

身體電影：蔡明亮電影中的身體影像

Corporeal Movies: The Cinematic Body in Tsai Ming-Liang's Films

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## 摘要

本文主要以「電影影像」作為立足點，不只討論身體，更重視電影框架下的身體影像，以期重新檢視蔡明亮的電影。第一部分重申電影影像「在與不在」的特點，如同鬼魅般的存在與外在世界有著雙重的關係。蔡明亮電影中的身體影像如同極簡主義作品屏除多餘附加意義，讓身體不被角色或情節矇蔽，讓日常身體的慾望、習慣與活動形成一種身體景觀(cinematic spectacle)。這種日常身體景觀能與觀眾對自身身體的經驗連結，並且提醒觀眾身體的存在。第二部分以「特寫」理論檢視蔡明亮電影中的身體影像，以巴拉茲(Bela Balázs)對「臉部特寫」的定義並非空間而是情感向度為起點，將靜默痛苦的身體當成「臉部表情特寫」，提出蔡明亮電影裡身體影像中的靜默以及疲憊姿態其實是簡化直接的意義表達，以期望觀者以凝視特寫般的專注來檢視這些身體。如張小虹所說，將情感「表」在「面」上，將不可見翻轉為可見。因此，「身體特寫」不只是一個靜止的影像，而是有內在的情感漫溢在影像上，而蔡明亮電影中的靜默以及疲憊才能存有莫名的強度。身體的姿態與細節流露出一種生活狀態，而這狀態就是蔡明亮電影的故事情節。身體姿態即是電影景觀。第三部分將以早期「歌舞雜耍表演」美學(vaudeville aesthetic)來檢視蔡明亮歌舞片段中的身體影像。在這歌舞片段中，身體影像作為主要觀視愉悅來源。但蔡明亮的歌舞片段如同單一個體嵌入電影敘述裡，截然不同的觀影經驗將觀眾拉回一個有距離的位置。並且，歌舞片段中誇張的服裝與佈景實為蔡明亮蓄意與傳統歌舞片作區隔，嘲弄嚴肅性與一般社會價值觀。因此，蔡明亮的歌舞片段帶有坎普(camp)的顛覆性。

關鍵字：蔡明亮、身體影像、肉體性、特寫、情感強度、歌舞雜耍美學、坎普、華語電影、台灣電影

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## ABSTRACT

My thesis studies the cinematic body in Tsai Ming-Liang's films. Tsai marks a significant turn in Taiwan cinema history, shifting from historical nostalgia to self-reflection. Criticisms of Tsai's films often emphasize their symbolic meanings or the social references to the urban Taipei. Tsai's concerns, however, are not only for the human body as a suffering receptacle in the modern world, but also the peculiarity of the film medium. In light of this, the "cinematic" body, instead of the body image, repositions the relation of the film medium and the spectators, where the suffering receptacle refers also to the corporeal spectators.

My thesis attempts to establish Tsai's cinematic body as a spectacle of corporeality. Firstly, applying minimalist aesthetics, Tsai effaces redundant indicative references from the cinematic body so to accentuate the presence of the body itself and constitutes an exhibition of the bodily habits, gestures, and actions. The exhibition of the biological needs contains a collectivity that communicates with the spectators' everyday experience. The spectacle of corporeality, therefore, forces the spectators to stare as if confronting a close-up. This close-up is not, according to Bela Balázs, estimated by spatial distance but by emotional intensity that expels excessive performance and requires obvious nuances. Tsai's films, from this perspective, tell an alternative story through the silent and everyday body. And Tsai's musical numbers are usually ignored for its disruptive function in the narrative. Instead, they can be seen as a return back to "vaudeville aesthetic" in Henry Jenkins' phrase. Vaudeville aesthetic carries the features of the explosive visual pleasure and fragmented narrative structure. Through vaudeville aesthetic, Tsai frustrates the musical convention of naturalization that mixes the imagery and the real. The characteristic of failed seriousness in Tsai's musical numbers also holds camp sensibility that situates the spectators in a distanced position from the musical spectacle.

**Keywords:** Tsai Ming-Liang, Cinematic body, Corporeality, Close-up, Emotional intensity, Vaudeville aesthetic, Camp, Chinese cinema, Taiwan cinema

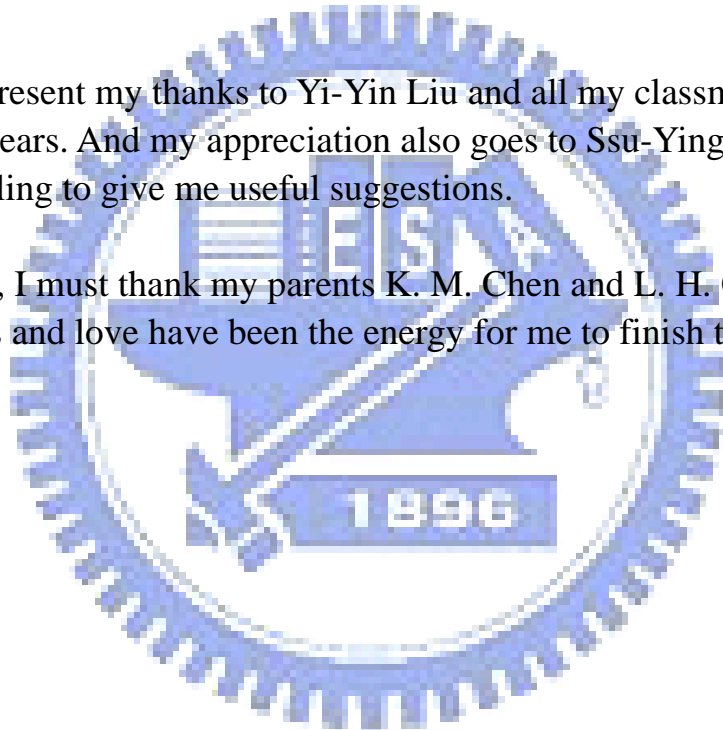
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## Chapter One: Introduction

Most film critics do not simply watch but “read” TSAI Ming-Liang (Cai Mingliang)’s films as literary texts.<sup>1</sup> They tend to concentrate on the referential world beyond the films and search for meanings in that “reality.” What they ignore or miss out is the fact that film itself is the object of study and film analysis should be carried out by taking the film as a medium.

Mostly without dialogue, Tsai’s films do not function as a mere narrative entity; rather, he pays more attention to the medium. Therefore, a more suitable way to analyze his films relies on a proper cinematic analysis rather than a literary interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Just like the well-quoted line from Jean-Luc Godard, “Not blood, red” (qtd. in Thomson 78). On screen, it is not the meaning of “blood” but the bright color of “red” that shocks the spectators. So we should not stop short at “what” the meaning is but should discuss “how” it works.

My thesis aims at analyzing the cinematic body in Tsai’s films through his employment of the film medium. In other words, this is not a study on the human body of flesh and bones, but on the body image of the cinematic. To begin with, the cinematic body is a projected image on the screen, but it, too, has a strange presence between two-dimensional and three-dimensional worlds. It is happening but it is not really there. In this light, we may say

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<sup>1</sup> Tsai Ming-Liang has been a widely-used translation by all critics and publications and I did not put his given name before his last name. I will follow Wade-Gilles transliteration system because people from Taiwan adopt this system. Following Wade-Gilles, I will give pinyin transliteration in a parenthesis. I will adopt the authorized translation, if there is one, such as I-Chu Chang or Kein Ket Lim.

<sup>2</sup> The term *literary* denotes the quality of literature. Steven Shaviro prefers the term *literal* for images that “does not correspond to any sort of presence” (26).

that a film does not happen on the screen but in the mind of the spectators. I, therefore, accentuates on the relationship between the cinematic body, the camera, and the spectators. In the process of watching Tsai's films, I want to ask: How does Tsai's cinematic body, devoid of words, communicate with the spectators? What is Tsai's unique methodology of storytelling?

Tsai's films mark an enormous shift in Taiwan film history. Different from the concern placed upon on family, society, and the nation in other directors, Tsai searches inwards within each individual. This may be related to the diasporic experiences of Tsai's, who was raised in Malaysia but has lived and made films in Taiwan for many years. In addition, the fast pace in urban life in Taipei may also be the reason why Tsai has turned to the inner world of people living there.

During his early years in Taiwan, Tsai engaged in various fields of activities, such as stage plays, scenario, and TV series, such as his early play *A Wardrobe in the Room*, a popular scenario *The Endless Love*, and a TV series *The Kid* that Tsai works with Kang-Sheng LEE (Kangsheng Li).<sup>3</sup> Later, he decided to devote himself to cinema. With his previous experiences, he understands that film medium has its own uniqueness compared with the other forms of performance arts and establishes his unique film style. He prefers new or inexperienced actors to the experienced ones, as the latter tend to overact in their movements, voice, and facial expressions. Likewise, he has also made documentaries, such as *My New*

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<sup>3</sup> Except noted otherwise, all translations of the Chinese texts into English as quoted in this thesis are mine.

*Friends* and *A Conversation with God*. It seems that he is more interested in the unsophisticated, natural presence of the characters, whether he is making a documentary or a feature films. It is also undeniable that Tsai's films are influenced by the theatre. Critics such as Ivy I-Chu CHANG (Aizhu Zhang) have already given a profound discussion. As my study does not attempt to repeat earlier investigations, I wish to analyze rather the invisible intensity of delivering a story in Tsai's films through the *cinematic spectacle of the body*.

There have been many research works on Tsai's films, in which critics suggest that his films represent the collapse of patriarchy in Chinese ethical value. Mei-Ling WU (Meilin Wu), for example, notes that Tsai's films represent the decline of "the rootedness of the Confucian family state" (80). Gina Marchetti expands this idea to the political opposition between Mainland/fatherland and Taiwan (118-20). Other critics accentuate the issue of homosexuality, for it impinges on the value of what a family should be. And still more critics believe that the urban isolation and lonesomeness in Tsai's films reveal a sense of loss in the capitalist society where carnal desire, that of homosexuality in particular, has been repressed (Chen-I HSU [Zhenyi Xu] 38). All these findings provide valuable contributions and carry their own conceptual weight. However, like what Tien-To LI (Tianduo Li) observes, Taiwan film critics are often dependent on "textual analysis" and ignore the relationship between films and spectators (10-11). That is, most critics tend to read films as literary works. They take the



cinematic image as a signifier that can directly refer to *the thing in itself* (das Ding an sich).<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, my study analyzes Tsai's films on the premise of the film medium. The *cinematic* body is not equal to any human body because it is built upon the characteristic specific to the film medium. And the cinematic body I want to discuss in this study is not anything metaphorical or psychological. It is not a body whose identity is wiped out by its character in the narrative. My main emphasis here is the *full* presence of the intensity inscribed in the cinematic body in Tsai's films. As Pin-Chia FENG (Pinjia Feng) points out, the body in Tsai's films demonstrates "a semioticization of the body" and "a somatization of story," in Peter Brook's phrases (102; qtd. in Peter Brook xii). The cinematic body becomes the primary source of meanings.

In the interview with Kien Ket LIM (Chienkuo Lin), Tsai mentions that silent films are better films because they are closer to the nature of the medium (15). The film medium consists of movements and other filmic elements that are meant to affect the spectators. By giving the spectators their due position in film studies, I focus on the interaction between the film medium and the spectators. Without words, the cinematic body is actually in the same situation with the spectators who are silent in the cinema. Only bodies, the cinematic one and those of the corporeal spectators', are left. This is how Tsai communicates with his spectators. He wants his spectators to watch, but not to read, his films.

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<sup>4</sup> *Thing in itself* is a concept favored by Immanuel Kant. H.M. Werkmeister writes that the thing in itself can be taken as "distinguished from objects of sensory experience (phenomena)" (304).

I draw attention to the cinematic intensity of the body in Tsai's films. But one thing to note is that it is not easy to categorize Tsai's films into one certain genre or to put them under examination according to any film convention. As a result, this thesis does not engage in any singular systematic theory but follows one major subject: Tsai's cinematic body. And therefore, my analytical approach to Tsai's films is also a "minimalist" one in that I deliberately avoid dealing with textual analysis and the historicity, without, however, ignoring their importance. Before examining Tsai's films from their historical perspective and developing into a more complicated theory, I believe it is necessary to take the term "cinematic" as the fundamental premise and theoretical frame of my thesis. As a result, although my theoretical approach is subtractive in kind, my analysis will not work in a void but strive to achieve unity. My discussion will be divided into three parts. In the first part, I examine the corporeality in Tsai's cinematic body through Pier Paolo Pasolini's concept of brute language and minimalist aesthetic style. In the second part, I suggest that Tsai employs the technique of close-up to generate the invisible intensity and display a bodily attitude of life. In the last part, my main focus lies in the cinematic body in Tsai's musical numbers that contain the vaudeville aesthetic and the subversive power of the camp taste.

### The Cinematic Body of Everydayness

In order to examine what film medium actually is, I divide my discussion into three

levels: physical reality, visual reality, and mental reality. Visual reality is a distorted physical reality and is formed as mental reality in the spectators' mind. In 1895, Lumière brothers introduced cinematography to the public. Film was to them a mere technological means of reproducing life. Afterwards Georges Méliès used cinematography to create a fantasy that brought the spectators to a never-never land, such as the moon. Yet *The Arrival of a Train at a Station* does literally bring the train to the screening room, though the spacecraft does not actually land on the moon. They are both visual reality. These events happen in a cinematic world where the relationship between things and human beings is different from the one in physical reality. And what makes the physical reality a cinematic one is due to filmic manipulation. The silent film *Berlin, Die Symphonie einer Grossstadt* by Walter Ruttmann makes a good example here. The fragments of the physical reality of Berlin combine together to form a joyful rhythm of the city in the spectators' mental world and the cinematic Berlin is not just Berlin anymore. It becomes a symphony.

Of course, we cannot deny that the physical world is the material for a virtual world, but we have to realize that virtual reality distorts and modifies it. Different from paintings, cinematography contains documentary values.<sup>5</sup> André Bazin celebrates the photographic image as the object itself and then cinema perfects the reproducing mechanism with the objectivity of time. It is this “disturbing presence of lives” that connects physical reality and

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<sup>5</sup> *Documentary values* means that the reproducing mechanism is automatic, without the interference of the human beings. What is in the photographic image is being recorded in reality (“The Virtues” 47).

mental reality together in an ambiguous relationship (“Ontology” 14). Mainstream Hollywood films could make a case here. The techniques of fast editing and special effects bring the spectators into a fantasy-like reality and indirectly influence the way of how the spectators perceive the world. This is the reason why films could be a medium of propaganda, for politics or for commercial world.<sup>6</sup>

The term *cinematic body*, therefore, recognizes the interference of the cinematic manipulation and distinguishes the cinematic body from the human body. Steven Saviro introduces the term *cinematic body* in his book of the same title *The Cinematic Body*. There he adheres to Deleuze’s theory that insists on the difference between the cinematic perception and the natural one. Shaviro criticizes semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory for their “fear for images” (14). He indicates that the fullness of images is reduced to a *lack*. Shaviro provides an excellent discussion on the characteristics of the film medium and an alternative perspective on film studies. And yet his understanding of the cinematic objects as “nonintentional and asubjective,” no matter a human body or a thing, is open to criticism (31).

