

**Poetics of the Crystal-Image: Dreams in *Mirror* and *Ashes of Time Redux***

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Yuh-yi Tan,

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**Abstract:** This paper delves into recurrent dreams and related recollections in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* and Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux*. Gilles Deleuze has called *Mirror* a film of "turning crystal" because it reflects the two sides of the protagonist's relationship with his mother and ex-wife by juxtaposing them in a mysterious labyrinth of past-present-future. The crystal imaging refracts four sides of two couples by showing the bonding of the parents along with the connection to his ex-wife and son. The same structure is apparent in *Ashes of Time Redux* where another set of two bilateral symmetries is initiated between Yaoshi Huang, Feng Ouyang, and Ouyang's lover through the constant blending of their self-differentiation. First, the study addresses the ways the turning crystal characterization strongly points to latent Freudian symbols from the childhood dacha and the peach blossom lake in the recurrent dreams to explore a forbidden love buried in the Lacanian pre-Oedipal mirror stage. Secondly, the study proposes to observe the convergences and differences of these two films with respect to the "turning crystal" structure composed of four manifestations: an interior-and-exterior home route, circularity structure, doubleness in the characterization, and an incestuous triangle of Oedipal-vertical vs. sibling-lateral. Wong and Tarkovsky's films succeed in producing visualizations of Deleuze's time-synthesis by combining past recollection, present dream, and promising future. Their films are accessible to the flow of time that moves from the conscious interior to the exterior unconscious to display the deep impact of (dis)remembrance.

Yuh-yi TAN,

### Poetics of the Crystal-Image: Dreams in *Mirror* and *Ashes of Time Redux*

Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2* details an intriguing concept of the crystal-image that elaborates on the coalescing of time to express a composite consisting of different layers of time, various signs of time, and crystalline circuits of time. Through his discussion of the crystal-image, Deleuze has adopted Henri Bergson's temporal schemas from *Matter and Memory*, renovating them to adapt to the cinematic aesthetic of temporality. What Deleuze sees in crystal are forks of time that create a switching between the actual and the virtual that, although indiscernible linearly, can be penetrated by an understanding of dream, memory, and recollection. In his book *Sculpting in Time*, the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, whose paradigm-shifting aesthetic treatment of time is reflected in Deleuze's theory, envisions cinematic rhythm as the pressure of time that surrenders to a spontaneous integrative structure of self-organizing shots. The perception of time produced from such images leads to an impression of the infiniteness of remembrance.

While shooting his film *Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1975), Tarkovsky intentionally presented overwrought poetic rhetoric and crystalline images of time, yet his purpose of doing so was to write of duplicitous affection through time. Tarkovsky strongly believes that the visual images are permeated with their own rhythmic time progression, which is the core of the "poetic film." A similar explication of dream-like temporality is found in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008).<sup>1</sup> Wong's disdain for linear narrative creates an irreplaceable visual expression through inner inquiry that earned him the title "poet of time" from the film critic Tony Rayns. Janice Tong argues that Wong's films "contribute to a new cinematic rendering of time by complicating the materiality, or the visuality, of time" (2003). As for the poetics of time, both *auteurs* have remained dominant figures who have distinguished themselves from other directors by their artistic mission to engage a discursive norm of temporality through poetic approaches to film narration. In an interview conducted by Claire Devarrieux, Tarkovsky declares, "I am seeking a principle of montage that will allow me to expose the subjective logic—the thought, the dream, the memory—instead of the logic of the subject" (Tarkovsky and Devarrieux xii). Truly, Tarkovsky's dream and memory are based on the realistic rather than the imagined. According to Wong, "Tarkovsky is making films that are very realistic. His films are very *deep*. . . . You feel very touched because you feel he is an authentic person" (Wong and Yeung 30). Tarkovsky himself claims that "It's impossible to create something unreal. Everything is real and unfortunately we aren't able to abandon reality. We can express ourselves toward the world that exists in a poetic way . . ." (Tarkovsky and Devarrieux 86).

Not only is the film itself "poetic," within *Mirror* the genre of poetry is a focal point. Painstakingly describing the function of the poems used in *Mirror*, Adams P. Sitney argues that Tarkovsky's usage of his father's poems is a means that matches the film's style characterizable as an impression of time. Sitney writes of this kind of cinema "as a means for the acute observation of a complex temporality that fluidly spanned duration, memory, and dreams" (211). The poems, then, are metonymic of the film's rhythmic style, as well as symbolic memories of the narrator's father. There is also a preponderance of mother images in *Mirror*. Tarkovsky explains, ". . . they (women) want to maintain the child in us, whereas we are already old men. *Mirror* is not a casual title. The storyteller perceives his wife as the continuation of his mother, because wives resemble mothers, and errors repeat themselves—a strange reflection" (Tarkovsky and Devarrieux 44). Natasha Synessios claims that "The depth of Maria's memory/emotion/experience rises to the surface (the world we see and hear on the screen), folds upon it, and the surface folds back into her depth (her unspeakable pain, her shattered future as it reveals itself to us in the present)" (78). Such close attention to the parents of the narrator suggests that *Mirror* addresses a portrait of the Oedipal family whose vertical axis is projected as either the absent paternal figure or the double-hatting maternal figure who could be either hated or loved. When the Oedipal-vertical expands to include three generations, a son is just like a father, an ex-wife is like a mother, and a son's son is like a father's son. Through a magic wheel of fortune, the crystalline family-portrait reaches its acme of time. Referring to *Mirror* as a film that carries specific relations of time, Deleuze argues, "*Mirror* is a turning crystal, with two sides if we relate it to the invisible adult character (his mother, his wife), with four sides if we relate it to two visible couples (his mother and the child he was, his wife and the child he has). And the crystal turns on itself, like a homing device that searches an opaque environment" (*Cinema 2* 75).

The narrator Alexei (played by Ignat Daniltsev) indulges in the memory of his childhood, in which there are some ephemeral images of his younger mother (played by Margarita Terekhova), the old

<sup>1</sup> *Ashes of Time Redux* will be abbreviated as *Ashes*.

mother Maria (played by Tarkovsky's mother Maria Vishnyakova), as well as his ex-wife Natalia (played also by Terekhova), and the voice of his absent poet-father. More than being reflective and reflexive, cinematic images are participatory in an imaginary world. From the cinematic screen, a distortion of the mirror image, the viewers could observe the reality to mold their virtual world in a crystal of time. Tarkovsky's time image portrays Alexei's imaginary integration with his mother in a childhood *dacha* that empowers what Deleuze calls the "universal becoming of the crystal," meaning that the shreds of past, sheets of present, and fragments of future overlap to form a mirror, reflecting in a nostalgic cinematic image (*Cinema 2* 115). *Mirror* deliberately creates a nostalgic mood for Alexei's past childhood memory, but it fills it with possessive irksomeness that contributes to cue crystallized retrieval of memories.

With respect to Wong's cinematic method in *Ashes*, Stephen Teo holds that the "romantic concept" underpins Wong's cinematic method which is characterized by a mood of "dreamy sensuality" infiltrating "his evocation of nostalgia as a state of emotion" (527). Similarly, Wimal Dissanayake sees in it an in-depth sadness "for a lost time, and realizing the impossibility of it . . . a nostalgia for a future moment" (31). *Ashes* is a poetic visual narrative, replete with flashbacks of dream, recollection and memory, like a crystal that grasps you in its entirely fleeting moment. The prevalent idea of the Deleuzian crystal-image comes to the fore in the film's recollection that is filtered through the major narrator Ouyang Feng (played by Leslie Cheung). As a reserve swordsman who has retreated to an inn at desert, Ouyang immerses himself deeply first in the loss of his lover, then her death, the afflictive bereavement forcing him to sink into troublesome memories and dreams. Whereas mirrors and their vicissitudes in the childhood *dacha* are constant reminders that trigger Alexei's entry into the time maze, motifs of peach blossoms and the lake in Ouyang's hometown become favored symbols of illusion and rebirth that offer an away-from-home shelter for the state of dis-remembrance.

This paper concentrates on the different ways Deleuze's concept of the crystal-image pervades and becomes a dominant visual style of the two poetic films, Tarkovsky's *Mirror* and Wong's *Ashes*. Scrutinizing the dream symbols of latency and their connection to Oedipal wish-fulfillments in both films, the analysis proves that Sigmund Freud's dream theory and Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" are effective in deciphering the recurrent dreams and recollections buried within a dyadic/triadic relationship between the self and the other(s) that underlie the poetic operation of time for both directors. In the process of observing the convergences and differences between these two films, the analysis demonstrates how Deleuze's crystal-image helps explain not only the doubleness in the character and circularity of structure that are reflected in a narrative in which the Oedipal-vertical with sibling-lateral modality is interwoven, but also in which the recurrent dreams and related recollections are imprinted with unconscious Oedipal wish-fulfillment oriented in the route of home-coming. In *Ashes*, there are recurrent dreams of Ouyang's lover waiting for him beside a colorful peach blossom lake in his hometown White Camel Mountain; in *Mirror*, there is Alexei's childhood *dacha*, the cottage in countryside where his dearest mother lives, that is still haunted with the absent father's memory. Elaborating on the primal maternal figures, namely the caring mother-father conglomerate in *Mirror* and the woman who waits in *Ashes*, the analysis shows that both films reflect a nostalgic mood of lost time in dream that is filled with majesty, yet is poignant and tragic.

### I. Primal Wounds

The recurrent dreams of the childhood *dacha* coming across in *Mirror*, like a refrain in poetry, indicate the rhythmic pressure of time that brings back repressed experience hidden in the unconscious, just as it renews it. Deleuze's crystal-image acknowledges the fundamental imbrication of dream-space in time where time needs space and space needs time to be traversable. He explains, "there are crystallized spaces, when the landscapes become hallucinatory in a setting which now retains only crystalline seeds and crystallizable materials. Now what characterizes these spaces is that their nature cannot be explained in a simply spatial way. They imply non-localizable relations. These are direct presentations of time" (*Cinema 2* 125).

Deleuze's concept centers on an imaginative circuit where through the layering of dreams the film travels from immediate perception into the past. To rethink the category of time, it is understandable that a time-space childhood *dacha* in *Mirror* makes it possible to move into a dream that provides not only an imaginary but is also linked with different periods of time. In his recurrent dreams, the middle-aged narrator Alexei is trapped within just such a space-time dilemma, one that divides into three discontinuous parts that can be classified into one organic piece. In the "lucid" dream<sup>2</sup> *mise-en-scène*

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<sup>2</sup> The term "lucid dream" was first proposed by the Dutch doctor Frederik van Eeden in 1913 article "A Study of Dreams." Lucid dreaming is when people stay conscious and recognize the dream state while dreaming..

