Past Masters, New Waves : Tsai Ming-liang / François Truffaut

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The cinematic universe of Tsai Ming-liang 蔡明亮 gives us a chance to examine contemporary Taiwanese art cinema strategy: to re-appropriate, analyze, parody and reflect on its tradition, its legacy and its influence. His films are good examples of the contemporary complex relationships between international production and circulation and national authenticity. This article will discuss an easily recognizable form of appropriation and parody of prior cinema in Tsai's work: in *Ni nabian jidian ?* 你那邊幾點？(What Time is it There ?, 2001), which uses extracts of *Les quatre cents coups* (François Truffaut, 1959) one of the first masterpieces of the French Nouvelle Vague of the 1960s. This apparently straightforward citation articulates its discourse in a complex reflection on the impact of the artistic heritage of the European cinema upon Taiwanese cinema, as well as a meditation on fathers and deceased ancestors.

L'univers cinématique de Tsai Ming-liang nous donne l'opportunité d'étudier les stratégies employées par le cinéma contemporain taiwanais pour se réapproprier, analyser, parodier et transformer sa tradition, son leg et son influence. Ses films sont exemplaires de la relation contemporaine complexe entre d'une part la dimension internationale de la production et de la distribution et d'autre part l'authenticité nationale. Cet article discute d'une forme aisément reconnaissable de réapropriation et de parodie d'un cinéma ancien dans le travail de Tsai Ming-liang: dans le film *Ni nabian jidian ?* 你那邊幾點？(Et là-bas quelle heure est-il ?, 2001), Tsai utilise des extraits des *Quatre cents coups* (François Truffaut, 1959), un des premiers chefs-d'oeuvres de la Nouvelle Vague française des années 1960. Cette référence apparemment explicite à Truffaut s'inscrit dans une réflexion complexe sur l'impact de l'héritage artistique du cinéma européen sur le cinéma taiwanais, elle est aussi une méditation sur les pères et les ancêtres.

蔡明亮的电影世界让我们有机会检视台湾当代艺术电影的策略：重新挪用、分析、模仿与反映其传统、遗产及影响等。他的电影在反映国际生产、发行与国家本真性之间当代复杂关系方面，不失为佳作。这篇文章将讨论蔡明亮作品《你那边几点》(2001)中，一些对老电影浅显的挪用与模仿形式，此部电影借用了法国导演楚浮（Truffaut）作品《四百击》(1959)中的片断，后者是开启于六十年代的法国新浪潮运动的第一部代表作品。这种显然直截了当的借用清晰地表明其在对欧洲电影艺术传承之综合反思中有关台湾电影的话语，以及对父辈与已故祖先的冥思。

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Introduction

Meta-cinema in its various forms – quotations, reconstruction of the making of cinema, parody and so on – is an important site from where to observe and analyse cross-cultural relations and national aesthetic currents. In particular, a discussion of the cinematic universe of Tsai Ming-liang 蔡明亮 gives us a chance to examine contemporary Taiwanese art cinema strategy: to re-appropriate, analyse, parody and reflect on its tradition, its legacy and its influence.[1] Tsai Ming-liang is a Malaysian-born overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* 華僑). He moved to Taipei in the 1970s to attend university, and has since the 1990s become the most representative *auteur* of the New Cinema.[2] Thus, his career can be seen as encapsulating the quintessential notion of Greater China, which implies the idea of a pervasive, transnational Chinese "traditional" culture that expands its boundaries well beyond the Popular Republic's borders.[3]

In addition, Taiwan itself is a very particular "nation" having lost its diplomatic international status as the Republic of China back in the 1970s, but still demonstrating all the characteristic features of a nation, such as, its current and regular democratic election. Taiwan is an island of deep-rooted contradictions, far from the historical relics of the millennial history of Chinese culture, but situating itself as the unique legitimate heir of this history. The "tradition" is projected as held and transmitted directly from characters). At the same time, the island is not only an entity clearly detached from the mainland, both in terms of cultural relics and material symbols of national identity, but also in terms of contemporary political and economic importance – which is shifting resolutely to the Peoples' Republic. In addition, Taiwan has experienced – as distinct from mainland China – both the direct protracted colonialism of the Japanese (1895-1945), and the indirect colonialism of the United States that has protected the island from the Mainland, making this very delicate and strategic area an important bastion of anti-communism. The importance of Taiwan as a tactical location became evident during the war with Korea, and consequently the American involvement with

1 Here, I am developing the ideas first broached in my monograph *Tsai Ming-liang*, Venice, Cafoscarina, 2004 (in Italian); see also "Tsai Ming-liang e François Truffaut: il maestro e il discepolo" in *Cher Maître: scritti in onore di Lionello Lanciotti*, Venezia, Cafoscarina, 2005. This article adopts the Pinyin Romanisation system, except in the case of personal names where the individual's preferred form is used. The Pinyin of Tsai Ming-liang is Cai Mingliang.
2 Studies on Taiwanese New Cinema include Jiao Xiongping (Peggy Chiao) 焦雄屏 (ed.), *Taiwan xin dianying* 台灣新電影 [Taiwanese New Cinema], Taibei, Shibao chuban gongsi, 1988; Li Tianduo 李天鐸, *Taiwan dianying, shehui yu lishi* 台灣電影, 社會與歷史 [Cinema, society, history in Taiwan], Taibei, Shibao wenhua, 1997; Chen Ruxiu (Robert Chen) 陳儒修, *Taiwan xin dianying de lishi wenhua jingyan* 台灣新電影的歷史文化經驗 [A history of Taiwanese New Cinema], Taibei, Wanxiang, 1993; Lu Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Bérénice Reynaud, *Nouvelles Chines, nouveaux cinémas*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1999; Emilie Yeh-yu Yeh and Darrel Williams Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005; Chris Berry et Fei Lu (eds), *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, Hong Kong University Press, 2005. 3 For an introduction to the notion of Greater China see John F. Copper, "The Meaning and Significance of Greater China" in Gary D. Rawnsley, Ming-Yeh

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Taiwan became more and more important. The influence of America upon Taiwan's cultural life cannot be overestimated. The most important politicians and businessmen have completed their studies in the United States-which maintains a very strong influence particularly in the cultural fields, and especially in popular entertainment, in Hollywood productions, and in a general "Americanization" of lifestyles. The previous colonizers – the Japanese – and their wealthy neighbour – the Koreans – also exert a strong influence in the practice of everyday life and popular culture.

