Transnational Mobility: Reading Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* as a Tourist Romance

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ABSTRACT

Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) is often interpreted as a "romantic comedy" which explores the unlikely encounter between the two married Americans in Japan: the two feel so dislocated and disoriented that they develop a nearly adulterous relationship. Such an interpretation, however, simplifies the film, seeing it merely as an "existential" drama in which the characters try to overcome their alienation in an Other-ized environment. This essay aims to reread the film as a "tourist romance" within a global context, where the travel-versus-home motif and the issue of transnational mobility must be addressed. Only in this way can we avoid categorizing the film only as an orientalizing Western text which falsely represents Japan's Otherness in order to highlight the Western protagonists' sameness. Thus here I will analyze the main characters' "tourist experience" within Tokyo's cityscape, and show how Tokyo serves as the "contact zone" where they shape their own perspectives on Japan by way of limited communication with a select group of (partly) bilingual Japanese.

KEY WORDS

tourist romance, home-versus-travel motif, transnational mobility, contact zone

Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) is a romantic comedy with a simple plot: the protagonists, Bob Harris (Bill Murray) and Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), encounter one anther in a foreign country, Japan, and because of their loneliness and sense of dislocation, they soon start to depend on each other's company; an erotic-yet-platonic (or sublimated-erotic) relationship germinates in spite of their many differences. All this happens due to the fact that the story is set in an alien place, thus guaranteeing that the encounter will be both transitory and memorable. Yet Coppola's film is anything but a clichéd holiday romance: the film is complex and multi-dimensional, since it involves Western "tourism" to an Asian country and in this way the meeting of West and East. When *Lost in Translation* is viewed as a "tourist romance," issues such as transnational mobility, the travel-home motif, cross-cultural contact, and the tourist experience of space begin to stand out. This essay aims to treat Coppola's film as a tourist romance by dividing its analysis into two major sections. The first section deals with how we should contextualize the central characters' travel to Japan, instead of simply focusing on their personal relationship. My contextualization will be based on the travel-home motif found in many works of travel literature. In the second section, I will bring the hero's/heroine's "tourists' spatial experience" into the discussion. The importance of examining their spatial experience is that we have to understand the material condition that underlies their romantic encounter. Otherwise we would dangerously see the film only as an "existential" drama where the characters try to overcome their alienation in an Other-ized environment. Only by analyzing the tourist space represented in the film can we grasp how this American couple

interpret the Tokyo's cityscape according to their Western perspective.

I

Besides being labeled as a romantic comedy, *Lost in Translation* is also viewed by many critics as a "holiday romance" (Haslem; Allsop), "shipboard romance" (Cardullo 465), or even "May-December romance" (Filippo 27). All these seemingly diverse labels convey that the film deals with a transient but unforgettable encounter between a middle-aged man and a young woman who, due to their hardly surmountable disparity in age and values, would never have loved each other had they not been situated in this very special, mutually alienated context. The most unsurpassable obstacle to the protagonists is that they are both married, making them seem an "unlikely couple." Actually, it is not the ephemerality of their encounter that makes their romance impressive for us. Rather, as film viewers, we are led to expect that their difficult-to-impossible love will be fulfilled, to the point of transgressing social norms, such as the prohibition of extramarital affair. In this sense, Bob and Charlotte's "May-December" relationship is not just a metaphor of the fleeting connection of two lonely souls in a foreign country; it connotes a kind of socially-unapproved intimacy which the two characters attempt to seek within a specific context (Tokyo) isolated from the normative system in their homeland.

Although this American-abroad romance is right on the edge of violating sexual morality—Bob and Charlotte verge on committing adultery—we can still treat them as an "unlikely couple" whose relationship may challenge the established social barrier such as loyalty to monogamy. It is arguable that this unlikely couple's transgression lies not in their adulterous intercourse (since apparently they never do so), but in their erotic desire for each other, though in the form of "sublimated" sexuality (King 46). I borrow the idea of "unlikely couple" from Thomas E. Wartenberg's cinematic study, *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism*, to suggest that Bob and Charlotte's improbable union leads them towards self-development, even though the film does not endorse their "long-term, committed

relationships, whether sanctioned in marriage or not" (234). And to say that Bob and Charlotte are an unlikely couple means that their affair is inappropriate or even offensive because it breaches a conventional norm regulating romance from the social perspective (2). However, the unlikeliness of their bonding can not be solely accounted for by their almost-gonna-happen adultery. More than that, their "May-December" romance is strongly associated with the "rob-the-cradle" impropriety, that is, a twenty-first-century version of *Lolita*. Such an old-man-and-young-girl theme on the other hand adds more transgressive tensions to the romance, since it makes Bob and Charlotte an example of a father-daughter pair who stage the drama of the Oedipus complex. According to the film critic, Stuart Klawans, *Lost in Translation* has an "incestuous" implication within the two characters' closeness, and he says that

> the age difference between these actors [Bob and Charlotte] nearly matches that between [Sofia] Coppola and her father, Francis, [and] the answer to the question would seem to entail not just plot complications but also legal issues, or maybe atavistic horror. . . . Coppola brings the daughter-father theme right to the surface by making parenting the core subject of her characters' deepest conversation. . . . It's a lovely sentiment . . . when the father [Bob] is horizontal beside his nubile daughter-surrogate [Charlotte] (34).

