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The Aesthetics of Displacement: Sensory Experience and Cultural Translation in Transnational Cinema

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This article examines how cultural displacement is sensorially tangible in two transnational films: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Memoria (2021) and Olivier Assayas's Irma Vep (1996). While existing scholarship on transnational cinema tends to foreground narrative representations of dislocation or industrial analyses of cross-border production, this essay develops the original concept of 'sensory disorientation' to argue that such approaches overlook the corporeal dimensions of film form, which are the ways of sensing; the disoriented body becomes the primary site through which cultural displacement is corporeally inhabited and communicated. Drawing on this framework, I trace how sonic estrangement in Memoria and visual transgression in Irma Vep transform abstract experiences of cultural dislocation into embodied encounters for viewers. The article further examines how the transnational production context, including funding structures, star personae, and distribution strategies materialise as an aesthetic form. These films propose a model of sensory transnationalism in which bodily engagement beyond linguistic comprehension becomes the primary medium of cross-cultural translation.

The massive population movements of the twentieth century have occurred alongside the development of the film as an art form. Since the 1980s, as the sociologist Avtar Brah observes, migrations across the world have proliferated, with diasporic communities becoming "exemplary communities of the transnational moment", "diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" (93, 205). During this period, films embodying cross-border movement have gradually taken on a more significant role in the global film market as well. The scholarship of transnational cinema has often focused its analysis on narrative representations of cultural dislocation or industry-level productions of cross-border production networks. This approach frequently overlooks how the sensory dimensions of film form and the bodily interactions with the audience materialise cultural displacement and how displacement is organised through film form and bodily perception.

This essay examines how the experience of cultural displacement is embodied through multisensory strategies in two films: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021) and Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep* (1996). I introduce the concept of 'sensory disorientation' to interpret the specific process through which transnational cinema renders cultural displacement not only as narrative content, but as an embodied and tangible experience shared between character and viewer. Sara Ahmed's phenomenology describes how "disorientation allows bodies to extend into spaces that would otherwise be inaccessible", demonstrating how these films transform cultural estrangement from limitation into creative possibility and a bodily mode of knowing (11). I also draw on Laura Marks' haptic visuality and Vivian Sobchack's film phenomenology, which describe how the body perceives images. Sensory disorientation specifies what happens when that perception is estranged across cultural and linguistic difference: when the sensing body itself becomes the site of untranslatability. This is also where the concept adds more to accented and transnational cinema scholarship. These two films echo with each other as analytical complements and map sensory disorientation from both directions: *Memoria* positions the displaced body as a receptor of sensory intrusion, *Irma Vep* presents it as the agent of sensory disruption.

Beyond the immediate audiovisual estrangement of the displaced body, I argue that these sensory strategies emerge not only as artistic choices but as registers of the power dynamics and creative tensions inherent in the material conditions of transnational filmmaking. By examining how these films engage with themes of memory, identity, and cultural untranslatability through distinct sights and sounds with a sensory approach, this essay demonstrates how transnational cinema can create new aesthetic forms precisely through the productive tensions that arise in the attempt to translate across cultural boundaries. Sensory disorientation thus extends beyond present perception into memory and into the material conditions of production – the three registers this essay traces in turn.

1. Sensory Disorientation and the Estranged Body

1.1 Sonic and Visual Disorientation

Both *Memoria* and *Irma Vep* embrace innovative uses of sounds and images which transform the abstract concept of cultural displacement into tangible experience for both

characters and viewers. While the cinematic representations of cultural dislocation in some films rely on narrative exposition or dialogue, these two films materialise estrangement through the embodied experience of ‘sensory disorientation’. Yet each film locates this disorientation in a distinct formal mechanism. *Memoria* works primarily through acousmatic sound, where displacement is registered first as an interrupted, enigmatic auditory intrusion. *Irma Vep*, by contrast, works through spatial and visual instability. The characters navigate strange spaces and physically experience being out of place in both films. This audiovisual interplay transforms cross-cultural experience into pathways that invite audiences to actively experience being a stranger alongside the characters on screen.

