

The Gaze of the Other: On Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*

1. Subjectivity on Trial

Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me . . . I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight Children*

"In reality, who am I?"

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

I could not understand "I." The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I," assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight?

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

In the beginning of his seminal essay "The Trace of the Other," Levinas provides two narratives: the saga of Ulysses and the story of Abraham, which represent the Greek and the Judaic concepts of the other respectively. He then provides a third narrative: the trace of the other based on the Abraham story. These three narratives are, in fact, about the three faces of subjectivity. The Greek model of subjectivity presents the self who undertakes a journey, conquers the other and returns to the self itself. The Judaic model portrays the self going on a journey under the instruction of God, an Absolute Other. As of the third narrative, which is obviously Levinas's ideal version, it looks into the meaning of the other as *trace*. The other, for Levinas, carries two meanings: He serves either as a perceived other without qualities or as *the Absolute Other*, God. Here I'll focus only on the former. Following Levinas's critique of Cartesian, Hegelian, Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts of subjectivity, especially the Odyssean model of subjectivity in which the self contain the other and return to the self

again, I will first examine some notions of subjectivity, as exemplified by the Cartesian ego, Hegelian self-consciousness or Absolute Spirit and Heideggerian "being-with-other" and point out that the other serves for these thinkers only as a background, a catalyst, a token, or a springboard. Then I will trace the *emerging* other and highlight its subversive potential. Finally, I will look at Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* in terms of Levinas's ethical other and Lacan's theory of the eye and the gaze.

The specter of Descartes has haunted the imagination of many Western philosophers, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts, such as Hume, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, Lacan, and others. Their discomfiture lies in the Cartesian concept of "certain" and "evident" knowledge predicated on the egological "I think" and its differentiative values which are filtered through the eyes of the mainstream dominant culture, namely, its inherent, enlightenment cultural heritage based on the claustrophobic concept of Western Man. Kenneth Liberman writes,

The marriage of the idea of self and civil authority propelled the political imagination of the Enlightenment and still characterizes the West today. Self-certain, rational individuals, protected by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and its progeny, freely select in a Hobbesian fashion a civil authority that in reality tolerates little diversion from the accepted corpus of reified truths (*theoria*). It is pertinent to note that Descartes's first moral rule in his epochal *Discourse on Method* was "to obey the law and customs of my country" and church. (128)

If we look into Western culture in terms of race, gender and class, we cannot fail to conclude that the history of Man is a history of discrimination in execution of "the Manichean aesthetics" (Abdul R. JanMohamed 1-13; Goldberg 14-40). According to Abdul R. JanMohamed, Manicheism performs rules of exclusions and punitive strategies so that the division of labor and tokenism are rendered possible: "Faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the Other in terms of identity or difference" ("Colonialist Literature" 83). According to Charles Taylor, "Manichean aesthetics" proffers a critique on the oft-taken-for-granted misrecognition that "shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred" (26).

The waking up from the narcissistic solipsism and grounding egocentrism leads us to a reevaluation of all values. The prestigious idols, for Nietzsche, have reached their twilight and "the other" will step into the

arena and articulate his silence: That the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think” connotes a falsification of facts to the effect that the correspondence and coordination between subject and object is arbitrary, namely, what the subject grasps as truth is only “a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an ‘immediate certainty’” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 24). In addition to adumbrating a limitation in language, Nietzsche, in *The Will to Power*, comments “‘Subject,’ ‘object,’ ‘attribute’—these distinctions are fabricated and are now imposed as a schematism upon all the apparent facts. The fundamental false observation is that I believe it is *I* who do something, suffer something, ‘have’ something, ‘have’ a quality” (294). Nietzsche’s demystification of the *I* purports to say “yes” to life and to go beyond the asceticism of Western philosophy and the megalomaniac concept of subjectivity. Following a Nietzschean line of thought and flight, Deleuze links up “life” with “vitalism” and “multiplicity”: “Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else . . . A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is sheer power, utter beatitude” (qtd in John Marks 39).

Though Nietzsche is right in pointing out that the ego is a “conceptual synthesis,” his transevaluation of all values revolves around a metaphysics of the myth of “Will” (Lyotard 29). Derrida, like Nietzsche, assumes that the history of Western ontology—a history of presence based on a single, originary, and ultimate truth or logocentrism, if you like, perceived by a transcendental ego—should be reconsidered if one approaches it in terms of *difference*. In a similar vein, the problem of modern subjectivity is, for Levinas, an overemphasis on “the consciousness of an ego *identical* in its *I think*,” which aims at and embraces, or perceives “all alterity under its thematizing gaze” (“Diachrony and Representation” 97). In other words, the dumb, uncounted voice of the other is tied in with the well-wrought ego who, as a seeing subject, intends, veils, and contains the seen at a distance. Thus, the “I’s” in the above-quoted passages at the outset are voices from the margin. They have a double consciousness because they are the howling “I’s,” the voices of the other, which is reduced to an *objet a* (mis-)represented by the narcissistic Self, the Being of truth. According to Fanon’s insight, such terms as “Man,” “Self,” and “individual” community will point to a Westernized monologic “difference-blindness” discourse; they are all racialized residues of the White Man. Moreover,

For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (*Wretched* 316)

Fanon further comments, not without irony, that

Mankind, I believe in you. . . . From all sides dozens and hundreds of pages assail me and try to impose their wills on me. But a single line would be enough. Supply a single answer and the color problem would be stripped of all its importance. What does a man want? What does the black man want? (7-8)

For Fanon, “mankind” is a *man*-made construct based on the White mythology. Under Western eyes, the subjectivity of the colored people and of those who are from interracial origins undergoes a diminished process. It is sacrificed and reduced to the background under the gaze of colonialism and cultural imperialism. Consequently, identity for those who are *mis*-represented becomes an issue of life and death. They claim that a “[d]ue recognition [of the other] is not just a courtesy we owe people” but that “[i]t is a vital human need” (Taylor 26).

