



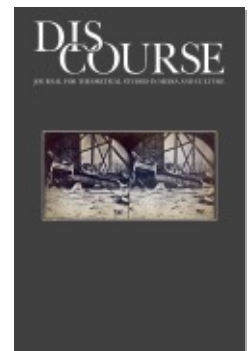
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Screening Today: The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Tsai  
Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*

Elizabeth Wijaya

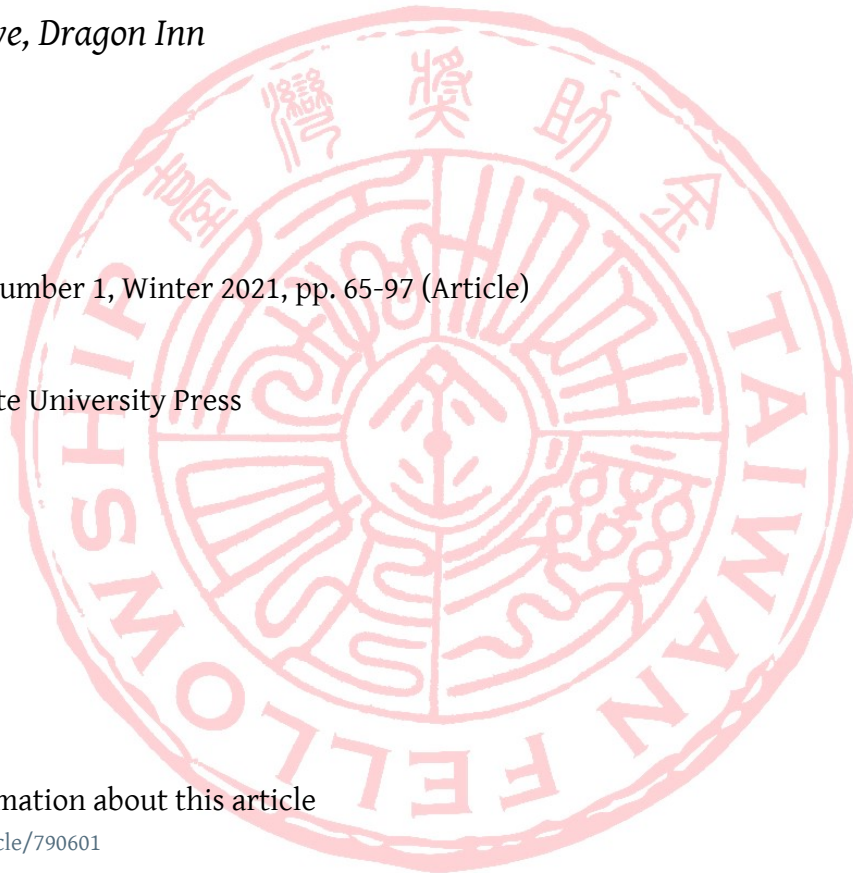
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**Screening Today: The Visible and  
Invisible Worlds of Tsai Ming-liang's  
*Goodbye, Dragon Inn***

**Elizabeth Wijaya**

Waste is the interface of life and death.  
It incarnates all that has been rendered  
invisible, peripheral, or expendable to  
history writ large, that is, history as the  
tale of great men, empire, and nation.

—Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*  
(2006)

A film operates through what it withdraws  
from the visible.

—Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*  
(2004)

### **1. Goodbye, Dragon Inn in the Time After**

Where does cinema begin and end?

There is a series of images in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), directed by Tsai Ming-liang, that contain the central thesis of this essay (figure 1). In the first image of a canted wide shot, Chen



Figure 1. The Ticket Lady's face intercepting the projected light in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2003).

Shiang-Chyi's character of the Ticket Lady is at the lower edge of the frame, and with one hand on the door of a cinema hall within Fuhe Grand Theater, she looks up at the film projection of a martial arts heroine in King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1967). The heroine, Daughter of Yu Qian, from *Dragon Inn*, is played by Hsu Feng. In this image, the Ticket Lady's lilac top visually echoes the blues of the film's landscape and the heroine's robe, but there are still lines of separation framing the spatiotemporal distance between the larger-than-life body onscreen and the diminutive body of the spectator. However, what follows is an unusual series of eyeline matches between the female leading characters in *Dragon Inn* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* that I will examine in detail later by extending Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh to the flash of the luminous world of cinema in order to show that the chiasm of the visible and the invisible allows for afterlives of cinema beyond the proclamations of the ends of cinema.

Through interviews, site visits, and formal and theoretical readings of cinematic and photographic works, this essay is a four-part investigation tethered to the deep space of Fuhe Grand Theater as a cinematic afterimage. First, I investigate the material remnants of Fuhe Grand Theater and the interconnections between the personal histories it shelters and the fortunes of the Taiwan film industry. Second, I read Merleau-Ponty's *Visible and the Invisible* through the ways in which the film *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* acts not only as a site of survival for a closed theater but also as a chiasmatic archive that holds intertwined experiential and cinematic worlds. Third, I

present Taiwanese artist Chu Yin Hua's photographic project *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn* as an example of spectatorial futurity persisting across technological and formal divides. Finally, I return to two fallen "Screening Today" signs in Fuhe Grand Theater in order to propose a speculative indexicality that not only functions as a link to a returning past but can also be reactivated for future referents.

By working through the material, cinematic, photographic, biographical, historical, and theoretical, I show the ways in which cinema is constituted by its materiality as well as its immaterial dimensions and, relatedly, show that the visibilities of cinema are inextricable from other modes of invisibility, including time as the past that verges on being forgotten and the future that is being awaited. The different methods of inquiry allow me to sketch out the chiasmatic intertwining of the flesh of the world and the flash of cinema by following threads of the expansive afterlives of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. In so doing, my aim is to extend Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological provocation on the chiasmatic intertwining of the flesh of the self in the world and the flesh of the world to consider the multiple embodiments that cinema has the capacity to hold, which I term the "flash of cinema." In the homonymous flesh/flash, I hope to evoke a sense of the accretion of bodies within the accumulative instances of cinema, where from each flash of captured time there is always something that escapes or dwells uncaptured within: from the physical and psychological remains of a site, screen bodies, bodies behind the screen, bodies living after their screen moments, and the bodies drawn to the screen to the bodies of work created in intertextual relation to the body of a cinematic work. The multibodied appearances and voices I trace through the physical and virtual sites of Fuhe Grand Theater illustrate a condition of possibility of cinema as the entanglement of flesh and flash, of the empirical and the abstract, and of the past and the future to come. In making an argument that there is a time after for cinema, I am suggesting that cinema's temporal discontinuity allows it to not only echo or represent the past or present, but also make palpable futures that are on the verge of existing.

*Goodbye, Dragon Inn's* setting in Fuhe Grand Theater and the impending abandonment of the site as depicted in the film has an almost mythological status. Viewers and scholars of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* have sometimes assumed, as the film's lingering farewell so persuasively suggests, that Fuhe Grand Theater is long lost to the redevelopment that is characteristic of urban spaces in high-speed modernity. For example, Flannery Wilson notes that "the site was demolished."<sup>1</sup> Yomi Braester makes a brief reference to Fuhe Grand Theater as "designated for demolition and razed soon



after the shoot.”<sup>2</sup> I first watched *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and *Dragon Inn* in 2007 to prepare for my first role as a teaching assistant in an “Introduction to Film Art” course while I was a graduate student in Singapore. In March 2016 on my first visit to Fuhe Grand Theater, located in the primarily residential Yonghe District, the smallest district in New Taipei City (No. 340, Yongli Road, Yonghe District, New Taipei City, 234, Taiwan), I was driven by a vague desire to see the site, however it might look like now, whatever may be in its place.<sup>3</sup> At the location, I first realized that unlike its film incarnation with the appearance of a stand-alone cinema, Fuhe Grand Theater was part of a mixed development, with an aging residential section connected to two places of worship on the second floor. Parts of the building seemed abandoned, such as a disused escalator on the ground floor, yet in other parts there were sounds and activity generated by the people who still live within the building. Asking a gray-haired resident where I might find the old cinema, I heard that “the cinema has been closed for a long time.” I was late and yet on time.