Taiwanese cultural production remains therefore, an ideal object for the analysis of cross-cultural and transnational tendencies; issues related to post-colonialism, post-modernism and, more generally, the contemporary politics of identity. Similarly, Tsai Ming-liang's identity is made up of contradictions: Tsai has been accused of being "unTaiwanese" – he actually does not have a Taiwanese passport – and yet the government has financed his films and marketed them as a national product.[4] However, his last two films were internationally funded, notably by Japan and France. Consequently, his movies are thus good examples of the contemporary complex relationships between international production and circulation, and national "authenticity". These films are evidently addressed to an international art film festival market, even if Tsai, himself, is adopting strategies that help to call local cinema back to the cinema and the local spectator. These strategies have included him personally standing in the street calling out to the public and attracting bypassers to his shows; screening and lecturing at universities nationwide; and causing scandals related to sexual representations – the latter functioned very well for his latest film to date, *Tianbian yi duo yun*天邊一朵雲 (*The Wayward Cloud, 2005)*.[5]

In conclusion, Tsai Ming-liang's authorial gaze is both internal and external, being profoundly shaped by the Chinese cultural context he lives in, and at the same developing a transnational point of view, especially evident in the complex treatment of quotation and parody of others' cinema in his own opus.

I will focus here on a particular and easily recognizable form of appropriation and parody of "old" cinema in Tsai's work. In the case of *Ni nabian jidian ?* 你那邊幾點？(*What Time is it There ?*, 2001), which uses extracts of *Les quatre cents coups* (*400 Blows*, François Truffaut, 1959) one of the first "masterpieces" of the French Nouvelle Vague that developed in the 1960s. The protagonist of the film watches a DVD of the older film, and Tsai cuts two sequences of the classic French text and melts it into his work, establishing a silent dialogue between two eras and two conceptions of cinema- two different representations of reality that, I would argue, finally have many common points. These apparently straightforward quotations become in fact more complicated when, in an uncanny twist, the girl, with whom the young protagonist is in love, meets the very actor of *400 Blows*, Jean Pierre Léaud. In this way, the body of the actor becomes a living quotation, and the citation articulates its discourse in a complex reflection on the artistic heritage of the European cinema upon Taiwanese cinema, as well as a meditation on fathers and deceased ancestors.

T. Rawnsley (eds.), *Political Communications in Greater China*, London and New York, Routledge Curzon, 2003. 4 *Cinema in the Republic of China: 2000 Yearbook*, Taipei, Motion Picture Development Foundation, 2001. 5 After he obtained three awards in Berlin (Silver Bear for outstanding artistic contribution; Alfred Bauer award; Fipresci award), Tsai demanded and got his film to be shown uncut; this gave the Taiwanese public a rare opportunity to go and see something very scandalous coming from the very centre of Taiwanese society – with the result as the

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French nouvelle vague and Taiwan new cinema

***Ni** nabian jidian ?* is, in the very first place, an open homage to François Truffaut and the French Nouvelle Vague of the sixties ; a movement, which had a profound influence on the development of the Taiwanese New Cinema in the eighties, as well as on its "second wave" in the nineties. *Ni nabian jidian ?* is a meditation on the death of a father and the heritage of the ancestors. It elaborates a thought both on a personal level and on an artistic, aesthetic level; this approach reveals a deep traditional interest in the relationship with predecessors, in a culture that has been defined as "obsessed with filiations and transmission." [6] Here we can see how Tsai Ming-liang uses a modernist approach and focuses on contemporary representation of urban decay and squalor, and at the same time maintains a traditional interest in the deepest concern for Chinese culture. Absences (of fathers, of masters) reveal a different kind of presence, an empty space occupied by ghosts and spectres. This reflection on origins becomes abstract and metaphysical, and the film situates itself in a perverse magical realism-a dreamlike, indefinite space where living and dead can communicate and interact.

The first scene of the movie shows the familiar house of the hero. I call it familiar because it is recurrent in Tsai's movies: the director utilises the same décors, the same actors, the same universe that become therefore a sort of personal universe marked by fetishized objects and gestures. I will return later to the peculiar relationship that binds the director and his alter ego, the actor Lee Kang-sheng/Li Kangsheng 李康生.

The next sequence shows Xiao Kang in a car, with a cinerarium. He is coming back from his father's funeral. The films develop the lives of the family, now comprised only of mother and son, following the departure of the father. The woman appears to be inconsolable; she is obsessed by the presence of the husband and is convinced that he comes back from the world of dead. She then prepares the table for him and obscures the windows with layers of papers and tissues because she is convinced that he cannot with stand direct sunlight; and she comes to believe that her husband has been reincarnated into a fish living in the aquarium. [7] Although the father is not actually there, his supposed presence deregulates all the schedules and habits of the family.

The son, Xiao Kang, is afraid of this presence, to the point that he does not dare to come out at night and has to pee into a plastic bottle, hidden within his room like an Otaku – fearful of the outside world, centred in front of his screen. [8] But his screen does not show video games; instead it provides old French movies. Flashback: Xiao Kang is a street peddler, selling watches on a skywalk. He meets a young girl, who buys him the watch he is wearing. He hesitates-he does not want to sell that particular watch; we do not know the reason… but our mind runs to *Pulp Fiction*: might it be a gift or souvenir of the departed father ? The girl

most successful of Tsai's films to date (especially in the south part of Taiwan) and probably a lot of deluded stares. 6 François Jullien, *La grande image n'a pas de forme*, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 41. 7 See, for a poetic analysis of the motif of the fish, Charles Tesson, "*Et là-bas, quelle heure est-il ? Motifs : poisson*", *Cahiers du cinéma*, n. 558, 2001, p. 34. 8 Massimiliano Griner and Rosa Isabella Furnari, *Otaku: i giovani perduti del Sol Levante*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 1999.

