

Blue Thursday @ the Casino: Suzan Noesen's *Book of Hours*

*Livre d'heures* : controlling time – Tracy Heindrichs (script)

Hello, I'm going to address Suzan's film from a textual point of view, meaning that I'm going to analyse the images, narrative and characters to discuss how the director presents time.

So, at first, it seems like *Book of hours* revolves around the relationship between two atypical flatmates – Bomi and Suzan – and Suzan's reluctance to follow Bomi's traditions. But I would argue that this film also contemplates the idea of time. Time is interpreted in different ways here: first, time seems to be a generational thing, with Bomi representing the traditional ways of embracing time and living alongside nature, and Suzan the millennial approach to time as a controllable personal resource. (This is enabled through evolving technologies and globalization etc). However, if Bomi and Suzan are considered to be the same person, a theory I will explore at the end of my talk, I would argue that the film "simply" represents one person's evolving understanding of time throughout their lifetime.

After a first viewing, I figured that *Book of hours* presents time as a generational matter. Throughout the film, the young adult character Suzan captures and structures the world around her through her art. Suzan observes, then translates it into structured, geometrical sketches and paintings. The paintings and patterns she creates capture a moment in time in a physical, defined form, thereby hindering that moment from passing on. When painted out, that moment becomes Suzan's. Indeed, Suzan sees time as something she owns, as can be understood by her behaviour. For instance, Suzan says she doesn't *have* time for Bomi's traditions, and seems to live her life ignoring the changing seasons and the accompanying Catholic traditions. Unlike her grandmother, she does not let time absorb her. Instead, she tries to make time her own by immortalising fleeting moments in her paintings.

In a similar fashion, the director Suzan – not to be confused with the character Suzan – also tries to control time. In a certain way, she already does so by choosing which parts of Suzan and Bomi's life to capture, and how to make the events unfold. More noticeably though, she does so by structuring the audience's viewing experience. Indeed, for the twenty something minutes of the film, the audience is told what to look for. As you may know, this film is inspired by Roman Catholic books of hours, and so, just like a book of hours tells believers what to pray for at a given time of the day, Suzan tells the viewer what to look out for at different times of the film: motifs, *l'office du temps*, etc.. The intertitles of the film tell the audience how to use their time by indicating the themes to observe. So, like the character Suzan, the *director* Suzan tries to capture a moment in time, albeit through the medium of film rather than paintings.

In contrast to this perhaps modern view of time, the grandmother, Bomi, lives in harmony with time and nature. As a farmer's wife, she is used to witnessing the passing of

time and adapting to it all year long. She lets time happen instead of grabbing it. Although traditions and nature help her structure the flow of time, Bomi accepts that, as a part of nature, she cannot escape the effect of time. Bomi blends with nature visually too. This is seen in the moments where she handles plants for instance. At one point, the camera focuses on her wrinkly, veiny hands plucking at green plants. The patterns of her skin blend with the patterns of the plants. In conclusion, it seems at first that *Book of Hours* is about two very different generations' approaches to time: the contemporary approach sees time as a resource that can be controlled, whereas the other sees time as a cycle that has to be respected and followed religiously.

However, even if it may appear that Suzan and Bomi belong to two different generations that define time through their own personal context, I would argue that *Book of hours* doesn't just present time as a generational affair, but also as a phenomenon that flows invariably through all of nature, humankind included. Indeed, after seeing the 'points of view' art expo Suzan presented at the Luxembourg City Film Festival, I came to the conclusion that Bomi and Suzan are one and the same person at different points of one single lifetime.

Though the director Suzan suggested during a Q&A that Bomi and Suzan are very different characters, there are several elements that lead me to believe that they are just one person. On a visual level, the frequent mirroring and parallelisms support my argument. First, the protagonists are often sitting opposite each other, facing each other, observing through an interdimensional mirror their future and past self. The frequent repetitions in frame composition accentuate the mirroring: often, when there is a shot of Bomi doing something, the next shot will capture Suzan in a similar action. For instance, when the camera focuses on Bomi's shaking hands slowly folding kitchen towels, it is followed by a shot of Suzan's steady hands aggressively and surely sketching a drawing into her notebook. Though they appear different, they essentially follow similar patterns. Funnily, their personalities too, though seemingly polar opposites, are equally stubborn.

Finally, the characters appear to be the one and the same person seeing life from different points of view in time as the same pattern of thoughts plagues them. In the film, both women have one mission: delivering flowers to a given location. Throughout *Book of hours*, a young girl in old-fashioned clothes is seen walking her bike and a flower pot across fields to an unknown destination. The lack of a linear structure in the presentation of these scenes, as well as the bleached, vintage look of the shots, suggest that this is one of Bomi's memories. Through the whispers that gradually dominate the soundscape of these shots, we find out that the girl means to deliver flowers somewhere by bike, just like Suzan means to bring flowers to her grandfather's grave by car. The memories convey a sense of confusion and unrest, despite the timelessness of the scene.

Yet, though they appear to be Bomi's memories, the fact that the whispers are voiced by Suzan blurs the line; the viewer can't be sure that these are Bomi's memories. They could also be Suzan's. Since we don't know Bomi's real name, she could very well just be Suzan at another moment in her life, before she became a 'Bomi' (Luxembourgish for 'grandmother'). If Bomi and Suzan are indeed one person at different points in time, it

would explain for one Suzan's reluctance to transport the flowers – as her younger self seems to have some negative memory associated with the delivery of flowers – and Bomi's complex feelings of empathy and contradictorily, impatience. So, the characters' behaviours, personalities, physical positions in the frame, as well as the narrative, suggest that *Book of hours* isn't about the cohabitation of two women, but rather about one woman observing the phenomenon of time from different POVs in her lifetime.

In conclusion, there are many patterns in this film. Visual patterns and narrative patterns attempt to control time and its passing, while simultaneously showing they are unable to do so. The director Suzan and the main character Suzan present time as a resource they own since birth, whereas Bomi acts as if time was an eternal fixture that flows through them season after season. As can be seen, Bomi and Suzan's concepts of time are constantly compared to each other. These contrasting approaches could be ascribed to a generational understanding of life. Or, as the parallels and similarities between Suzan and Bomi suggest, instead of being generational, the understanding of time simply changes the more one experiences the phenomenon. As seasons pass and nature and the human body follow their inescapable cycle, one starts to understand that time cannot be captured in itself. It can be conserved, through paintings or films, at most, but its essence simply not be owned.

Ultimately, as the film and Bomi demonstrate, time can only ever be embraced.