(Re)imagining and (Re)negotiating the Taiwanese Sense of Self: "The Taipei Experience" in the Post Taiwan New Cinema

Ellen Y. Chang, New York University, U.S.A.

Abstract

Since the Emergence of the Post Taiwan New Cinema, advocates of the Taiwanese New Cinema's recuperation of "The Taiwanese Experience" has criticized the postmodernized Taipei cityscape in those PTNC films as a crisis in reestablishing a sense of Taiwanese identity. From a postcolonial standpoint, the contemplation on the PTNC's cinematic engagement with the debates on Taiwanese cultural and political subjectivity will, in fact, demonstrate the inseparable connection between the TNC and the PTNC, and moreover, between "The Taiwanese Experience" and "The Taipei Experience" inscribed upon each cinematic movement. Therefore, this paper, from the perspective of a generation of Taiwanese people with no memory of "The Taiwanese Experience," seeks to demonstrate that the cinematic layering of different phases of Taiwan's past and present can illuminate the emergence of "The Taipei Experience" through the erasure of "The Taiwanese Experience," and thus to reevaluate "The Taipei Experience" as an alternative embodiment of its predecessor. This paper will focus on Taipei-based urban films—Terrorizer, Vive L'Amour, Good Men, Good Women, and Connection by Fate—that manifest the spectrality of Taiwanese history. Their renderings of Taipei as a haunted city, a site of temporal and spatial palimpsests, position "The Taipei Experience" as the core contending against the Kuomintang's One-Chinese narrative. Going beyond the TNC's reconfiguration of Taipei as a site of cultural hybridization, the PTNC transfigures Taipei as a layered postcolonial city of historical inscriptions, consequently paving the way for an innovative perspective to (re)imagine and (re)negotiate the Taiwanese sense of self.

Keywords:
Postcolonialism, national identity, transnationalism, Taiwanese New Cinema, Post Taiwan New Cinema, postmodernism, Taiwan, history, historiography, urban cinema, spectrality, hauntology, cultural studies

Introduction

Taiwan, taking a trajectory familiar to many postcolonial nations, strives to distinguish its independent identity from China by rapidly globalizing its capital, Taipei. As the globalization of Taipei accelerates, the discussion of a Taiwanese identity is confronted by the massive transformation of the Taipei cityscape, in which Taipei has been transferring into a series of heterotopias that rapidly replace the "absolute spaces." In this sense, the earlier studies on the hybrid nature of the Taiwanese sense of self in relation to the Taiwanese New Cinema's recuperation of "The Taiwanese Experience," which reconfigures Taipei as a site of cultural hybridization with distinct Taiwanese experiences, becomes difficult to realize.

Consequently, the independent subjectivity emerged from "the Taiwanese Experience," which the Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s aims to differentiate from the Chinese culture, becomes difficult to find in the Taipei urban cinema around the turn of the century. This shift in the cinematic figurations of the city through the Taipei urban cinema's portrayal of the spectral urban space appears to conform with the political, economical, and cultural movement proceeding in Taiwan in the age of transnational capitalism. In this regard, Taipei-based urban films, Edward Yang's Terrorizer (1986), Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Good Men, Good Women (1995), Tsai Min-Liang's Vive L'Amour (1994), and Wan Jen's Connection by Fate (1998), came into view around the turn of the century, and manifest the spectrality of Taiwanese history through their rendering of Taipei as a series of "postmodern liminal spaces." where (re)imaginations and (re)negotiations"[1] constantly take place.

From the perspective of a generation of Taiwanese people, people like myself, who has no direct contact or memory of "The Taiwanese Experience"—namely the arrival of the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) and the subsequent atrocities committed on the island—I therefore argue that the emergence of this cinematic theme unfolding through the Post Taiwan New Cinema's Taipei-based urban films collectively becomes a critique of the history of Taiwan by distancing Taipei from "The Taiwanese Experience." This cinematic theme implies the possibilities of the emergence of "The Taipei Experience" as a replacement for "The Taiwanese Experience" and therefore illuminates expressly an alternative route to the envisioning of the Taiwanese national identity around the turn of the century.