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leaves Taiwan for Paris. While she is walking the gloomy streets of the French capital in a parody of tourism, a melancholic apogee of solitude and displacement; the boy becomes weirdly obsessed by her – or better, by her absence. He begins to regulate all the watches to Paris time. First his own, then all the watches he's selling, then the clock in the living room (or is it the father who did it ? We do not know-the mother is convinced that the deceased husband regulates the clock according to his own time); and then all the watches he sees-in shops and public spaces. Apparently, the girl too feels a kind of sentimental jet leg. The two young people seem to have a some kind of indirect communication: the boy gets drunk in Taipei and the girl troughs up in Paris. The boy, in Taipei, buys films that show Paris, and at home watches the DVD of *400 Blows*; at the same time (as suggested by what is supposedly a cross cutting) the girl meets Jean-Pierre Léaud in Montparnasse cemetery and he gives her his phone number. The pervasive theme of personal mourn and desolation caused by a loss shifts to a poetic statement about artistic influences and heritage. Life and representation, art and diary get confused in a mirroring of chance and geometrical correspondences. Thanks to this mechanism of replacement and displacement; of shifting from a personal mourn to a transnational echo of artistic practise Tsai reveals his aesthetic debts to the great French director. These correspondences articulate a complex problematic of artistic independence and influences, of postmodernist citations and deep structural mode of production in a globalized world.

In the first place, we can read the more simple literal homage to a culture that has invented cinema. France represents not only the very place where modern cinema as a public show was born, but also the first country where cinema was considered as an art, entering in the university and beneficiating of public funds for cultural products. It is France which, to come back to our specific director, screens his films regularly in festivals and theatres, and which allows him to work. His film, (*Dong*, for example) is co financed by the television channel ARTE. Tsai's emblematic stylistic coherence creates a unique universe of silences, long takes, and distant shots. This fetishized and ultra-symbolic universe enables him to create a unique universe, but alienates him from the greater public, especially the market-oriented Hollywood shaped cinema consumption of Taiwan. As is well known, France has a policy that sustains national and "alternative" cinema, in opposition to the standardised Hollywood production, and Tsai benefits from this policy, while in Taiwan local production has sunk to a few films produced every year, scarcely distributed and not at all advertised. The French co-production permits shooting in Paris, and the possibility of integrating French technicians: the director of photography is Benoît Delhomme, who has already worked for a French-Asian co-production with director Trahn Ahn Hung, for *Mù dud u xhan* (*The Scent of Green Papaya*, 1999, Vietnam/ France).

The presence of Jean-Pierre Léaud in *Ni nabian jidian ?* can be seen as a simple citation- a homage to a great director and a great actor. We could therefore analyse this transplant – the present and aging body of the French actor in a Taiwanese cinematography that is already "classical", no longer "new" – as a cultivated and respectful citation. But it is also, I would argue, a poetic declaration that involves Tsai's personal work as well as the entire production of Taiwanese art films.

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Multiple Intertextualities

We could in fact find different and apparently more pertinent paternity for Tsai's work. The immediate reference is Hou Hsiao-hsien (Hou Xiaoxian侯孝賢) the spiritual father of Taiwanese New Cinema, the most well-known and respected Taiwanese director. [9] From Hou, Tsai derives important stylistic features like the long-take, the fixed camera, the geometrical composition of the frame, the slow-paced rhythm and the elliptical narration.

Another major influence on Tsai comes from Yang Dechang 楊德昌 (Edward Yang). [10] If Hou was considered as the master of the nativist (*xiangtu* 鄉土), expressing a local and purely Chinese style, Yang Dechang has been considered the first poet of urban cosmopolitism, of Taipei as a metaphor of contemporary post-colonial society, of modernism and globalisation. [11] It is a Taipei where languages, cultures, localism and global trends get mixed and confused; his films contain a strong social critique and theoretical consciousness. [12] They are 'epic' and theoretical at the same time, forests of crossed destinies, moving characters strongly connoted as exponents of peculiar social identities and milieu, therefore readable as symbols or metaphors of Taiwanese social and political identities. [13]

Tsai re-reads some of the topics recurrent in Yang: urban alienation, solitude, crossing destinies and mysterious coincidences, modern soulless apartments, post-modern architectures that represent the crisis of contemporary society, the generational conflict, and the contradiction of a society still stubbornly faithful to Confucian "tradition", but at the same time completely focused upon a materialistic, western modernity. These motifs are dealt with a style and a tone that is absolutely unique and original. It's a kind of parody, in other words a re-vision ("reversionary ratio"). [14] If Yang cinema remains a classic, narrative oriented cinema, Tsai Ming-liang's is much more a "cinema of experience". [15] In other words, Tsai experiments with an innovative cinema, both stylistically and thematically. His style is definitely experimental and sensorial, and his narrative explores a metaphysical dimension related to his Buddhist

9 See Jean-Michel Frodon (ed.), *Hou Hsiao-hsien*, Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1999. Actually Tsai openly cites a film by Hou in one of his TV movies: in *Haijiao tianya* 海角天涯 (*All the Corners of the Sea*, 1989) the protagonists sell tickets for a cinema theatre that's showing *Beiqing chengshi* 悲情城市 (*City of Sadness*, Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989). At the beginning of his career Tsai indicates the Taiwanese director as an important reference. 10 See Huang Jianye 黃建業, *Yang Dechang dianying yanjiu: Taiwan xin dianying de zhixing sibian jia* 楊德場電影研究: 台灣新電影的知性思辯家 [Le cinéma de Yang Dechang], Taibei, Yuanliu, 1995. 11 For a study of nativism in Taiwanese literature see Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan*, Austin, Duke University press, 1993. For discussions on the "chineseness" of his style, see (among others) Yeh Yueh-yu, "Politics and Poetics of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Films", *Postscript*, 20, no. 2/3, (2001), pp. 61-76. On urban cinema (much relevant in the study of Tsai Ming-liang) see Ni Zhen 倪震, "Chengshi dianying de wenhua maodun 城市電影的文化矛盾", [The contradiction in urban cinema culture], in Li Tianduo 李天鐸 (ed.), *Dangdai huayu dianying lunshu* 當代華語電影論述 [Contemporary Chinese Cinema], Taibei, Shibao wenhua, 1996, pp. 227-247; Wang Qun王群, "Miandui xiandai wenming de sikao: xinshiqi dushi dianying chuangzuo tantao" 面對現代文明的思考: 新時期都市電影創作探討 [Facing contemporary culture: new urban cinema], *Dangdai dianying*, n. 5, 1999, pp. 74-9; and particular on Taipei: Chen Ruxiu (Robert Chen) 陳儒修, Liao Jinfeng 廖金鳳 (eds.), *Xunzhao dianying zhong de Taibei* 尋找電影中的台北 [Looking for cinematographic Taipei], Taipei, Wanxiang, 1995; Lin Wenqi 林文淇, "Jiushi niandai Taiwan dushi dianying zhong de lishi, kongjian, yu jia/guo" 九十年代台灣都市電影中的歷史, 空間與家/國 [History, space and family/nation in contemporary

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faith and anthropological interest regarding the manifestation of popular religion. In Taiwan there is a strong interest in spirits and mediums, a deep faith in the presence and interaction between living and dead, an attention to the laws of *fengshui* 風水, and regular consultation with *suanming* 算命 (fortune tellers). The popular culture and practice of everyday life is absorbed both by its narrative (infinite ghost stories, spectres everywhere) and visual aspects (temples and offerings in every household, shop and bus), aspects discussed further in relation to the ending of *Ni nabian jidian ?*.