Although he admits that the cinematic body belongs to the realm of visual reality, he denies the specificity of the human body on the screen. Hsiao-Hung CHANG (Xiaohong Zhang), therefore, puts her doubt on the Deleuzian theory because it is devoid of *humanism* and

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin in “Works of Art in the Age of Reproducibility” points out that the new technology of reproduction causes the disappearance of aura. That is, the exhibited value of an artwork is substituted for the cult value. The work of art in the age of reproducibility is, therefore, available by the mass, instead of upper-class appreciators. In the epilogue, Benjamin is concerned about that fascism takes advantage of this mass reproduction to *aestheticize politics*, as in glorification of war (269).

refuses to acknowledge the *emotion* that the cinematic body may contain (173).

In order to examine Tsai's cinematic body, Pier Paolo Pasolini's discussion on the *bruteness* of the cinematic language may provide an alternative perspective on the cinematic body. He acknowledges the difference between the cinematic language and the semiotic one. He believes that the physical reality is the raw material for the cinematic language, after much manipulation. As a result, the cinematic language still contains the bruteness, or the "disturbing presence of lives" in Bazin's phrase, but it is re-constructed as poetry ("The Virtues" 47). Pasolini's *the cinema of poetry* does not situate the relationship between the *cinematic* body and the *physical* reality at an extreme opposition (173). The *bruteness* collected from the physical reality is related to the everyday experience or a quotidian body. As Rey CHOW indicates, the bruteness or the banality of the everyday reveals a collective experience ("Sentimental Returns" 640). By the same token, the repetitive actions of drinking, urinating, and having sex in Tsai's films must also reveal a collectivity of corporeality that connects the cinematic body to the corporeal spectators.

The collectivity of corporeality denotes also another characteristic in Tsai's films: his minimalist style. He takes away everything that can be taken from the cinematic body, including social references, motivations, or sexual orientation. Unlike most mainstream Hollywood films, the cinematic body is the only main focus in Tsai's films. Whereas his strategy is a subtractive one, it also reveals more. The pornographic actress in *The Wayward*

*Cloud* can make a case here because it is when Tsai makes her unconscious that the heaviness of her body is keenly felt. In the meantime, the minimalist style helps to realize Tsai's concept of the *body*. A cinematic body should be presented as a whole, by which I mean that a cinematic body is not just a face, a sexual organ, or even a character. The cinematic body as a whole contains emotions indicative of suffering, confusion, and loneliness.

#### The Cinematic Body in a Close-up

Tsai's films always mark a significant transition from the 1980s to the 1990s in that they "no longer focus nostalgically on the history, memory, or stories of *bildung*" (Wen-Chi LIN 88). He erases unnecessary background information that would obscure the presence of the cinematic body. His narrative style does not rely upon the dialogue because words obstruct the implicit intensity that the cinematic body generates. In most narrative films, it is the characters that tell the story, not the cinematic body. That is, the presence of the body has been ignored. And the meaning of the dialogue sticks to its surface and is always stable. It is as if the characters *told* a story literally.

The central problem of Tsai's *corporeal movies* is that how does the cinematic body tells a story without words or plots. The theory on close-ups may provide a clue. But this close-up need not be one that is traditionally understood. Bela Balázs proposes a "new dimension" of the close-up (60). He argues that a close-up is not a matter of *space*. In his understanding, a

crucial moment could be a close-up even if it is in a full shot. He hence believes that a close-up may tell a story in which words are not necessary. In a close-up, an obvious nuance can reveal much information and emotion. In that case, a relatively simple story may contain an intensive drama underneath. As Hsiao-Hung Chang suggests, Balázs and a few other three film critics such as Jean Epstein, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin do not confine a close-up to a matter of distance. She recommends that a new dimension of a close-up should be estimated by *emotion* (144). If the emotion reaches a certain level, the cinematic experience is similar to a close-up. This is because the emotional intensity demands that the spectators focus on this scene, and this becomes a close-up. A close-up of *distance* intends to direct the spectators' attention to a certain scene. On the other hand, a close-up of *emotion* requires the spectators' attention on a certain situation. Tsai's cinematic body is a close-up from this perspective.

Chang then proposes that a close-up is a *process* of “e-motion, the motion of emotion” (144). That is to say, a close-up is not just an appearance or a stable surface. The externality (surface) and the internality (depth) do not stand in opposition, but in cooperation. Through a close-up, the spectators are forced to stare at the surface so that the internal emotion can reach them. This process cannot be estimated by the chronological time. A close-up has another temporality. It does not refer to a certain historical moment. It is engaged, rather, with the *here and now* or a *situation* of life. As Jean Epstein points out, within a close-up, “There have

never been stories. There are only situations...” (“The Senses I (b)” 242). In that case, a close-up of emotion does not just carry explicit information for *the narrative development*. It has its own internal narrative system that Bálázs has called “the hidden subtle adventures of the soul” (84).

Tsai’s cinematic body contains the process of “e-motion” because of Tsai’s long takes. As we can observe, the cinematic body does not carry explicit information very much. Most of the time, the cinematic body repeats only the daily routines. But Tsai gives these ordinary movements some time to let their inner intensity *sur-face*. Therefore, Tsai’s films are a psychological communication with the spectators. The cinematic body and the spectators are both in a state of silent interaction. At some level, we may say that the cinematic experience in Tsai’s films is that of a communication of the bodies. Balázs also writes, “a close-up provides an entire scene” (65). That is, a close-up constitutes a cinematic spectacle. And Tsai’s close-up of the cinematic body is a cinematic spectacle of the corporeal body with some inner emotion.

A question arises is what this cinematic spectacle of the corporeal body tells in Tsai’s films. To begin with, the cinematic body in a close-up of emotion is engaged with the temporality of here and now, as well as the everydayness. And a close-up often banishes words but celebrates the presence of the body. Another issue that should be brought up here, then, is what the cinematic body in a close-up imparts. Deleuze has once applied this idea of Cassavetes’ s, “...the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to result



is the gest, that is, a ‘spectacle,’ a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots” (192). Namely, Deleuze regards that the cinematic body and its gestures, instead of characters, can be a spectacle that reveals the bodily attitudes. In light of this, Tsai’s cinematic body in a close-up embodies its bodily attitudes and *narrates* a spectacle of attitudes for the everyday life, for desire, and for the world.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Camp Taste: The Vaudeville body

Musical numbers in Tsai’s films are usually neglected by film critics, as the aesthetic style is totally inconsistent with the central narrative. And even though some critics deal with this topic, they tend to believe that the musical scene is a site where the actors and actresses could escape from the alienated situation of the central narrative. Song-Yong SING [Songrong Sun], for instance, regards that the body in the musical numbers reveals a sense of nostalgia. He says that the characters are “searching for their identity” and the musical numbers with songs of 1950s or 1960s provide a space for the characters and the spectators to locate their identity (64-65). Admittedly, these numbers look back on the past and imply that this musical world is a utopia. But little attention has been given to the unconventional elements of the *musical* numbers, including their narrative relevance and the lip-synching to the oldies.

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<sup>7</sup> There is another interesting linkage between Deleuzian concept of “attitudes of the body” and Tsai’s *What Time Is It There?* In discussing the “cinema of attitudes and postures,” Deleuze mentions that the French New Wave provides an example and “the model actor would be Jean-Pierre Léaud” (193). In *What Time Is It There?*, not only Hsiao Kang watches precisely the film *400 Blows*, whose lead role is played by Jean-Pierre Léaud.

Chia-Yu CHANG (Jiayu Zhang) in her thesis indicates that the conventional musical genre aesthetics tries to make a harmonious cooperation between the musical numbers and the central narrative. She writes, “It is exactly the blur of the real and imagery that makes a musical film so appealing to the audiences” (2). To insert a singing and dancing sequence in the central narrative is to normalize or naturalize it. Chang, then, points out that the embodiment of the naturalization is “the flow,” by which she means the performers flows smoothly into the dancing and singing scene (8). The musical sequence would not suddenly break into the narrative so to alarm the spectators. Instead, in order to be fully naturalized, the musical numbers will work their best to serve the central narrative.

In Chang’s observation, the differences between the classical Hollywood films and Tsai’s musical numbers are very obvious. Tsai’s musical numbers does not *flow* into the state of narrative imagination, but feel more likely to have been roughly inserted into the central narrative. The musical numbers always take place in a location different from that of the previous scene. The story in the central narrative and the numbers form a loose relation.<sup>8</sup>

Apparently, Tsai does not try to naturalize the musical numbers but intends to isolate the musical units and make them inconsistent with the rest.

To explain this inconsistency, vaudeville aesthetic may provide a useful point of

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<sup>8</sup> The central narrative and the musical numbers are loosely connected by the lyrics that imply the inner emotion of the characters. But those lyrics do not support the development of the plot and cannot be taken as the dialogue spoken directly from the characters, either. Instead of taking them as part of the narrative, I would rather put my emphasis on the lyrics as part of the musical performance than on the interpretation of the textual meanings.

departure. Vaudeville was one of the popular theatrical shows before the birth of the cinematography. In order to appeal to as many audiences as possible, vaudeville consisted of various shows that were loosely related. The only aim of vaudeville show was to attract the audiences' immediate attention and make them stay and pay. After the cinematography was born, the film industry tried to integrate the vaudeville style into musical films and comedies. That is what Henry Jenkins has called, "vaudeville aesthetics." The film structure at that time presented a sense of inconsistency. Those vaudeville shows were stuffed into the film structure and loosely connected with the main narrative line. Tsai's musical numbers, similar to vaudeville shows, are also coarsely inserted into the films. Their relationship with the main narrative line is also loosely connected. Most importantly, the cinematic body is the central attraction of Tsai's musical numbers. The emotion does not hide inside the body but is directly epidermized on the surface.<sup>9</sup> It does not require the spectators to feel, by staring, the intensity as the central narrative; instead, the emotion is on display to attract the attention actively. The bright colors, the masquerade, the exaggerated gestures are the indications of the attention. The cinematic body still constitutes a cinematic spectacle in Tsai's musical numbers. It is because the lip-synching technique prevents the cinematic body from talking or singing on their own. As a result, the cinematic body, including its mouth, can focus on its own performance to become the attraction of the show.

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<sup>9</sup> "Epidermization" originally means grafting the deeper skin to the upper one. In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Frantz Fanon uses the term to describe the self-abasement of the minor races. My usage is closer to the former one which refers to a visible bodily change.

I would therefore suggest that these musical numbers could be more than a passive escape, as some critics believe, but a positive subversive dynamics known as camp taste. As Jack Babuscio indicates, camp taste consists of four elements: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor (129). He explains that camp taste frustrates the seriousness of normality to create the effect of irony and humor. Esther Newton also points out that the “incongruous juxtapositions” creates the playfulness of the camp taste (103). And most camp critics agree that camp belongs to gay community because of its oppositional position to the mainstream culture. Tsai’s musical numbers obviously embody the aesthetic value of camp taste. In her essay “Pornography, Musical, Drag, and the Art Film: Performing ‘Queer’ in Tsai Ming-Liang’s *The Wayward Cloud*,” Vivian LEE believes that the camp taste in Tsai’s musical numbers not only embody the camp aesthetic form, but also provides the power of “self-critique and subversion” (133). In her understanding, Lee considers genre blending of art film, classic Hollywood musical film, and pornographic film as the subversive power in Tsai’s musical films. The manipulation of different generic conventions can be taken as the act of destabilizing the normalcy.

Lee made several important statements on the camp taste in Tsai’s musical films, in *The Wayward Cloud* most exclusively. She also puts her emphasis on the actress I-Ching LU [Yijing Lu], the spider woman who fails to present the stereotype of a *femme fatale*, and Hsiao Kang, the crocodile man that points to homosexuality and the erect penis that reveals a sense

of exhaustion in the musical numbers. But I want to go further than this. Firstly, vaudeville aesthetic, including the ruptured structure in the narrative and the physical attraction achieved, also signals how the conventions of musical film genre are shaken. Incidentally, Kuei-mei YANG [Guimei Yang] in *The Hole* also provides an alternative drag queen image. Yang's drag performativity is extremely exaggerated and glamorous that her cinematic body does not reveal any sense of failure.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Yang's drag queen image *overdoes* the "heterosexual performativity," in Judith Butler's words, so that she becomes camp (237).<sup>11</sup> According to this, the camp sensibility is an *attitude*, not necessarily a gay production.

Gay sensibility, as in Babuscio, is intended by the authors. Any camp taste, he finds, is a reflection of the author's gay sensibility. Given that the intention of the film directors should be taken into account, Yang's cinematic body in the musical numbers is then a site of manipulation, a space where Tsai relieves his repressed gay sensibility in the mainstream world.

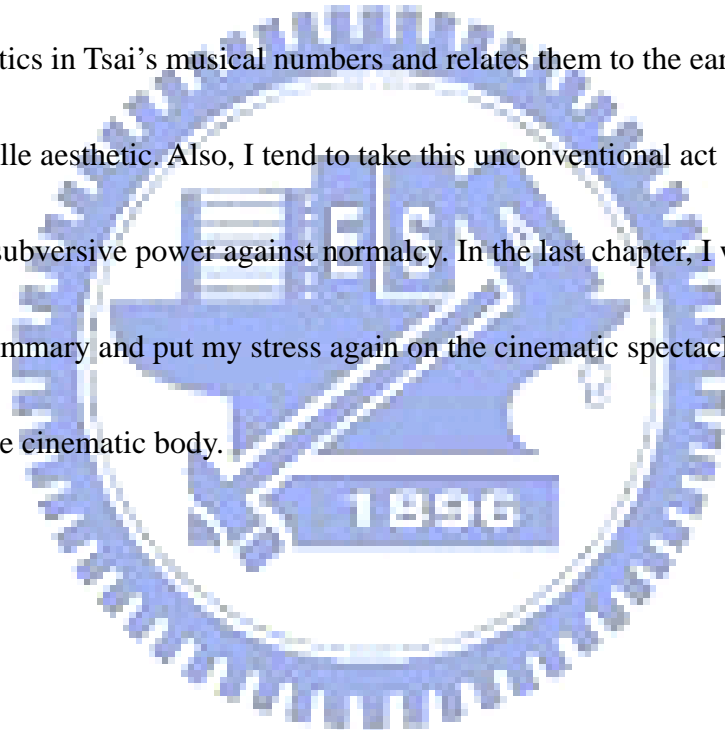
My thesis consists of five chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. "Chapter One: Introduction" is a review of criticisms and studies on Tsai's films. There I examine how film critics have discussed Tsai's body image and then briefly introduce the main issues my next three chapters will deal with. Following the introduction, "Chapter Two: The Cinematic

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<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Lee comments that I-Ching Lu's ageing body represents a sense of failed seduction (132).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Dyer also mentions the overdone heterosexual performativity that makes Judy Garland camp. He points this out quoting a letter to him which thinks that Garland "was so damned 'straight'" ("Judy Garland" 107).

