming that finer clothes make for a finer man. Similarly, she assumes that her second lover, Hurstwood, belongs to a higher social status than Drouet by observing the high quality of his outfits. It turns out that people, like commodities, are defined by the label and the price of what

they wear.

Still, as a shop-girl in turn-of-the-century London, Millicent is not immune to being the object of a desiring gaze. For example, she has a nebulous relationship with Captain Sholto who intends to buy a pocket-handkerchief in her workplace. As an excellent shop-girl, however, Millicent develops the skill of observational expertise, and the talent or the courage to return the challenging scrutiny in public. While she notices that she is the object of Sholto's gaze, she is not panicked or afraid. On the contrary, she confidently returns the look and challenges his gaze: "Well, I can stare as well as him." She "sustained his glance with composure," and "performed with deliberation the ceremony of taking his measure" (78-79). Millicent's ability to observe people around her and her insubordination to the male gaze establish her as a female character in public who has her way in a male-dominated culture and society.

All three of these heroines negotiate a space of their own in a city in which their desire is frequently mediated through glass. Among them, Denise seems to be most immune to the allure of commodities (especially in comparison to the army of female shoppers who are overwhelmed by the phantasmagoria of *The Lady's Paradise*), and she ends up the co-owner of a department store. She (almost miraculously) domesticates Mouret as well as his great machine of commerce. Carrie, on the other hand, is the one whose life and love are most intertwined with window display and consumer culture. She cannot resist the attraction of the commodities on display, growing to embrace and celebrate the material life, and finally becoming a commodity herself—a successful actress in New York. By contrast, rather than just a passive prey to the male gaze, Millicent is ebullient and assertive. She manipulates the customers and potential suitors

while modeling for them. Though readers are left to wonder what becomes of her, Millicent's future is not entirely at the mercy of this male-dominated society. A possibility of liberation is suggested. Though the three characters respond to the new consumer culture and environment differently, the role glass plays in determining and shaping their lives and desires is equally significant and should not be underestimated.

III. Glass as Medium/Barrier: Connection, Alienation, and the Consuming Gaze in Virginia Woolf's Novels

Virginia Woolf frequently uses glass to explore the questionable identity, self-representation, production of desire, as well as the changed mode of gaze produced by window displays. Analyzing her works allows us to explore in more depth how glass is used as a trope to understand paradoxical and ambivalent dimensions in urban space and visual culture. My discussion of Woolf's writings functions as a synthesis to my previous sections, as well as a point of departure for further exploration on the other possibilities in the novelistic representation of glass.

The significance of glass in Woolf's writings is multi-fold and sometimes contradictory. The mirror, as an important site for identity formation and public scrutiny, tends to drive Woolf's female characters to a state of anxiety and self-abnegation. Glass, both a medium and a barrier in epistemological exploration, simultaneously represents a possible connection and an obstacle to knowing in different contexts. The window display further complicates the way people see themselves and others. In *Night and Day* (1919) in particular, Woolf parallels the window display with the female figure walking on the street, exploring the mediated gaze and commodified vision.

Mirrors

Woolf feels uncomfortable looking at her own reflection. In a letter to her friend Ethel Smyth, she confessed, "I hate my own face in the looking glass" (*Letters* V: 38, qtd in Skrbic). She tends to attach feelings of shame and guilt to her mirror image. In "A Sketch of the Past" (1939), she emphasizes the solitary, private, and almost unauthorized

nature of the act of looking in the mirror.²¹ This uneasiness experienced in one's mirror image is vividly reflected in her writings. One disquieting encounter with a mirror occurs in Woolf's short story, "New Dress" (1927). It does not take long for the narrator, Mabel, to realize the inadequacy of her dress at Mrs. Dalloway's party. The embarrassing distinction between her dress and other female guests' dresses makes her "[go] straight to the far end of the room, to a shaded corner where a looking-glass hung and looked" (170), but "she could not face the whole horror" and "felt like a dressmaker's dummy standing there, for young people to stick pins into" (171). Glass here is a symbol of public scrutiny, social opinion, as well as a device of self-objectification, for Mabel feels like a "dummy." Obviously, she has little power to stop the violation implicit in such objectification, remaining a physical object to be looked at, examined, and criticized. The immediate comparison of herself to a dresser's dummy also suggests that the culture of display and commodities is deeply embedded in her consciousness and self-identification. This scene recalls a similar scene in *Villette* in which Lucy, while seeing her reflected image in the mirror, feels her appearance inadequate to stand next to her noble and elegant godmother and Dr. John at a ball.

A similar moment occurs in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), when Elizabeth's governess Miss Kilman finds herself forced to face her lack of feminine beauty, not in a party, but in a department store. From the beginning, Miss Kilman is introduced to the reader as a quasi-feminist who abominates the idea of feminine images imposed by patriarchal society and consumer culture. Woolf's depiction of Miss Kilman's appearance and personality desexualizes her, building an illusion that she detests everything the ideal

²¹ Nena Skrbic connects Woolf's disgust with her own mirror image with the sexual abuse she suffered in her childhood. See *Wild Outbursts of Freedom: Reading Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction*.

bourgeois female (perfectly embodied in Clarissa) stands for, and therefore is immune to the luxury promoted by the consumer culture. However, when Miss Kilman, with Elizabeth's company, enters the Army and Navy Store in order to buy a petticoat, she finds herself helplessly disempowered and vulnerable. She is simply overwhelmed by the dazzling spectacle of commodities and feels ashamed that she cannot afford a decent petticoat. A woman who never dresses to please now anxiously worries about her homely appearance: "she could not afford to buy pretty clothes" (126). The goods and nicely-dressed people around her, similar to the display window-as-a-mirror, force Miss Kilman to recognize her inferiority and the lack of decency in her appearance and social status. She feels an urgent need to appeal to her dignity and intelligence for self-assurance.

However, her attempt to regain her confidence fails. After Elizabeth leaves her alone, Miss Kilman's experience in this "palace for ladies" is even more disoriented and more miserable:

So she sat. She got up, blundered off among the little tables, rocking slightly from side to side, and somebody came after her with her petticoat, and she lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India; next go among the accouchement sets, and baby linen; through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationery, variously smelling, now sweet, now sour she lurched; saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street. (130)

All things and people around Miss Kilman in the department store, the display, the shop-girls who think she is mad, the shoppers with parcels, and finally, the actual mirror itself, together symbolically serve as mirrors that relentlessly reflect Miss Kilman's unrecognized or repressed desires. By comparison, she is shown what she is not, what she lacks, and what she cannot afford. Miss Kilman is forced to face desires she does not

recognize she has until she enters the Army and Navy Store.

From Window to Window: Connections

Woolf's first novel, *Night and Day* (1919), set in London, tells the story of Katharine Hilbery and her good friend, Mary Datchet, who both often wonder about the coexistence of marriage and careers, love and happiness. As its title suggests, *Night and Day* consists of a series of binaries. Rachel Wetzsteon insightfully indicates that while "day" means "the comforting clarity of norm and tradition," "night" is "the alluring murk of vision and innovation" (xxvii). The other binaries are observable in the main characters' personality, speech, and artistic taste. For example, Katharine likes mathematics, while Rodney is a literature person. Rodney enjoys Alexander Pope, while Katharine likes Dostoevsky. Their literary tastes are as opposite as the sun and moon. The novel itself is arguably a form of representation in which a series of binaries—night and day, darkness and brightness, tradition and innovation, science and art, emotion and reason—are put together. In short, the novel itself functions like the seemingly least important word in its title, the conjunction—"and" (*Night and Day*). Indeed, one of the main themes in this novel is precisely the possibilities and difficulties for two opposites to come to terms with each other.

In her exploration of the human connection, Woolf relies on glass, which can be a medium and a barrier at the same time. Throughout the novel, the characters are frequently positioned by the window, looking out or looking in. The cityscape one sees through windows also parallels one's inner world, serving as a reflection of his or her current state of mind. The character's imagination of him or herself in relation to the

others, or to the city as a whole, is vividly reflected in his or her encounters with glass.

When one turns to the window scene in a domestic setting, as we have seen in *Sister Carrie*, the character experiences a moment of contemplation, in a need of a sort of reassurance for the future or new inspiration to escape from a current predicament. For example, when Katharine becomes fed up with her elder relatives' gossip and talk of her cousin's marriage, she turns to "the window, and stood among the folds of the curtain, pressing close to the window-pane, and gazing disconsolately at the river much in the attitude of a child depressed by the meaningless talk of its elders" (108). It is Katharine's habit to stand by the window doing nothing when she realizes her values and thoughts have nothing in common with those of her mother and the other elder people in the room.

The window symbolizes a threshold of the domestic and the public. Katharine's physical position (standing by the window) reflects her mental struggle between a life following the traditional expectation imposed on her and a more independent life symbolized by her friend Mary Datchet. In the following window scene, the titular opposition "night and day" is made explicit and meaningful:

She looked out of the window, sternly determined to forget private misfortunes, to forget herself, to forget individual lives. With her eyes upon the dark sky, voices reached her from the room in which she was standing. She heard them as if they came from people in another world, a world antecedent to her world, a world that was the prelude, the antechamber to reality; it was as if, lately dead, she heard the living talking. The dream nature of our life had never been more apparent to her, never had life been more certainly an affair of four walls, whose objects existed only within the range of lights and fires, beyond which lay nothing, or nothing more than darkness. She seemed physically to have stepped beyond the region where the light of illusion still makes it desirable to possess, to love, to struggle. And yet her melancholy brought her no serenity. She still heard the voices within the room. She was still tormented by desires. She wished to be beyond their range. She wished inconsistently enough that she could find herself driving rapidly through the streets... (307)

A window allows Katharine to imaginatively position herself in relation to a world open

to more possibilities and changes. On the other hand, the existence of a window also reinforces the opposition between the two separate domains: a domestic room and a public space, a world of darkness and a world of light. In this scene she reaffirms that her life is limited to the four walls, and the room symbolizes woman's domestic duty as a wife and a mother. In this moment, Katharine stands in the interstice between night and day, darkness and light, tradition and innovation, tormented by her desire for a life not easily available to her, presented on the other side of the window.

How the character views the window scene reflects the relationship between the subject and outside world. As a woman who goes to college and gains a sense of fulfillment in working for the women's rights movement, Mary Datchet feels a sense of control, as if she could direct every passerby while she looks out of the window from her office. At one point, she is bothered by Ralph's comment that her work for women's rights is useless, but soon resumes her confidence and vigor when she returns to her office:

She flung up the window and stood by it, looking out. The street lamps were already lit; and through the mist in the square one could see little figures hurrying across the road and along the pavement, on the farther side. In her absurd mood of lustful arrogance, Mary looked at the little figures and thought, "If I liked I could make you go in there or stop short; I could make you walk in single file or in double file; I could do what I liked with you." (148)

Her window scene reflects her regained confidence and self-assurance, making her feel that she "knew the ways of this world," which was a "shapely, orderly place" (147).

However, her complacency turns into uncertainty later. Though she is secretly in love with Ralph, she refuses Ralph's proposal to marry him and feels offended, for she realizes he is actually in love with Katharine. It is heartbreaking for Mary to realize that she has just abandoned the opportunity to spend her life with the person she loves. She

then contemplates the incompatibility of a woman's marriage and career ambition, and the gains and losses in her life as a woman and a suffragist. In the middle of her paperwork, Mary rests her pen on the table, and gets lost in the scene of the large hotel across the square. The window scene in her eyes dovetails to her inner feelings:

... her mind pursued its own journey among the sun-blazoned windows and the drifts of purplish smoke which formed her view. And, indeed, this background was by no means out of keeping with her thoughts. She saw to the remote spaces behind the strife of the foreground, enabled now to gaze there, since she had renounced her own demands, privileged to see the larger view, to share the vast desires and sufferings of the mass of mankind. She had been too lately and too roughly mastered by facts to take an easy pleasure in the relief of renunciation; such satisfaction as she felt came only from the discovery that, having renounced everything that made life happy, easy, splendid, individual, there remained a hard reality, unimpaired by one's personal adventures, remote as the stars, unquenchable as they are. (227-28)

She is looking at the scene outside as if she is looking at her own life path. Instead of fixing her gaze on the more immediate happiness and satisfaction in one's personal life, she is focusing on what lies behind: her efforts and dream to improve gender equality and lessen the suffering of the people. This bittersweet realization is represented in her gaze on the cityscape seen through her window, while she is undergoing "this curious transformation from the particular to the universal" (228). It is the existence of the window that allows Mary to imagine her connection to the world outside and inspires her to think through her life-changing decision.

As a threshold to connect oneself to the outside world, a window appears both in the beginning and in the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the opening scene in her trip to buy flowers, Clarissa is excited to abandon herself in the London city: "What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air" (3). José Luís Araújo Lima argues that the window is an entrance which

opens to the inside (to the vistas at Bourton, as a young Clarissa) and outside (London streets, as Mrs. Dalloway). The window, as a juncture or an intersection connecting inside and outside, the past and present, the memory and the reality, blends her separated identities, “[a]t the windows are, in fact, Clarissa and Mrs. Dalloway” (111).

Clarissa’s early experience at Bourton is also an exercise of curiosity and visual extension that later forms her habit of observing the old lady across the way through her window. Once, when Clarissa is contemplating the idea of Love and Religion, she looks out the window, sees the old lady, and is enlightened by a truth that is “simply this: here was one room; there another” (125). At that precise moment, Clarissa realizes that human minds are like our rooms, which are separated from each other and may not be transcended by religion or love.

However, the fact that she can still see through her window to gain a vision foreshadows the ending climax of her spiritual connection with Septimus through her window watching. After she hears the news of this stranger’s suicide, Clarissa falls into a deep contemplation. Her thoughts on Septimus’s death parallel and intertwine with, like a montage, her vision of the old woman’s ending of the day:

It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun... She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself... she must assemble. (181-82)

The window scene of this old lady going to bed and putting out the light reflects

Clarissa’s fragmentary thoughts in attempting to make sense of her unfathomable affinity

with this stranger who just committed suicide. The possible returned gaze of the old lady implies that it is not only Clarissa that is a spectator of other people's minds (the rooms). Rather, standing by the window herself, Clarissa may have been observed by someone looking in her direction, too. The window episode implies a possibility of vague bonding between Clarissa and the old lady across two spaces separated by the window. The old lady's act of putting out the candle and going to bed symbolizes the end of her single day; it parallels Septimus's death, which is also the end of his entire life. This connection makes Clarissa feel somehow she is connected to Septimus's death, and then she gains a new vision of her own life. In other words, the window offers a partial but epiphanic view of what is foreign to her, what is not on her side and in her sight. The real window in Clarissa's room allows her to make stories of her neighbors' daily life, and the bond she feels by observing this old lady serves as a metaphorical window, which mysteriously and spiritually connects her to a person she never meets. From window to window, though obscure and partial it may seem, a connection is established.

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf reinforces this image of the human mind as a windowed chamber and the attempt for potential connection and understanding through a window. In this novel, the window is an essential setting as well as an important trope in the main characters' interactions. The first section, "The Window," ends with a scene when Mrs. Ramsay stands by the window under her husband's gaze, after she realizes that she is unable to fulfill her husband's unquenchable longing for the straightforward expression of her love. In her attempt to take a break, Mrs. Ramsay turns to the sight outside the window: "Getting up, she stood at the window with the reddish-brown stocking in her hands, partly to turn away from him, partly because she remembered how

beautiful it often is—the sea at night” (123). While she is looking out, she is aware of her position as the object of her husband’s gaze. Later, she gently returns his gaze as a gesture of understanding and love. The Ramsays achieve mutual understanding, and their previous conflict is naturally balanced, if not entirely resolved:

And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)—
 “Yes, you were right. It’s going to be wet tomorrow. You won’t be able to go.” And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew. (124)

Similar to the window scene in *Mrs. Dalloway*, this ending scene occurs at the end of the day, giving a sense of closure. Both for Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay, a possible human connection is established, or a resolution to a previous conflict is achieved. Like chambers with windows, human minds are not completely sealed to one another.

However, it would be an oversimplification to argue that Woolf believes that one’s mind is like one’s room, and one can simply get a glimpse into another mind by peeping in its window. In her writings, Woolf often suggests that human minds are by nature unfathomable. In *To the Lighthouse*, for example, Lily Briscoe’s metaphor of human minds as sealed hives engages intensely in a dialectical debate with Mrs. Ramsay’s mental “window” through which connection is not impossible. Throughout the novel, Lily, an unmarried female artist, shares a bittersweet relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. She adores and loves Mrs. Ramsay in a complicated way. She feels perplexed about how she can see the “sacred inscription” of Mrs. Ramsay’s heart:

she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art

was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? (51)

Again, in Lily's imagination, Mrs. Ramsay's mind is spatial; it is a room, a "secret chamber," only it is sealed, without a window where one can peep into. The art of knowing Mrs. Ramsay's mind eludes Lily, but the longing never leaves her:

How, then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries of the world alone, and then haunted the hives with their murmurs and their stirrings; the hives, which were people. (51)

In this metaphor, Lily imagines that human minds are not approachable. The best one can do is to hover around the outside, haunting the hives, listening to the murmurs and stirrings which are the signs of the vibrant life within. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily's different attitudes and beliefs about approaching another person's mind represent Woolf's experiment on epistemological knowledge, through a comparison of a human mind as a windowed room and a secret chamber.