Unlike Marks’ “haptic visuality”, which primarily focuses on visual textures that evoke tactile memories (162), sensory displacement can be emphasised as a hearing experience. In *Memoria*, Apichatpong¹ employs ‘sonic disorientation’ as a sub-category of the sensory dislocated experience. The protagonist, Jessica Holland (Tilda Swinton), is a Scottish botanist who is abruptly disturbed by a profound sonic disturbance during her stay in Bogotá to visit her sick sibling. The film creates an intense sense of displacement by positioning a mysterious “Bang—” sound in the interlayer between objective reality and subjective imagination, constantly disrupting Jessica’s sense of belonging. The loud noise echoes throughout the entire film, constantly reminding the audience of its presence, inviting the audience to navigate alongside the protagonist and follow the development of the film to join her immersively in the search for the source of the sound. This sets off a journey of fantasy, chance encounters, and reunions that echoes with memories and history. This sensory approach positions viewers to embody the disorientation of existing between cultural worlds and reflects Apichatpong’s comment that *Memoria* is a film made for the theatre with its unique sound effect experience (Weerasethakul “Interview”).

The opening sequence establishes sonic displacement through what Michel Chion terms “acousmatic sound”, which is a sound one hears without seeing its source (71). The unvisualised sound becomes the skeleton to the character’s journey. A long static take of a darkened bedroom with ambient nocturnal tranquillity is suddenly disrupted when Jessica is startled awake by an inexplicable sonic phenomenon (*Memoria*, 00:01:17–00:02:05). Through

¹ Following common Thai naming convention in which individuals are formally addressed by their given name rather than their surname, I refer to the director as Apichatpong throughout (see *Cultural Atlas*).

dim lighting that renders Jessica as a silhouette, her disorientation is visualised through formal elements rather than conventional emotional signifiers. The sound functions as the primary sensory channel to unfold the film narrative with the central enigma: “Where does this eerie sound come from?” It is established within the first minute and the striking echoes of “Bang—” are planted in Jessica’s and audiences’ minds.

Irma Vep develops a parallel strategy through ‘visual dislocation’, destabilising spatial perception to embody cultural disorientation. Assayas establishes Maggie Cheung’s displacement immediately through a chaotic arrival scene at a Parisian film studio, where the camera follows her through the office like a maze filled with unfamiliar faces speaking rapid French (*Irma Vep*, 00:02:02–00:05:40). The fragmented editing patterns also mimic Maggie’s sensory overwhelm, creating what Marks describes as “haptic space”, or the space perceived more as enveloping texture than visual clarity (166). This haptic approach positions viewers within Maggie’s experience of cultural disorientation rather than observing it from a distance. Her sense of alienation from the place is shown from her panicked and confused facial expression and her polite English greeting.

The contrasting sensory approaches in these films reveal different dimensions of cultural displacement. While *Memoria* employs sound as a metaphysical intrusion that disrupts Jessica’s discovery of the city of Bogotá, *Irma Vep* uses visual fragmentation to represent the more immediate, social dimensions of Maggie’s disorientation in the working environment. Although their perspectives as strangers are not identical, Jessica, as an expat, has more opportunities to engage with the environment. There are many scenes in the film where she explores public areas like the library, art exhibition, university, and hospital alone. By contrast Maggie, as an actress, is passively guided around Paris by her crew members and her mobility is limited due to her unfamiliarity with the city. Both films transform what would typically be abstract psychological states into concrete sensory experiences that viewers can relate to.

1.2 Embodied Disorientation: The Recording Studio Sequence in *Memoria*

The recording studio scene in *Memoria* demonstrates how sensory displacement materialises through both technological mediation and bodily experience. After being haunted by the mysterious “Bang—” sound for several sleepless nights, Jessica visits a

university sound studio where she meets Juan (Juan Pablo Urrego), a young sound engineer who helps her recreate the sound (*Memoria*, 00:18:20–00:30:22; see fig. 1). Their interaction with disorientation is marked by linguistic barriers, as Jessica's limited Spanish forces her to rely on simple vocabulary, gestures, and occasional English words to make herself clear. Apichatpong films the conversation in just two static shots: one framing Jessica and Juan from the front as they face the computer, the other taken from behind, letting us see the sound-editing software on the screen. The ambient noise of the studio drops away almost entirely, so that every test tone arrives against near-silence, and the small pauses between Jessica's corrections such as a slight frown or a hesitation before she speaks become as legible as the words themselves. This not only signals communicative failure, it also marks her body as foreign and renders her cultural displacement audible and therefore legible to those around her. As Chion notes, the out of sync in language moments of "linguistic desynchronization" highlight the awareness of sound as material, as the communication through sound samples here rather than purely semantic (103).