Coming up to the third floor through the broad concrete stairwell that played such a prominent role in the interminable walking scenes of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, I saw the rusted shutters of the theater. Physically encountering the signboard of the theater near the ground-level entrance of the building, the shutters, and the stairway for the first time was already a return to a place my corporeal body had never been but had experienced in mediation through its instantiation in the filmic worlds of Tsai Ming-liang’s *What Time Is It There?* (2001) and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. These worlds I carry with me, intersected by other filmic worlds, other memories. The French anthropologist Marc Augé, for whom *Casablanca* (1942) was transformed into an intermixing of history and personal montage, says that the name of a film “flickers every time we pronounce it, that [it] hereafter resonates in us as if it were a memory coming out of a distant past.”<sup>4</sup> For me, No. 340, Yongli Road, was a flickering but still inaccessible place.

It was only upon returning on a late afternoon in May that same year that I discovered a door ajar on the third floor (figure 2). Walking through it, I entered an almost forgotten place: media storage devices—from cassette tapes, compact disc digital videos (VCDs), and digital video discs (DVDs) to 35mm film reels—lay amid the peeling ceilings and scattered remains along with decomposed food waste, containers, and ripped-out cinema seats (figure 3). On the table of the projection room, a film reel with discernible scenes of an action movie lay next to untorn ticket booklets, a small can of Mobil fuel, and a promotional miniposter of Vincent Ward’s



Figure 2. Entrance to the cinema halls of Fu He Grand Theater. Author's photo, May 10, 2016.



Figure 3. Film reel left on a table in the projection room of Fuhe Grand Theater. Author's photo, May 10, 2016.



Figure 4. Autographed movie memorabilia of *What Dreams May Come* on a table in the projection room in Fuhe Grand Theater. Author's photo, May 10, 2016.

*What Dreams May Come* (1998) that seems to bear the autograph of Robin Williams (figure 4). What dreams, indeed, lie in wait for this place that has ceased operations since 2002? If, as Jeroen de Kloet reads, the relation between the cinema and the film is “a case of art trying to resuscitate life, since Tsai Ming-liang deliberately secured the location to shoot the movie with the knowledge that it was going to be demolished,” could it then be that *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and Fuhe Grand Theater have somehow succeeded in resuscitating each other?<sup>5</sup> Even if the site is not today a cinema the way it was before, could we conceive of other forms of cinematic survival?

A scene in the 2001 film *What Time Is It There?* marks the first appearance of Fuhe Grand Theater in Tsai Ming-liang's cinematic oeuvre. After selling a watch on an overhead bridge to a woman who is flying to Paris, Lee Kang-sheng's character becomes obsessed with changing the time of clocks in Taipei to Paris time. He removes a clock on the wall of Fuhe Grand Theater and holds it on his lap as he sits in (what is now apparent is) Fu Hall. In an act of displaced queer seduction, another man steals his stolen clock and lures him to the public toilet of the theater. The French historian Serge Gruzinski is inspired by the intimacy of *What Time Is It There?*



to write “a history of worlds that encounter each other without ever meeting.”<sup>6</sup> It is this confrontation and creation of worlds where art and life, death and survival, meet that give Tsai’s films the sense of creating bonds beyond the narrowest definition of indexicality in cinema that I will discuss in the final section of the essay.<sup>7</sup> After its brief appearance in *What Time Is It There?*, Fuhe Grand Theater lands the starring role in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*.

Hoping to uncover another layer of history beneath the dust of this place, I contacted Fuhe Grand Theater’s former operator, Jiang Tai Dun (江泰墩). Jiang is now a traveling exhibitor, and his business involves setting up screenings for film festivals and events. In June 2017, we met in Ximending at a small theater he was constructing for jury screenings of the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival. Writing on *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, Tiago de Luca situates Fuhe Grand Theater in Ximending (translatable as “West Gate District”): “a crumbling cinema (in reality, the Fuhe Grand Theater, in Taipei’s West Gate District).”<sup>8</sup> Ximending is the first pedestrian zone in Taiwan, a historic site for cinema theaters since the 1930s, and remains a still-thriving center of cinematic exhibition in Taipei. Even though Fuhe Grand Theater’s physical location is some miles away in Yonghe District of New Taipei City, Fuhe Grand Theater’s larger-than-life presence in the imagination of Taiwanese cinema has mythological affinities with Ximending’s cinematic allure.

In this small theater under construction where Fuhe Grand Theater was not and yet could have been located, I listened to Jiang talk about how his life’s trajectory intertwined with cinematic changes in Taiwan. Born in 1958, he is the eldest of six siblings in Taichung and was first introduced to the film industry as a child, when he traveled from Taichung to Taipei during his summer and winter breaks to learn the ropes of the exhibition trade from his maternal uncle. Jiang later worked as a film censor, set up test screening studios, and imported projectors. He faced his first major setback when he was fined for importing projectors from the People’s Republic of China and the projectors were confiscated. Selling his house in Ximending to pay for the losses, in 1990 he took over the management of Fuhe Grand Theater in which he maintains a minority stake. In listening, I asked for neither documents nor photographs as forms of textual support for the veracity of his biography or what he has to say about the cinema in question. Verification is a form of investigation, while listening to testimony in the search for the auratic beginnings of a cinema is another.

Established in the late 1970s, the building Fuhe Grand Theater, which shares its name with the cinema, was constructed as



a mixed residential and commercial building with a marketplace on the first and second floors and residential apartments and a second-run cinema on the third floor. The cinema Fuhe Grand Theater initially had the thousand-seat Fu Hall (福庭), and later on He Hall (和庭), with a capacity of around two hundred seats, was added. In its prime, Fuhe Grand Theater was the biggest theater in Yong He district, and with fifty New Taiwan dollar a moviegoer could watch two second-run films. The programming of Fuhe Grand Theater initially focused on Hong Kong films and Taiwanese films. Only toward its end did Fuhe Grand Theater show foreign films. In the 1990s during the waning years of the theater, the cinema could barely sell a hundred tickets a day, a fraction of its capacity, and each screening would only attract twenty to thirty people. The theater became a gathering and cruising place for queer spectators, serving as inspiration for its casting in Tsai's films. Jean Ma insightfully links the closing of a film era memorialized by *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* with the queer politics haunting Fuhe Grand Theater.<sup>9</sup> In 1999, the theater was closed. It was only after the closure that Fuhe Grand Theater was rented for six months in 2002 by Tsai Ming-liang's production team for the filming of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*.