Window as a Wall

Septimus and Clarissa, characters who are doubles in *Mrs. Dalloway*, never meet, but both contemplate the (im)possibility of human connection. Interestingly, at those precise moments, both characters refer to glass, but with quite different consequences. Once an idealistic, promising, and enthusiastic poet, Septimus suffers from shell shock after his return from World War I. After his traumatic experience at war, he is full of doubt and disgust toward the society he was ordered to protect. As a symptom of his shell shock, he habitually removes himself from the physical world and gets lost in his own

mind.

One day, his wife Rezia brings him out to a hat shop. There he struggles to make sense of what he sees, but fails to “feel”: “As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them... they were rubbing wires among coloured beads in saucers; they were turning buckram shapes this way and that... but something failed him; he could not feel” (85). Septimus’s traumatic sense of detachment marks a contrast with his wife’s fascination of window display in front of them: “And there were shops—hat shops, dress shops, shops with leather bags in the window, where she would stand staring” (87). Later Rezia makes an exclamation when a French lady is descending from her carriage in her beautiful clothes and jewelry. Her enthusiastic reaction to the scene re-confirms Septimus’s loss of connection with outside world: “‘Beautiful!’ she would murmur, nudging Septimus, that he might see. But beauty was *behind a pane of glass*” (85, italics added). The scene is seen through shop windows, so it is literally “behind a pane of glass.” However, symbolically speaking, even if Septimus is not standing behind a literal window, the scene of beauty in his eyes will probably still look as if it were placed behind a pane of glass, because in his special state of mind, he can see, but he can *only* see. Glass offers transparency at the expense of other senses. Richard Sennett once comments that plate glass gives an experience that, “Fully apprehending the outside from within, yet feeling neither cold nor wind nor moisture, is a modern sensation” (qtd. in Friedberg, *Virtual Window* 117). Seeing without hearing, touch, and feeling increases the sense that what is inside is inaccessible. The following passage shows Septimus’s feeling of detachment and aloofness as it deepens: “He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting,

laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel” (86).

Septimus at this moment moves about in the city as if he is imprisoned in a box of glass. The urban images incessantly, fleetingly, and transiently come before him, but he cannot *feel* them.

At times glass in Woolf’s writings appears in the form of transparent wall between the spectator and the urban spectacle. In *Night and Day*, glass is further developed as a device of “fatal attraction” in the visual domain. When Ralph finally comes to realize that he loves Katharine and feels an impulse to share this strong feeling, he wanders around the street and sits on the Embankment for a short rest, where there is a drunken old man mumbling about his misfortune and failure. Feeling afflicted and anger, Ralph thinks about his own life, and suddenly comes up with an image of a lighthouse and lost birds:

And when the elderly man refused to listen and mumbled on, an odd image came to his mind of a lighthouse besieged by the flying bodies of lost birds, who were dashed senseless, by the gale, against the glass. He had a strange sensation that he was both lighthouse and bird; he was steadfast and brilliant; and at the same time he was whirled, with all other things, senseless against the glass. (342)

Again, as an echo to the novel’s title *Night and Day*, the brightness of the lighthouse here forms a sharp contrast with the darkness of senselessness and death. While the light draws birds dashed by the strong wind, glass is neglected, an invisible barrier which is not felt until the violent clash occurs.

This image is later elaborated on and extended in a specific scene when Ralph goes to Katharine’s house and fixes his gaze on her windows. The following passage compares Ralph’s gaze on Katharine’s window with the bird’s dashing to the lighthouse:

Lights burnt in the three long windows of the drawing-room. The space of the room behind became, in Ralph’s vision, the center of the dark, flying wilderness of the world; the justification for the welter of confusion surrounding it; the steady light which cast its beams, like those of a lighthouse, with searching composure over the

trackless waste.... His thoughts lingered over Mrs. Hilbery and Cassandra; and then he turned to Rodney and Mr. Hilbery. Physically, he saw them bathed in that steady flow of yellow light which filled the long oblongs of the windows; in their movements they were beautiful; and in their speech he figured a reserve of meaning, unspoken, but understood. At length, after all this half-conscious selection and arrangement, he allowed himself to approach the figure of Katharine herself; and instantly the scene was flooded with excitement. He did not see her in the body; he seemed curiously to see her as a shape of light, the light itself; he seemed, simplified and exhausted as he was, to be like one of those lost birds fascinated by the lighthouse and held to the glass by the splendor of the blaze. (344)

Like the lost birds which suicidally fly toward the lighthouse, Ralph is fascinated and overwhelmed by Katharine's silhouette of light emitting from the other side of the window. However, this tendency to disembody Katharine to "the light itself" suggests Ralph's inability to approach and connect with Katharine directly. The metaphor of lost birds and the lighthouse also indicates that the images which one tries to comprehend and capture are always elusive. They can only be represented or approached as projections or reflections. In other words, these objects of the gaze are always mediated, in this case, through the windowpane. Though Ralph subordinates his gaze to the fascination with the light from Katharine's house, the impending danger and threat implied in this allegory (whether he will, like a lost bird, hit glass) heighten intensity and anxiety to his vision. Urban images and signs that the spectators confront are the light of a lighthouse that attracts lost birds.²² The allegory seems to address the fundamental structure of seeing in urban space, which is full of mirroring and reflection, the transient and the fleeting.

The elusive nature of the image and its representation through glass is significant in another short story by Woolf, "A Haunted House" (1921). The language of this uncanny story is artfully vague, describing a ghostly couple who haunts a house in search for their "buried treasure." The couple's existence is felt only through traces, sounds, hints, and

²² This allegory seems to also suggest that this tragic clash is a mindless and unintentional mistake, for the lighthouse is originally designed to guide lost ships, and its use of glass is necessary to emit light.

reflections. One can never see this ghostly couple, and what one can see is always mediated by glass: “The window-panes reflected apples, reflected roses; all the leaves were green in the glass” (122). Elusive and ambiguous words such as “it” or “here” which resist proper recognition and coherence dominate the narrative. The purposeful abstraction and concealment of the object of the gaze in Woolf’s writing are made possible by glass, as a symbol of the obstacle to knowledge.

This exploration on an epistemological (im)possibility is highlighted by Woolf’s connection with glass and death:

A moment later the light had faded. Out in the garden then? But the trees spun darkness for a wandering beam of sun. So fine, so rare, coolly sunk beneath the surface the beam I sought always burnt behind the glass. Death was the glass; death was between us; coming to the woman first, hundreds of years ago, leaving the house, sealing all the windows, the rooms were darkened. (123)

Again, Woolf is fascinated with the contrast and the blurred boundary between light and darkness, life and death. She attempts to expose these cloudy spots, but she fails to penetrate them. What she does instead is to make a tour-de-force effort to see through something that is fundamentally invisible or unknowable. Glass here is a barrier which stands between the representation and the represented, as well as a medium to search for a possible representation for something basically unfathomable. The difficulty of representation is also a recurrent motif in Woolf’s short story, “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” (1929), which I will discuss later. For Woolf, glass introduces a dialectic of transparency and opacity, medium and barrier, connection and confinement, and turns out to be a perfect trope to explore a kind of mediated visibility and the problematic structure of seeing and knowing.

Street Haunting and Window Shopping

In urban space, the relationship between the inanimate and the animate undergoes drastic changes. Marx illuminates that in modern capitalism, human relations are mediated by materials, and Benjamin notices that, walking in a world composed of ubiquitous display and commodities, the *flâneur* himself, unable to resist the strong whirl of capitalism and commodification, becomes merchandise, too. Woolf is quite aware of this prevalent standard to evaluate things based on their “commodity value.” In her essay “The Docks of London” (1932), she describes, “Oddities, beauties, rarities may occur, but if so, they are instantly tested for their mercantile value” (*London Scene* 11), and “every commodity in the world has been examined and graded according to its use and value” (12). The city of London is characterized by this juxtaposition and montage of colorful signs, transparent show windows, and carefully composed window displays. In “Oxford Street Tide” (1932), London is not a city to be preserved eternally, but to be enjoyed for its very transient quality: “The charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass. Its glassiness, its transparency, its surging waves of coloured plaster give a different pleasure and achieve a different end from that which was desired and attempted by the old builders and their patrons, the nobility of England” (*London Scene* 24).

The acts of window dressing and window shopping are prevalent in Woolf’s novels. In her flower-buying trip, Mrs. Dalloway observes that “the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans.” Mrs. Dalloway identifies herself with the other window shoppers and needs to remind herself to refrain from impulse-buying: “(but one must economise, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth)” (5).

Unlike Clarissa, who seems to still side with the customer, Mary Datchet in *Night and Day* keeps her distance from the window display as a critical observer:

Now and then she would pause and look into the window of some bookseller or flower shop, where, at this early hour, the goods were being arranged, and empty gaps behind the plate glass revealed a state of undress. Mary felt kindly disposed towards the shopkeepers, and hoped that they would trick the midday public into purchasing, for at this hour of the morning she ranged herself entirely on the side of the shopkeepers and bank clerks, and regarded all who slept late and had money to spend as her enemy and natural prey. (67)

While she is observing the show window being decorated and arranged, Mary is conscious that these goods are presented in order to attract passersby to go inside, take money out of their pockets, and buy the commodity. Mary is not like the overwhelmed female shoppers who lose their minds in front of window displays, partly because the scene she sees at the moment is not a completed work. Mary, as a woman who has her own job, understands that window-dressing is part of the shop-keeper's "work." Her working experience and knowledge allow her to see beyond her range of vision. Mary identifies the act of window-dressing as a strategy of advertisement, as part of commercialism.

Woolf is well aware of the fact that the constantly changing cityscape results in an urgent need for modern people to adjust our ways of seeing. In her "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" (1927), Woolf offers us a new angle to rethink urban spectatorship. First, she celebrates the delight of "street haunting," embracing the crowd, joining the anonymous army on the street, the pleasure of being a passerby: "As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six, we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room" (20-21). In this space of display and

spectacle, the visual is privileged to the extent that the female narrator becomes “a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye” (22). Miraculously, under her gaze, the London street in the winter evening is “at once revealed and obscured” (22), probably under the working of ubiquitous glass.

It is also notable that not only shop windows, but also domestic windows, entice the passerby to a scene for display:

Here vaguely one can trace symmetrical straight avenues of doors and windows; here under the lamps are floating islands of pale light through which pass quickly bright men and women, who, for all their poverty and shabbiness, wear a certain look of unreality, an air of triumph, as if they had given life the slip, so that life, deceived of her prey, blunders on without them. (22)

Each man and woman, rich or poor, young or old, even “the humped, the twisted, the deformed,” invariably join the series of signs and images on the street to form a unique spectacle mysteriously tinged with beauty. It is admirable to see how Woolf, as if presenting her dreamlike reverie, aesthetically represents “this maimed company of the halt and the blind” as a grotesque group that is fused into the world of commerce and display:

They lie close to those shop windows where commerce offers to a world of old women laid on doorsteps, of blind men, of hobbling dwarfs, sofas which are supported by the gilt necks of proud swans; tables inlaid with baskets of many coloured fruit; sideboards paved with green marble the better to support the weight of boars’ heads; and carpets so softened with age that their carnations have almost vanished in a pale green sea. (26-27)

Woolf’s blending of natural images (swans, fruit, sea) to compare a city street with an ocean reminds us of the opening passage of Louis Aragon’s *Paris Peasant* (1926), in which he describes the intoxicated gaze as he strolls through the “aquariums” into which the Passage de l’Opéra is transformed (14). Similar to what Woolf’s female stroller sees,

in Aragon's narrator's eyes, the ordinariness in everyday life is a work of art. Attracted to a window display of a cane shop, the narrator is astonished to see the window "was bathed in a greenish, almost submarine light, the source of which remained invisible." He continues, "it was the same kind of phosphorescence that, I remember, emanated from the fish I watched, as a child," and he hears a sort of noise from the shop, which "was the same voice of the seashells that has never ceased to amaze poets and film-stars" (22). The commodities, the canes, "floated gently like seaweed" (22). He apprehends the marvelous suffusing of everyday existence, celebrates the mundane glories in an anti-elitist gaze, and eulogizes the ordinary to spell out a utopia in which everyone is an artist.

In "Street Haunting," the narrator's gaze is moderate and non-penetrative. It should follow a flow and there is no need to focus on one thing too deeply or for too long. No matter how curious one may be, one should rest one's gaze on the surface only: "The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream; resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks" (22). Though Woolf also recognizes that curiosity and a desire for complete knowledge is human nature, she still finds it necessary to moderate her gaze carefully:

But here we must stop peremptorily. We are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves... At any moment, the sleeping army may stir itself and wake in us a thousand violins and trumpets in response; the army of human beings may rouse itself and assert all its oddities and sufferings and sordidities. Let us dally a little longer, be content still with surfaces only—the glossy brilliance of the motor omnibuses; the carnal splendour of the butchers' shops with their yellow flanks and purple steaks; the blue and red bunches of flowers burning so bravely through the plate glass of the florists' windows. (23)

In order not to indulge oneself too deeply or too sentimentally in the thought aroused by "oddities, suffering, and sordidities," the observer turns her gaze to the omnibuses, the steaks, the flowers, the things people can really use or consume. This unwillingness to

dwell in the contemplation or reflection of the scene too long and a conscious shift of one's gaze to the display are also observable in *Night and Day*.

The moment occurs when Ralph realizes with surprise and uneasiness that Mary is not just his loyal friend, but a woman who is secretly in love with him. In order to calm himself, Ralph disciplines his chaotic thoughts and emotions by resting his gaze on the signs and spectacles outside the window:

In his agitation Ralph rose, turned his back upon Mary, and looked out of the window. The people in the street seemed to him only a dissolving and combining pattern of black particles; which, for the moment, represented very well the involuntary procession of feelings and thoughts which formed and dissolved in rapid succession in his own mind. At one moment he exulted in the thought that Mary loved him; at the next, it seemed that he was without feeling for her; her love was repulsive to him. Now he felt urged to marry her at once; now to disappear and never see her again. In order to control this disorderly race of thought he forced himself to read the name on the chemist's shop directly opposite him; then to examine the objects in the shop windows, and then to focus his eyes exactly upon a little group of women looking in at the great windows of a large draper's shop. This discipline having given him at least a superficial control of himself. (201)

The observer consciously embraces the display and spectacle to indulge in the superficial scene the city offers, to focus on the fleeting, the transient, and the fragmentary, in an attempt not to "dig" too deep or too long. Like the narrator in "Street Haunting," we should not see or explore more than the eye or the mind approves. To shift one's attention from the internal chaos to the external spectacle seems to be a mechanism of defense developed by urban dwellers.

Woolf's celebration of a seemingly superficial yet creative gaze appears to be a critical response to the materialism and commercialization in urban society and consumer culture. In the beginning, the narrator claims that her pretext to go for a walk is to buy a pencil. This trivial purchase is more of an "invented" legitimate excuse than a necessity. Woolf feels dissatisfied that one has to be producing or consuming something in order to

move around in urban space. Through the text of “Street Haunting,” Woolf shows an alternative to harmlessly “consume” the urban scene by exercising the art of “just looking.” This also seems to be a perfect and safe way to interact with the urban images and signs: “With no thought of buying, the eye is sportive and generous; it creates; it adorns; it enhances” (27).

In “Street Haunting,” Woolf suggests that if a society invites, encourages, or even compels one to buy, to consume in this space, one had better master the art of window shopping, the art of “just looking.” It also seems to be a critical response to her earlier metaphor of a lost bird hitting the window of a light house. A seemingly superficial but self-contained spectatorship like the female stroller in “Street Haunting” can shed new light on how one can observe the display behind a pane of glass at ease without making a dangerous clash.

The Consuming Gaze

The emergent window display changes the shopping environment and cityscapes, as well as people’s ways of seeing. In *Night and Day*, Woolf parallels the commodities on display with the female figures walking on the street in London in 1910 (the year after Selfridges’s opening). One afternoon, while Ralph is walking on the Strand for an interview with a lawyer, he sees Katharine by chance. As a keen consumer, Ralph pictures the figure of Katharine on the street in parallel with the commodities on display behind shop windows on both sides:

The afternoon light was almost over, and already streams of greenish and yellowish artificial light were being poured into an atmosphere which, in country lanes, would now have been soft with the smoke of wood fires; and on both sides of the road the shop windows were full of sparkling chains and highly polished leather cases, which

stood upon shelves made of thick plate-glass. None of these different objects was seen separately by Denham, but from all of them he drew an impression of stir and cheerfulness. Thus it came about that he saw Katharine Hilbery coming towards him, and looked straight at her, as if she were only an illustration of the argument that was going forward in his mind. In this spirit he noticed the rather set expression in her eyes, and the slight, half-conscious movement of her lips, which, together with her height and the distinction of her dress, made her look as if the scurrying crowd impeded her, and her direction were different from theirs. (114)

Katharine here seems to emerge directly from Ralph's window shopping, above the crowd. As Elizabeth Outka rightly points out, "The very qualities that make up Katharine's distinction in dress and appearance are what might be suggested, reproduced, and sold behind a shop window" (138). Here Katharine is seen as a mobile commodity, an animated store mannequin, which Ralph consumes visually without actually purchasing.

