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LINGERING IN-BETWEEN The Hesitant, Affect, and Borderline Moments in Chinese Cinema

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Chinese literature and philosophy from the West, this article seeks to redefine and complicate the notion of hesitation, aiming to foreground our understanding of hesitation beyond the mere concept of indecision, broadening it to an interval filled with consciousness and affective forces. This article elaborates on the manifestations of hesitation in Chinese cinema by delving into films such as *Chungking Express* (1994), *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *Still Life* (2006), *Peacock* (2005), and *Spring Fever* (2009). These films artfully illustrate hesitant gestures where protagonists—immersed in indeterminacy and affect—find themselves trapped in a realm of suspension and ambiguity. In conclusion, this paper contends that hesitation should not be seen as just a simple suspension, but an intense affectivity that may be amorphous, and can be felt through cinema.

KEYWORDS

Affect, Hesitation, Interval, Suspension, Chinese Films

Time is this very hesitation, or it is nothing.

—Henri Bergson (2007, 98).

When we face uncertain situations, we often hesitate and reflect, entering a state of temporary pause. This hesitation creates a gap between perception and action, disrupting the usual flow of perception-reaction circuits. The gap between reception and reaction here not only aligns closely with Henri Bergson's philosophy of memory (1929), intellect (2023), and consciousness (2013), but also with Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization of movement-images (1986, 61-66) where intervals occur between action and reaction within the centers of indetermination, which will be further investigated in this paper.

Hesitation, however, is not just a pause: it often involves anticipation and constant evaluation of an outcome. People tend to hesitate when faced with uncertain situations where they cannot predict what will happen next, such as deciding on a career path. Similarly, animals with fear-based behaviors, like cats, often exhibit hesitation in their actions—sniffing their surroundings, walking cautiously, and gradually approaching a person or object. The caution stems from their instinct to process information and sensory input before feeling confident and reacting to the environment.

Here, hesitation entails two meanings: First, the experience of hesitation is a precursory interval that occurs before the next event, involving the internal accumulation of thoughts and emotions. This accumulation heightens our vigilance, leading to increased sensibility, awareness, and intense affect. According to Sholtz affect can “produce a sensitivity to this intensive and immanent realm that normally eludes us,



or through which we clumsily pass unaware” (2017, 249). Thus, the affect of hesitation alerts us to potential abnormalities or dangers, making us more aware of what typically passes through our mind unconsciously in daily life. Such affect cannot arise without deep thought, sensitivity, and concentration all infolding, internally and consistently.

Besides, hesitation creates a space for alternative futures by refusing to automatically continue the past. This pause liberates individuals from the inertia of previous actions and adhering to a prior experience. Those who hesitate are exposed to a vast and overwhelming territory of indeterminacy, filled with indefinite paths and potentials.

Lastly, hesitant and ambiguous behaviors are predominant in Chinese culture, especially when expressing affection and feelings. It is argued that within Chinese culture and tradition, individuals are inclined to express themselves implicitly through detours, and vagueness sometimes out of concern for community harmony and hierarchy (Chang 1998). As a result, a repertoire of poems, puns, metonymy, metaphors, aphorisms, and fables emerged that are also referenced in modern cinema (Wang 2011).

Despite its omnipresence, hesitation remains uncharted in Chinese philosophy and theoretical discussion. Therefore, this paper aims to bridge this gap by incorporating the Chinese culture of hesitation with Western theorization. Besides, it attempts to reveal the experience of hesitation and the ways in which it takes shape in cinema. First, this paper defines hesitation by drawing on relevant terms and poets from Chinese culture and Western philosophical concepts from Bergson, Spinoza, and Deleuze. The paper argues that hesitation does not merely denote a pause, but an interval imbued with consciousness and affectivity, disrupting the linear continuity of the past and the present.

Subsequently, this paper examines a selection of Chinese films in which the protagonists, immersed in indeterminacy and the affective ambience that follows, find themselves trapped and dwelling in the terrain of hesitation and suspension. While hesitation may appear elusive and intangible, it incarnates in different manners in films through the ways our sensibility is capable of perceiving such affect. Hesitation not only complicates our involuntary thoughts and amplifies our sensibility to the present, but also opens up an equivocal sphere between the virtual and the real, leading one to linger in such borderline moments.

