

*Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?*  
**Reinventing Intermedial Urban Space  
in Early 1980s Taiwan\***

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**Abstract**

This paper situates the proliferating media culture of early 1980s Taiwan against a social backdrop characterized by urbanites' malleable living environment. I argue for a reconsideration of urban space less as blueprinted or represented than as brought together by intermedial nexuses and collaborations. To do so, I study three media works—a video art work, a feature film, and a street performance—to illustrate their interrelations. By foregrounding the identity of mainlander veterans and their vanishing homes as underlying all three media works, I illustrate how intermedial networks help foster a collective citizenship that acutely reflects the issue of urban dwelling. A refocus on intermedial practices takes up issues of displacement, embodiment, and mobility, keys to teasing out body-environment relations in Taiwan's ultra-urbanizing era.

**Keywords**

urban space, intermediality, Taiwan New Cinema, *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?*, Chen Chieh-jen

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Critics of contemporary Chinese cinema have devoted much attention to the representation of urban space. This scholarship is in part responsive to the international ascent of Taiwan New Cinema—to the sober anatomy of apartment spaces, office buildings, and barren parks represented in the works of Edward Yang (楊德昌) and, later on, of Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮)—and to the subsequent arrival of China’s Urban Generation. Yet the recently developed notion of a “DV-made China” and the more general circumstance of media proliferation demand a new set of approaches with which to probe the production, governance, and appropriation of urban spaces with respect to their technologically mediated nature. As James Tweedie and Yomi Braester observe in their Introduction to *Cinema at the City’s Edge* (2010), urban subjects at the turn of the twenty-first century “find themselves inhabiting a space where the horizon of images and the substance of the city begin to merge”; consequently, “it is no longer possible to determine where the city ends and cinema begins” (11). The mutual immersion of cinema and city, and by extension of media and space, echoes recent theoretical moves in the humanities. On the one hand, the methodological shift to the posthermeneutic necessitates a full recognition of the “materialities of communication,” looking not only into the representation of meaning but into the history-specific conditions of representation as well as its external and material constituents (Bao, “From Duration” 135). On the other hand, the spatial turn taking place in the field of film and media studies also calls for a rethinking of cinematic space, whose elastic properties strongly depend upon its technological support and the environment of screening.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I situate the convergence of city and media in the early 1980s in Taiwan, a time widely known for having nurtured the creative energy of Taiwan New Cinema. What has been neglected, however, is that this period also witnessed a burgeoning media culture, one that resounded across the clamorous debuts of local rock music, entertainment media, video art production, and the avant-garde theater movement. Crucially, the era also saw the launching of a series of urban restructuring projects, with a new material environment forming to mediate new types of social relations. I argue that urban space in this period is not only the result of municipal design and its implementation. Rather, it should be understood as a

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief account of cinema studies’ spatial turn and how it might catalyze a new understanding of cinematic time, see Bao, “From Duration.” On the “materialities of communication,” see the eponymous anthology *Materialities* edited by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, especially Gumbrecht’s chapter “A Farewell to Interpretation.” On explications of China’s Urban Generation and DV-Made China, see the two anthologies edited by Zhang Zhen.

topography whose contours and meanings are shaped by the synergistic work of a media network. I draw upon the notion of intermediality to address the implications of this variably mediated space. As the prefix “inter-” illustrates, different media have the ability to cross, enter, and perhaps change the boundaries between each other. This view recognizes not only the agency of media themselves, but their distributive quality, as intermedial practices usually transmit information, perceptions, and emotions in a collective and relaying fashion. The prefix’s geographical connotations also allow us to imagine media border-crossing as actively weaving social spaces together, making space not so much a physical-objective category as an effect of intermedial technics. Here I recall Miriam Hansen’s important insight that early American silent films could function as an alternative public sphere, a social horizon of sensorial reverberations within which spectators could reflect upon and negotiate the jarring experience of modernity.<sup>2</sup> In the urban scenes of 1980s Taiwan, the rise of such a public sphere depended ever more on intermedial interactions to foster a collective citizenship that acutely reflected on the issue of urban dwelling.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the intermedial perspective leads us to revisit early 1980s Taiwan, whose historical value goes beyond the auteurist visions subsumed under a single film movement. Although I lodge my main discussion within a New Cinema film that addresses housing problems in explicit terms, I distance myself from

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<sup>2</sup> Hansen’s notion of the public sphere follows and expands upon the thinking of Siegfried Kracauer, Oskar Negt, and Alexander Kluge. It is extensively discussed in her *Babel and Babylon*, especially ch. 3.