Like a spell, Katharine's image mesmerizes Ralph, making him desire more of her image so that he keeps looking:

Where should he go? To walk through the streets of London until he came to Katharine's house, to look up at the windows and fancy her within, seemed to him possible for a moment; and then he rejected the plan almost with a blush as, with a curious division of consciousness, one plucks a flower sentimentally and throws it away, with a blush, when it is actually picked. (115)

Ralph's commodification of Katharine's body is evident in his desire to fancy Katharine outside her window, as if this was an extension to his window shopping on the Strand, as though Katharine in her own room was an elegant mannequin in a store window.

Later, a similar moment takes place when Ralph accidentally casts a glimpse of Katharine walking on the street through a restaurant window. He fails to recognize

Katharine as a human figure before he visually fragmentizes her, fixing his gaze on her gloves:

... he was about to turn and ask the waiter to bring the bill, when his eye was caught by a tall figure walking quickly along the opposite pavement—a tall figure, upright, dark, and commanding, much detached from her surroundings. She held her gloves in her left hand, and the left hand was bare. All this Ralph noticed and enumerated and recognized before he put a name to the whole—Katharine Hilbery... This sudden apparition had an extraordinary effect upon him. (201-202)

Like a would-be shopper experiences in front of a shop window, Ralph is tantalized by Katharine's image, an extension to his window shopping, looking at display with a dreamy, enchanting, and apparitional quality. These images are made more desirable because they are at once seemingly approachable and yet out of reach.

This male gaze that commodifies a female figure also appears in *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Peter Walsh follows an unknown woman on the street. Like Baudelaire's poem "To a Passerby" (1861), it is an urban romance of "love at last sight." The woman in Peter's eyes is not totally indistinguishable from the commodities displayed in both shop windows. At one moment he even wonders if the woman is literally a commodity herself (a prostitute):

Was she, he wondered, respectable?... But other people got between them in the street, obstructing him, blotting her out. He pursued; she changed. There was colour in her cheeks, mockery in her eyes; he was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer, careless of all these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing-rods, in the shop windows; and respectability and evening parties and spruced old men wearing white slips beneath their waistcoats. He was a buccaneer. On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops on to the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness. (52-53)

Peter's wild imagination, similar to Ralph's, intertwines the unknown woman's image

into the spectacle of commodities. The interaction between the male gaze and the object of the gaze (the female body) parallels that between the window shopper and the window display. The distance is essential in forming both relations, and the viewer's desire is sustained and created by the ever-changing quality of the object: "he pursued; she changed." Woolf vividly grasps a related pattern of romance and gazing inspired and mediated by window displays in modern urban life.

Glass and Writing

Glass also sheds new light on Woolf's thoughts on the conjunction of modernist aesthetics and consumer culture. For example, "Street Haunting" is not merely a *flânerie* about a special mode of gaze which is creative but not overly penetrative, but also a symbol of writing itself, the act and the process of creating.²³ The female narrator takes her freedom to make stories out of each chance encounter she has on this urban journey, to playfully yet harmlessly become someone else for a little while:

Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others. One could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer. And what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men? (36)

With no intension of penetrative scrutiny, she constantly changes her focus and stays only on the surface. At times, she may want to "dally a little longer," but she makes it clear that her gaze should not dig "deeper than the eye approves" and should "be content still

²³ There are many symbols of writing in "Street Haunting." The narrator is going out to buy a "pencil," the tool one needs to write. The shops the narrator enters are a bookstore (the work of art) and a stationary, which also highlight the fact that one of Woolf's aims in this story is to explore the connection between walking and writing.

with surfaces only” (23). This is a story of window shopping *par excellence*, a *flâneuse*’s gaze, and the city both as a setting for wandering and inspiration for story-making.

This superficial but creative gaze, which I previously argue to be a possible resolution to avoid the dangerous clash (to be excessively attracted to the object of gaze, or the image behind glass) that Woolf worries about, also spells out the essential core of Woolf’s beliefs and views on literature itself. In her “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924), Woolf makes a distinction between the writing style of “the Edwardians” (Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy) and that of “the Georgians” (Joyce, Forster, Lawrence, Eliot, Strachey). Woolf disputes the former groups to be realists, whose works tend to be meticulously over-detailed. In another essay “Modern Fiction” (1925), Woolf categorizes the “Edwardians” as “materialists” who obsessively observe the object.

Alex Zwerdling indicates that Woolf does not dismiss the Edwardians’ over attention to material details and circumstantial facts because she asks for an “‘insight’—the ability to see into the inner nature of things” (16). Rather, what she finds distasteful is Bennett’s unselective vision which, for Woolf, is counterproductive and unnecessary. Woolf believes that an evasive image would stimulate more creative imagination than a lucid vision (and to her a lucid vision is either illusory or impossible). In “The Mark on the Wall,” Woolf illustrates how these inspired thoughts or whims would sparkle like a diligent ant: “How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it” (83). The work of art is precisely created during this interplay of lifting and leaving. This suggests Woolf’s lack of interest or belief in attaining a complete and exhaustive understanding of the outside world. Aesthetically Woolf values obscurity or translucency

more than pure transparency.

Woolf again relies on glass to highlight the paradoxical nature of represented reality. “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” (1929) is a tour de force in which Woolf deals with a self-conscious pursuit of an unfathomable character and the unreliability of a mirror, an instrument which, ironically, is designed to be a neutral medium of revelation. The story begins with a somewhat provocative statement: “People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms any more than they should leave open cheque books or letters confessing some hideous crime” (221). The narrator then reveals that she is observing an old lady named Isabella Tyson’s room in its reflected form: “One could see reflected in the Italian glass not only the marble-topped table opposite, but a stretch of the garden beyond. One could see a long grass path leading between banks of tall flowers until, slicing off an angle, the gold rim cut it off” (221). The view is sliced off by the gilt rim of the mirror, like a picture that grasps a transient moment; yet unlike a picture, the mirror scene is constantly changing: “nothing stayed the same for two seconds together” (221). The owner of this room may appear in the narrator’s vision a moment and then quickly vanishes. Sometimes the reflected image can be entirely altered by unexpected and unidentifiable intrusion: “Suddenly these reflections were ended violently—and yet without a sound. A large black form loomed in to the looking-glass; blotted out everything, strewn the table with a packet of marble tablets veined with pink and grey, and was gone. But the picture was entirely altered” (223). The intrusion of “a large black form” is later known as a pile of mail, which the narrator imagines to be invitations to dinners and parties.

The mirror holds nothing lasting in its frame. Reading a constantly-shifting image as

such, one has to quickly conjure up what kind of a person Isabella is and what her life is like. As we have seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf tends to imagine the human mind as a room; here, the narrator parallels Isabella's mind with her room:

Her mind was like her room, in which lights advanced and retreated, came pirouetting and stepping delicately, spread their tails, pecked their way; and then her whole being was suffused, like the room again, with a cloud of some profound knowledge, some unspoken regret, and then she was full of locked drawers, stuffed with letters, like her cabinets. To talk of "prizing her open" as if she were an oyster, to use any but the finest and subtlest and most pliable tools upon her was impious and absurd. One must imagine—here was she in the looking glass. (225)

Woolf is not interested in penetrative knowledge of the old lady, for to cut her open is "impious and absurd." Rather, the voyeur-narrator relies heavily on her imagination to make sense of the mirror scene, making the unknown accessible and creative. At the same time, Woolf also makes the limitation of her gaze felt—her vision is always framed by the rim of the mirror, and the shifting inscrutability of Isabella's inner self is represented by the dancing pattern of the light.²⁴

Woolf chooses to represent her experience of story-making through a mirror scene because she believes what she may reveal to the reader is, at best, and as the subtitle of this story suggests, "a reflection." In this story of story-telling, she dramatizes her approach to know the world, which simply cannot be experienced or represented as a

²⁴ The mirror in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" serves more as a frame than a reflective instrument. Nena Skrbic holds the view that this mirror functions like a cinematic cut:

In the story the mirror acts as a curtain or cinematic cut, dividing the story into scenes and presenting only small sections of a larger whole. The mirror organizes the disposition of the story's scenes by deciding what to include or exclude from its frame. As a device that eliminates and excludes "the unessential and superficial" (*CSF* 219), it is a tool that parallels the circumscribed borders and delimiting frame of the short story, since what the mirror does not reflect, the story excludes. (74)

Indeed, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" is a text with cinematic qualities. The narrative is mainly constituted by clipped images, such as the mirror, the flowers, the postman, and the letters. The narrator's virtual and mobile gaze is comparable to a camera lens, which captures and puts together a myriad of fleeting encounters. Mary Ann Caws indicates that the mirror's frame, like a camera, is a cutoff point, which may give rise to the reader or the viewer's anxiety as to what is hidden outside the frame: "There is a feeling that we are being denied a full-on experience, for most of what the reader sees is what occurs within the parameters of the mirror, leaving the larger picture tantalizingly oblique" (5).

whole. Thus, what is left to us can only come as a broken narrative with juxtaposed fragments or a montage of opaque images. Woolf makes clear that the readers should attempt to experience “the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure” in modern art (*Collected Essays* 337). Since Woolf cannot write Isabella because her vision is limited and framed in a mirror, she chooses to write *around* or *about* her, with the aid of glass.

CHAPTER THREE

Transparency, Reflections, and Urban Space in Contemporary Sinophone Film

My third chapter shifts the focus to the three films on modernizing Shanghai, Beijing, and Taipei: Xia Gang's *As Light as Glass* (*Boli shi touming de*, 1999), Ning Ying's *I Love Beijing* (*Xiari nuanyangyang*, 2000), and Edward Yang's *Yi Yi: A One and a Two* (*Yi Yi*, 2000). I argue that these directors, with their urban sensibilities, rely heavily on glass to represent a rapidly modernized and commodified city, in conjunction with urban dwellers' constant struggle to make sense of the new space with its transformed affect, desire, and sociality. Before we discuss these works in detail, it is crucial to review the social and cultural contexts within which these films were produced. Towards the end of the twentieth century, China witnessed its own rapid urbanization, large-scale demolition of the old buildings and communities, and reconstruction of new cityscapes. Taiwan underwent modernization and urbanization decades earlier. By the end of the twentieth century, Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, had already become a globalized metropolis, a city of glass. The urban upheaval and its influence on urban mentality are vividly reflected in the films of the Urban Generation in Chinese cinema as well as Taiwan New Cinema.

Urbanization in China and the Urban Generation

It still remains a mystery why, as a great country of ancient civilization, China's pursuit of modernization and urbanization has lagged behind its Western counterparts for centuries. It may have something to do with China's conservative mentality, Confucianism's value of the spiritual sublime rather than material affluence, critiques of government policies that fettered economic development, or Mao's emphasis on

rural-urban balance and agricultural growth. China used to be hostile to the city, as seen in Mao's guerrilla-war principle that "the countryside surrounds the cities."²⁵ Following Mao's death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's new formula of "transformation" or system shift (*zhuanxing*), which pronounced that "socialism can also practice market economy," Chinese cities have undergone tremendous changes in infrastructural, social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Zhang 5). Since the early 1990s, as a result of abandoning Mao's economic planning in favor of global capitalism, China has engaged in large-scale urbanization, which swiftly changed not only the cityscape, but also urban dwellers' mentality and values. The commercialization of space and a series of demolition and relocation projects in the 1990s and 2000s eliminated a lot of traditional architecture (*hutong* in Beijing and *longtang* in Shanghai).²⁶ In the wake of entering the global economy and the need to establish a real estate market, old communities have been torn down to give way to modern facilities, mass transportation, and architecture such as highways, subway stations, skyscrapers, corporate buildings, department stores, and shopping malls. The ample job opportunities generated by the demolition and construction of cities and the prospect of a city life attracted numerous people to move from the countryside to the city. The capitalist city, which was once denounced as parasitical under Mao and devalued by traditional ethics, now significantly defines and

²⁵ As the original text goes,

Chairman Mao creatively laid down the general line and general policy of the new democratic revolution, founded the Chinese People's Liberation Army and pointed out that the seizure of political power by armed force in China could be achieved only by following the road of building rural base areas, using the countryside to encircle the cities and finally seizing the cities, and not by any other road.

From "Text of Announcement Issued by Peking Reporting Death of Chairman Mao." *Xinhua* 10 September 1976. (qtd. in Visser 1).

²⁶ *Hutong* is a type of narrow streets, or alleys, formed by lines of *siheyuan*, in which a courtyard is surrounded by four buildings. *Longtang* is associated with the old Shanghai, which means alleyway, but it also refers to a living complex where diverse residents from different walks of life would assimilate and interact with each other, forming a unique Shanghai local culture.

shapes individual and collective identity.

Here I choose to focus on Shanghai and Beijing, among other cities, not only because of the prodigious number of films made in and about these cities, but also because of their rich cultural and architectural heritage. In the PRC, Beijing and Shanghai have served as models for other emerging cities. The gentrification of all Chinese cities mimics the patterns and projects such as Beijing's Oriental Plaza and Shanghai's New World (*Xintiandi*) (Braester *Painting* 23). Located at the mouth of the Yangtze River in eastern China, Shanghai has been a cultural, commercial, and international center since the nineteenth century. The scale and speed of urbanization in Shanghai are also unparalleled—according to the United Nations, the urbanized area of Shanghai municipality increased five times from 1985 to 1995 (Braester and Tweedie 3). In 1917, Shanghai was also the first city in mainland China to build a skyscraper, a symbol of the global city. Recently Shanghai proudly presented itself as a symbol of metropolitan progress, advanced modernity, and national power in the World Exposition of 2010.

The government has taken measures since the mid-1990s to tie Beijing, an ancient national and cultural center for decades, with metropolitan centers around the world, making every effort to make it a global city. In 2001, China made this ambitious goal clear to the world by obtaining membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and winning the bid for the 2008 Olympics. I select Beijing also because its urban transformation and the profound psychological impact this upheaval has had on urban dwellers are the most obvious and radical in recent decades. Indeed, Robin Visser considers Beijing a city “in a state of perpetual destruction and disruption” (146). Unlike Shanghai, which has been in contact with foreign cultures and values for centuries,

Beijing has had to cope with the new changes and challenges, including the conflict and mingling between the traditional and the new values, the destruction of cultural heritage and the establishment of global market, in a very short period of time.

At the same time Chinese filmmaking underwent a transition from the so called the Fifth Generation to the Sixth Generation. The former, led by Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Zhang Yimou, refers to the graduates since 1982 from Beijing Film Academy after its reopening following the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This group of directors stayed in the state-owned studio, waiting to be assigned films to direct. Their works mainly focus on rural landscape and traditional culture in the form of grand epic or historical allegories. The dominant image of the Fifth Generation is Chen Kaige's ground-breaking film *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984). This is also the period in which Chinese cinema began to earn international fame, obtaining overseas recognition and acclaim in international film festivals.

In this cultural climate, following the suppressed democracy movement in 1989, there emerged a group of young filmmakers including Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, He Jianjun (He Yi), Jia Zhangke, and Lou Ye, who began directing around the mid 1980s to the late 1990s. These young directors distinguish themselves by defining their narrative style against the grand style of their predecessors, urban themes of modern sensitivity, a documentary impulse, and individualistic perception. They are more interested in the present rather than the past, the quotidian everyday life rather than historical melodrama. They are therefore also known as the "Urban Generation," a term coined for a film program "The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema in Transformation" presented in 2001 at New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (Zhang 1). These directors tend to

particularly identify themselves as urban dwellers. One director Lu Xuechang makes it clear that because he was born and raised in the city, it is very natural for him to want to tell stories about the city. Another director Guan Hu asserts that their generation has urban sensibilities which are more authentic to urban life than the previous generation (Zhang 66). Zhang Zhen claims that one can identify the Sixth Generation with the Urban Generation, as they emerged in a time when the Chinese film industry faced internal and external crises, and they are “caught in the dynamic tension between ‘deterritorialization’ by the state or commercial mainstream (domestic and international) and the constant ‘reterritorialization’ by the same forces that have alienated or marginalized it” (1).

Jason McGrath observes that the difference between the Fifth and the Sixth Generation also lies in the status of their film studios. The Fifth Generation had made their early signature within the state-sponsored studio system, whereas many Sixth Generation directors are independent of the state system (168). This state of independence led to the inevitable conflict with the state. Some films made by Wu Wenguang, Zhang Yuan, He Jianjun, Wang Xiaoshuai, and others in the 1990s and 2000s were banned not necessarily because of the radical or subversive content of their films. More often than not, they were prohibited from being released in China simply because they failed to go through proper official channels before being screened at film festivals abroad. However, this label of “independent” or “underground” films increases their popularity and attractiveness to investment from abroad, western audiences, and festival programmers.²⁷ The film industry in China underwent institutional and structural

²⁷ For a more comprehensive history of Chinese cinema and the ambiguous definition of “independent film” in the period of “transformation,” (as some filmmakers made a “prohibited” film on purpose to attract overseas funds and increase its popularity at international film festivals), see Zhang Zhen’s “Introduction” in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. pp. 9-14.

changes in the 1990s, which privileged market-driven genres such as New Year celebration comedies (*hesuipian*). In this market-oriented trend of production, independent filmmakers were pushed to the margin. However, in the most difficult years of 1994 to 1996, some daring films by Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, Guan Hu, Lou Ye, He Jianjun, Ning Ying, and Zhang Ming still managed to win critical acclaim and awards at international film festivals, even though they remained inaccessible to the domestic audience.