1. Hesitation and Beyond

Hesitation in Chinese translates as *youyu* (猶豫), denoting a temporary pause and retraction from the current situation. There are other terms that also refer to hesitation but with slightly different implications in the context. For instance, *panghuang* (彷徨) also means hesitate in English with an emphasis on walking back and forth nervously without knowing where to go, usually caused by indeterminacy (Baidu 2023). *Chouchubuqian* (躊躇不前) depicts a person standing still and failing to move forward due to hesitation (Baidu 2023). Contrarily, *youyi* (游移) and *paihuai* (徘徊), with a hint of hesitation, delineate lingering around with uncertainty, physically and psychologically (Baidu 2021). Besides, other words like *chichu* (踟躕), *zhizhu* (躑躅), and *chiyi* (遲疑) also refer to hesitation. *Aimei* (曖昧), similarly, denotes dalliances, flirtations, or equivocal affection between individuals, usually before they confess to each other. It can also be used to describe ambiguous relationships or boundaries that result from hesitancy.

Apart from the lexicons, the Chinese poet and politician of the late Tang dynasty, Li Shangyin (李商隱), encapsulates hesitation in his poetry: “In the vast waves, a lone boat drifts, just as thoughts of home subside, hesitation arises anew” (万里风波一叶舟，忆归初罢更夷犹。). The poem reflects the



poet's own sense of hesitation as he travels away from his hometown, feeling lost and nostalgic due to the uncertainty of the future. The term *yiyou* (夷犹) is an archaic one which also refers to hesitation, as it is also used in the poem “Jiu Ge Xiang Jun” (九歌·湘君) by the Chinese poet and aristocrat, Qu Yuan (屈原), from the State of Chu during the Warring States period: “Xiang Jun, you hesitate and do not leave, for whom do you linger on the islet in the river?” (君不行兮夷犹，蹇谁留兮中洲。) In this context, the term does not imply hesitation as a failure to make a decision but a bodily movement of indeterminacy—lingering. Therefore, *yiyou* (夷犹) vividly illustrates both the psychological state and the physical manifestation of hesitation.

Additionally, the verse (Watson, n.d.) “Southeast fly the peacocks, every five li they hesitate in its flight” (孔雀東南飛，五里一徘徊) derives from the grand poem *Southeast Fly the Peacocks*, a significant work in Chinese literary history and recognized as the longest *gushi* (古詩).

By depicting the hesitant flight of a pair of peacocks at its outset, the verse artfully alludes to the poignant love story of a wedded couple torn apart by the stricture of ancient feudal ethics. The metaphor of the peacocks further underscores the protagonists' emotional turmoil and indecision, ultimately culminating in their agonizing choice of joint suicide.

As shown, hesitation in Chinese culture refers to a wide range of activities and events, emotionally and physically, including the bodily movement of lingering, equivocal feelings, anxiousness, or back-and-forth movement all caused by hesitation. Despite the slight variations in its meanings, hesitation in Chinese diffracts indeterminate physical moves but also the emotional state in thought, giving rise to affectivity and intense sensibility.

To further unpack how hesitation forms, we delve into the work of Bergson, Deleuze, and Spinoza, intending to theorize hesitation in three aspects: hesitation as discontinuity, hesitation as consciousness, and hesitation as affective interval.

2 (i). Hesitation as Discontinuity: Space-time of the “Otherwise”

When individuals encounter an uncertain event or dilemma, they are often triggered by a certain degree of indeterminacy or even anticipation of future failure. In this process, hesitation emerges and accumulates as a pre-actualized thought or a form of emotional struggle. Only when this hesitant thought continues to accumulate and crystalize, will it eventually culminate in action. The back-and-forth negotiation within one's thoughts disrupts the action-response process. However, such hesitation as discontinuity is twofold: it not only disrupts the perception-reaction circuit but also creates a disconnect between the past and the present, thereby breaking the linear temporality.

First, the emergence of hesitation foresees the failure of the cerebral mechanisms that unconsciously and automatically follow the flow of perception and reaction, disrupting the continuity of the past and the present (Rutgeerts 2023, 253). In this situation, one comes to realize that the present is no longer an assumed event nor an automatic extension of the past. That said, the past and its concomitant circumstances fail to trigger the present. Consequently, one is inclined to disengage from the past and reevaluate the present circumstances. This suspension accords with Bergson's concept of recognition and memory (1929, 105). For him, recognition is the process of associating the past memory with the present. Specifically, the present perception delves into our memory, searching for associations in the past perceptions that can trigger



remembrance—a mingling process of perception and memory (Bergson 1929, 106). Bergson gives another example of recognition with the experience of hesitation, “at every corner I hesitate, uncertain where I am going. I am in doubt; and I mean by this that alternatives are offered to my body, that my movement as a whole is discontinuous, that there is nothing in one attitude which foretells and prepares future attitudes” (1929, 110).