In the years since Fuhe Grand Theater's official closure, the space has changed from a transitory site for queer bodies to a refuge for straying spirits, including the homeless seeking refuge as well as ghosts that are believed to remain. In Jiang's perspective, even some of the homeless, for fear of the lingering spirits, do not have the courage to sleep in the cavernous abandoned space. While the cinema was in operation, there were many tales reported to him of the theater's hauntedness—of a floating woman in white, of transparent bodies, of a hall full of spectators—even when to the physical eye, the hall, and ticket sales suggest otherwise. While operating the theater he lived in the complex with his family but did not himself experience supernatural events, though he believes that the place is characterized by its overwhelmingly 陰 (*yin*) quality, which translates as “shadowy,” and by folk Taoist belief, which is associated with the darkness of the netherworld. Due to the complicated property and land ownership structure of the complex, the joint owners continue to pay taxes without being able to sell or destroy and rebuild the structure. Finishing the interview, Jiang said that were he to renovate and rebuild the theater he would have to hire priests to exorcise the spirits, and the process would be a hard battle moreover because there is no longer an audience in the area to warrant the investment in

renovation fees for a thousand-seat theater, so he might as well leave the place for the ghosts to stay.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. There Are Ghosts in This Cinema

The ghosts, in Jiang's narration, have been allowed to remain due to the economic suspension of the building between the continued payment of taxes and the lack of the financial incentive to pay for renovation or redevelopment. Within the cycle of development and demolition that has infected global urban cities at varying speeds, with Taiwan being no exception, this cinema in stasis has survived its time, stretching out its spatial existence between its own past and precarious future.<sup>11</sup> In other words, as a cinematic afterimage, the cinema and its ghosts have outlasted the cinema's own cinematic heyday. Jiang's words on the hauntedness of the cinema echo the first lines of dialogue uttered by a character in the diegetic world of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*: "Did you know, there are ghosts in this cinema?" Receiving no verbal response he continues, "In this cinema, there are ghosts. Ghosts."<sup>12</sup>

The haunted and haunting quality of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is both atmospheric and structural. With the premise that Fuhe Grand Theater's last screening is the martial arts (武俠, *wuxia*) classic *Dragon Inn* (1967) (龍門客棧, *Longmen kezhan*), *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (eighty-four minutes long) contains within it the condensed timespan of *Dragon Inn* (two hundred minutes long). Both films begin together through a J-cut split edit, where the audio of the following scene arrives before its accompanying images such that the expository narration from *Dragon Inn* plays over the opening credits of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. A fade-in and fade-out of the bilingual directorial attribution "蔡明亮 作品 A TSAI MING LIANG FILM" is accompanied by high-pitched Chinese operatic music and a dramatic narratorial introduction of the setting and cast of characters from *Dragon Inn*. In both traditional Mandarin characters and English, we see the title of Tsai's film "不散 *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*," which cuts to the scene of General Yu Qian's execution in *Dragon Inn*. The scene of death in *Dragon Inn* is visually and sonically enmeshed with the beginning of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, a film very much about the interrogation of when and where something begins and ends, along with what lives and what dies.<sup>13</sup>

The diegetic world of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* first appears in a voyeuristic long shot through heavy, dark curtains of a cinema hall with a partially obscured cinema screen on which *Dragon Inn* plays.

The title of King Hu's film, 龍門客棧 (*Longmen kezhan*), reads in literal translation as "Dragon Gate Guest Inn." From the wandering guests and pugilists with shifting alliances in King Hu's *Dragon Inn* to the mundane, wandering cinemagoers never clearly living nor dead, shown in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, as well as the otherworldly guests who are rumored to haunt Fuhe Grand Theater to this day, the cinema waits for its guests to enter again into a world held in reserve.

The twinning of *Dragon Inn* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* include with them particular micro- and macrocinematic histories.<sup>14</sup> By the time Tsai Ming-liang started production on *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in 2002, Fuhe Grand Theater had already closed. The Taiwan film industry was in decline in terms of box office and critical acclaim, whether in overseas Chinese markets or the international film festival circuit. It was apparent that the glory days—of King Hu's *wuxia* films in the 1960s and 1970s and the heyday of Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s–1990s—were gone.<sup>15</sup> Yet *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, in memorializing *Dragon Inn* through aural-visual intertwining, lets *Dragon Inn* linger. Indeed, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* ends with a rain-soaked scene with the nondiegetic use of the soundtrack featuring the wistful song from the 1960s, "留戀" (*Liulian*), that leads into the credit sequence. From the same era as *Dragon Inn*, "*liulian*" translates as "lingering" or "nostalgia." *Liulian* is sung by Yao Li, whose songs were featured in many Shaw Brothers and Cathay films. In 1966, King Hu broke his contract with Shaw Brothers and went to Taiwan to make *Dragon Inn* with the Union Film Company. Even as the credits for *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* roll, the voice of Yao Li serves as an auditory, palpable attempt to hold onto the world as it is disappearing.

For the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, "The time after is neither that of reason recovered nor that of the expected disaster. . . . It is the time in which we take interest in the wait itself."<sup>16</sup> In the time after, who waits for whom? Chronologically, *Dragon Inn* clearly had an existence before *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, and what a spectacular, record-breaking, game-changing existence it was. King Hu brought martial arts cinema to Taiwan with the release of *Dragon Inn* in 1967. Bearing the standard for a golden era of Taiwanese films, *Dragon Inn* set box office records in East and Southeast Asia and jump-started a decade of *wuxia* film production. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* mourns not just the closure of a cinema hall but also the end of a golden era. The film enacts its own inability to say farewell by archiving what it says farewell to within itself. As an archive, it is partial, parasitic, and palimpsestic, since it



frames, consumes, and inscribes itself over what it archives. Neither film exists now without the other.

This structure of connected worlds is also evident intertextually and intratextually. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (不散 *Busan*) was released in the same year with a companion piece, *The Missing* (不見, *Bujian*). The translinguistic tension between *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*'s English title and its Mandarin title 不散 (*Busan*), literally “not scattering, or not parting,” is triangulated with the Mandarin idiom “不見不散” (*bujian busan*), which literally means “not seeing, not parting,” or that one will wait until the other has come. *The Missing* was produced by Tsai and directed by Lee Kang-Sheng, the actor-muse who has been in all of Tsai's films since 1989. The actor Miao Tien is the recurring presence in *Dragon Inn*, *The Missing*, and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. In *Dragon Inn*, Miao Tien plays the leader of the imperial guards; in *The Missing*, having lost his memory, he wanders the streets of Taipei; and in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, he plays a fictional version of himself, a filmgoer watching *Dragon Inn* while seated next to Shih Chun, who was the heroic lead of *Dragon Inn*. The characters in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* can be divided into three groups:

1. The actors turned viewers: Shih Chun and Miao Tien as audience members in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, who shared their first scenes together as feuding characters in *Dragon Inn*.
2. The cinema workers: the Ticket Lady (Chen Hsiang-chi) and the projectionist (Lee Kang-sheng).
3. The viewers: a Japanese tourist (Mitamura Kiyonubu), a queer man (Chen Chao-jung), and a ghostly-looking female moviegoer lit in green who munches on melon seeds (Yang Kuei-mei).

In the unfolding time of the film, the workers and viewers in the cinema become spectatorial spectators, immersed in the light of cinematic enmeshment. To delve into the intertwining between the two films and the worlds of past and future that they carry, I develop a reading of what I call the “the flash of cinema” from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the elemental flesh of the world in order to show that the question of the cinematic lies at the chiasm between the visible and invisible world.



### 3. The Chiasmatic Flesh/Flash of the Cinematic World

Raise the question: the invisible life, the invisible community, the invisible other, the invisible culture.

Elaborate a phenomenology of “the other world,” as the limit of a phenomenology of the imaginary and the hidden.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

*The Visible and the Invisible* (1968)

The epigraph above is from Merleau-Ponty’s posthumously published incomplete working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* and raises questions of the invisible, the imaginary, and hidden. In a discussion of the preexistence of the world prior to perception and reflection and the relation between the worlds of subjective experience and the unique world, Merleau-Ponty suggests there is no subject-object divide between the seer and the world, since “there is no brute world, there is only an elaborated world.”<sup>17</sup> In this section, I work through Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the “flesh” that allows for a reading of invisibilities and visibilities within worlds of distance, depth, and duration that shifts the ontological debate from that of being versus nothingness to one of horizons of visibilities and possibilities.