A series of reforms in the film industry in China in recent decades includes the administrative power's transition from Ministry of Culture to Ministry of Broadcasting, Television and Film. As a result, film was at risk losing its elite status and had to compete against other forms of media for funds, and the filmmakers were forced to solicit more external resources and became more market-driven. In his "Contemporary Mainstream PRC Cinema," Yomi Braester observes that a new trend of urban cinema emerging as a commercial genre in the early 2000s, such as *A Beautiful New World* (*Meili xin shijie*, 1998, dir. Shi Runjiu), *Spicy Love Soup* (*Aiqing malatang*, 1997, dir. Zhang Yang), and *Shower* (*Xizao*, 1999, dir. Zhang Yang). Unlike the urban films of the mid 1980s through 1990s, which were usually understood as a type of art film contesting Maoist aesthetics and state ideology, new urban cinema is a marketable mainstream genre which aims straight for the box office (178). New urban cinema often depicts city romance, without going too deep into sensitive political and social issues. Zhang Yibai, the director of *Spring Subway* (*Kai wang chuntian de ditie*, 2002), explicitly identifies his film with New urban cinema which aims at "reflecting and discovering the beauty of modern city life" (qtd. in Braester "Urban Film" 357).

Urbanization in Taiwan and Taiwan New Cinema

After losing the Chinese Civil War and being forced to retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT) government under Chiang Kai-Shek established Taipei as the provincial capital of the Republic of China (ROC). Since then, Taipei has been the most important political, commercial, social, and cultural center in Taiwan. The Taipei city expanded in large scale in the decades after 1949. In 1967, Taipei was declared a special centrally administered municipality. In 1968, Taipei increased fourfold, absorbing several vicinal towns and villages. The population in Taipei also exceeded two million by the mid-1970s. Taipei successfully evolved from a manufacturing center in the 1960s, to a service center in the 1970s, and finally became a knowledge-based and high tech-oriented center after the 1980s (Hsu 16). One key to this successful evolvement lies in its integration into the global economy. Its rapid, sustained economic growth and social progress placed Taiwan alongside Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong as the “Four Asian Tigers.”²⁸ Taiwan’s rapid industrialization since the 1950s conforms closely to the urban-industrial growth in advanced western countries and is said to be “one of the few special cases of development and urbanization outside the western cultures” (Speare et al. 41).

The rapid industrialization and economic growth during the 1970s to the 1990s brought had a significant impact on social conditions and the cultural climate. In 1971, Taiwan lost its seat and membership in the United Nations to the PRC. Since then a sense of insecurity about the future position of the nation on the global stage has permeated Taiwanese society, coupled with the anxiety associated with money worshipping and the

²⁸ In Chinese the term is more commonly known as “Four Asian Dragons” (*Yazhou si xiaolong*).

consequent devaluation of the humanities. The film industry in Taiwan underwent a series of transformations in response to these social changes. In pre-1980s Taiwanese cinema, Taipei was usually represented within a nationalist framework whose center was always located outside the island. As newly emergent middle-class audience became dissatisfied with anti-communist and military propaganda, highly commercialized Kung Fu action films, and Qiong Yao's escapist melodramas, this social climate called for aesthetic and thematic reforms in the Taiwanese film industry.

In the early 1980s, the government-owned Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), led by Ming Ji, recruited a group of new directors and screenwriters, including Xiao Ye, Wu Nien-Jen, Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang to produce films to serve as an alternative to the prevailing norms, producing the New Cinema Movement. Aside from its rich formal innovations, New Cinema aimed at putting Taiwan and its people at the center and shifting focus from the local to the urban, accompanied by a cultural awareness of the Native Soil Movement in literature: "the New Cinema produces Taiwan's first films concerned primarily with the promise of the city and the less grandiose reality on the street, its first 'city films'; and by the 1990s Taipei itself becomes a vital and imperative presence in Taiwan cinema" (Tweedie 118). Neither popular nor successful at the box office, the New Wave Movement did not last long due to a lack of support from political institutions, the media, and film critics, as well as the misconception that a more sophisticated film culture would necessarily breed a more commercially successful film industry (Lu 124). Darrell William Davis defines the New Cinema as "a state-supported movement under intense public scrutiny, criticized for its high standards, elitism, and commercial shortcomings, as well as its discomfort with

popular formulae” (134).

In terms of its outcome and effects, the New Cinema Movement was not a success, but one of its most important legacies is the emergence of two world-renowned directors, Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang. Hou is noted for his “lyric aesthetics rooted in traditional Chinese culture,” and Yang for “his globally oriented modernist cinematography” (Lu 129).

Cinema and the City

The shift in focus from the country to the city is thus observable both in Chinese and Taiwanese cinema. In earlier films, a city appeared merely as a narrative background, but in contemporary films, it is given unparalleled significance. Also, in response to the extensive housing reforms, filmmakers feel an urgent need to preserve a record of the vanishing cityscape and its cultural heritage.

Sheldon Lu indicates that outside of the official mouthpiece, main melody film and outlawed, rebellious art film, the urban film rises as a new genre which caters to the tastes, dreams, pursuits, and disillusionments of a rising Chinese middle class.²⁹ The emergence of the urban film is a cultural response to the dissatisfaction with available cultural productions. The new social class had a need for a new form of media to represent, to imagine, and to make sense of their contemporary lives and unfamiliar urban space. These films cared less about politics or local identity, but more about money and the city dweller’s disillusionment with the long-held familial values and traditional family

²⁹ Main melody film, or leitmotif film, “*zhuxuanlu*” film, is propagandist in nature, sanctioned by the government/Party, especially in the early 1990s. The purpose of main melody film is to reaffirm the official narrative of modern Chinese history and restore the positive image of the Party and its revolutionary heroes in the face of the political turmoil of the Tian’anmen Incident.

structures. The “urbanization” in Chinese cinema is not unlike the emergence of the novel in the nineteenth century. Both are a cultural response to an urgent need for a horizon to represent the experience of modernization for the new rising middle class.

As I have discussed in the first chapter, the relation between city and film is reciprocal. In his discussion of the contemporary Taipei film in a global perspective, James Tweedie contends that a city represented in a film is a “crystallization of a modernity realized in the urban form and placed on display, broadcast outward by modern media technology,” while the urban film also serves as a global rhetoric to enhance the public image of a city. In his words, “...this fascination with the cinematic city arises at a moment when the development of vibrant and renowned cultural life (including film festivals) and its display on screen becomes a means of extending a city’s brand recognition and enhancing its stature in the burgeoning competition for prominence in the global economy” (117). Film is valued as an important global discourse to represent and advance a city’s status in a global art market.

In *Painting the City Red*, Braester further explores film’s negotiating and mediating power—the “urban contract,” which refers to the dynamic relation between visual practices and urban planning and development in China and Taiwan. Braester’s research demonstrates that film has taken an active and crucial role in reshaping the city and provides a discursive framework for urban policies and transformations.

Glass in the Sinophone Film

The introduction of glass as a ubiquitous building material transforms not only the cityscape, but also every aspect of urban dweller’s lives, determining their affects, desires,

and social connections. Given the importance of glass in urban space, the directors of urban films, consciously or unconsciously, tend to privilege glass as a narrative device to explore the ambivalent and paradoxical nature of urban life. One of the dominant images of glass is the ceiling-to-floor windows of high-rises, as a symbol of urban modernity and cosmopolitanism. Shi Runjiu's *A Beautiful New World* (*Meili xin shijie*, 1998), a film set in the turn-of-the-millennium Shanghai, is a comedy about a country bumpkin, Zhang Baogen (Jiang Wu), who heads to Shanghai first time to claim his lottery prize—a free, brand-new apartment. The narrative of the film is framed by the storytelling of a traditional Suzhou chanting-performance (Suzhou *pingtan*). Zhang's first visit to Shanghai is interspersed with the scenes of a teahouse in which a group of traditional Chinese singers chant about how Zhang is lucky enough to rise to the upper class simply by winning a lottery. The framing of the filmic narrative of an urban story within traditional lyrics reinforces the contrast between traditional heritage and new urban culture.

As the film title suggests, Shanghai is imagined as a city of hopes and dreams. However, Zhang's experience of “a beautiful new world” soon turns sour when the manager of the construction company tells him that the apartment is still under construction, and it will take a year and a half to complete this apartment block. Unable to go home, for his family, along with the whole village, is looking forward to his new fortune, Zhang decides to get a job in Shanghai and stays with a distant relation, an aunt—Jin Fang (Tao Hong), while waiting for his apartment to materialize. It does not take long for him to learn that earning a living in Shanghai is tough, and somehow his dream of getting a new home in a high-rise apartment is always being postponed or

withheld.

In the opening scene, Shi shows Shanghai's spectacular glamour first through the windows of a crowded night bus which Zhang takes. Zhang's first sight of Shanghai is composed of the images of brand new skyscrapers and glitzy neon lights of Pudong, Shanghai's new development zone. Shanghai is revealed as a bright and vibrant city, which stands in sharp contrast to where Zhang is standing—the space of a crowded, dark, and dull bus. The skyscraper is the most important visual and architectural icon of a metropolis, and often serves as a symbol of wealth, power, success, progress, and a promising future. The image of the skyscraper is pervasive in world cinema as “a visual marker of the global metropolis” because cinema came of age approximately around the same time as the skyscrapers emerged. A skyscraper stands for “the home or office of the cosmopolitan classes who lived in a particular city but had the opportunity, through travel and culture, to move around the globe” (Palmer 194). The skyscraper establishes a cosmopolitan urban identity with the freedom and capacity for global mobility.

In her reading of *A Beautiful New World*, Augusta Palmer argues that this fetishization of the increasingly vertical cityscape—the skyscraper is reminiscent of Shanghai cinema of the 1930s. The opening scene features skyscrapers, towering buildings made of steel and glass, that function as “emblems of economic hierarchy,” symbols of the class divide (192). In order to see the tall building, Zhang has to slightly lower his head and look up (for his vision is often blocked and limited due to the crowded moving bus), and he looks stunned by the grandeur of the globalized Shanghai city, with his mouth hanging halfway open. The opening scene suggests that what lies ahead is a “beautiful new world,” but soon we realize that this breathtaking skyline is in complete

contrast to the crowded house of Jin Fang, who is depicted as a snobbish, calculative Shanghai native who seeks fame and wealth and is contemptuous of the lower social class. Spatially speaking, Zhang just moves from a crowded bus to a crowded neighborhood, with a dreamland high above, symbolized by the skyscrapers of Shanghai. At the end of the film, when Zhang stands at the construction site of a future skyscraper and points up at the sky, the tall building in the future symbolizes his lasting hopes and dreams of social success and wealth. Thanks to his hard work and ingenuity, Zhang can not only make enough money to survive in the city: with his new apartment available in near future, he is also going to enter the skyscraper world. Being upwardly mobile, socially and spatially, in a city like Shanghai for a countryman like Zhang is not entirely impossible.

Zhang Yuan, another director who is concerned with modern urban life, tells the story of an everlasting search for love in his Beijing romance *Green Tea* (*Lücha*, 2003), in which glass is used to reveal the true nature of urban romance. A conservative Beijing graduate student, Wu Fang (Zhao Wei) goes on a series of blind dates, always taking place in a Beijing teahouse where green tea is served as a tall glass of hot water with a dish of tea leaves. Chen Mingliang (Jiang Wen) is one of her many dates, and their first date ends in disaster when Wu is upset at Chen's inappropriate questions and request for sex. However, as Wu piques Chen's interest with a mysterious story of her more interesting friend who can tell fortune by reading the swirling green tea leaves, the two begin a long conversation about love. At the same time, Chen meets an attractive lounge bar pianist, Langlang (also played by Zhao Wei), who looks like Wu's sexy twin, though she denies that she is related to Wu at all. Throughout the film Chen is trying to uncover the relation between Wu and Langlang.

To show the fragmentary, unstable, and transient quality of love in the city, *Green Tea* disorients us with shifting atmosphere, random glimpses, and half-spoken sentences. The overwhelming experience of being exposed to excessive images and information in urban space is artfully brought by Christopher Doyle's dazzling camerawork. The audience frequently sees the images through a pane of glass, which is not always transparent, but sometimes blurred and decorated with words. The close-ups of the beautiful swirls of tea leaves in a tall glass make Wu's signature drink a symbol of the mysterious revelation of destiny. In one scene, Wu and Chen are seen from the window of the teahouse painted with incomplete Chinese characters (with missing strokes, for decoration purposes) on the transparent wall. The words on the wall blur their faces and make their bodies mostly invisible to the audience. Such half-revealed scenes work to represent the unfathomable and mysterious maze of urban love.

The most artfully made scene probably occurs towards the end of the film, when the camera is situated under a semi-transparent tea table looking upward. The table is made of blurred glass; thus when the view is distorted, we can still guess what is on the other side of the table from the vague silhouettes. The scene shifts very quickly. First we see one hand on the table, and then we see both (supposedly) Wu and Chen's hands on the table. Finally we recognize that Chen places his hands over Wu's, suggesting a happy ending, though they do not reunite without doubts or uncertainty. The film ends as Wu asks a question about love: "Do you really like me?" A love story in the city is destined to involve in endless searches and doubts. Though the ending of *Green Tea* implies that what is achieved is at best semi-transparency, half-revealed truth, it asserts that within the

urban sphere, personal connections were still attainable.³⁰

Zhang Yibai's *Spring Subway* (2002) is a feel-good flick about a couple who deals with problems and crises in their seven year relationship in Beijing. The opening scene shows the blurred faces of the couple, Xiaohui (Xu Jinglie) and Jianbin (Geng Le), through the metro windows, and they each talk off-screen about how they feel about coming to Beijing and their life together during those seven years. As their images are shown indirectly through the metro windows, the audience is led to wonder if their lives and minds have been changed in a city of everlasting changes. In one scene, Xiaohui is talking to a suitor, Laohu (Zhang Yang), whose pursuit makes Xiaohui lose confidence in her failing relationship with Jianbin. Their conversation takes place right next to a transparent building, which casts multiple reflections that represent their confused and chaotic mental state.

The film also includes a subplot in which a shy young man Daming (Tu Qiang) finally gathers enough courage to ask his crush Tianai (Gao Yuanyuan) out on a date by bringing a photo of himself carrying a message of invitation to the photo studio where she works. Daming has never spoken to Tianan before, even though they take the same subway almost every day. When Tianai shows up where they are to meet, she finds herself alone. Later Tianai approaches Daming on the subway, asking him why he had stood her up, and for some reason Daming has no defense but a long silence. Tianai then pins his picture with the invitation message on his collar, and gets off the train, smiling

³⁰ Glass plays an important role in Johnny To's Hong Kong romance *Don't Go Breaking My Heart* (*Danshennannu*, 2011). This romantic comedy is a story of a love triangle, in which the heroine Zixin (Gao Yuanyuan) from mainland China and two gentlemen from Hong Kong, Shenran (Louis Goo) and Chihung (Daniel Wu) exchange messages not by calling, texting, or e-mailing, but by using the post-its on the ceiling-to-floor windows of their office building. Zixin's office desk faces the window, so that she can be seen through the transparent walls from Shenran and later Chihung's offices in the building across the street.

triumphantly at him. As the subway door is closing, through the window, Daming seizes the chance to express himself at the last moment, unexpectedly, by using sign language. Tianai's eyes water, for she finally comes to realize what holds this shy boy back and make him hesitate to pursue his love. This bittersweet revelation of affection from a dumb boy is made possible, again, through a pane of glass on a subway carriage. Like Tianai, the audience fails to understand Daming's hesitation and struggles throughout the film, until the invisible wall between Tianai and Daming asserts its presence in the form of that metro window separating them, but it simultaneously connects them in silence.

In Xia Gang's *After Separation* (*Da sabar 'r*, 1992), on the other hand, glass makes estrangement more tangible. In the opening scene at the Beijing airport, Gu Yen (Ge You) stands outside the transparent wall of the passport control, watching his wife leaving for Canada. His wife's excitement is in sharp contrast with his sadness to see her go. The transparent wall that allows Gu Yen to see his wife departing from the security checkpoint, also to make this separation all the more heartbreaking for him—he stands there watching as the image of his wife is overlapped and erased by other reflected images.

Glass in Edward Yang's *Terrorizers* (*Kongbu fenzi*, 1986) is utilized to show Taipei as a city of glass boxes. *Terrorizers* maps out criss-crossing lines of fate in intricately multi-layered narratives. In the beginning of the film, Yang gives us three juxtaposed stories which are seemingly independent from each other—a rich young photographer falls in love with a girl he randomly captured in his camera frame; an unhappily married couple, Li Li-Chung (Li Li-Chun) and Chou Yu-Fen (Cora Miao), struggles with their failing relationship and their lives gradually drift apart; a part-time Eurasian prostitute,

known as the White Chick (Wang An), is grounded and imprisoned in her own room by her mother, and kills time by making prank phone calls. The audience is left to figure out how the lives of these characters would eventually intersect.