<sup>3</sup> My use of the term “collective citizenship” intends to invoke specific socio-historical conditions of the time. I locate the formation of these conditions slightly earlier, in the 1970s, out of which emerges what sociologist Hsiao A-chin terms the “return to reality” generation (回歸現實世代 *huigui xianshi shidai*). Unlike preceding decades, during which a sense of exile, rootlessness, and inability pervaded the social atmosphere, the postwar generation that came to maturity in the 1970s was struck with a series of diplomatic setbacks, along with a heightened awareness of the social and political reality on the island. The educated urban youth, while still under the influence of Chinese national identification imposed by the state, began to voice their concerns over diplomatic marginalization, campus democracy, class injustice, and local cultural heritage, regardless of their class and ethnic differences. Although Hsiao does not directly point it out, I wish to address the fact that the subjects of his analysis—historical revisionists resituating intellectual dissidents of the Japanese colonial period for contemporary political purposes, nativist literary workers, and outside-the-party activists—all developed a strong reliance on media (archives, novels, and magazines) to strategically broadcast their agendas. Well into the 1980s, these engagements with social reality further fermented with the proliferation of mass media, not the least of which include video art, the avant-garde theater movement, rock music, and the New Cinema. See Hsiao, *Huigui (Return)*, especially ch. 2, for the emergence of the return-to-reality generation.

conventional aesthetic interpretations with two further complications. First, I posit this particular film in relation to two other social events, whose significance cannot be properly reckoned without recourse to their reliance on broadcasting media and avant-garde bodily practice. Viewed together, these three “media events” chart an intermedial horizon that helps articulate the experience of city-dwelling. Second, I treat the filmic space as more than a textual one populated by signs and references. I consider it as constituted by media entities whose agencies are as vital as those of human characters, and whose materiality crosses from the outside world to actively shape the inner diegetic space. These two complications deliberately remain inattentive to concerns about medium specificity and representational strategies. They cancel out the demarcations of different media, as well as those between texts and the implied external world, with the hope of building an intermedial sphere that fuses disparate spaces into an affective and commotional continuum.

### **The Li Shi-ke Incident**

On the afternoon of April 14, 1982, a crime of unheard-of audacity occurred in broad daylight in Taipei. A man forced his way into a major branch of the Land Bank of Taiwan, where he robbed five million New Taiwan dollars after injuring the bank’s deputy manager with a revolver. The robber managed to flee before the police arrived at the scene, leaving no traces except for the blurred images of his fully disguised figure that were captured by the bank’s internal surveillance camera. Identified as Taiwan’s first ever bank robbery, this incident immediately made a splash and received wide coverage by the media. After a month’s painstaking search, the police finally hunted down the culprit with the help of a telephone tip. He turned out to be a retired soldier named Li Shi-ke (李師科), who had accompanied the Nationalist (i.e., Kuomintang) regime’s relocation to Taiwan in 1949, and ended up leading a meager life after being forced out of the army due to physical illness. In an interview with a journalist, Li declared the cause of his extreme conduct: he had long planned to rob a bank because he witnessed the rapidly rising number of individual upstarts and financial crimes, twin and mutually-reinforcing phenomena during Taiwan’s economic boom. He was equally upset by the immense stagnant debt resulting from the public money loaned exclusively to the privileged class.

The Li Shi-ke Incident spread through the broadcasting media authorized by the Nationalist Party, which produced widely circulated images, first of Li’s transgressive conduct, and then of his docile, handcuffed figure. These images cast Li in an intermedial circuit, coursing from the bank’s surveillance camera through

newspapers and television reports to the receiving end in local homes. Two years later, when video artist Chen Chieh-jen (陳界仁) created his first video work, he recalled his experience of gazing at the robbery scene that was repeatedly shown on TV. The gun Li Shi-ke held made him think of the photographic gun used in the late nineteenth century to capture moving objects in consecutive frames.<sup>4</sup> He was then inspired to record with his Betacam a veiled man shot through with an invisible gun, combining the effects of a surveillance camera's grainy quality and TV's flashing scan lines (Fig. 1). Framed and caged in the middle of the screen, the man resembles a palimpsest written and rewritten by multiple media; because the gun is not shown on the screen, it is as if the body is penetrated, or "written off," by some mysterious media force. While Chen's work could hint at the broadcasting media's share of violence in Li's final execution by the state, it also conveys messages other than the fatedness it explicitly triggers. In its exhibition context, the shooting scene was edited into an hour-long cycle, with the body being shot but quickly restored. It seemed that while media conspired against the man, the bad object fit for eradication, they also sustained his body's eternal return.<sup>5</sup> In real life, although Li was executed within a month of his apprehension, he was soon enshrined in a folk temple in suburban Taipei. Regarded as a righteous robber and acting as many practicing thieves' patron saint, his body became a divine medium itself, mediating the social idealism and outlawed chivalry unrealizable in our own time.

