

# TOO WIDE FOR WORDS



THE ART OF **LONGING** IN  
EAST ASIAN CINEMA



THIS ZINE  
IS ABOUT  
THE SPACES  
BETWEEN  
WORDS,  
GESTURES,  
AND ALL THAT  
STAYS UNSAID.

LONGING FOR    ESCAPE  
                  UNDERSTANDING  
                  WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN  
                  DIRECTION

# INTRODUCTION

## LONGING IS THE THREAD.

A whisper into a hollow tree. An empty green field. A silent car ride stretching across time and terrain. A motionless body on a grainy CCTV screen.

These moments—quiet, restrained, and unresolved—are not the emotional peaks of their stories, but the spaces around them. They convey the language of longing.

This zine explores longing in contemporary Asian cinema—not simply as unrequited love, as it's often understood, but as something more expansive. Longing for escape, for understanding, for direction, for what cannot be named. Across these films, characters ache not through outbursts,

but through stillness, repetition, detachment, and delay. **What remains unsaid becomes louder than any confession.**

It is important to consider why longing is such a prominent theme in Asian cinema, and that can be attributed to many Asian cultures, where emotions are often expressed through silence, subtext, or gesture rather than direct action or dialogue. In these contexts, restraint is **not repression but a kind of emotional literacy**, where what remains unsaid often carries more weight than what is spoken aloud.

Asian films often reflect this sensibility, allowing longing to take center stage—not as a lack, but as a mode

of expression in itself. The result is a cinematic language where glances, pauses, and empty spaces tell stories more powerful than words.

This is a zine that explores four films about the things that we reach for, and what always slips just beyond our grasp.





# ALL ABOUT LILY CHOU-CHOU

*All About Lily Chou-Chou*, directed by Shuji Iwai, is an experimental nonlinear film which follows several Japanese youth who all revere an enigmatic singer named Lily Chou-Chou. For these middle school students who face bullying, alienation, and emotional numbness, Lily's ethereal music becomes the only thing that offers meaning, escape, or hope.

At the center of the film is Yuichi, a quiet, passive boy who becomes the target of relentless bullying. As his reality becomes increasingly unbearable, he turns to an online fan forum dedicated to Lily, a space where he can disappear into anonymity and devotion. The forum becomes his sanctuary, a digital refuge from the violence and humiliation of his daily life.

The film opens with a dreamlike scene: Yuichi, alone in a vast green rice field, listening to Lily's music on a Discman. The music is haunting and wordless.

The open landscape, empty but for Yuichi, isn't just aesthetic, it serves as a symbol for **the only space where he feels free**. Lily's music becomes a form of salvation, a safe haven that shields him from the cruelty of his waking world.

In *All About Lily Chou-Chou*, longing for escape is the force holding everything together. The characters want out of pain, out of school, out of their bodies, out of the roles forced on them. In Lily Chou-Chou, they find a sliver of that escape: ephemeral, digital, imagined—a kind of tragic collective hallucination, **a shared dream of a softer, kinder world**.



# IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

LONGING FOR  
WHAT COULD  
HAVE BEEN

You can't talk about films about longing without mentioning Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*. For many, it stands as one of the most powerful and iconic representations of that feeling in cinema.

The film is about two neighbors, Chow Mo-wan and Su Li-Zhen, who discover their spouses are having an affair. In the aftermath of this quiet betrayal, they grow close, developing a tender, unspoken bond. But they make a pact to not be like their spouses. This decision creates a love story defined not by fulfillment, but by restraint. They love each other deeply—but do nothing about it.

Unlike traditional romantic cinema, there is no confession or consummation of their relationship, rather, every small gesture, passing glance, and deliberate silence, is filled with a passion that both characters know they must never act upon. In *In the Mood for Love*, inaction becomes the most powerful form of interaction.





# IN THE OR LOVE

You can't talk about films about longing without mentioning Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*. For many, it stands as one of the most powerful and iconic representations of that feeling in cinema.

In the film, two neighbors, Chow Moan-ling and Mr. Chow, who discover they have been having an affair, slowly grow closer, developing a tender, unspoken bond. But they make a pact not to be like their spouses. The film creates a love story defined by restraint, but by restraint, they love each other deeply—but do not act on it. The film is a beautiful study of emotional restraint and the power of silence. It's a love story that is not about passion, but about the quiet, unspoken bond that grows between two people who are not supposed to be together. The film is a beautiful study of emotional restraint and the power of silence. It's a love story that is not about passion, but about the quiet, unspoken bond that grows between two people who are not supposed to be together.

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And for that, they were  
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## ARRIVE MY CAR

Chow's character is a man who is in love with a woman who is in love with another man. This is a story of love and longing, and it is a story that is told in a very subtle and beautiful way.

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In one of the most famous scenes from the film, Chow whispers a secret into the hollow of a tree and seals it with mud as a final act of silent longing—sharing what he will never say aloud, and literally burying a love that will never be allowed to live.