Here Bergson’s argument contains two dimensions: first, hesitation cancels the past perception’s ability to prefigure the next movement. But it does not entirely eliminate the past. Instead, the past and the current merge together at this moment of hesitation. And it also opens possibilities for alternative futures. Following this Bergsonian scheme, Deleuze and Guattari argue that within the interval established between perception and reaction, the delayed reactions “have the time to select their elements, to organize them or to integrate them into a new movement which is impossible to conclude by simply prolonging the received excitation” (1997, 62). In this sense, the mere prolongation of an event by impulses or unconsciousness cannot render additional avenues for the future. Conversely, hesitation delays the movement by interpolating an interval in between, merging past and present circumstances, involving more conscious and organized thoughts that are not yet actualized. As a result, hesitation as discontinuity earns more time for us to tentatively tarry and linger in this space, forming and organizing precursory thoughts and mental activities that always hover on the verge of concretization.

This sphere of in-between, imbued with thoughts, imagination, and consciousness, configures an alternative space-time that deviates from the present space-time. It is a virtual realm of “otherwise” where one could tentatively detach from the current space and immerse in the

alternative futures and thoughts. It is the “otherwise” space for imagination.

In the second narrative of the film *Chungking Express* (directed by Wong Kar-Wai, 1994), in which two stories cross paths chronologically, intricate interplays of hesitation and the mechanisms of imagination come to the fore through the lens of fastfood waitress Faye’s (played by Faye Wong) unrequited affection. Her infatuation centers on a police officer named 663 (played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai) who is trapped in a distant relationship. This narrative arc gives rise to moments of palpable hesitancy: 663’s ambivalence about starting anew, and Faye’s hesitation to unveil her affections to him. As the storyline unfolds, an intricate entanglement of burgeoning affection, ambiguity, and indeterminacy becomes apparent. Faye soon immerses herself in a reverie, where she dreams of a daily pilgrimage to 663’s apartment, meticulously replacing the relics of the previous relationship. Worn towels are replaced by new ones, expired tuna cans are exchanged for fresh ones, and her favorite song “California Dreamin’” is also put in the player. The acts of substitution reveal her subtle yet purposeful endeavor to gradually change the old habits of his past. However, the movie’s transitioning from Faye falling in daydreaming in the store to her appearance in 663’s apartment leaves an uncertain ambiance to the story, blurring the demarcation between fantastical hallucination and reality. At this juncture, the movie deliberately configures a terrain of reverie or a dreamy reality, all starting with the hesitancy in the protagonists. The space-time of semi-conscious daydreams becomes an alternative arena where Faye is unshackled to release her sentiments and affections that the real-world hesitation has kept concealed. Such spatial-temporal domain forges the affective interval of hesitation not just between sensation and reaction but also leaps between the real and the virtual, as the reverie continues. Hesitance

and its affective interval here, in turn, act as a catalyst for Faye's imaginative faculties, allowing her to enter the space-time of the otherwise, distinct from the quotidian.



Figure 1. Faye lying on 663's bed, inspecting the relics of the previous relationship in *Chungking Express*, directed by Wang Kar-Wai, (1994; Hongkong: Jet Tone Production Co.,Ltd.). Photo credit: AsiaMovie Pulse.com, <https://asianmoviepulse.com/2022/04/film-analysis-chungking-express-1994-by-wong-kar-wai/>

In this film, hesitation is rather ineffable, intangible, and splintered even when it comes to the surface because it is the “in-between” and the “not-yet” before crystallization of action, without needing to take a form. It nevertheless shows the disposition of hesitation—“we do not actually see the interval, but we do feel its force into the perception of movement moving” (Manning 2009, 114). As such, the affective forces of hesitation

here do not manifest solely in specific actions but in various frames throughout the movie, becoming an atmosphere that we can perceive.

However, in some cases, because of fright, the anxiety of an uncertain future, or whatever reason, one may prolong this duration and dwell in this alternative terrain created by the experience of hesitation for as long and as much as they could, to escape from making the final decision. Consequently, they may find themselves both tempted and trapped in the not-yet duration.

For instance, set against the backdrop of Chongqing and the Three Gorges Dam project in the early 2000s, the film *Still Life* (2006), directed by Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhangke, follows two protagonists, a man named Han Sanming (played by Han Sanming) and a woman named Shen Hong (played by Zhao Tao), as they search for their missing families. Han, a miner, is looking for his lost wife whom he bought through human trafficking, while Shen, a nurse, seeks her estranged husband who has since started a new life with another woman. Though unrelated, both characters grapple with the same dilemma—whether to give up their past and move forward or remain trapped in the stagnant impasse of a marriage that exists in name only. The film delicately portrays this hesitancy, which is pervasive and subtle. On the one hand, Han toils as a low-wage laborer while he waits for his wife to show up. On the other, Shen refuses to confront the reality of her failed marriage until she is finally reunited with her husband.