2. The Emerging Other

After offering a symptomatic reading on the narcissistic “I,” we can conclude that the other is always referred to as an “alter ego” or as an “objectified” other, and our culture seems to have given all the privileges to the One/Self, leaving the other destitute. In this section, I will then discuss how the other is downplayed by such philosophers as Descartes, Heidegger, Husserl, Heidegger, and others, and trace those who attempt to salvage the other, especially Martin Buber’s “I-thou” mutually-implicated relationship, Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism, and Levinas’s ethical other, so that we can offer a balanced judgment on the relationship between self and other.

In the opening paragraph of *Meditation II*, Descartes employs “the Other” to derive his premise on “I think, therefore I am”: The existence of “an evil genius”—the absolute Other—presupposes the existence of the Cartesian subject. Again in *Meditation III*, when Descartes tries to prove a perfect God exists, he still resorts to an other: “... when I turn my mind’s eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on an other and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that he is God” (Dicker 81). In both cases, Descartes employs the other to foreground the self. Dalia Judovitz rephrases a Derridean mistrust of the Cartesian ways of doubting doubts: “Thus the truth of the *cogito*’s existence is here established through the exercise of an impossible fiction, through a rhetoric of negation whose

truth is based on the totalizing character of fiction and whose evidence relies on the power of representation to perform even its own negation, as if the verisimilitude of subjectivity did not require the substrate of language ..." ("Derrida and Decartes" 47).

It is viable for Derrida to question the validity of the Cartesian certainty in truth, not in terms of the other but in terms of the fishy boundary between fiction and truth. The question of the other did not become a major issue to ponder until the advent of postcolonialism, where the gray area of the unquestioned other has begun to receive due critical attention. Taken together, our attitudes toward the other fall into three kinds: the other as *event*, the other as *recognition*, and the other as *demand*. First, the question of the other has not yet been resolved. A lot of postcolonial critics, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, to name only a few, deal with the limitation of mimetic representation of the other. If the question of the other becomes a polemic, it poses itself as an event. Here I call this event a "rupture" that punctuates the seamless flow of self-consciousness. Thus to situate the other as an *event* means to awaken our consciousness to the otherness of the other and render it visible. Examining the emerging moment of the other, we find that the other serves only as a mirror or a mediation. For example, self-consciousness, for Descartes and Hegel, makes its appearance through the otherness of the other: "[S]elf-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*" (*Phenomenology* 105). Though Hegel acknowledges that self and other "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another," the essence of the other is "darkness" (419). As a result, the other remains invisible and is not properly dealt with or carefully teased out, especially in the structure of understanding—a dubious understanding of the Self as the center and agency of signification. In *The Souls of the Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois complains that blacks are compelled to accept the white concept of being and the white subject who represents a universally acknowledged interpretation of consciousness. Even in the age of multiculturalism, we can easily observe that the question of the other remains unsolved, in that the other is still being contained, subjected, and reduced to the cultural imaginary. In other words, tokenism as other-blindness is racially, culturally, socially, and politically incorrect.

Second, as for the *recognition* of the other, it involves a very complicated identification process. According to Alexandre Kojève, "the human reality is nothing but the fact of the *recognition* of one man by another man" (41). Man becomes *conscious* of himself when he says "I."

When he contemplates a thing, he is "absorbed" by it. It is through *desire* as *lack* that man becomes self-conscious because "the I of Desire is an emptiness that receives a real positive content only by negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming, and 'assimilating' the desired non-I" (4). For Lacan, identification undergoes a more complicated process. In "The Mirror Stage," he divides identification into two categories: "homeomorphic" identification and "heteromorphic" identification (*Écrits* 3). The former is related to the Lacanian "eye," while the latter to the "gaze." Looked at this way, identity is fluid, subject to the interaction between self and other. Identity as a self-sufficient, autonomous, and sacrosanct entity is problematic as soon as the other appears as an event.