The paradox of perception for Merleau-Ponty is a paradox of the distance between the self and the world that is both sensibly graspable and infinitely distant—in reserve: “The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance.”<sup>18</sup> How can we measure how close or far away the world is while being in the world and also distinguishable from the world? The distance that Merleau-Ponty refers to is clearly more than physical, measurable distance, since it involves the idea of “proximity.” From the time of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body image—as external, primarily visual apprehension of the body—is distinguished from the prenoetic body schema.<sup>19</sup> Noesis in philosophy of the mind is usually understood as consciousness or comprehension. The prenoetic thus comes before consciousness but shapes noetic processes.<sup>20</sup> In Mark B. Hansen’s reading, the body schema is a source of “embodied potential” and the potentiality for virtuality.<sup>21</sup> Comprising body habit, data processing with regard to posture and movement, communication and integration between perception and movement, the body schema shapes and structures the experiential body-in-the-world.

Beyond the ocular, vision in Merleau-Ponty includes the corporeality of being in the world.<sup>22</sup> The act of seeing something, including watching a film, goes beyond the physical mechanism and optics of the eye. Writing on painting and the body's imbrication in the fabric of the world in his last published essay, "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty says, "Seeing is not a mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means being given me for being absent from myself, for being present from within at the fission of Being only at the end of which do I close up into myself."<sup>23</sup> Rather than the self that sits and sees in the plenitude of presence, seeing becomes a possibility of absencing the self from the self, or of withdrawal. The distinction between the prenoetic and phenomenal experience is a useful analytical distinction, but the line between the prenoetic and the phenomenal is not a unidirectional uncrossable border. With Merleau-Ponty, seeing is part of a corporeal exteriorization of a chiasmatic intertwining within a world that is flesh. But what is flesh, and how is it more than the body?

In *The Flesh of Images*, Mauro Carbone reminds us that "what is often forgotten is that 'flesh' is another term for the 'element' Merleau-Ponty also calls 'Visibility.'"<sup>24</sup> Beyond optical vision, flesh that names the elemental condition of visibility resides with neither the world that is perceived nor the body that perceives, since the body is also contained within the world and is part of the visibility of the world. Rather than an ontology of being and non-being, Merleau-Ponty's flesh/visibility articulates the intercalation of invisibility and visibility, between the idea and the idea incarnate within the milieu of the here and now, with thickness, duration, exigency, and facticity. Flesh/visibility in Merleau-Ponty's late work transcends the subject/object divide and belongs "properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact," and thus because of it "the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen."<sup>25</sup> "Latency," "porosity," and "pregnancy" are recurring words in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The work is suffused with light, with the latency and potency of light, the natality of light that coils over the entwinement of visible beings and the visible world. The visibility of things and the vision of the seer do not preexist solipsistically and independently in themselves. Sociality is figured here as an enmeshment of seeing.

At its most fundamental, Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh—which intertwines between the world, the things and bodies of the world, the past and future of the world—rejects the positivist account of the seer who has a body that is then in the world or that the limits of the world and the body can be delineated via a third-party perspective. This is where the relation between the flesh

of the world and the flesh of the seer through chiasmatic intertwining becomes important, since “the world seen is not ‘in’ my body, and my body is not ‘in’ the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it,” and “there is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.”<sup>26</sup> By extending his conception of the chiasmatic intertwining of the flesh of the world to the duration of time, Merleau-Ponty concludes that “past and present are *Ineinander* [intertwining, or inside one another], each enveloping enveloped and that itself is the flesh.”<sup>27</sup> Though he does not work out the mechanism of how time is chiasmatic flesh, there are multiple references to the duration of the past within constellations of the flesh and visibility that has elements of the sensible that are exterior to individual memories, with reference to transcendence, transmission beyond the psyche of the individual, “openness upon general configurations or constellations, rays of the past and the rays of the world.”<sup>28</sup>

What happens—cinematically—with the cryptic moments of a philosophy that is cryptic not only because it is unfinished but also because it is trying to articulate the limits of the phenomenological and of the invisible without setting up oppositions between the visible and the invisible, the for-itself and the in-itself, the self and the world, the seer and the seen?<sup>29</sup>

Following Merleau-Ponty’s theory of corporeality chiasmatically entwined with the flesh of the world while maintaining a gap (*écart*), fundamental fission, or dehiscence in the experience of the world, what, then, is the intervention made by the cinematic flash of the world in relation to the intertwining of the flesh of the body and flesh of the world?<sup>30</sup>

Returning to the image from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* where the Ticket Lady looks up at General Yu’s Daughter on the screen, the lines that demarcate them are less solid than they seem. In figure 1, the image of the limping Ticket Lady looking up at the heroine on the cinema screen interrogates the distance between the cinematic image and the viewer. But this visual distance, from the point of the view of the wide shot, can still seem to be a measurable distance where two distinct bodies can be marked out and distinguished.

The difficulty of apprehending the distance between the seer and the seen is apparent in a series of quick cuts where Tsai creates the effect of a shot/reverse-shot and eyeline match between the heroine played by Hsu Feng and the Ticket Lady. In *Dragon Inn*, Hsu Feng is shown in profile to the left of the screen, with her face slightly tilted down and looking toward her right (figure 5). In the next shot, the Ticket Lady from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is placed in the right of the screen, with her profile slightly lifted and looking



Figure 5. Hsu Feng in *Dragon Inn* as shown in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2003).



Figure 6. The Ticket Lady's face intercepting the projected light in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2003).

toward her left. This eyeline match establishes continuity across the two characters, two films, and two film eras. It is the cinematic flash of the colliding flesh of the worlds between *Dragon Inn* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* that enables their visibility to form an intertwined temporal surface in that time and place. In figure 6, we see the implied rays of the world of *Dragon Inn* superimposed as a screen of moving lights on the Ticket Lady through her bodily interception of the projected light. The isolation of this moment shows the paradox of proximity and the irremediable distance between the seer and the seen and the seer that is seen.

Where, in this exchange of gazes, is the audience of *Goodbye,*



*Dragon Inn*? The audience functions as the invisible flesh intercepting the cinematic flash of the eyeline match between the two iconic actresses. The audience of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, staring at their screen, is positioned to stare at the light that is like a netting enveloping the body of the Ticket Lady. The Ticket Lady is figuratively and literally absorbed by the screen she is watching and also the screen she exists in as a cinematic image. Merleau-Ponty explains the chiasmatic relation between body and flesh through the analogy of “two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces.”<sup>31</sup> In this analogy, there is always something in excess despite the infinite multiplicity of images. The one who is looking into the endlessly reflected world of the surface is still immersed within that world and has no outside point of view, thus “I will never see my own retina” still rings true because even if I saw my retina in a mirror, I am only seeing myself seeing my retina in a mirror.<sup>32</sup> The limits between the fleshiness of the world and the flashes of the cinematic screen are perforated and permeable like the dots on the Ticket Lady’s body. The flash of cinema enters this chiasm between the flesh of the body intertwined with the flesh of the world as a liminal temporal surface illuminating the porosity of the visible and the invisible. The rays and shadows of the cinematic world of *Dragon Inn* falling on the skin of the Ticket Lady in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* forms a cinematic world enacted within the site of Fuhe Grand Theater that is then screened for the audience of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, who are themselves embedded within the flesh of their world. As the flash of the film falls onto the flesh of the viewer, the spectator and the spectated both become-visible and become-invisible. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the chiasmatic intertwining of the flesh of the world opens up a way to think of embodiment without the preconception of embodiment as the joining of two separable surfaces. The Ticket Lady’s material enmeshment with the light of *Dragon Inn* as it overflows its screen within *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in turn overflows into future screens. The analysis of the chiasmatic intertwining between the flesh of the world and the flash of cinema allows for cinema to be seen not as a representation of a phenomenological philosophy but instead as its close-up. As a medium for the actualization of a virtual, material reality that is not merely a representation of a past reality, the cinematic potential transcends debate on indexicality and representation. The relationship between that which is filmed and the filmed involves virtualizations in the movements of abstraction and rematerialization. While much emphasis has been placed on the positive side of this projection in terms of the content of the frame,

the cinematographic-editing-projection experience relies not only on the experience of the invisibilities of the gaps realized as discontinuous stream of images and the blinks and gaps of sensory perception but also in the discontinuity of time.