Lastly, if we wish to find a parallel in Western cinema, the most obvious example, is of course Michelangelo Antonioni, particularly films like *Deserto rosso* (Red Desert, 1964) and *L'eclisse* (The Eclipse, 1962). These films share an interest in the enigmatic silence of characters, in the fixed gaze at modern architecture, slums and desolated landscapes, expressing alienation and incommunicability in a modern metropolis.

Besides, Tsai cites as his references, as he reveals in a personal communication, Rainer Werner Fassbinder. They have in common a certain dark humour related to pornography and a harsh social critique reshaping the boundaries of common taste. They share as well as some queer reshaping of a counter culture discourse revealing the dark mechanisms of a social system.

But in *Ni nabian jidian ?* Tsai foregrounds the decisive place of Francois Truffaut and French Nouvelle Vague in his cinema and, as we will see, in Taiwanese New cinema in general. It is in fact a film about fathers, and the reference to Truffaut renders him a spiritual father – even though the style of the two directors could not be more different.

In many interviews Tsai, like most Taiwanese directors of the New Wave (we can find the same expressions in mainland China, notably in Zhang Yimou 張藝謀) recalls school days passed in some old cinema theatres or, during university, in classrooms, attentively watching classic French movies.[16] To explain this particular attraction it' is necessary to point out that, *mutatis mutandis*, the two movements have many points in common in their artistic and historical development.

First, there is an initial revolutionary enthusiasm that informs a band of friends, collaborating and exchanging roles, followed by a clearer division between two different ideas of cinema, notably between a narrative approach and one which is more experimental and intellectual. The friends choose different ways and lonely careers.

Secondly, French Nouvelle Vague is used as symbol of a struggle against all fake and manipulative representations. New cinema which developed in Taiwan at the beginning of the eighties, lead by Hou Hsiao-hsien and Yang Dechang, stated the necessity to film reality – both present and historical, to bring personal emotion to the screen along with personal memories, as well as a social critique to the regime, and forced a modernisation that

urban Taiwanese cinema], *Zhongwai wenxue*, n. 27, 1998, pp. 99-119. 12 It is noteworthy the presence of the French actress Virginie Ledoyen in Yang's *Majiang* 麻將 (1996). 13 See Fredric Jameson, "Remapping Taipei" in Nick Browne et al. (eds.), *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. 14 I use here the classification that Harold Bloom (in the literary field) defines as *Tessera*: "completion and antithesis; I take the word not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment say of a small pot which with other fragments would re-constitute the vessel. A poet antithetically "completes" his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as thought the precursor had failed to go far enough", in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, London, Oxford University Press, 1973. 15 Jean-Pierre Rehm, *Tsai Ming-liang*, Parigi, Dis Voir, 2001, p. 10. 16 See for example Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec Tsai Ming-liang : Faire travailler l'imagination du spectateur", *Positif*, n. 458, 1999, pp. 24-27. For example Hou Hsiao-hsien dans Jean Michel Frodon, *Hou Hsiao-hsien*, Paris, Cahiers du cinema, 1999, p. 131. See Frances Gateward, *Zhang Yimou: Interviews*, Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, 2001.

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completely changed Taiwan. It was a social attitude that never before had been represented on screen. It was necessary to change the propaganda driven cinematic culture of Taiwan; the latter produced clearly ideological works, or pure entertainment films that presented – to the eyes of the new directors – a false reassuring image of social reality. This was not only just false or untrue, and denied cinema any social relevance, but also it was not artistic at all, since cinema was perceived as a pure instrument of propaganda or profit making. But this studio and star system driven machines (like in France at the end of the fifties) fell apart; it was an economic crisis that helped the birth of the Nouvelle Vague. An old system fell apart – losing consensus, aging stars, socio political changes – and the public was eager to look for something new. Even if the public success of the Taiwan New cinema was going to be – like the one of the Nouvelle Vague – very short-lived. The 1980s was an epoch of strong political debate, and rapid and vivid changes in society and in mentalities –martial law was lifted in 1987 after 40 years.

To summarise certain common traits of the two new waves, we recall the rebellion against the "cinema of the father", a rebellion that evolved both in cinema practice and in the theoretical field; the creation of a new, self-conscious cinematic grammar; the actions of a strong united group of artists who often exchanged roles (screenwriters, actors, directors). Furthermore, we can find more specific stylistic traits like the idea of a camera stylo (cinema as a diary, reflecting personal experiences and ideas), the abolition of codified genres or their fusion in a self-reflexive manner, the multiplication of themes and visual solutions. And then, above all, the idea of the director as auteur, clearly inspired by the theories published in the 1950s and 1960s in the *Cahiers du cinéma* by the belligerent group lead by André Bazin and his pupil, François Truffaut.[17] Film was seen as an individual creation, a diary, a confession, an expression of innermost convictions, fear and values of its director. These concepts were alien in the public sphere of Taiwan in the 1980s; film was a product, not an art.[18]

Another important component that determined the success of the French art film in Taiwan was precisely its French character, in other words, its European character… in other words, that it was not American. Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer constitute, in the eyes of Taiwanese film directors (the same applies to their mainland colleagues), a resistance in the face of the American invasion of the Hollywood movies. Hollywood represents an invading commercial culture, mechanical and standardised, whereas the European art films, and especially the golden age represented by French New Wave and Italian neo-realism, represent art, freedom of expression and creation, fantasy, diversity, research and exploration.