Finally, let me discuss the question of the other as *demand* of a space of enunciation. From the Cartesian epistemology, through the Hegelian sublation of self-conscious as Absolute Spirit, to the Husserlian phenomenology of the transcendental ego, various concepts of self are raised at the expense of the Other. Demand means both "the call of the Other" and "articulating a need" (Evans 34-35). For Levinas, the history of Western philosophy is built on the empire of ego and the umpire of reason, both of which are associated with light and knowledge. Reason thus goes hand in hand with knowledge: it never finds any *other* reason" to speak. Why? Because "[t]he intentionality of consciousness allows one to distinguish the ego from things, but it does not make solipsism disappear: its element—light—renders us master of the exterior world but is incapable of discovering a peer for us there" (65). Here, representation based on "light" carries a negative meaning because it is a truth-claim, a monologue of the self. This explains why Foucault wants to launch an attack on the exclusion of madness based on the Cartesian concept of reason/truth: "It is not the permanence of a truth which guarantees thought against madness, as it would permit truth to detach itself from error or to emerge from a dream; it is an impossibility of being mad, essential not to the object of thought but to the subject who thinks" (Qtd in Boyne 46). For Levinas, a demand is a *demand to speak*. He writes,

To speak, at the same time as knowing the Other, is making oneself known to him. The Other is not only known, he is *greeted* [salué] . . . This *commerce* which the word implies is precisely action without violence: the agent, at the very moment of its action, has renounced all claims to domination or sovereignty, and is already exposed to the action of the Other in the way it waits for a response. (*Difficult* 7-8)

The major pitfall of the modern theory of subjectivity resides in an overemphasis on the transparency and/or self-sufficiency of the modern subject, thus developing an other-blindness mentality. The other is culturally, historically, and philosophically a being without a face. S/he is forever re-moved and back-grounded, without a chance to be a central figure in the scopic field. Levinas professes that perhaps art should seek to give a "face" to the other. Consequently, identity of the other—the self in the other—merits our careful attention.

Schleiermacher and Dilthey alert us to the attention of the other (or the text) and advise us to regard it as a "Thou," an alien, defamiliarized "I" that could carry a meaning of its own. The "I" will try to understand the "I" in "You." Similarly, Gadamer writes

Hermeneutical experience is concerned with a *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and to govern; it is *language*—i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. . . . Still, the relationship to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation must be capable of teaching us something about hermeneutical experience. (358)

Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Gadamer all adapt a positive attitude toward the Other—a Thou. For Gadamer, the "Thou" indicates a possibility for us to understand the world and to have "a knowledge of human nature." It helps us to "calculate how the other person will behave." The Thou is not self-evident, transparent, and pre-supposed. Here Gadamer tries to highlight the importance of the relation of "tradition" to "Thou" because the interaction between I-Thou or I-tradition carries an historical consciousness, i.e., the pastness of the past. He points out that without an adequate understanding of human nature, especially the "Thou," there would be no true understanding, let alone a "fusion of horizon" (378).

Heidegger's analysis of the Being of Dasein implies an effort to get out of the ego-centered universe of the Cartesian "I think." His "Being-with" is being-with-other and being-toward-the-other. However, he fails to deal with Dasein's being-with-otherness. The others are encountered as "what they are; they are what they do" (163). The big difference between Being and beings lies in a principle of difference. Being indicates "the essence of man" whose ontological condition of being is "authenticity" (Silverman 159) while the being of beings bears a ring with the "everydayness," a world of the "They" (*Das Man*) whose idle talk characterizes the being of beings. Furthermore, Being is always referred to as an other because of the "thrown-ness" of its condition of

being-in-the-world. Heidegger's path to thinking in the other is still egocentric, in that "*Dasein* never wonders whether, by being *da*, 'there,' it's taking somebody else's place" (Mortley 19). According to Adriaan Peperzak, the "principle" of principles in Husserlian phenomenology is "intuition," and Levinas's intervention as an "other" marks a prelude to the overcoming of the symmetrical, noetico-noematic analysis of consciousness (12-21). Against the phenomenological thesis of an autonomous, transcendental, egological subject, who reduces all realities of lived experience into a self-centered and solipsistic monism of consciousness, Levinas recognized the moment of the Other, i.e., the irreducible moment of heterogeneity of the otherness of the other in the other. Thus the epiphany of the modern subject lies not in the recognition of the self, but in the re-cognition of the Other. According to Adriaan Peperzak, Heidegger's fault-line is his oblivion of the Other, in that the "relation" or "event" of self and other is simply not a point to ponder. Thus, the question of the Other is *either* left unnoticed, *or* treated as a phenomena among other phenomena, *or* repressed in the common culture. In other words, the strong case of Dasein as "being-with" becomes Heidegger's "Achilles' heel" once the question of the Other is raised.

Heidegger's "being-with-the-other" is a false alarm, in that the question of the Other is still ignored in the ontological discussion of Dasein. His existential project is still a monologue of Dasein. Conversely, the communicative model proffered by Bakhtin is a dialogic one. The linguistic system asks us to recognize the importance of the Other. Thus dialogism demands a recognition of "exotopy" (the recognition of otherness) (de Man 109-11). For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is itself exotopy, signifying intra- and inter-cultural relations. Dialogue is of paramount importance in cultural exchange. Instead of taming the otherness of the Other, dialogism promotes mutual implication and influence. Instead of reducing otherness to the politics of sameness, dialogism translates cultural differences. When tackling the European monologic novelistic discourse, Bakhtin rewrites the Manichean relation between subject and object, which tops one over the other. Thus the unequalness of the subject and object in his communication model is overhauled, because, for Bakhtin, the subject-object relationship is not based on an objectified re-cognition, but on a reciprocal penetration. In Bakhtin's words, his dialogism is to "affirm someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (*Dialogic Imagination* 10). His communication system is based on "a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" participating in inter-cultural exchange without a wishful representation of the Other in terms of its otherness. By placing

emphasis on the multi-faceted, yet contradictory, values and voices, dialogism aims at an artistic hybrid, namely, cultural differences. Thus negotiation among different cultures is rendered possible. To further this argument, Bakhtin writes that

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). Separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self as the main reason for the loss of one's self. Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*. And everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension filled encounter lies its entire essence. (*Problems* 287)

In Bakhtin's view, in fact, the boundary between self and other is fluid and cross-referential (*Dialogic Imagination* 315). One's self-consciousness is not autonomous and self-sufficient. It needs someone's consciousness to complete its meaning. As Bakhtin writes, "A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone" (*Problems* 177).