#### 4. This Cinema Is Haunted

The cinema that already looks empty is not yet empty. When *Dragon Inn* ends within *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the spectators' spectrality is performed as a disappearing act between cuts. With an over-the-shoulder composition, we see the words “終劇” (*zhongju*), literally “end play,” on the cinema screen in Fu Hall. Read from the right of the screen to the left, the words 劇終 (*juzhong*), conventionally signifies “the end.”

The frame compositionally echoes the opening diegetic image of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, where the silhouettes of a few spectators of *Dragon Inn* were visible. In the upper right corner of the frame, the cast of characters from *Dragon Inn* are gathered and looking out to sea. Tsai cuts to a deep-focus wide shot of the cinema seats. In this cut, from “the end” to the cinema hall, the spectators have disappeared. In an echo of the scene when she was looking from a doorway at *Dragon Inn*, the extreme right of the frame shows the barely discernible figure of the Ticket Lady looking into the hall. From where she stands, a light is visible above her head, like a spotlight on the stage of everyday life (figure 7). The theater space after a film projection, with the particles of dust still faintly illuminated by the light, contains something that is on the verge of visibility,



Figure 7. The cinema hall in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2003).

and in this case someone, that lingers for a while longer.<sup>33</sup> After the theater was finally shut down, the chairs from both cinema halls of Fuhe Grand Theater were donated to Taiwan's National Central University.<sup>34</sup> This sense of something coming to an end followed by the tentative finding of new purpose is also echoed in the closing moments of the film.

The vanishing of the spectators when *Dragon Inn* ends serves as a visual commentary on the loss of audience interest in Taiwan arthouse cinema. In the corridor of the theater Miao Tien, the antihero of *Dragon Inn*, is accompanied by his grandson, and they chance upon the hero Shih Chun. The sparse lines below form the second and final dialogue sequence in the film:

*Shih Chun:* Teacher Miao.

*Miao Tien:* Shih Chun.

[pause]

*Shih Chun:* Teacher, you came to see the movie?

*Miao Tien:* I haven't seen a movie in a long time.

*Shih Chun:* No one goes to the movies anymore

[pause]

*Shih Chun:* And no one remembers us anymore.

In the exchange between the hero and antihero in the hallway of Fuhe Grand Theater, Shih Chun refers to Miao Tien with the respectful designation of "Teacher," as Miao Tien was already a veteran in the film industry when the young Shih Chun was discovered by King Hu in a dessert shop and convinced by the director to star as *Dragon Inn*'s lead. The dialogue between them can be read as a self-nostalgic complaint, but to the audience who watches *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the utterance "no one remembers us anymore" is also a call to remember.

With the weight of interwoven personal and transnational cinematic histories, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*'s nostalgic notes contain a cinematic bearing of not only a film within a film but also of lives within and beyond a film. As Jacques Derrida reminds us in *Specters of Marx*, "inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task."<sup>35</sup> Beyond its technological manifestations, the cinematic recurs as a mode of bearing the other at the unique and recurrent end of worlds. In this case, Shih Chun's life/career has been closely associated with King Hu's legacy. Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* was Shih Chun's last film appearance until Hou Hsiao Hsien's *The Assassin* (2015), where Shih was filmed in eight scenes but was only included in two scenes of the released film. Perhaps in homage to the sublime endings of King Hu's *wuxia* films, Shih's back profile



is visible in the final scene of *The Assassin*, where Shih walks once again toward the horizon along with the younger heroes of the film. During our interview, Shih recalls that Hou and Tsai's descriptions of their projects were quite different from the eventual films. Other than the draw of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*'s tribute to King Hu, Shih had earlier worked with Tsai to approach Union Film Company (聯邦影業) to rerelease *Dragon Inn*. In 2003, the same year *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* was released, Shih Chun set up the King Hu Foundation in Taiwan in the hope of preserving King Hu's legacy.<sup>36</sup>

If we consider the cinematic endeavor as a work of world making and a mode of bearing the other—whether the other be on or offscreen, human or nonhuman, a time or a place—then it is possible that the end of a film would not merely be any end among others but rather *the end*.<sup>37</sup> In addition, where there is world making there too would be world ruining. It might be tempting to say that these luminaries' pasts have been immortalized in film and that the crystallized moment of their swashbuckling time will play out in eternal repetition for whoever watches, but the eternity of repetition in cinema is another illusion, since the material instantiations of the invisibilities of the cinematic cannot escape the threat of total invisibility and forgetting. When we remember the past of cinema as it finds new forms and remember the past through cinema, what remains obscured and forgotten? The brief account of Shih Chun's and Jiang Tai Dun's lives trace two strands of lives that have passed through the halls of Fuhe Grand Theater. The former is corporeally captured in films, while the latter is one of the frequently forgotten bodies who labor within the cinema without having their names remembered. Lives are neither analog nor digital. More than the melancholia of marking an end of an era, the closing of a theater, the twilight of a life, there is an arche-cinematic moment at play here whereby the temporality of the screen intertwines with the temporality of life/death.

The operations of the archive are indissociable with the project of cinema as world making. The processes of restoration and digitization recall Auge's observation that remembering and forgetting are not oppositional forces: "Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea."<sup>38</sup> The *L'Immagine Ritrovata* laboratory in Bologna, Italy, worked with the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (renamed Taiwan Film Institute) to restore *Dragon Inn*, which was then selected for the Cannes Classics section of the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. The 4K restoration of *Dragon Inn* gave the film a digital afterlife on Blu-ray and DVD as well as a theatrical return—including a significantly belated North American premiere, almost half a century after its initial Asian



release—at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival. The press kit accompanying the Cannes Film Festival premiere of the restored version details the complications in the process of preservation and restoration:

The subject of this project is the preservation of the original material of *Dragon Inn* by digitization in 4K resolution, and the restoration of the film in 4K by producing a set of digital elements. The original film negative is generally in good preservation condition. The restoration of *Dragon Inn* was aimed at solving the main issues: flickering, tramlines, major dirt and scratches and all splice marks, jittering, tilting and in general unstable image. The only very tricky part was a tear going along 7 frames in reel 2, that was solved with manual clone reconstruction and luminance adjustment. Due to the high number of scratches, a final speckle filter was applied, for a wet gate scratch removal effect without creating many single artifacts. There was no vintage copy available to be used as a reference for color restoration.<sup>39</sup>

I cite the notes on the issues encountered with preservation and digitization of *Dragon Inn* as an example of the impossibility of cinema surviving as an agglomeration of uncorrupted photomechanical film reels. John Hess and Patricia Zimmermann's "Transnational/National Digital Imaginaries" advocates for a broader understanding of the digital in order to imagine alternatives to collective forgetting within global capitalism. In their reading, analog and digitality are in a "continual dialectic relationship (each containing elements of the other), a relationship of process and processing."<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Timothy Murray argues that digital art has social and political pertinence, asking if "to shape a digital code means to bear the loss of code itself, to carry on the legacy of cinema as the crypt of the twentieth century?"<sup>41</sup> Digital and mechanical manipulation multiplies rather than ruins the cinematic possibility of bearing witness to what was or what has become invisible. The "it has been" of photography that Roland Barthes repeats in *Camera Lucida* lies not merely in the physical trace of the subject having been present but also in the trace memory of such an absent presence.<sup>42</sup> In a time when film archiving and film restorations have gained increased prominence and urgency, the dust and debris of Fuhe Grand Theater also serves as a reminder to consider the forms of fidelity that restoration work posits as ideal, the criteria by which films are selected to be saved from the endangered pile, and the less visible ways in which one work resuscitates another. Beyond the analogical understanding of indexicality, the difference between the born-analog *Dragon Inn* and its digital incarnation lies not in

an ontological shift but instead in a hauntological, chiasmatic repetition that was always latent in the flesh of the cinematic. In the next section, I turn to a series of photographic works that bear and reshape the imprint of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* as a revirtualization and rematerialization of the cinematic world carried into another body of work.