Consequently I would argue that the claim to influence from many Asian artists does not really imply direct stylistic influence, but a political impulse to advocate freedom. French Nouvelle Vague, while appreciating the art of such directors considered until then mere craftsmen such as Hitchcock and Ford, states that a different cinema is possible, a cinema far from the studio system, an inventive, free, rebellious cinema. Young French critics became film directors, advocated with their own practice, with their enflamed articles in the *Cahiers*, that cinema is an art first and foremost, and not art on demand, a predictable, chained, commercial art, but on the contrary a unique way to express personal emotion and social realities, an art that calls for maximum freedom. The same demands came from the Taiwanese young directors. Most

17 See André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?*, Paris, Les Editions du cerf, 1985. 18 See, for a critical approach and a reappraisal of the nouvelle vague *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Nouvelle Vague : une légende en question*, Paris, numéro hors série, 1998.

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of them (with the notable exception of Hou Hsiao-hsien, who was educated in Taiwan and worked as an assistant for veteran film-director Li Xing 李行) were trained abroad, mainly in the United States. They are therefore extremely conscious of international cinema theory and history, including postcolonial theories that underline the importance of ideology in artistic practice. They criticized both the propagandistic representation of Guomindang produced movies and the Hollywood invasion, imposing a foreign dominance of taste, behaviour, consumption and, therefore, ideology. This critique did not imply a blatant application of existing models, like the mainstream cinema that tried, especially in the 1990s, to reproduce Hollywood mainstream production, but on the contrary it implied that every creation should follow its own paths. [19] The encouragement that the directors received from the European art house movie enabled them to develop an independent and original style, experimental and of no easy access.

National and global cinemas

Regarding foreign technology capturing local images and imaginary, it is useful here to recall the analysis made by Charles Tesson of cultural identity, national consciousness, and influences between transnational representational practices.[20] Tesson recalls that, a few months after the projection of the first films by Lumière brothers at Hotel Watson, in Bombay in 1896, an Indian cinematographer produced *Train arriving at Bombay Station*, a remake *ante litteram* of the famous documentary by the "inventors" of cinema. Images must be reconsidered, reframed into a familiar context, put into a different perspective in order for them to be appreciated by the local public. At the very beginning of his existence as a socially constructed actor, the spectator demands the transformation or the modification of the images in order for them to be accepted and enjoyed. This is still true in many societies, especially in the United States, where it is demanded that images acquire immediately recognizable traits in order to be "digested" or decoded by the public. This is not new, but it is particularly manifest in the case of Asian cinema, see for example the recent fad for Asian horror movies: all of them, even if they do not present any particular cultural barrier to comprehension, still need to be "translated" onto the American soil or at least feature (blond) American actors.[21] Nothing of the sort happens in Taiwan, where on the contrary the American model is adopted with adolescent fervour and national cinema is often ignored; this poses a clearly serious problem of cultural identity. All the diversity and multiculturalism that the authors of New Cinema advocate appear to be consciously, or perhaps subconsciously, deleted to make up for the 'superiority' of the Western model. This is particularly evident in the cinema theatre, completely conquered by Hollywood production – whereas the TV still maintains an Asian "flavour", especially via the local transmission (in various "dialects") and the popularity of Korean and Japanese TV series. Hollywood industry is attractive not only for its high technical level, but also for the way of life celebrated, an ideal of prosperity and cultural openness, especially where sexual behaviour and family relationships are concerned. Indian film director

19 See for example *Shuang tong* 雙瞳 [Double Vision], Chen Guofu, 陳國富, 2002. 20 Charles Tesson (ed.), *Pour un cinéma comparé*, Paris, Cinémathèque Française, 1996. 21 See Gary Gang Xu "Remaking East Asia,

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Satyajit Raynotes that this western influence in India created numerous anomalies, apparent in every manifestation of everyday existence: notably in the use of objects – like phones, cars, western dresses – which are completely alien in respect to the local culture, but they became standards nonetheless, objects of desire, models that need conformation, and consequently causes of economic, political and social transformation, acting as weapons of economical and cultural neo-colonialism.[22] This mimicry, imitation, assimilation of cultural alien forms, modes of representations, and objects of everyday life find their counterpart in a "nativist" perspective. In other worlds, there is the reintegration in the work of art of local aspects and peculiar traits, irreducible to the Western colonial power. In Taiwan, these local currents assume a very interesting character. In fact, in response to the classical entertainment production the New Cinema directors, following antecedent literary trends, introduce in their movies aspects of local culture such as Taiwanese dialect, which was initially banned from the screen and from public life.[23] It is remarkable that all the movies of the 1960s and 1970s were set in idyllic bucolic landscapes and remote villages, showing characters speaking in fluid Mandarin, when this was just a representation instrumental to the propaganda of the ruling party effective in reinforcing mandarin as the only official language, already made widespread by a massive scholarisation. To make Taiwanese dialect heard in the cinema again was one of the "neo-realist" strategies of the authors to bring cinema closer to real life, there was also the utilisation of direct sound, the utilisation of non professional actors, the portrayal of negative aspects of t economic progress and the dilemmas of modernity.[24]

Even Tsai Ming-liang, who by no means is a "nativist", still includes various typically Taiwanese elements in his movies. First of all, his gaze does not depict a sort of transnational "chineseness" made of fancy restaurants, postcolonial buildings, trendy coffee shops, modern shopping malls and traditional-decorated interiors (like, say, *Yinshi nannü* 飲食男女 *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, Li An 李 安 a.k.a. Ang Lee, 1994), but rather the urban squalor and decay, the dark alleys, the building sites, the polluted streets, the neon lights of the shopping arcade, the gloomy apartments, the endless rain and the unbearable hot weather in what has been defined a "threnody of collapse".[25] All these aspects are indeed a part of Taiwan experience, even if of course extremely rarefied and condensed into recurrent symbolic forms. Taipei, for instance, is filmed with an intense gaze, by an eye attentive to all its changes and symptoms, as though it was a human being itself.[26] Tsai positions himself as the most attentive spokesman of nationaldepression, a national high art – sublimating, transforming, mocking this very depression into a surreal Beckettian absurd cinema.[27]