Body of the Everydayness” seeks to elaborate the concept of “the cinematic body” and gives an analysis of the corporeality of the cinematic body and the corporeal spectators. “Chapter Three: The Cinematic Body in a Close-up” attempts to examine the corporeality of the cinematic body in relation to the cinematic spectacle in a close-up of emotion. The cinematic body uses only the body language to communicate with the world and the spectators. In “Chapter Four: The Camp Taste: Vaudeville Body,” I put my emphasis on the unconventional generic aesthetics in Tsai’s musical numbers and relates them to the early style of the musical films: vaudeville aesthetic. Also, I tend to take this unconventional act as an embodiment of camp taste, a subversive power against normalcy. In the last chapter, I will conclude my thesis with a brief summary and put my stress again on the cinematic spectacle of corporeality as inscribed in the cinematic body.



## Chapter Two: The establishment of the Cinematic Body

Cinema conjures up human beings as phantom objects, as Rey Chow once notices (“Phantom Discipline” 1393). Indeed, phantomness defines the essence of cinema. Cinema is a heterogeneous world of convincing reality but with different spatial-temporality. Its ambivalent relation with the referential world is a rupture where cinematic manipulation comes into play. Stepping into the field of film studies, we need, therefore, to recognize this interfering power of cinema and stick to some kind of phantom reasoning. Nonetheless, Rey Chow is not the first one who promotes the “cinematic” quality in film studies. Dziga Vertov, the leader of the Soviet kino-eye theory, puts his emphasis on the perfection of the camera eye. He believes that a kino-eye man is a builder who transforms raw materials into rhythmical/abstract entity. And he terms the objects in front of the camera *filmic* objects (20). Ever since then, more and more film critics who have always taken the word “cinematic” into their considerations as their object of study.

In this chapter, the human body in Tsai’s films is my object of study whose utmost feature is its cinematic quality. For this reason, I opt for the term *cinematic body*, rather than *body image*. By emphasizing the word *cinematic*, I examine the human body in Tsai’s films as a virtual body in moving picture, rather than in still photography or painting. Swinging between the realistic and the illusory, I argue that the cinematic body in Tsai’s films preserves

the *documentary value* of everydayness and is also upheld by minimalism at the same time. I will first analyze the strange existence of the cinematic body: “present in absence,” as in Maurice Blanchot’s term (qtd. in Shaviro 17). Afterwards, I argue that the cinematic body displays its own corporeality, interacting with the corporeal spectators, through everydayness and minimalist aesthetic. I will particularly lay my emphasis on the discussion of *The Wayward Cloud*, by comparing the everyday/minimalist body with the pornographic body.

#### The Cinematic Body as an Everyday Practice

“Being present in absence” may be the best description of this “phantom” quality of the cinematic, carrying out one ambiguous position of the cinematic world. As Shaviro explains, “Images are neither true nor false, neither real nor artificial, neither present nor absent; they are radically devoid of essence” (17). The word “essence” here suggests that the cinematic image should not be easily stabilized by the meanings given from the referential world. It is this ambiguous position that the presence of the cinematic image maintains a close relation with reality but still retains a rupture in between. Also, it is this rupture, absent of essence, which holds the possibility of the cinematic manipulation. As Rudolf Arnheim puts it, “Thus the lack of depth brings a very welcome element of unreality into the film picture” (274). In other words, the specificity of “being present in absence” is the creative power of the film medium.



Likewise, Pier Paolo Pasolini points out also this indefinite position of the cinematic. He argues that cinema has “a double nature”: both objective and subjective (173). The objective nature refers to the raw material, or *brute objects* in Pasolini’s terms. Film directors are also authors who choose their raw materials, reconstruct them, and create another nature of cinema. He writes, “The two moments of the above-mentioned nature [a double nature] are closely intertwined and are not separable even in the laboratory” (173). In other words, cinema is never an authentic representation of the referential world but the camera will automatically preserve the bruteness of reality. Chow, therefore, links Pasolini’s theory to the everydayness of Chinese directors in her essay “Sentimental Returns.” She argues that the use of the quotidian in films carries “a vast collectivity of actions, gestures, movements, and habits” (640). It is because this collectivity comes from the bruteness of the *experienced* reality that connects with the spectators, and so it carries a sense of “sentimental returns” (642-651). In this line of reasoning, she concludes that Zhang Yimou’s *The Road Home* holds a collectivity of country lifestyle that reveals “the logic of a socialist ideal” (645).

Obviously, Tsai’s films are also filled with everyday activities, such as drinking, urinating, or walking. However, his use of the everyday does not resemble Zhang Yimou’s. First of all, Tsai’s everyday use sticks to the biological needs of a corporeal body. In other words, Tsai’s use of the everyday does not only sustain the “brute objects” in the experienced reality, but also “brutely” exposes the everyday body as a display of corporeal existence.

Tsai's everyday use, therefore, focuses on the body itself. Hence, if the everyday actions and habits in Zhang's *The Road Home* express a collectivity of country lifestyle that implies some social idealism, as Chow says, Tsai's everyday use displays a collective *corporeal* body. The collectivity of corporeality does not indicate certain country or urban lifestyle. The corporeal presence carries no further implication than suggests an everyday condition, the plainness of corporeality.

Tsai's everyday use has an affinity to Benjamin's description of cinema's "optical unconscious." Benjamin argues that the camera eye has an ability to capture things that people are so familiar with but so easy to ignore. So, he praises the camera eye for its power of making examination. He describes, "We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or metal, and still less how this varies with different moods" (266). Correspondingly, Tsai's everyday use intends to refamiliarize us with people's unconscious actions and habits in everyday life. Through his camera, he reminds the spectators of their corporeal bodies. So, the cinematic body in Tsai's films can communicate with the spectators through the collectivity of corporeality.

The comparison of Tsai's everyday use to Zhang's indicates that the collectivity of corporeality is not engaged so much with "sentimental returns." Corporeality does not return to a certain historical point: it is rather an existential condition that is in question. The everyday temporality is dwelling inside the cinematic body. As a result, the instantaneity of

the brute everydayness becomes an optical violence, seeking to directly unsettle the corporeal spectators. Tsai himself is also aware of this corporeal effect. He, more than once, explains that it is the spectators' own corporeality that has caused their unsettlement, as they are not used to watching themselves on screen ("Liang's Words II" 68; Yi-Zhi Wang 246).

The point is that Tsai's use of the everyday does not serve to facilitate his narrative development easily. The major function of this use is to reveal what existence is. As we can observe, Tsai does not just capture the repetitive everyday activities. He also employs long takes to avoid the interference of montage that may contribute to repetition. As a result, these long takes preserve for their audience a strong sense of existence. And this sense of existence is reserved in the details of these body movements. Take *Vive L'amour*, for example. Yang's six minutes of weeping in the last scene maintains a situation of loneliness, the bruteness of everyday life. And during the whole six minutes, the loneliness displayed does not belong solely to Yang. The corporeality of the cinematic body starts to connect with the spectators and triggers their own loneliness. Jared Rapfogel also indicates thus, "This idea is not to carry as along on a narrative wave, but to let us engage with the here and now. This is what gives Tsai's films their remarkable sense of presence, and their tremendous emotional weight" ("Tsai Ming Liang" par. 6). We may say that the temporality in Tsai's films does not engage with linear causality or real time, but with the emotional status of the cinematic body and also the spectators "here and now." Accordingly, "existence" understood in this context is not a

representation of the physical presence. Rather, it is a presence of the psychological condition, a phantom present in absence.

### The Minimalized Body and Corporeality

The everyday use of corporeality is not a practice of addition, but of subtraction. This practice takes away the redundant social reference and achieves “a simplicity of a corporeal body.” As Rey Chow observes, the characters in Tsai’s films are the cinematic images of “remnants of social relations, [...] in the form of bodies, gestures, movements, and looks” (“A Pain in the Neck” 129). She argues that in the so called “incest scene” in *The River*, darkness has already effaced the social relations and sexuality. In this alternative space of sauna room, there is no father and son, nor a man-man sexual scene. There are only corporeal bodies with biological needs. For that reason, Tsai’s aesthetic strategy is a minimalist one. The effacement of the social relations and sexuality can be taken as a practice of minimalism. Wen-Chi LIN (Wunchi LIN) has been indicated that Tsai’s films express a sense of insignificance by “Tsai’s minimalist narrative style that does not really tell a story” (“The Representation of Taipei” 89). But the minimalist strategy does not only apply to the narrative style, but also on the cinematic body. It is a minimalized body that as Hal Foster writes, “Thus, far from idealist, minimalist work complicates the purity of conception with the contingency of perception, of the body in a particular space and time” (40). The cinematic body has been striped off

additional meanings, in order to let the corporeality stand out.

When we say that the aesthetic strategy in Tsai's films is a practice of subtraction, it does not mean that the minimalized body is emptied out. The spirit of minimalism lies deeper. Mies van der Rohe, a famous minimalist, once said, "I opt for an intensive, rather than extensive form" (qtd. in *Minimalisms* 9). In that case, the plainness on the surface is not a limitation. In fact, the simplicity opens the possibilities to more interpretations and participations of *the spectators*. Minimalists argue that the meaning of the artwork does not come from a direct depiction, but from the communication between the work and the spectators. This implies that the author is not the only source of meaning. A minimalist work should also anticipate the participation/temporality of the spectators: the time of appreciating. Consequently, the subject/object relation loses its stable position, from "I [author] express" to "I [spectator] perceive" (Foster 43). In this line of reasoning, the sheer presence of the corporeal body movements, such as drinking, urinating, and having sex, does not reduce its cinematic intensity for its plainness.

As Anaxu Zabalbeascoa and Javier Rodríguez Marcos put it, "The more ambiguous and indeterminate these spaces are, the more interested spectators will participate in them" (90). Hence, the minimalized body in Tsai's films is a recipient that can undertake more interpretations, though none of them can be definite. The beauty of the vulgar plainness invites the corporeal spectators to communicate and connect with the presented corporeality

more easily. In other words, the practice of simplicity does not silence the everyday body, but amplifies it. Rey Chow has also pointed out that the banality of the everyday activities does not ruin the intensity of romantic love. In contrast, the plainness of “the vulgar realities of everyday life” is an “indispensable part of a love relationship” (“New Wave” 41). In conclusion, the plainness of the vulgar body movements could provide a positive emotional impact and an ambiguous space/temporality for the spectators to participate in.

#### An Analysis of *The Wayward Cloud*

*The Wayward Cloud* obviously criticizes the pornography industry for its artificial use of the cinematic body.<sup>12</sup> The discussion on the pornographic films has been divided into two groups. One group is concerned with the social morality of the pornographic films. The critics in this group worry that violence and objectification of female body implicated there could lead to degrading influence on the society. The other group acknowledges the existence of the pornographic films and admits its transgressive power over social normality. But *The Wayward Cloud* does not belong to either group. Rather, Tsai stands by his belief in the everyday/minimalized body and is opposed to the cinematic manipulation of human body in

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<sup>12</sup> The pornography industry and the pornographic films here refer specifically to that of low-budget mass production. As we can observe, this kind of pornographic films is quoted in Tsai’s early films. For example, in *The River*, Hsiao Kang’s mother has a lover who sells pornographic films. In *The Wayward Cloud*, there is a roomful of pornographic films in a video rental store. But the issue of the whole pornography culture is complicated and also not the main point of my thesis. Instead, I put my emphasis on the hard core pornographic films and its aesthetic strategy on the cinematic body.

the pornography industry.

Compared with Tsai's minimalist style, the pornography industry's strategy follows the practice of addition.<sup>13</sup> The cinematic body in Tsai's films does not have an absolute identity or an obvious social relation but aims instead to expose plain corporeality. On the other hand, various social relations or lifestyles are implied in the cinematic body in pornographic films. And the cinematic body in pornographic films is mostly sensational and willing to have sex. This artificial desire is always embedded in the cinematic body. The added identities and the artificial desire have only one destination: sexual intercourse. Ke-Hua CHEN points out also that the plot in the pornographic films "explicitly or implicitly suggests nudity" (17). In that case, the cinematic body of addition is just a tool for the purpose of exhibiting intercourse, scarcely carrying any emotional weight beneath it.

In *The Wayward Cloud*, the mock pornographic scene in the beginning echoes the traditional impression one has of the pornographic films. In this scene, Hsiao Kang and Sumomo Yozakura play the doctor-nurse relation. Hsiao Kang wearing a doctor uniform crawls onto the bed where Sumomo lies. His white coat is a just a loose cover of his nude body. The doctor identity is then an added veil/tool meant to be ripped off later. Afterwards, Tsai applies his strategy of subtraction on the pornographic body, like in an experiment. He

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Kipnis argues in *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* that pornography industry does not stand on its own in relation to other popular cultures but is also a form of expression. It is true that contemporary Hollywood industry, as well as pornography industry, aims at a fantastic, artificial world, but pornography industry seems to put its emphasis on the body alone. Though there is a strong contrast between the everyday body in Tsai's films and the pornographic body, it does not follow that pornography industry is more skin-deep and naïve than the production of other popular cultures.

takes the veil away, including the identity, social relations, and the will to have sex. As a result, the female pornographic body loses her consciousness in a later scene. The myth of the pornographic body fails in its wake. Without this veil, Sumomo becomes a heavy, motherly body, an ordinary body. This minimalized body makes the pornography shooting afterwards ridiculous and tiresome. The strategy of subtraction is also employed in shooting the male pornographic body. Originally, Hsiao Kang is a penis that never becomes diminutive, as in other male porn stars. After the myth breaks down, Hsiao Kang becomes an ordinary man who might not have an erection whenever he wants it. Ironically, he cannot even have sex with his lover. At the end, there are only suffering, ordinary bodies in this minimalized everyday “pornography industry.”