A sense of confinement and intensity persists throughout the film; for example, Li Li-Chung and his wife are frequently shown through the windows of their workspace. In “Remapping Taipei,” Fredric Jameson points out that Yang represents the urban space of Taipei as “a superimposed set of boxed dwelling spaces” (154). Yang is not only interested in showing prison-like isolating cubicles in urban space, he is more concerned with how in this space these improbable urban networks—chance encounters, coincidences, random connections, spontaneity or misconnections, deceptions, and misunderstandings—take place. Michelle Yeh and Darrell William Davis hold the view that, “... the grids and glass panels organizing social life in the city also allow chance encounters, forging unexpected connections. The narrative connections of *The Terrorizers* function as pretext, like an accident or collision, and almost always result in damage, recrimination, paranoia, and terror” (94). It turns out that an opaque prison is probably less dangerous than a dwelling space with transparent walls.

Once, out of curiosity, the young amateur photographer moves to the apartment from which he saw the unknown girl escape, and transforms the room into a dark room. This scene of windows covered with black cardboard is a symbolic gesture indicating that the transparency is not always desirable. As the spellbinding plot shows us, a mindless action made out of boredom or ennui would cause life-changing harm or damage. This intense atmosphere persists throughout the film, symbolized by the giant spherical gas tank, shaped just like a bomb, which makes its appearance several times in the cityscape. As

Yang makes clear, “The bombs we plant in each other are ticking away” (qtd. in John Anderson 10).

Glass in *Terrorizers* is also used to explore and contest the blurred line between art and life. The young photographer’s girlfriend tells him about Chou’s prize winning novel “A Real Record of a Marriage” (“Hunying shilu”) published in the newspaper, which depicts how a marriage goes awry when one day the wife receives an anonymous call from a girl. The plot is apparently inspired by the White Chick’s prank phone call in Chou’s real life: She once calls Chou, pretending to be Li’s mistress, and her call helps Chou make up her mind to leave the house. As we hear the girlfriend’s voice describing the plot of Chou’s story, in a long shot we see Chou herself entering a modern restaurant and walking toward her husband. This is the first time they meet each other after their long estrangement. Through the transparent wall of the restaurant, we see from a distance that these two persons, ironically including the author of the novel, are presented as if they are the unhappy couple walking out of Chou’s fiction. Glass manifests this aesthetic or philosophical question: whether art imitates life or vice versa. It is a moment when they no longer can distinguish what is authentic and what is reflective or representative.

Indeed, from Li’s point of view, their troubled marriage could have been saved if Chou had simply ignored White Chick’s mischievous call, but Chou may not regret using her marriage crisis to leave a suffocating and counter-productive family life. Apparently she finds the inspiration in the White Chick’s lie to finish her prize-winning novel. When Li reads Chou’s novel, he tries fanatically to persuade Chou that all their problems arose from a series of misunderstandings resulting from a prank phone call. Chou denies that their lives parallel the fictional lives of the couple in her novel, and impatiently

admonishes her husband, “Fiction is fiction. Don’t you distinguish real from fiction at all?” However, the murder in Chou’s fiction intensifies and foreshadows the tragic ending of the film. This convoluted structure of narrative within narrative pushes the couple’s lives into a mirror hall of art versus reality.

I. Glass Is Transparent: Invisible Walls in Shanghai in *As Light as Glass*

Introduction: Xia Gang

Before he enrolled in the first post-Mao class at Beijing Film Academy, Xia Gang's early experiences in Beijing as a construction worker in the 1970s helped cultivate his interest in urban life. He began to work in Beijing Film Studio in 1988. Xia's films are characterized by their persistent concern and focus on urban issues and a delicate balance between emotion and satire, including *Passionate Encounter* (*Zaoyu jiqing*, 1990), *My Heart's Not Changed* (*Woxin yijiu*, 1991), *After Separation* (*Da Saba'r*, 1992), *No One Cheers* (*Wurenhetsai*, 1993), *To Be with You Till Dawn* (*Banni dao liming*, 1995), *Yesterday's Wine* (*Yu wangshi ganbei*, 1996), *Life as a Song* (*Shengming ruge*, 1997), *As Light as Glass* (*Boli shi touming de*, 1999), *Who Might Be Listening* (*Shei lai qingting*, 2000), and *Love at First Sight* (*Yijian zhongqing*, 2002).

A common motif in Xia's city films is the complexity of "emotions" underlying the urban labyrinth; as he explains, "No art work can be created without being involved in the emotions. I don't like to treat the city I love as an object without life and give it an anatomy, even if it is a most scientific sociological anatomy."³¹ Harry H. Kuoshu observes that Xia's films with an emphasis on the emotional lives of urban dwellers strike a balance between emotion ("*qing*") and humor/satire ("*xie*"). The self-mockery and the timely humor function to prevent the film from becoming too sentimental, and help the audience to follow the filmic narrative without being carried away by the emotions it

³¹ Xia Gang, "On Topics about Metropolis," ("*Guanyu dushi de huati*") in *Contemporary Cinema* 90 (1997). Here I borrowed Kuoshu's translation, pp. 79-80.

evokes.³²

The blend of sentiments and humor is also observable in *As Light as Glass*, also known as *A Country Boy in Shanghai* or *Glass Is Transparent*, which tells the story about a young man's battle with a transparent door.³³ This film is adapted from a Shanxi-based novelist Li Chunping's novella of the same name, first published in a literary magazine *Shanghai Literature* in 1997. Xia Gang was intrigued by this story about a country boy's bittersweet journey to "make it" in Shanghai, and decided to make a film adaptation in 1998. This film touches upon several contemporary social issues in China under rapid urbanization, including the influx of rural population to the city, the demolition and reconstruction of urban space, and the money-oriented social values, all epitomized in a young boy, Little Sichuan (Huang Kai)'s adventure from countryside to Shanghai to seek a good income and a better future. The film vividly delineates the disorienting experiences with which the country boy must cope in order to survive in a space and a society foreign to him. While the country boy's job search and promotion seem to progress smoothly, his greatest enemy in the city is one ceiling-to-floor transparent door in the restaurant where he works. As the story unfolds, we are reminded that surviving in a city requires us to keep in mind that "glass is transparent"—this invisible wall does not only exist in the restaurant in Shanghai, the barrier is also vividly felt among urban dwellers. Shanghai in the new immigrants' minds is a city of transparent walls.

³² This combination of sentimental and comedic elements is influenced by the tongue-in-cheek style of Wang Shuo fever in the late 1980s. See Kuoshu, Chapter 3, "*No One Cheers: The Later Fifth Generation and the Urban 'Situation Movie.'*" pp. 70-105.

³³ For example, Xia Gang balances his revelation of emotions (qing) with humor ("xie") in a scene when Miss Wang quickly hands Little Sichuan one of her sanitary napkins to take care of his bleeding nose, when no napkins or paper towels are available at the moment. This is an example of how the director handles the conflict between city and country with the interjection of some humorous elements.

A Country Boy in Shanghai

The film begins when Little Sichuan's elementary school teacher shows the class where Shanghai is on the map. For a country boy like Little Sichuan, moving to a big city is his dream. In his imagination, history is personified as an old man, who is wise and kind enough to arrange a journey to Shanghai for him. He explains early in the film why he goes to Shanghai: "I believe that it is History that arranges this opportunity for me. Shanghai in the 1990s created a lot of 'rice bowls,' waiting for people to go get them. History the Old Man sends us to the big city to snatch up these rice bowls."³⁴ Indeed, aside from Little Sichuan, the three main characters in *As Light as Glass* are all immigrants who came to Shanghai in search of success, fame, and wealth—Miss Wang (Xu Xiaodan) is from the northeast area. Mr. Su (Ma Lun) from Ningpo, and Miss Liu (also called Xiao Yazi, dialectically meaning Lass, little girl, played by Ma Yili) from Shanxi. Xia's film addresses the demographic flow from the country to the city and delineates the challenges and struggles new immigrants have to face in this new environment.

Little Sichuan is the first-person narrator, who frequently talks to the camera about his feelings and never hesitates to share his observations with the audience. In this way, the audience is invited to observe the city through this outsider's eyes. Little Sichuan's urban adventure has a smooth beginning. Soon after he arrives in Shanghai and lingers in a labor market, he is lucky enough to be picked up by Miss Wang, co-owner of Feng Man Lou (Rising Wind Tower), a two-floor restaurant.³⁵ His job is to serve tea from a bronze tea kettle with an extremely long serving spout, a distinctive feature and stunt of the

³⁴ My translation. In Chinese, "rice bowls" means jobs, the source of income.

³⁵ A labor market is a local place where job seekers linger and wait for job opportunities.

restaurant. His hard work and diligence earn him a raise shortly. Little Sichuan respects and fears Miss Wang, who similarly migrated a few years before from a smaller city to the northeast and now runs the restaurant. In Little Sichuan's eyes, Wang is a successful example to become rich and socially respectable as an immigrant. Her co-owner Mr. Su is a builder from a southern town, who handles construction projects in Shanghai. Little Sichuan also develops a bond with Xiao Yazhi, a young waitress from the countryside dreaming to succeed in Shanghai.

While it is not too difficult for Little Sichuan to get a job and find a shelter in Shanghai, he soon experiences the invisible gap between his rural mentality and this urban space, represented by his greatest enemy in his work space—a ceiling-to-floor transparent door on the second floor in Feng Man Lou. On his first day to work, we see his confused and disoriented look reflected on the transparent front door of the restaurant. This scene foreshadows his impending battle against a pane of glass. Born and raised in the countryside, Little Sichuan is not used to glass. Its transparency makes one tend to ignore its material existence, and the invisibility of glass proves to be very disturbing for him.

Once, when he rushes to refill tea for the customers on the second floor, he forgets that there is a door in between and slams into it. Miss Wang is very upset about his uncouth behavior and scolds him harshly:

WANG. You haven't seen glass before?

LITTLE SICHUAN. I have.

WANG. You have no idea that it is transparent?

LITTLE SICHUAN. Yes, I know...

WANG. Knowing is not enough. You must always keep that in mind! *Glass is transparent!*

Later, in order to practice what he is told, to keep in mind the transparency of glass, all

day long Little Sichuan keeps mumbling to himself that “glass is transparent, glass is transparent...”

As the film unfolds, it turns out that Miss Wang’s admonishment that “glass is transparent,” said in her harsh and firm tone, is probably the most important lesson she ever teaches Little Sichuan as a guide line for survival in a big city. It is not only because in order to move in a big city one needs to adjust to a space where glass is prevalent. One also needs to be aware of the existence of glass in a metaphorical sense, as an invisible wall between self and others. If one fails to recognize the need to watch out for it, he may, like Little Sichuan, hit the glass and get hurt. Even though Little Sichuan takes efforts to remind himself not to forget the existence of the door that is transparent, he still hits it again when Xiao Yazi makes fun of him, telling him that Miss Wang needs to see him right away. Little Sichuan then rushes upstairs and forgets what Miss Wang has taught him—that glass is transparent. Again he hits the door with a thud, leaving him with a bloody nose.

As a newcomer from the rural countryside, Little Sichuan has to take extra efforts to adjust to the new space. Xiao Yazi once takes Little Sichuan to Nanjing Road, one of Shanghai’s most prosperous shopping areas and touring sites. From Little Sichuan’s perspective, the surrounding high-rise buildings seem to spin. While the cityscape, seen from a distance, seems to be a symbol of a promising future and wealth (as in the opening scene in *A Beautiful New World*), when Little Sichuan walks into a city with towering buildings of glass and steel on both sides, he finds himself overwhelmed and disoriented by the flooding signs and images in this phantasmagoric world. Seeing her companion unable to walk straight, Xiao Yazi teases him: “Are you drunk?” The intoxicating quality

of cityscapes that makes a country boy feel dizzy suggests an over-exposure of signs and images, wanted and unwanted, in urban space. Glass produces new perceptions of space and new visual images, and it blurs the boundary between what is supposed to be shown and what concealed, between what is meant to be seen and what not seen.

Behind a Pane of Glass

The invisible barrier epitomized in the transparent door that Little Sichuan fails to recognize persists almost everywhere in the film. Little Sichuan is the only character in the restaurant who speaks Chinese with a heavy Sichuan accent, which distinguishes him from other characters from the beginning to the end. The linguistic difference suggests that though the accent poses no challenges for the other characters to communicate with Little Sichuan, the gap between the urban and country mentality makes it doubtful whether Little Sichuan really speaks their language culturally and socially.

Little Sichuan makes clear that his goal is not to become a real Shanghainese; rather, his goal is to earn enough money to go home and better his family's life. He never makes a fuss about money. When Miss Wang tells him how much he can earn as a tea boy, he seems to be very pleased as long as it covers his meals and accommodation. On the other hand, the other characters are more obsessed with earning a fortune. Mr. Su and Miss Wang are always talking about money, stock prices, Wang's losses in the stock market, and profits made from their restaurant business. This money-oriented attitude is particularly evinced when Mr. Su tells Little Sichuan that as long as a man has money, a good life and many women will follow. For Su, money comes before everything. Little Sichuan frequently feels that there is a significant difference in their values, as if there

were always a transparent wall between him and others.

Towards the end of the film, Little Sichuan places his face against the transparent window of the restaurant, looking out. He looks helpless, but he has to learn to observe things through a pane of glass. The scene suggests that the protagonist, symbolically, witnesses what happens in and beyond this restaurant always with some distance and has a hard time fitting in, mostly because Shanghai is not his home. This lack of connection between personal identity and a new city is a common theme in contemporary Chinese cinema. As post-Mao urbanization fragmented the former sense of self that is tied to a particular piece of land, the characters' identities are now defined more by personal capital and ownership than their place of birth or where their family is. In his shooting notes on *As Light as Glass*, Xia mentions this wandering state of mind and the difficulties inherent in finding one's home and one's "rice bowls" in the same place:

Migration is to live away from home. It also indicates a mental condition that one has temporarily lost his spiritual orientation and has to adjust to the fact of wandering. In a society where everyone is trying to make it on his or her own, one's "rice bowl" (Chinese for financial income) is always more attractive than one's "home." In people's search for their "rice bowls," they are searching for [a new] sense of "returning home." The fact that "rice bowl" and "homes" can't always remain together is what this film is about. (qtd. in Kuoshu 191-92)³⁶

The uprooting experience of rural immigrants in the city gives rise to anxiety and confusion while they are searching for a sense of belonging. This sense of alienation and detachment in a space foreign to them is best captured by the dominant metaphor of the transparent wall in this film because Shanghai is not his home.

No materials could serve better than glass as a metaphor for urban dwellers' desire for connection and accessibility, and the concurrent sense of alienation, detachment, and

³⁶ Xia Gang, et al. "Shanghai Is a Seaport: Shooting Notes on *As Light as Glass*" ("Shanghai shi ge tan: Boli shi toujmingde paishe sanji"), *The Art of Cinema (Dianying yinshu)* 1 (2001), 65. Kuoshu's translation, in 191-192.

dislocation. While its transparency attracts one to get close to what lies behind a pane of glass, its visual accessibility is not without restrictions. As the film shows, one should not get too close; otherwise one will hit the wall, cold and hard as it is. Ma Yili, the actress who plays Xiao Yazi talks about the message she thinks *As Light as Glass* tries to convey:

Through the glass, we can observe closely the world beyond but we can never touch, smell, or taste the real flavor of that world. The glass in between remains cold. Your struggle may break the glass. That, however, will also break your head and break your hopes. Differences of social status have distanced us. Let's remain observing behind the glass walls. That way you can still keep your hope alive. (qtd. in Kuoshu 194)³⁷

Ma's remark reflects an urban mentality that helps one survive the city jungle. One should know how to perceive and respond appropriately to what the city offers; namely, how to stay behind a pane of glass and tolerate these invisible barriers, without self-sabotage.

Glass brings convenience and visibility, but it does not come without a price. We cannot select what to see or not to see because what lies on the other side of a pane of glass shows itself unreservedly, even if it happens in another space. On the other hand, if what lies behind glass draws us closer and arouses our desire to reach it, we will soon find that glass is a barrier. The English title of the film is intriguing in the sense that though the barrier seems to be as light as glass, sometimes it is the most dangerous and the most unbreakable, for its invisibility tends to make one ignore its existence and easily fall into trap. Shanghai is portrayed as a city with many glass walls, visible or invisible, material or immaterial.

In the end of the story, Miss Wang chooses to back out of the love triangle she has with Sue and Xiao Yazi. She leaves the restaurant and opens a florist with her former

³⁷ Ma Yili, "Viewing the World through a Pane of Glass." *Popular Cinema* 2000 vol 7, 25. qtd. in Kuoshu 194.

lover. Mr. Sue divorces his wife in the country and plans to marry Xiao Yazi who is promoted to manager, replacing Miss Wang. Xiao Yazi, as a country girl who wholeheartedly embraces and celebrates what a city can offer, once tells Little Sichuan that “Shanghai is awesome! I don’t want to go home anymore,” and her goal is to make this city her home, for she wants to “buy a home here in Shanghai.” In the end it turns out that she achieves both goals. She now owns the restaurant where she started as a waitress.³⁸

At this point, the film seems to come to a happy ending. It is sensible to think that now that Xiao Yazi is Little Sichuan’s boss, his employment in Feng Man Lou should be more firmly guaranteed. Instead, she abruptly fires him. She claims that since he is a high-school graduate, he should be able to do better than serving tea in a restaurant. In their last conversation, Xiao Yazi’s tone is bitter, “You and I came all the way here for the sake of a better life, didn’t we?” She admits that she wants him to leave also because his presence is unbearable for her, given that he has witnessed her transformation from country girl to restaurant owner. His innocence cruelly reminds her how different she is now as a Shanghainese. It seems that what she gains does not come without a price.