Outsourcing Hollywood", in www.sensofcinema.com, issue n. 34, 2005. 22 Satyajit Ray, *Our Films, Their Films*, London, Ramsey, 1976. 23 These movies are by no means uninteresting; it is just beyond the scope of this article to discuss further their social impact. As Roy Armes points out "[The Third World commercial cinema]… is a local cinema, conceived and made for immediate consumption by local audience, who have generally shown themselves as enthusiastically receptive. But it has given birth to virtually no accompanying critical writing or theoretical speculation of the kind Hollywood has provoked, only to reactions of a thoroughly negative kind. Created for a mass audience and apparently fulfilling no more than an entertainment function, these films are a cause of great unease on the part of Third World critics and film makers, even – and perhaps especially – those concerned to define and promote a "national" cinema. For these critics and filmmakers, rejection of the standards implicit in a local cinema is the beginning of an authentic film culture" Roy Arms, *Third World Film Making and the West*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, p. 65. This observation also resumes well the situation of Taiwan New cinema. 24 I have analysed these aspects of Taiwan New Cinema in "*A Time to Live, a Time to Die: a Time to Grow"* in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, London, BFI Publishing, 2003. 25 Bradley Winterton, "Tsai Ming-liang: Celebration of Camp or Threnody of Collapse ?", *Taipei Times*, 31-07-05, p. 18. 26 It must be pointed out that *The Wayward Cloud* was shot in Gaoxiong and Taipei, and presents recognisable urban landscapes of the two towns. Tsai constructs a cinematic town, abstract and theoretical. 27 Tesson (in the work cited above) reminds us that the

The first shots of *400 Blows* shows Paris, the city walked extensively and deeply loved by Truffaut's characters who do not seek out fancy cafés, but instead try to find a place of their own, often outside the social conventions. When Antoine Doinel flees his parents home he finds refuge with or in his close friend, and the two spend hours in the attic, hidden from the friend's parents who remain unaware of the presence of Antoine. This strategy of creating an illusionary, flimsy and temporary home is comparative to the strategies of the protagonist of Tsai's *Aiqing wansui* 愛情萬歲 (*Vive l'amour*, 1994); the characters are vagabonds (*liulang* 流浪), and cinema traces their trajectories in a personal, semi-autobiographical, adventurous act. It is a cinema of small rebellion, a cinema , also , of solitude. The two extracts of *400 Blows* in *Ni nabian ji dian ?* show Antoine as always alone; stealing a bottle of milk in the cold streets of an unromantic Paris, and in the famous sequence in the attraction park. The boy is enjoying an attraction, a wheel that, while rotating fast, deletes gravity and compels the people inside it to squeeze against its wall, they crawl around like weightless spiders . Xiao Kang probably finds an echo with its solitude-strolling around the streets of Taipei in an apparent pointless vagrant life. What the two characters feel is both freedom and loneliness. We have seen how the Other can become an inspiration for a completely distinct artistic production. We can now travel deeper into the universes of Tsai Ming-liang and François Truffaut to find other parallels, far more intimate, between the two authors. It has to be underlined that they develop completely different styles and that, basically, Truffaut loves experimenting and has a vivacity for a great number of genres, while Tsai remains stubbornly fixated on a symbolic universe of his own; it is this very universe that has a stringent resemblance to a part of Truffaut's work. They develop a sort of semi-autobiographical soap opera centred on one body/actor that the camera follows in the long term – over decades. Truffaut discovered Jean-Pierre Léaud for *400 Blows*. He develops the character of Antoine Doinel, who has autobiographical traits but also resembles, in a creative process of collaboration, the young actor Jean-Pierre Léaud.[28] After *400 Blows*, Truffaut further developed the character of Antoine Doinel in an episode of the collective work *Antoine and Colette* (*L'amour à vingt ans* (1962), which recounts the passage from boyhood to manhood, and subsequently in *Stolen kisses* (*Baisers volés*, 1968), *Bed and Board* (*Domicile conjugal*, 1970) and *Love on the Run* (*L'amour en fuite*, 1979).

Tsai adopts the same policy: he discovered Lee Kang-sheng outside a videogame arcade, while he was auditioning for his TV movie *Xiao hai* 小孩 (*Boys*, 1991). Lee here interprets a youngster bullying a little boy . But with a cause: he's helping a friend of his paying a hospital fee. After this first encounter, Tsai's cinema career will be moulded on his young

model of cinema history according to national criteria is becoming a difficult task. In the first place, the "politique des auteurs" has created a different model, based on singular personalities with individual psychological traits. Second, the rapid change of media radically changes the forms of fruitions and communication, virtually making every image immediately world widely available. And as a conclusion, he points out that the producing structures make possible changes unthinkable just a few years ago, changes that can blur national boundaries (see for instance the very object of this study, *Ni nabian ji dian ?*). 28 See the preface of *Les aventures d'Antoine Doinel* by François Truffaut, Paris, Mercure de France, 1970.

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"model" (to take a Bressian definition of "actor"): he's the protagonist of all Tsai's movies. In *Qing shaonian Nezha* 青少年哪吒 (Rebels of the Neon God, 1992) he becomes officially the character Xiao Kang, he has the same nickname as the actor in real life. His "adventures" will follow in *Aiqing wansui* 愛情萬歲 (*Vive l'amour*, 1994), *Heliu* 河流 (*La rivière*, 1997), *Dong* 洞 (*The Hole*, 1998). And then, of course, *Ni nabian jidian ?*. And after the movie focussed on here, in *Bu san* (*Goodbye, Dragon Inn*) and *Tianbian yi duo yun*, and the short *Tianqiao bu jianle* 天橋不見了 (*The Skywalk is Gone*, 2001).

There is a parallel that becomes explicit in *Ni nabian ji dian ?* in the artistic relationship that binds Tsai Ming-liang and Lee Kang-sheng and the one that unites François Truffaut and Jean-Pierre Léaud. Tsai is reproducing his master's practise on the Taiwan ground – and we know how much "traditional" Chinese culture respects the master (*shifu* 師父)-disciple (*tudi* 徒弟) relationship. It is both an artistic and existential practice. He invented, or selected, a personage whom he will follow during his maturation from a young boy into a man. At the same time, as was the case for Truffaut, Tsai's movies are deeply influenced by the very physical presence of his actor. He acknowledges, for example, that Lee's movements, which are slow-paced, almost autistic, deeply influenced the camera work: it is the very slow rhythm of Xiao Kang's walk, his sluggish gestures, his attention suddenly and inexplicably driven to some anonymous detail that shape Tsai's cutting rhythm. He says (in a personal communication) that his cinema is a cinema of patience and waiting – for reality to manifest itself, for a particular atmosphere to develop– but especially waiting for Xiao Kang. We are therefore in a game of mutual influences: Tsai moulds his film on the young actor's body, but at the same time the latter is inevitably shaped by cinema. Tsai lets him interpret his own fantasies, autobiographical urges and memories (for example, Tsai was actually a cinerarium seller), and at the same time he shapes another adolescence with the means of cinema; he lets this youth develop and end in front of his staring camera.