Identity emerges from an interaction of self and other. In his influential essay "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor comments that "my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others" (34). Drawing on Rousseau's insight, Taylor also points out that "[a] society takes a turn toward corruption and injustice, when people begin to desire preferential esteem," especially when they "failed to appreciate other cultures" which is "not only factually mistaken but somehow morally wrong" (35; 42). Drawing insights from Martin Buber's *I-Thou*, we find that his contribution lies in his invention of a "Thou." In his rhapsodic, religious, and philosophical poem *I-Thou*, Buber promulgates the two-ness of the world: the world of It and the world of Thou. The worlds of It and Thou, according to Buber, are designed in rejection of the prestigious Cartesian

"*Cogito, ergo sum*." For Buber, there is no such thing as an independent I minus the consideration of the other. The relation of I to It is unilateral while the relation of I to Thou is fluid.¹

To solve the problem of equal identity and dignity in the politics of recognition, Levinas develops an attitude which differs from that of the hierarchically preferential esteem. Instead of referring to the self as the center of localization, Levinas tries to articulate the voices of the other because, like Taylor, he does not want the uniqueness of the other to be "ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity" (Taylor 38). With regard to the other, *I am passive*. *I am free of intentionality, cognition, representation, horizon, and interiority*. In communication, "[a]lterity comes to me [the self] from without, and comes by exceeding my capacities" (*Otherwise* 4). The world of self is the world of *Da*. It is a world of existence without existents, a transcendence and a passing over ending at beings' other (*Otherwise* 3).

From a Levinasian perspective, the relationship between self and other is not dialectical, but ethical. The other is seen as a neighbor who *demand*s a saying which "signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities" (*Otherwise* 46). The self does not thematize nor reduce the consciousness of the Other to the "I think." Instead of intentionality, the saying bridges the self and other and "[t]o say is to approach a neighbor" (48). Though saying is communication, it cannot be reduced to a phenomenology of truth. The subject is not in and at home with himself. He is passive, just as "the saying": "An exposure to the other, it is signification, is signification itself, the-one-for-the-other to the point of substitution, but a substitution in separation, that is, responsibility" (54). In what follows I will treat two filmic texts—Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*—because both deal with caged "egos" and the self-other relationship.

3. Self and Other in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

What characterizes Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is his carefully chosen titular symbolism. The meaning of the title is three-fold. First, "Tiger" and "Dragon" indicate "the world of River and Lake."² In the

1 Wood's arguments falls into three categories: the I's relationship with nature, with men, and with intelligible forms.

2 Here I follow Sharon Lai's translation of *chiang-hu* 江湖 (River and Lake). See her "Translating Jin Yong," Chiu-quei Wang 376-78.

world of martial arts fiction, there is a plethora of skillful swordsmen in the complicated world of martial arts where one can never get a whole picture of it because their “eyes” are watching. This statement triggers a negative epiphany localized through the mouth of Mu-Bai, when he is in dialogue with Hsiu-lian, who articulates the danger of living in a precarious world where one always puts one’s life in jeopardy. Second, “Tiger” and “Dragon” are associated with “Tiny Tiger” and “Beloved Dragon” respectively, a pair of star-crossed lovers whose aleatory meetings and separations are acted out in tragic overtone. Tiny Tiger is always “crouching” while Beloved Dragon is always “hidden” and can only have a tryst with her lover without being seen by *others*. Third, both the crouching “tiger” and the hidden “dragon” describe the “ego” which is clouded and prisoned so that one can’t really see one’s self and the subject can’t serve as an agent either (Ye 300). Small wonder that there are no tigers and dragons in the film. In fact, the title indicates three concentric life-worlds: the world of Tiny Tiger and Beloved Dragon, the world of Mu-Bai and Hsiu-lian, and the world of the martial arts.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is originally a martial arts fiction by Du-lu Wang (1909-77), who became known as one of the four “Old-style” martial arts fictional practitioners in the North in China, including Bao-yu Kung, Sho-ming Lee, and Chen-ying Chen (Chou 1-13). Wang has published a pentalogy of martial arts fiction: *The Crane in Kung-lung*, *Precious Sword and Famous Ladies*, *The Sword’s Breath and Its Glamor*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *The Iron Steed and the Silver Jar*, which are called the *Kung-Iron* pentalogy by critics (Chou 10). According to Ssu-nian Hsu, who reads these five popular fictions in terms of the heroes’ “inability” rather than “ability” to achieve a heroic deed, which distinguishes Wang from other popular martial arts fiction writers:

They have a single purpose in life—to fight for the right they think right, but sometimes at a loss about the noble cause they are supposed to achieve, not because they are unwilling to sacrifice themselves but because they are all too willing to sacrifice themselves while not having a slightest hope of bringing happiness to those they love. The tragedy of love is not entirely imposed from outside, such as the traditional feudal law or manners. Being mostly tactical and highly skilled in martial arts, they can get the upper hand over their enemy, but when confronted with their character, psychological foibles, inner self, they are nevertheless fighting a losing cause. Seen in this perspective, their enemy is themselves. (Wang 1: 2; translation mine)

Hsu aptly points out that Wang’s heroes are “anti-hero.” Being trapped into the web of the social interactions in the world of martial arts, they have to be “heroes” so that they can survive and arrest the reader’s interest. What is tragic in the world of Wang’s characterology is the writing of the limit, an inability to transcend the limited.