### 5. Love Never Dies: Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn

If cinema can be resurrected, it will only be through the birth of a new kind of cine-love.

—Susan Sontag,  
“The Decay of Cinema” (1996)

The audience that dematerializes at the end of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* exists somewhere, and Fuhe Grand Theater that received no audience after the end of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* persists in place, in cinema and in memory. In 2007, the Taiwanese artist Chu Yin Hua modeled memory scenes from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* on a miniature scale and turned her models into a photographic project with 50 × 60 cm chromogenic color prints. I call the images “memory scenes” because they are reminiscent of Fuhe Grand Theater as seen in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, though the mise-en-scène is not a copy of any particular scene. In figure 8, the light source emanates from within the screening hall and some spectators are visible, with the blue light suggesting a screening is happening, while in the foreground

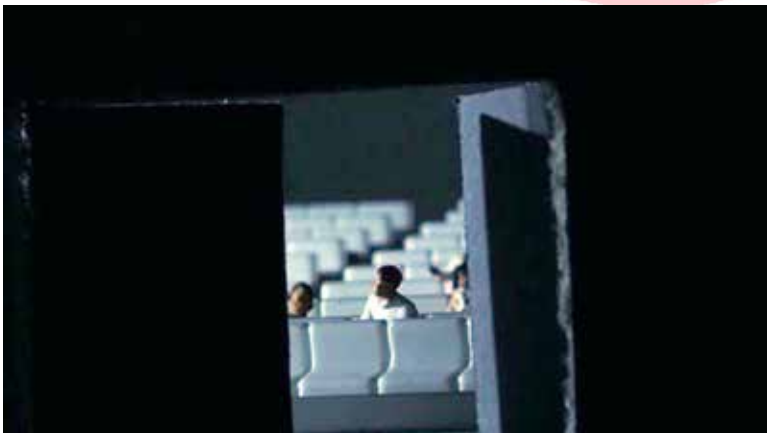


Figure 8. Chu Yin Hua's miniature model of spectators. Chu Yin Hua, 2007.

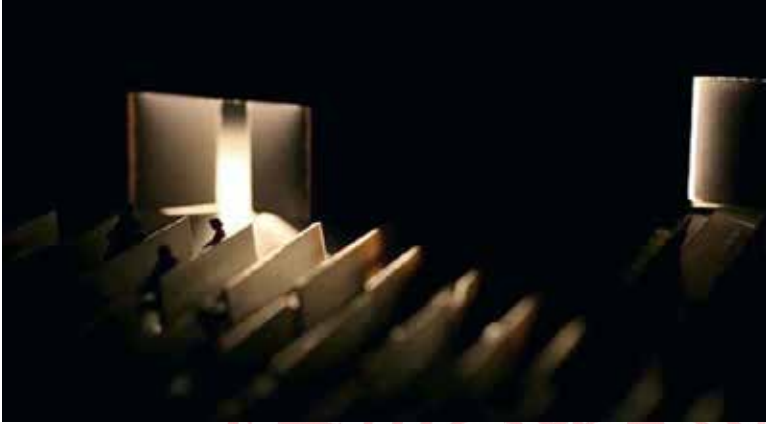


Figure 9. Chu Yin Hua's miniature model of spectators. Chu Yin Hua, 2007.

the space outside the hall is in darkness. In figure 9, the darkened hall suggests that no film is screening, or perhaps only a very dark scene. Three figures are seated in semidarkness near the ajar door. The glowing light from the corridor spills over into the cinema hall and creates an absorbing interplay of light, shadow, and darkness; we do not know if they are awaiting the beginning of a film or staying after a film's end or are just the lingering spirits from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. Chu titles her project *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn*. By adding a "Goodbye" into her title she extends Tsai's wordplay on *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and 不散 (*busan*) and reiterates the refusal of detachment underlying the "Goodbye" in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*.

The flash of Chu's photographic world is an intermixing of the flesh of her experiential world wrapped up in her private memories of viewing the film in a diasporic world that was distant to her even while she was within it. Chu started work on *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn* as a private experiment when she was a graduate student in visual arts at Goldsmiths under the supervision of Victor Burgin. *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn* has never been exhibited, and Chu expressed surprise when we met at Café de Gear on June 5, 2017, in Taipei to speak about the work. I explained that I had chanced upon it on her website while researching *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. She responded that her early experiment with shooting on a pinhole camera with polaroid film had failed due to light and exposure problems. *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn* was shot digitally with a Canon 60mm lens. She had built the model on cardboard and placed in it readymade figures used in architecture models. Instead of building a complete model of the theater and then photographing it, she built partial sets for the purpose of photography.



For her, the screen of the film functioned as an entrance and an exit. Looking through the lens of her camera, she was entering into the set and experiencing the theater. Gesturing toward her smartphone on the café table, she spoke of her interest in the exteriors of the frame and added that the experience of watching a film on a mobile device if one were traveling would be like being in a different world upon lifting one's head and realizing that one is already in a different world (抬頭是不同的世界, *taitou shi butong de shijie*).<sup>43</sup>

Holding on to the memory-images of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* at a time when she was a diasporic figure allowed Chu to experiment with interiorization and exteriorization and project her own estrangement into the world of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. In so doing, *Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn* exteriorizes the afterlife of that possibility in the time after, where the spectator becomes the creator of another afterlife, which not only extends the world of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and all that it carries but also creates another world. In this new world, which is both Fuhe Grand Theater in New Taipei City and instantiated in London, Chu becomes a spectator-creator of miniaturized memory models abstracted from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. The day we met, Chu spoke as a professional artist who looks back to her isolated time as a graduate student. When she conceived of the piece in 2004, she was a foreign student who traveled from Taiwan to London for graduate studies. Alone in her hostel, Chu watched an average of two to three Asian films per week from Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and Korea. She was particularly struck by the subtitles on Taiwanese films, which allowed her to see the newfound foreignness of Taiwanese culture from the point of view of her own foreignness in London. Of these films Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* was the only one she directly addressed in her work. In thinking of her memory of Taiwan through her experience of watching Taiwanese films with English subtitles, she thought not just of herself but also of the condition of emotional translation. Chu's nostalgia for Taiwan then was displaced onto the lonely world of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. Yet, this manifestation of nostalgia was not a static turn to her past but rather the beginning of her work as an artist and her exploration of the condition of spectatorship. By visually translating the emotions she felt from the film to the medium of modeling and photography, Chu makes palpable an affective dimension of spectatorship and reveals the residual potential of cinema surviving as memory traces with potential for reactivation in another form, another time.