Figure 2. Han Sanming smoking while looking over the landscape in *Still Life*, directed by Jia Zhangke (2006; China: Xstream Pictures). Photo credit: The Cinematheque, https://thecinematheque.ca/assets/images/films/_small169/StillLife_web2.jpg

The affectivity of hesitation then reaches its peak in the film's concluding scenes. First, Shen reunites with her husband, and they walk to the riverside where they begin to dance together in silence. Their wordless dance is suffused with lingering emotions, sentiments, and a touch of awkwardness. In this moment, hesitation transcends mere indecision; it manifests the complex, ambiguous, and ineffable feelings between two people who loved and shared a life together. The dance creates a temporary space where these equivocal, residual emotions can surface, enveloped in an atmosphere of indeterminacy and hesitation. However, as we articulated earlier, individuals cannot remain indefinitely within such a sphere of uncertainty; eventually, decisive action must be taken to end the hesitant state. In this case, Shen chooses to lie to her husband, claiming that she has fallen in love with someone else, in an attempt to burst the bubble of longstanding hesitation and embrace a new life.

Second, Han's wife decides to meet him again after sixteen years of separation. They sit together in a shabby tent near the river and talk about their lives. Han poses a question, "Why did you have to leave? I was always nice to you." His bewilderment reveals that he never truly understood, nor did he attempt to understand, the reasons behind her departure. Instead, he chose to linger in the indeterminate state of their marriage for decades, avoiding any clear answers. This is because of the very hesitation to accept the reality. When Han asks her to show him photos of their daughter and to take him to her, his wife responds with a seemingly unrelated remark: "You didn't come earlier, you didn't come later. Why did it take you so many years to come looking for me now?" Her question subtly underscores Han's own hesitation again—over sixteen years, he never faced the reality that he had lost his wife. Instead, he traveled all the way to Chongqing, working as a laborer, clinging to the hope that she might return with him.

Moreover, the atmosphere of hesitation, though elusive and seemingly invisible, envelops the former lovers in awkward silences, unnatural gestures, and trivial conversations in the last scenes. This space-time of the otherwise, shaped by hesitant emotions, is not just a pause between actions for those unable to decide to move forward; it turns into a virtual territory where individuals tarry, wandering around their ambiguous sentiments and clinging to a delusional denial of reality.

Another example can be found in *Spring Fever* (2009) directed by Lou Ye. Inspired by the Chinese literary masterpiece *Intoxicating Spring Nights* (1924) by poet and writer Yu Dafu, the film portrays intricate homosexual affairs among its protagonists. Hesitation is not the main theme until it emerges later when Jiang Cheng (played by Qin Hao) and Luo Haitao (played by Chen Sicheng) develop a growing affection for each

other, despite Luo's existing relationship with a young woman named Li Jing.



Figure 3. Shen Hong overlooking the landscape of the Three Gorges Dam while searching for her husband in *Still Life*, directed by Jia Zhangke (2006; China: Xstream Pictures), The Cinematheque, <https://thecinematheque.ca/films/2021/still-life>

The pivotal juncture that highlights the hesitant ambience arrives as Jiang and Luo are about to embark on a journey to a distant town. However, a call from Li—asking for Luo's company—disrupts their plans. Caught between conflicting emotions, Luo decides to bring Li along. This decision introduces a complex layer of hesitation, also highlighting the ambiguous and flirtatious affection between Luo and Jiang.

The film intensifies the scene of hesitation when Li unexpectedly witnesses a kiss between Jiang and Luo on a balcony. Left overwhelmed and astonished by this revelation, Li is bewildered and uncertain about her role in their dynamic as well as where the future is ahead. The journey continues, and an unspoken yet palpable dynamic pervades the trio. They go on karaoke, driving, and swimming together as if nothing happened,

relishing the ambivalent and ephemeral joy before the dissolution of their relationships. The shared bewilderment among them is most pronounced when the three huddle together by the river, the spring breeze reflecting the mounting tension that hangs in the air. This tranquil moment further culminates the not-yet moment and bewildered emotions due to indeterminacy and hesitancy before the suppressed emotions within them eventually lead to an eruption, resulting in Li departing without a word, while Luo parts ways with Jiang following a heated argument.