(01:16:01-01:17:47) the screen suddenly changes from black-and-white to color by showing the mother, a focal image, walking into the dacha where she tenderly talks to the child Alexei, and then gracefully ambles outside the dacha. The warm color screen, whose lucidity increases visuospatial reality<sup>3</sup> navigating time through the space of nostalgic childhood with the conscientious effort,<sup>4</sup> is accompanied by the middle-aged Alexei's voice-over which recounts,

I keep seeing one and the same dream. It seems to make me return to the place, poignantly dear to my heart . . . . **Each time I try to enter it, something prevents me from doing that.** I see this dream again and again. And when I see those walls made of logs and the dark entrance, even in my dream **I become aware that I'm only dreaming it.** And the overwhelming joy is clouded by anticipation of awakening. (emphasis mine)

Before the voice-over says, "Each time I try to enter it, something prevents me from doing that," the child Alexei immediately conceals a broken mirror from his mother's sight. The hiding gesture implies that the "broken mirror" is a symbolic topos that underscores the narrative of the film to reveal the child's Oedipal anxiety suppressed from his deepest affection and remorse for his mother. What we have perceived from the speech is the narrator's repeated obsession with his dream of childhood, the primary cause of which is linked to a strengthening bond with the mother, an angel guarding the family without the paternal support.

The symbolic "broken mirror" brings to light a disrupted complex of dream narrative that contributes to decode the child Alexei's self-formation attached to his mother's recognition. Elucidating Lacan's "mirror stage," it adds depth to the Oedipal dream analysis. Based on the Freudian notion of primary narcissism, the Lacanian mirror stage "manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 5-6). Lacan suggests that around the age of 6 to 18 months, when the infant encounters its image in front of a mirror that initiates its misrecognized anticipation of a symbiosis with the specular image of the mother. Realizing its first narcissistic reflection of itself, it comes to assume an identity separate from the maternal other. The illusionary quality of the mirror enacts a criticism of mimesis since it moves the infant from a fragmented piece to the fantasy of identity—the ideal I—who is usually related to its maternal caregiver.

In *Mirror*, the "broken" mirror reflects Alexei's realization of the illusory connection with the maternal other in a multidirectional process of identifying the self in terms of the other. Doubled with the cracked window glass in the unconscious "barn" dream, the broken mirror image is seen as a time-space channel that drives Alexei into his "mirror stage" childhood where his maternal attachment is emphasized. The revelation of the mother-relation compensates not only for Alexei's fear that she will be lost, but also for his loss of the father who is the desire and the lack of the mother. Mirroring the voice-over, "Each time I try to enter it, something prevents me from doing that," Alexei's gesture of concealment of the "broken mirror" in front of his mother can be construed as a cover-up of a shattering dyadic relationship between the mother and son but also a split between the visibly seen mother and the absent father who causes the anxiety. A host of intra-subjective and intersubjective images rotating around Alexei's self and the imaginary others are constantly revealing unconscious bonds between the ego and its others. However, these bonds are subject to deception under the disguise of the dream narrative, revealed by the voice-over's latent meaning that concretizes the double splitting of Alexei from both his mother and the father that produces the self and ideal egos so that in turn the Imaginary mother and the Symbolic father and their entwining relationships are generated. All in all, the passage from the mirror stage through the Imaginary and the Symbolic prefigures Alexei's primal narcissistic repression as originating from the maternal illusion whose lack and loss leads to his future paternal crisis.

In his treatise "On Dreams," Aristotle notes that people in lucid dreams have the ability to stay conscious to realize they are in a dream sequence: "The sleeper perceives that he is asleep, and is conscious of the sleeping state during which the perception comes before his mind" (702). Without mentioning the lucid dream, Freud casually explains that some people are clearly aware when they are dreaming. He comments, ". . . the wish to sleep had given place to another preconscious wish, namely to observe his dreams and enjoy them. Sleep is just as compatible with a wish of this sort as it is with a mental reservation to wake up if some particular condition is fulfilled" (*Interpretation* 571)<sup>5</sup>. Based on

<sup>3</sup> In C. Tart's article "From Spontaneous Event to Lucidity," he concludes that dreams can be experienced more vividly than reality.

<sup>4</sup> In A. Rechtschaffen's essay "The Single-Mindedness and Isolation of Dreams," he recognizes the characteristic of self-reflection in a lucid dream.

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Interpretation of Dream*.



Freud, this clear-sighted state of one's unconscious feelings surfacing to the "preconscious"<sup>6</sup> is referred to as lucid dreaming. In the article "Varieties of Lucid Dreaming Experience," S. LaBerge and D. J. Degracia suggest that "lucidity in dreams is not a discrete phenomenon, but that reflective consciousness exists in all dreams and can be measured on a continuum with 'lucidity' and 'non-lucidity' representing two ends of the spectrum" (269-70).

In *Mirror*, whereas his lucid dream is positioned on the border between the preconscious and the unconscious, Alexei's non-lucid "barn" dream in its obscure and reticent form is hidden in the unconscious. Rather than being treated as a dichotomous pair, these two dream sequences are intimately linked; consequently, audiences might not only realize that the lucid dream is on a reflected "continuum" with the unconscious dream, connected via a thematic maternal motif, but also understand that entering a topology of the psyche in a dream can be achieved through conscious efforts. Yet the purpose of an intentional separation of these two sequences by shifting one from color to nostalgic black-and-white shows a polyphonic echoing of subtle layers of the maternal theme. Like the "lucid" dream, the continuous "barn" dream reveals the similar primal longing, but this time it is embedded with a different tone and color to inject a "maternal rejection" motif, making the deeper dream stand in clear continuity with the "lucid" dream, even though the latter hovers between reality and dream with an awareness of the dreamer's intention and the dream environment while the former is totally immersed in the unconscious dream. Bordering on the in-betweenness of the preconscious and the unconscious, Tarkovsky's recurrent dream challenges the logic of traditional dreaming by integrating pieces of the fabric of temporarily visuospatial existence based on its appearance in reality and the chaotic unconscious world. The director has a unique preference for black-and-white but at the same time acknowledges the alternative aesthetics of color. Rather than being placed in opposition, these two formats, based on Tarkovsky's cinematic notion, can be mixed in a fluid relationship that offers the Deleuzian crystalized layer of obfuscation among reality, memory, and dream.

As the voice-over concludes, we enter an unconscious "barn" dream *mise-en-scène* (1:17:47-1:20:30) where the screen changes from color to black-and-white to zoom toward a glass water bottle that reflects an upside-down image of the child Alexei walking across to the grass field. Like the broken mirror in the lucid dream, the crystal water-bottle conjures up the reflective depths of Alexei's unconscious anxiety that takes shape gradually. When a whispering call of "Mama" is heard, the camera pulls back to the dacha brimming with light to reveal the primal focus of the childhood dream. The call "Mama" is juxtaposed to the dacha house, suggesting that the house now represents the maternal dwelling. An open dacha door leads to the empty room where there is no sight of the mother, yet a feminine hand reaches toward the child Alexei's face, only to soon shrink back. The hand could indicate maternal contact whose intentional communication with the son is hesitant for some unknown reason. However, the child Alexei's exceeding anxiety resonates when a cockerel is seen breaking through a glass window. After that, the camera cuts to a forest where the leaves of trees are blown violently by a gust of unexpected magical wind. Running to the dacha barn door when it is raining hard in slow motion, the child Alexei intends to open the door but fails, in contrast to the previous door that automatically opened. With a sense of disappointment, the child Alexei turns away from the door and leaves his silhouette reflected on the door. It suddenly opens to reveal his mother squatting on the ground to pick up potatoes, her eyes gazing in the direction of the trace of his leaving. The mother's gaze is addressed to remind the viewers that the son is missing the mother. As a contronym, "missing" is a word with two opposite meanings that suggest either being connected or disconnected. For Alexei, to miss the mother means to love her, yet he is missing the other part of what makes him whole.

Indeed, the motif of "maternal rejection," that can be clearly detected in the shrinking hand and unopened barn door that leads to the child's ambivalent love-and-hatred feelings toward the mother, reaches a breaking point. The crystal image in a transformative process is continually displayed through a glass window cracked by a rooster. Echoing the broken mirror in the "lucid" dream, the cracked window glass symbolizes Alexei's split self, nurtured by the lack of maternal love. A "broken part of a self" is reflected to suggest the self is attached to some kind of wholeness with no hint of achieving completeness. Alexei's narcissistic looking for the mother is counterbraced by the maternal gaze that causes him to have an uncanny feeling of being the object of being gazed. Under the maternal gaze, he is reminded of his own lack since he cannot completely satisfy his mother's desire. On the level of the

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<sup>6</sup> Freud in *Interpretation of Dreams* introduces three levels of mind and compares them to an iceberg: the conscious mind is the top of the iceberg representing something that we are aware of at any given time; the unconscious mind, on the contrary, is something that goes beyond our consciousness like the lower part of the iceberg; the preconscious mind is located between these two levels to symbolize something that can be easily retrieved from the conscious. However, the term "the preconscious" is usually interchangeable with "the subconscious."

Lacanian Imaginary, one's self is shaped by mirroring, which then amounts to projection of his/her inner chaos onto others. Lacan explains, "At first, before language, desire exists solely in the single plane of the imaginary relation of the specular stage, projected, alienated in the other. The tension it provokes is then deprived of an outcome. That is to say that it has no other outcome—Hegel teaches us this—than the destruction of the other" (*Seminar I* 170). In the "mirror stage," Alexei is doubled with the mother and tries to win her recognition. However, coming too close to the specular image results in a dangerous destruction of the self based on Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave. The implied conflict between Alexei and the mother is thus incurred on the imaginary plane and demonstrated via the "cracked" window glass.