Another cinematic manipulation of the pornography industry is the technique of “close-ups,” used specifically on the sexual organs. These close-ups carry no further meaning than the exhibition of sexual intercourse. The implication is obvious enough on the surface, likewise the organs to tools. As in *The Wayward Cloud*, Sumomo uses her private part to open a bottle while a camera man shoots this scene in a close-up. Pornography industry applies this shooting approach as a means of enlargement, so to cut off other parts of the body, as if the whole body were reduced to a sexual organ. Therefore, the definition of *body* is not complete in the pornographic films. In contrast, Tsai does not enlarge the sexual organs. He deliberately replaces them with a watermelon. The cinematic body can then reserve its entity by this



absurd substitution. Obviously, Tsai has a different definition of the body from that of the pornography industry. The pornographic body is always cut into pieces as sexual organs, whose aim is to display the details of sexual intercourse. Tsai, then, insists on the completeness of the body, whose aim is to show the collectivity of corporeality.<sup>14</sup>

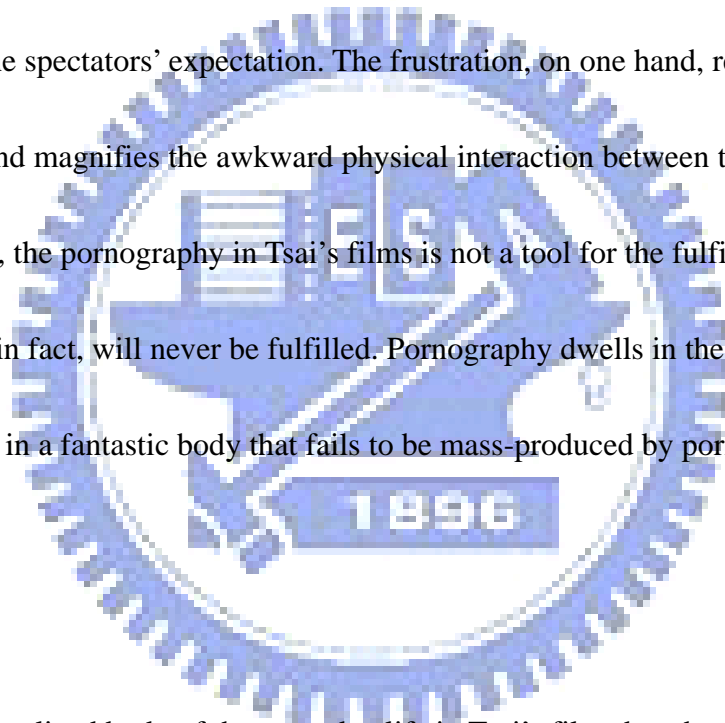
There is a further question that needs to be mentioned here. Pornography and the pornography *industry* could be two different things. Since it is an industry, pornography industry has its own commercial considerations. But it does not suggest that *pornography* is meant to be a product to sell. Tsai has also a different definition of pornography. Pornography does not, to him, refer only to nudity. Rather, it is a pervasive need and an acknowledged secret. He has once mentioned that pornography would be a controversial issue to talk about and believed that it would have a strong cinematic intensity. However, pornography does not depend on nudity, but on the way we use for expressing it (“Vive L’amour” 49). Obviously, all of his films involve in the issue of pornography. But these erotic scenes do not arouse sexual pleasure or lead to the exhibition of intercourse as pornographic films do. Instead, pornography is there and dwells in the everyday body to disclose the unsatisfied desire in everyday life. This everyday life belongs to the realm of love, as Chow mentions above of the quotidian use as “part of a love relationship” (“New Wave” 41). In other words, while

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<sup>14</sup> Tsai’s insistence is obviously shown when Taiwan’s Government Information Office (GIO) tries to ban the poster of *I Don’t Want To Sleep Alone* because of the exposed hips. He mentioned in a speech that the focus on the hip blinded the view of the whole body, which shows the cinematic body in Tsai’s films does not lead to the destination of nudity or sexual organs. See “A Talk on *I Don’t Want To Sleep Alone*” 14 Mar. 2007.

pornographic films exercise in the regime of fantasy, the pornography in Tsai's films is connected with the collectivity of everyday life, where the unfulfilled desire abounds.

In *The Wayward Cloud*, pornography is inserted into the everyday banality when Hsiao Kang and Shiang-Chyi CHEN (Xiangqi Chen) are eating crabs, drinking watermelon juice, or smoking under a table. The direct communication between two bodies is implicit but the inner intensity is obvious. But when they intend to make physical contact, nudity and sexual scenes are failed in the spectators' expectation. The frustration, on one hand, reminds of everyday corporeality and magnifies the awkward physical interaction between two bodies, on the other. To summarize, the pornography in Tsai's films is not a tool for the fulfillment of visual pleasure that, in fact, will never be fulfilled. Pornography dwells in the everyday body of the cinematic, not in a fantastic body that fails to be mass-produced by pornography industry.



## Conclusion

The minimalized body of the everyday life in Tsai's films has the dynamics of fluidity. The plainness of this body is susceptible to various interpretations, none of which, however, can be settled down. Tsai's strategy of subtraction is to efface any definite meaning and to create an ambiguous, abstract spatial-temporality. As in Tsai's films, the traffic, the moving crowds, and even the invisible communication through phone lines gives the ambiguous space a sense of fluidity. Likewise, the image of water also delivers a sense of unsettlement while

the water always goes in and out through the invisible water pipes in the building, in the way it goes in and out of the cinematic body. After all, Tsai's cinematic body often wanders in the city. In *Vive L'amour*, we see the cinematic body wander in the place where the ashes of the dead are secured. The cinematic body later floats to a foreign country in *What Time Is It There?*. In *The Skywalk Is Gone*, the movement of the pedestrians is confused because the routine has been changed. In this light, Tsai's cinematic body does not just wander among some abstract spaces, but lingers also from film to film. A sense of ambiguity/fluidity is revealed.

Everydayness is also an uncertain temporality in that it does not belong to a certain point of the history. Everydayness is also implanted in the abstract space that does not refer to a fixed location. The ambiguity of everydayness allows the cinematic power to merge the cinematic body easily. Yet the plainness involved, or the minimalist style, does not refer to the quality of transparency. Meaning can hardly be transparent, when the plainness of corporeality in Tsai's films is not a sheer surface, but carries also the emotional weight beneath it, though invisible. This cinematic intensity is often neglected in film studies, due to its nondescript nature. In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss this cinematic power of the invisible emotional weight in Tsai's films.

### Chapter Three: The Cinematic Body in Close-ups

The cinematic body in Tsai's films is cut off from its social reference to elicit an everyday body of the cinematic. This everyday body, then, becomes a minimalist body that magnifies instead the indescribable intensity inside the body. In this chapter, I take the process of magnification as a close-up embodiment since the camera seldom turns away from the cinematic body. I approach the mechanism of close-ups in an understanding not limited to its technical sense. That is, a close-up needs not to be a human face or an *enlargement* of objects. That the cinematic body could be understood as a close-up is formulated in terms of intensity, instead of space. It is the emotional weight that makes the cinematic body a close-up. The employment of a close-up is endowed with the aesthetic value to intensify the cinematic spectacle.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the magnified power does not tell a regular story, but reveals rather an attitude for life through gestures, movements, and facial expressions. Tsai intentionally directs the spectators' attention closely onto the cinematic body and causes a totally different visual impact on the spectators. On the whole, in the last chapter, the everyday body of the cinematic has been understood to be a close-up in the spectrum of *time*, displaying the corporeality of the everyday life. Contrarily, in this chapter, I will focus on the obvious nuances of the cinematic body itself in the spectrum of *intensity*.

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<sup>15</sup> The adjective aesthetic is in contrast to the term technical. The aesthetic value of a close-up in Tsai's films does not depend on the capacity of enlargement, but of intensification. Through this aesthetic value, Tsai establishes his own unique style of filmmaking.

### An Alternative Definition of a Close-up

Conventionally, the close-ups are discussed under the proposition of spatial distance. As far as the distance is concerned, a close-up is restricted to be a spatial magnification of the appearance. As Walter Benjamin points out, “With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended” (265). But the camera eye enlarges not only the details. The spatial-temporality is different from those beyond it. The time seems to be slower, the space narrower, the emotion stronger. In other words, it is rather a process of chemistry than a mechanical variation involved. Therefore, Benjamin accentuates the “entirely new structures of matter” within a close-up (266). A close-up that brings a certain cinematic intensity could be more than a part of narrative development. Hsiao-Hung Chang also argues that according to the early film theorists, what constitutes a close-up is essentially the intensity of the interior emotion. A *photogenic* landscape or a breath-taking moment could be categorized as a close-up because of “the impact of proximity” (Epstein “Magnification” 239).<sup>16</sup>

As Jean Epstein points out, “the close-up limits and directs the attention” (239), and the spectators are forced to look closely or attentively at a close-up.<sup>17</sup> But the situation is reversed in the employment of the close-up in Tsai’s films. I would rather suggest that, due to the

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<sup>16</sup> The word “*photogénie*” or “*photogenic*” does not mean that one person looks pretty in front of the camera. This word indicates rather that one filmic image, enhanced by filmic production, shows the greatest intensity of mind, even in a few seconds.

<sup>17</sup> When the spectators are watching a movie, their perception of the cinematic image is more attentive than the one of their surrounding environment. And the perception of a close-up is more intensive than the one of a regular full shot.

intensive emotional weight and the attentive perception from the spectators, the cinematic body that “directs and limits the attention” actually takes place in a close-up, with which the temporality is suspended into a *situation* of everyday life.<sup>18</sup> And the cinematic body is trapped in a framed space as if the air is impenetrable.

I would hereby apply Béla Balázs’ discussions to define the cinematic body in Tsai’s films as a close-up. At least four characteristics of the close-up in Balázs’ “The Close-Up” and “The Face of Man” can be enumerated: silent soliloquy, simplified acting, simple face, and simple story. First of all, silent soliloquy is the inner dialogue spoken to the eye, not to the ear. “Close-ups,” writes Balázs, “are the pictures expressing the poetic sensibility of the director. They show the faces of things and those expressions on them which are significant because they are reflected expressions of our own subconscious feeling” (56). Balázs’ notion of close-ups is “physiognomy,” which shows that every filmic object can have a facial expression that communicates with the spectators. In other words, the spectators and the cinematic image intersect at the site of intensive attention through visual intimacy, not spoken words. Likewise, the silent soliloquy refers specifically to the silent cinema. During the silent film era, actors and actresses were forced to signify the unspoken words using their body movements and facial expressions. People found that body gestures and the subtle facial movements spoke better than words. Birds that rest on the trees rushing to the sky, for

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<sup>18</sup> The temporality in a close-up like this is estimated on emotional weight but not on chronological (causal) logic. That is, a close-up contains a condition of uncertainty and therefore, accentuates the suspended emotion rather than the story.

example, may indicate a gunshot. Afterwards, when the sound cinema arrived, a few critics even worried that certain precious characteristics of the film medium would be gradually ignored. Obviously, Tsai's films show his agreement with these critics. Tsai has once said that he appreciated early cinema more than contemporary films, for early cinema thought highly of the film *medium* ("Reading" 15). As we can observe, Tsai seldom lets the cinematic body talk in sync sound and, at some level, his films share an affinity to the silent films. As a result, every little movement becomes a focus of attention as if it is in a close-up. Every obvious nuance of the body seems to reveal an invisible face speaking directly to the spectators' eyes.

Within a close-up, the space narrows down. There is no room for huge movements. But this does not mean that things have to remain motionless in a close-up. On the contrary, in a close-up, every little movement carries a great power with it. As Balázs describes it, "In films in which a slight movement can express a deep passion and the tragedy of a soul can manifest itself in the twitching of an eyebrow, broad gesturing and grimacing become unbearable" (76).

It is the "economy of expression" that happens only in close-ups. In Tsai's films, the cinematic body seems to be motionless and tired. But in the intensive close-up of the whole body, the heaving movements of the breathing chest and the frowned eyebrows can show extraordinary feelings from inside. In *The River*, for example, when MIAO Tien (Miao Tian) and Chao-Jung CHEN (Zhaorong Chen) meet in front of a McDonald's, their eye contacts

reveal invisible sexual desire underneath their “straight faces.”<sup>19</sup> The same happens in *Vive L’amour* when May Lin and Ah-Jung first meet in a café. They do not speak a word, but May Lin turns her head slightly sideways and meets Ah-Jung’s gaze through the corner of her eyes. And then, when she lifts up the coffee cup near her mouth, or when she stops to watch a poster, every little glance and every gesture speaks effectively to Ah-Jung and the spectators. These implicit but significant movements draw the spectators’ attention as if they are in a close-up. Although the cinematic body is in a full shot distance from the camera, the emotional intensity has made the shot a close-up.

Silence is also a *close-up* of inner voice of the cinematic body. Susan Sontag points out in “The Aesthetics of Silence” that silence is a *bodily* speech. She believes that the presence of the body speaks louder than “weightless” words (20). That is, the less the cinematic body speaks, the stronger the presence would be. And that is why Sontag argues that silence “engenders a stare” (16) in that the *look* is a voluntary action, whereas the *stare* is an attentive, compulsive one. Therefore, the cinematic body in Tsai’s films can manifest its presence and its emotional *weight* more effectively through silence.<sup>20</sup> In that sense, silence *magnifies* the presence of the cinematic body and directs the spectators’ stare to it as if the body were in a

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<sup>19</sup> *Straight face*, on one hand, means an expressionless face and on the other, may imply the pretence of *normal* sexuality.

<sup>20</sup> Tsai’s films are, in fact, not silent films because the characters talk sometimes and the background sync sound exists. By silence, I mean that the films do not depend on spoken language to develop the narrative plot. Sontag also puts her emphasis on the comparison between silence and speech and puts some doubts on the “authenticity of language” (20). She writes, “Or how, when one talks less, one beings feeling more fully one’s physical presence in a given space” (20). From this perspective, the aesthetics of silence creates an effect of a close-up in that silence draws attention on the cinematic body and lets it generate its silent monologue.



close-up, or the “object of attention” in Sontag’s phrase (13).

Balázs also indicates that a pretty face is totally not necessary in a close-up (78). Within a close-up, a beautiful face becomes a mask and tends to be false in that a close-up uncovers the sub-consciousness of the face. Any dramatic acting would fail in a close-up. This is why Tsai insists on using “professional non-actors.” They are basically themselves on the screen. This kind of actors/actresses does not *act* to be others. Tsai seldom uses professional actors who act too hard in a theatrical way.<sup>21</sup> The camera in Tsai’s films, however, is the one for the close-up. The spectators stare at the details, especially the “intimate details” of their faces. Sub-consciousness cannot be acted. A close-up explores not only the surface, but also what lies underneath. In like manner way, if we take the cinematic body as a close-up, the whole body can be taken as a *facial* expression that delivers one’s inner feelings. So, the physical movement needs not be dramatic or elegant but ordinary. A close-up can elicit the obvious nuance of emotions out of simplicity.

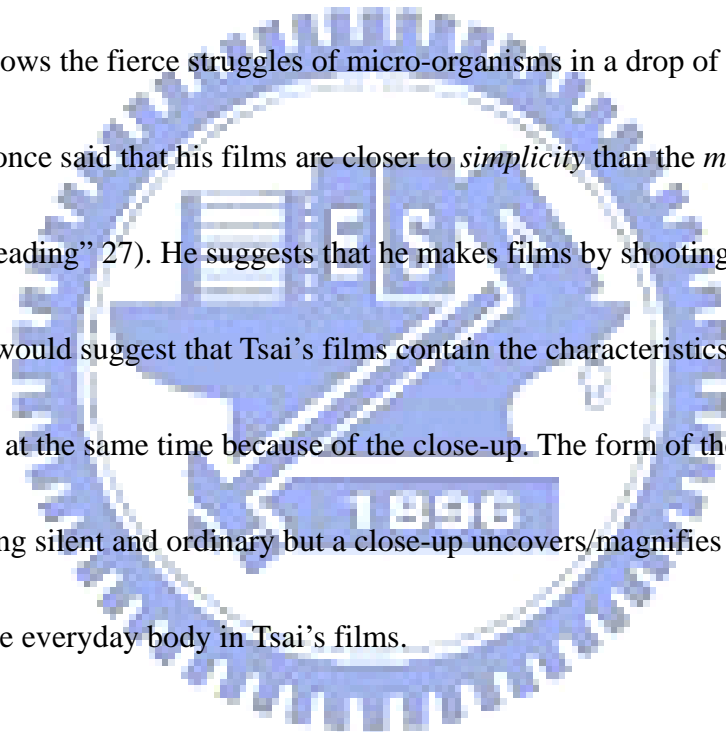
As we mentioned above, when it is speechless, the cinematic body in Tsai’s films lets the inner face/body speak. The silent monologues, then, constitute the whole story. Basically, the story depends on the ups and downs of the emotion, not the narrative plot. Leo Ou-Fan LEE finds that the space in Tsai’s films sucks up all the meanings (73) and I would suggest that Tsai’s cinematic body does, too. The story goes inward to the cinematic body, not outward to

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<sup>21</sup> Tsai reveals that professional actors are trained to perform in a dramatic way in front of a camera. This kind of acting is “unnatural” (“Reading” 16), especially in his films.

the plots. In that case, a simple narrative line would often suffice. Too many dialogues and plots would obscure the inner face, the inner story. As in *Rebels of the Neon God*, after Hsiao Kang's father kicks him out of the door, his mother stands sadly beside a mirror that also reflects the vague image of the angry father. Both of them do not say a word but the silence is intense. The micro-drama still lingers during this silent moment. "The micro-tragedies in the peace and quiet of ordinary families," Balázs notes, "were shown as deadly battles, just as the microscope shows the fierce struggles of micro-organisms in a drop of water" (85).