Affection, fear, indecision, and indeterminacy in the film all mingle together, obscuring the demarcations between right and wrong. The river scene demonstrates that faced with dilemma and indecision, they all opt to suspend and tarry in the realm of not-yet, a duration that hesitation endows, with the hope of escaping from the overwhelming reality by indulging and immersing themselves in fleeting revelry for as long as they could. Hesitation manifests in lingering moments and tarrying, especially when faced with a predicament and the desire to avoid executing the final decision or immediate reaction. However, although indecisiveness often leads to back-and-forth actions and repetitive patterns of movement, what ultimately awaits is the very moment of reaction because one cannot coexist with hesitation, nor can one indefinitely dwell in this virtuality of not-yet. Hesitation is a transitory duration and virtual sphere that accommodates one only temporarily. The accumulation of excessive consciousness and overwhelming indeterminacy foreshadows hesitation's irreconcilability with our sanity. Hesitation ultimately finds its way to elicit a reaction when it can no longer afford more intensity and indeterminacy. Eventually, the original relationships and events may collapse, burst out, and put an end to the maelstroms of hesitation, depicted as all the protagonists parting ways at the end of the film.



Figure 4. Jiang Cheng, Li Jing, and Luo Haitao (from left to right) huddling together by the river in silence in *Spring Fever*, directed by Lou Ye (2009; China: Dream Factory HK Rosem Films). Photo credit: Review Online, <https://inreviewonline.com/2019/05/17/spring-fever/>

2 (ii). Hesitation as Consciousness: The Abyss of Thought

Henri Bergson establishes a connection between hesitation and the concept of consciousness in *Time and Free Will* (2013, 173-77) and *Creative Evolution* (2023, 132-33), suggesting that “consciousness is hesitation and choice” (2023, 132). He contends that consciousness emerges when facing multiple possibilities before taking actions whereas consciousness becomes nothing if there is only one certain action (2023, 132). Similarly, English philosopher John Stuart Mill perceives the consciousness in free will, suggesting that “to be conscious of free will must mean to be conscious, before I have decided, that I am able to decide either way” (1878, 580 quoted in Bergson 2013, 173-74). Bergson and Mill underscore the complexity and indeterminacy of consciousness, which are both characterized by and formed within the experience of hesitation.

However, other options do not disappear but remain awaiting until one retracts their decisions (Bergson 2013, 176). In short, the present fails to follow the patterns of the past automatically but evolves in multiple directions and possibilities (Rutgeerts 2021). This highlights another characteristic of hesitation—it is a nonlinear process of thinking, which could further manifest in negotiation and in back-and-forth movements.

Furthermore, indeterminacy arising from hesitation somewhat resonates with Janae Sholtz’s elaboration on silence and indeterminacy in John Cage’s music (2017, 245–252). As Sholtz construes, silence in Cage’s musical pieces entails uncertainty and unpredictable situations, annihilating our normal cognitive and affective circuits (Sholtz 2017, 250). Similarly, hesitation emancipates the mind from habitual and semi-conscious moments in everyday life. As Bergson suggests, the brain passes “those external influences which are indifferent to them; the others isolated, become ‘perceptions’ by their very isolation” (1929, 28–29). Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari argue that our brain’s mechanism is subtractive, filtering out less relevant things according to our needs (1997, 63).

Therefore, when one hesitates, the brain starts to perceive the event at hand, instead of letting it pass like other events. This process entails heightened consciousness and in-depth contemplation, or what Bergson calls *intellect*—a process of thinking “oriented more toward consciousness” (2023, 132). Compared to instincts which usually manifest in immediate responses, intellect is more flexible with the potential it offers, and it is hesitant (Landes 2023, xxxiii). That said, hesitation propagates abundant consciousness, potentially giving rise to intellect. Intellect, in turn, may lead to more hesitant actions. In this regard, a priori responses developed in the past seem to be nullified; instead, indeterminacy and hesitation awaken our sensibility from involuntary



moments and frustrate the rhythm of “ready and easy responses craved by our habituated bodies” (Colebrook 2011, 50 quoted in Sholtz 2017, 247). In this interplay, hesitation and consciousness can further reach a climax with abundant intellect.

This aspect of hesitation shares similarities with the notion of arrhythmia. In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre (2004, 68) explains that arrhythmia indicates rhythm discordance that disrupts rhythmic alliances’ equilibrium, such as wars and epidemics (Lyon 2021, 166). This discordance calls for attention to the current infrastructure within which arrhythmia occurs. Additionally, composer John Cage utilizes silence in his musical compositions as a way to render indeterminacy and awareness and further develops a theory where one could only become aware of the composition because of the very existence of silence (Sholtz 2017, 250). Therefore, the arrhythmia of linear thought and action, namely hesitation, could be one of those awakening moments that arouse our consciousness to challenge the haecceity of the event, and perhaps the normalcy of the present. What such doubt may lead to is emotional turmoil. Therefore, hesitation as consciousness here does not necessarily refer to being hesitant to make a choice. Rather it can be an emotional and affective state with an overflow of consciousness that gives rise to one’s hesitancy to accept the present.