In the introduction of Transnational Chinese Cinema, Hsiao-Peng Lu proclaims, "Chinese national cinema can only be understood in its properly transnational context:"[2]

> [F]irst, the split of China into several geopolitical entities since the nineteenth century—the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—and consequently the triangulation of competing national/local 'Chinese cinemas,' especially after 1949; … third, the representation and questioning of 'China' and 'Chineseness' in filmic discourse itself, namely, the cross-examination of the

[1] Zhang, Yingjin. "Cinematic Remapping of Taipei: Cultural Hybridization, Heterotopias and Postmodernity." *Remapping Taiwan: Histories and Cultures in the Context of Globalization.* The Fifth Annual Conference on the History and Culture of Taiwan, UCLA, 2000. 2. (Unpublished paper.)
[2] Lu, Sheldon Hsiao-Peng. *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997. 3.

national, cultural, political, ethnic, and gender identity of individuals and communities in the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diasporas.[3]

Correspondingly, in Envisioning Taiwan, June Yip points out that the Taiwanese New Cinema provides an alternative vision of nation by carrying forward the search for a "cultural authenticity," adding it to the quest for "cultural hybridity" and toward a postmodern perspective. Yip elaborates upon cultural hybridity from a perspective similar to Chris Berry's exploration on Chinese cinema and nationhood. In a section titled "Taipei or Not Taipei," Berry argues that through the enunciation in A City of Sadness, "we have a collective self that is hybridized and riven with difference, a subject that cannot speak, and at least the shadow of a post-national imagined community found on hybrid space."[4] Taking in these lines of thought, Yip therefore states that such hybridity provides a platform for Taiwan to successfully connect itself to globalization, and consequently allows Taiwan to be considered as a "post-nation," which features profoundly postcolonial and postmodern characteristics.

Wenchi Lin embeds both Lu and Yip's arguments, and presents "The History, Space, and Home/Nation in Taiwanese City Films of the 90s" from the perspective that neither the singular Chinese identity, nor the varying Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese identities could be indicated in Taiwan's urban cinema due to the fact that the relationships between Taiwanese cinema and Taiwanese national identity have wavered since the 1990s in a transnational context.[5] Accordingly, Jerome Chenya Li draws on a similar argument and concludes, "the tendency of Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s to set its geographical space in the rural areas is in fact a denial of the fact that Taiwan has been rapidly capitalized by transnationalism."[6] Therefore, when filmmakers began to take the metropolis of Taipei as the foundation of their cinematic projects, they realized that the earlier focus on Taiwan, which cinematically reconfigured Taipei in the Taiwanese New Cinema as a site of cultural hybridization with distinct Taiwanese experiences, faded.

Taking into account Homi Bhabha's postcolonial thoughts on hybridity as "a familiar and ambivalent trope," in his study of "Globalization as Hybridization," Jan Nederveen Pieterse suggests, "we can construct a continuum of hybridities: on one end, an assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs

[3] Lu 3.

[4] Berry, Chris. "A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)." *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*. Ed. Wimal Dissanayake. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994. 42-64. 59.

[5] Lin, Wenchi (林文淇). "The History, Space, and Home: Nation in Taiwanese City Films of the 90s" [九〇年代台灣都市電影中的歷史、空間與家／國]. *Chung-Wai Literature* [中外文學] 27.5 (1998): 99-119. 99.

[6] Lin (1998) 102.
See also Li, Jerome Chenya (李振亞). "Historical Space/Spatial History: The Construction of Memories and Geographical Space in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*" [歷史空間／空間歷史]. *Passionate Detachment: Films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* [戲戀人生—侯孝賢電影研究]. Eds. Wenchi Lin, Shiao-Ying Shen, and Jerome Chenya Li. Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 2000. 113-140. 136. (My translation.)

the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre."[7] In many ways, Taipei urban films' cinematic remapping of the city exemplifies what Pieterse calls "destabilizing hybridity."