Despite Klawans's shrewdness to pinpoint the film's incestuous eroticism in terms of psychoanalysis, his interpretation is not adequate enough to address other dimensions, such as the social and cultural agendas in the context of Bob and Charlotte's travel to Japan.

Our treatment of the protagonists as an unlikely couple, however, needs to be contextualized, since this romance by no means occurs in a vacuum. Many critics have shared a common reading of the film by indicating that Bob and Charlotte are two dislocated as well as alienated expatriates who not only feel inaccessible to the Japanese language and culture but also have their own family crisis respectively, and that they later develop a sense of erotic companionship and mutual

understanding while encircled by a foreign city of otherness (Haslem; Allsop; Paik; Klawans 34). Such a setting which places the characters in a defamiliarized situation—the absence of home and familiarity—provides them a perfect condition to temporarily lay aside the social mores and familial responsibility that they have to face if they remain in their home country. Yet, this kind of reading still fails to fully contextualize Bob and Charlotte's romance, for the reason that these critics have mistakenly regarded Japan as a mere backdrop which functions as an extension of their loneliness. This shallow interpretation risks taking the characters' travel to Japan simply as a "narrative strategy" with which Coppola can resolve Bob and Charlotte's ostensible differences by locating the two in an estranged environment. This implies that, for the critics, the travel narrative in *Lost in Translation* appears as an instrumental device by means of which an extramarital affair can justifiably germinate. The deficiency of contextualizing the romance can yield a purely aesthetic reading like this: "Tokyo is chosen as the setting for [Bob and Charlotte's] romantic friendship, but because they never fully engage [in] the city, any foreign place might do: Cairo, perhaps, or Moscow" (Pinckard).

Here we see the tendency to read *Lost in Translation* as a postmodern allegory of self-alienation in the city, which gives rise to the problem of de-contextualization. The allegorical analysis will asocially treat the characters' encounter as an adult *Bildungsroman* in which they reaffirm the meaning of life in the face of their metropolitan estrangement. At this point, the film is reduced to an existential drama in which the central issue is about how the protagonists overcome their own personal crises through their mutual support. For example, the comment by the critic, Samara Allsop, is based on such an existentialist standpoint:

> *Lost in Translation* delves into the transitory nature of human life, analyzing both the existence and non-existence of relationships and meanings that have the innate ability to transform and change the future direction of a person's perseity. . . . [B]oth characters are driven towards each other in an attempt to locate themselves.

> Together they are alone in . . . one of the busiest cities in the world, left to ponder over 'the meaning of life' in the darkest hours of the night.

While not dismissing the above interpretation as invalid, I will contend that travel is a central motif in *Lost in Translation*, one around which revolve other issues, such as the suspension of personal crisis through travel narrative and the encounter between Americanness and Japaneseness. It is only through the investigation of the travelogue that we can contextualize the protagonists' romantic relationship in a larger socio-cultural realm. The problem with the above existentialistic reading is that Allsop sees, with naïveté, travel as a neutral concept which only involves a movement from home to destination. Allsop interprets the metropolitan alienation in *Lost in Translation* as a universal phenomenon, and she reads the travel narrative only as the film's representation technique to stage this existential drama which is set in Japan as its backdrop. Even though Allsop more or less recognizes the cultural impact upon Bob and Charlotte during their travel—she is aware that changes in tourists' life experience are possible—she, however, takes that impact only as an incidental by-product. For Allsop, the travelogue is a given narrative device according to which the protagonists' interaction grows into passion beyond their difference of age and marital status.

This is why I choose to read *Lost in Translation* as a tourist romance, one whose travel narrative is hardly neutral: it is explicitly ideological. Its travelogue means more than what some critics perceive as a geographical movement from a familiar realm (America) to the Other (Japan) and then a homecoming. Rather, it involves a dialectical tension between the destination and home: tourism is a symbolic vehicle laden with a desire to escape from home, a mundane sphere of everydayness and family responsibility, and travel is a momentary respite from those routine concerns. This is not to emphasize the binary opposition between staying at home and getting away; instead, escape and home are implicated in a dynamic process. "The experience of *home* requires the balance of *reach* [to another destination]," as is

indicated by Jaakko Suvantola (237, emphasis in original). This balance emerges as a cyclical pattern "in which we reach for change in the form of the contact with the Other, and then return back home" (82). On the other hand, the circular formation of journey-return is often represented in tourist romance films: "Tourism has traditionally operated as a mode of ideological reinforcement—we experience another place in order to return, rejuvenated, to our customary environment," observes Diane Negra in her study of Hollywood films (84).

The foregoing examination of the ideology underlying the common travelogue can help us explain why the male protagonist, Bob, at last needs to go back to the U.S., leaving unfulfilled his romantic love with the heroine. After all, Bob's travel is different from self-exile or migration whose possibility of non-return is always greater than that of return, and his movement ineluctably has its "reference point"—home. In spite of the fact that in *Lost in Translation* the scenario of both home and the American land is totally rendered absent from the narrative, the existence of family relation, especially for Bob, nevertheless remains present. For instance, when Bob is telephoned by her wife, Lydia, to remember to attend his daughter's ballet recital, here we are suddenly reminded that there is still family obligation awaiting him to undertake, no matter how faintly perceivable (or distant) that household bonding is. The film's travelogue suggests that the physical absence of home makes itself perceptible through its influence upon the hero's mindset, even though home is left far behind. *Lost in Translation* exemplifies the motif of home as being behind-the-scenes in travel. This implies that Bob eventually remains as a family guy whose father-and-husband identity can not and will not be abandoned in facing his soul mate, Charlotte. For tourists like Bob and Charlotte, travel "promise[s] a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour" (Chambers 5).