Again in black-and-white, the discontinuous "Eurydice" sequence, the third "sequel" to the recurrent dream fills up the gap between the mother and the son with the father's supported recitation of his poem. In the "Eurydice" dream *mise-en-scène* (01:34:46-01:37:14), the camera follows the same gust of wind over the grass field that occurred in the "barn" dream sequence to suggest their continuum, a coherent whole characterized as part of the same recurrent dream. The child Alexei enters a long corridor of the dacha where white, transparent curtains are flying, leading him to encounter an antique mirror in which the dim reflection displays a child holding a milk jar. This is an image of a child who longs for an intimate bond with the mother who is not there to give him comfort; yet in the empty house the father's poem recitation fills his heart with love. Walking through the dacha corridor in slow motion, Alexei, symbolically, retreats to a womb-like maternal passage to ask for maternal nutrients but ends up meeting an image of his own reflected self. Yet his reflection is supported with the father's reciting of the poem "Eurydice:" the sound he hears is,

Run on, my child, do not lament  
The fate of poor Eurydice  
Just keep on driving to globe's end  
Your copper hoop for all to see  
As long as answering to your step  
However slight might be a tone  
The earth sends signals gay and pep  
To every energetic bone

As the Greek myth goes, the newly married nymph Eurydice dies from the bite of a snake. When the famed singer Orpheus, her husband, goes to the underworld to bring her back to life, on the way out he breaks the taboo of looking back at her, and so loses her forever. The film portrays a corresponding theme in the dream that manages to show what someone would do for love, and the unbearable void that comes when it disappears. In her article, Alexandra Smith points out "Tarkovsky's ultimate subject in *Mirror* is the split subject that desires language to achieve self-realization even as it is simultaneously obstructed by language in its quest for wholeness" (61). Undeniably, the juxtaposition of the father's poem with the feelings of the child Alexei fits well the Lacanian claim that the unconscious is structured as a language of the other who is in the process of becoming (*Culture/Clinic* 12). It also poses a problematic question about the representation of authenticity from the father's poem to instill a critical probing into the possibility of a dialogue to form a bridge with the nostalgic past. Rather than a reflection on paternal love, it alludes more to maternal loss. Arseny Tarkovsky's "Eurydice" evokes a dream of a flame-like "Imaginary" soul running on a futural road of artistic freedom even though he is still burdened with the traumatically nostalgic past. By using the poetic association, Tarkovsky displays mythical characters in alternative settings to hint at the riddle of the narrator's origin as a resourceful and creative identity who tries to get nutrients from the parental bondage. Undergoing a double framing, Alexei is observed through the inner maternal gaze and paternal look, but he rises above the dilemma, turning to his inner "flames of spirit light-like" to realize that he has to sublimate his childhood loss to poetic salvation. Yet his reflected image with a milk jar could be interpreted as another allusion to the mutilations of love which begin as an expression of Edenic paternal love in a prelapsarian world and lead to a discourse of loss from the absent mother in the empty dacha.

In his diary entry dated September 12, 1970, Tarkovsky elaborates his ambivalent feelings toward his parents, "It's patently clear that I have a complex about my parents. I don't feel adult when I'm with them. And I don't think they consider me adult either. Our relations are somehow tortured, complicated, unspoken" (*Time* 19). Arguably, Alexei's constructed identities echo a problematic representation of communion between his parents that causes him to be stuck in a disastrous Oedipus complex. Here with his mother as Eurydice and father as Orpheus, they tie their fate to that of the poetic son-narrator whose Oedipus complex harbors ambivalent feelings toward his parents. Alexei stresses his attachment to the mother, yet at the same time he still desires recognition from the switched-off father. This

ambivalence can be inferred from the father's poem that encourages the narrator to find his own fortune regardless of maternal bondage.

*Mirror* is a film about the mother whose image is usually paired with that of the father or son, inseparable in a maze of time. If we put the "lucid," "barn," and "Eurydice" sequences together as a complete set of recurrent dream, it then reveals Alexei's repressed Oedipal complex, a strong attachment toward his mother-father conglomerate. In the "lucid" sequence, the mother is tenderly talking to the child Alexei in the dacha as in reality, but when it comes to the other two sequences, the reflected dream-like visual images tell a story stemming from Alexei's unconsciousness. In the "barn" sequence, although the door is finally open, the mother and son miss each other. In the "Eurydice" sequence, the child Alexei enters the dacha through a long corridor only to meet his own reflection in the "nursing" child who is enchanted by the father's poem. His father complex tends to be incorporated under the broader scope of the Oedipus complex as a whole, yet he is preoccupied with the loss of paternal authority. This inner probing for the absent father aggravates his guilt and betrayal of his mother. Even so, he unconsciously internalizes the loss when he becomes an absent father to his son. In the end, he is not like an Oedipal son who murders a father, but one who turns on himself. The metaphorical death of the middle-aged narrator at the end of the film is a cathartic approach to release Alexei/Tarkovsky's sense of guilt derived from identifying with his absent father who has abandoned his loving mother.

Tarkovsky's crystalline narrative points out essential motifs in the recurrent dream-trilogy: a broken mirror in the "lucid" sequence; a glass bottle, flying cockerel breaking through a glass window, and gentle hand in the "barn" sequence; a paternal audio-recitation of poem and antique mirror in the "Eurydice" sequence. In brief, a mirror/glass bottle/window glass, cockerel, and hand constitute typically three Freudian symbols of latency that reveal the narrator's repression, caused by the entangled family relationships (See fig. 1).<sup>7</sup>

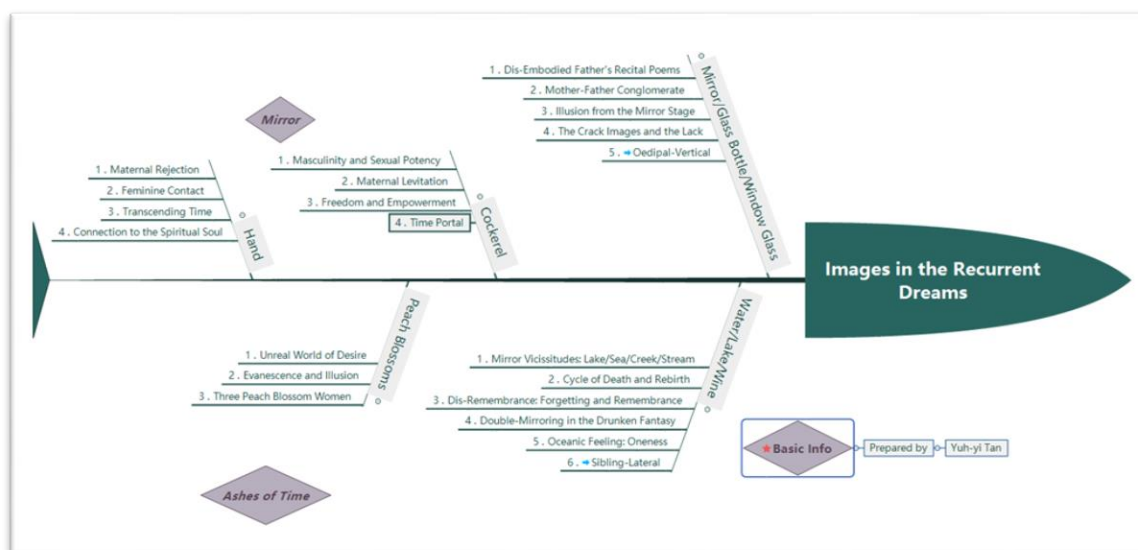


Figure 1: "Images in the Recurrent Dreams"

The first group of the Freudian dream symbols are mirrors and their vicissitudes, starting from the hide-away broken mirror, glass bottle, and cracked window glass, finally an antique mirror to reveal the narrator's repressed Oedipal self. As a crucial topos, they have interwoven the core narrative of the dream-trilogy. The most intriguing mirror-like symbol is a bottle of glass, both a time portal that initiates Alexei's dacha dream and a transitional crystalized-media to proceed from the "lucid" sequence to the

<sup>7</sup> Fig. 1 is divided into two parts to represent the use of motific symbols in Wong's *Ashes* and Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. A mirror/glass bottle/window glass, cockerel, and hand are connected to the crystal-image that reveals his Oedipal complex toward a mother-father conglomerate; for Wong's film a lake and peach blossoms symbolize the narrator Ouyang's illicit love for his sister-in-law.



"barn" sequence. It is loaded with a clock-wheel on the bottom that not only foreshadows the opening of a black-and-white childhood hallucination but also illuminates a non-chronological crystal of time that juxtaposes the middle-aged Alexei's voice-over with the virtual, a potentially coexisting dream image of the childhood self. This irreducible circuit generates a vision of the world as a concatenation of expounded reflections of the present middle-aged Alexei's voice-over and the past child Alexei's image. In the film, this visible/audible sensory inextricability of the actual and the virtual displays not only the continuing stress between the petrifying forces of the past, but also those of the unending present. Moreover, their cooperative effect on the openness of the future is facilitated by a maternal hand reaching out for the child Alexei's face. All of these proceed after a sudden interlude with an image of a flying cockerel which breaks a window glass, a break-through to a time maze. The crystalized window glass is cracked by maternal calling to constitute the essential motifs of the narrator's unreachable childhood filled with a constantly streaming, circular flow of time. The somnambulistic movements induce a trance-like state that interrupts the linear sense of time and opens up to duration.

In his essay "On Dreams," Freud offers the following formula for dreams: "*they are disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes*" (165; emphasis his). Dreams represent wish-fulfillments, being manifestations of unconscious desires, striving to express themselves in sleep. In dreams, Freud asserts, there are manifest content and latent content to address the exact material of the dream and appears in a disguised form containing the underlying implication of the symbols. Freud concludes that, "every dream is connected through its manifest content with recent experiences, while through its latent content it is connected with the most remote experiences" (*Interpretation* 73). Alexei's recurrent dreams have a strange quality constituting a psychological breakthrough to hint at Alexei's repressed wishes. A mysterious attachment to his mother, one of "the most remote experiences," is buried in the unconscious—a forbidden line of sexual transgression, the so-called Oedipus Complex in the Freudian sense.

In *Mirror*, the broken mirror and the cracking sound from the glass window indicate the child Alexei's inner cry that reveals his insecurity as he lacks an intimate bond with the mother, the primal wound making its mark on his whole life. Whenever he needs the mother, she is not accessible emotionally or physically, probably because she has sunk deeply into her own misery of losing a husband. As a multiplicity composing the crystal circuitry, the broken mirror and the glass bottle initiate a start to the dream before the piece of cracked window glass releases Alexei's pent-up feelings of maternal hunger rooted in the "remote" childhood dacha. Yet the most effective way to crystalize a mirror's timelessness is its collocation with the paternal side to complicate, on a new level of consideration, its ambiguity. After the broken mirror is hidden by the child Alexei from the mother's sight, the middle-aged Alexei's voice-over recites the words, "Something always prevents me from entering." In the maternal dacha, "Something" hints at the narrator's wrestling with his inner paternal complex toward the poet-father who is the cause of the mother's sadness.

