



WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

2046

Five years in production, at least intermittently, *2046* presents itself as Wong Kar Wai's magnum opus. It's set in the Hong Kong of the late 1960s, but includes flashbacks to the protagonist's earlier life in Singapore as well as a number of fantastic extrapolations from the film's present that are notionally set in 2046. It chronicles one man's successive relationships – sexual and/or romantic – with four women, but each liaison is haunted by the man's memories of an earlier relationship with a married woman that never quite coalesced into an affair. That intense non-affair, the greatest emotional experience in the man's life, was explored in Wong's previous film *In the Mood for Love* (2000) which ended with the man trying to exorcise his memories by 'burying' them in a hole in the walls of Angkor Wat.

The conceit here is that the hole in the wall becomes '2046', a time/space where nothing changes, a site where nothing is lost and so everything can be found, a repository for everything that has been repressed, blocked, denied or deferred. In the film, '2046' is both the number of a hotel room, where one woman is gravely wounded by a jealous lover, another is cruelly rejected by the man she loves, and yet another practises Japanese to rehearse her elopement with her forbidden Japanese lover, and the title of a newspaper serial written by Chow Mo-Wan, in which he revisits his memories of affairs past and present in science-fiction terms. By naming it *2046*, though, Wong suggests that the film itself is a giant 'hole' into which everyone – including, of course, himself – can whisper their secrets. That's why *2046* is loaded with references to and evocations of Wong's previous films, and why it feels like some kind of summation of his career to date. Fans of an auteurist bent will find enough here to keep them busy for months.

Just as *Fallen Angels* (1995) became the darker flipside of *Chungking Express*, so *2046* inexorably turned into the shadow film of *In the Mood for Love* part sequel, part revision, part remix, part aftermath. As the sci-fi elements shrank, the desire to return to Hong Kong in the 1960s swelled. In interviews Wong has sometimes compared *In the Mood for Love* to a drug on which he was hooked, and so you could see *2046* as a film designed to feed an addiction. But Wong was clearly a reluctant addict: he undertook numerous side-projects to distract himself from the struggle to refocus the conception of *2046*. The biggest was *The Hand*, his episode for the portmanteau feature *Eros* (2004), generally recognised as the best in that film (the other episodes are by Steven Soderbergh and Michelangelo Antonioni). Others included a short compilation of archival clips edited to the song 'Hua Yang de Nianhua', the music video *Six Days* for DJ Shadow and advertising shorts for Lacoste and BMW. Wong also launched a successful subsidiary company to manage artists, which has led to Jet Tone opening branch offices in Shanghai and Taipei and seems to have solved its cash-flow problems.

Wong summoned me to Bangkok in late April 2004 to help with the film's subtitling, and the days I spent in the Ramindra Sound Studio with the Jet Tone crew gave me some insight into its difficult birth. Wong was still filming pick-up shots of Tony Leung and Gong Li when I arrived, while the sleepless William Chang had set up an Avid editing suite in the lobby of Ramindra and was working round the clock to prepare reels for the sound mix. A last-minute

rush is the norm for a Wong Kar Wai production; I remember waiting in the lobby of a Hong Kong theatre in 1994 for the world premiere of *Chungking Express* because the theatre manager refused to start the screening until more reels had arrived from the lab. All this means, of course, that Wong is one of those artists who needs a real deadline to force himself to make the difficult final decisions about his work and sever the umbilical cord. In the case of *2046*, though, I got the strong impression that the film had ‘clicked’ in Wong’s mind only very recently. What I witnessed was not a rush to complete the film but a rush to complete an interim approximation of the film in time to meet – more or less – the Cannes deadline. More editing, shooting and voiceover recording took place in the months after Cannes, all of it designed to finesse the film Wong now knew it should be. The definitive version premiered in China on 20 September [2004], with openings in Hong Kong and Taipei a few days later.

I’d begun working on the subtitles earlier in April in Hong Kong, and I reckon I processed 30-40 minutes of material that didn’t make it into any cut of the film, most of it scenes between Chow Mo-Wan and Miss Bai, one of his neighbours in Room 2046. I don’t know how much other footage was axed, but it’s clear that Wong had decided to drop most of the sci-fi scenes well before he decamped to Bangkok. Gone in its entirety is the strand of Chow’s ‘2046’ story based on the doomed romance between bar-girl Lulu and the nightclub drummer who stabs her in Room 2046; this reduces Carina Lau’s role to a few enigmatic appearances in which Lulu claims – or affects – to have forgotten meeting Chow in Singapore, and reduces Chang Chen’s to a couple of brooding, jealous stares. Also gone is nearly all the strand involving Thongchai MacIntyre and Kimura Takuya; two brief shots survive in a phantasmagoria early in the film, prefiguring Chow’s decision to write the ‘2046’ stories. And the one sci-fi strand which still runs through the film – based on the illicit romance between the hotel owner’s elder daughter Jingwen and her Japanese boyfriend – has been drastically pruned.