As a consequence of its speedy capitalization, Taipei has lost its capability to recapture the sense of "The Taiwanese Experience." "Taipei has been transfigured as a series of heterotopias, where a wide range of postmodern [liminal] spaces are (re)imagined and (re)negotiated"[8] as they speedily replace the "absolute spaces," which Henri Lefebvre coins to describe "[specific spaces that have] acquired fixed social and political meanings over a long period of historical accumulation, and manufactured for the express purpose of legitimation of an identification with the nation-state."[9] Due to the city's rapid urbanization, the Post Taiwan New Cinema's Taipei-based urban films distance Taipei from "The Taiwanese Experience" and imply the possibilities of the emergence of "The Taipei Experience" as a replacement for "The Taiwanese Experience" to serve as the initiation for the envisioning of the Taiwanese national identity around the turn of the century.

The investigation of the Taiwanese cinema's intervention in the envisioning of a identity for Taiwan, from a postcolonial perspective, has employed a variety of critical, theoretical and cinematic approaches in the fields of history, memory and identity studies. This corpus of theories and films emerges as a response to "the contemporary cultural challenges result[ing] from the enormous social and political transformations that have occurred globally in the last decades of the twentieth century."[10] Remarkably, in addition to the discursive debates of memory and collective identity these selected theories and films endeavor to unfold, sharing among them has the potential to radically redraw the traditional boundaries delineating the contours of their respective subjects.

In this regard, Bhabha evocatively describes an innovative strategy in reading between the "pedagogical" and "perfomative," in which "counter-narratives of the nation continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries of the imagined communities."[11] With an emphasis on its postcolonial provenance, Bhabha draws from Frantz Fanon's explanation of the nature of colonial struggle, and further considers the "Third Space of enunciation" the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference, which in consequence embraces his provocative arguments on the hybridity, liminality, and ambivalence of cultural analysis:

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as in

[7] Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. "Globalization as Hybridization." *Global Modualitie*s. Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson. London: Sage Publications, 1995. 45-68. 56-7.

[8] Zhang, Yingjin. "Cinematic Remapping of Taipei: Cultural Hybridization, Heterotopias and Postmodernity." *Remapping Taiwan: Histories and Cultures in the Context of Globalization.* The Fifth Annual Conference on the History and Culture of Taiwan, UCLA, 2000. 2. (Unpublished paper.)

[9] Lin (1998) 112.

[10] Colmeiro, José. "Nation of Ghosts?: Haunting, Historical Memory and Forgetting in Post-Franco Spain." [online article], *452ºF. Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature*, 4, 2001. 17-34. 21. <http://www.452f.com/index.php/en/jose-colmeiro.html>

[11] Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. 291-322. 300.

integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation which Benedict Anderson so perceptively describes as being written in homogeneous, serial time.[12]

Through its introduction of an ambivalence in the act of interpretation, the Third Space therefore "ensure[s] that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew."[13]

[T]he theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.[14]

Bhabha considers the difference in the process of language, the linguistic difference, crucial to the production of meaning, which requires that the two places—the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation—to be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space. The Third Space, redrawing the boundaries of the process of language, appropriately becomes the site to embrace any narratives of cultural hybridity. Bhabha's idea of expanding the concept of nation with postcolonial notions, such as double temporality, therefore provide a critical approach in reading the Taiwanese New Cinema's mission to "recover, privilege, and articulate the historical significance and the contemporary, as well as future, implications of what [KMT's] official histories insist on erasing."[15] A City of Sadness, Banana Paradise (Wang Tung, 1989), and Super Citizen Ko (Wan, 1996), with their respective ambivalent and heterogeneous textures concerning popular memory, therefore serve as a liminal form of social representation that holds the potential for other cultural identities and political solidarities to emerge.

The Puppetmaster (Hou, 1993), The Red Lotus Society (Lai Sheng-Chuan, 1994) and Good Men, Good Women not only inherit the Taiwanese New Cinema's mission of recovering popular memory, they together provide a critique of Taiwan's politics of memory through their engagement in the dialectical relationship between past and present with their collage of fragmentary shots that shuttle between Taiwan's past and present. Their investigation in the usage of historical remembrances recalls Walter

---

[12] Bhabha. *Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004. 54.
[13] Bhabha (2004) 55-6.
[14] Bhabha (2004) 56.
[15] Cham, Mbye. "Official History and Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembene." *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*. Ed. Marcia Landy. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. 261-68. 262.