Fig. 1.

The sensory displacement in this scene is portrayed through three stages. First, Jessica visits Juan in the sound studio, where he attempts to recreate the mysterious sound she has been hearing. The studio space both connects her to and isolates her from her sonic memory. It offers the technical match to reproduce the sound that exists only in her memory. Jessica's subtle facial reactions are captured as Juan plays various electronic sounds through the studio speakers to show none of them match her memory. Her frustrated expressions show her

body's rejection of sensory approximations that fail to capture lived experience. In the second stage, Jessica attempts verbal description in Spanish, saying the sound is "very earthy, like from the core of the Earth". This strong, precise account is what Sobchack terms a "synaesthetic challenge": the attempt to translate across sensory modalities to describe the heaviness of the sound when direct communication fails (80). Unable to name the sound in a shared language, Jessica reaches for texture and weight of the sound as well as using body language to communicate with a consensus that Juan can also perceive. The description marks the gap between her subjective experience and Juan's technical understanding of sound. Then, the scene reaches its resolution when Juan produces a deep, resonant boom that causes Jessica to physically resonate. Apichatpong documents the entire process of producing the sound, including every minute shift in Jessica's expression of recognition, relief and confusion. This extended duration echoes what Gilles Deleuze calls a "direct time-image" where viewers experience time as pure duration rather than action and creates a space to feel the emotional transition with her (128).

The scene positions the body as both archive and medium for cross-cultural experience. Jessica's body holds a sensation but not an exact word, the felt weight and texture of a sound she cannot locate. She fails to translate the bodily sensation into verbal shared language, marking the gap between what a body has felt and a language that cannot hold it. Her attempt to communicate this memory is a process of sensory translation that acknowledges the impossibility of direct equivalence while still attempting to describe the sensation existing in the memory across cultural and linguistic boundaries, demonstrating how cultural displacement operates at a sensory level beyond intellectual understanding.

1.3 Transgressive Embodiment: The Hotel Prowling Sequence in *Irma Vep*

The hotel prowling sequence in *Irma Vep* provides a counterpoint to *Memoria's* sonic exploration through its radical visual embodiment of cultural displacement. This five-minute sequence marks a turning point in Maggie's relationship to both her character and the unfamiliar working environment (*Irma Vep*, 00:53:05–01:01:52). As Maggie leaves her hotel room, she changes into the black latex catsuit of Irma Vep. The film makes a radical technical shift here by switching from 35mm film to degraded video with low resolution. This abrupt

medium change corresponds to Marks' theory of "haptic effects [that] are media-specific", which acknowledges the sensory experience of encountering different representational materialities (173). The grainy video quality creates a visual analogue to Jessica's acoustic disturbance in *Memoria*, which both show the disruption of sensory continuity, materialising the experience of displacement.

The sequence progresses through distinct spatial transgressions which operate on three levels at once. At the level of the character, Maggie sneakily walks along the hotel hallway, her body moving unnaturally. The latex costume allows her to slide along the walls to avoid others. Then Maggie enters a hotel room where a guest is fully naked and having a private conversation on a phone call. At the level of the camera, the unstable handheld camerawork further destabilises spatial perception to highlight the location specificity. At the level of spectators, we are placed in the slightly uncomfortable position of the embodied experience of looking when one should not. However, I argue that beyond the viewers experiencing boundary transgressions, the characters themselves become active agents of sensory disruption. This dual focus on both spectatorship and character embodiment allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how transnational cinema creates the 'sensory disorientation' which positions viewers within the phenomenological reality of cultural displacement. Maggie surprisingly steals the jewellery of the guest in her room and goes to the balcony of the hotel on a heavily rainy night, then she throws the jewellery into the rain (see fig. 2).