Lost in Translation manifests Coppola's unique technique of linking the destination (Tokyo) with home (America) by way of non-representing the latter. The best example is that her shooting of Bob's movement is confined in Tokyo's cityscape: the film begins with

Bob's entrance into Tokyo's streets and ends with his heading for the airport. It should be noted that even the image of the airport is deleted from the screen. Bob's arrival scene starts with his car ride immediately to the Park Hyatt hotel, but the scene of his alighting from the plane (or his stepping outside the airport), which is supposed to appear, is excluded from the narrative. In the beginning we can only hear the loud noise of the jet's landing, and simultaneously the screen is a total blackout with a female announcer's voice-over: "Welcome to New Tokyo International Airport." In the same way, the anticipated ending scene of Bob's boarding the plane (or the plane's departure) is also missing. Generally speaking, the airport functions as a nodal point of transference between home and the destination, so that it links the two locations between which the traveller fulfills an act of mobile agency. However, Coppola's seemingly deliberate non-representation of the airport is to make obscure such a linkage between home and other. The effect is that Bob's transnational agency becomes less remarkable, and that our awareness about his arrival/departure is thus diverted.

On the other hand, the invisible-yet-present home inserts itself in the film's narrative through the telecommunication system. As we can see, Lydia, albeit obviously lukewarm about her interaction with Bob, keeps contacting him through long-distance calls and faxing him messages. (We can observe here that Coppola does not put Bob and Lydia in the frame by making shifts of shots between the two conversing spouses; rather, Lydia's role is designed as a mere voice-over—a so-called absent character.) In Lydia's first fax, she informs Bob that he has forgotten his son's birthday, and this implies that he does not play his fatherhood well. Except this, it seems that the other messages Bob receives are related to unimportant trivial matters such as the choice of color for his study room's carpet. And the materialized form of Lydia's concern is that she sends Bob a package of carpet samples by way of express delivery, but such concern seems to lack wifely affection, just directed toward their plan of house decoration. The trivialization of this unhappy couple's conversation on the phone suggests the weight of home from which the hero aspires to escape. Bob's travel involves his intention to eradicate some of the old

associations that home embodies, yet the global communication network would not allow him to cast home away. In Bob's case, home is like the invisible luggage carried by the traveller, and Suvantola illustrates this paradox: "[H]ome is bound to remain the dominant point of reference. Even—and maybe particularly—the unhappiest relationship with home lingers as the focus of the traveller's reluctant attention" (238).

In another case, home has its "presence-at-hand" appearance for Charlotte, though not in the physical sense of dwelling or location. She, with somewhat of reluctance, accompanies her husband, John (Giovanni Ribisi), a photographer, to Japan, who is industriously scheduled to film a video for a rock band. Although the couple are in transit—the Park Hyatt hotel as their short-term fixed point of stay—their togetherness to some extent constitutes an image of "homeness," a kind of domestic interaction visible to the viewer. However, this homeness embedded in Charlotte's trip is less desirable, since her husband's frequent absence highlights their marriage crisis. Such a crisis reaches its climax when she feels deeply frustrated by her failed attempt to approach Japanese culture (i.e. listening to the monks' chanting in the temple and learning the art of flower arrangement, *ikebana*), an attempt that she makes to divert herself from her marriage problem. In a sense Charlotte's contact with the Otherness of Japanese culture is a substitute for the insufficiency of homeness,[1] because she seeks to locate what may be familiar to her in the unfamiliar context. However, when she meets with the unintelligibility of Japaneseness, she tries two other different ways of finding homeness. First, she gives a call to her American friend, Lauren, who cannot understand her loneliness of being away. Lauren, despite her physical absence just like that of Lydia, represents the image of America through which the heroine forms an emotional link with home. Second, there is a scene in which Charlotte ornaments her hotel room with artificial cherry blossoms—a sign that she wants to replicate an ambience of home by adding some personal and domestic characters into the uniformity of the hotel room's décor. And her selection of *sakura* (Japan's national emblem) is not a random choice; it suggests that she allows the

"locality"—though taking a material form of commodity—to be a component of her constructed homeness. Such an image of home, created at the hotel, implies Charlotte's situation of "in-betweenness" since the hotel in *Lost in Translation* operates as the "contact zone" for western tourists and the local Other.