Tsai has once said that his films are closer to *simplicity* than the *micro-cosmos* and its details do ("Reading" 27). He suggests that he makes films by shooting one person simply and plainly. I would suggest that Tsai's films contain the characteristics of simplicity and the micro-cosmos at the same time because of the close-up. The form of the cinematic body can be simple, being silent and ordinary but a close-up uncovers/magnifies a micro-cosmos inscribed in the everyday body in Tsai's films.



### The Body Attitude of the Cinematic

It would not be true to say that Tsai's films have no storyline at all. Tsai's cinematic body, likewise, is not reduced to emptiness, either. Kuang LU describes Tsai's films as "post-minimalism," by which he means that the minimum still contains "something rather

than nothing”<sup>22</sup> (76-7). The form is minimal but the camera still captures *something* behind the plain appearance. That is, the cinematic body holds an emotional depth, though indescribable and invisible. Here I would like to examine the silent story embedded in this inner depth. But one thing to note is that although the cinematic body is silent, the dynamics is never so. The emotion behind the images is never static. Cinema is a form of *motion* pictures that constitutes a continuous process, even though the cinematic body is silent and motionless. It is still happening. The repetitive image of the drainage hole in Tsai’s films, for example, does not just represent a noun or a signifier. Most important of all, the image of a drainage hole indicates a process of overflowing water coming in and out of it and of generating continual emotion effect.

Hsiao-Hung Chang proposes in her essay “The Cinematic Face” the concept of “sur-face” as a verb to explain the constant overflowing emotion in a close-up. She mentions Roland Barthes’ division of faces. Greta Garbo’s face falls into the order of *concept*, while Audrey Hepburn’s face the order of substance. Chang, then, observes that Garbo’s and Hepburn’s faces do not stand in oppositional positions, as the “upper face” and the “lower face.”<sup>23</sup> “According to Barthes,” she writes, “Garbo’s face contains Hepburn’s face” (143). This exemplifies that the oppositional positions of both faces are not static. She explains that Hepburn’s face gives softness to Garbo’s divine face, which, on the other hand, has its

<sup>22</sup> The translation of “quelque chose plutôt que rien.”

<sup>23</sup> The “upper” face means the “metaphysical” face and the “lower” means the “physical” (Chang 141).

“e-motion, the motion of emotion” (144). In that case, Garbo’s divine face does not stay at its face value. The invisible emotional softness underneath the face keeps surfacing up. When discussing Balázs, Chang explains how micro-physiognomy can turn interiority into exteriority, the invisible spirit into materiality, and the subconsciousness of the actors into the consciousness of the spectators.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the cinematic body in Tsai’s films is also an *inter-face*, by which Chang refers to an in-between situation (143-44). The meaning does not lie on the appearance or stay hidden under the surface. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the filmic image is “present in absence.” The presence is the appearance, while the absence enables filmic production to bring emotion into the image. The characteristic of absence gives vitality to filmic images. The ambiguity of the presence and the absence is similar to the in-between position of Garbo’s and Hepburn’s faces. They are not a binary set. The emotion (absence) keeps surfacing out of the cinematic body (presence), just as Hepburn’s soft face giving vitality to Garbo’s divine face. Absence/presence, interiority/exteriority, invisibility/visibility, emotion/appearance, and concept/substance do not stand in oppositional stillness but bind together in the cinematic body. This is a dynamic process of interchange that constitutes Tsai’s corporeal movies.

Tsai notes also that “I’ve disliked the performing way of mainstream Hollywood films.

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<sup>24</sup> Balázs proposes the term *microphysiognomy* to signify the “strange new dimension of soul” created by a close-up in silent films (“The Face of Man” 65). He also argues that in the sound films, words cannot express the emotional intensity as well as facial expressions.

All the information is written on the face” (“One Director” 54). In the Hollywood acting, the facial expression or body movement is a signifier of specific meaning. A smile means happiness; tears mean sadness. All signifiers point the spectators to a certain direction. This kind of performing, however, is abandoned in Tsai’s films. No matter it is happiness or sadness, the facial expression or body movement does not give explicit indications. But the meaning is not emptied out. It is full. As what Rudolf Arnheim explains, “The emotional quality of the conversation is made obvious with a clarity and definiteness which are hardly possible in the medium of actual speech” (276). In *What Time Is It There?*, for instance, the sadness for losing one’s husband turns into weird behaviors. Hsiao Kang’s mother wakes up at midnight to check if her husband returns as a ghost. She dresses up and eats with her invisible husband. She does not say a word, nor does she cry out loud. But her affection for her husband keeps surfacing up on her everyday body and on her expressionless face. Like the water coming out of the drainage hole, it is a *motion* of emotion that delivers the story.

Tsai, when discussing death in *What Time Is It There?*, indicates that the sadness there is not “that obvious.” The sadness is inscribed inside the body and turns into actions (“One Director” 51). Yet, those behaviors do not signify explicit meanings for the spectators, as we never know what Hsiao Kang is thinking exactly. In *The River*, Hsiao Kang cannot ride a motorcycle properly with the pain in his neck. He falls twice with his father near him. His father just keeps asking: “What is wrong with you?” The same question also occurs in the

viewers' mind. But all we know is that something wrong inside the body gives rise to his weird behaviors. Without words, the wired behaviors still can give the spectators a strong sense of uneasiness as if the pain is a contagious disease. Also, in *The Hole*, people get sick and turn into cockroaches. But Tsai does not use special effects to transform the cinematic body into a cockroach *visually*. The cinematic body just changes its *exterior* behaviors to deliver its *interior* disturbance. In light of this, Tsai's films have the characteristics of silent cinema: speaking to the eyes, not to the ears. Arnheim indicates, "But if one does not hear what is said, the meaning becomes indirectly clear and is artistically interpreted by muscles of the face, of the limbs, of the body." Arnheim continues, "The absence of the spoken word concentrates the spectator's attention more closely on the visible aspect of behavior..." (276). Judging from these paragraphs, we may suggest that Tsai's films as silent films are corporeal movies that consist of physical movements.

Obviously, Tsai adheres to the aesthetic style of the silent films. He actually thinks that Lee Kang-Sheng is his Buster Keaton (1895-1966), a famous comedian and filmmaker in silent cinema, whose deadpan expression makes a deep impression on the spectators.

Correspondingly, Hsiao Kang also has a deadpan expression. Tsai has once said, "I think Hsiao Kang gives me a sense of sadness, so does Keaton. There is something deep and heavy hidden in all the actions" ("Reading" 17). The deadpan expression, as well as the accompanying physical actions, is not just a static signifier at face value. Instead, this blank

face contains a characteristic of impenetrability. The cinematic body is in a fullness that is not subordinate to a fixed position. Tsai, then, continues to say that he will work in a comedic style and make Lee a comedian. This indicates that Tsai's films are, more or less, influenced by silent comedies. The cinematic body in Tsai's films also embraces the clumsiness and impulsiveness of a comedian. Hsiao Kang, for instance, tries to kill himself in *Vive L'amour* but is interrupted absurdly. He is left there alone and helpless, and has to bandage himself, the absurdity of which reveals a sense of frustration. Also in *What Time Is It There?*, the scene when I-Ching Lu dresses up and eats with a ghost is also indicative of the style of silent comedies, yet in a slower pace. In conclusion, the cinematic body embodies a site of intersection of various, opaque emotions that do not just hide underneath, but keep surfacing up on the cinematic body.

Deleuze writes in *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, "Give me a body then" (189). Here Deleuze refers to a "non-thinking" body. He disagrees that philosophically, a body has been an obstacle for thought. Instead, he would insist that the body "forces us to think." He specifically indicates the body in Michelangelo Antonioni's films as a non-thinking body, which shows its tiredness, despair, and everydayness.<sup>25</sup> Deleuze writes, " 'We do not even know what a body can do': in its sleep, in its drunkenness, in its efforts and resistances" (189).

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<sup>25</sup> Deleuze does not use the term the cinematic body. However, he proposes a link of "cinema-body-thought" (190). In light of this link, he indicates that the everyday body has to go through "a ceremony," which, namely the manipulation of camera, imposes "a masquerade on the it [body]... until at last the disappearance of the visible body is achieved" (190). From this perspective, Deleuze intentionally distinguishes the human body from the one on the screen and his concept corresponds to the concept of the *cinematic* body.

The body is not just an “inter-medium.” The body, even in its tiredness, forces us to think, “and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life” (189). According to Deleuze, the body embodies an *attitude* of life. Therefore, give me a body then and a body will just do.

The dialogues are abandoned but the gestures of the cinematic body can speak. The attitude of the body is the story in Tsai’s films. Deleuze borrows Bertolt Brecht’s notion of “gest” to explain the relationship between gestures and attitudes. Brecht’s “epic theatre” does not depend on plots. Instead, it alienates the spectators from the developing narrative. But Deleuze finds that the *gest* in Brecht’s understanding belongs to the regime of *social action*. Hence, he indicates that, through the filmic production, *the cinematic gest* is a development of the attitudes that belongs to the regime of the body gestures, not of “a previous story, a pre-existing plot or an action-image” (192). In light of this, he suggests that the cinematic gest itself, instead of characters, embodies a theatricality of everyday life. That is, the cinematic body can extend its everyday body attitudes into a theatrical spectacle. *Vive L’amour* provides an example. Before Tsai shot this film, he had actually observed the everyday life of a female real estate agent. She talked on telephone squatting. She squatted in front of the refrigerator eating after work. Tsai, then, asks Kuei-Mei Yang to do the same, so that these gestures reveal the true personality of a real estate agent. Meanwhile, Hsiao Kang always hunches his back. Unlike Miao Tien, Hsiao Kang seldom stands straight to confront his life. The attitude of a floating, confusing, and tired body explains Tsai’s attitude of life that becomes the tonality of



his films.

With respect to Brecht, Shaviro explains in *The Cinematic Body*, “But these theorists fail to notice that Brechtian techniques have an entirely different impact when they are transferred from the stage to screen” (43). Shaviro continues, “The fact is that distancing and alienation-effects serve not to dispel but only to intensify the captivating power of cinematic spectacle” (43).<sup>26</sup> Theatrical experience is not the same as cinematic experience. The theatre is always in a full shot but the cinema can employ close-ups to magnify and surface the emotion, through which the cinematic body can provide a “cinematic spectacle” which consists of gestic and body attitudes. This corresponds to Balázs’ notions of silent soliloquy, simple action, simple face, and simple story. The simplicity in a close-up intensifies, not dispels, the cinematic spectacle of the body attitude.

Tom Gunning also provides a similar point of view about the ways to tell a cinematic story. He questions Christian Metz and Jean Mitry’s “evolutionary assumption” that the film medium gets rid of theatricality and “evolves as a better and more efficient teller of stories” (72). André Gaudreault and him, instead, proposes the term “the cinema of attractions” to argue against the “narrative assumption.” They do not think that D. W. Griffith’s narrative films “discover” the natural essence of the film medium. They assume rather that the “discovery” of narrative films results from the economic and social forces (“Now You See it”

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<sup>26</sup> Tsai directed a dance piece entitled “The Good Women of Setzuan,” in memory of Brecht in Hong Kong in 1998. In this dance piece, Tsai did not let the dancers do the dance, but make them “flow” like water on the stage. By this, he says this stage play corresponds to the Brechtian style of dialectic (“Liang’s Words I” 54).

72-73). *The cinema as an attraction* represents another way of storytelling in early cinema, which Gunning specifically points out that this cinema took place before 1908. He observes that the films in this period did not depend on narrative skills but “were absorbed by a cinematic gesture of presentation” (73). Gunning takes *The Arrival of a Train at a Station* by Louis Lumière in 1896 as an example. The film is on an everyday event. The astonishment and the simulation of this film do not rely on any earlier plot.<sup>27</sup>

The term “attraction” is derived from Sergei Eisenstein in theatre study. Originally, this term means that the spectator is subjected to “sensual or psychological impact” (“The Cinema of Attractions” 59). Gunning borrows this term to explain how early cinema attracts spectators by visual impacts. Different from narrative cinema, the cinema of attractions also has a different temporality, and does not rely on the chronological development of plots. Gunning writes, “Rather than a developing configuration of narrative, the attraction offers a jolt of pure presence, soliciting surprise, [...] instead of following the enigmas on which narrative depends” (“Now You See It” 81). In Tsai’s films, we do not know much about the characters’ past and future. His films do not start or end on a specific date. It is like cutting a slice of time period randomly. This period of time, therefore, does not narrate a historical event, but a “situation” in life. Like the six-minute weeping sequence in *Vive L’amour*, May Lin sobs out a lonesome situation of life. But it is not the end of the story. May Lin still has to continue her

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<sup>27</sup> Gunning also takes *A Trip to the Moon* of Georges Méliès in 1904 as his example. He does not consider this fantastic film as a pure narrative film. He says that this film consists of several clips and each clip is an attraction, not just narrative paragraphs.

life in the film. Most important of all is that the cinematic body, without narrative developments, social references, dialogues, and dramatic body movements, must still embody the object of attraction as if it were in a close-up that magnifies, surfaces, and delivers the body attitude of life.

### The Corporeal Spectators

The cinema as *attractions* foregrounds the spectators in a different light. Gunning explains that he chooses the term *attraction* “partly to underscore the relation to the spectators” (“The Cinema of Attractions” 59). Attractions indicate the relationship between the cinematic spectacle and the one who perceives it. Gunning, then, specifically distinguishes the spectatorial address of cinematic attractions from the “classically constructed spectatorial address of later narrative cinema” (“Now You See It” 74). Different from the narrative films, the cinema of attractions expects to communicate directly by means of the visual impact. Gunning indicates that the cinematic attractions set a contrast with the “static and stupid voyeur” (“The Cinema of Attractions” 59). He explains, “As I have stated elsewhere, the attraction invokes an exhibitionist rather than a voyeuristic regime. The attraction directly addresses the spectator, acknowledging the viewer’s presence and seeking to quickly satisfy a curiosity” (“Now You See It” 75). A voyeur is a passive viewer. But the spectators of Tsai’s films are not voyeurs. Tsai’s films are similar to early cinema and the cinema of attractions in

that his films provide the cinematic spectacle of corporeal bodies. The surfaced emotion or attitude of life is the attraction of his films. The spectators participate in the exhibition of the cinematic body and interact with it.

Following psychoanalysis, critics tend to simplify the spectators into the eye.