The beginning of the next scene shows Maggie being woken up by the crew the next morning, still wearing the catsuit, making it difficult to distinguish whether this happened or was just Maggie's dream. This sequence visualises cultural displacement not as an abstract concept but as embodied transgression of spatial, social, and ethical boundaries. The cinematic techniques transform cultural displacement from intellectual concept into physical experience. Unlike *Memoria's* approach, which positions the body as a receptor of external sensory disturbance, *Irma Vep* presents the body itself as the agent of sensory disruption. Maggie's transformation into Irma Vep enables what performance theorist Rebecca Schneider calls "cross-temporal touching" (6). She presents a physical engagement that collapses distinctions between past and present, self and other, and blurs temporal and spatial boundaries. By embodying a character from French cinema, Maggie's performance

materialises the complex temporal and cultural dislocations inherent in transnational filmmaking.

The culmination of these sensory strategies demonstrates how both films transform cultural displacement from abstract concept into tangible, embodied experience through cinematic techniques. Whether with sound or sight, they both reveal that understanding cultural displacement requires not just intellectual comprehension but sensory engagement.



Fig. 2.

2. Disorientation in Memory: Through the Scope of Self-Reflexivity and Untranslatability

While sensory displacement materialises the immediate, present-tense experience of cultural displacement, the films extend this same logic backward into memory. In both films, memory is a sensory event; it returns through sound, texture, and the body's involuntary response. I argue that memory here operates as a temporal register of sensory disorientation, functioning as both a site of cultural untranslatability and a potential connection between cultural differences. The displaced bodies feel estrangement not just in the present but re-experience it through the same disoriented perception that resists translation. Both films stage this through self-reflexive techniques that transform Ahmed's "moments of disorientation" from abstract concepts into tangible sensory experiences, making the lived, abstract disorientation of cultural dislocation physically accessible to viewers (9).

As the title itself suggests, *Memoria* explicitly foregrounds memory as the core narrative structure, exploring how personal and collective memory intersect in post-conflict Colombia. Jessica's mysterious "Bang—" sound functions simultaneously as uncertain personal auditory hallucination and metaphorical echo of Colombia's violent history. As Javier Pérez-Osorio observes, the film registers this history not through direct exposition but through "an architecture of listening, sensing, and waiting", as such the sound embodies historical haunting and keeps Colombia's traumatic past "beneath the surface of the everyday" (215, 216). The film positions memory not as a reliable archive but as fragmented sensory intrusion that disrupts linear temporality. As Deleuze suggests in his discussion of the time-image, such disruptions create "sheets of past" that coexist with the present (99). Jessica's journey to identify the sound becomes an exploration of how memory operates across cultural boundaries such that her British expat experience connects with Colombia's collective trauma in ways that resist straightforward translation.

While memory may seem less central to *Irma Vep*, I argue that cultural memory fundamentally shapes the film's exploration of cultural translation. The film unfolds with the remaking of Louis Feuillade's silent film serial *Les Vampires* (1915-16). It positions cinema itself as a technology of cultural memory. Through the director René Vidal's (Jean-Pierre Léaud) obsession with faithfully recreating Feuillade's original, the film explores how cultural memory becomes fetishised as a cinephile perspective, creating what Svetlana Boym describes as "restorative nostalgia" – an attempt to rebuild a mythologised past (41). This can also be interpreted as Assayas' own reflection on the film industrial development and the nostalgia for the golden era of French cinema. These ideas parallel Maggie Cheung's presence, as she carries the cultural memory of Hong Kong action cinema embodied in her star persona. Whether by the film crew who works with her in the film or by the viewers of *Irma Vep*, she is regarded as the embodiment of Hong Kong cinema.