By pointing out the travel-home dialectics in *Lost in Translation*, I thus have contextualized the protagonists' tourist romance. Their "getting-away" is accompanied by a sense of home which is "left-far-behind." For this reason, they contrast their experience of Japan's Otherness with their experience of home's familiarity, and the latter is what they resort to. Although the homeness is represented respectively by the calls from America (in Bob's case) and by the husband's company (for Charlotte), it is nevertheless undermined by their marriage crisis. Therefore, what Bob and Charlotte turn to is not their original family tie (i.e. Lydia and John); they instead search into each other for a sense of belonging. Both characters are caught in a state of in-betweenness: neither is Japan a tourist utopia for them to engage in, nor can their family relationship provide desirable comfort of home. This is why their romance can be brought into existence. And the paradox of this romance is: Bob and Charlotte certainly do not cast home (or marriage) away by getting lost in the foreignness of Japan so as to realize erotic love; rather, their escape from marriage crisis exactly rests upon their longing for homeness—a kind of familiarity that Bob looks for in Charlotte's Americanness, and vice versa.

According to Negra, in recent tourist-film romances there is a crucial element that involves the assumption of "dysfunctional" family relations in the American context. She observes that those family problems are resolved by way of the "transference of the heroine [or hero] from the US context to a setting" in another country (86–87). This helps to show how, in *Lost in Translation*, the image of America signifies a dysfunctional married life which requires a solution whose very possibility lies in the protagonists' encounter in a foreign milieu, Japan. Yet here we have to bear in mind that the main characters' family crises are just temporarily "suspended" and not resolved. The "non-consummation" of Bob and Charlotte's platonic-yet-erotic love

suggests that their encounter is essentially a form of escapism. Such escapism contrasts with the narrative closure of those late-twentieth-century tourist romances examined by Negra, who points out that those films share a similar formula—the "non-return" of the heroine who now acquires a new national identity in the foreign land (84).[2] In Negra's observation, the female protagonist's non-return in these tourist romances serves as the resolution to a family crisis that is embedded in the US context. By contrast, escapism in *Lost in Translation* is balanced by the final homecoming which re-directs the hero/heroine to face the undesirable burden of home again—although I do not at all interpret such an ending as Coppola's ideological re-inscription (or reinforcement) of the structure of American family values.

II

The previous section has investigated the cultural-ideological dimension of the travel-home motif in *Lost in Translation* as a tourist romance; in this part I will probe into the protagonists' "spatial experience" during their exploration of Tokyo as a modernized metropolis. Only by so doing can we comprehend the material conditions that underlie their romantic relationship. In the first place, we should note that the "journey" of the hero, Bob, is not a leisure-time one, it is profit-oriented, like that of Charlotte's photographer husband. It is a business trip to a global city. Given this fact, we see that the film does not fit the category of those commonly-seen imperial travelogues in which a western white has an exotic encounter with an oriental other in a Third World country. (And usually the white character plays the role of saving the other, often a female, from difficulties. Or the western traveller may seek the primitive authenticity of indigenous people for his or her own visual consumption.) Yet by no means on the "periphery" or in the Third World, Japan actually confronts Bob as a hardly inferior host country whose economic power can benefit him considerably: he is being paid by a Japanese transnational liquor supplier. (He confesses to Charlotte how he has "sold out": "[Here I am]

getting paid $ 2 million to endorse a whisky when I could be doing a play somewhere.") And, as the setting is Tokyo, a highly westernized city, we cannot expect Bob to be an authenticity-seeking tourist, a seeker of a timeless heritage full of pre-modern signs which can stimulate his/her nostalgia for the past. Neither is he a savior-like colonizer who wants to raise up the Orientals from their lower position, nor a hedonistic vacationer who is interested in consuming the local female body (sex tourism).[3] Because of the particular context of Bob's arrival, it is inappropriate to read the film's travelogue as an imperialist or racist text as many critics, like E. Koohan Paik and Mizuko Ito, have done.[4]

The protagonists' spatial experience on their trip is of significance yet largely neglected by critics. Most reviewers of *Lost in Translation* tend to focus on non-spatial themes, such as urban alienation and cultural dislocation. One typical example is Bert Cardullo's "metaphorical," perhaps even allegorical, reading of the hero's/heroine's exilic sentiment:

> It's true that Tokyo's mix of the familiar (neon and skyscrapers) and the remote (language and customs) seems to press Bob and Charlotte together, to push them to find rather than lose each other in translation to another world. As for the posh, all-service Hyatt in which they are entombed (or incarcerated, according to Bob), however, *this hotel could be in any of the world's major cities*. It does work as a *metaphor* for a kind of modern alienation in which one can experience a dark night of the soul amidst the numbing, cocooned satisfaction of one's every material need. (465–66, emphasis added)

Cardullo here seems to reduce spatiality to a "metaphor" of geographical and cultural distance from home and familiarity. Although he has identified the Park Hyatt hotel as the cocoon where the characters secure themselves against unfamiliar otherness, he however sees it as a metaphor or a signifier, as if it were not a real entity which is materialized in Tokyo's global economic context. Similarly, for

Cardullo, Tokyo becomes an allegorical city which might be replaced by other cities, by Shanghai, Bangkok, or Taipei. In other words, he fails to pinpoint the material conditions of Bob and Charlotte's spatial experience.