Benjamin's conception of the present as "the time of now," Jetzizeit, which seeks to blast open the myth, the homogeneity of a historicist conception of time. Benjamin's "now-time" challenges the traditional perception of history through his discussion on the orientation of time. "In opposition to the conventional modern view that the present's expectations of the future determine its appropriation of the past," Jetzizeit, bearing a historical materialist viewpoint, becomes an "emphatic renewal" of a consciousness that espouses a radical orientation toward the past, in which "the past's horizon of expectation is one to which our present and our future are acutely responsible."[16]

In his analysis on the ghost films' manifestation of spectral temporalities as historical allegory, Bliss Cua Lim links together Benjamin's "now-time" and Jacques Derrida's disjointed time with specters and focuses on both theories' call to historical accountability mindful of the dead.[17] Along with Benjamin's description, "for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably,"[18] Derrida's disjointed time with specters, which leads to a radicalized conception of historical justice, also "undermines modernity's homogeneous time, fomenting instead a radicalized accountability to those who are no longer with us [yet still there]."[19] To put this in Benjamin's words, "haunting as a recognition of commonalities between those who are and those who are no longer"[20] becomes a solidarity with specters made possible by remembering, "[and] blast[s] a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history."[21]

Similar to "Benjamin's image of the tiger's leap of the revolution as the messianic blasting of a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history,"[22] Derrida's notion of hauntology developed in Specters of Marx, as a discourse on death— seeking to get beyond the sharp dividing line between the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it—necessarily "involves a rhetoric of borders."[23]

> A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: "now," future present). We are questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time.[24]

[16] Lim, Bliss Cua. "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory." *Positions* 9.2 (Fall, 2001). 287-329. 318-19.

[17] Lim 297-318.

[18] "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Benjamin, Walter. *lluminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 253-64. 355.

[19] Lim 319.

[20] Lim 319.

[21] Benjamin 263.

[22] Postone, Moishe. "Deconstruction as Social Critique: Derrida on Marx and the New World Order." *History and Theory* 37.3 (Oct. 1998). 370-87. 374.

[23] Cheah, Pheng. "Spectral Nationality: The Living On *[sur-vie]* of the Postcolonial Nation in Neocolonial Globalization." *boundary 2* 26:3 (Fall, 1999). Cornell UP. 225-252. 240.
See also Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Bernd Magnus. New York: Routledge, 2006. 48.

[24] Derrida xix.

The specter exceeds conventional knowledge of time. It collapses departure and return, life and death, presence and absence, seen and unseen, death and survival. Therefore, "the specter represents temporalities that cannot be grasped adequately in terms of present time;"[25] the apparition, instead, can be grasped "only in a dislocated time of the preset, at the joining of a radically dis-jointed time, without certain conjunction."[26] As Derrida observes, because death delimits "the right of absolute property, the right of property to our own life," it is the ultimate border, a border "more essential, more originary and more proper than those of any other territory in the world."[27]

Derrida considers hauntology, the specter's "ontology," as the repetition of first-time-and-last-time that potentially undermines not only the conventional perception of history, but also the order of knowledge, the ontology of being and time.

> Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. What is a ghost? What is the effectively or the presence of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there there, between the thin itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a hauntology.[28]

Derrida's concept of hauntology illustrates the spectral aspect of history—a past that is already not there but at the same time makes itself present by way of the ambiguous appearance of the specter. Derrida's spectrality's linking of modalized presents, carrying forward Benjamin's now-time's demanding of a radical orientation toward the past, inspires the discussion of the future of a Taiwanese identity in a postcolonial context. This postcolonial culture constantly struggles to "mark the broad historical facts of decolonization and the determined achievement of sovereignty, but also [marks] the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination." [29] Together with Bhabha's provocative strategy for reading between the pedagogical and perfomative that provides a site for the discussion of cultural hybridity, Derrida's reflections on hauntology and Benjamin's perception of now-time, illuminating the discourse of history and memory through their critical reviews emphasizing the temporal dimension, express an awareness that "contemporary historical developments require a different and more adequate theoretical response, one that also addresses directly the problematic of global capitalism."[30] In consequence, these theoretical approaches emerge as a significant intervention in the discussions about the future of a Taiwanese identity at the turn of the century.

