

# Wong kar wai's in the mood for love

[Life](#), [Love](#)



IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE Set in front of the conservative backdrop of 1960's Hong Kong, Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* tells the intimate tale of two people who, by fate, seem to land themselves in each other's company due to the common bond of the absence of their spouses. The plot of the film is by no means anything original, but it is deeply accentuated by the style in which the film is shot. With unconventional camera angles, an inconsistent musical score, and deep, luscious colors, *In the Mood for Love* brings a seemingly real perspective to a very personal story. Mr.

Chow (Tony Leung) and Mrs. Chang (Maggie Cheung) coincidentally, move in to their small neighboring Hong Kong flats on the same day. Mr. Chow, a newspaper editor with an unseen, but presumably traveling, wife, and Mrs. Chang, a secretary, also with an unseen business executive husband. The two often find their paths crossing as they frequent the same streets, restaurants, and noodle shop. It is when they discover that their spouses are having an affair that they begin to see each other. Unlike very fast paced, show-all, American films, the relationship that blossoms between Mr.

Chow and Mrs. Chang is not one of immense passion and love, but more of a deeper unsaid understanding. It is the simple gestures such as the conversations, the gazing into one another's eyes, and the holding of hands where the real relationship lies. This could not be clearer when, in a climactic moment of the film, they briefly caress each other's hands in the back of a taxi. The film is accentuated by the unconventional, but highly innovative camera work throughout. Often times the camera remains stationary while the characters move about, and sometimes out of the frame.

It's as if to remind the audience that we are looking through a peep hole rather than through a movie screen, and that there are things that we will not be able to see. Throughout various portions of the film, like the rice cooker scene, for example, you can hear the characters speaking, but you will actually have to visualize what they are doing. The position at which the camera lies throughout the movie is also noteworthy because of the strange angles it is put at, such as under a bed, over a person's shoulder, through metal grating, and in general, low to the ground.

It seems that Wong Kar Wai is telling us " no, that's too easy. You need to look at this from a more difficult position, as if you were eavesdropping on these very private moments..." The rich colors and costumes of the film play a very large part in how the story is told as well. In the first scene, at the appearance of Mrs. Chan and her very colorful dress, the audience is immediately drawn to her and continues to watch her throughout the rest of the film. From then on each dress, one right after the other, begins to astonish the viewer with its lush colors and interesting patterns.

This immediately sets Mrs. Chan apart from any other character, especially Mr. Chow, who dresses in relatively the same attire every day, creating a very physical contrast between two characters who are emotionally similar. Not only does the costuming add emphasis to the film, but the lighting of most of the scenes adds another layer onto they already thick stylized coat of the film. Much of the film takes place on the very foreign and almost enigmatic streets of Hong Kong, usually during the night, and we are provided with not quite enough illumination to see everything perfectly.

This adds a heightened level of mystery throughout the entire film, especially in the first half, before the characters really meet. The warm colors, in a sense, add quite a bit to the slow pacing of the film. These are not very cold, vivid, or fast colors, but rather ones that let the scenes take their time, in a place where conversations are not hurried and friendly games with neighbors last into the late hours of the night. The editing also does its part to slow down the movie, making the shifts between days seamless and slowing scenes down into slow motion to literally "juice" the magic out of them.

However, much, if not all of the aforementioned material is simply technique none of the true bread and butter of movies is covered. This is simply because there hardly was any. Is the plot original? No, not really. Is the script solid? Well, considering there was no actual script to begin with, no. But is the way in which all of these, otherwise boring, elements filmed beautiful and interesting? Absolutely! It seems that the true core of this movie is missing, but who's to say that every movie has to follow a standard formula?

#### THEMES TIME

After reading some interviews I found that Kar-wai was very interested in the past, almost nostalgic for how Hong Kong was when he was growing up. He also finds interesting ways to show the passing of time in In the Mood for Love with the many beautiful dresses that Mrs. Chang wears. ISOLATION  
Another heavy theme in In the Mood for Love is isolation. In a couple of the interviews Kar-wai mentioned that people (like himself) fleeing Shanghai to

Hong Kong basically had to cram into apartments. Kar-wai creates a limited visual space by having actors off-camera, shooting in narrow hallways.