Also Truffaut often says that Léaud was for him a strong influence, specifically in a formal sense

> Jean Renoir taught me that the actor, when he's playing a character, is more important then the character himself, or, if you prefer, that the abstract must always be sacrificed to the real […] no wonder, then, that Antoine Doinel, since the first days of shooting *400 Blows*, progressively grew apart from me, closer to Jean-Pierre. [29]

Truffaut was the spiritual father of Jean-Pierre Léaud. He created around him the character of Antoine Doinel, and made him one of the strongest icons first of the Nouvelle Vague, first, and then of French cinema in general. Character and director grew up together in cinema and in real life. Truffaut says: Antoine Doinel is "an imaginary character, representing the synthesis of two real people, Jean-Pierre Léaud and me." [30] Tsai himself stresses the differences between him and Truffaut:

> I've got the feeling that Truffaut utilizes Léaud to tell things about himself. When I film Xiao Kang, he's my starting point, and then I add my own emotions and personal feelings. [31]

29 Truffaut, *Les aventures d'Antoine Doinel*, p. X. 30 François Truffaut, *Le avventure di Antoine Doinel*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1992, p. IX. 31 Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec Tsai Ming-liang: le temps est un mauvais guérisseur", in *Positif*, n. 488, 2001, p. 9.

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The two directors find in their actors fragments of their own biographies, and at the same time they become their putative fathers. It is cinema like a diary written on the body of their personifications that will forever preserve a trace of their artistic fathers. They look attentively at their pupils. For instance, in one sequence of *400 Blows*, Antoine is in a reformatory and has been interrogated by a psychiatrist. The troupe filmed also the reverse shot of the doctor questioning him, but Truffaut decided to keep a long take fixed on the boy, gazing at him, surprised and fascinated by his performance, maybe recalling personal experience. The cinema of Tsai develops in the same way as a question does, with a long take of a fixed camera on Xiao Kang, without reverse shots, trying to read his psychological mechanisms under the surface of his enigmatic face. It's a delicate equilibrium between naturalism and surrealism; the fixed gaze of Tsai's camera creates what has been defined as "hyperbolic realism."[32] In Léaud, too, there is something dreamlike, anti-naturalistic, as Truffaut says: "Jean-Pierre has plenty of plausibility and verisimilitude, but his realism is the realism of dreams."[33]

Closing **circ**le

With a very interesting twist, Tsai tells that he was once observing Lee Kang-sheng sleeping, and suddenly the face of the boy reminded him of his own father. The circle closes, the boys become adults and the sons become fathers.[34] The form of a circle is also the form that closes *Ni nabian ji dian ?* The film, which is, as we have seen, a film about fathers and sons, about mourning, but also about the legacy of fathers, about the memories left by real ancestors and the traces left by artistic masters; cannot but end with a circle, that stresses the coexistence between epochs and worlds: the epoch of the Nouvelle Vague (where Tsai says he belongs) and the worlds of living and of the dead.

With a symmetry that reminds us of Kieslowski or South Korean Hong Sang-soo, Tsai sews a web of silent dialogues. The film ends with three solitudes indulging in a sexual outburst. Xiao Kang goes with a prostitute; in the morning, she leaves stealing his precious suitcase, with all his watches inside. So she steals his time, the object of his obsessive concern. At the same time, the girl in Paris, the absent object of Xiao Kang's desire, experiences a frustrating approach by another girl; and she fails to lose her precious watch, a fetish object of Xiao Kang, in the sheets. At the same time, Xiao Kang's mother masturbates thinking about her deceased husband. In the following scene, we see the man, elegantly dressed, walking in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris, where the girl with whom Xiao Kang is in love, is sleeping. This is possibly a suggestion that the solitary, displaced orgy that closes the film acts like a spiritualist séance.[35] The big panoramic wheel is a rich symbol that could stand for the Buddhist wheel of life, and consequently allude to the possibility of reincarnation. Or be seen

32 Chris Berry, "Where is Love ? Hyperbolic Realism and Indulgence in *Vive l'amour*", in Chris Berry et Fei Lu (eds.), pp. 89-100. 33 Flavio Vergerio, "*I 400 colpi*: il testo infinito", in Flavio Vergerio, *Cinema e adolescenza*, Bergamo, Moretti&Vitali, 1993, p. 188. 34 It is interesting to note that Tsai produced Lee Kang-sheng's debut as a film director, *Bu jian*不見 (*The Missing*, 2003) a film that forms a diptych with *Bu san* (the 2 titles actually form a set-phrase, expressing the desire that memory lasts). The illusion that Xiao Kang is a non-professional actor, an innocent body untamed by cinema, is lost; he is now a professional director, too, a complete film artist. 35 For a discussion on spirit possession and its related rituals see Peter Nickerson, "A Poetic of Possession: Taiwanese Spirit-Medium Cults and Autonomous Popular Cultural Space", *positions*, 9:1, 2001, pp. 187-217.

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as a maternal womb, giving a psychological reading to this final sequence. And again, it could allude to the recurrent form of watches, hinting at a possible communication between father and son via the symbol of the obsession of Xiao Kang.

In this almost silent movie, in fact, where almost no verbal communication takes place, the world still responds with its manifestation of desire for communication between people, between ghosts and living, between cinema currents and aesthetics. We are reminded of the sequence where some correspondences do take place – between the young man and the young woman – via wine, first, and then via the images of *400 Blows* and the appearance of Jean-Pierre Léaud. In this final sequence, we see that everyone is alone, but still something happens that unites them – even if they are not conscious of it. They reach a metaphysical communication because their action reflects from one continent to another, from one time to another, applying the holistic principle of *ganying* 感應 (correspondence, interaction). The final presence of the father is highly ambivalent, and indicates the possibility of a dialogue between the dead and those who are alive, and also between *shifu* and *tudi*. The figure of the Father here is a present memory, a memory that cannot disperse (*bu san*, like the title of next episode of Tsai's saga), but that which determines the identity of the individual and gives sense to the present. The *shifu* speaks here via his avatar, Léaud, sent to this world like a visible trace still able to communicate to his disciple transcending the immaterial distances that divide them.