For example, *Peacock* (2005), directed by Gu Changwei, portrays a family of three siblings in post-socialist China between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The first narrative arc subtly unveils the hesitancy of the daughter, Gao Weihong (played by Zhang Jingchu), within their mundane yet stifling everyday life. It captures how Gao watches her dreams falling apart, ultimately leading her to embrace a bittersweet sense of mundanity that she once resists.

At the outset, Gao aspires to be a parachute military personnel, envisioning herself flying and landing with the freedom of birds. After failing to enlist in the military, she attaches a homemade parachute to the backseat of her bicycle, ecstatically cycling around the town and immersing in the daydream of being a parachute soldier. However, the fleeting joy is soon shattered by her mother, who prohibits her from engaging in anything that deviates from the ordinary. The hesitancy within the daughter does not only just surface in her refusal to the mundane daily life but also in a series of endeavors to alter her destiny, ranging from attempting to enlist in the parachute military to liberate herself from day-to-day factory work, to seeking out a new family that genuinely cares for her. With these attempts, hesitant thoughts and consciousness are rather dispersed throughout the narrative, appearing elusive and intangible.

Moreover, following the Bergsonian perspective of intellect versus instinct, the consciousness stemming from the daughter's hesitancy differs from the instinct of adhering to societal norms. It embodies an arrhythmic consciousness and intellect, making her unable to assimilate societal dogmas. This, in turn, contributes to her emotional turmoil and the strife between ideals and reality. Arrhythmic or turbulent consciousness, again, remains pronounced in the experience of hesitation, arising between the occurrence of an event and the decision to embrace it.



Figure 5. Gao Weihong riding her bike with a broken parachute, envisioning herself flying and landing like a parachuting military personnel in *Peacock*, directed by Gu Changwei (2005; China: Asian Union Film). Photo credit: Movies that Make You Think, <https://moviessansfrontiers.blogspot.com/2006/09/8-changwei-gus-chinese-film-kong-que.html>

2 (iii). Hesitation as Affective Interval: The Intensity of Emotion

Although Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts provide new ways to understand hesitation in relation to perception and consciousness, none were developed into a full-blown theory of hesitation. None of the philosophers consider the intense affectivity that emerged alongside hesitation. As previously articulated, how hesitation awakens our sensation and consciousness also gives rise to intense emotions and affectivity. Therefore, hesitation should be considered as an interval imbued with affect. To further delineate hesitation in this regard, this article will draw from affect theory and establish a relation between affect

and hesitation. First, in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (1987, xvi) writes:

L'affect (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies).

Both Massumi and Spinoza reject considering affect as emotions or feelings, but rather as the ways external factors and causes impinge upon the mental. It is also an experiential process for the body to act, affect, and be affected by the surroundings. Besides, Shouse succinctly articulates that "at any moments hundreds, perhaps thousands of stimuli impinge upon the human body and the body responds by infolding them all at once and registering them as an intensity. Affect is this intensity" (2005). Similarly, Bergson construes affect as the power of absorbing the actions that act upon the body (1929, 57). In this sense, affect measures the gap between perception and reaction in the body, and this very gap, in turn, gives rise to intense affectivity and sensibility while digesting received information, and preparing for executed movements. The intensity of this experience is affect. However, this intensity does not connote intense emotions or feelings in the sensorium when one hesitates. Instead, it refers to the affective state in thought, which is rather slippery and enigmatic.



In *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995, 83-109), Massumi considers affect as the “suspension of action-reaction circuits” (1995, 89). Similarly, Deleuze suggests that “the interval is not merely defined by the specialization of the two limit-facets, perceptive and active. There is an in-between. Affection is what occupies the interval, what occupies it without filling it in or filling it up” (1986, 65). Then perhaps, when a temporary suspension such as hesitation occurs, a space for affect is also opened up. Moreover, hesitation always lingers on the brink of actualization of events, such an interval thus is a moment of not-yet with a plentitude of affective forces and sensibilities.

However, affect does not occur individually. It is, instead, interpersonal and sometimes collective, dynamic and dispersed, even across humans and non-human entities (Robinson and Kutner 2019, 112). That means affect from one body (for Spinoza, the affecting body) can also affect other bodies, or as Spinoza would say, the affected bodies. Thus, movements among bodies could together create an atmosphere of indeterminacy—that is hesitation, further constituting a landscape of affect and sensation that in turn, enwraps bodies. Because the patterning and affective tonality¹ of how bodies relate to each other is always unique in every circumstance, the affective force here in hesitation or any other situation is also unique, “making experience this and not that” (Manning 2009, 9).

¹ Affective tonality or affective tone here refers to the mood and atmosphere of the film as a whole. “The affective tone of the film is the culmination of all of the affective elements of the film itself, be it sound, colour, movement and so on” (Hawkins 2016).