Then again, the recollection of the absent father is also embodied in the recitation of another poem "First Meeting." In the *mise-en-scène* (00:11:45-00:14:01), the audial recitation of the father is matched with the mother's visual image, so the two combined together work out the director's childhood recollection. The poem reads,

Awaking, you *transformed*  
The humdrum dictionary of humans  
Till *speech* was full and running over  
With resounding strength, and *the word* you  
Revealed its new meaning: it meant king. (Arseny 59; emphasis mine)

Reciting the poem while the mother ambles around the dacha, the voice of Tarkovsky's father symbolizes an invisible lack that could be heard but not visualized. The voice of the absent father is an autobiographical reminder of the director's father whose body is excluded from the frames. Such an incongruity in the film constitutes a phantasmatic phenomenon between sound and image. Although the dis-embodied father is not anchored in a visible body, his reciting of poems transcends the spatio-temporal restriction and becomes the soul of the film.<sup>8</sup> All in all, the father's recitations permeate the film to offer an intriguing audio-platform when one considers how the dis-embodied father might move beyond mere representation and highlight the in-between place of imagination. "The word" and "speech"

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<sup>8</sup> In *Mirror*, there are four poems written by Arseny Tarkovsky that are used by the director: "First Meeting," "In the Morning I Waited for You Yesterday," "Life, Life," and "Eurydice." The film's stylistic rhythm is based on the father's poetry that has inspired Tarkovsky's cinematic art.

in the poem empower the director with the ability to shape his visual imagination upon a repressed Oedipal family. Based on such a context, the heard poem becomes an invisible crystal-image that shapes the childhood time into a constant two-way mirror that cannot separate the father from the mother in the son's film. In this recollection, the mother is like the Goddess of Memory Mnemosyne who holds the father's poem book as a mirror to reflect her heart-broken love while the father's sonorous disruption leads to an interruption in the temporality of her action, and becomes an echo-like ghost around the dacha.

"First Meeting" is the portrait of the broken family of Alexei's early childhood,<sup>9</sup> where the absent father's image is replaced by the voiced poem to retrieve an image of a grief-driven and tearful mother. When coming to the second stage of his adolescence, his image is doubled with his father's teenage image. In the "Mirror and Hand" *mise-en-scène* (01:24:25-01:27:08), he accompanies his mother to sell a pair of pearl earrings to a neighboring doctor's wife. While waiting for his mother, he perceives an oval mirror where he sees his reflection looking back at him in a reverse shot. There is a blurred reflection from a mirror visible above burnt logs. All of a sudden, the camera pans to a back view shot which resembles the director Tarkovsky standing in front of his young admirer. After he leaves, the camera cuts to a close-up of the face of the young lover whose eyes turn back to gaze at the camera. The last image is the young lover's hand placed before the fireplace. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie appraise Tarkovsky's concept of crystal-image, which is constantly revealed throughout: "Mirrors and glossy reflecting surfaces will abound in this film, where the whole world, the physical objects and human relationships, is always somehow distorted, refracted, doubled up, seen in a new, more truthful way" (117). In *Mirror*, the adolescent Alexei/middle-aged Tarkovsky seems to be fully aware of his identity "doubled up" with his father, implying some kind of sexual self-awareness in the teen years. And the female hand reminds us of the maternal hand in the recurrent dream, but this time it is a "refracted" between the narrator and director via the hand of the young lover, which moves the wheel of time across son and father generations. In an analogous way, Deleuze points out, "We are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence old age and maturity" (*Cinema 2* 99). In Alexei's adolescent phase, a mirror presents the depth of the temporal image, and Tarkovsky's "distorted" presence creates a concentrated circuit of actual and virtual states. A double-sided image of Alexei's adolescence is juxtaposed with the paternal director through a link of the girl and Tarkovsky's presence to posit a return look at his own years as a teenager.

Both Alexei's childhood and adolescent stages project a mirror of the mother-father conglomerate on similar trajectories. In his third middle-aged phase, a "Maternal Mirrors" *mise-en-scène* (01:34:40-01:36:59) is presented where he fights with his ex-wife for custody rights of his son. During the argument, Alexei's ex-wife Natalia is surrounded by mirrors whereas Alexei is excluded from the frame, and only his voice is heard. As with the absent father in the "First Meeting" scenario, Alexei faces an alienated family drama. The scene gives the ex-wife highly sympathetic respect since she, just like his mother, is suffering from having an irresponsible husband. Alexei and his father are standing parallel to two mirrors face to face; and the mother and the ex-wife are also a pair of mirrors through likeness. Exchange and indiscernibility follow the pairs of son-and-father, ex-wife-and-mother in the crystalline circuit. Altogether, in the three phases of the narrator's involvement with his parents, a visual mirror and aural poem-recitation are interrelated as dominant crystalline symbols to underscore Alexei's repressed desire in the Oedipal situation. Alexei/Tarkovsky's Oedipus complex is an extraordinary case because in it is revealed a strong attachment toward the mother who is usually visualized with paternal involvement, here especially supported by the father's recitation. And a mirror is a mediator of time that forces the narrator to see his adolescent sexual-awareness and middle-aged marriage disaster.

Apart from the mirror and its vicissitudes, the second latent symbol, a cockerel, is recognized by its time connotation and a sexual implication. A flying cockerel breaking through the glass window is encoded with not only the narrator's strengthened power to revive his sexual masculinity, the part of himself he feels has been rendered impotent in real life, but also it gives him the courage to transcend the sublimated pain of the past traumatic memory. The metaphorical rooster also undergoes a ritual sacrifice inviting the spirit of resurrection in creativity. In the "Rooster and Levitation" scenario (01:31:04-01:33:53), the doctor's wife asks the mother to kill a rooster for her. A plumed rooster in his mother's hand seems vulnerable, unable to resist as the mother mercifully performs a killing act. Yet Tarkovsky here plays a twist to reverse the mother's fate with that of the dead rooster: the spirit of the cockerel/rooster finds reincarnation in the mother who levitates herself from the bed in the next moment. In the shot of the mother's levitation, Petric Vlada suggests it to be "a visualization of the

<sup>9</sup> Alexei goes through three stages of his whole life: 3-4 years old (played by Filipp Yankovskiy); 11-13 years old (played by Ignat Danil'tsev who also played the narrator's son Ignat); 37 years old.

young protagonist's inner world, above all, love for his mother" (31). Indeed, through a poetic reconstruction of a flying cockerel via the spirit of the sacrificial rooster with maternal levitation, the director matches a sense of freedom with empowerment. Tarkovsky adores the motif of levitation, using it basically in two ways: one by linking it to the related motif of a bird flying above the ascending mother to doubly highlight the meaning of freedom from imprisonment, and the other by empowering the mother with unreal strength.

However, the gravity of the broken window leads in an opposite direction to show how the narrator's inner world is given the strength of a breaking-away from the difficult family status. The crack revealed in the depth of the crystal window glass appears to provide lines of flight to lead Alexei to a Deleuzian "clarified reality" where he realizes that his Oedipus complex has caused him to marry a woman who has his mother's face and that his marriage is a failure like that of his parents. As Deleuze expresses this situation, ". . . a new Real will come out beyond the actual and the virtual. Everything happens as if the circuit served to try out roles, as if roles were being tried in it until the right one were found, the one with which we escape to enter a clarified reality" (*Cinema 2* 85-86). In a deeper exploration of "clarified reality," we discover that the middle-aged Alexei's recent failure in his marriage to Natalia is attributed to her having a face like his mother. The similarity forces him to the brink of incestuous intimacy and moral criticism. Whenever intending to remember his mother, Alexei recounts that what his mind always reflects on is the face of his wife. Tarkovsky intentionally confuses the mutual images of the mother and the wife, obscures a line between the actress-mother and real mother, and even challenges to bring up the connection with the teenage girlfriend. As such, an instance of time crystals that demonstrate an expression of a "mutual image," appears where Alexei's ex-wife Natalia, situated in front of a mirror, enters into a relation with Maria, his older mother (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 69). Through this exchange of actual and virtual images, the maternal image becomes autonomous and changes into a seed of time that transforms the present and past into eternity.

The third occurrence of the hand symbol initiating a primal maternal yearning in the recurrent dream can be also detected during a fallen house dream sequence (00:16:36-00:20:01) where the plaster on the ceiling begins to disintegrate, and the mother's face covered by her wet hair looks like a terrifying apparition. The camera cuts to a close-up of the mother, then cuts to a half-size mirror reflecting a Renaissance landscape with Tarkovsky's then-aged mother Maria. Like in a childhood nightmare, a hand suddenly rubs over the reflection in the mirror, and its owner turns out to be the aged mother. It cuts to another hand silhouette reflected in a burning log, which turns out to be the hand of the young lover. If the hand in the recurrent dream is an affectionate maternal gesture which proposes to touch Alexei's face but flinches at the last moment, the hand in front of a mirror image of a fallen house is a tender reclamation to rub off the confused time and connect three women from two generations. Central to Tarkovsky's ability to frame this fissuring of time is his creation of temporal confusion by juxtaposing multiple time planes of the mother whose mutual implication retains her own trajectories as well as those of the ex-wife and teenage lover. In his death bed, with his right-hand Alexei sets a bird free. In this gesture of release, the open hand in the air symbolizes the narrator's contact with the spiritual nature as a flying bird usually is a symbol of the soul. With his last breath, he says, "Everything will be all right" as if sparing the bird's life would mean to release his soul in an ascent to heaven. The contemplative suspense of the hand's lifting image glorifies that of the bird's tossing into the light of sun. Alexei's hand liberating the bird into light allows Alexei to pass away calmly, having come to terms with his own death. Therefore, the lifting hand represents a contact with a spiritual soul that is emancipated from his conscientious guilt of feeling unworthy of his family.

Tarkovsky's original intention in producing *Mirror* is based on troubling dreams of his own childhood at the family's dacha that had kept on bothering him for years. Thus, the three sequences of the recurrent dream, and other related dreams/recollections, cement the cornerstone of this process of a Deleuzian "turning crystal." A mirror/glass bottle/window glass, hand, and flying cockerel reveal scenes where, as Freud described dreams, "several wish-fulfilments [may] be combined in it . . . but one meaning or one wish-fulfilment may conceal another, until in the *lowest stratum* one comes upon the fulfilment of a wish from the earliest period of childhood" (*Interpretation* 155; emphasis mine). Based on Freudian dream theory, Alexei, in his recurrent dreams, has the penchant to repeatedly bring himself back to the scene of the childhood dacha. If the dacha is Alexei's longing for maternal love, then, this primal affection is not restricted to his mother but extended to his ex-wife since they both have a similar personality and face. However, the latent content behind a search for a primal love hides an Oedipus Complex, a strong attachment to his mother that triggers an inner incestuous bomb between him and his ex-wife. The family romance is even more complicated when the middle-aged Alexei finds out that he is walking on the same path of a broken marriage as his parents. This makes him feel deeply remorseful for his loving mother since his failure causes him to betray his own mother twice: as a son,

his love of the father betrays the mother; as a father, his broken marriage betrays his mother again like his father did. More startling, Alexei's unexpected speedy death, a Freudian death-wish, has been realized to atone for his guilt to his mother. Before that, his middle-aged paternal consideration is sidestepped visually like it was with his father and remains only as a dis-embodied voice to narrate his coming-home dream. Only when his death wish is realized can he truly break the spell of the childhood nightmare.