Of her project, Chu writes about her own layered experience of viewing the film as an intermixing of memory, retention, and

perception whereby the line between the flash of cinema and the flesh of the world cannot be clearly demarcated:

In the third layer of pictures, I see images from *Dragon Inn* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* playing on the screen of my laptop. I see my room in London, a personal and intimate space. There is a gap between the images of *Dragon Inn* projected on the cinema screen in Tsai's film, the images of *Goodbye*[,] *Dragon Inn* playing on the laptop screen, and the image of my room that frames the screen. My perception of the film has been mediated and layered by my memories. For example, I recognise the cinema from *What Time Is It There?* I see not only Lee, Miao and Chen as they play out their roles in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, but also their performances and characters in Tsai's other films. . . . Images juxtaposed; there is a film within the cinema, a cinema within my room, and my memories within the film.<sup>44</sup>

In a general sense, even a film watched on a laptop in the solitude of a dark student dormitory turns the room into a cinematic dream world, inhabited by others who have watched, will watch, or are watching the same film. In the final scene of Abbas Kiarostami's *24 Frames*, which premiered posthumously at the Cannes Film Festival in 2017, an unforgettable tableau poetically and masterfully performs the cinematic force of death and reincarnation through each era's defining technological medium. Comprising twenty-four segments, *24 Frames* expands twenty-four still images into moving tableaux through digital technology. Beginning with Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), *24 Frames* ends with a monochromatic scene of a woman whose back is to the audience and who is asleep at her desk in front of her iMac. The shadowy spectrality and intertwining of cinematic worlds as well as the cinematic beyond the cinema hall illuminates even the dim presences of everyday solitude and finitude. We cannot see into her dreams, but despite her sleep, the images on her computer monitor play on: a couple moves sputteringly, as if lagging over a poor Internet connection, toward each other for a kiss. This final scene of Kiarostami's world is scored with Andrew Lloyd Webber's rapturous "Love Never Dies" that plays over the credits, marking Kiarostami's farewell to cinema that is also a refusal to say goodbye to the survival of the cinematic through different scales and forms of screen technology.

My argument on the survival of cinema as a cinematic or photographic afterimage in the time after is both general and specific: the general point on the latency of cinematic futurity as a virtual possibility is rooted within *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*'s status as a

metatextual film about the cinema hall, its ghosts, and the entanglements between letting go of the past and carrying it along into the future. My return to the cinema theater and the question of nonlinear cinematic time via Fuhe Grand Theater is not the nostalgia of a return to a lost past but rather a means of posing the argument that the potential of cinema past does not lose itself in the inevitability of new technological developments, such as cinema halls replacing projectors with 4K LED screens.<sup>45</sup> Since the cinema's mortality and its formal incarnations may also be discontinuous in time, future forms of cinema promised in the expansionary possibilities of shiny new media technologies may also take the form of a returning past that is not yet dead.<sup>46</sup>

### 6. Screening Today: Indexicality in the Time After

In the concluding scene of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, a yellow paper notice pasted on the signboard as the Ticket Lady exits the premises reads “暫停營業” (*zanting yingye*), or “temporary suspension of business” (figure 10). In March 2016 the cinema's signboard, though in disrepair, was still legible, and the paper sign for “temporary suspension of business” had been torn down (figure 11). In the intervening years Fuhe Grand Theater has not screened more films, but what if the time after its closure contains more cinematic potential as an afterimage and accidental archive of cinema's lived materiality?



Figure 10. Ticket Lady exiting the cinema in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2013).





Figure 11. Signage for Fuhe Grand Theater on the ground floor of the eponymous building. Author's photo, March 14, 2016.

Inside Fuhe Grand Theater in May 2016, I found another signboard that shows the films that are “screening today” (今日放映, *jinti fangying*): Futing (Prosperity Hall) is screening *Dragon Inn*, and Heting is screening 情事 (*Qingshi*). *Qingshi* is the Mandarin title for Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, (1960).<sup>47</sup> The signboard shows six daily screenings of *L'Avventura* and seven screenings of *Dragon Inn*, which corresponds to the premise in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* that only *Dragon Inn* was screened for the final show (figure 12). The sign is partially visible in the background in the final minutes of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in a scene with Lee Kang-sheng in the foreground, reading his fortune from a palmistry machine (figure 13). Between the image of the sign above the ticket counter shown in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* that was taken during filming in 2002 and the theater in 2016 the fortune machines are gone, but in the years that passed no one had erased the signboard. Perhaps the film crew, knowing that they were leaving a closed cinema, did not feel the need to erase their traces.

In the abandoned Fu Hall, I found two fallen signs with the words “福庭 今天放映” (Futing *jintian fangying*, Futing screening today) and “和庭 今天放映” (Heting *jintian fangying*, Heting screening today). This common sign serves as a preview advertisement for films that are currently screening or will be screened in

the next cycle. The debate on indexicality in semiotics and the philosophy of language frequently involves the adverbs of time: now, today, yesterday, and tomorrow.<sup>48</sup> As indexicals, the contents of screening “today” and screening “next” vary with the situation in which the words are uttered or found in, since the referents can



Figure 12. “Now Showing” sign above the ticket counter advertising *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *L'Avventura* (1960). Author’s photo, May 10, 2016.



Figure 13. Signboard showing *Dragon Inn* and *L'Avventura* from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Homegreen Films, 2013).

shift. With a sign that says “Screening Today” long after the closure of the cinema, it is possible to conclude that the sign now points toward nothing, since nothing is visibly screening today at Fuhe Grand Theater. Or, if we were to take our cue from the sign, the question could then be recast: what is screening today, what will screen in the next cycle, how has the referent shifted? What if we considered the indexicality of cinema in relation to a speculative multidirectionality, not only in terms of fidelity to the past but also as an index of a virtualization-to-come, pointing toward the possibility of future reactivation? It would be too simplistic to consider the relation between film and digital technology as a replacement of one by the other or even a transition, as if one had to decide between the two, or we already understood the so-called dead time of film. The old English root of “film,” *filmen*, includes the senses of “membrane, thin skin” and “hide,” and this sense of film as a fleshly, membranous binding around a nexus of encounter persists even when every stage of the production to exhibition of a film appears to be digitally inflected. In this sensory way, film lingers beyond the technology of the film stock. This vision of indexicality turns cinema from the glance toward the mechanical link to the past to also consider the potential of the cinematic as that which, while screening today, waits too for future referents and reactivation. In this sense, like the sign “Screening Today” that lies in wait, cinema is an anticipation of returns and futurity.

Even more cinematic than in the heyday of its operation in the late 1970s, the site of the abandoned cinema hosts encounters between the abstract and the material, not forgetting the intermixing of voices and intertwined lives from different worlds and eras. Through the material perforations of the unknown film reel and the gaps in time of Fuhe Grand Theater’s persistence in disappearance (from public usage and memory), the indexical relation of cinema expands beyond the physical relation to a past scene when we include the material and immaterial traces that carry the residual futures of cinema. There is one moment in *The Visible and the Invisible* when Merleau-Ponty makes a reference to cinema and the index:

And, conversely, it is not because in the “objective” world such or such a phenomenon is without visible index that we must forego making it figure in the life world. The discontinuous images of the cinema prove nothing with regard to the phenomenal truth of the movement that connects them before the eyes of the spectator—moreover, they do not even prove that the life world involves movements without a mobile: the mobile could well be projected by him who perceives.<sup>49</sup>





Figure 14. From a corridor just before the closed entrance of Fuhe Grand Theater, the New Taipei City Civil Sports Center is visible in the distance. Author's photo, June 15, 2017.

What seems like Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the cinema and its discontinuous images is, more specifically, the rejection of the cinema as an index of the visible by acknowledging invisibility as the condition of perception, since "what it does not see, is what makes it see."<sup>50</sup> With the fallen sign in Fuhe Grand Theater, what is "screening today" in the cinema encompasses horizons of invisibility, both of life worlds that have receded from view and those that are only just coming into being.

Returning, in June 2017 to bid my own lingering farewell to Fuhe Grand Theater, I find that the gates to the cinema are locked with a chain, and the signage on the ground floor has finally been removed. The shiny exterior of the New Taipei City Civil Sports Center, which was under construction a year ago in my first visit to the theater, is now visible in the horizon (figure 14). On one hand, the dusty theater serves as a reminder that "there is always plenty of the past (all of it, in fact) left in storage waiting to be unpacked."<sup>51</sup> Yet, Ethan Kleinberg rightly cautions that placing too much emphasis on space, materiality, and experience leads to a thinking of time that forgets the negative infinity of time's ghostliness, since the past can never fully manifest itself in the full presence of the spatiotemporal present. Circling around Fuhe Grand

Theater and in my physical and psychical returns to the site, I'm made aware that I'm a resident of neither its time nor its space, and the door that was opened on my second visit, was locked by my third visit in late summer of 2017. But the door that does not open is not the door that can never be opened. The past is not a foreign country but instead is a door that opens and closes, blinking, like the negative spaces of a film reel or the timeouts of digital connections. When, then, does a world end and begin?