Figure 6. The final scene when Chow meets with Su, and expresses his decision to leave for Singapore in *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-wai (2000; Hongkong: Jet Tone Production Paradis Films). Photo credit: EvanRichards.com, <https://www.evanerichards.com/2012/2774/>

For instance, faced with the same dilemma, two people hesitate together, configuring the affective force is rather atmospheric, which only exists between them and is perceivable by them. *In the Mood for Love* (2000) unfolds the tale of two neighbors, Su Lizhen (played by Maggie Cheung) and Chow Mo-wan (played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai) who discover their spouses are engaged in an affair. And over time, they also develop feelings for each other. Hesitation then becomes a central theme, intertwined with the growing affection between Su and Chow. Faced with the dilemma of insurmountable marital barriers and ethics, the two protagonists constantly oscillate between veiled expressions of fondness and concealment. The film captures a series of fleeting connections, affectionate yearnings and gestures, unspoken desires, as well as wavering indecision. It does so by crafting an interval space between reality and the inner world of the protagonists. An illustrative instance unfolds in the rehearsal scene between Su and Chow at the end of the film.



At this juncture, Chow makes the decision to move to Singapore and proposes a practice farewell with Su, to be emotionally prepared for the actual farewell later. However, the rehearsal leaves Su overwhelmed, causing tears to well up. Eventually, her pent-up hesitancy, like their affection crept up over time, reaches a boiling point, erupting forth in an emotional outpour. Up until the rehearsal, Su had always been the restrained one, adhering to societal norms with the hope of her spouse's return. Yet, faced with an impending farewell, the hesitancy arrives at a point where it can no longer suppress further accumulation of burgeoning emotions and affections. Consequently, it chooses to take form. Such hesitation finds expression, manifesting itself in reactions—in this case actualizing as Su's emotional outburst. The space-time configured, although temporarily, by the rehearsal, enwraps the protagonists with its intensity but also disperses across them, further constituting affective duration in time as well as an affective landscape around them. The affective forces in the scene further become atmospheric and interpersonal. Therefore, hesitation or other emotion-driven events are the expression of such affective forces. The experience of hesitation in the film enhances one's sensibility to grasp and sense such diffused affect.

2 (iv). Hesitation in Uttered Expression: The Feltness of the Borderline Moments

As articulated earlier, there are two types of hesitation: individual and interpersonal. The latter is rather interesting here since it involves interactions with or among individuals and attempts to express through a variety of methods such as ambiguous utterances. This section thus will be focused on the uttered expression of hesitation in *In the Mood of Love* (2000).

The essence of hesitation, as addressed, lies on indeterminacy, which, in turn, determines the fate of hesitation—it always remains equivocal and can dwell in the sphere of virtuality without concretization; it is thus in the space of pre-forming and not-yet. Consequently, the expression of hesitation must remain both expressive and not explicit. Therefore, to feel hesitation is to feel the intensity of such expression. To feel the expression of it is also to feel—with the experience and movement. In considering intensity in images, Manning writes that, “we feel intensity without seeing its actual form. The feeling of intensity coexists virtually with what actually happens”(2009, 96). The intensity of hesitation can be invisible but subtle enough to be perceptible and it exists together with the present happening. However, a dilemma emerges in this process: the interpersonal hesitation is in need of expressing itself and makes itself felt between individuals, on the one hand; but on the other, it cannot become concrete and lucid or it will lose its indeterminacy—hesitation then will no longer be indefinite but definite. In other words, hesitation must remain as a not-yet interstice before making things certain, and the expression of it relies on making the intensity of hesitancy felt through verbleness, gestures, movements, and experiences.

Two intertitles show in the opening and closing frames of *In the Mood of Love* (2000):

那是一種難堪的相對。她一直羞低著頭，給他一個接近的機會。他沒有勇氣接近。她轉身，走了。

It is a restless moment. She has kept her head lowered...to give him a chance to come closer. But he could not, for lack of courage. She turns and walks away.

—Opening intertitle



那些消逝了的歲月，彷彿隔著一塊積著灰塵的玻璃，看得到，抓不著。他一直在懷念過去的一切。
如果能衝破那塊積著灰塵的玻璃，他會走回早已消逝的歲月。

He remembers those vanished years. As though looking through a dusty window pane, the past is something he could see, but not touch. And everything he sees is blurred and indistinct.