Post script : other films, other universes

Another important feature that the two directors share is a deep love for cinema. This is obvious in Truffaut's role as a critic, and also in his film practise, enriched with citations, homage, inside jokes, and one of the most important, touching and beautiful example of meta-cinema, *La nuit américaine* (*Day for Night* , 1973) an "act d'amour" for cinema practise. His very last opus, *Vivement dimanche* (*Confidentially Yours*, 1983) is a pastiche of classic noir movies, reverberating with humour and a love for a classic genre, renovating its language into a modern vision and an elegant black and white. Besides, his participation as an actor for other movies – notably, his role in *Close Encounter of the Third Kind* (Spielberg, 1977) – demonstrates his versatility and passion for every aspect of the medium.

In Tsai Ming-liang, too, other forms of cinema are present and calling for attention. It is not the place here to develop further analysis, but I'll point out other forms of quotation and homage in Tsai's cinema in order to suggest a possible comparison with his attitude to Truffaut. I would argue that, if Truffaut is treated as a personal *shifu*, with respect and longing, the other form of cinema present in Tsai's work are object dissociated from the authorial gaze and more related to their form as a genre. I am referring here to Hong Kong popular cinema and to pornographic footage.

First, popular Hong Kong films enter in Tsai's practise in two different forms: the musical (*gewu pian* 歌舞片) and the martial arts movie (*wuxia pian*武俠片). Popular cinema from Hong

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Kong grew successfully during the 1950s to the 1970s first with a local market and then with a huge Diaspora market in the absence of visual products coming from mainland China. Hong Kong period drama, traditional musicals, roaring visualisation of popular knight errant fiction, and modern Hollywood-like musical responded to the desire of visual representation of home and origin for all expatriates. Chinese Malaysian born Tsai Ming-liang was no exception. In his movie, we can find two different tactics of re-contextualisation: first, the reconstruction of the musical. In the grey and shabby décor of the modern Taipei the worn out characters start to play back ancient songs, and the décor magically transforms in a kitsch universe of glittering neon lights. We can find these magical, ironic, funny moments in *Dong* 洞 (*The Hole*, 1998) and *Tianbian yi duo yun* 天邊一朵雲 (*The Wayward Cloud*, 2005). The musical world is, in meta-filmic terms, another world: it is the world of the homage, a tribute to past glories of (trans ?) national culture, it is a technique involving such post-modern categories as pastiche and parody. Especially in *Dong*, they are used as a way to express emotions for the protagonists, mute and death to each other, unable to communicate if not in a world of fantasy and nostalgia.[36]

Second, we find literal quotations of the classical martial arts movie in *Bu san*不散 (*Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, 2003). *Bu san* is set in a run down movie theatre, showing 1960s classic *Dragon Inn* (*Longmen kezhan* 龍門客棧, 1967) by King Hu (Hu Jinquan胡金銓). Between the two texts begins a dialogue that indirectly establishes contrasts and paragons between past and present, and creates deep feelings of loss and mourning for cinema itself, while celebrating its magic. Following the same logic of the presence of Jean-Pierre Léaud in *Ni nabian ji dian ?*, Tsai introduces the very actors of *Longmen kezhan* in the new film, staring at their older faces as if to interrogate the very essence of time.

French New Wave and Hong Kong classic cinema both form direct citations that we can find in Tsai Ming-liang's movie. But it is possible to locate a third, important presence of another cinematic practice in his movie: pornographic cinema.

This kind of cinema within a cinema is very different from the previous ones, simply because while for the citation or parody of French or Hong Kong cinema, Tsai can cite actually existing material, but for the pornographic movie he refers to a genre itself and does not cite already existent films but rather films them himself. It is a complex discourse that I can here only hint at. But it is useful to remember the continual interest for this particular genre. Pornographic cinema is always present in Tsai's work- his characters watch it, TV screens and cinema theatres show it, he himself asks his actors to play "as if" – but in a totally different light compared to the nostalgic presence of other forms of cinema already mentioned. This kind of meta-cinema is obviously present in the short *Tianqiao bu jianle* and in the very "fleshy" *Tianbian yi duo yun*: [37] The first one, immediately following *Ni nabian jidian ?* presents the audition of Xiao Kang as a young aspiring porn actor, and the second we see him in action. It is evident that if French new wave and Hong Kong cinema offer occasions for a dialogue, the pornographic movie is a symbol of all that is dead and fossilized. And not for moralistic reasons – Tsai's representation goes far beyond that of every other known Chinese/Taiwanese director – but in so far as the rules of representation are concerned. Earlier, we discussed the Nouvelle Vague as an important drive to freedom. But, pornographic films, on the contrary,

36 This direct reading has been contested in Jean-Pierre Rehm, where it is viewed as a way to disorient the viewer, *Tsai Ming-liang*, 2001. Yeh and Davis offer a complex reading of the "camp" character of Tsai's films, of which these musical sequences offer good examples, Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, 2005. 37 It is possible to see a prelude of this critique in the sequence of *Heliu* where the real-life Hong Kong director Ann Hui asks Xiao Kang to play the dead body in the polluted Tamshui river.

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represent the standardising habit, the rule that unifies all representation, that creates patterns and models in a totalitarian way. In the final sequence of *Tianbian yi duo yun* the pornographic actress is mysteriously unconscious, but the troupe still films her, uses her as a mechanical, soulless doll.[38] Like the sequence in *Heliu*, like the audition in *Tianqiao bu jianle*, the body is immobile, fixed in a necrotic state created by the dictatorial porn (mainstream) film. What Tsai proposes here is a different kind of pornography, related to the observation we made about Truffaut and Léaud: the gaze fixed on a body for a long time – for decades. His "pornography" is the leitmotif of the tiniest changes of the body, of the maturing and then growing old, in a process, not only of his Xiao Kang, but of all the characters, old and young, their persistence over time and their forever returning. Pornography then is not (only) watching a body in the convulsion of the love making pleasure, but also and especially the patient observation of the body changing in time and leaving traces and being traced in the irrevocable progression of human life.

38 It is noteworthy here that the actress of the pornographic film is a stranger, a pulpy (which emphasises the meaning of flesh without soul) Japanese pornographic star. This indicates how the pornographic film industry still relies on exotic flavour, and how in a sense society accepts pornography performed outside its boundaries, coming from outside, not touching the pure innocent soul and virtue of the motherland.

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