Hsiao-Hung Chang has pointed out that contemporary film theories tend to focus on “visual identification.” The spectators, being *sutured* as the characters, “watch the world with their eyes” (151). Chang, then, turns away from this ocularcentrism. She suggests that Balázs’ theory of close-ups provides another perspective of the cinematic experience. Balázs notes that the close-up of a face, such as in Asta Nielsen, has two faces. One is her face; the other is the reflected face in the spectators. Thus, within a close-up, a face constitutes the “inter-subjectivity” (Chang 150-1). The spectators are not reduced into the eyes but “identify” with the characters by forming one *face*. But this face does not need to be a real face. As I mentioned above, a landscape could be a facial expression as long as it draws spectators’ attention to forge into inter-subjectivity. Therefore, the cinematic body in a close-up could be a facial expression. The spectators’ bodies should not be eliminated from the cinematic experience. A body is not an obstacle. Accordingly, Chang indicates that the inter-subjectivity leads to an *embodiment* of the cinematic experience. By this she means that the spectators are bodies, not the eyes only. That is, the cinematic experience belongs to hapticity.<sup>28</sup> Especially

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<sup>28</sup> Yung-Chao LIAO (Yongchao Liao) discusses Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love* from the perspective of “haptic visuality.” He indicates that historical narratives usually ignore the haptic space of the spectators’ body.

in Tsai's films, the everyday body of the cinematic and the corporeal spectators are forged with each other by their basic corporeal body needs, including drinking, urinating, and sexual acts. In this sense, the spectators and the cinematic body form an inter-subjectivity of corporeality

Tsai does not make films only for himself. He says, "I never put the spectators out of the considerations" ("One Director" 55). Every genre of films has different group of spectators. It is certainly hard to categorize Tsai's films into one specific genre. He has his unique aesthetic style that attracts his specific group of spectators. Generally speaking, Tsai expects those spectators who are similar to the corporeal body without masks. Or rather, Tsai expects to induce the *pure* body of the spectators. He keeps saying that some people do not feel comfortable after watching his films, and explains that it is because they are afraid of watching themselves, as if looking into a mirror. They are not used to see their own ordinary corporeal body magnified on the screen ("Liang's Words II" 68). Tsai never evades displaying the intolerable of the everyday body. He is not afraid of ripping the cinematic body open and leaving no space for fantasies and masks. What is left is only this embarrassing but pure body. The corporeality is what the spectators dislike the most but also what they are most familiar with.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, by employing Balázs' concept, I analyze the possibility of Tsai's cinematic body as a close-up in a new dimension. A close-up in this context is estimated on the premise of emotional intensity, not of distance. Concluding Balázs' point of view, the basic feature of a close-up like this is *simplification* of movements, plots, and even faces. That is, simplification in a close-up signifies magnification of emotion at the same time. Similarly, less speech makes a full presence of the cinematic body, as Sontag points out. From this perspective, Tsai's cinematic body forms a close-up in that Tsai's minimalist aesthetics makes a focus on the everyday body, as mentioned in the last chapter.

In a close-up of emotion, a performance is not needed, as Balázs indicates. He finds that the emotional intimacy of a close-up would expose the subconscious through the obvious nuances. That is, a close-up can surface up the inner feelings on the surface. The intimacy in a close-up connects the cinematic body and the spectators closely that leaves no room for pretence. Tsai's cinematic body, therefore, depends on its subconscious body attitudes to surface up in a close-up like this. And that is why Tsai's films reveal a sense of real existence, not of performance.

Hsiao-Hung Chang also mentions that a close-up can mobilize the opposition of the upper face (divine) and the lower face (softness). In the process of mobilization, a close-up forms an *in-between* (of interiority and exteriority) relationship that allows the spectators to

project their own reflection. That is, a close-up establishes *an in-between subjectivity* of the spectators and the characters. In light of this, Tsai's cinematic body in a close-up also forms an in-between subjectivity, which is based on a collective experience of corporeality.



## Chapter Four: The Camp Taste: A Vaudeville Body

Tsai Ming-Liang's musical numbers in *The Hole* and *The Wayward Cloud* have been usually excluded from most discussions on his works. Most critics prefer taking these musical numbers as a nostalgic escape from the modern world to the period between 1950s and 1960s. But after *The Hole*, Tsai presented *The Wayward Cloud* with another five musical numbers in 2005. This film reveals that these musical numbers may be more than just experiments. The importance of the *musical* genre cannot be reduced to some aesthetic style as one used to know it to be. That is, Tsai's employment of the musical style deserves more attention.

In the previous chapter, I argue that in the non-musical scenes, the cinematic body generates its power by the *obvious nuance* of the physical movements through the mechanism similar to close-ups. That is, the invisible emotion *sur-faces* up the *sur-face* of the visible physical body. The spectators perceive the emotional weight not only by the eyes but also by their own corporeality. The musical numbers, on the other hand, *epidermize* or make the inner emotion *seen* directly by the eyes. The skin-tight dress, for instance, is directly "worn" by the cinematic body to highlight the bodily desire. And the popular songs speak out the inner desire, but not the silent monologues. Even the performers' direct gaze breaks down the invisible fourth wall (in theatrical terms) and lets the emotion flow to the spectators smoothly.

In this chapter, I will therefore analyze the relationship between the musical genre and



the cinematic body by tracing back to an early model of musical films: vaudeville. Tsai applies the mechanism of vaudeville spectacle, instead of conventional musical one, to infuse a different energy into his films. Afterwards, I will look at the *camp* element that Tsai endows in these musical numbers to generate a power of subversion against normality.

### Vaudeville Aesthetic

*The Hole* contains five musical numbers including “I Love Calypso,” “Tiger Lady,” “I Want Your Love,” “Achoo Cha Cha,” and “I Don’t Care Who You Are.” The leading role of these five numbers is the woman living downstairs, while the man living upstairs is a supporting role. These songs mainly express the woman’s inner desire for love, as in “I Want Your Love” and “I Don’t Care Who You Are.” But in *The Wayward Cloud*, the five numbers, including “A Half Moon,” “It’s Only the Beginning,” “Wonderful Rendezvous,” “Tung Ching Hsin” (Sympathy), and “Ching Hsin Teng” (Waiting Patiently), do not pay particular stress on female roles.<sup>29</sup> Almost every character in this film has a leading musical number. Nonetheless, these ten numbers share some similar aesthetic strategies. They stand in opposition to the everyday non-musical scenes, and deliver an exaggerated and imaginative form of physical

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<sup>29</sup> These ten oldies belong to the period of 1950s and 1960s. Grace CHANG (Ge Lan) is the singer of the five songs in *The Hole* and “Tung Chin Hsin” in *The Wayward Cloud*. Most of the songs are the musical numbers in the films. The characters Chang performs are mostly independent and energetic young women. As Shih-Cheng JUNG (Shicheng Rong) points out, Motion Pictures and General Investment (Tien Mao) intends to shoot western-like films, such as *Our Sister Hedy* by Chin TAO (Qin Tao) and *Mambo Girl* by Wen I (Wen Yi184). Chang in *Mambo Girl* plays a young girl who is brave enough to pursue her love. “A Choo Cha Cha” and “I Want Your Love” are adopted from western popular songs. The singer of “A Half Moon” and “Wonderful Rendezvous” is Chung HUNG (Zhong Hong); “Ching Hsin Teng” by Lu CHANG (Lu Zhang); “It’s Only the Beginning” by Li YAO. All of them are the popular singers in that period.

*performance*, similar to the musical spectacle.

But when the notion of the musical genre is involved, things become complicated, especially when Tsai's *musical* films do not exactly follow the convention of contemporary Hollywood musicals. In a classical musical, musical numbers are carefully integrated into the narrative, in order to "naturalize" the unrealistic song-and-dance sequences as normal events that happen in everyday life. But in Tsai's *musical* films, the musical numbers obviously rupture the central narrative because on one hand, the aesthetic style is distinct, and on the other, the numbers does not carry on the narrative development but interrupt it with a sudden start and an abrupt end. With an uneasy transition, the musical numbers seem to be closed units on their own sense: they do not serve the function of developing the plot, nor try to be integrated into it. So, it is difficult to categorize Tsai's use of the numbers as the standard practice of contemporary musical films. However, if we take a closer look at the genre history, the musical films in the early phase also present such a state of disintegration as in Tsai's.

Henry Jenkins, the author of *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*, observes that the early sound comedy has a difficult time to integrate the slapsticks into the narrative structure. He, then, explains that the disintegration is due to the influence of vaudeville.<sup>30</sup> According to Jenkins, vaudeville is a form of *theatrical*

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<sup>30</sup> The early sound comedy that Jenkins refers to is the one between 1920s and 1930s. At that period, America was moving into the Great Depression. But Jenkins argues that the disintegration of the narrative structure did not just represent a reaction to any social situation. As for the "early sound comedy," defined by the book title, Jenkins does not agree that the arrival of sound "denied silent clowns the use of their artistry as physical performers..." (3). The history between silent cinema and sound cinema is not ruptured, but continued. The sound comedians also share the characters of physical performance, which he characterizes as vaudeville

entertainment before the birth of cinematography, similar to the variety show that constitutes such various performances as musical numbers, acrobatic shows, slapsticks, and so on. Each act is independent from one another. The only purpose is to arouse the spectators' immediate response in succession. And when cinematography took over the place of vaudeville, the latter was not abandoned but integrated into the film medium. But the integration was not easy at the beginning. The early comedians tried to put individual performances together in one film, yet in a disorganized plot structure. As a result, the early comedies or musical films had a loose structure with unintegrated vaudeville shows. Jenkins indicates that the classic Hollywood cinema, instead of pushing away the diverse elements from the contemporary cultures, welcomed them and put them in films. He writes, "A fairly conventional element might still bear faint traces of its earlier use and an unconventional technique might still be consistent with prevailing conceptions of appropriate taste and social propriety" (21). Judging from this perspective, Jenkins claims that the fragmented structure in a comedy should not be necessarily interpreted as an escape from, or a reaction to, the social situation in context.

These acts should be considered as an aesthetic continuity of vaudeville.

The accidental numbers of Tsai's musical films may not therefore be just his nostalgic escape to the period of 1950s or 1960s. The musical films made then, such as *Air Hostess* or *The Wild Wild Rose*, still follow the principle of *naturalizing* the musical numbers into the

central narrative.<sup>31</sup> Tsai's musical numbers, however, create a fantastic and exaggerating style of film shooting. They stand out of the central narrative and follow their own logic. Viewed in this light, Tsai, although his films still retain some faint traces of the musical convention, tries also to hark back to an the early stage of film history, which is vaudeville aesthetic: where narrative rupture and physical performance abound.

The aim of the fragmented vaudeville shows is not to develop a well-organized plot structure or even a round character. Rather, its aim lies more in soliciting an immediate response from the spectators. These units are cut short in case they bore the spectators. In that case, according to Jenkins, every short unit, inserted into the film plot becomes “an explosion into remarkable performance spectacle” (2). The power of disruption is intense and strong. This power carries emotionally intense weight that draws the attention of the spectators from the plot to the performance itself (whereas the inner implication of the plot is expressed in the narrative structure). In fact, the inner emotion has to be exaggerated and amplified to make the spectators immediately understand the cause-effect relation while receiving visual pleasure. Most importantly, through the settings can be reduced, physical performance has to be magnified because vaudeville is a performance of body movements. The body is where the story is embedded. “Vaudeville saw the individual performer as the primary creative force [...],” Jenkins notes (*What Made a Pistachio Nuts?* 67). When vaudeville aesthetic is applied

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<sup>31</sup> “I Love Calypso” is the original sound track in *Air Hostess* by Wen I. “Tong Chin Shin” is the original sound track in *The Wild Wild Rose* by Tien Lin WANG (Tianlin Wang).

in the film medium, the cinematic body magnifies its movements, exaggerates the costume, and looks at the spectators in their eyes. This vaudeville body is a site where the show begins and ends.

In addition to the early *sound* comedy, Jenkins also relates the vaudeville aesthetic to the early *silent* comedy, especially Buster Keaton's.<sup>32</sup> In "The Fellow Keaton Seems to Be the Whole Show," he indicates that silent comedy, in fact, is a vaudeville show in that all kinds of slapsticks and gags are *physical* performances. And its purpose is to attract the spectators' attention and offers visual pleasure. But most importantly, when it is a silent film, the physical performance has to be more exaggerated and explicit, as in any vaudeville. "The incorporation of this vaudeville tradition," writes Jenkins, "was what gave silent screen comedy its intensity and fascination..." (36). Jenkins takes Keaton especially as a vaudeville body because the direct visual pleasure in silent films strengthens the performativity of vaudeville aesthetic.

Tsai's musical numbers operate in the same direction, as a vaudeville show does. The musical unit in his films usually has an abrupt start and a sudden end that separates these numbers from his central narrative of everyday life. This makes each musical number a self-reflexive unit and also an explosion into a cinematic spectacle. In addition, the cinematic

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<sup>32</sup> Vaudeville aesthetic does not necessarily belong to either silent or sound cinema. Most important of all, vaudeville aesthetic depends rather on *physical* performance than on *spoken* language and Buster Keaton can provide a good example. Keaton does not *speak* but just *act* in silent films and that was when he established the fame of being a great comedian with his deadpan expression. However, when the film industry (MGM) asked him to speak, the vaudeville aesthetic was substituted for spoken jokes. Keaton, therefore, "acted slow and spoke fast," as Andrew Horton describes, but not "thought slow and acted fast" and the stone face could not hold the emotional intensity inside anymore. And that was when Keaton's physical performance of vaudeville started to fade away from his filmmaking, the reason why Keaton withdrew from his film career. In Tsai's musical numbers, the oldies indicate the function of the sound but the music or the lyrics do not substitute the vaudeville performance of the cinematic body but intensify it.

power does not *surface* out of the everyday body as in the central narrative. The intensity is directly displayed *on* the surface in the imaginative space. The inner desire is *worn* by the cinematic body. The bright color, the paillettes and the skin-tight dress seem to put the inner desire into an exhibition. And the direct eye contact with the spectators breaks down the fourth wall between them and the cinematic body. Submitted to seduction, the spectators are not an objective “examiner” on every nuance of the body movements as in a close-up. The spectators, as if watching a glamorous vaudeville show, are distracted by some outspoken emotion, under the direct stare of the cinematic body.

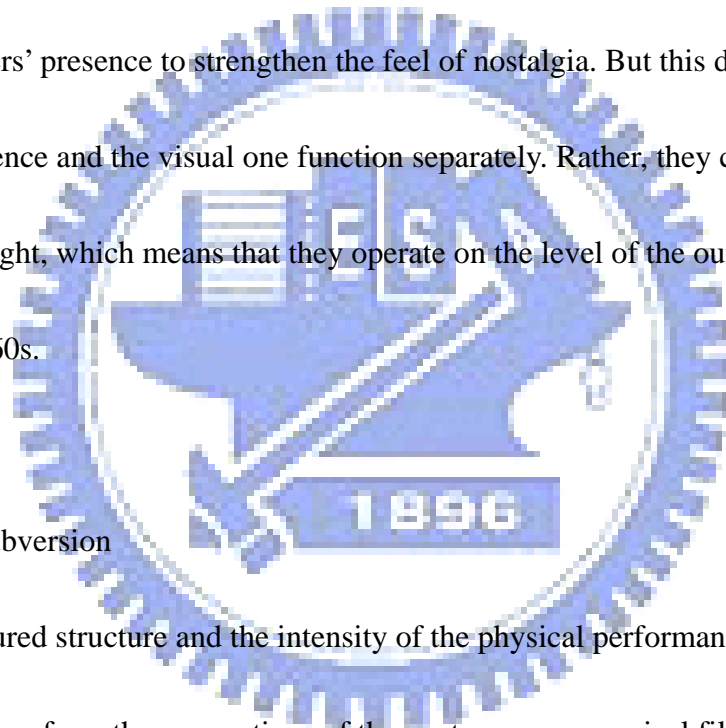
Also, the songs speak out some silent feelings. Tsai once mentioned that the songs in 1950s and 1960s carry the quality of *explicit* emotion, as one of the song titles suggests: “I want your love.” The emotion is candid and has no hidden agenda (Bang Wang 218). The straightforward communication in these songs is what a vaudeville performance needs. And the cinematic body in Tsai’s musical numbers performs these songs *visually*, such as Calypso dancing in “Calypso” and the love chasing scene in “I Want Your Love.” Even more, the disguised penis and the black widow in “Ching Hsin Teng” deliver a strong visual effect. So, the honest emotion inscribed in these songs corresponds to the straightforward performance of the cinematic body.