---

[25] Postone 371.
[26] Derrida 20.
[27] Derrida, Jacques. *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth."* Trans, Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. 3.
[28] Derrida (2006) 10.
[29] Young, Robert J.C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001. 57.
[30] Postone 378.

The Taiwanese New Cinema's cinematic rewrites of Taiwan's modern history, as a response to the Taiwanese people's desperate searching for their cultural identity after the lifting of KMT's Martial Law, depend extensively on the revitalization of Taiwanese popular memory of the historical era long considered taboo. The succeeding Post Taiwan New Cinema's filmic approach, in addition to their inheritance of the Taiwanese New Cinema's social and cultural practices, features the 1990s as "the age of 'Confucian Confusion,' [in which] people [living, or surviving, in Taipei,] become alienated souls, struggling to catch something out of their meaningless lives, and to find a place they can call 'home.'"[31]

Through gradually altering and replacing "The Taiwanese Experience" depicted through the recovery of popular memory and traumatic history, The Post Taiwan New Cinema films begin to engage with the problematic of global capitalism through their cinematic representation of "The Taipei Experience" that derives from their diverse treatments and delineation of the Taipei cityscape and its urbanites around the turn of the century. Recalling both Derrida and Benjamin's theories on time and history, the diverse cinematic styles emerging in the Post Taiwan New Cinema not only bring forward the Taiwanese New Cinema's tradition of realism, but also express a critique to the rapidly growing Taipei with its awareness of the loss of connection to "The Taiwanese Experience," namely the historical consciousness of Taiwanese history and land. In short, the Taiwanese New Cinema's cinematic approach, which endeavors to reveal a more integrated and distinct Taiwanese historical subjectivity and cultural hybridity, never ceases to inspire its followers. Just as how Song-Yong Sing describes, "the specters of the [Taiwanese] New Cinema hauntingly linger on Taiwanese cinema."[32]

Getting into our selected films, to being with, Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, pioneers of the Taiwanese New Cinema, join the theme of the Post Taiwan New Cinema with their explicit concerns about Taipei and its urbanites in Terrorizer and Good Men, Good Women. Terrorizer explores the coincidental interactions between people in Taipei, and therefore engages in a reflexive kind of story-telling discourse through unfolding the multitude of relationships between characters and spaces. Among the controversial characters, Novelist Chou Yufen's husband, Li Li-Chung, is a stereotype of people surviving in Taipei. His losing out at work and in his personal life, in Frederic Jameson's words, "allegorically serves as evidence for an unconscious mediation on the positioning of [Taiwan as an] national entity within the new world system."[33] Three possible endings of the film, all resulting in violent death, are unfolded through Yang's arrangement of synchronous monadic simultaneity penetrated by Li's grief and revenge for his wife's betrayal. The synchronous editing of the gunshots, the broken vase, the police kicking open the hotel room, and the police and Chou's sudden wakeup interweaves together multiple space-time. The temporal overlaps not only confuse our perception of the established relationships

[31] Chen, Ru-Shou Robert (陳儒修). "Focus on Taipei: An Introduction." *Focus on Taipei Through Cinema* [尋找電影中的台北]. Eds. Ru-Shou Robert Chen, and Gene-Fon Liao. Taipei: Wanxiang, 1995. 17-9. 19.

[32] Sing, Song-Yong (孫松榮). "The Telepathy in Downgrading History: On the Fluid Imaging of Taiwan's 'Post–New Cinema'" [輕歷史的心靈感應：論台灣「後-新電影」的流體影像]. *Film Appreciation Academic Journal* [電影欣賞學刊] 28.2=142 (Jan.-Mar. 2010): 137-56. 138. (My translation.)