Most reviewers of *Lost in Translation* have noticed that the romance occurs in the context of cultural Otherness, but their discussions unfortunately do not touch upon the protagonists' spatial experience that is involved in the confrontation with Otherness. In fact, *the way how Bob and Charlotte respond to cultural Otherness depends upon what circumstance they are located in* (emphasis added). For example, Bob's humiliation and anxiety with the Japanese photographing crew, with whom he has a linguistic barrier, can be alleviated when he spends time drinking, surrounded by English-speaking foreigners, at the New York bar of the Park Hyatt hotel. And in Charlotte's case, her aerial view, from the upper floor, over the far-stretching panorama of the cityscape somehow reflects her protective, yet partial, isolation from the enormity of Otherness outside the hotel. Therefore, it should be noted that the Otherness encountered by the protagonists cannot be discussed simply at the cultural level; the space that they experience also influences how they interpret the local reality of the destination.

In a rough way I would like to divide the protagonists' spatial experience into two stages: the first is when they are encapsulated within the hotel most of the time (though Charlotte's outdoor scenes appear far more than those of Bob); the second is when they start moving about the city together in the mode of "adventurers".[5] The turning point, the move to stage two, comes when Charlotte encourages Bob to re-experience his lost youth by enjoying Tokyo's fascinating nightlife with her Japanese friends. The reason for distinguishing between the two stages is this: the former part concerns the hero's avoidance of penetrating into the open space of Tokyo's cityscape, while in the latter we can see his flight, with Charlotte's company, from the hotel—as his secure cocoon—into the chaos and anonymity of the mass crowd on the street. (In the protagonists' second conversation at the bar, Bob's response to Charlotte has hinted that he will have a try to

break through his accustomed confinement within the hotel: "I'm trying to organize a prison break. I'm looking for, like, an accomplice. We'd have to, first, get out of this bar. Then the hotel, then the city, and then the country.") The significance of such a movement is that Bob becomes willing to get lost in the unfamiliarity of the city even after his loss in the translation between English and Japanese.

By examining the first stage of the characters' spatial experience we can see that Tokyo, as their destination, operates as a "contact zone" where the West meets the East.[6] According to Nikos Papastergiadis, the contact zone is where "transculturalism occurs" (128). In that space, the outsider, whether being the migrant or the colonized, will somehow develop a strategy of survival and adaptation in confronting the host's culture. In Papastergiadis's view, the encounter between the self and other can effect cross-cultural interaction, and thus there are many possibilities, such as "creolization and hybridization" in the contact zone (128). Unfortunately, what Papastergiadis hails as "transculturation" does not happen in Bob's initial contact with the local. The fact is that he insulates himself in the westernized hotel from unnecessary communication with the Japanese local (except his work with the photographing crew and his translator). The contact zone includes the glittering streets filled with local multitudes anonymous to Bob, and the film studio where lots of translation is required but rendered ineffective. It even includes the verbal interaction, at the cultural-linguistic level, between Bob and those English-speaking Japanese whose accents and conveyance of meaning confound him with uneasiness. (For instance, the Japanese call girl's confusion between the "l" and "r" sounds makes her flirtation less sensual for Bob, who does not know what to do with her seduction.) One might argue that Bob should be more privileged than the local due to his status of Caucasian whiteness which makes him a would-be colonizer. But this is not the actual case for Bob. As he is situated in such a contact zone, it is possible that he becomes an "Other" in the natives' eyes, and stands out like a cartoonish spectacle for visual consumption, as we can see from his puppet-like posture at a Japanese talk show, *Matthew's Best Hit TV*. In confrontation with the Japanese host who has an economic

advantage over him, Bob to some extent loses his white superiority.

Between Coppola's two primary representations of the contact zone—Tokyo's hustle-and-bustle streets and the Park Hyatt hotel—there exists an imposing contrast: the former appears as a fragmented, discontinuous space, overflowing with dazzling postmodern signs; the latter is, however, filmed to be a coherent, familiarized environment, as if it were America's "enclave" in Eastern Asia. Such a contrast can be found in Bob's arrival in Tokyo. As he is driven from the airport through Tokyo's streets, at first sight we glimpse the blurred reflections of neon lights and tall buildings upon the car's window, behind which Bob's face is still in focus. This shot conveys that the image of Tokyo is floating, as though the city were not a concrete entity but only an assemblage of urban spectacles. Coppola's close-up of the advertisement boards with Japanese characters (or even with Chinese characters which read "*san-qian-li-yao-pin*" [三千里藥品]) obviously informs us that Bob is already cast into strange surroundings loaded with foreign language signs. The movie's opening scene generates a paradox: Tokyo, as a well-known "global" metropolis, confronts the hero with a strong impression of "localness" to which he feels a sense of inaccessibility. The reviewer, Rob Breymaier, makes a similar comment: "For the most part, Americans consider Tokyo in its global spatial setting. Once Murray arrives in Tokyo, he must change his mental construct from a global scale to a local one. And, this creates anxiety because he knows very little about the local spatial patterns and particulars of place in Tokyo." After Bob's initial passage through the Tokyo's streetscape, we then see him relaxing in his hotel room, encircled by familiar spatial patterns.