In parallel with the two-generational Oedipal families, another significant printing press scene, connected to the contemporary Russian culture of paternal surveillances, symbolizes the Freudian "lowest stratum," indicating the fact that "remote experiences" can be understood to encompass a historical and social event beyond the immediate context of family trauma. In the prewar time frame, the young mother Maria, a proof-reader at a printing press, is observed rushing frenetically to her workplace in a downpour. Being extremely concerned about having overlooked a mistake, Maria sits down next to a poster of Stalin and cautiously checks the Goslit edition, a version presumably written by a powerful figure of authority. Later realizing no typographical mistake, walking down a corridor, she is comforted by the father's recitation of a poem "In the Morning I Waited for You Yesterday" then abruptly reduces her personal anxiety with a rhythmical allusion to construct the self via imaginative language. The nervousness caused by the authoritarian words is released through a poetic elevation. However, the production of words under the paternal watchful eye of a national machine significantly enforces the Lacanian "Name-of-the-Father" to complicate and ironize the meaning of the father figure that is constantly depicted as the poetically tender soul of the film.

The two images of the paternal figures are antitheses of each other, and the mother is considered an imaginary evocation to reflect the light from the father's poem that softens the harsh national doctrine. Maria, thus, accommodates images "of the *double*, in which psychical realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested (Lacan, "Mirror" 3; emphasis in the original). Tarkovsky transforms the maternal figure seen as a frenetic hysteric to a graceful muse who has been burdened with a national dogma inscribed on her body, as if the camera is used as a blade to reveal her inner cry that is later instilled with a refreshing kind of poetic sensibility. Maria in the printing press scene emblemizes the Lacanian "spatial captation," a term that elucidates a cultural memory etched in her body, a person who is able to occupy a position in a spatial location and whose self extended as social construct. There is a social, historical, and personal continuity to be perceived from Maria's split self through which is injected an audio context from the poetic lexicon to assuage a sense of socialist nationalism.

In a 2013 interview, the director's son Max Dax says of his father's films that "His art was always strongly connected not only to Russian cinema, but also to Russian philosophy, poetry and to twentieth century literature, the so-called "Silver Age." In *Mirror*, we find out how personal memory, legacy of poetic tradition, and contemporarily social and cultural ambience are eternalized in the dream-like visual narrative. "There are two kinds of dreams," Tarkovsky illustrates, "Those that you forget right away and the others that have a colossal importance. I would like to understand them deeply because they are messages" (Tarkovsky and Devarrieux 48). The key to this cinematic language of crystal images relates to Tarkovsky's notion of the "poetic logic" in which cinema is recognized as an alternative representation of reality that is infused with spontaneous elements of dream, patterns of thinking and mechanisms of memory (*Sculping* 18-24, 28-30). A plethora of mirror images in the recurrent dream of *Mirror* are predominantly iterated to create non-linear and floating "seeds of time" as their shards of reflecting surface disrupt time whose notions of before and after literally break down (*Cinema* 2 262-263).

In an interview, Tarkovsky illustrates his passion to see the world from a child's perspective, "You have to be like a child" (Tarkovsky and Christie 67). The circular narrative in the tripartite recurrent dream displays a similar kind of crystalized mirroring of "childhood" to elucidate a dialectal relationship between self and other in the pre-Oedipal mirror stage. Each part of the dream is considered to be an organic microcosmos of the unconscious that functions as a "dream mirror," culminating in formulations of the dialectical doubles and crystal image respectively. By the way, it is not necessary to read the tripartite-sequence based on their chronological order in the film since each sequence mirrors the other to portray a motif of subjectivity in a perennial process of becoming. The colored "lucid" sequence can be perceived more vividly than reality to present "par excellence a visuospatial task," thus, Alexei's voice-over can be highlighted to demonstrate his/Tarkovsky's voluntary intervention to explore the unconscious in a dream (Green & McCreery 37). The audiences sense the subjective realism of the dream that focalizes the mother's image, like an inhabited guardian angel, who enters easily in and out of the childhood dacha whereas Alexei seems to be trapped in the house, playing with the broken mirror whose secrecy becomes an obstacle that prevents them from further intimate contact. The broken mirror, thus, is a metaphor not only to escape from a maternal illusion caused by the absent father, but also to reveal a dialectic communion that the middle-age Alexei tries to build up with his child self.



Intrinsically Tarkovsky fuses Alexei's past and present, using the broken mirror surface as the point at which his physical absence is also mirrored in that of his father's absence from the "Eurydice" sequence where Tarkovsky's father is reciting his poem. As a dis-embodied voice without a physical manifestation like his father, the middle-aged Alexei in the "lucid" sequence, becomes a paternal lack, a mysterious object of the maternal desire. The "Imaginary" lack is also applied to the "barn" sequence where Alexei, like his get-away father, is not allowed to enter the dacha barn. The same pre-Oedipal dacha refuses the out-cast son Alexei from finding his mother who is imprisoned in the house. His attachment to the mother is shattered, as seen from the cracked window glass. The recurring "Imaginary" lack in the "Eurydice" sequence turns to the absent mother, the image of the child Alexei's holding a jar of milk reflected from an antique mirror seems to suggest that he is nurtured by the paternal words but needs the mother to have his body fed. The lack, thus, is considered as a fluid in-betweenness that challenges the conventional codes of paternal-and-maternal.

Altogether the three sequences of the recurrent dream exemplify two forms of narcissistic identification in Lacan's "mirror stage." By first identifying with a reflection from the mirror, the child Alexei forms its identity based on an image of his mother. Yet such a narcissistic recognition is problematic once the child Alexei realizes the projection of identity is not an actual one but an illusion demonstrated by his fear of being driven away from the dacha barn. The breakdown of the self attached to the mother in the Imaginary Order thrusts the child Alexei into the second narcissism that produces the self connected with the paternal laws in the Symbolic Order, the world of language shaped by the predefined social rules. The recurrent dream makes up a typological mapping of the pre-Oedipal phase that is not just based on a dual relation but more specially on a triangle among the mother, the child Alexei, and the imaginary father. There is a circulation between them in a series of disguises. In his analysis, Lacan speaks of this formation of Imaginary triangle as being shaped once the infant discovers a lack in the mother (Lacan, *Seminar V* 180-196). The broken mirror and the cracked window glass in the recurrent dreams are cautiously chosen as mirror-doubles to exemplify the "lack" that cultivates crystal-images in a fork of time. In the dreams, Tarkovsky portrays the pre-Oedipal mother-child relation on the surface, yet the fear of loss of the mother and the desire of the paternal love are simultaneously internalized through images of the broken mirror and the cracked window glass. Their heterogeneous elements interact dynamically, creating fresh possibilities of switching between the actual and the virtual, the maternal and the paternal. The mother is the one who has been placed as the dominant maternal figure here, yet she acts like a patriarch to spread the Symbolic law in the single family. In other words, from the son's perspective, Alexei sees a crystalized split-image from the broken/cracked mirror/window glass that his mother shoulders with a paternal responsibility and that in turn reminds him of the third "other" father who intrudes to break the space-time that allows an ambivalence between the maternal and paternal role. From the black hole of mirror/glass, the father appears spectrally through the mother and this spectral entwinement becomes a poetic evocation of the recurrent dreams that are full of doubling to produce temporal short-circuits and crystal-images.

## II. From Ashes to Rebirth

The recurrent dreams in *Ashes* materialize twice to start up and end the film, in doing so, scenes fit a typical Chinese Buddhist philosophy that considers life and death as a cycle in which each begins the other's continuity and discontinuity. *Samsara* and *karma* are two of the main beliefs of Buddhism to address a transmigration of birth-death-rebirth: *samsara* is the wheel of life that refers to the cyclical stages of existence as a reincarnation; "*karma* [sic] acquires a kind of psycho-moral continuity through rebirth" (Puligandla, "Time" 166-67). Both of them have emphasized a circular movement between life and death as highlighted in the recurrent dreams.. The first dream *mise-en-scène* (00:34:37-00:35:42) begins with Ouyang's voice-over murmuring, "I had a recurrent dream. I dreamed of the peach blossoms in my hometown. I suddenly realized, I hadn't been back to the White Camel Mountain for many years." In the dream, the lover's close-up appears to show she is brushing her hair, and then there is a long shot of the woman who waits in front of a brass mirror, imprisoned in the house. After that, the camera displays a stunning image of peach trees in bloom against the blue sky, and the next shot is of a couple standing under the trees beside a beautiful lake in which a stone is thrown to cause ripples. After adding an intercut of the narrator's sleeping on the table, the camera comes back to the lake where a person is hurriedly riding a horse away in the opposite direction of White Camel Mountain; below, a man is squatting beside a lake seen at a slant from which his reflection is displayed. Suddenly the narrator awakes, and, with eyes wide open, he realizes that the lake in his dream is shrinking, and the woman beside the lake is gone.

In the second sequence of the recurrent dream, the same lake appears, but without blossoming trees, and the images from the reflective surface of the lake become the pivotal images. After drinking



a half bottle of the "Wine of Forgetfulness" given him by his deceased lover, Ouyang immediately descends into a bizarre and unrealistic dream *mise-en-scène* (01:26:05-01:26:36), where he, lying down to sleep with eyes closed, feels his beloved's tender touch through her hand onto his body. The couple seems to float horizontally on the water because their bodies shine with a light that is sometimes bright and sometimes dark, like flickering water-ripples. Then the camera pans to the lover who appears beside a desolate lake. In contrast to the visual aesthetics that emphasize the couple's horizontal embrace, this time the camera pans, in a long take, to a vertical inversion reflected from the water that takes over the whole frame to show the lover walking away from him. Like the first recurrent dream, the sequence ends with the same reflected frame of a man squatting above juxtaposed to a person riding away below. The subtle differences between these two dream sequences can be detected as the latter is shot from the lake's reflection and the riding direction is oriented toward home. The apparition of the double dreams is considered as a species of mirroring to display Ouyang's psychological ambiguity: a past self who runs away from home and a present self meditating on his past suppression, present dilemma, and future homecoming.

The first dream symbolizes Ouyang's entering into an intimacy with his lover, indicated by the trees full of peach blossoms and the ripples caused by a stone skipping on the lake; in an inverse contrast, a shrinking lake visually signifies his anxiety concerning the loss of his beloved. The second dream magnifies the loss, which belongs to the primary latent content of the previous dream, that can be effective by turning around the manifest dream-content; rather than a person sinking into water, the potential interpretation could be one emerging from the water—meaning one being reborn from the water. Whereas the first dream fits into a nostalgic dream regarding the good old time and its illusion, the second dream portrays a future breakthrough and rebirth, a wish fulfillment. However, these two dreams are not designed as a contrast but a continuity, with an overlapping tone of repressed fear and anxiety embedded to link these two dreams as one.