Failing to foresee the transparent wall even between him and his best friend, Little Sichuan is caught off guard when he suddenly loses his job. However, as optimistic as he always is, he shows no sign of frustration or disappointment. He faces the camera and tells the audience what he has in mind: “again I am wandering under the sunshine of Shanghai, like an idler. Actually I am not just fooling around. This is ‘moving on’ in order to lead a better life.” The film ends here. What lingers is the country boy’s firm belief that,

³⁸ Xiao Yazi’s story resonates with some nineteenth-century Western narratives about a country girl becoming successful in a city by either marrying up or selling her body.

even facing this betrayal by his best friend and the unexpected loss of his job, somehow he will make a living in Shanghai, no matter how many invisible walls exist in this city. It seems that the beautiful and mesmerizing cityscape will continue motivating him and sustaining his dream for a better future, even though this city is not unlike an enticing scene out there behind a pane of glass, while its approachability remains uncertain.

II. Beijing in a Rearview Mirror: Class, Gender, and Urban Space in *I Love Beijing*

Introduction: Ning Ying

Ning Ying went to the Beijing Film Academy in 1978, continued her study in directing in Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografia in Italy in 1982, and also worked as Bernardo Bertolucci's assistant director on *The Last Emperor* (1987). Ning's background in Italy makes the style of her films quite distinct from her classmates at the Beijing Film Academy, such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou. Ning's films often deal with the quotidian, focusing on anti-heroes with a documentary-like, realistic lens, and they pay less attention to national allegories and visual splendor.

Ning's overseas experience allows her to observe her native Beijing from a distance. She was also shocked to witness how much Beijing had changed when she returned from Italy in 1988. She then recognized the urgent need to turn her camera on the vanishing cityscape. As she explains, "I cared about reality, but I saw what I knew as reality was evaporating so fast. I thought that putting it into my films would be a way to capture the true spirit, like taking a photograph of someone before they go through radical plastic surgery" (He). She also recognizes the privileged status of cinema to give a visual record of Beijing's transformation: "Film offers compelling advantages as a capsule of history—even more than literature, painting, and music" (He).

Recognizing the urgent need to document the protean Beijing, Ning responds to the rapid urban transformation in her "Beijing Trilogy"—*For Fun* (Zhao le, 1992), *On the Beat* (Minjing gushi, 1995), and *I Love Beijing* (Xiari nuanyangyang, 2000). *For Fun* tells the story of a group of elderly retirees, played by nonprofessional actors, setting up

their amateur Peking opera troupe, which is relegated to the social margin. This film is a lament for a cultural space and heritage that soon disappear. This time using exclusively nonprofessional actors, *On the Beat* addresses the routine work of a group of policemen in Beijing chasing rabid dogs, manifesting a social political space in which common police officers are caught between state and commercial imperatives. Finally, through a taxi driver's summer rhapsody of love in a metropolis overtaken by commercial culture, *I Love Beijing* offers a glimpse of the various forms of urbanity and urban crowding in Beijing at the millennium.

Ning's Beijing Trilogy chronicles the tremendous changes Beijing experiences which come too fast. Adopting different life styles during ten crucial years of change, from the post-Mao era into a consumerist society, all Ning's characters of different generations in these three films anxiously search for a secure space in an age of uncertainty. Ning's films vividly capture the overwhelming impact of urbanization on space and society and the price of progress. As Braester observes, Ning's Beijing Trilogy reveals the reality of the social progress and urban transformation: "The films mark a progression—first moving by foot, then by bicycle, and finally by car—to cover a small neighborhood, a district, and finally the entire city. The increasingly distant forays correspond to the growing scale of urban change" (*Painting* 262). Ning's films function like a final snapshot of the old Beijing, preserving vanishing buildings and neighborhoods:

... the films present the city in flux by dwelling on images of demolition. The opera club in *For Fun* is housed in a courtyard that is eventually torn down to make room for a profitable karaoke bar. The dilapidated alleys where most of *For Fun* was shot, east of Fuxingmen, were indeed soon demolished and replaced by the skyscrapers of Capital Financial Street (Shoudu Jinrong Jie). (*Painting* 262)

In *I Love Beijing*, Ning relies on glass to represent the ungraspable, fleeting nature of the cityscape and urban crowds. Utilizing his vehicle as a tool to earn a living and also to win women's hearts, Dezi (Yu Ailei) the taxi driver shows us the vitreous forms of urbanity in turn-of-the-century Beijing. The urban images in this film tend to be shifting, floating, non-fixed, and fragmented. In this section I focus on the ambiguity of Dezi's identity and the space he occupies mostly in his daily life—his taxi, his unique status as a mobile urban observer. Dezi tends to associate his tool of transportation with his romantic life, and the crowded Beijing cityscape is captured through a series of casual glimpses reflected on his windshield or in his rearview mirror. The different outcomes of his romantic encounters also reveal Dezi's constant anxiety, confusion, and frustration about his ambiguous identity and class in this ever-changing city.

The original film title in Chinese is *I Love Beijing* (“*Wo ai Beijing*”), but Ning was not allowed to use this title because the film authorities were suspicious of its irony. Thus she had to release the film under the new title “The Warmth of Summer” or “Summer Heat” (*Xiari nuanyangyang*). The film authorities were particularly sensitive to the representation of Beijing. For example, they were concerned with the initial scene in Ning's film, representing the traffic congestion in Beijing, since the chaotic scene is not consistent with the mainstream productions that feature the prosperous and modernized space of the city. Ning found herself dealing with the censors frequently for her documentary-like approach to represent urban space. As Ning notes, films about contemporary Beijing are examined meticulously by the board, and any specific framings or camera angles are questioned. Here is a summary of the censor's objections to Ning's film:

...the Chinese title had to be changed, since *I Love Beijing* sounded too ironic; the traffic gridlock sequence that opens the film was deemed too negative; even the shots of morning exercise in a public park suggested to the censors an allusion to a nationwide psychosis. The final cut is relatively fast-paced, thanks to the censors' demand to excise entire shots and shorten others. (Braester *Painting* 265)

I Love Beijing still presents the audience with a more realistic Beijing, though these loyal representations frequently put the film and the filmmaker at stake.

Ambiguous Identity, Ambiguous Space

It is no coincidence that Ning chooses to tell the story of turn-of-the-century Beijing through a taxi driver's eyes. Ning explains that in 1996 there were two important changes that reshaped Beijing's cityscape: one was the widening of roads, and the other was the introduction of uniform private taxis. Yellow taxis replaced the official's black limousines on the streets (Braester *Painting* 263). The taxi driver is part of a newly emergent social class which is difficult to define. In the China of the 1950s to 1970s, a car was an unaffordable luxury for common families, and an icon of power and wealth. Owning a car and knowing how to drive were considered privileges. Beginning in the 1990s, the taxi driver became a persuasive example that one's income can depend exactly on how hard one works. Among the lower-middle class, taxi drivers were the first group who got a very competitive wage.³⁹ Still, a taxi driver is considered an ambiguous class precisely because the cultural significance of the car had changed. While a taxi driver may own his car, he mainly uses it to earn a living; it is not a sign of luxury because driving is considered labor. On the other hand, the flexibility of working time and mobility, as well as a good income, facilitate the proclivity of a taxi driver like Dezi to chase woman after

³⁹ At that time, when a university professor's monthly salary on average was 100 to 200 RMB, a taxi driver could easily earn about 100,00 RMB.

woman. Thanks to his occupation, he has opportunities to meet people far beyond his class horizon. His job allows him to get a glimpse into the different lives of urban dwellers, from the rich and famous, to middle-class professionals, from gangsters to poor countrymen in the city. Following Dezi's taxi, we are led to every corner of the city from the underworld of organized crime to high-end clubs and restaurants.

Dezi belongs to a social class caught in the middle. While initially he seems to enjoy his playboy lifestyle, he sometimes still reveals anxieties regarding his ambiguous identity and class. Dezi defines himself by his car and his money. In the beginning, Dezi's conversation with his mother is all about how much he earns, and he is upset when his mother questions he earns more than other drivers. While courting women, he frequently offers to pay the bill for the date, and once he debates with a woman about the value of money over knowledge. As Dezi feels he is financially superior to most people, he feels excluded when he is surrounded by the truly rich and upper class denizens of the city. Later when he gives a ride to the host of a popular matchmaking radio program, he has the chance to go to the Maxim's, a high-class night club, where a mix of foreign languages are heard—English, Italian, French—and he finds that he cannot really join any of the conversations there, leaving him feeling alienated and dislocated.

Dezi's job as a taxi driver also blurs the boundary between his working and private lives. His car is his tool to earn a living, a way of transportation, and also a space for romance, leisure, and pleasure. He spends long hours in his cab, alone or with different companions and passengers—we see him listening to the radio, talking, observing, flirting, dating, and taking a nap in his car. Glass—his windshield and his car windows—makes this hybrid space neither public nor private. He enjoys the freedom to

observe the passers-by on the streets, at the same time that he is also seen by the people outside.

As previously mentioned, Dezi always takes advantage of his car and working environment to chase women. Dezi has four short-lived relationships with women from different levels of society. We learn from their conversations that Dezi had pursued the woman who would become his ex-wife one day when he saw her waiting at a bus stop, tailing after the bus in order to know her. The waitress Xiaoxue, a migrant from Northeast China, relies on Dezi to pick her up. Dezi first spots Zhao Yuan (Tao Hong), a college librarian, randomly on the street, and tries to goad her into his car. The awkward moment when Zhao introduces him to another country girl Kuo Shun, who later becomes his second wife, also takes place in Dezi's car. After Zhao leaves, Dezi drives Kuo around Beijing and shows her the sights.

Dezi's romantic encounters all involved driving, and his dates often take place in his car. Dezi seems to identify his car with a testing ground for romantic possibilities. Taking advantage of the transparent glass on all four sides of his car, he exploits the freedom to cast his male gaze at random and "prey" on female figures on the street through his window. He seems to think that if he can successfully invite a woman into his car, as a symbolic gesture of entering his realm, he may have a better chance winning her heart. That is also why Dezi is outraged to see his ex-wife leaving him to get into another man's taxi. Since he identifies himself with his vehicle, he feels humiliated to see his ex-wife choosing someone beneath him, someone who owns a lower-end car.

Commodified Beijing

Dezi defines himself and establishes his self-esteem in terms of how much money he earns and how good his car is; as a result, he never misses a chance to show off his ability to pay, especially for women. Beijing in this film is represented as a money-worshipping capitalist society. This tendency is best observed in Dezi's fleeting romance with a college graduate working as a librarian, Zhao Yuan. Dezi follows Zhao wandering on the street looking for a place to fix her vacuum cleaner. As Zhao states that she cannot afford a taxi ride, Dezi talks her into taking his taxi by lowering the fare. After she gets in, Dezi asks why an intellectual like her cannot even pay for a ride, and ridicules her, saying that although he is not as knowledgeable as she is, he would just buy a new vacuum cleaner instead of fixing a broken one if it were him. Zhao is irritated by Dezi's arrogant attitude about his financial superiority, and they soon engage in a debate on capital and culture. She insists that though without material comfort, it is better to spend the day around books than to work as a taxi driver.

In spite of their quarrels, Dezi still manages to invite Zhao to an expensive ice cream shop where he offers to pay. Zhao is surprised to see how expensive the bill is. While she seems to have issues with Dezi's tendency to squander money, as she reveals more about herself, Zhao seems not wholly immune to the culture of commodities—she shows a desire to go beyond the institutional rules; she dreams of going abroad; and she wants to work in a place where she can wear makeup and brand-name dresses at will.

When Zhao makes her first appearance on the street, we see her gaze fixed intently on something invisible to us for a few seconds. Her look shows interest and admiration but not without hesitation. In the next scene when the camera moves to the other side of the show window, the audience realizes that the object of Zhao's gaze is a dress displayed

on a mannequin. It is notable that when Zhao is looking at the dress through the show window, meanwhile, she is also the object of Dezi's gaze, also seen through a pane of glass—his car window. Like Zhao's window shopping, Dezi also moves around to “window shop” (through his car window) the women that interest him, and in a way he does use money (picking her up with the promise of a cheap ride, and later offering to cover the bill in a chic place) to win Zhao's heart. Both Dezi's “window shopping” and the librarian's real “window shopping” involve visual desire, money, and consumption. We see the flow of desire through one side of the window to another, through show windows and car windows.

The audience may find it puzzling that Zhao and Dezi spend a night together in her university apartment where she lives with her parents, who are professors. In one scene, the film shows the prison-like university apartment with its many identical windows, but the window is also where Dezi enters a space that does not belong to his class or his lived experience. This unlikely romance may suggest Dezi's chance to get in touch with a higher, intellectual class, or it may manifest Zhao's desire to break free out of her well-educated family and strict, dull work. However, it turns out that this short-lived romance is more like Zhao's whim. One day, she brings a country girl Kuo to Dezi on a rainy day, trying to set them up for a date. Not until that moment does Dezi realize that Zhao never took him seriously. Dezi can only respond to Zhao's arrangement with a long silence and a blank look, watching Zhao out of his car, and walking away from this unlikely relationship. Zhao's figure is blurred by the rain drops on his car window, and her figure blends into the crowd on the street, soon becoming unrecognizable. He painfully realizes that he only deserves woman of his class, though for one moment he

believed he had probably transcended the boundaries of classes when he entered Zhao's room through her window.

Reflecting Beijing

Dai Jinhua insightfully points out that the two elements in the opening scene of Beijing traffic, flow and congestion, foreshadow the nature of urban life and the main theme of the whole film (353). "Flow" refers to the physical mobility (walkers, bicyclists, and drivers), the demographical flow from the country to the city (Dezi's ex, the waitress Xiaoxue, and his new wife are all immigrants), and Dezi's life flowing from one stage to the next (marriage, divorce, second marriage, chance encounters, breaking up, passing by); "congestion" refers not only to the traffic jam, but also works as a metaphor for the urban mentality, a sense of confinement, and a perpetual search for a way out.

A disynchronization between the external floating world and the urban dwellers' internal emotions is how Ning feels about her native city after spending six years abroad. She is inspired by unimaginably fast pace of urban changes happening before her eyes. In 1993, Beijing's master plan for 1991-2010 was approved and thereby accelerated new construction by promoting private enterprise, attracting foreign investment, and designating a Central Business District. The preparation for the 2008 Olympics further sped China's rush toward modernization and globalization. The old buildings were dismantled to build spectacular landmarks, museums, recreational spaces, and subway lines (Braester *Painting* 224).

Filming in contemporary Beijing is a race against time, as Ning suggests, because buildings were quickly demolished and new commercial thoroughfares were quickly

constructed. The making of the film is also a production under the impetus of social change. A lot of filming plans are subject to social and spatial changes in the real Beijing.

In an interview with the director, Christopher Barden writes,

In early versions of the script, Dezi begins the film driving a luxurious Toyota Crown Salon and winds up in a beat-up yellow miandi (cheap minivan) by the end. Unfortunately, by the time Ning Ying began shooting Salon's were scarce, and miandi's had already become a popular source of scrap metal. Reality, for the first time in her career, was changing faster than she could record it.

In order to capture this unpredictable, shifting, ungraspable cascade of urban images, Beijing is seen through Dezi's mobile gaze and framed through his car window. In the modernized space of Beijing, such as the shopping mall where Zhao and Dezi have their first date, the reflections of customers and commodities overlap one another in mirrors and show windows everywhere.

Globalization is epitomized by the foreign partygoers in Maxim's, a high-class club, where locals, journalists, and celebrities mingle. Urbanites have to get used to moving, floating, fleeting, unfixed images, represented in the reflections on Dezi's auto glass and rearview mirror. The film often shows that a newcomer like Dezi who rarely goes to high-end places having no time to respond to rapid changes, feeling distracted and unanchored. Beijing audience members are often impressed by the uncanny sense they get while watching *I Love Beijing*, and in a conversation with Ackbar Abbas, Ning admits that she intended to show an estranged urban space where the familiar is vanishing too quickly.⁴⁰

According to the director, Dezi's romance with several women can be seen as an analogy to urban dwellers' romance with the city. As Barden intriguingly puts it, Dezi is

⁴⁰ A Dialogue between Ning Ying and Ackbar Abbas at Hong Kong University. <<https://sites.google.com/site/ningyingfilms/dialoguewithprof.ackbarabbas>>.

just like “a taxi-driving Don Quixote on his four-wheeled, metered Rociante” in search of a possible romance, a connection, something he can hold on to; but people and places are quickly flowing in and out his life and space, as is the fleeting nature of urban life. His floating between different destinations and different women is not unlike Beijing’s own search for identity in this age of large-scale upheaval and transformation. What is familiar keeps evaporating, and one is still not too sure how to embrace the unknown yet ambitious future the city seems to promise.