2.1 Sensory Memory and Collective Experience: The Jazz Rehearsal in *Memoria*

The jazz rehearsal scene in *Memoria* embodies the film's approach to memory as sensory rather than narrative (01:00:28–01:03:43). For the first half of this sequence, the camera captures only Jessica's face and reactions, keeping the band offscreen. The audience shares

Jessica's perspective and must engage their sensory memory to complete the cinematic space. This deliberate withholding creates what Marks describes as a "haptic" viewing experience, where audiences draw on their own memories to fill perceptual gaps (148). The music remains invisible, as in Chion's concept of "acousmatic sound", to leave the space for the audience to imagine (71). Jessica and other listeners stand motionless to focus on the performance and this is a long scene without any dialogue and minimal camera position changes. When the shot of the quartet finally appears, the sequence has established a form of co-presence beyond language, a shared moment of sensory attention for both Jessica and the audience, demonstrating how music can create collective experiences that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries even beyond the screen (see fig. 3). It highlights music's capacity to communicate across cultural boundaries, creating what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino terms "participatory consciousness", a shared state of attention that connects individuals through sensory experience (16). Jessica and other auditors remain motionless without narrative; a state of collective attentiveness permeates the space and forms an atmosphere. A transpersonal bodily charge that circulates through the room prior and beyond linguistic comprehension, binding disparate bodies into momentary community of feeling through a common act of listening.



Fig. 3.

“Why jazz?” is a central question to understand the transnational as a transcultural art form in this scene. As musicologist Ingrid Monson notes, jazz itself embodies “diasporic aesthetics”, the artistic practices that emerge from cultural displacement and hybridisation (73). Born from the African American experience but incorporating elements from European harmonic traditions, Caribbean rhythms, and various global influences, in the transnational production context of *Memoria*, this already hybrid form accents the film’s transculturation. Although the jazz sequence is not narratively relevant to the film’s story, it demonstrates how sensory experience can create immediate connections across cultural boundaries, offering an alternative model of transnational communication that bypasses linguistic difficulties (akin to Jessica’s struggle to verbally describe her mysterious sound). This scene unites the discussion on cross-cultural communication with the sensory dimensions of displacement.

2.2 Memory as Performative Transformation: The Crystal-Image in *Irma Vep*

In this section, I bring up the hotel prowling sequence of Maggie again with the discussion of self-reflexivity. This scene creates what Deleuze terms a “crystal-image”, a moment where actual and virtual, character and performer, become indistinguishable and reflect on each other (68). The performer, Maggie, and the character, Irma, fold into one another. The complicated film-within-a-film structure also mirrors Assayas’s actual position making a French film influenced by Hong Kong cinema within a transnational production context. As Maggie/Irma crawls across ceilings and steals jewellery, the boundaries between Hong Kong action cinema and French art film dissolve. This sequence functions simultaneously as sensory disruption and as a materialisation of cultural memory in crisis. The degraded video aesthetics suggest the impossibility of faithful translation between cultural forms, while paradoxically creating a space where different cinematic traditions can interact. Unlike conventional representations of cultural memory as narrative flashback, this sequence presents memory as embodied performance that transforms through cultural translation.

What distinguishes this approach to memory from conventional cinematic representations is its emphasis on transformation rather than preservation. The sequence does not simply recall cinema history but actively reimagines it through what performance scholar Joseph Roach defines as “kinesthetic imagination” (26). Maggie’s movements in the

hotel space, her crawling, sliding, and stealing, embody this concept as her physical actions preserve cultural knowledge of both silent film thievery and Hong Kong action choreography through bodily practice. These physical engagements function as a temporal springboard to connect historical periods, cultural traditions, and cinematic forms. According to Thomas Elsaesser, her body becomes a “performative archive”, simultaneously preserving and transforming cultural memory through embodied action (189). Assayas’s deliberate technical transition to degraded video highlights not transparent communication between cultural memories, but rather the productive tensions that emerge to create new cinematic forms precisely through the friction of attempted translation.