Being interconnected by the two motifs of peach blossoms and lake (See fig. 1), the two recurrent dreams reshape a psychological transformation arc for Ouyang: he is born, torn, and reborn in a trilogy of love. The first continuity is found in the peach blossoms that explore a transformation from "Woman Who Waits" to "Woman Who Leaves." The waiting woman is gone from the lake and no longer expects Ouyang's return; meanwhile, both dream sequences indulge Ouyang's subsequent loneliness by visualizing his desolate waiting beside the lake. When the narrative emphasizes a waiting woman who becomes a woman who leaves, the effect of the visual images functions to strengthen a mood of eternal regret that traps Ouyang into a crystal maze. The place of peaches in bloom alludes to a wishful longing for a long-awaited unspeakable love to be fulfilled. Indeed, blossoming peach trees are usually connected with spring, representing purity and womanhood and are known to put men into an intense trance of love. Discussing the meaning of the peach blossom in Wong's work, Dissanayake points out, "[t]he peach blossom is another interesting topos that underlines the narrative of the film. According to the culturally-grounded associations, peach blossoms represent the highly glorified and idealized realm of sophisticated ambition and desire. They indicate an unreal world of desire. They also have come to symbolize the unattainable, evanescent, pure and unforgettable" (51). Peach blossoms, a repeated motif used throughout the film to signify a metaphorical temporality of "transience," serve as one of the film's important latent psychological emblems. They are seen as a last breath of mother Nature whose "unattainable, evanescent, pure and unforgettable" character is connected with Ouyang's deceased lover. The thread of peach blossoms links three female characters involved in a parallel polygonal love relation. Apart from alluding to Ouyang's lover, there are intricate and spirited associations with a peach blossom in the Blind Swordsman's wife "Peach Blossom" and the princess Murong Yin that express the "unreal world of desire," the sophisticated taboo that forbids a female to develop a strong desire toward another man apart from her spouse or partner.

However, there is a hint insinuating that all three peach blossom women are connected with an image of water that reflects their crystalized split selves. They make up an important paired motif of homecoming and exile rooted in forbidden sexual love. In a broader sense, the water image extends to the sister-in-law's lake/sea, Murong's stream, and Peach Blossom's creek. The sister-in-law, in the second sequence of the recurrent dream, sees from the lake her own reflection walking away from her lover. To express indulgence in a more devastating love, the small lake is expanded to an image of the mysterious sea shown through her two soliloquies near the end of the film. In his compassionate depiction of Ouyang's lover, Huang Yaoshi's (played by Tony Leung Ka Fai) voice-over recounting her confession shows a profound understanding of the female psyche via the recollection in her seaside house where she mourns her lost love. Wearing a peach-red dress, looking out the window and watching her son's obscure image of the same color on the beach as she leans the upper part of her body lazily against the right-corner of a windowsill, she confesses to Huang that her favorite son will grow up and

leave her, just like his father. Although she does not reveal the son's father literally, we notice her sorrow since she mentions that life is full of illusions and changeable like the sea. Contrasted with another scene at the same seaside house, she rests her body on the other side of the window, like a soul ready to fall apart. The way she reclines elegantly on the two sides of the window in different time zones creates a crystalized image that combines space and time into a single continuum: her old self talks to her present self, and vice versa. She is dressed in peach-red and her hand holds faded peach blossoms implying that her life is "evanescent." The recurrent color comes to signify her image associated with approaching "faded" life while her son carries the trademark of forbidden love. After realizing that Huang will not help her to find Ouyang, she is utterly defeated by love-born depression. When she dies, the camera moves from a close-up of her closing eyes to a long shot of the billowing sea. This is a woman whose name is written on water.

Living in "Peach Blossom Village," the Blind Swordsman has a wife who is given the village's name "Peach Blossom." In one creek scene, beside her horse she cries out her sorrow for losing her husband; the same creek is also used to exhibit her secret admiration for Huang, her husband's best friend, where she strokes her horse tenderly just to assuage her own sexual desires. The light reflected from the creek gives her face a seductive facial charm that reveals her prohibited affection for Huang. The reflection exposed from the creek is like a sharp cutting edge that slices her into two contrary roles of wife and mistress. The third peach blossom woman is Murong Yin who practices her swordsmanship in front of a big stream; her reflection in the water seems to tell her that she is her own dream and illusion. Some would argue that there is a symbolic relationship between water and secrets, and so the reflection in the water reveals their repressed desires and sexuality. One can look at a lake as into a mirror, in which one will see a split self. All of the reflections from lake/sea/creek/stream in Wong's film are typical crystal-images that become more alluring when water is doubly combined with flower images and even extended into a wine symbol.

The most sophisticated aspect of the water image is its symbolic relationship to wine. To initiate a state of dis-remembrance, Wine of Forgetfulness, a gift given to Ouyang via Huang by the sister-in-law before her death, is equally shared by these two men, who find forgetfulness attractive since they both suffer from the depression of love's loss. In this context, Wong's cinematic execution introduces Ouyang-and-Huang as a twin character whose inability to face real hidden desire for the sister-in-law makes them seek temporary obliviousness to escape the unalterable predicament. The result is achieved by drinking the Wine of Forgetfulness that promises to erase the irrevocable past and steer into a future of possibilities. But the wine turns out to be an ironic joke that brings them to the edge of death. Finally they accept seeing the world as it is, and, thus, are free to see time beyond time: one retreats to an isolated peach blossom island to find his inner nostalgic home; the other returns to his brother's home to greet his illegitimate son. The mechanism of remembrance and forgetfulness are two sides of the same coin stored in the mind. *Ashes* intentionally uses a special kind of wine to force Ouyang to indulge in the status of forgetfulness, but even such a subtle cue triggers traumatic memories that are intended to be buried. Whereas the crystalline images of time in *Mirror* are dominantly manifested through "mirrors," in the dacha, "wine" in Wong's film entirely conveys the coalescence of time. The crystal-image of wine comes to affect the values of Ouyang, a middle-aged assassin who leads a befuddled life as if in a dream, and his "other" Huang who has drunk himself into a love-death situation. Wine of Forgetfulness is served as an invisible mirror to reflect their redemption through death.

Apart from the mirrored pair of Ouyang and Huang, the second related pair is Murong Yin/Yang, a twin siblings, and the sister-in-law. In the name of wine, the character doubling is repeated twice to formulate the narrative structure of "turning crystal" in a dream-like drunken *mise-en-scène* (00:27:53—00:30:00). Ouyang is misidentified, in the dream, as Huang by Murong Yang who has drunk a bit of wine to induce oblivion. Murong first confesses that Yin and Yang are the same person hidden behind a wounded soul; then, s/he tenderly caresses Ouyang as if he were Huang. Instead of revealing his true identity, Ouyang takes Murong's love as that of his own lover's care. This configuration of "indiscernible becoming" among the two pairs of lovers in *Ashes* is well defined by Deleuze, who writes, ". . . the *indiscernible becoming* of distinct images: it is *undecidable alternatives* between circles of past, [and] *inextricable differences* between peaks of present" (*Cinema 2* 104; emphasis his). Deleuze's "indiscernible becoming" remains crucial to understanding a crystal-image as something between the actual and the virtual, between the outside and the inside, between the past recollection and recurrent dreams. The mistaken and imaginary love fantasy becomes a mirror-image staged again by Ouyang to initiate his imagination of the forbidden love with his sister-in-law, but this time he returns it to Murong. Meanwhile, with Murong's tender caresses, he also imagines that his beloved's love for him has materialized. Whether the hands are those of Ouyang's beloved or Murong's, the virtual is indiscernible from the reality, that is, the crystal-images are infinite and suspended in hallucination. The dis-embodied

pair of the sister-in-law and Huang forms a sanctuary to cover the couple living in both Murong and Ouyang's imagination. The function of the dual-doubling makes the intricate lovers' relationships more intriguing and complicated as if they were immersed in a crystallized reflection where it is hard to tell the difference from the self and the other.

The drunken fantasy is more than a reflection of the actual. It is a distortion of the crystal-image that lays the foundation for Ouyang's imaginary worlds disclosing the connection with the world. For Huang, the wine makes him forget every loving attachment from the world except his love of the peach blossom, yet for Ouyang the wine releases him from the spell of his memory of his beloved. The metaphorical wine as crystal provides a multiplicity of reflections of differently mirrored characters coalescing into the same temporal framework. Drinking wine makes Ouyang end up embracing desire without succumbing to desire. At the end, this delusional drunkenness awakes Ouyang's living death and bestows upon him, through the effect of the crystallized images, a fresh perspective through which to experience the world again. He eventually sets fire to the desert tavern where he lives to suggest a symbolic act of departure from a past of solitude and orients the film's narrative toward the future where he returns to his homeland. The film stresses circularity of time, and wine and peach blossoms turn on themselves, like a homecoming metaphor that pursue an opaque environment to surround the forbidden triangular love.

It is worthy to note that the drunken hallucination is actually part of the second sequence of the recurrent dream, judging from the same shot of the couple's horizontal lying position and the ripple-flickering effect. It suggests that incestuously illicit love is floating underneath in the sea of the unconscious. The drunken dream brings up the second motif of continuity—water in which the unconscious within consciousness, an in-betweenness of dream and reality, is explored by means of the crystal-image. The narrative of the first sequence of the recurrent dream is interrupted with shots from Ouyang's half-awake mirages, whereas the second dream is completely filled with dream-level images without interruption from reality. In other words, the second sequence suggests that he is passing through to an absolute unconscious dream whose reversed reflection from the lake shows a couple's parting so unrealistically dream-like. The second sequence of the recurrent dream, undeniably, displays a continuity of the reflection with more involvement in the depth of the unconscious than the previous one.

By piecing together the two sequences of the recurring dream along with the drunken dream into an organic dream-narrative trilogy, then we can create a complementary mapping of the unconscious mind from a lucid dream to a dream of oneness, cracking open Ouyang's encrusted psychological secret. The dream-trilogy is tightly coupled with the recurring motif of water that can be metaphorically extended to a Freudian "oceanic feeling." In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud's account of "oceanic feeling" entails a sense of "limitlessness and of a bond with the universe," of "oneness with the universe" (68, 72). Indeed, Ouyang starts from a half-awake lucid dream and is led into a deeper unconscious dream in which he does not differentiate himself from his reflection, a kind of Freudian "oneness with the universe." It seems that his dream-work has a tendency to attribute the primal love to the regressive aspect of primary narcissism. Defining the meaning of primal "oneness" and the transcendence of time in Wong's work, Rey Chow considers it is "attached to a fantasized state of oneness, to a time of absolute coupling and indifferentiation that may, nonetheless, appear in the guise of an intense, indeed delirious, memory" (35). The narcissistic feeling could engender Ouyang's recognition that he might have indulged himself too deeply in the world of "oneness" with the deceased lover, and might thereby provide some consolation for him in the face of mortality and loss. He is born from death.