[33] Jameson 145.

between the characters and their plot lines, but also simultaneously blur the boundaries between truth, dream, and fiction, which at the end lead to an open ending allowing various interpretations. The cinematic approach of interweaving multiple space-time is also evident in Good Men, Good Women. Although this film shows only a little information about the Taipei cityscape, it forcefully suggests how Taiwan in the 1990s loses its connection with "The Taiwanese Experience" by shuttling between multiple moments in time. Different from Terrorizer's open ending that dialectically engages in a postmodern discourse, this film attempts to merge together Taiwan's past and present in order to suggest the everlasting specter of the past and its call to historical justice through the layering of Jiang Bi-Yu's life, such as her mourning of her husband's death in the past in B&W, and Liang Jing's reenactment of the same sequences in the present time, which is shown in color.

The utilization of modern technology in these two films weaves together an emerging theme of the Post Taiwan New Cinema that concerns the spectrality of Taiwanese history and the Taipei urban space. In Good Men, Good Women, a fax machine keeps sending Liang Jing, from an unknown source, pages of her diaries written three years ago, blurring Liang's perception of time-space. These memories become the specter of history hovering between temporalities and imperceptibly advise Liang to merge her own private memories with the historical drama she has been rehearsing. Consequently, the spatiotemporal nonsynchronism deriving from Liang's merging of the past and present recalls Derrida's conception of hauntology. Aligned with the springing awareness of the Taipei urban space, the fax machine in Good Men, Good Women turns into the Eurasian girl's phone calls in Terrorizer. While the diary pages delivered by the fax machine is taken as a symbol of the specters of history, the Eurasian girl's phone calls imply the circumstance, in which the Taipei urbanites are haunted by the rapidly modernizing city.

The cinematic remapping of Taipei "increasingly configures Taipei as a globalized city,"[34] in which the rapid development and the incessant flow of transnational capital sweep away the Taiwanese historical memories. Consequently the "[Taipei] cityscape becomes [barely] recognizable, and its identity hybridized and dubious."[35] This idea is further emphasized in the "postmodern liminal spaces" portrayed in Vive L'Amour through his noticeable subversion of the idea of home within the urban consuming space. Its opening shot expressly unfolds its attempt to transfigure Taipei into a series of heterotopian spaces through its precise cinematic embodiment of Foucault's description of the "mirror" and the "other place." The entire shot is a shot reflected by a convex surveillance mirror. It is a shot of a reflection of the shot itself, which potentially blurs our perception of the absence and presence, virtual and real, and utopias and heterotopias. Likewise, behind the surface of the mirror opens a virtual space of the actual space being reflected by the mirror and shot by the camera, in which Xiao-Kang is at the same time present and absent. Vive L'Amour, parallel to Terrorizer, demonstrates the sense of imprisonment of the urbanites through its portrayal of urban alienation, especially by "framing the blank spiritual lives of characters drifting through the city in a state of melancholy disconnection."[36] Similar to the Eurasian girl's phone calls joining together the independent plot strands in

---

[34] Zhang 9.
[35] Zhang 9.
[36] Hoden, Stephen. "Rev. of *Vive L'Amour*." *New York Times*. 23 May 2012.
<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=990CE6DE133DF930A15750C0A963958260>

Terrorizer, in Vive L'Amour three Taipei loners with their distinct plot lines, without confronting each other, surreptitiously co-exist in a vacant duplex apartment in a new high-rise; two of them find their temporary "home" there. In this case, the idea of home has been ironically transfigured as an alienated space, in which one no longer feels emotionally attached to anyone or anything. While the living ones no longer feel emotionally attached to anyone or anything, not even to their homes, as they drift through the city in a state of melancholy disconnection, the columbarium business, a business associated with death, by contrast, ironically bears a significant sense of belonging. As part of the vocational training for those salespersons, Hsiao-Kang's colleagues play a group activity that labels each player as one of the family members, and moreover, the slogan of the business emphasizes the feeling of being at home with the beloved ones.