In Wang’s portrayal of the martial arts heroes, he tends to look at them as subjects of passivity. For example, in Sir Te’s view, Mu-bai is “skilled in sword-wielding, a man with good manners, generous and righteous” (Wang 15), but he, unlike the *he* portrayed in the original, is less active, heroic, and vindictive. Unlike those martial arts fictional writers who offer an unusual presentation of the hero and chronicles the itinerary of the growth of a would-be martial arts hero, Ang Lee presents Mu-bai as an anti-hero who suffers a lot from a negative epiphany when he was in meditation of a higher level of martial arts. In other words, he is a man ready to step out of the world of River and Lake. He is not a hero burning with a desire to make himself perfect in his martial arts. Conversely, he is tired of what he is now.

Both in the original martial arts fiction and the film, the heroine is Beloved Dragon. Her story is told in metafictional analepsis. Wang writes:

When I narrate my story until now, I have to relate all the things that happened to Beloved Dragon. Before accompanying her father to the Capital city, she spent all her past life in Hsin Chiang Province. She is well versed in martial arts, brave enough to defy the gods and the devils, deft enough to swap the moon and glean the stars with ease. Her parents are still incognizant of their daughter’s dexterity in martial arts. (Wang 1: 188; translation mine)

Here Ang Lee’s filmic text is true to the Wang’s original portrayal of Beloved Dragon’s story. However, the life story of Beloved Dragon is not substantially provided. In Wang’s original, the Beloved Dragon’s past weaves a web of triangular love between Jade Fox, the Dumb Warrior, and Sir Kao. As the story unfolds itself, the Dumb Warrior, being ill and senile, was murdered with a pillow by Jade Fox, a paramour of Sir Kao. Being illiterate and full of compunction after the murder of her lover, Jade Fox cannot recognize the importance of the Dumb Warrior’s two old books, which are, in fact, two rare books on Chinese martial arts given away to Sir Kao, who practices them nocturnally when he serves as a secretary in his younger brother’s court. This intriguing part, however, is not included in Ang Lee’s filmic text.

In Wang Du-lu’s martial arts fictional world, gender is set in motion. When Tiny Tiger revisited Beloved Dragon, the novel leads us back to what

has made her a girl skilled in martial arts. According to Wang's original, Sir Kao was Hsiao-zai Yang's friend and he saw Yang's son, Tiny Tiger, only once when he was seven or eight after the decline of the Yang's. In the long period of looking for Tiny Tiger, Sir Kao went to Hsin Chiang Province to serve first as Governor Yu's Secretary, then as a tutor to Beloved Dragon. According to Sir Kao, after five years of instruction in rhetoric, law, and sword (a rare combination of three talented women—Ban Chao, Chin Liang-yu, and Hung Hsian—Beloved Dragon will distinguish herself in the world of River and Lake. Later, he came across Jade Fox in Ganshu Province, who requested Sir Kao return her two books and they both went to Hsin Chiang Province. That explains why Jade Fox becomes Beloved Dragon's mentor, a fact that is also missed in the filmic text.

The relation of Mu-bai to Beloved Dragon points to a responsibility, an ethical question corresponding to Levinas's ethics as first philosophy. While Beloved Dragon is becoming egocentric and hedonistic, Mu-bai is losing gradually his subjectivity. After Mu-bai's first encounter with Beloved Dragon, he assumes a responsibility—an ethical being put into the service of an other which is other than himself. In other words, Mu-bai is much more concerned about the aftermath of the Other's disruption of the complicated world than about the systematic construction of his own subjectivity based on an old code. After the handing in of the sword to Sir Te, he has only one "wish" that can be fulfilled once Hsiu-lian accepts his marriage proposal. As Mu-bai decreases, Beloved Dragon increases. Her desire points toward the infinite and wishes to reach the beyond. When Mu-bai's desire turned into a need, he assumes a responsibility for the other and acquires a being-for-the-other, the realization of which makes him free and independent.

The advent of Beloved Dragon disrupts Mu-bai's dream of a future idyllic paradise. When Mu-bai has awakened to the idea that being human is a concrete existence which is directed to the other, he himself becomes a hostage to the Other, one who makes him infinitely responsible. Perhaps he has already had a hunch that something will happen. In fact Mu-bai is always already a hostage even before his knowing who he might be.

The master signifier in the film is Mu-bai's sword, aged four hundred years, heavy, beautiful, but dangerous, 2.9 feet in length, 1.1 inches in width, 1 inch thick at the handle, with seven rubies missing from the hilt. Because of its reputation, the sword creates a stir in the world of martial arts. For the martial arts community, it is the very embodiment of Mu-bai's "righteousness" and "moral integrity" (Ye 290). Even if it kills, it draws no blood. The sword presupposes a relationship, a bond that has to be

disengaged with the world of River and Lake because the sword is Mu-bai's gift to Sir Te. To his consternation, it drags Mu-bai into the web of the complicated world of River and Lake and connects Mu-bai with Beloved Dragon, making them mutually other. In Ang Lee's film, the sword links Mu-bai to the world, his friend, and Beloved Dragon.