Even the character's emotions seem to distance themselves.

CINEMATOGRAPHY The way Wong Kar-wai and Chris Boyle go about shooting movies is the complete opposite from every other director we've studied this semester. Instead of taking a more professional approach of meticulously planning out every shot, they figure out what would be best determined by location, and it seems they act more like bumbling film students rather than award winning filmmakers. " Our styles come from the way we work; like in *Fallen Angels* we started working in a very small teahouse, and the only way we could shoot the scene was with a wide-angle lens.

But I thought the wide-angle lens was too normal, so instead I preferred an extreme wide-angle. And the effect is stunning because it draws the characters very close to the camera but twists the perspective of the space so they seem far away. It became a contrast to *Chungking Express*, in which people are very far away from the camera but seem so close. Also, we work with very limited budgets and we don't have permits, so we have to work like CNN, you know, just breaking into some place and taking some shots.

We often don't have time for setups, and sometimes when neighbors walk into the frames we have to cut them out, and that becomes a jump cut. I think 10 or 15 percent is preconceived. Most of it just happens. " --Wong Kar-wai This is all very surprising because the most notable features in *In the Mood for Love* is the look of the film, which is beautiful. It's nice to know there are other ways to go about shooting a film, and that being meticulous

doesn't make you a better director. The way you take on the challenges of shooting a film to be as visually competent as possible makes you a director.

WORKING WITH ACTORS Seeing how Kar-wai's filming techniques are by the seat of your pants, it comes as no surprise that his directing of actors is just as spontaneous. During the filming of *In the Mood for Love*, Maggie Cheung said that the camera would be far away (because he's shooting with a wide angle I'd assume) and that he would all of a sudden want to switch the shot to slow motion, without telling any of the actors. " He will see a shot and then suddenly he will picture it as a slow motion shot and he'll just say, let's try one of those, and then he'll just do it, without us even knowing. I'm not sure if this is the best way to go about directing an actor unless you are absolutely sure about what you're doing. Wong Kar-wai seems to be a free spirit in the way he speaks, and directs. Plus he has a close relationship with many collaborators so everyone knows what is needed from them to complete his vision. Kar-wai seems to know the most about human emotions and how to properly show them on the screen so they're believable. I remember there was an emotional scene where I was saying good-bye to Andy Lau at a bus stop.

We had to retake that scene the next day because I was not very good. I thought I had been good because I had been crying and crying, but Wong Kar Wai said, " It is not about that. It is not about how many tears drop out of your eyes or how emotional you are. " I said, " No? But you ask me to cry and I am crying, why am I doing it wrong? " He said, " But when you cry you should try to hold back. Nobody cries just like that. The minute you feel the

sting in your eyes your first reaction should be ' I don't want to cry,' and to hold it back. " INFLUENCES

Wong Kar-wai was born in Shanghai and moved to Hong Kong when he was five. Leaving his 40 or so cousins, he became an only child thanks to the Cultural Revolution. Leaving the lifestyle of a small village full of friends and family your own age, to a city full of adults must have been very impressionable on the young Kar-wai. His mother loved movies and luckily for them there were plenty of theaters around playing Western, European, and local films, " we spent almost every day in the cinemas because she doesn't have any friends or relatives in Hong Kong".

Days of Being Wild, In the Mood for Love, and 2046 all take place during the 1960's in Hong Kong, with slight political undertones so this place and time was obviously very important to him. Wong Kar-wai also seems to be heavily influenced by the French New Wave, but who isn't? Like The 400 Blows and Breathless, Kar-wai's films come off as a love letter to their settings because of how beautifully detailed the shots are. You can tell that he is in love with Hong Kong and that it is his greatest influence.