In *In the Mood for Love*, longing is not a side effect of unfulfilled love, it *is* the love. It's a story where nothing happens, and yet everything does. It's about what people don't say, what they don't do, and how those silences come to define them. They were in love. They were careful. And for that, they were heartbroken, and that is the tragedy.



# DRIVE MY CAR

## LONGING FOR UNDERSTANDING

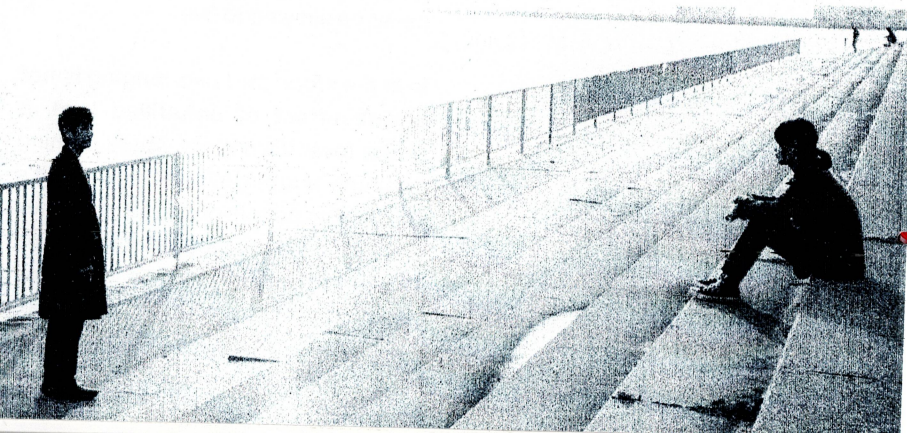
Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car*, adapted loosely from Haruki Murakami's short story, follows theater actor and director Yūsuke Kafuku as he reckons with the death of his wife and the secrets she left behind. When he travels to Hiroshima to direct a multilingual production of *Uncle Vanya*, he is assigned a reserved young driver, Misaki, and the two begin to share long, silent drives through the city while they each carry their own hidden wounds.

At its heart, the film is about **people longing to be understood**. Grief and guilt are felt everywhere, but are rarely expressed outwardly. Rather, these emotions are translated through performance, ritual, and pause. Characters hold space for one another without forcing closeness.

Director Ryusuke Hamaguchi has spoken about the influence of the Japanese concept of *ma* (間): the "in-between" or the space between things. In cinema, *ma* can be a literal pause, a breath, a silence. But it also reflects emotional space: the distance between people, and the unspoken tension that lives there. In *Drive My Car*, *ma* is where most of the meaning resides. It's in the long drives with no dialogue, in the quiet moments before a line is spoken, in the pauses that stretch longer than expected.

The film's breakthrough comes not through confession, but through shared stillness. At its climax, Yūsuke and Misaki reach her hometown, an emotional and physical destination, and what passes between them is not catharsis, but recognition. Not a solution, but a mutual understanding that has been built slowly and with tender care.

In *Drive My Car*, longing is quiet, delayed. Like *ma*, it serves as a reminder that sometimes the space that exists between words holds more truth than the words themselves.





# MILLENNIUM MAMBO

## LONGING FOR DIRECTION

In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Millennium Mambo*, the turn of the century isn't marked by change, it's marked by stasis. The film follows Vicky, a young woman living in Taipei, caught between two men, numbed by nightlife, and is feeling lost in her own life. Narrated from the future, Vicky reflects on this time with a vague and ghostlike detachment, as if recounting a dream she barely remembers.

What *Millennium Mambo* captures so precisely is a very specific kind of longing, **a longing for a life that feels like it's moving somewhere.** Vicky can't move, not forward, not inward, not away. She exists in a kind of suspended animation, where every night is the same and every morning is just a delay.

In one haunting scene after a night of partying, the film abruptly cuts to grainy CCTV footage of an apartment hallway. Vicky lies face-down on the floor, completely still. For a long moment, nothing happens. Then, slowly, painfully, she begins to drag herself toward a door, struggling to unlock it. The stillness of the frame, the absence of music, the sheer helplessness of the moment, it's chilling. No outburst, no dramatics—just a quiet, crushing descent that somehow feels lower than anything that came before.

The narration delivered by Vicky's older self adds another layer of distance. She speaks from ten years in the future, remembering these lost years with a soft, matter-of-fact tone. There's no anger in her voice, only melancholy. It's as if she's looking back at a version of herself she no longer fully understands. A girl floating through her twenties, waiting for a life that never starts.



# CONCLUSION

"IT IS A RESTLESS MOMENT.  
SHE HAS KEPT HER HEAD  
LOWERED, TO GIVE HIM A  
CHANCE TO COME CLOSER.  
BUT HE COULD NOT, FOR  
LACK OF COURAGE. SHE  
TURNS AND WALKS AWAY."



WHAT DO **YOU** LONG FOR?

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