In the first stage of the hero's/heroine's spatial experience, the Park Hyatt hotel functions as a comparatively tourist-friendly site that encapsulates them from the contact zone. In a sense, the westernized hotel can be regarded as a "tourist bubble" which, in Kevin Meethan's definition, is a space "consist[ing] of a standard set of facilities" (152) which operate as tourism-oriented infrastructures catering for the leisure needs of outsiders. The hotel room is designed according to Western standards of comfort, but still dotted with decorations of some

Japanese style. A little local color seen in the hotel "makes travelers feel that they are involved with the Other, and 'away' instead of home, but still with all the homely conveniences and even more" (Suvantola 124). The tourist space demarcates discrete local boundaries, "encapsulating and protecting the traveler from many of the physical realities of the destination (116). Bob and Charlotte's stay inside the hotel in fact means their "outsideness" from the genuine Tokyo, since they just "[look] at the places, not being a part of them" (115). Therefore, the hotel is more than a material site; it assumes the "mediation" between the domain of the Other and the tourist's world.

On the other hand, it is inadequate to say that the hotel itself is a tourist bubble; Bob's translator and the local press agents should be included in this space, too. Because of these bilingual Japanese, Bob never fails to receive excessive "hospitality" from them, who always try their best to make him feel familiar in Tokyo so that his culture shock can be minimized. In this sense, they also perform the mediators whose Japanese-English translation cushions Bob from direct confrontation with non-English-speaking locals. Their "assumed" (in my view) hospitality secures him from the potential hostility in the contact zone.

The reviewer, Paul Julian Smith, writes: "The hotel, huge and hermetic, is the clearest example of [the] *in-between* space" (14, emphasis added). I will extend Smith's comment by arguing that the Park Hyatt is a "liminal space" where an erotic but non-sexual liaison becomes possible for the protagonists. In this tourist bubble, the two lonely souls experience both Otherness and homeness. Otherness here means their frustration at marriage, while homeness is about their easily-won mutual understanding. The "hominess" in their relationship leads them to cross the difference of age and lay aside the social disapproval of extramarital affair. On the other hand, "liminality" is associated with the unconscious—unspoken desire—which often releases itself in the dream world. In the film, both Bob and Charlotte suffer from insomnia; their sleep deprivation signifies their blocked entrance to the unconscious in the nocturnal hours. But, their drinking at the bar in the night is a substitute for dreaming, since being under the

influence of alcohol is often described as a trip to pleasure. In the bar talk with Charlotte, Bob admits having a midlife crisis, wishing to get rid of family obligation: "[I come here for] taking a break from my wife, forgetting my son's birthday." In the bar desire rises to the surface; two married persons want to lose self-control.

The hotel has not encapsulated the protagonists too long, and they together step outside the tourist bubble into the contact zone anyway. Here begins the second stage of their spatial experience. Except his previous presence at the film studio for the sake of business, this is Bob's first time to leave the hotel for having pleasure.[7] Yet, Bob and Charlotte's moving transition from the hotel to the nightclub (where there are oversized balloons with images of fireworks projected onto them) is rendered absent: we can only see them instantaneously appearing in the club as soon as they push open their hotel room's door. Coppola's shift of the shots between the two places "omits" the representation of the so-called chaotic streets in the contact zone. Such an omission may be deliberate, implying that the protagonists tend to be located within an enclosed space where Otherness can be lessened.

One may argue that Bob later becomes more open-minded to encounter unexpected transculturation by crossing the threshold of the contact zone. In my view, this could be a hasty judgment. Bob's boundary-crossing, as a matter of fact, is conditional. It is only with Charlotte's company that he makes an attempt to "organize a prison break" from the hotel. (Strangely, Bob's self-confinement in the Park Hyatt seems to be a symptom of agoraphobia.) What's more, his seeming adventure into the heart of Tokyo takes place under the circumstance of having English-speaking Japanese friends beside him. After all, Bob is by no means a tourist flâneur who yearns to get lost alone in the Otherness of the crowd; he would rather disorient himself among what is expected.[8] Charlotte and her bilingual Japanese fellows altogether bring him a sense of familiarity. Because of their companionship, the nightclub, the karaoke parlor, and the foreign cityscape are thus transformed into a familiarized environment. In other words, these bilingual locals are the mediators in the contact zone, because they can translate Otherness into homeness for Bob.

Bob and Charlotte's passage into the city labyrinth is not so much an entrance to the realm of Otherness as an "exteriorization" of their liminal space which is originally embedded in the hotel. By so doing, they can extend what has been familiar beyond the restricted scope of the tourist bubble. Even though there may occur unexpected encounters with the Other in the contact zone (e.g. they, along with their Japanese friends, are chased by the nightclub's bartender, who shoots at them with a popgun), however, they try to lighten the negativity of that accidental encounter by making it an exhilarating episode of their city exploration. For instance, in the street chase scene, Charlotte, running ahead of Bob, leads him to escape into a pachinko parlor where they zigzag as if they were playing a game of searching for the exit of a maze. The scene suggests that the contact zone may be appropriated by the protagonists as a playground which becomes a part of their liminal space. Also, this scene exemplifies how the heroine attempts to invigorate Bob from his midlife crisis by taking him away from the secure cocoon. Following the chase scene, we then see them singing in a karaoke parlor. This space also offers liminal experiences, since it mixes Otherness with familiarity. Otherness refers to karaoke-singing, typical of Japanese subculture that is foreign to the American. Familiarity is found in the availability of American pop love songs through which they indirectly express desire for each other without speaking. We can say that they appropriate such Japanese subculture to let their desire flow under the surface.