There are two kinds of Lacanian Imaginary narcissism explored in *Ashes*: the first centers on the creation of a double as Ouyang, like Narcissus, sees his other reflection Huang in the water since both of them love the same woman. The second concentrates on Ouyang's lover who becomes an intermediary between these two men and a narcissistic object of Ouyang's desire. This is a double mirror manipulating Ouyang's psyche. Ouyang's lover loves him although he makes no promises about the future, so she marries his elder brother out of revenge. Yet, like Echo repeating the words of love, she spends her last days confessing her admiration and regretfulness for losing Ouyang. After her pining death, she eventually becomes both men's lack, a desire for an object that cannot be fulfilled and satisfied. "When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—You never look at me from the place from which I see you" (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 103). As Lacan illustrates, love in the mirror stage has an unpassable split that generates illusionary fantasies in which follow the route of a desired object takes place in the form of a lost "lack." Lacan seems to suggest that the way to complete one's selfhood depends on the understanding of the true nature of Imaginary oneness as a changeable illusion. However, the best way forward is not to coalesce with the other but to reverse the lethal impact of the "lack" of the other by turning it into one's own life nutrient. The lake's reflection in

the recurrent dreams creates such a narcissistic entwining process of mirroring that may be linked to a cycle of the lover's death and Ouyang's rebirth. The imaginary reflection may lead Ouyang to symbiotic entrapment that pushes him into a dreadful regret caused by the death of the loved one. Yet mysteriously, a release of the apparition double gives him some comfort and the strength to resurrect himself from the living death. Even though the primal longing of such a symbiotic love makes him pine away like he is losing his own self, it still bears a residual life-force to save Ouyang from the imprisonment of his Ideal-ego, the primary incestuous maternal bonding.

In an interview with Tony Rayns, Wong said that the original model for Ouyang is inspired by Ethan Edwards (played by John Wayne) in John Ford's *The Searchers*. Wong explains, "Usually I find the genre conventions get in the way of dealing with certain areas of character psychology, but one of my inspirations for *Ashes of Time* was *The Searchers*—a film which suggests how you can get inside an apparently opaque protagonist" (14). As noted, the pair of Ouyang and his sister-in-law dovetails that of Ethan and Martha. An incestuous bond between Ethan and his sister-in-law Martha foregrounds Ouyang's unacceptable feelings toward his brother's wife. The decent into eroticizing adulterous desire has been comprehended from the latent content of the recurrent dreams. It seems to suggest that the very extremity of his lover's death brings him to go through a ritual of liberated cleansing: with his incestuous alter ego finally penalized, Ouyang becomes free to accept himself as a newfound person.

The crystal-image in the recurrent dream sequences claims that time, for Ouyang, is usually linked with memory. It is impossible to contain time, and reduce it to one system or circuit; instead, it liberates itself from various movements and space zones. Hence, time is manifold, like a crystal that shapes the multiplicity of duration. Deleuze puts forward a strikingly similar statement, as he writes, "Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal. The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal. We see in the crystal . . . the gushing of time as dividing in two, as splitting" (*Cinema 2* 81). For Deleuze, time cannot be confined into a linear chronology as it entails recursively not just the present but also the past and the future, all of them which are implicated in each other through the cinematic device of the crystal-image. What Wong presents in his dream sequences is the point of contact between the world of consciousness and the world of dream where time gives a better sense of the communicative and evocative power. In the dreams, Ouyang's latent anxiety lies in his illicit attachment to his sister-in-law, a transgression that he has buried deep in his memory. That is the reason why he cannot go home and must wander in the desert, shown by the reflection of a man riding a running horse. Yet the same rider eventually changes his direction and rides toward home to bring his resolution of incestuous complex to the surface. Ouyang's dreams confront his notion of the self that is constantly a "gushing of time as dividing in two." His anxious present self, reflected in meditation at the lake, can communicate with the past running-away self and gives rise to a communal dialogue transpiring in different dream-like time zones. Thus, Wong's handling of cinematographic time succeeds in capturing a psychological dream-time. By recounting peach blossoms and water symbols that create imaginary microcosms of temporalities, the doubleness of the psyche of various characters appears in a "turning crystal."

### III. Turning Crystal: Ritual Remembrance

In *The Magic Lantern*, Ingmar Bergman declares, "Tarkovsky is for me the greatest, the one who invented a new language, true to the nature of film, as it captures life as a reflection, life as a dream" (73). Undeniably, in *Mirror* a series of dreams and recollections appear in nonchronological order as the film interweaves a crystal-like aesthetics of duration; so it is with *Ashes* whose dream sequences sparkle with a secret light from the unconscious. Relatively, for Tarkovsky and Wong, a Russian dacha and a peach blossom lake, the major dream symbols, serve as places in time. As homecoming devices, they both mask an unconscious incestuous love that needs to be decoded in a dream of wish fulfilment. In the previous two sections we have already analyzed the crystalline dreams and recollections; now we move on to address the significance of four manifestations in both films with respect to the "turning crystal" structure: an interior-and-exterior home route, a structure of circularity, doubleness in the characterization, and the incestuous modality of Oedipal-vertical vs. sibling-lateral (See fig. 2, "Turning Crystal").<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 "Turning Crystal," displays the relationship between four manifestations to address similarities and differences in Wong's *Ashes* and Tarkovsky's *Mirrors*: an interior-and-exterior home route, a structure of circularity, doubleness of character, and incest-vertical vs. horizontal.

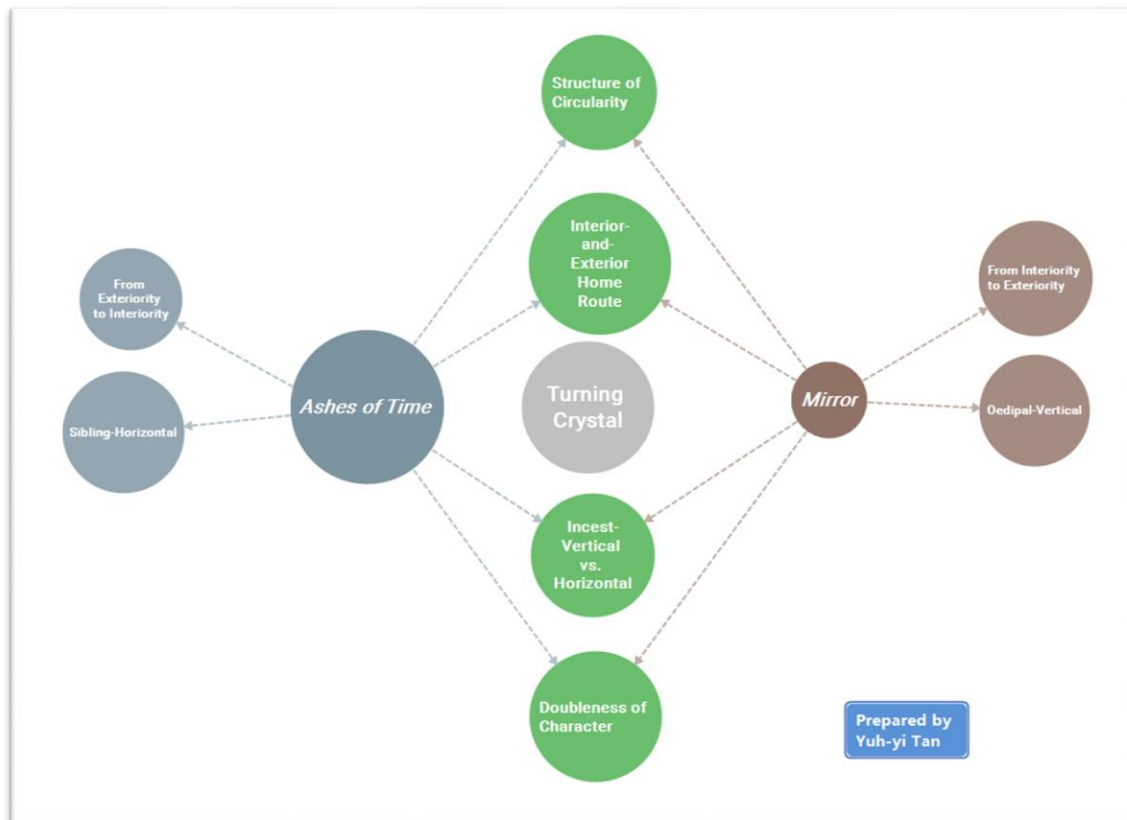


Figure 2: "Turning Crystal"

The recurring dreams in both films display a similar unconscious wish of coming home in a disguised way, the biggest difference being that Wong's home route starts from the outside then moves toward the inside, whereas Tarkovsky takes it the other way around. In *Mirror*, Alexei's death compromises the maternal complex by presenting an open tunnel to reflect on the immortality of the mother away from home in an axis of past-present-future. For Tarkovsky, it is a psychological journey starting directly from the inner cave of his Oedipal family and sprawling into an away-from-home route of salvation. On the contrary, Ouyang in *Ashes* remains in an isolated desert house where he drifts away from his hometown until his lover's death releases him from a sibling complex so that he can find the way home. The film explores a family trauma from the perspective of an exile until the death of Ouyang's lover resolves the dilemma. In a nutshell, the inside-and-outside home route is a to-and-fro strategy engaged in by two visual *auteurs* who delve into their narrators' dream work, passing from the conscious interior to the exterior unconscious.

Both films unsettle a linear chronological time order by bringing about the whole image of time that is sophisticatedly layered without beginning or end. Apart from the non-linear and discontinuous recurrent dreams, Tarkovsky's crystalline final *mise-en-scène* is suppressed within a structure of circularity, which represents an organic cycle of disintegration and restoration. With a parallel to the notion that we die to live, and we live to die, present in one of Tarkovsky's father-poems (*Sculpting* 142) it is understandable why Tarkovsky places the narrator's death before the mother's immortality. The final *mise-en-scène* (01:41:19-01:46:07) returns to the natural landscape of the dacha by conflation of the past, present, and future. This is a typical Deleuzian crystalline universe that blurs conventional boundaries set on time and characters. In this pre-war setting, the young mother Maria lies on the grass with her husband, and they optimistically discuss her pregnancy. Gazing into her future, the camera cuts to the old mother Maria (played by Tarkovsky's own mother) striding through a meadow at the edge of the forest with her two children, Alexei and his sister, and walking in the opposite direction from the dacha. On the road, they see things ruined by the passing of time. Finally, they are walking on a wide grass field, where the child Alexei gets away from his mother's grip and yells "Hahahaha." Across the field where they stand, there is a telegraph pole resembling an erect cross, and beside it is a very



tiny image of the younger Maria standing to meet with her older self on the other side of the meadow. Off-screen voices sing the opening to Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. John Passion*.