As the story unfolds, Dezi’s attitude toward the city also changes. At first we can tell that Dezi embraces every chance he is granted to observe the city streets and crowds. He is interested in learning strangers’ stories and lives. He is open to all the possibilities, adventures, and encounters that modern life in the city promises. He is not afraid of taking risks, and willing to taste life and experience beyond his class and social circle. He owns his car and apartment, and he confidently knows which road to travel, telling his passenger that he knows every good place to go in the city. The turning point is Zhao’s rejection of his love, which forces him to painfully recognize an invisible wall between his class and Zhao’s. Eventually Dezi chooses to accept his fate by marrying Kuo, a woman of his class, as a gesture of his powerlessness in front of the social hierarchy.

In the end, Dezi seems to be a changed man; he becomes a distanced urban observer who does not really participates in this urban world, as if the world presents itself behind a pane of glass. He still does his job, drives his taxi, meets people from different walks of life, day by day, but his vacant look shows a new spiritual emptiness and blasé attitude, the after effect of being exposed to too much stimulus. What Ning attempts to tell is not just a story of a taxi driver’s summer of love, but also a Beijing resident’s love affair with

Beijing conveying how delusional it is to fall in love with a city, which cannot love you back. The new Chinese title “Summer Heat” or “The Warmth of Summer” is ironic in the sense that while the story takes place in summer, it turns out to be a story about a man unwittingly engaging in a sad break-up with the whole city, a city romance as cold as glass.

III. City of Glass: Reflections and Invisibility in Taipei in *Yi Yi: A One and a Two*

Introduction: Edward Yang

Born in Shanghai in 1947 and raised in Taipei since 1949, Edward Yang has been a film lover since he was in elementary school. After earning his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at Chiao-Tung University and a master's degree in computer design at the University of Florida, he worked as a microcomputer and systems designer in Seattle for seven years. Yang's choice of major and his career in spite of his passion for films reflected the mainstream social values at that time—art and humanities earn no money, but science and technology do. It is Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* that inspired Yang to give up his promising career and turned to pursue his dream of becoming a filmmaker. He then enrolled at the University of Southern California in film studies, but dropped out after only one semester in frustration at the institution's narrow focus on Hollywood film.

Yang returned to Taiwan in 1980, and became one of the most important Taiwanese New Wave pioneers. Yang is noted for his concern at the impact of urbanization and modernization on culture and humanity, as well as the changed network of urban relations, as evidenced in his seven films on these themes: *That Day on the Beach* (*Haitan de yitian*, 1983), *Taipei Story* (*Qingmeizhuma*, 1984), *Terrorizers* (*Kongbu fenzi*, 1986), *A Brighter Summer Day* (*Gulingjie shaonian sharenshijian*, 1991), *A Confucian Confusion* (*Durishidai*, 1994), *Mahjong* (*Majiang*, 1996), and *Yi Yi: A One and a Two* (2000). Like Ning Ying, Yang never hid his concern and worries about the city in which he grew up, and he shared with Ning a similar background of experiences overseas. After distancing

himself from the city with which he was once so familiar, with his acute sense of precision and modernist aesthetic in his films, Yang dissects the new urban culture and presents Taipei as a cold, glassy city consumed by loneliness and alienation.

Yang's critique of Taipei manifests itself most explicitly in his reference to Confucianism in the introduction titles to *A Confucian Confusion*, an urban satire showing a group of Taipei yuppies and artists caught up in a complex web of relationships full of fakery, fallacies, and lies.

Confucius: The city is too crowded.
 Disciples: What can we do about it?
 Confucius: Make the people rich.
 Disciples: What comes next, after they are made rich?
 Two thousand years of poverty and struggles later, it took a city named Taipei just twenty years to become one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

Yang stops the quote here and leaves the second questions unanswered. (In the original text, Confucius actually has an answer: "to educate them.") The quote suggests that the whole film is a process of searching for the answer to the unsolved question—"what comes next, after we are made rich?" Yang recognizes an urgent need to use his films as a medium of reflection on the fast-paced modern life which moves so quickly that urban dwellers have no time to make sense of or adjust to their new space. In one interview in Chicago in 1997, Yang expresses his concerns and worries about a disconnection between the old culture and the new value emerging from the globalized economy and rapid urbanization since the 1990s:

The situation in all of Asia is terrible now. It's not an economic problem, it's not a financial problem, it's not a political problem, it's a serious cultural problem. *A Confucian Confusion* is the first and so far only attempt at self-reflection: at examining what is wrong with trying to head into the twenty-first century with a fourth-century B.C. ideology. (qtd. in John Anderson 66)

Yang's last film, *Yi Yi*, scripted by Yang himself, is a three-hour family saga. Yang

considers *Yi Yi* a statement of the urban life in the millennium: “We started working on *Yi Yi* in 1998 and we wrapped it up just before the turn of the century. During that moment the world was consumed by high tech and virtual reality; many aspects of the later, I feel, are very destructive” (Berry 290-91). With what Jonathan Crow aptly describes as “the sweep of an epic and the fine acuity of a haiku,” *Yi Yi* tells the story of NJ (Wu Nien-Jen)’s middle-class family of three generations in which each family member has his or her own struggles and troubles. In his 40s, NJ is dissatisfied with his work at a software company, especially his unreliable business partners’ plan to cooperate with a second-rate videogames company. His unexpected reunion with his old flame Sherry (Ko Su-Yun) at his brother-in-law’s wedding also overturns his seemingly steady life. NJ’s wife Min-Min (Elain Jin) escapes from the monotonous routine of daily life to meditate in a Buddhist monastery. NJ’s teenage daughter, Ting-Ting (Li Kai-Li) has to deal with a love triangle with her neighbor girl, Li-Li (Lin Meng-Jin) and Li-Li’s boyfriend, Fatty (Chang Yu-Pang). NJ’s eight-year-old son Yang-Yang (Chang Yang-Yang) needs to handle the large girls bullying him in his school and later falls in love with one of them. NJ’s brother-in-law A-Di (Chen Hsi-Sheng) has to wrestle with his demanding pregnant wife and a former love, plus his endless money troubles and his superstitious beliefs in lucky dates.

All these characters are centered around the grandmother (Tang Ru-Yun), who is in a coma after a stroke on the same day of the wedding. She remains silent and absent for most of the film, but her existence is always felt, triggering the significant changes and awakenings in each character’s life. The fact that the grandmother used to be a teacher suggests that her role is meant to instruct the other characters in the film. Like a mirror,

the dying grandmother in bed shows each character the facts in their life they were blind to before, and encourages or drives them to explore the nature of urban life.

Yi Yi starts with a wedding, ends with a funeral, and sandwiches between these events almost all areas of human life. The film traverses the full spectrum of human experience and emotions, though it focuses on a middle-class family in Taipei, western audiences easily find *Yi Yi* relatable and its theme universal. There are reviewers on Amazon.com, with great admiration for the film and a sense of humor, who suggest that if we have the chance we should leave this three-hour film to Martians when they sort through the rubble and detritus of humanity, because *Yi Yi* is just rich and profound enough to represent modern urban culture in general.

Yi Yi is a summation of Yang's twenty-year film career. In *Yi Yi*, one can easily identify recurrent themes from and cross references to Yang's early films. For example, the murder in *Yi Yi* reminds us of *A Brighter Summer Day*; an anxious and depressed wife who escapes from the repetitiveness and ennui of everyday life exists both in *Yi Yi* and *Terrorizers*; the blurred line between reality and fiction is explored in both *Terrorizers* and *Yi Yi*, the former through the novel, and the latter through video games and movies. Yang even uses the same actors from his previous movies—the teenagers who talk loudly in an American fast-food restaurant called N. Y. Bagels in *Yi Yi* are all from *Majong*.

As Yang's swan song, with its delicate narrative and comprehensive theme, *Yi Yi* is a multi-award winning film worldwide. It won Yang the Best Director Award at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival; it won the Best Foreign Film from the New York Film Critics Circle Awards in 2000. In 2002, this film earned the distinction of being called one of the "Ten Greatest Films of the Past Twenty-five Years" by British film magazine *Sight and*

Sound, among other masterpieces such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Blade Runner*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Chungking Express*. Undoubtedly *Yi Yi* was an amazing success at international festivals and competitions, tops the film critics (including Susan Sontag) lists of the year, and unanimously wins accolades from overseas audiences. However, in spite of its huge success overseas, ironically, *Yi Yi* was not released in its hometown Taiwan until seven years later, after Yang's untimely death in 2007. The delayed release of this three-hour gem of Taiwanese cinema is a result of a copyright issue, due to Japanese investment in the film, as well as representative of the director Yang's frustration and dissatisfaction with Taiwan's unfriendly and unsupportive attitude towards the domestic film industry and filmmakers at that time.

One or Two?

At first the film's Chinese title may seem unusual and confusing to the audience. Why not "One" or "One Two," but "One One"? The film title "一一" in Chinese means "One One," in the sense of "one by one," "each one" or "individually." If the two characters are written in vertical alignment, as it shows in the beginning of the film, it looks like another Chinese character "二," which means "Two." The double way of reading the title also plays up the major theme of double or multiple perspectives of viewing human lives. Yang comments on his naming of the film as follows: "One one is very simple, a combination of two 'one's, the number one, *yi*, in Chinese culture is the beginning of everything. The first entry on the first page of the dictionary is always this one stroke character. *Yi* is the simplest. Here we have two 'one's, so it is very simple but not the

simplest” (Chang).⁴¹

Yang’s contemplation on both simplicity and complexity in modern life is expressed through several characters in the film. In one scene, Min-Min feels uneasy about her mother’s coma, telling her friend about her brother’s belief that his wedding day is the best day of the whole year, and therefore their mother wouldn’t die. As if to convince herself, she asks her friend, “this matter [her mother’s coma happening on her brother’s wedding day] couldn’t be so complicated, right?” On the other hand, in the hospital, NJ tells his superstitious brother-in-law, “things are not that simple!”

The title is paradoxical also in the sense that though “one” is the beginning, it repeats itself to be “one one.” There are two scenes in *Yi Yi* that manifest Yang’s exploration of the repetitiveness and contingency of life. Once the Japanese mogul Ota with whom NJ feels a bond tells NJ that he has no idea why people are afraid of changes since every day begins anew. In his words, “Why are we afraid of first time? Every day in life is a first time. Every morning is new. We never live the same day twice. We are never afraid of getting up every morning. Why?” Here the philosopher-like Ota provides a new perspective to think about daily life as many new beginnings, as the film title suggests.

When Yang-Yang attempts to avoid being caught by his enemy at school—an unreasonable teacher and a group of tall girls—by sneaking into a dark schoolroom, an education film about the birth of universe is being shown to the class. A tall girl who is one of Yang-Yang’s abusers and later his crush walks in, first with her skirt accidentally flying up and showing her underpants, and later with her body captured in the projector’s streams. Her silhouette projects onto the screen superimpose on the image of thunder and lightning, while Yang-Yang stares, obviously stunned by the scene, which powerfully

⁴¹ My translation.

juxtaposes violent natural imagery and sound with Yang-Yang's initiation into love. Simultaneously the narrator of the nature film reads a line which echoes the film title, "These [thunder and light] were the beginning of everything." The double way of reading the title (Two "ones" or one "two" in Chinese characters) is also the reason why we have an amusing English title *A One and a Two*, which suggests a flow of life, like a bandleader counting off, a jazz riff. A. O. Scott thinks that this English title is apt in the sense that the film is "composed with the meticulous discipline of a symphony, nonetheless has the swing and spontaneity of group improvisation." Indeed, this three-hour film does not drag, it marvelously waltzes.

A Globalized City

A sense of uncertainty and anxiety prevails in the film, which features a globalized city at the turn of the century. Taipei in *Yi Yi* is represented as a globalized metropolis, under growing influence of the West. NJ brings Yang-Yang to McDonald's to comfort his sulky son who was picked on by the big girls at the wedding; NJ's colleagues and Yang-Yang's classmates always drink Coke; the teenagers in the film—Fatty, Ting-Ting, and Li-Li frequent a Taipei restaurant named "N. Y. Bagels," serving American fast food. Yang-Yang's Mickey Mouse T-shirt and the Batman poster in his room show Taipei as a city greatly under the influence of western culture.

The flow of global capital cultivates a money-worshipping social value, which manifests itself in NJ's co-workers' plan to prioritize profits over creativity by cooperating with a copycat second-rate company; similarly, A-Di always talks about money and investment. The fact that A-Di's life is defined exclusively by money is most

evident in the scene when he talks to his comatose mother. The doctor advises NJ's family to keep talking to the grandmother every day because it may aid her recovery. A-Di tells her that he is now very rich so there is no need to worry about him. After talking about his financial condition, he soon runs short of things to say, as if the global economy and money-oriented social values have already emptied his life.

In fact, not just A-Di, but the other characters are all unsettled by a millennial anxiety at the uncertainty and pointlessness of modern urban life. In their daily life, they tend to forget about the purpose of their actions. Early in this film, NJ stands in front of his desk and forgets what he is going to take; NJ's co-worker Da-Da goes downstairs, bumping into NJ and Sherry, and then returns to the elevator with NJ and Yang-Yang without remembering the reason why he had gone downstairs; Min-Min reveals her anguish more explicitly, saying "I have no idea what I am doing every day..."; later on, NJ murmurs to his comatose mother-in-law, revealing his sense of powerlessness and uncertainty in his current life, "I wake up feeling unsure about everything... I wonder why I wake up at all." Urban dwellers in a turn-of-the-century globalized city need to deal with and make sense of a life that seems not as simple as it was once before. And it is glass upon which Yang relies on to portray the uncertainty and anxiety that constantly plague the modern city.⁴²

City of Glass

In his "Remapping Taipei," Fredric Jameson argues that in *Terrorizers* Taipei is "mapped and configured as a superimposed set of boxed dwelling spaces in which the

⁴² In his comments track on the DVD, Yang mentioned a recurring strategy of shooting through the glare of reflecting plate-glass panes. While it is certain that he consciously used these reflective shots, at times these shots just presented themselves to him and it was like a magic he discovered when he got to the location.

characters are all in one way or another confined” (154). In *Yi Yi*, Yang reinforces the sense of confinement in Taipei by showing it as a city of glass boxes, portraying the urban dwellers living in densely populated skyscraper apartments. Glass appears everywhere in the characters’ living spaces, and urban images tend to be reflected and mediated. Yang shows this mediated nature of the urban gaze earlier in the film. On their way back to their apartment, Ting-Ting and her grandmother are seen through a series of different lenses—the car window, the transparent front gate, and several 24-hour monitors in the building. People, traffic, logos, office interiors are frequently shown through store-front and high-rise windows: through the transparent window, we see A-Di and his ex Yun-Yun (Tseng Hsin-Yi) talking in Eslite Café; through a ceiling-to-floor window we see NJ and Sherry having dinner in a second-floor restaurant in *Utsuru* Hotel in Japan; A-Di looks at his newborn baby through the window of the hospital nursery; NJ and his co-workers are frequently seen through the transparent wall of their offices or their car windows.

Seeing through a pane of glass suggests a distance between the viewer and the object of the gaze, as if we are looking at a live story unfold. The obscured figures sometimes look ghostlike while their dialogue remains clear and sharp. The images are often framed, fragmented, and half-revealed, blocking the audience’s full vision. Yang’s unwillingness to grant full visibility also highlights the limitation of the camera lens and human perspective.

Yang shows Taipei cityscapes as a series of boxlike packages that contain, separate, and isolate the dwellers. The grids and glass make chance encounters and unexpected connection possible, but it does not always bring transparency. A. O. Scott contends that

Yang's reliance on long shots and the shots through glass suggests "both the transparency and opacity of experience." Godfrey Cheshire once writes, "In all of his films, Yang examined the world through the cloudy prism of modern Taipei." It is the dualism of glass that makes Yang privilege it as an important device to explore the nature of urban life, which is at once simple and complicated, repetitive and dynamic, transparent and opaque.

Half of the Truth

It is no coincidence that NJ's son Yang-Yang shares the same name with the film director. Indeed, Yang-Yang is unmistakably a surrogate for the director-writer Edward Yang, who relies on the little boy's exploration of the limitation of visual perspectives to reveal the rationale of the film itself. In the beginning of the film, Yang-Yang finds himself bothered by what lies beyond his vision. As NJ's family lines up for a wedding portrait, a group of little girls make fun of Yang-Yang by tapping on his head from behind. Yang-Yang soon figures out that his vulnerability comes from his inability to "see" what comes from behind.

From that point on, Yang-Yang shows an intense anxiety and keen interest in visibility and invisibility. He firmly believes that "seeing is believing" and visibility is paramount, as evidenced in several incidents. When the teacher wrongly blames him for bringing a condom to school (which is actually just a balloon), Yang-Yang explains to the teacher, "You just heard what people say. You didn't confirm it with your own eyes." Later when Min-Min asks her little son to talk to his unconscious Grandma, Yang-Yang remains silent. When Min-Min becomes upset, Yang-Yang explains: "I want to show

Grandma my painting, but what's the point if she cannot see it?" When NJ blames Yang-Yang for looking straight at their neighbor, Mrs. Chiang (Hsu Shu-Yuan)'s face, who is wearing sunglasses to cover her swollen eyes and clearly wants no attention, Yang-Yang emphasizes the importance of "seeing" again: "I want to know why she is sad, but I just cannot see it from behind."