As is previously mentioned, the Tokyo landscape, in Coppola's representation of Bob's first-stage spatial experience, is either omitted or compressed. We know that Bob needs to move to and fro between the hotel and the film studio, but how the two nodal points are connected remains unknown to us. Neither is it easy for us to piece together the fragmented travel routes taken by Charlotte during her saunter in Tokyo. Yet in the second stage, the image of the cityscape becomes less disjointed, for Coppola now takes a steady shot along the protagonists' movement. For example, Bob and Charlotte, after the karaoke scene, sit in a cab back to the hotel, and the camera follows their course along which we can see a long steady shot of the Tokyo

Tower (a landmark appearing again near the ending when Bob is driven to the airport), and of the Rainbow Bridge. Roughly speaking, this is a linear-movement filming, uninterrupted by shifts of shots. The road signs are also filmed within the frame of the shot; its significance is that the viewer is led to visually experience the topography of Tokyo, although such an experience will never be complete. Coppola's gradual mapping of Tokyo, in a sense, corresponds to the protagonists' venture into the contact zone. As Coppola starts to connect those scattered nodes, Bob and Charlotte at the same time develop the geographical knowledge about the foreign city (but their understanding of Japanese culture unfortunately remains shallow).

Conclusion

As the essay's title indicates, *Lost in Translation* dramatizes how the two American protagonists connect with Japan by way of their "transnational mobility." However, the film's representation of global mobility does not fit the postmodern idea of "deterritorialization," since Bob and Charlotte are not nomadic subjects who desire to cast away their American identity so as to enjoy the self-forgotten experience of in-betweenness or foreignness. To be sure, they can afford cross-country movements, yet their consciousness of territoriality is tenaciously preserved. Their geographical dislocation is not really a psychological boundary-crossing, since the hero and the heroine are just tourists, far from being members of some diaspora, or migrants (with their potential for mixed or hybrid identities). For Bob and Charlotte, home always remains the reference point by which the measure their journey "outward" (or "away") to Japan. This is why Bob still feels obliged to return home to assume his paternal role in the family again, and why Charlotte needs to face her unhappy marriage after her brief "romantic" encounter.

NOTES

[1] It should be noted that my use of "Otherness" (like the phrase "the

Otherness of Japanese culture") in this paper does not signify "racial/oriental inferiority"—which is the abjectness negated by the occidental Self—a common notion in the postcolonial theory. I shall remind my readers that my idea of otherness here is more associated with "foreignness," a more neutral term that serves as the opposite of "familiarity." Actually, my argument is not based on a postcolonial reading, and, as my following analysis develops, I do not employ the colonial master-slave dialectic to interpret the American protagonists' encounter with the Japanese locals.

[2] In Negra's essay, "Romance and/as Tourism: Heritage Whiteness and the (Inter)National Imaginary in the New Woman's Film," her study cases are centered upon the following films in the 1990s: *Only You* (1994), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *French Kiss* (1995), *The Matchmaker* (1997), and *Notting Hill* (1999). My comparison between this group of romances and *Lost in Translation* is meaningful here, since all of them contain travelogues that involve heterosexual love between the protagonists. The only two different aspects among them are: (1) the above 1990s' films end with the protagonist's permanent stay in the foreign country as an endorsement of the romantic relationship, while *Lost in Translation* entails the hero's/heroine's homecoming to the orbit of everydayness; (2) the former five movies are set in the context of Western Europe, whereas *Lost in Translation* chooses Japan, the most modernized country in Asia, as the main setting. The second point deserves our attention, because the European setting strongly connotes the prospect of the heroine's lasting settlement in the new environment, while the Japanese setting cannot afford to provide a sense of belonging for the American character. This comparison may offer us an interpretation as such: American and European identities are interchangeable, but Japaneseness remains oriental otherness.

[3] Although Bob is offered a sex service with a Japanese "premium fantasy" woman (Nao Asuka), he does not take that offer as a deserved bonus during his stay. The prostitute is sent by a Japanese press agent who hopes this may entertain the American actor. It is possible that the Suntory client, as the host, projects onto Bob the imagination that westerners take pleasure in consuming the exoticness of the oriental woman. In my interpretation, the scene of prostitution illustrates Bob's struggle with such stereotyping from the Japanese host who assumes that the white man is attracted by and desires to

dominate the oriental female's body. The call girl's two contrasting kinds of behavior—aggressive seduction and pretended resistance at the same time—also reflect this stereotyping: she invites Bob, as a superior white, to desire her body, yet feigns resistance to his domination.

[4] E. Koohan Paik in his "Is *Lost in Translation* Racist?" comments by employing Edward Said's postcolonial theory:

> The [self-versus-other] logic has been a convention in English literature for centuries and has also informed cinematic storytelling. In fact, it's so deeply rooted that even in *Lost in Translation*, a film which takes place in a country of *superior* technological prowess, *superior* social conditions (crime and homelessness are nearly nonexistent) and *superior* politesse, the ethnic European protagonists cop the same arrogant attitude found in the jingoistic characters of Kipling. "East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet" could've been *Lost in Translation*'s publicity campaign tagline. The Coppola adherence to the convention of the superior westerner remains steeped in the era of sahibs in pith helmets. It's the classic schism between cinematic virtuosity and political cluelessness. (emphasis in original)

I will argue that reading *Lost in Translation* as a colonial text would be inappropriate, since such a reading neglects the fact that even the white movie star, Bob, becomes an object under the gaze of the advertisement director, the photographer and other managers of the Suntory company. In the eyes of these Japanese locals, the white man is likened to a racial other who himself is commercialized as an visual product, as we can see that the transnational alcohol supplier sells his image via advertisements.