Tarkovsky's dacha remembrance sublimates religious redemption to aesthetic contemplation. Moreover, the childhood dacha allows a manifestation of the maternal image that is attached to Oedipal desire. The crystallized quality of time fills life with bitterness and sweetness, yet the maternal image remains eternal in a time-axis. Apart from this, the away-from-dacha scene compensates for the narrator's desire to make up with his mother in one sequence of the recurring dreams where the child narrator is being rejected from entering through the barn door. The best way to sublimate his Oedipal guilt is to immortalize the mother. Tarkovsky says, "I cannot come to terms with the fact that my mother will die, I cannot agree with this. I will protest and show that my mother is immortal" (Synessios 17). In the maternal timelessness scene, the director conflates three layers of time within the time-space dacha that revises crystalline circuits of time: the virtual past memories are inextricably bonded with the present heading to the future, all of these time zones being concretized via the mother. The child Alexei's scream releases Tarkovsky from the spell of his childhood remorse and Oedipal guilt at the price of the narrator's death. Deleuze adequately describes the scene, when he says that "It is characteristic of cinema to seize [the] past and [the] future that coexist with the present image . . . Perhaps it is necessary to make what is before and after the film pass inside it in order to get out of the chain of presents" (*Cinema 2* 37-38). In its pure outline, a virtual image happens outside of the consciousness in a time-axis. When this virtual image is in collaboration with an anterior state in the present, we glimpse Deleuze's crystal-image that manifests the temporal fluidity of the "past" mothers dashing through the filmic image while projecting the static "present" of the narrator's death.

The circularity of time is also obvious in the recurring dreams but also in the finale in *Ashes*. In the final dream scenario, when his lone inverted image is reflected by the river, Ouyang indulges in the recurring dream reflection of his lover who no longer waits beside the peach blossom lake. The whole story begins with this reflection. There's no end and no beginning, only moving on. The radical change for him is that he finally sees from his inverted reflection that the illusive past has been transformed into a source of nourishment from which he can be released from the old trauma and form a new memory. Wong's peach blossom lake reminiscence forces the characters not only to lose their power but to indulge themselves in pain caused by loss in love. At the same time Ouyang's power surfaces to bring him from death to life at the price of his lover's death. Based on the traditional Chinese Almanac, seasonal changes permeate the structure of *Ashes* that follows the almanac's division of the year into four seasons and 24 solar terms. Teo explains, "It is as if the transience of time determines the documentary nature of the film. It draws the film closer to nature as it is categorized in the Chinese Almanac" (536). Each major character is interlocked with a solar term from the almanac. The notion of circularity is obviously implied by the same solar term "Jingzhe" (Insects Awaken) that starts and ends the film. Jingzhe is the name for the time in spring under the influence of a total eclipse when peach blossoms are in bloom and insects revive on earth. It echoes the ending scene where Ouyang is resurrected from a living death, a release from his illicit love for his sibling's wife. Therefore, the peach blossom lake is more than a nostalgic place to reminisce and to mourn. It is transformed into a place for renewal. Both films are summoning up the nurturing powers of the deepest dreams from the unconscious where their desire for forbidden love has lain buried. Whether the energy derives from the Oedipus complex or an incestuous sibling complex, by stressing the circularity of crystal-time, both films elaborate upon the crystal-images of dream and memory—the elusive reverie and primal elements of vision belonging to a poetic cinema.

A technique of using a doubling of characters in a narrative adhering to dream-logic and thus creating a spatio-temporal labyrinth of (dis)remembrance is also to be observed in these films. In *Mirror*, several characters are performed by the identical actors and actresses. Margarita Terekhova plays the two roles of the mother and the ex-wife: Maria (the mother), and of Natalia (the narrator Alexei's ex-wife as a young female). Ignat Daniltsev plays three roles of teenage sons: the adolescent Alexei at the age of 12, Alexei's son Ignat at the same age, as well as Alyosha, the youth of Alexei's father. For the mother's role, with Margarita playing wife-and-mother across two generations and the addition of Tarkovsky's own mother to serve as the old mother, there is a multiplication of the "mother" into three roles. The same strategy is applied to the roles of the two sons. The casting for a multiplicity of roles of both mother and the son leads to a difficult reading of the biographical memoir probably because Tarkovsky proposes to disrupt the core of the real to privilege the virtual, which is the essence of what Deleuze calls the "turning crystal." In *Ashes*, a double characterization penetrates the remembrance and forgetfulness to engage two seemingly different paths. Yet the same mechanism of memory leads to the ultimate destination. As a pair, Huang and Ouyang serve as the two sides of forgetting and remembrance. The doubling of characters is employed to serve as "a useful device to explore possibilities

for change and movement through the play of similarity and difference, and contributes to the combination of subjective moods of resignation and repressed desire with reflective moments of insight and understanding" (Yau 545). While Huang resorts to a state of "dis-remembrance," Ouyang carries out remembrance. However, Huang's dis-remembrance contains a form of remembering since the "original" feminine image has been replaced metonymically by peach blossoms that will eternally return in the names of the other female characters. That is why Huang is also involved with Murong Yin and "Peach Blossom." On the contrary, Ouyang's remembrance retains a form of forgetfulness and forgiveness as shown in the film's line "When you no longer possess something, what you can hold on to is your memory." As Sinkwan Cheng puts it well, Ouyang finally conquers time and the loss of his lover: "So long as he lives and loves, his beloved will never die. She is, and will remain, coextensive with his existence" (1179). No doubt, memory can be penetrated as an exhibit of desire in time: that one lives because one remembers constitutes the meaning of existence resolved in the rhythm of poetic time.

In *Mirror*, the crystalline family relationships form a schema called the vertical axis—relationships that go up and down between mothers and sons, sons and fathers—an indication of the dominance of the paternal-vertical over the sibling-lateral. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud suggests that we can see "the same contradictory feelings . . . at work in the ambivalent father-complexes of our children and of our neurotic parents. They hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too" (143). Similarly, the narrator Alexei's psychical process is transmitted trans-generationally from his father to his son. His Oedipus complex cultivates his hatred toward his father, but that does not prevent his filial love for him. For his mother, he feels the same, the ambivalent feelings are both productive and destructive: they re-create and re-erase the memory of his mother's home but also relate to his marriage with his ex-wife.

Whereas *Mirror* emphasizes the paternal subtleties to be reflected at the crossroads of a character's doubleness in a family romance on a vertical axis, *Ashes* attaches fraternal dynamics to a lateral axis to bring siblings, particularly brothers, to the front line of discussion. In her book *Siblings*, Juliet Mitchell reviews the processes of subjectivity formation by taking account of lateral, sibling relations. She writes, "The sibling is par excellence someone who threatens the subject's uniqueness. The ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one's place (10)." For Ouyang in *Ashes*, the advent of the sibling, who may be his biological brother, and peers, like his favorite friend Huang and the other related swordsmen Hong Qi and Blind Swordsman, is perceived by him as a challenge to his uniqueness, and as a threat of annihilation. Although Ouyang's brother is an absent character who does not appear in the film, the dis-embodied brother triggers an original mode of the Cain complex, which is based on a biblical story of fratricide. One of the most poignant examples of this is the relationship between Ouyang and Huang whose mirroring shapes a lateral dimension. In the process of lateral development, it reflects a sibling triangle that threatens to challenge one's unique place in a world of others who are similar and different at the same time.

The film concentrates on an emerging preoccupation with the dynamics of sibling relationships, particularly the double character Ouyang-and-Huang and the other related sibling lovers. Many of these peer relationships end in a breakdown by cutting off the relationship or betrayal, often followed by death. Apart from his relationship with his biological brother, Ouyang's strong friendship with Huang, sometimes referred to as his "other" sibling, does not endure because they love the same woman. The third complication is his involvement with the village girl and the hired assassin Hong Qi, who reminds Ouyang of his carefree youth when he fought only for justice with a chivalrous heart. Hong Qi completes Ouyang's own other, a righteous self that he had lost a long time before, and one who suffered the loss of one finger for a village girl who makes him recall his romantic self. Yet they engage in a violent duel to the death, and Ouyang commits fratricide.<sup>11</sup>

If Ouyang occupies one half of the incestuous sibling crystal, Huang's triangles dominate the other half. The next sibling triangle is triggered by Huang whose seduction of his best friend Blind Swordsman's wife Peach Blossom leads to his friend's tragic death, another case of fratricide. However, Blind Swordsman is not the only victim; more intriguing is the last triangle activated by Huang who casts a love spell on Murong. The love makes Murong a schizophrenic. Her ambivalent gender identification is contradictorily a curse on both genders, and it can be considered the psychological equivalent of sibling

<sup>11</sup> After Hong Qi disappears from Ouyang's inn with his wife, the intertitle is shown in the film to illustrate what has happened in his later life. It writes, "Hong Qi joined the Gang of Beggars three years later. He became their leader and was known as the Beggar of the North. In his later years, he duelled with Ouyang Feng on Snow Mountain where they took each other's life" (The film 1:10:48-01:10:56).

murder, inner fratricide. The sexual inversion makes the self split within Murong's mind, generating a possessive incestuous relationship that desires both to love and to hate the other self at the same time. If we relate it to the context of incestuous sibling love, the two leading male leads, Evil East (Ouyang) and Malicious West (Huang) are two brother-like characters, the eponymous heroes whose names constitute the film's Chinese title. Apart from their deep attachment to the sister-in-law, each of them is involved in triangles with two other siblings. Reflecting two leads, the sibling crystal turns on itself, doubling and tripling in multiple images.

In conclusion, the forms of appearance of the crystal-image, a dacha in *Mirror* and a lake in *Ashes*, recreate a pattern of circularity in the recurring dreams that combines the conscious interior and unconscious exterior. The doubleness of characters' mirror images in both films creates complicated polyphonic structures filled with the flow of events akin to a symphony. Probing the depths of dream and memory, the films inevitably lead the viewer to touch the spirit of the major narrators, Alexei and Ouyang, and their complicated relationships with the others in their life narratives. The sophisticated correlations between the lives of the characters and their society are structured to reflect Oedipus-vertical and sibling-vertical motific patterns, which deepen the poetry of visual images and embellish the films' rigorously organized stylistic unity. From start to finish, the journey into the narrators' dreams and memories is constituted by moments of circularity in order to generate a framework for now and then, as well as for the future. Indeed, this is true for Alexei and Ouyang, both of whose physical presence is substituted by multiply functioning mirror-like motifs that allow their mind and thoughts to float into an inner journey that liberates them from remorseful guilt. For Wong and Tarkovsky, the sustained use of poetic crystal images turning in their dream-like cinema follows a secretive code that provides the means to overlap memory in a maze of time.

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