The temporary belonging May Lin obtains from her casual sex with Ah-Jung is not enough to soothe her long depressed spirit, just as in Terrorizer the comfort Li Li-Chung gets from his friend fails to stop him from committing a crime or a suicide. Aligned with the close-up shot of Li crying as he wakes up the next morning after his wife refused to move back home with him, the end of Vive L'Amour consists of an extended tracking shot of May Lin unhappily walking through a desolate park under construction, and ends with a prolonged, highly emotional close-up of May Lin weeping in grief. These emotional close-ups, which will later be employed in Connection by Fate to depict Ah-De's sorrow for having no way out from the memory haunting him, emerge as an evident portrayal of the urbanites confined in the Taipei cityscape. Such portrayal manifests Wenchi Lin's argument that Taipei city films around the turn of the century expressively depict the tableau in which "discarded memories and/or disoriented individuals hauntingly return and roam as ghosts in the city,"[37] and therefore align with the emerging theme that transfigure Taipei into a haunted city.

Wang Jen's Connection by Fate, described as political ghost films by Emilie Yeh and Darrel Davis, transfigure Taipei as a postcolonial city through the director's cinematic manifestation of the "'present past,' rather than the historiographies of classical reconstruction and postmodern deconstruction."[38] Adopting the politics of "present past," this film turns Taipei into "a [postcolonial] city of layers of historical deposits, strata, and inscriptions"[39] by "embodying the temporal 'present past' in spatial 'urban palimpsest.'"[40] In this sense, two edifices haunted by historical and political ghosts are employed here to illustrate the poetics of demolition through a textual doubling of the spatial palimpsest that allows the cinematically writing of "The Taipei Experience" to be constructed through the erasure of "The Taiwanese Experience."

The former Mayor office, although collapsing into ruins, seems to be the only site in the film inscribed with dense historical and political deposits, which becomes an appropriate "absolute space" in contrast to other "abstract spaces." On the other hand, the construction site, bearing no historical meanings, ironically serves as a sufficient site for Ah-De's cognitive mapping of the city as he is often drawn back to his memories of the past when he gazes at it. The ambiguous positioning of these two

---

[37] Wenchi 114.
[38] Chen 64
[39] Chen 74.
[40] Chen 67.

sites, both in a state of being "in-between," provides "no absolute sense of time and place, turns Taiwan into a "'spatial palimpsest' traversed by divergent temporalities," [41] a spectral "liminal state" perfect for ghosts,"[42] namely our two protagonists, Ah-De and Mah-Le, a walking dead man and a ghost.

Conclusion

Grasping these lines of thought, the Post Taiwan New Cinema's cinematic remapping of Taipei, which calls for a radical orientation of temporalities, should be read as a collective critique of the problematic of global capitalism. Their utilization of the poetics of demolition as a reflection to Taipei's rapid urbanization and globalization deploys an innovative perspective that Taipei can become a site for temporal and spatial palimpsests, on which "The Taipei Experience" can emerge through the erasure of "The Taiwanese Experience." Therefore, projected through the Taipei urban cinema's diverse treatments of the Taipei cityscape and its urbanites, the heterotopian city composed of a series of postmodern liminal spaces appears to be not only a treasure metropolis of past memories and history, but also a field—manifesting the spectrality of history—that introduces an alternative route though which the Taiwanese national identity can be (re)imagined and (re)negotiated, and appropriately paves the way to position Taiwan within the new world system as an independent entity at the turn of the century.

---

[41] Lim 291.
[42] Chen 86.

References

A. Nornes, & Y. Yeh (1998). "Narrating National Sadess: Cinematic Mapping and Hypertextual Dispersion." *CinemaSpace*. University of California, Berkeley: Film Studies Program.
<http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/Papers/CityOfSadness/table.html>

Benjamin, W. (1969). "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In A. Hannah (Ed.), H. Zohn (Trans.), *lluminations: Essays and Reflections* (pp. 253-64). New York: Schocken Books.

Berry, C. (1994). "A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)." In W. Dissanayake, *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (pp. 42-64). Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Bhabha, H. (1990). "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." In H. K. Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and Narration* (pp. 291-322). London: Routledge.

C. Berry, & Feii L. (2005). *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Aberdeem: Hong Kong UP.

Cham, M. (2001). "Official History and Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the FIlms of Ousmane Sembene." In M. Landy (Ed.), *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (pp. 261-268). New Brumswick: Rutgers UP.