The corresponding decision, which determined the overall structure of the film, was to centre it on Chow’s successive relationships with the four women. Each relationship is different, and only one of them is directly sexual (the torrid affair with Miss Bai, which Chow breaks off with maximum emotional cruelty by suddenly treating it as a paid transaction), though there’s a strong implication that Chow and Lulu dated each other in Singapore some years earlier. But the four form an emotional continuum, ranging in tone from humour (Jingwen ghost-writing a martial-arts serial for the flu-stricken Chow) to pathos (Gong Li’s role as a femme fatale from Phnom Penh: a gambler who never loses but never takes off one black glove, as if to hide a prosthetic hand replacing a real hand severed for cheating). If *In the Mood for Love* was a paean to the staying power of choked-back emotions, then *2046* is a set of symphonic variations on the theme of unfulfilled love. It comes to no startling conclusions (luck in love is largely a matter of timing, lovers have an endless capacity for misleading themselves and each other, and so on), but it dramatises each vagary of the heart with an intensity rarely found in the movies.

Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, January 2005

2046

Director: Wong Kar Wai
Production Companies: Block 2 Pictures, Paradis Films, Orly Films
Production Supervised by: China Film Co-production Corporation
Co-production: Jet Tone Production, Shanghai Film Group Corporation, Shanghai SFS Digital Media
With the participation of: Arte France Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, ZDF-Arte
Executive Producers: Chan Ye-Cheng, Ren Zhonglun
Producers: Wong Kar Wai, Eric Heumann, Ren Zhonglun, Zhu Yongde
Co-producers: Jacky Pang Yee-Wah, Zhou Wu
Line Producer: Alice Chan
Associate Producers: Zhong Zheng, Fu Wenxia, Li Xiaojun
Production Managers: Liu Bin, Zhang Yunhong
Thai Unit Production Manager: Pairoj Rojlertjanya
Macau Unit Production Manager: Alice Augusto
Post-production Consultant: Stéphane Kooshmanian
1st Assistant Directors: Johnnie Kong Yeuk-Shing, Li Shaohua
Screenplay: Wong Kar Wai
Directors of Photography: Christopher Doyle, Lai Yiu-Fai, Kwan Pun-Leung
Gaffer (Hong Kong): Wong Chi-Ming
Stills Photography: Wing Shya
Special Effects: Buf Compagnie
Supervising Editor: William Chang Suk-Ping
Production Designer: William Chang Suk-Ping
Art Director: Alfred Yau Wai-Ming
Props Master: Wong Tze-On
Wardrobe: Luk Ha-Fong
Make-up Artists: Candy Law Pui-Yan, Kwan Lee-Na
Hairstylists: Wong Bo-Chuen, Ray Chan Man-Jim, Samuel Wong Kwok Hung, Bower Wu Yuk-Ho
Digital Colour Grading Supervisor: William Chang Suk-Ping
Original Music: Peer Raben, Shigeru Umebayashi

Sound Designers: Claude Letessier, Tu Duu-Chih
Hong Kong Unit Production Sound Mixer: Kuo Li-Chi
English Subtitles: Tony Rayns
Stunt Co-ordinator: Stephen Tung Wai

Cast

Tony Leung Chiu-Wai (Chow Mo-Wan)
Gong Li (The Singapore Su Lizhen, ‘Black Spider’)
Faye Wong (Wang Jingwen/android)
Takuya Kimura (Tak)
Zhang Ziyi (Bai Ling)
Carina Lau Kar Ling (Lulu/Mimi, ex-flame)
Chang Chen (cc1966, club drummer)
Thongchai McIntyre (man in 2046 Phantasmagoria)
Dong Jie (Wang Jiewen, Jingwen’s sister)
Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk (The Hong Kong Su Lizhen)
Wang Sum (Wang the hotel manager/train conductor)
Siu Ping-Lam (Ah Ping)
Wang Shan
Kong Tao-Hoi
Cheung Yiu-Ling
Ng Ting-Yip
Miao Fei-Lin
Ching Siu-Lung
Hong Wah

Hong Kong/France/Germany/
People’s Republic of China 2004
139 mins

WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

2046

Thu 15 Jul 20:20; Sat 17 Jul 16:10; Sat 31 Jul 14:30
Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)
Fri 16 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:10
In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)
Sat 17 Jul 13:30; Wed 21 Jul 14:30; Thu 29 Jul 20:45
As Tears Go By (Wong Gok ka moon)
Sat 17 Jul 20:30; Mon 19 Jul 20:45
Days of Being Wild (Ah Fei jing juen)
Mon 19 Jul 18:00
The Grandmaster (Yi dai zong shi)
Tue 20 Jul 18:00; Thu 22 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 20:50
Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)
Tue 20 Jul 20:45; Thu 29 Jul 14:30
Ashes of Time Redux (Dung che sai duk)
Wed 21 Jul 20:45; Fri 30 Jul 20:45
The Hand (Extended Cut)
Thu 22 Jul 18:30; Fri 30 Jul 18:20
My Blueberry Nights
Fri 23 Jul 20:50; Wed 28 Jul 20:40
Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)
Sun 25 Jul 18:30

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