3. Transnational Production: Producing the Body

3.1 Transnational Stars

There is a 25-year gap between *Memoria* and *Irma Vep* and their connection is not immediately apparent. But both are further enriched by the transnational star personas of their lead actresses, whose bodies become sites where sensory disorientation is produced at the level of the star itself. As Russell Meeuf states, “A star becomes ‘transnational’ ... because they provide resonant narratives about the challenges of personal and national identity as the world has become more globally interconnected” (197). Tilda Swinton and Maggie Cheung exemplify this concept, functioning as different cultures meet and negotiate within contexts of unequal social power (Meeuf and Raphael 3). Cheung’s position in *Irma Vep* is particularly complex as she plays ‘herself’, a Hong Kong actress working in French cinema both in film and the film-in-a-film; this creates a meta-commentary on transnational stardom itself. Building on the ‘performative archive’ I mentioned above, her body becomes what Sabrina Qiong Yu might recognise as a “transnational star text”, physically embodying the cultural translation central to the film’s themes (142). The restrictive nature of Maggie’s vampire catsuit presents an important element of costume design in *Irma Vep*. Maggie says of the latex costume, “it’s too tight” and her costume designer in the film even comments this looks like a sexual costume (*Irma Vep*, 00:10:17–00:13:43). Maggie’s visible discomfort while wearing it creates a contrast to her natural agility in the opening archive footage the director Vidal watches: Maggie performs martial arts sequences in traditional wuxia attire, moving effortlessly across

rooftops and through complex fight choreography. The vampire costume, with its Western cultural implications of transgression, physically constrains her body that was relatively free in the Hong Kong cinemas. This costume transformation is also a forum of sensory disorientation and makes her move between cinematic cultures. It subtly comments on how Western representations of the vampire mythos often emphasise the monstrous yet seductive otherness of its figures, reimagining and restricting Maggie's physical expression as an Asian actress through this cultural framework.

Tilda Swinton similarly carries her transnational star persona into *Memoria*, where her status as a British actress in Colombia mirrors Jessica's outsider perspective. Her established identity as what Belén Vidal terms an "alternative star" – one who challenges conventional gender norms and crosses between mainstream and art cinema – enhances this portrayal (145). In the film, Jessica is also a character who crosses between cultures, highlighting her liminal position. The scene where Jessica visits an anthropologist (Jeanne Balibar) demonstrates this intercultural negotiation (*Memoria*, 00:40:25–00:42:30). As they examine ancient human remains, their conversation moves fluidly between Spanish and English. The skeletons function as a symbol of human commonality: the ultimate destination for all mankind is death. This creates viewing experiences that disrupt conventional temporality to forge new relationships with historical time. The archaeological motif serves as a metaphor for transnational filmmaking itself—the careful excavation of cultural meanings across temporal and spatial boundaries.

Both actresses represent what Meeuf describes as "performers through which audiences can imagine forms of borderless identity ... capable of managing the tensions between the global and the local, between national identity and cosmopolitan culture" (197). Their established transnational identities allow both films to explore memory not only as a personal phenomenon but as a site where cultural translation acts as negotiation and embodiment.

3.2 Transnational Production as Aesthetic Determinant

The sensory and mnemonic disorientation in these films cannot be separated from their transnational production contexts – the material conditions under which these transnational bodies are cast, funded and distributed. Their transnational production functions as a further

register of sensory disorientation, one that determines how the displaced body appears on screen before any formal strategy is applied. Moving beyond textual analysis, this section examines how these films' production histories shape their aesthetic strategies through Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim's "critical transnationalism" (9). This approach examines how transnational filmmaking practices themselves generate specific forms of cultural negotiation that manifest in both content and form.

Memoria exemplifies this complexity through its unique production history. As Apichatpong's first feature filmed outside Thailand, the project emerges from what Chris Berry describes as "cross-regional filmmaking practices" that challenge traditional national cinema frameworks (127). The collaboration between a Thai director, British actress, Colombian settings and crew, and multinational funding from seven countries creates a truly transnational structure ("Technical Details"). This transnational structure resonates with the film's thematic concerns with cultural translation and displacement. The film's central "Bang—" draws directly on the director's own experience. Apichatpong has described suffering from what he learned was Exploding Head Syndrome, a sound "not from elsewhere but within my head" and the bang sound disappeared while he was making *Memoria* in Bogotá and Pijao (Weerasethakul "To Memoria"). The personal sonic experience carries over into Jessica's search in the film, emerging not only as a thematic choice but as a direct manifestation of what Marks calls "the experience of living between cultures" that characterised its production (24). The films' distribution strategies further reflect their transnational nature.