Cheah, P. (1999). "Spectral Nationality: The Living On [sur-vie] of the Postcolonial Nation in Neocolonial Globalization." *Boundary 2*, 26.3, 225-52.

Colmeiro, J (2001). "Nation of Ghosts?: Haunting, Historical Memory and Forgetting in Post-Franco Spain." *452ºF. Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature*, 4, 17-34. <http://www.452f.com/index.php/en/jose-colmeiro.html>

Derrida, J. (1993). *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth."* T. Dutoit (Trans.). Stanford: Stanford UP.

--- (2006). *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. B. Magnus (Trans.). New York: Routledge.

E. Yeh, & D. W. Davis (2005). *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*. New York: Columbia UP.

Hsaio-Hung C. (張小虹), & Chih-Hung W. (王志弘) (1995). "Mapping Taipei's Landscape of Desire: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization of the Family/Park." In R. Chen, & G. Liao (Eds.), 尋找電影中的台北 [*Focus on Taipei Through Cinema*] (pp. 115-25). Taipei: Wanxiang.

Hoden, S. (2012). "Rev. of *Vive L'Amour*." *New York Times*, 23 May. <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=990CE6DE133DF930A15750C0A96 3958260>

Li, J. (李振亞) (2000). "Historical Space/Spatial History: The Construction of Memories and Geographical Space in A Time to Live, a Time to Die" [歷史空間／空間歷史]. In S. Shen (沈曉茵), J. C. Li (李振亞), & W. Lin (林文淇) (Eds.), *Passionate Detachment: Films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* [戲戀人生──侯孝賢電影研究] (pp. 113-40). Taipei: Rye Field Publications.

--- (1998). "The History, Space, and Home: Nation in Taiwanese City Films of the 90s" [九〇年代台灣都市電影中的歷史、空間與家／國]. *Chung-Wai Literature* [中外文學], 27.5, 99-119.

Lim, B. (2001). "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory." *Position: East Asia Cultural Critique*, 9.2 Fall, 287-329.

Lu, S. (1997). *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Pieterse, J. (1995). "Globalization as Hybridization." In Mike F., Scott L., & Roland R. (Eds.), *Global Modernities*, (pp. 45-68). London: Sage Publications.

Postone, M. (1998). "Deconstruction as Social Critique: Derrida on Marx and the New World Order." *History and Theory*, 37.3, 370-87.

Sing, S. (孫松榮) (2010). "The Telepathy in Downgrading History: On the Fluid Imaging of Taiwan's 'Post–New Cinema'" [輕歷史的心靈感應：論台灣「後-新電影」的流體影像]. *Film Appreciation Academic Journal* [電影欣賞學刊], 28.2=142 Jan.-Mar, 137-56.

Yip, J. (1997). "Constructing a Nation: Taiwanese History and the Films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien." In H. Lu (Ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (pp. 139-68). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

--- (2004). *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*. Durham: Duke UP.

Young, R. (2001). *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Zhang, Y. (2000). "Cinematic Remapping of Taipei: Cultural Hybridization, Heterotopias and Postmodernity." In *Remapping Taiwan: Histories and Cultures in the Context of Globalization.* The Fifth Annual Conference on the History and Culture of Taiwan, UCLA. (Unpublished paper.)

Films

A City Of Sadness [悲情城市]. Dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien (侯孝賢). 1989.

Banana Paradise [香蕉天堂]. Dir. Wang Tung (王童). 1989.

Connection by Fate [超級公民]. Dir. Wan Jen (萬仁). 1998.

Good Men, Good Women [好男好女]. Dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien (侯孝賢). 1995.

Super Citizen Ko [超級大國民]. Dir. Wan Jen (萬仁). 1996.

The Puppetmaster [戲夢人生]. Dir. Hou Hsiao-Hsien (侯孝賢). 1993.

The Red Lotus Society [飛俠阿達]. Dir. Lai Sheng-Chuan (賴聲川). 1994.

Terrorizer [恐怖份子]. Dir. Edward Yang (楊德昌). 1986.

Vive L'Amour [愛情萬歲]. Dir. Tsai Ming-Liang (蔡明亮). 1994.

Contact email: ec1573@nyu.edu