As in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and the mystery of the disappearing audience before the lights are up, the time has passed. Looking up, we discover that we are already, in the time after.

### Notes

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1. Flannery Wilson, *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving within and beyond the Frame* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 110.

2. Yomi Braester, "Tales of a Porous City: Public Residences and Private Streets in Taipei Films," in *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, ed. Charles A. Laughlin, 157–70 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

3. My gratitude to Lin Wen-chi for providing the address of the cinema and other research support during my period of research with the Taiwan Film Institute.

4. Marc Augé, *Casablanca: Movies and Memory*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 30.

5. Jeroen de Kloet, "Crossing the Threshold: Chinese Cinema Studies in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1, no.1 (2007): 66–67.

6. Serge Gruzinski, *What Time Is It There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times?*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 1.

7. See also Song Hwee Lim on intratextuality within Tsai's films in *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014). Sing Song-yong relates the mournfulness over the death of cinema and cinophilia evident in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* to the resurrection of cinema in Tsai's film installations. See Sing Song-yong, *Ru jing chu jing: Cai ming liang de ying xiang yi shu yu kua jie shi jian* (Projecting Tsai Ming-liang: Towards Trans Art Cinema) (Taipei: Wu-nan Culture, 2014), 88–124.

8. Tiago de Luca, "Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectators," *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 1 (2016): 32.

9. Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 103. See also Guo-Juin Hong, "Theatrics of Cruising: Bath Houses and Movie Houses in Tsai Ming-liang's Films," in *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, ed. Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich, 149–59 (London: Routledge, 2013).

10. Jiang Tai Dun, interview by author, June 13, 2017.

11. For a broad study on the transformation of public spaces in Taipei through social and political changes in Taiwan, see Joseph R. Allen, *Taipei: City of Displacements* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

12. Critics have analyzed the significance of ghosts and haunting within *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. See G. Andrew Stuckey "Ghosts in the Theatre: Generic Play and Temporality in Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*," *Asian Cinema* 25, no. 1 (2014): 33–48.

13. For an astute reading of the historical significance of General Yu Qian's death sentence portrayed in the opening scene of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and Chief Eunuch Zhao, see Carlos Rojas, *Homesickness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

14. The popularity of the martial arts film in Taiwan in the 1960s–1970s and the decline of Taiwanese cinema in the 1990s cannot be understood without the shifting recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty and the geopolitical conflict with the People's Republic of China, but this lies beyond the scope of this essay. For further analysis of the historical significance of *Dragon Inn* in Taiwan cinema, see Lin Wen-chi, "Cong Wuxia Chuanqi Dao Guojia Yuyan: Dazui Xia Yu Longmen Kezhan De Xushi Bijiao" (From Martial Arts Legend to National Fable: A Narrative Comparison of *Come Drink with Me* and *Dragon Inn*), in *Guan zhan kan ying: Hua wen di qu shi jue wen hua yan jiu* (Viewing, Exhibiting, Gazing, and Moving Images: Essays on Chinese Visual Culture), ed. Lin Wen-chi and Wu Fangzheng, 179–96 (Taipei: Bookman, 2009).

15. For a discussion of the film industries of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China, see Zhou Xuelin, *Youth Culture in Chinese-Language Film* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chap. 2.

16. Jacques Rancière, *Bela Tarr, The Time After*, trans. Erik Beranek (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2015), 63.

17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 49.

18. *Ibid.*, 8.

19. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 30–59.

20. See Shaun Gallagher, *The Inordinance of Time* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

21. Mark B. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 42.

22. See Merleau-Ponty's reference to "sonorous being" (*The Visible and the Invisible*, 144). For an example of this ocularcentric charge, see Mikel Dufrenne, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, 121–64 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993). I follow



here Françoise Dastur's emphasis on the *écart* in Merleau-Ponty's sense of vision's relation to the blind spot of the mind. See Françoise Dastur, "World, Flesh, Vision," in *Chiasm: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 23–49 (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

23. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenal Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Eddie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 146.

24. Mauro Carbone, *The Flesh of Images: Merleau-Ponty between Cinema and Painting*, trans. Marta Nijhuis (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 1.

25. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132.

26. *Ibid.*, 138.

27. *Ibid.*, 268.

28. *Ibid.*, 240.

29. Two of Merleau-Ponty's key philosophical interlocutors are René Descartes and Jean-Paul Sartre. Merleau-Ponty criticizes Sartre's distinction between being-for-itself as the self-realized exteriority of objects and being-in-itself as the interiority of humans. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 215.

30. On phenomenology and affective perceptual immersion in cinema studies, see, for example, Vivian Sobchack's field-defining *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

31. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

32. *Ibid.*, 146.

33. For an analysis of nostalgia rooted in the film, see Kenneth Chan, "Goodbye, Dragon Inn: Tsai Ming-liang's Political Aesthetics of Nostalgia, Place, and Lingering," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1, no. 2 (2007): 89–103.

34. Lin Wen-chi, interview by author, March 25, 2016.

35. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 67.

36. Shih Chun, interview by author, June 6, 2016.

37. On singularity, spectrality, and reading the end of the world through the late work of Jacques Derrida, see Kas Saghafi, *The World after the End of the World: A Spectro-Poetics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2020).

38. Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 20. On the challenges of film in the epochal shift to digital technology, see Gian Luca Farinelli, "Film Archives after Film," *Journal of Film Preservation* 89 (2013): 13–14; Francis David, "Challenges of Film Archiving in the 21st Century," *Journal of Film Preservation* 65 (2002): 18–24.

39. "Press Kit for the Newly Restored Film Directed by King Hu: 2014 Cannes Classics Selection," Chinese Taipei Film Archive, 2014.

40. John Hess and Patricia Zimmermann, "Transnational/National Digital Imaginaries," in *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities*, ed. Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 83.

41. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 142.

42. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 76–77.

43. Chu Yin Hua, interview by author, June 5, 2017.

44. "Goodbye, Goodbye Dragon Inn," Chu Yin Hua, 2007, <https://www.chuyinhua.com/goodbye-goodbye-dragon-inn>.

45. Jean Noh, "World's First Cinema with Projector-less LED Screen Opens in Korea," *Screen Daily*, July 13, 2017, [www.screendaily.com/news/worlds-first-cinema-with-projector-less-led-screen-opens-in-korea/5119928.article](http://www.screendaily.com/news/worlds-first-cinema-with-projector-less-led-screen-opens-in-korea/5119928.article).

46. Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

47. Tsai Ming-liang's films, particularly *Vive L'Amour* (1994), have frequently been compared to Antonioni's films, and Tsai has even been called the "Taiwanese Antonioni" by film critic Toh Hai Leong. For a reading of Tsai within cinematic modernism, see Mark Betz, "The Cinema of Tsai Ming-liang: A Modernist Genealogy," in *Reading Chinese Transnationalism: Society, Literature, Film*, ed. Maria N. Ng and Philip Holden, 161–72 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

48. See David Kaplan's influential work on indexicals, "Demonstratives," in *Themes from Kaplan*, ed. Joseph Almog et al., 481–563 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also David Kaplan, "On the Logic of Demonstratives," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8, no.1 (1979): 81–98.

49. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 157.

50. *Ibid.*, 248.

51. Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 61.