Memoria's unusual "traveling single-screen release" in the United States by NEON reflects what Toby Miller and colleagues identify as the alternative circulation patterns that characterise certain forms of transnational cinema (43). This approach positions the film against conventional models of global distribution. *Memoria's* unconventional release strategy creates a sense of resistant temporality, the distribution practices that challenge accelerated consumption patterns characteristic of digital platforms. By insisting on theatrical exclusivity and releasing slowly, *Memoria* extends its exploration of alternative temporalities into the distribution itself. This release strategy also extends the film's sensory logic to the viewer's own body: the traveling single-screen release compels audiences to be physically present in a darkened theatre, drawn into the disorienting soundscape with full attention.

The displaced body of Jessica on screen is mirrored by the attentive body in the cinema, encountering the film through sensation.

Irma Vep presents a parallel case through its hybridised production context, emerging at a vital moment when French cinema was re-locating its relationship with global film industries. Assayas's production creates tension between French cinematic tradition and Hong Kong action cinema, reflecting what Mette Hjort terms "affinitive transnationalism", which refers to collaborations motivated by shared aesthetic sensibilities across cultural boundaries (15). The film is produced by Canal+ television and funds with independent film production, which also reflects the industry tensions the film itself critiques. As French cinema faced pressure to compete with Hollywood in the 1990s, Assayas's artistic choices of the contrast between 35mm film and degraded video I mentioned above and the unique film-within-a-film narrative structure of *Irma Vep* is a metaphor of the industrial anxiety about cinema's changing media landscape with the uncertain position of French cinema in global markets, which is a state between artistic tradition and commercial pressure, national specificity and international appeal.

Unlike frameworks that view such productions as simply economic arrangements, I argue that the funding structures in both films are legible in their formal choices. The production record documents Western financing in each case, and I infer a subtler resonance with the films' forms: Jessica's position as a Western expat in Colombia mirrors actual power dynamics in global film production, where Western money often enables non-Western artistic expression while simultaneously shaping it. Similarly, Maggie Cheung's character in *Irma Vep* comments on what film scholar Olivia Khoo identifies as "the fetishization of Asian cinema within European festival circuits" by embodying the complex position of Asian cinema within European art film circles, simultaneously exoticised and celebrated (85).

4. Conclusion: Towards a Sensory Transnationalism

This essay explores how *Memoria* and *Irma Vep* employ innovative sensory strategies, self-reflexive techniques, and transnational production elements to materialise cultural displacement. By developing the concept of 'sensory disorientation', I demonstrate how these films transform the abstract experience of cultural displacement into tangible,

embodied experiences that engage viewers at a sensory level beyond linguistic or narrative representation. Through sensory memory, recollection itself becomes a bodily experience: the body becomes a perceptible carrier of cultural difference, registering and re-experiencing it through sound and texture. The transnational production contexts of these films further portray how industrial and economic structures correspond to the aesthetic forms. Rather than simply representing displacement, these films embody it through their very creation, with funding structures, distribution strategies, and star personae all contributing to their multisensory approaches. Tilda Swinton and Maggie Cheung present the embodiment of cultural negotiation, their performances reflecting broader power dynamics within global cinema networks. In tracing the three registers – perception, memory, and production – this essay relocates the analysis of transnational cinema from what films represent about displacement to how they organise displacement to be sensed, with the disoriented body of both character and viewer as the site where cultural untranslatability is perceived, remembered, and produced.

As global migration continues to reshape cultural landscapes in this century, these films offer valuable insights into how cinema can articulate the embodied experience of displacement beyond narrative representation. By prioritising sensation over exposition, they invite viewers to physically experience the disorientation of cultural translation rather than merely observe it. The ‘sensory disorientation’ strategies in these films ultimately suggest that understanding cultural displacement requires not just intellectual comprehension but bodily engagement and a recognition that transnational experience operates at the level of sense as much as sense-making. Since the advent of sound cinema, films have often relied heavily on dialogue to shape narrative and convey meaning. However, transnational works like *Memoria* and *Irma Vep* remind us that embodied perception can liberate us from this dependence on linguistic communication. Through their emphasis on sensory transnationalism, these films transform the cinema into a contemplative space where cultural translation occurs not through verbal explanation but through bodily engagement; they recover cinema’s capacity to function as a meditative space. In doing so, they transform the limitations of cultural untranslatability into creative possibilities, creating new aesthetic forms with cinematic scope through the productive tensions of attempted translation.

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