— Closing intertitle

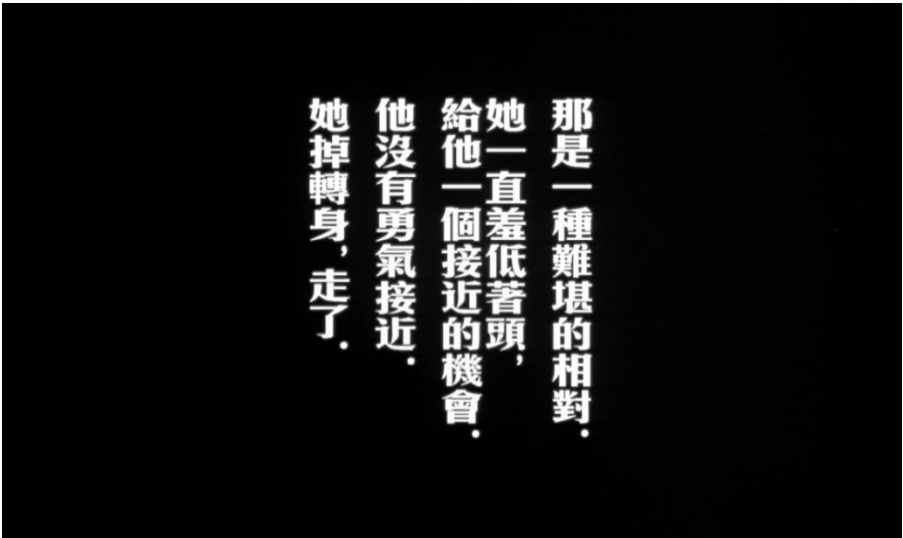


Figure 7. Opening intertitle: “It is a restless moment. She has kept her head lowered...to give him a chance to come closer. But he could not, for lack of courage. She turns and walks away.” *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-Wai (2000; Hongkong: Jet Tone Production Paradis Films). Photo credit: EvanRichards.com, <https://www.evanerichards.com/2012/2774/>

The intertitles unfurl the underlying affection between Su and Chow while also delicately portraying the uncertainty and indecision in them, as well as the not-yet-ness of this indecisiveness. Su’s implicit expression, a consequence of her hesitance in the face of societal pressures, and Chow’s hesitancy-driven lack of courage, are subtly depicted in these intertitles. As a result, the affective tonality of hesitation is made felt through words. Hesitation in the intertitles may not acquire physical forms in the film, yet

the audience is capable of perceiving affective tonality and affective forces without any visual forms.

Besides, at the end of the movie, Chow asks Su whether she would accompany him if an extra ticket were available. Instead of giving a direct response, Su sits alone in her apartment, tears quietly dropping down her cheeks. She poses the same question even after Chow's departure. This poignant scene not only underscores the elusive and ambivalent nature of their affection but also leaves the query unanswered, with an open ending stemming from the quandaries of their affair. Hesitant postures and affection between them are expressed through the unanswered question, constituting the myriad 'what-ifs' and lingering indeterminacy that reside therein. The uttered, again, is the perceptible expressive quality of the seemingly imperceptible hesitation, clustering intensity and feltness in hesitation.

3. Conclusion

If we regard thoughts and movements as ebbs and flows in everyday life, hesitation is a rupture of thought disrupting the cadence and continuum of our experience. But in this paper, hesitation is not just indecision. Referring to the definitions in Chinese, hesitation also denotes ambiguous affection, bewilderment, uncertainty about the future, anxiousness, as well as a back-and-forth bodily movement. Building upon these definitions, this article turned to Western philosophy and articulated that hesitation contains affectivity and expressivity that are not only personal but interpersonal, dispersing across individuals and constituting an atmosphere of hesitation. The affective assets in hesitation are, similar to what Robinson and Kutner construe in affect: "dispersed subjectivity, posthuman emotion so diffuse it travels through crowds, up mountains, and down spines" (2019, 112). Hesitation turns into discontinuity,



excessive consciousness, and affective interval, further expressing itself in various ways such as imagination, arrhythmic consciousness that causes emotional turmoil, uncertain movement (both physical and mental), and implicit verbal expressions that linger between the definite and the indefinite, the virtual and the actual.

In the reading on Deleuze and Guattari's affect, Colebrook suggests that "the power of art [is] not just to present this or that affect, but to bring us to an experience of any affect whatever or 'affectuality' — or *that there is affect*" (2004, 18 cited in Sholtz 2017, 248). The listed Chinese films in this essay, similarly, have the same capacity of presenting not just the existence of hesitation but the experience of it. These films also expand the concepts of hesitation to diverse and intricate emotions, such as struggling, nervousness, and even silence. Yet, the quasi-experience or quasi-emotion elicited by cinema is not our actual perception. To feel hesitation, we do not necessarily need to engage in hesitant events. Instead, we sense, feel, and perceive the force of hesitancy, that is, the affect of hesitation through cinema when it takes form. In this process, we become-with the hesitant protagonists, and we become-with hesitation.

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