But what should not be forgotten is that music and the cinematic body has an irresolvable contradiction, in which the cinematic body is a silent one. The performers in Tsai’s musical

numbers do not sing in sync sound. They lip-sync to the old songs. In that case, the rupture between the music and the cinematic body is clear enough that the cinematic body is exempted from the limitations of the given principle: naturalization. The performers do not have to worry if they look like singing in sync sound. As a result, the mouth movement can be as exaggerated as it needs to be. Balázs also points out that the facial expression in silent films can achieve more emotional reality than the rhythm of the spoken words can (72-73). In other words, the performance of the mouth, not limited by the principle of naturalization, can adjust itself according to the emotional intensity as in silent cinema. The physical movements do not have to restrict themselves to reaching authenticity of any kind. Likewise, the cinematic body becomes more flexible to create the immediate intensity. Take Yang in “I Want Your Love” as an example. Her mouth wears the lipstick in bright red and she dramatizes her lip movements to magnify her inner desire. And the body movements are also exaggerated that Yang even dances with an extinguisher. But she skips the middle part of the song because the rhythm does not correspond to the emotional reality intended. Another example is “I Don’t Care Who You Are” when Yang and Lee dance just quietly and tenderly. The mouth and the body are producing a moderate expression that matches the atmosphere of love and peace.

The aesthetics of silence not only directs Tsai’s vaudeville shows into a visual and physical performance, an explosion of visual pleasure, but also preserves in full the nostalgia embedded in the oldies and the *aural presence* of the old-time singers. In that case, the music

is not meant to be an accessory or subordination for the *visual* physical performance. The aural presence of these singers inhabits in the nuance of the vocal performance that is individual and unique. As Philip Drake puts it, “Similarly, the voice of the star is also a particularly potent sign in their idiolect, one that is often read as the site of presence, as, for instance, in the authority conferred through the voice-over or the use of star voices to anthropomorphize animated characters” (88). The original vocal performance signifies out-time singers’ presence to strengthen the feel of nostalgia. But this does not suggest that the aural presence and the visual one function separately. Rather, they converge in their emotional weight, which means that they operate on the level of the outspoken passion in the 1950s and 1960s.



#### Camp: The Subversion

The ruptured structure and the intensity of the physical performance distinguish Tsai’s musical numbers from the conventions of the contemporary musical films (such as naturalization and subordination to the central narrative) and bring it closer to the vaudeville aesthetic. Yet Tsai’s musical numbers are not meant to be a representation or reconstruction of this aesthetic. My point is that to put vaudeville aesthetic in the context of modern age generates a different meaning from the period of the early sound comedies. The ruptured narrative structure and exaggeration of the physical performance may be a reaction or



subversion to the mainstream disciplines of the musical films. And Tsai's employment of subversion does not only de-naturalize the well-organized disciplines of the musical films, but also shatters the given stability of the social norm implied. The value of Tsai's musical numbers, therefore, lies more in the strength of disruption than in offering an easy nostalgic escape, as many critics have claimed. In order to examine the strength of subversion in Tsai's musical numbers, the *camp taste* could provide useful points of view.

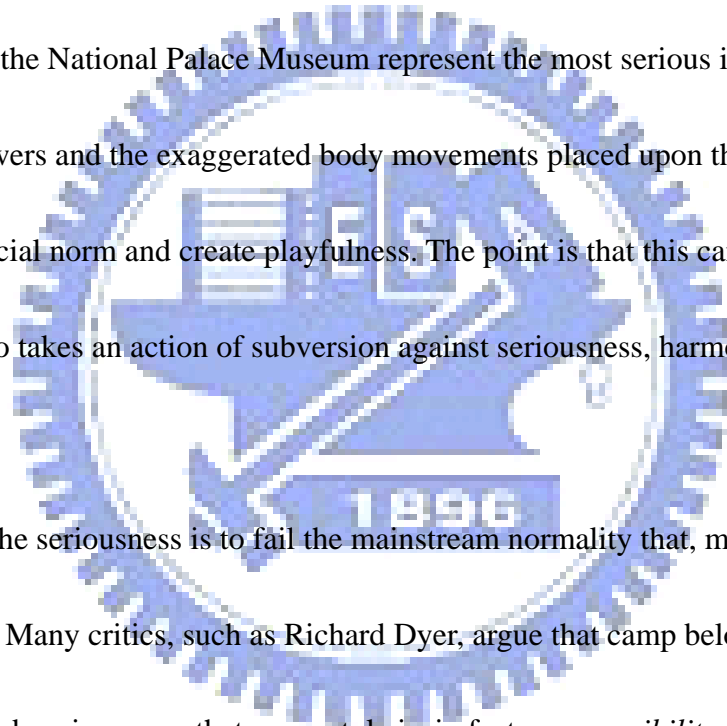
Camp has been a controversial issue and according to Fabio Cleto, camp's definition could be dated back to 1909 and "has been used to describe a literary style," such as that of Oscar Wilde since the 1920s (Cleto 9). And when cinema takes over the entertainment business, critics start to examine campy elements in films, especially in horror films and musical films. And during these years, critics cannot give a definition of what camp is or what a campy work looks like.<sup>33</sup> But still, a few critics, such as Esther Newton and Jack Babuscio, generalize some recurrent characteristics of a campy work: "irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour" (Babuscio 119).

Irony depends on the "incongruous juxtapositions" (Newton 103). For example, a *man* dressing like a *woman* is an incongruous juxtaposition of sexes. So, a drag queen is ironic in the sense of camp. The juxtapositions of incongruous elements are also obvious in Tsai's

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<sup>33</sup> The debates mainly concern the issue of whether camp belongs to gay men only. Some critics object Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" for she integrates gay community into the mainstream popular culture. On the other hand, other critics argue that taking camp as a heritage of gay men's stabilizes the possibility of camp discussion. These debates, however, are not the main focus of my analysis on Tsai's musical numbers. I am rather engaged in the general idea of a campy work.

musical numbers and “Wonderful Rendezvous” is a perfect example for the incongruence of sexes. In this musical number, Lee, the male actor, wears a pink dress with high heels, while Chen, the female actress, dresses a suit with a stick in her hand. The incongruous juxtaposition makes fun of the given implication of what men and women should wear. Also, the musical numbers in *The Hole* display an incongruous juxtaposition of a fantastic body in the dark, realistic space. Most obviously, in “It’s Only a Beginning,” both the statue of Chiang Kai-Shek and the National Palace Museum represent the most serious icons in Taiwan. But enormous flowers and the exaggerated body movements placed upon those serious icons subvert the social norm and create playfulness. The point is that this camp taste is not just for humour. It also takes an action of subversion against seriousness, harmony, and standards of beauty.



To fail the seriousness is to fail the mainstream normality that, most important of all, is heterogeneity. Many critics, such as Richard Dyer, argue that camp belongs to gay community exclusively. Babuscio argues that camp style is, in fact, *gay sensibility* (118). By this gay sensibility, gay men can subvert the binary sets: male and female, masculine and feminine, and normal and abnormal. So, some gay men put on a female dress to deconstruct what a man should be like.<sup>34</sup> Sexual difference is a production of social construction. Identity is a performativity, acting, and a role manipulation (Fabio 15; Newton 104). And those

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<sup>34</sup> One thing to note is that gay men, dressing a female outfit, may risk the danger of strengthening the stereotype of heterogeneity.

masquerade gay men can manipulate the gender system through camp taste.

Opinions are divergent on the issue of *gay* sensibility. Some critics note that the exclusiveness of gay community would violate their belief on instability (Fabio 19). They suggest that the performativity of a drag queen is a camp style that does not have to exclude female drag queen. A *female* drag queen is sustainable as long as she carries the camp style. Newton, therefore, takes Greta Garbo as a drag queen of *high camp* for two reasons.<sup>35</sup> First, she becomes a drag queen “whenever she took some heavy glamour part” (104). Her acting is an obvious performance that her identity is like her “costume” that can be taken off and put back on (105). Second, she performs in an *androgynous* style in that she “overplays” the role as a “*femme fatale*” (105). In Tsai’s musical numbers, Yang’s performance can be taken as drag acts, according to Newton’s descriptions. On the one hand, Yang’s garish dress has already been part of the performance. The covert outfit signifies her presence on the stage of the musical numbers, in contrast to the realistic scene where her presence is in an everyday, minimalized style. Her manipulated identity on and off the stage puts her in drag style. On the other hand, Yang also performs in an androgynous style because she almost controls the whole scene: the camera, lighting, and even the men around her. She demands for love and is not afraid to sing it out loud. In “Ching Hsin Teng,” she even leads a female army to chase a penis, worn as a hat by Lee. As a female drag queen, Yang, *overplaying* straightness, subverts

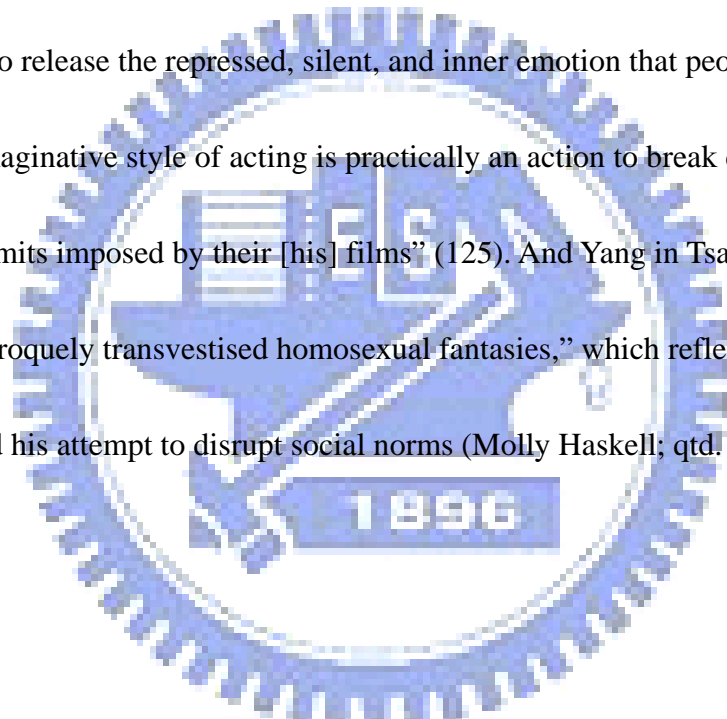
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<sup>35</sup> The idea of taking Garbo as a drag queen, Newton says, is derived from Parker Tyler’s “The Garbo Image.” Susan Sontag also offers a note on Garbo in “Notes on Camp.”

the binarism of masculine and feminine.

Babuscio recommends that authors are responsible for a campy work because of their gay sensibility. He says that the camp style is derived from gay authors' "unacceptable emotion" under the repression of the mainstream world, social norm, and heterogeneity system. And the campy work provides a space where they can hide themselves (132).<sup>36</sup>

Correspondingly, the musical numbers in Tsai's films, though non-realistic and imaginative, offer a space to release the repressed, silent, and inner emotion that people are used to lock up inside. The imaginative style of acting is practically an action to break down stability and to "exceed the limits imposed by their [his] films" (125). And Yang in Tsai's musical numbers shows the "baroquely transvestised homosexual fantasies," which reflect Tsai's own gay sensibility and his attempt to disrupt social norms (Molly Haskell; qtd. in Babuscio 131).



## Conclusion

The similarity of vaudeville aesthetic and camp lies in the characteristic of subversive theatricality. Vaudeville is a mode of exaggerated expression, in need of direct communication and explosive visual pleasure that disrupts the musical convention: naturalization. Camp taste is a self-reflexive performance that tries to exceed the limits imposed by social expectations and film convention. As Babuscio writes, "To appreciate camp in things or persons is to

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<sup>36</sup> But he also mentions that it would be better to take this oppressed community as general minority, in addition to gay men (133).

perceive the notion of life-as-theatre, being versus role-playing, reality and appearance” (123).

Their common purpose is to create fun. The cinematic body is mainly their site of

manipulation, such as physical performance and drag acts. The difference between them,

however, is that camp inscribes a power of subversion to disrupt normality. In Tsai’s musical

numbers, camp style cooperates with vaudeville aesthetic to de-naturalize the relation

between the central narrative and imaginative scenes. The ruptured structure and the

vaudeville body give Tsai’s musical numbers a power to overthrow the convention of musical

films. Some critics, including Fabio and Sontag, proclaim that camp style is related to pop

culture, especially the one in the past. Pop culture belongs to the regime of mainstream culture

but as time goes by, the pop culture of *the past* contains an intensity of temporal incongruence.

Sontag writes, “Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the

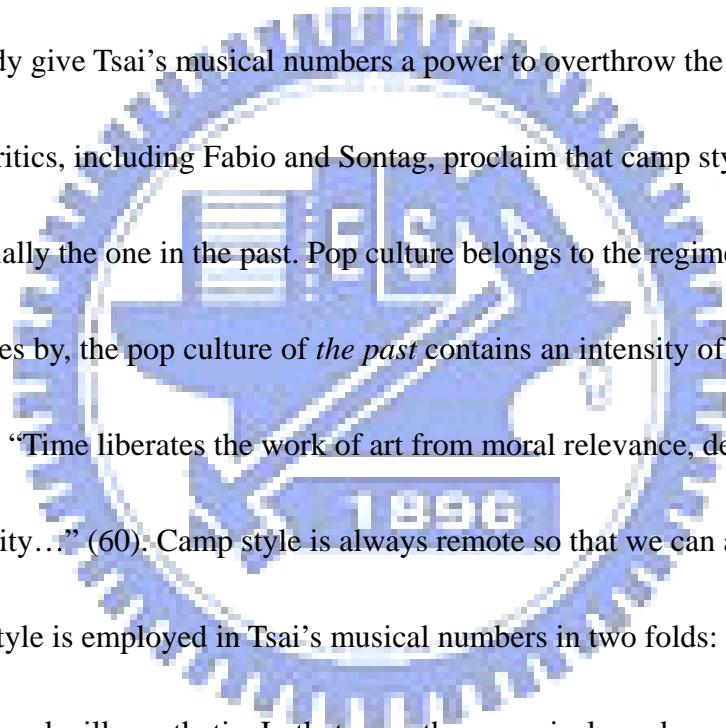
Camp sensibility...” (60). Camp style is always remote so that we can appreciate it more. This

incongruous style is employed in Tsai’s musical numbers in two folds: the songs in the 1950s

or 1960s and vaudeville aesthetic. In that case, these musical numbers are not just an action in

honor of and an escape to the past. They also use the pop culture of the past to gain a camp

style, as a power of subversion.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

By employing various critical concepts, such as Pasolini's bruteness, Balázs' new dimension of a close-up, and Jenkins' vaudeville aesthetic, I have examined the cinematic body in Tsai's films from a series of related perspectives. All these concepts, disconnected as they may seem, converge on the same point: the cinematic spectacle of corporeality. Tsai's films do not create a character that belongs to the realm of narrative description. Instead, his films put emphasis on the presence of the cinematic body. By means of the corporeal presence, the cinematic body reminds the spectators of their bodily presence through the magnification of the camera. That is, the cinematic body in Tsai's films is not reduced to a character or disguised as a body for fantasy. Rather, it appeals to the everyday corporeal experience that contains suffering, and hence, stresses the presence of the body. The primary source of meanings lies in this cinematic spectacle of corporeality. In my thesis, my main concern is not on the meaning of the body nor on what the cinematic body represents. The core of the issue lies in the presence of the cinematic body in Tsai's films and in how this cinematic body communicates with the spectators.