When the sword is stolen, it becomes a "signified Absent" and creates a face to which all the traces lead. A face is not definable unless it establishes a relationship with *illeity*, which is beyond *being*, beyond its *ipseity*. When Mu-bai and Hsiu-lian are able to reconstruct a face of the other through the trace of the other, the relationship between self and other becomes a personal and ethical one, which points to a responsibility of the other in the self. For Levinas, the relationship between self and other is not that master-slave oppositional and bipolar relationship. On the contrary, the self is a *slave*. His being is beyond being, a being that cannot be neutralized by being. In other words, the presence of the other signifies a trace which points to a beyond.

The importance of the other lies in his calling into question the concept of an I. The other alerts the self to the attention of the Other and "[I]t is the summoning of myself by the other (*audrui*), it is a responsibility toward those whom we do not even know" (*Philosophical Writings* 81). In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Mu-bai and Hsiu-lian are well-established martial-arts practitioners, and they are going to withdraw from the martial arts world, but in vain, because the vendetta of Mu-bai's instructor of martial arts still preoccupies him.

Traditionally, morality and righteousness are two important prerequisites in a martial arts hero, especially for those who want to achieve a name in the world of River and Lake. In Du-lu Wang and Ang Lee's hands, these traditional qualities such as name, fame, morality, and righteousness, have become a burden not only to the martial arts heroes but also to the heroines. What makes Wang's fiction and Li's film interesting is the characters' self-reflexivity and their self-reflection upon their spiritual as well as existential dilemma.

The would-be couple of Mu-bai and Hsiu-lian is a foil to the always already "couple"—Tiny Tiger and Beloved Dragon. For Beloved Dragon, Mu-bai and Hsiu-lian are next to fictional characters in their deeds. Being a late-comer in the pecking order of the world of River and Lake and an Other to the mainstream world of martial arts, Beloved Dragon has to practice her martial arts first under the tutelage of Mentor Kao and then under Jade Fox. In the field of gaze, she remains an other in the eyes of her instructor of martial arts, Sir Kao; Jade Fox, Mu-bai, and Hsiu-lian. Even

when she wants to step into the world of River and Lake, she has to disguise herself as a man and make herself himself, an *other* of the other in the face of the Other.

The vendetta between Mu-bai and Jade Fox ends up with Mu-bai's downfall because he failed to avoid all of the poisoned flying needles shot from a lethal device invented by the latter. However, the novelistic ending differs a lot from the filmic one, in that Jade Fox died in the garden shortly after she killed the General Catcher Chiu Tsai. In Wang's original, she was killed by Hsiu-lian's machete. In the filmic ending, Ang Lee weaves an entangled web that pushes all the main characters to the limit of their destiny: the death of Jade Fox, Mu-bai's death, and finally Beloved Dragon's death/life.

The cave scene indicates the shadowy, illusory nature of the world, but there is a slant beam coming from the top. For Plato, the cave is an allegory of the world of appearance. For Ang Lee, the cave is a transcendence, pushing all the characters to their destiny and casting the film with a beautifully staged tragic overtone. Jade Fox expresses, regretfully, her *ignorance* not only of Beloved Dragon's sly civility, but also of her own illiteracy. After the death of Jade Fox, the audience rivets their attention to Mu-bai's "story of an hour." By uplifting his *chi* or breath, which is also a sleight of hand in martial arts fiction, he tries his best to hold breath and waits for Beloved Dragon's antidote. According to the Chinese folklore, to practice the circulation of *chi* within the practitioner's body is of paramount importance because, in the martial-arts school, it is considered as a "substance" (*ti* 體) and the sword as an "expediency" (*yong* 用) (Shahar 128). In Ang Lee's filmic world, "breath" and "sword" are rendered useless and their importance and function are made dysfunctional, but his last words merit our attention. In other words, Ang Lee lets the Other talk; his sleight of hand of casting a slant beam into the allegory of the cave exteriorizes the characters' thought and turns the idealization of truth inside out, so that the subjects have a chance to present their alterity.

The ending of the film is laudable. If we compare the original and the adapted one, we will find that there is a big gap between the novel and the film. In the original, the narratorial technique is metafictional, in that the authorial voice pops up to wrap up the story. In effect, Mu-bai remains safe and sound in the original, nor is Jade Fox killed by him. Rather, it is Hsiu-lian who killed her when Jade Fox was dueling with General Catcher Chiu Tsai. Moreover, Beloved Dragon's incentive for jumping down the cliff differs from the ending in the original, namely, she jumps not for Tiny Tiger's story but for her father who is prostrate on the sick bed because

Beloved Dragon has wrought havoc to her family. Partly because of personal compunction, partly because of a heart willing to sacrifice, and partly because of the idea that whoever jumps down the cliff and still can survive could save his or her family, Beloved Dragon is willing to jump down to the cliff to sacrifice herself to save her father. According to Levinas, "Here to be or not to be is not the question where transcendence is concerned" (*Otherwise* 3). What matters after the jumping is filled with an "*il y a*." In Ang Lee's hands, the ending is full of fictional possibilities: whether Beloved Dragon is dead or not is still an enigma.³ It is through the negation of life that she regains life and re-establishes a bond, an apprenticeship between herself and Mu-bai, self and other, the seer and the seen, the eye and the gaze.