As the story unfolds, Yang-Yang's curiosity and anxiety about the limited visual perspective gradually accumulate, finally he asks his father a question: "Daddy, can we only know half of the truth? I can only see what's in front of us, but not behind. So I can only know half of the truth, right?" He also wonders about the futility or impossibility of gaining mutual understanding: "If I cannot see what you see, and you cannot see what I see. Then how can I know what you are really seeing?" Unable to give his son a good answer at the moment, NJ gives Yang-Yang a camera. Once armed with his father's camera, Yang-Yang enthusiastically takes pictures of the backs of different people's heads, hoping to show people something they cannot see themselves. Intriguingly, it is precisely because Yang-Yang realizes that he cannot see (everything) that he becomes the keenest observer in the film.

Yang-Yang's innocent but insightful observation on the limitations of human perspective foreshadows other characters' blindness, unable to see what is happening in the other half of their lives. For instance, Yang shows the back of NJ's head every time he gets struck by an unforeseeable accident—the first time he bumps into Sherry at A-Di's wedding; when NJ receives the call from his co-worker Da-Da telling him that they already made a change to their contract plan with another company and therefore NJ's negotiations with Ota is no longer necessary; when NJ learns about Sherry's unexpected

early departure from the hotel's receptionist. In these scenes, we see NJ's back, not his face, suggesting his vulnerability to events he does not see coming from behind.

In Yang's filmic narrative, glass often reveals the other half of the truth that the characters cannot see with their own eyes. It turns out that glass, like a storyteller, speaks. One significant scene occurs when NJ and his three coworkers are sitting in a car discussing the contract with a knockoff company in order to earn instant profits. NJ is the only one in the car who insists on doing the right thing—to produce something original—while his business partners only care about the immediate profits that copying successful software can bring. At this moment, we see NJ's face, showing disapproval, and he even slips on his headsets, shuts his eyes, and listens to music in order to ignore the conversation. We cannot see NJ's colleagues' faces while they are talking; the camera is positioned outside the car shooting the backs of their heads. Their images are engulfed in the curve of the auto-glass as the reflection of skyscrapers and office buildings roll over. This scene suggests that these people are all blind to the fact that they have been brainwashed by globalized capitalism and fail to concern themselves with anything beyond money, because, as Yang-Yang helpfully points out for us, they cannot see what comes from behind and only know half of the truth at best. Here the audience is allowed to see what the characters cannot see—how their lives and identities have been inscribed, if not devoured, by the flow of global capital, through the fleeting images reflected and superimposed on the car windows.

Another remarkable scene which glass helps to reveal what the characters cannot see occurs when Min-Min experiences her breakdown crying and talking to NJ in their bedroom. Min-Min's back is reflected in the mirror behind her, so we see both Min-Min's

face and the back of her head simultaneously. She tells NJ that she has troubles accepting her mother's coma and talking to her mother leads her to see the tediousness and meaninglessness of her life: "I have nothing to say to Mom. I tell her exactly the same things every day! I have so little... How can it be so little? I feel that I am wasting my time. What if I ended up like her one day..." We see Min-Min's back in the mirror which she cannot see herself. Ting-Ting once tells her neighbor girl Li-Li that her grandmother was a teacher, and she does teach, through her silent presence, the other characters the essence of their lives that they had failed to see before. Grandma lying in bed similarly functions as a mirror in the scene, reflecting the truth the other characters fail to recognize in this fast flow of urban life.

When NJ leaves his office in a rage after his secretary tells him that his co-workers are in a meeting with the copycat company which they arranged without telling him, the camera stays in place as NJ leaves. Through the transparent wall in NJ's office, we see in the reflection that the secretary returns to her office and picks up an international call for NJ from Sherry. Shooting through glass shows the audience what happens both in front of and behind the glass at the same time, but it also highlights the fact that the character tends to be aware of only what happens on their side, not the other side, no matter how transparent the wall is in between.

Another scene in which glass is used as a narrative device takes place when NJ is talking to A-Di in the hospital. When Grandma is sent to the hospital the same day A-Di is getting married, superstitious A-Di tells NJ that the day is the best day of the whole year, and thus Grandma would get well soon. They are talking and walking towards the ceiling-to-floor window, and then the camera stays with their reflection on the window.

At this moment, we see that the reflections of NJ and A-Di are separated by the window frames. They are talking to each other, but NJ does not believe A-Di's ridiculous theory, replying that "it's not that simple!" They are physically in the same space, but their values and thoughts are so disconnected that they are never really communicating, as if there is a transparent wall between them—a truth betrayed by glass.

Glass and Space

Glass not only shows the division between what is known and unknown, it also shows an interpermeation and liquidation of different spaces. Right after Min-min tells NJ about her midlife crisis, we hear a loud fight in the next-door apartment, and then NJ closes the shades and turns down the lights in their room. From the window we see the reflection of the headlights of heavy traffic on a freeway. Together we hear the traffic, Min-min's sobbing, and the couple next door fighting and squabbling. Min-min's anguish at her own life seems trivial and insignificant when in this scene we realize that NJ's family is merely one of millions in the Taipei city.

We see this interweaving of interior and exterior in urban space again in Tokyo—when NJ confesses to Sherry that he can never fall in love with another woman, she closes the door and weeps alone in a hotel room. Throughout the scene, the camera is positioned outside the window, and we can only see her faintly in the reflection of a window against the night skyline of the city and passing traffic. In both scenes in Taipei and Tokyo, the character is engulfed and blurred by the cityscape reflected on the window, introducing a dialectics between inner and outer space, city and body.

The most spellbinding scene emphasizing the blurred line between public and

personal spaces occurs when Min-Min stands alone by her office window in darkness and her image is engulfed by the passing traffic outside. Later when Min-Min's colleagues enter the office and turn on the lights, we are presented with an amazing sight—almost a work of art itself. As Isabelle Wu puts it, the red flashing light on the tallest building outside is reflected exactly in the position of Min-Min's heart, as if it is Min-min's heart beating (94). The public space permeates Min-Min's space in the office in an incredibly poetic way. The urban space influences and determines people's actions and thoughts to the extent that parts of the city can be fused with the human body. It is not only that we are living in a city, the city is also living in us. Later Min-Min tells her coworker Nancy that she has nowhere to go. She gets physically and symbolically stuck in an interstice, with her work-space on the one side, the symbolic place of her daily routine, and the bustling city and traffic on the other. Glass epitomizes the abstract relation between the urban dweller and the city, making visible what is otherwise unseen.

Mirroring

In *Yi Yi*, mirroring occurs everywhere. One city mirrors another. In those panning shots, were it not for the presence of Tokyo Tower, it would be difficult to distinguish Taipei from Tokyo. One character also mirrors another. One generation mirrors another. Once NJ tells his comatose mother-in-law that his son Yang-Yang resembles him in many ways. However, he may not be aware of the fact that the challenges his children need to tackle in order to grow up could be so similar to his own. Ting-Ting and Fatty's short-lived romance taking place in Taipei mirrors the bittersweet experience of NJ and Sherry in their earlier romance and their Tokyo reunion. When NJ reminisces about him

holding Sherry's hand for the very first time, the scene jumps to Ting-Ting and Fatty holding hands on their way to the movie theater. Ting-Ting's frustration in love mirrors her father's decades ago. On the other hand, Yang-Yang's enthusiasm for photographing the backs of people's heads is ridiculed by the girls and his teacher at school, who dismiss his photos as worthless "avant-garde art." NJ experiences a similar frustration when he is forced to give up his passion for music and pursue computer science instead, an experience shared by the director Yang himself.

Yi Yi is also a self-reflexive film which explores the thin line between art and life. Fatty once tells Ting-Ting that "movies are life-like, that is why we love them," and he continues to address the changes films bring to modern people's lives by quoting his uncle: "after the invention of film our lives have been extended three times over." The cinema does not only function like a mirror which reflects reality but it is also like a window which shows the audience different possibilities beyond their lived experiences.

In the end, NJ tells his wife that while she is away he has the chance to relive his youth, but he realizes that it is not necessary to right past wrongs or to regret what has already taken place. The past cannot be undone. Even if he had done things differently, everything might have turned out about the same. It appears that NJ's life does not change in the end—he still returns to his family and work; neither the contract with the knockoff company or with Japanese Ota works out, and his company is still in financial trouble. It seems that NJ returns to exactly where he stood at the beginning of the film; and yet we know something is different this time.

The ending of the film mirrors the beginning. *Yi Yi* both begins and ends with a ceremony which brings all the characters together, but the nature of these two gatherings

is very different. The opening wedding is eventful and chaotic—the wedding photo is hung upside down, and A-Di's ex shows up uninvited, and Grandma falls into a coma all on the same day. After showing the other half of truth through glass, Yang presents the ending funeral more calmly and harmoniously. We come to understand, through the three-hour journey with NJ's family, that life can be a one and a two, as the title puns, that it can be at once simple and profound, transparent and opaque, repetitive and uncertain, depending on our perspectives.

Giving his uncle A-Di a picture of the back of his head, Yang-Yang explains, "you cannot see it yourself, so I'll help you!" Yang-Yang's camera as a symbol of Edward Yang's cinematic lens is reinforced when Yang-Yang reads a letter at Grandma's funeral, stating that he will dedicate himself to "telling people what they do not know and showing them what they cannot see." The favor Yang-Yang does for the other characters—to show the other half they cannot see—is exactly what Yang offers his audience by making a film like *Yi Yi*. Like Yang-Yang's camera, Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* makes visible the truth which might otherwise remain unseen by playing with light, glass, and reflection.

Glass reshapes urban space and modern life. This phenomenon has caught the three directors' attention and has inspired them to structure their urban films around this unique material. In these films, glass demonstrates different relations between urban dwellers and the city. Glass used in a macro-dimension tends to produce exterior spectacles, such as transparent walls in the high-rise buildings of Taipei and Tokyo in *Yi Yi*, and the skyscrapers in the commercial zones of Shanghai in *As Light as Glass*. The gigantic

transparent surface often humbles or even overwhelms urban dwellers, as we have seen with a country bumpkin Little Sichuan, who, newly arrived in Shanghai, is frustrated in trying to enter a transparent space foreign to him, and gets dizzy while walking in a commercial area with skyscrapers on both sides. Portraying Taipei as a city in which glass is omnipresent also highlights a sense of alienation and detachment peculiar to modern urban life. Glass permeates urban space to the extent that at times, as *Yi Yi* shows, it produces one glass box after another to confine ourselves and others.

On the other hand, small scale glass we see in interior and personal space, used in a micro-space, such as the rearview mirror in Dezi's taxi, epitomizes a desire for a Beijing native to control and frame transient urban images. Unlike the newly arrived Little Sichuan, Dezi owns his own vehicle and an apartment; at first it seems he is skilled at navigating the city, as he once tells his passengers that he knows all the best places to go in Beijing and he habitually takes the role of a tour guide as he drives his dates around. However, as the ending of *I Love Beijing* suggests, this sense of control and intimacy with the city is more likely to be temporary and illusory.

Among the three films, *Yi Yi* deals with glass as a material, device, and trope in a most sophisticated and convoluted way. In this film, glass appears both in micro- and macro-spatial dimensions, in the domestic rooms and skyscrapers of global metropolises. Moreover, Yang beautifully uses the transparency and reflectiveness of glass to form a unique urban narrative, unraveling the constant struggle and anxiety of urban dwellers underlying the glassy surface of modern Taipei.

Coda

I have argued that industrial glass has changed the cityscape of the Western world since the mid-nineteenth century, with the appearance of the Crystal Palace and the Arcades and the ensuing construction of towering buildings and department stores utilizing large panes of glass in London and Paris. This extensive use of glass altered people's visual perceptions, blurred the boundaries between public and domestic spaces, and made tangible a kind of invisibility, due to glass's dual nature as medium and barrier. I associate the appearance of a glass-infused culture with Western modernity, arguing that the Sinophone world's relatively late use of glass manifests a desire to take on a Western modernity in its own cities. The modernizing London and Paris in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in a sense, mirrors the modernizing Shanghai, Beijing, and Taipei in the present.

As I have demonstrated in my chapters, urban experiences and cultural productions in Europe and in Asia have centered around glass as a key material and metaphorical category of urban culture. While the novel emerged as the urbanizing and modernizing genre which "reflects" social reality in nineteenth-century Western cities, film is the privileged genre of urbanizing and modernizing China and Taiwan. I have shown the distinguishing features of both genres, such as its transition and mobility, which make themselves peculiarly suitable for capturing the essence of modern urban life. The novel has claimed to be a (moving) mirror that honestly reflects reality; and film, through the lens-framed images, shows life in a series of transitory windows. By analyzing these select novels and films, I compare how the novelists and filmmakers utilize glass as a material, medium, and artistic trope to explore the relations between the city and the

people, the public and the private, the perceiver and the things perceived in Western and Chinese modernity.

One common theme in all the works I have discussed is the entangled relation between glass and people, which demonstrates that the subject/object divide or the assumption that humans are agents that act upon objects needs reconsideration. Glass is not merely a utilitarian object; rather, it is a vehicle of symbolic communication, a means for the shaping of identities. As Zola has shown us, show windows are capable of orchestrating new desires in human subjects. Glass also educates and initiates people into new ways of seeing. Sometimes it functions as a storyteller, revealing truths of which we were not aware; sometimes its transparency facilitates communication and reciprocity; yet at times it also deceives us, making the city a disorienting labyrinth, alienating us from one another. There are moments when glass seems to have its own character.

In this sense, glass belongs to what Bill Brown defines as a “thing.” Brown defines a “thing,” in opposition to “object,” as “what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects—their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects becomes values, fetishes, idols, and totems” (5). Indeed, as I have discussed, glass is an object with its own life; moreover, it even breathes new life into other objects, such as the items for sale in the window display. We tend to experience glass beyond its materiality precisely because it is a complex assemblage of qualities, physical as well as metaphorical. It is transparent and reflective, and it asserts its materiality and immateriality at the same time. In this sense, glass is a “thing” *par excellence*.

The opening of A. S. Byatt’s *Biographer’s Tale* (2001) shows us how a window asserts its “thingness” in a graduate seminar room. The narrator, a doctoral student of

literature, has an epiphany, and abruptly decides to give up his pursuit of becoming a postmodernist literary theorist when he absent-mindedly fixes his gaze on a dirty window:

I made my decision, abruptly, in the middle of one of Gareth Butcher's famous theoretical seminars... It was a sunny day, and the windows were very dirty. I was looking at the windows, and I thought, I'm not going to go on with this anymore. Just like that.... I went on looking at the filthy window above his head, and I thought, I must have *things*. I know a dirty window is an ancient well-worn trope for intellectual dissatisfaction and scholarly blindness. The thing is, that the thing is also there. A real, very dirty window, shutting out the sun. A *thing*. (3-4, italics original).

The filthy window interrupts the narrator's habit of looking through windows as transparencies, serving as a metaphor for the problematic and opaque medium through which we obtain knowledge. Rather than looking *through* the window, the narrator is looking *at* the window. At the moment he realizes that the window disguises its own thingness with its transparency. The narrator explains to his professor that he wants a life that is full of facts. Instead of immersing himself in abstract theory, he decides to write a biography, a recollection of things and facts of a human's life, about a great biographer. Similar to what Armstrong argues for Victorian glass, Byatt's dirty window asserts its existence, interposing its materiality between the self and the world, and creating a heightened awareness of mediation.

My dissertation demonstrates the fact that the role of glass in modernity is more profound and influential in urban contexts than we have thus far presumed, and highlights the need for a more thorough scholarly excavation of the many texts and contexts within which glass figures so prominently. More research on cultures of glass and its representation, and the relation between the two would be important and necessary, especially since to date glass is still a material that defines our modern life, and even our future life. It is intriguing that, as Friedberg's book title suggests, our civilization seems to

be structured around the concept of “windows,” from Alberti’s window to Microsoft’s “Windows.” Recently, a series of promotion videos made by Corning, “A Day Made of Glass” (2011 & 2012),⁴³ envisions an amazing future for mankind, in which we confront a world that is even more transparent, super high-tech glass touching every part of our life: we will organize our daily schedule on the touch screen on our bathroom mirror; chat with far-away friends through interactive video displays on the kitchen counter; cook in a kitchen in which everything from the countertop to the stove top is covered in smart glass; read a classic novel on a paper-thin piece of flexible glass; and study in a classroom with wall-format display glass. A life in a sense “made of glass” would absolutely give rise to yet another new culture of glass, and it would also entail, to borrow Armstrong’s term, a new glass consciousness. Will the new culture bring with it a new visual logic and introduce new meanings to the terms “windows,” “screens,” and “frames”? How will it reshape our identity and spectatorship, as we have seen that cultures of glass have done in past centuries? Moreover, will this new culture of glass generate a new genre, like the novel and film, which would “reflect” and help us navigate the new experiences in this more totalizing world of glass?

⁴³ The clips are available here: “A Day Made of Glass” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Cf7IL_eZ38
 “A Day Made of Glass 2” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZkHpNnXLB0>

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