[5] My division, of course, is not very accurate, because even in the first stage Charlotte has stepped outside the hotel alone for a long walk three times, while Bob has had no intention to visit Tokyo's tourist sites by himself or with company. According to the information provided by Charlie Amter, a foreign correspondent in Japan, Charlotte's first day-tripping is to the Jugan-ji Temple near Shinjuku (新宿). Her second stroll through a vast pedestrian crosswalk—along with the camera shot of a giant LCD screen projecting the spectacular images of the dinosaur and elephants—takes place near the

Hachiko exit (八公捷運站) in Shibuya (涉谷). Her third outing is to a video arcade center (whose location is not identified by Amter). More details about the sites filmed in *Lost in Translation* can be found in the webpage: ttp://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/02/29/TRG0355C011.DTL.

[6] I borrow the term, "contact zone," from Nikos Papastergiadis's essay, "The Limits of Cultural Translation." Papastergiadis defines the contact zone as "the space of colonial encounters" which "bristles with the contradictions and conflicts of uneven exchange. . . . Colonized people, forcibly brought into contact with colonial regimes, and with new systems for social organization, were compelled both to internalize the dominant order, and to invent new strategies for cultural survival" (128). My use of this term, however, is different from Papastergiadis's, since he has emphasized an "asymmetrical" power relation between the colonizer and the colonized. In my own treatment, the term is applied as a more neutral concept. I will not use it with the dialectics of colonizer-versus-colonized, because my discussed film, *Lost in Translation*, is much less than a colonial text. I will focus on the comparatively equal relation between the host (e.g. Japanese people) and the guest (e.g. Bob and Charlotte).

[7] Bob's first time to do a leisure activity alone outside the hotel is that he plays golf in a golf course where we can see the distant Mount Fuji. One might argue that this is a suitable example that Bob is still willing to break through the hotel as a tourist cocoon. However, I will argue that the golf course can be regarded as the externalization of the tourist bubble. In this scene of golf-playing, what Bob confronts is simply a rural landscape where human beings, except the hero, are invisible. In this space, he is left undisturbed, free from the anxiety about the contact with Japaneseness.

[8] The latest essay on this film is Amy Murphy's "Traces of the Flâneuse: From *Roman Holiday* to *Lost in Translation*" (2006), which interprets both Bob and Charlotte respectively as a flâneur and a flâneuse who "are transformed through their shared exploration of a foreign city" (40). Murphy emphasizes that the protagonists' entrance into Tokyo's streetscape appears as a practice of "Baudelairean" flânerie by which they gain "freedom in the urban space":

> [T]hey escape like the nineteenth-century flâneur by hiding in the crowd. In [the film], none of the characters are at home; instead,

> each is either on "holiday" or "lost". . . . They suggest . . . that, as Western culture grapples with its inherited definitions of gender and space, we (like these characters) can be transformed by the urban experience and our lives made more profound by its liberating humanity. (39–41)

My analysis, nevertheless, runs counter to Murphy's Baudelairean reading of Bob and Charlotte' spatial experience. The reason for my disagreement is that their movement is not free but "selective": they fear to lose their traces in the immensity of the crowd, preferring the company of their bilingual Japanese friends, who look like their "chaperons" so as to provide them a "tourist guide" according to which the protagonists can search for certain sites (such as the night club and the karaoke bar) that seem to be the extension of the tourist cocoon. Murphy's reading, unfortunately, confuses the characters' confined tourist route with unbounded flânerie.

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跨國流動：
閱讀《愛情不用翻譯》爲一部旅行羅曼史

摘　要

蘇菲雅・科波拉的電影《愛情不用翻譯》（2003）在許多評論者的眼中是部異國愛情劇，說的是兩個美國分別已婚的男女暫待在日本這樣的異國，與當地文化格格不入之感油然而生，他們的相遇後來發展成婚外情。多數影評常解讀男女主角不適應異國文化轉而在彼此身上尋找熟悉感，這樣的解讀恐怕是把此部電影當作一齣「存在主義式」的都會愛情戲，將這對主角的關係簡化成他們的相知相惜是爲了一起克服在異地所遭遇的疏離與異化。因此，本文欲提出不同的閱讀觀點，將這部電影視爲「旅行羅曼史」（tourist romance），並放在全球化的脈絡下討論兩個重要子題：跨國流動與旅行／家園的辯證關係。唯有如此，我們才不會陷於東方主義式的批評，認爲這部電影偏頗地呈現日本的「他者性」以凸顯美國主角的「相同性」。本文隨後將分析主角做爲旅行者在東京有何種的空間經驗，並指出主角在東京城市這樣的「接觸地帶」（contact zone）並不見願意進行跨文化的交流；相反的，他們是透過會說英語的當地朋友來理解東京，而且這種理解礙於他們是旅行的過客，所以是非常有限的。

關鍵字：旅行羅曼史、旅行／家園辯證關係、跨國流動、接觸地帶