In Wang's original, the other is the centrality of the novel. Tiny Tiger's quest for his own identity is of paramount importance. Though universally claimed as an infamous bandit, he was just a naughty kid in the beginning and he did pay for past wrong doings in the end. When he was mature enough to know who he was, Tiny Tiger began searching for his own identity. Unexpectedly, he is what he *is not* under the public gaze. In other words, the quest for personal identity is replaced by a cultural identity which is other than his own being. Because of a sworn oath to marry Beloved Dragon one day when he makes it in the world, Tiny Tiger comes to the capital city, Beijing. However, his exodus from the desert into the promised land does not bring him any happiness, in that he is an other, not in birth but in status. He is an other out and out, even when he is face-to-face to others. He is, in fact, torn between two consciousnesses—the right and fright of meeting his beloved. Similarly, Beloved Dragon *is not* what she is. Though from a rich family, she is not happy about that, especially the parental persiflage that she is expected to marry a man of equal social status. Thus, she is also torn between the past and the present, between her memory of Tiny Tiger and her marriage to Fatie Lu, a destiny which she cannot overcome.

Ang Lee's film is about anti-ethics, a rewriting of traditional male-centered Chinese cultural identity, which indicates a conversion, a rupture, and a new direction. He lets the readers think about the ways of looking and of looking at new directions that may lead us to meditate on a new ethics and a new concept of subjectivity. His film highlights the

3 According to Du-lu Wang's *The Iron Steed and the Silver Jar*, Beloved Dragon did not die after jumping off the cliff. In the novel, she is pregnant with a baby, but she died while looking for her swapped baby.

importance of the other in popular fiction and dramatizes the interaction between self and the other, presupposing responsibility of the one to the other.

4. The Eye and the Gaze in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*

The Birds explores the interaction between subject and object, the eye and the gaze, and culture and nature. It opens with seabirds (seagulls) soaring up in the sky as a passing background.

The film sets a case of deliberate mistaken identity in a pet shop where a man (Mitch) comes to buy a present for his adolescent sister (Cathy) while a young lady (Melanie) comes to fetch her parrots. The man recognizes the young lady upon seeing her and begins testing and teasing her during a brief stay in the pet shop because she pretends to be a pet shop clerk. Feeling personally affronted, she immediately calls her friend Charlie to help her locate his name and address from his license plate number. She then goes to Bodega Bay to send a pair of lovebirds to his sister as a birthday present. On the visit to Bogeda Bay, she learns, by accident, that Mitch once had a lover who is a school-teacher. Hitchcock lets Melanie play a trick and a coincidence is arranged so that he can put together all the characters and events within a familial web that thematizes three kinds of "birds": (1) the *caged love-birds* which stand for the human "ego," (2) the *caged* Mitch family members, especially Lydia, who live in her Oedipal, imaginary world, and (3) the *wild seabirds* that represent the other.⁴ The former two are tamed while the latter (as the Other) is beyond man's ken. What's fascinating here is that Melanie is unaware of the impending danger—the triangular love into which she is trapped and the attack of malicious seabirds mirroring Lydia Brenner's jealousy, possessiveness and aggressiveness (Horwitz 279).

Being a *tetralogy* about "the maternal superego"—*Rear Windows*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Psycho*, and *The Birds*—Slavoj Žižek suggests that we take this film *serially* (98). Instead of regarding the birds as "an expression of Lydia's jealousy," Žižek is apt to see the attacking birds as a catalyst and a *solution* to the domestic problem confronted by Mitch's family members:

4 For Horwitz, "birds are associated with female hysteria and destructiveness" and the wild birds are symbols of "maternal anxiety which seeks to punish any form of sexual expression" (282).

There is a key detail that supports our reading; at the very end of the film, Mitch's mother "accepts" Melanie as her son's wife, gives her consent, and abandons her superego role (as indicated by the fleeting smile she and Melanie exchange in the car)—and that is why, at that moment, they are all able to leave the property that is being threatened by the birds: the birds are no longer needed, their role is finished. (106)

Žižek's succinct and insightful remark offers a structural and functional reading of the attacking birds. Similarly, the attacking birds are looked upon as an agent of "surveillance" by Margaret M. Horwitz who suggests *The Birds* stages a "female rivalry over Mitch between Annie Hayworth (the schoolteacher), Melanie, and Lydia" and who suggests that the attacking birds is the key to this familial dilemma (280). After the traumatic experience, all of Mitch's family members can finally get rid of the attacking birds that are, for them, like nightmares. Though the ending *seems* a happy one and Hitchcock does create a formal unity in the film, the problem of the birds is not yet resolved; it merits our second thought. In "The Hitchcockian Blot," Žižek, following Robin Wood's line of thought, summarizes his three ways of reading the film:

According to the first, "cosmological" reading, the attack of the birds can be viewed as embodying Hitchcock's vision of the universe, of the (human) cosmos as system . . . that can be upset at any time, that can be thrown into chaos by the intervention of pure chance. . . .