### The Cinematic Spectacle of Corporeality

*Corporeality* in this context does not refer to the real human body in physical reality. It is

a *concept* that is inscribed in Tsai's cinematic body. Firstly, as Rey Chow points out, Tsai's cinematic body does not carry much social reference or biographical information, and its meanings are not derived from the words or the plot. Its temporality is embodied in the everyday situation that is devoid of a chronological and causal development. That is, the cinematic body is not subordinated to the historical time or socio-cultural context. Even the clothes are ripped off from the cinematic body. On the whole, Tsai's aesthetic strategy is not an additive one, but one that is subtractive or minimalist. Without any disguise, the cinematic intensity is caused by the pure presence of the cinematic body. Similarly, Tsai has removed the redundant factors, such as the camera frame, the furnished interior (e.g. empty houses) and unneeded indicative gestures of the cinematic body, and not to mention the camera movements. These factors would not then distract the spectators' attention but make them focus on/stare at the obvious nuances of the cinematic body. Such a subtractive strategy can then enhance the presence of the cinematic body and at some level constitutes a close-up in Tsai's films in a new dimension.

As a close-up enlarge details, it does not need complexity. According to Bálazs, a new dimension of the close-up is that it is not concerned with spatial details, but emotional intensity. That is, magnified intensity constitutes a close-up. Bálazs also mentions that this kind of close-up requires a simple story, a simple action, and a simple face. Simplification *concentrates the attention* on the subtle emotional changes by which it means a close-up

requires *a staring gaze*. A spectator *sees* a filmic narrative story but *stares* at the invisible emotion. To be precise, *a stare* penetrates the materiality/appearance and upturns the immateriality/depth while *seeing* stays at the surface of meaning. So, simplification enables the inner depth to *surface up on the surface*. That is to say, Bálazs has stated that a close-up of emotion tells a microdrama (obvious nuance) of the soul (inner emotion). In Tsai's cinematic body, as the obstacle on the surface is removed, the emotion hidden inside the body can be magnified by a small gesture; corporeality can also be manifested by the everyday, tired body as if in a close-up. In other words, the minimalist aesthetics of the cinematic body generates some dramatic *theatricality* of emotion in the context of a close-up.

On a whole, the corporeality in Tsai's films appeals to a *violent visual impact* on the spectators. On one hand, the minimalist aesthetics *exposes* the corporeality as the object of attention. On the other hand, a close-up of emotion magnifies every little *physical* movement to generate strong intensity. As a result, Tsai's cinematic body does not only reserve the "bruteness" of the physical reality in Pasolini's terms, revealing a collectivity of everyday activities.<sup>37</sup> Tsai's cinematic body goes still further in the perspective of bruteness. His everyday activities generate a series of corporeal needs. These corporeal activities are used to being removed from the sight of the spectators. But Tsai does not only put his camera in front of these activities but also makes them the objects of attention. And corporeality, minimalized

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<sup>37</sup> The bruteness of the physical reality, in my understanding, may refer to the "documentary value" in Bazin's terms, by which he means that the cinematic images are partially connected to the physical reality ("The Virtues" 47). What happens in the films is partially true, compared to paintings.



and magnified, highlights the presence of the cinematic body, so to remind the spectators of their corporeal bodies through the collective experience of everyday banality.

Likewise, Tsai's musical spectacle is a spectacle of *physical performance*. A musical spectacle is usually associated with the objectification of the female body and fetishism of the male gaze. In Tsai, the musical numbers do act as a spectacle of physical performance but not a generic, conventional one. The physical performance in Tsai's musical numbers shows an explosion of visual pleasure. The performers do not *naturalize* themselves as an object to see. Rather, they stare back at the spectators as if they are in a theatrical performance. The interaction between the cinematic spectacle and the spectators is immediate and direct. The cinematic body, as a result, does not succumb to fetishism easily but has an affinity to early theatrical form: *vaudeville aesthetic*. Jenkins points out the anarchistic style in vaudeville aesthetic that "saw the individual performer as the primary creative force [...]" (67). That is, the cinematic body is not taken as an object but as a self-reflexive performance. From the same perspective, Tsai's unconventional musical numbers also embrace this anarchistic style. For instance, the alienated effect of lip-synching strays away from the generic convention of naturalizing the musical scenes and emancipates therefore the cinematic body from the limit set by words. In Tsai, again, the garish costume and exaggerated physical movements put their emphasis on the *excessive presence* of the cinematic body. Tsai's musical numbers carry thereby this exaggerated theatricality of vaudeville aesthetic that enables the physical

movements to be a cinematic spectacle.

### The Position of the Spectators

Obviously, the modes of expression of Tsai's non-musical scenes and musical numbers are distinct from each other. In the non-musical scenes, the cinematic reception results in the invisible emotion surfacing up from interiority. It is a continuing process of reversing the relation of immateriality and materiality, of the invisible and the visible, and, in Barthes' terms, of the upper face and the lower face. To Hsiao-Hung Chang, the film medium, through the combination of these two faces, will allow the inscription of the immateriality of emotion (the softness of Hepburn's face). By employing Balázs' new dimension of a close-up, Chang then suggests that the spectators and the cinematic image in a close-up should form a relationship of "inter-subjectivity," by which she means that the spectators can project their subjective reflection on to the cinematic image (150). Through this inter-subjectivity, the spectators can participate in the cinematic reception and deepen the emotional intensity of the cinematic body. The exposed corporeality, as in Tsai's cinematic body in a close-up, provokes the spectators to project their corporeal experience on to the screen and therefore intensify the corporeality of the cinematic body. As a consequence, the spectators and the cinematic body forms the inter-subjectivity based on a *collectivity* of corporeal experience. From this perspective, the spectators are situated in a position where the presence of their bodies keeps

being reminded. That is to say, Tsai's corporeal films conjure up the corporeal spectators.

What is similar to the non-musical scenes is that the musical numbers also eliminate the use of words to intensify the presence of the cinematic body. However, the distinct point is that the musical numbers does not reverse the relation of the interior and the exterior or surface up the inner emotion. These musical numbers, instead, *epidermize* the interior desire as visibility in the physical performance: the skin-tight dress, the exaggerated body movements, or the garish make-up. Although the physical performance constitutes a musical spectacle, the spectators of Tsai's films are not traditional viewers, nor are they passive. A tongue-in-cheek seriousness always reminds them of the existence of the film medium and at the same time, widens the gap between them. As Tsai has mentioned himself, "We are used to laughing at the films at that time because there was singing all the time. But I wish to draw to a distanced position. For instance, I can turn the left to the right. There is no distance as it may seem but a form that comes into being" ("Reading" 14).

Tsai's cinematic spectacle does not resemble any razzle-dazzle or hallucination in which the spectators are fully distracted and guided passively by the films. Instead, Tsai's cinematic spectacle of corporeality puts the spectators in a distance as examiners. Benjamin proposes the term *a distracted examiner*, by which he argues that the cinematic experience is similar to a habitual one but "the audience takes the position of the camera" (260). That is, there is a certain distance between the cinematic world and the spectators because of the camera. Tsai's

films, therefore, do not naturalize the existence of the medium but on the contrary, accentuate the film medium that leaves some space for the spectators to ponder. Consequently, the spectators are more like examiners. The everyday corporeality (habitual experience) is put under the examination in a close-up. The physical performance in a musical spectacle (distraction) is disrupted by the “incongruous juxtapositions” of camp taste (Newton 103).

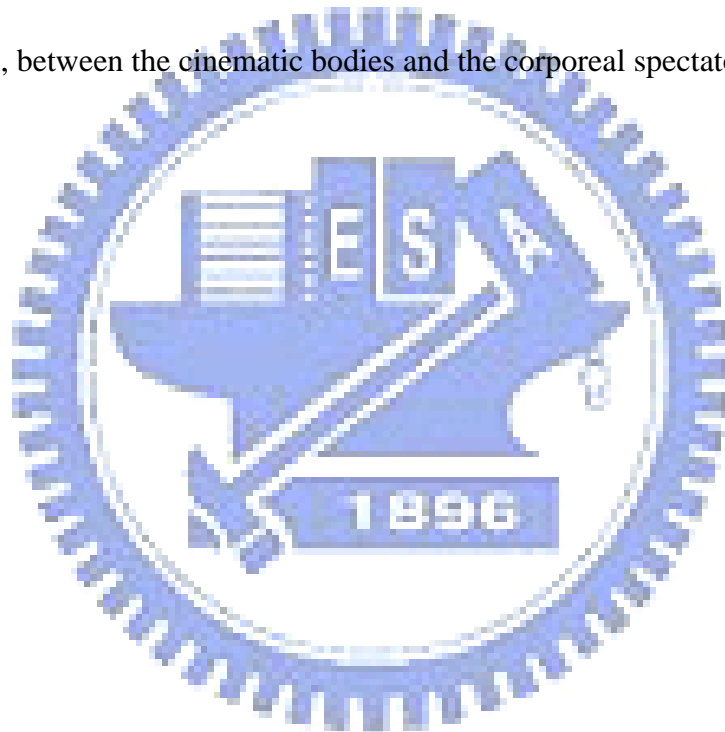
### The Theme of Tsai’s Corporeal Movies

The theme of Tsai’s films is the everyday corporeality that keeps going astray from the mainstream and challenges the existing normalcy. Tsai’s first three films, the so-called *family trilogy*, unfold the process of establishing an alternative family system. In his first film *Rebels of the Neon God*, Hsiao Kang is seen walking away from his family. He lives in a hotel where he does not need to sit in front of his desk, go to the cram school, or drink talismanic water. His everyday corporeality is not the same as the one he used to own. His *abnormal* corporeality breaks the frame of normality and performs a neon god show that is not allowed at home but in a hotel. In *Vive L’amour*, a family/home in the traditional sense is visually empty. But the everyday corporeality establishes an alternative concept of the family. Hsiao Kang starts to do someone’s laundry, to cook, and to wear female clothes. These physical behaviors imply another structure of the everyday corporeality. This idea goes on to develop in *The River*. As Rey Chow points out, the sauna room is the place of “a new social contract”

(“A Pain in the Neck” 134). People there even adopt a different language use as indicated by the opening and closing of doors or touching each other’s body. In the darkness, they communicate with their bodies. Hsiao Kang’s pain in the neck also distorts his everyday activities, such as riding a motorcycle in a normal way. The everyday corporeality in *The Hole* is in turn challenged by a mythical virus. Corporeality is forced to adopt the animal-like lifestyle, such as crawling on the floor and hiding from the light. The distorted corporeality upsets at the same time the spectators’ cinematic experience. In *What Time Is It There?*, Hsiao Kang is afraid of living in his house and later has sex with a prostitute in his car. Hsiao Kang’s mother lives in a world of day and night reversal. In *Goodbye Dragon Inn*, Tsai challenges the usual experience one has in the cinema. People walk, meet, and have physical contacts. The everyday experience becomes intense, scary, and weird. In *The Wayward Cloud*, Tsai subverts the fantasy-like corporeality in a pornographic film. A pornographic actress does not perform her task but turns into an unconscious body. Soon the spectators feel a sense of physical heaviness, the presence of her body as an everyday body. And Hsiao Kang and Shiang-Chyi Chen’s crab eating scene is rendered as the portrait of hunger.

In conclusion, Tsai’s films appeal to a distinct cinematic experience from mainstream Hollywood films: a distracted examination. On one hand, Tsai puts the spectators in a distance position so that they can stare and *examine* the presence of the cinematic body. In the musical spectacle, Tsai prevents the spectators from falling into a fantasy by frustrating the musical

convention of naturalization. The frustration reminds the spectators of the interference of the film medium and of their own presence as well. On the other hand, Tsai's cinematic body forms a close-up of bodily attitude under the gaze of the spectators. This magnification of emotion turns the corporeality into an alternative spectacle whose cinematic impact exercises directly on the everyday experience of the spectators. Given above, Tsai's films can be taken as corporeal movies in that he effaces the narrative characters and lets the bodies communicate, between the cinematic bodies and the corporeal spectators.



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---, dir.. *The Skywalk Is Gone*. Perf. Kang-Sheng Lee, Shiang-Chyi Chen, and I-Ching Lu.

Home Green Films, 2001.

---, dir.. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. Perf. Kang-Sheng Lee, Shiang-Chyi Chen, Kiyonobu

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Films, 2003.

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## Glossary

The Names of Chinese Filmmakers and Film Titles in Chinese Characters (Listed  
alphabetized in *Wade-Gilles*)

A Conversation With God (Yu Shen Tui Hua) 與神對話

Air Hostess (Kung Chung Hsiao Chieh) 空中小姐

Chin TAO 陶秦

The Endless Love (Pu Liao Chin) 不了情

Goodbye Dragon Inn (Pu San) 不散

The Hole (Tung) 洞

I Don't Want To Sleep Alone (Hei Yen Chuan) 黑眼圈

In The Mood For Love (Hua Yang Nien Hua) 花樣年華

The Kid (Hsiao Hai) 小孩

Mambo Girl (Man Po Nu Lang) 曼波女郎

My New Friends (Wo Hsin Jen Shih De Peng You) 我新認識的朋友

Our Sister Hedy (Ssu Chien Chin) 四千金

Rebels of the Neon God (Ching Shao Nien Na Cha) 青少年哪吒

The River (He Liu) 河流

The Road Home (Wo De Fu Chin Mu Chin) 我的父親母親

The Skywalk Is Gone (Tien Chiao Pu Chien Le) 天橋不見了



Tsai Ming-Liang 蔡明亮

Vive L'amour (Ai Ching Wan Sui) 愛情萬歲

The Wayward Cloud (Tien Pien I To Yun) 天邊一朵雲

Wen I 易文

What Time Is It There? (Ni Na Pien Chi Tien?) 你那邊幾點

The Wild Wild Rose (Yeh Mei Kui Chih Lien) 野玫瑰之戀

Wong Kar-wai (Wang Chia-Wei) 王家衛

Zhang Yimou (Chang I-Mou) 張藝謀