For the second, "ecological" reading, the film's title could have been *Birds of the World, Unite!* in this reading, the birds function as a condensation of exploited nature that finally rises up against man's heedless exploitation. . . .

The third reading sees the key to the film in the intersubjective relations between the main characters (Melanie, Mitch, and his mother), which are far from being merely an insignificant sideline to the "true" plot, the attack of the birds: the attacking birds only "embody" a fundamental discord . . . (97-98)

Among the three readings, Žižek focuses more on the familial problems and less on the ecological consciousness in the film.⁵ If we follow Žižek's

5 In his *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek defends the Cartesian subject: "All academic powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this [the Cartesian subject] spectre: the New Age obscurantist . . . and the Heideggerian proponent of the thought of Being . . . and Deep Ecologist (who blames Cartesian mechanistic materialism for providing the philosophical foundation for the ruthless exploitation of nature) . . ." (1). He then makes two claims: (1) "Cartesian subjectivity continues to be acknowledged by all

reading of Hitchcock seriously and serially, we will find that his *North by Northwest* is also about birds:

In *North by Northwest* we have what is perhaps the most famous Hitchcockian scene, the attack by the plane—a steel bird—that pursues the hero across a flat, sun-baked landscape; in *Psycho*, Norman's room is filled with stuffed mounted birds, and even the body of his mummified mother reminds us of a stuffed bird; in *The Birds*, after the (metaphorical) steel bird and the (metonymic) stuffed birds, we finally have actual live birds attacking the town. (99)

Žižek's reading on the emotional intrigues of the characters and the familial relationship is superb, though he skips the cosmological and ecological themes and only focuses his analysis on the former. To further supplement Žižek's argument and, following Wood's argument again, I will reiterate the rift between nature and culture, namely, the privilege of culture over nature in the order of things. As an *other* to the culture, nature is doubly removed from culture. It is not only alienated from the civilized world but also from man's reason. Though the attacking birds serve as a solution to the familial crisis between mother and daughter-in-law, *they*, as an Other to *our* human society, are not properly looked at. Only the mild lovebirds, like the tamed egos, are objects of desire, the desire of the Other. Like the "dragon" and the "tiger" in the wilderness who represent "nature," the attacking birds are still referred to as the *malicious, attacking* other. Thus, the critique, for me, is a critique of the Cartesian self-reflection, a critique of the consciousness going back to the self-consciousness itself. In other words, self-reflexiveness should go beyond the "clear and distinct" and "self-guaranteeing" affirmation of self-reflexivity. Self-reflection is an ongoing and endless process of affirmation and non-affirmation, negation and non-negation.

As a rewriting of the visible and the invisible and of self and other, Lacan's theory of the eye and the gaze can help us revisit Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Though he does not explore the Cartesian meditation in terms of phenomenological intentionality, his use of visual theories to formulate "I saw myself seeing myself" is itself a masterstroke, in that it is, indeed, a paraphrase of a "Cartesian *cogito* by which the subject apprehends himself as thought" (*Four Fundamental Essays* 80). It resembles a dream vision in which

academic powers as a powerful and still active intellectual tradition," and (2) "It is high time that the partisans of Cartesian subjectivity should, in the face of the whole world, publish their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Cartesian subjectivity with the philosophical manifesto of Cartesian subjectivity itself" (1-2).

the dreamer enters into his own mind and looks at what he is looking at. He explains it later that this formulation is tantamount to the fact that "the consciousness, in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze" (82). Thus self and other in the Cartesian "I think" becomes the problem of the eye and the gaze—"Seeing itself seeing itself." In the scopic field, the other is always already backgrounded, and the gaze is always imagined. Lacan questions: "Where is the background? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge—just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence" (26). The birds in Hitchcock's *The Birds* is an example. They always lurk in the background as others, and they are not part of human scopic field until they begin to function diegetically. The human eye, as the light of the body, is disrupted by the gaze of the Other. Looked at through this view, the relationship between the eye and the gaze, like the relationship between self and other, is interactive, mutually implicated; they are contradictory, yet complementary.

To overcome the politics of "re-cognition," which is still based on an imaginary, assimilated, and narcissistic concept of culture, we should reconstruct a new concept of subjectivity that goes beyond the Manichean and integratistic cultural logic. In so far as Hitchcock's and Ang Lee's films are concerned, both have an opening ending; both try to go beyond the deadlock of dealing with a subjective (in-)sufficiency of self-reflection at the cost of the Other. Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* emphasizes more on the interaction between self and other, which is ethical in its own right. As for the rift between culture and nature, both films have a common ground: The Odyssean self back home implies the insufficiency of self-consciousness. In *The Birds*, Mitch and others have survived the attack of the wild birds, which means the Gordian knot is cut, because the domestic peace is restored and the possessive and aggressive mother has come to terms with her future daughter-in-law. The irony is: the question of the other, as exemplified in the birds, is still unresolved, and the caged lovebirds—like their egos—are taken away to another brave new world. In Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the others, such as Tiny Tiger and Beloved Dragon, are still not accepted by the class-bound, male-dominated mainstream martial arts fictional world, but Ang Lee lets the other talk. Both authors cast a suspicious look at this kind of Odyssean, narcissistic

cultural identification, and try to “de-pose,” “de-situate,” and “revert” the ego into a self, a self *without* self.

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