Meanwhile, also cast under the social spotlight was Li Shi-ke's identity as a mainland émigré and the living conditions this group of residents had long endured. In "A Vindication of Li Shi-ke," a famous article penned by writer and social commentator Li Ao (李敖) and published in a *dangwai* 黨外 (outside the party) magazine, Li Shi-ke is portrayed as beloved by his neighbors, who occasionally benefit from his deeds of kindness. At a remove from the neighbors' affectionate gaze, however, Li lives alone inside a shabby space, where almost every piece of his furniture is tattered.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited from Chen's personal account on his creation of the work; I thank the artist for sharing with me this material. In 1882, French scientist Étienne-Jules Marey invented his chronophotographer with a revolving cylinder containing photographic plates, with which he could take aim and "shoot" at the speed of twelve frames a second. For more details, see Braun.

<sup>5</sup> Originally lost, Chen's video work was discovered amongst a pile of old DV cassettes. Re-entitled "Shanguang" 閃光 ("Flashlight"), it was exhibited at the 2015 "REWIND\_Video Art in Taiwan 1983-1999," which chronicled Taiwan's video art history since its genesis in 1983. For more details on Chen's video work, see Sing Song-Yong's recent article "Shijian zhihou" ("Post-Event").

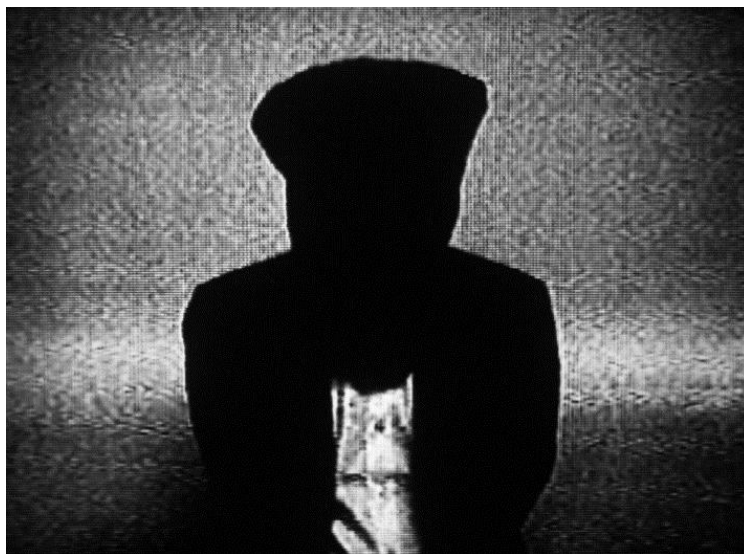


Fig. 1. Chen Chieh-jen, "Flashlight." Courtesy of Chen Chieh-jen.

Li Ao then criticizes the government's disregard of the mainlanders, whose solitary figures now occupy the margins of the city after they spent the prime of their lives defending the country (5-9). Li's dwelling predicament called forth the overall difficulty mainlanders faced at the time, when many of their illegal residences, officially known as *feilieguan juancun* 非列管眷村 (non-regulated veterans' villages), became an obstacle to the city's modernizing plan. As the central government passed an article in 1977 that legalized the appropriation of the *juancun* to offer more space for public housing (31), and as Taipei entered a gentrification phase that initiated several construction sprees since the 1980s (Lin, *Dushi sheji* 60-61), many *juancun* sites were scheduled for wholesale demolition because some occupied prime locations in the downtown area.

The concern for media and dwelling spaces invoked respectively by Chen Chieh-jen and Li Ao with regard to Li's incident complicates our understanding of these two terms. On the one hand, Chen's artwork highlights the presence of a close-circuited space created by the surveillance camera, in which the man is rendered in stark frontality and violently dealt with. Considered as a video installation, however, the man is also framed by a TV screen, its frontal position directly addressing the viewers on the exhibition scene. The TV set further implies a potential outreach to its installation in homes and public spaces, which facilitates

the collective viewing of this incarcerated body. Chen thus creates a work whose form resembles the mechanism of media itself: its stripped-down style bespeaks an intentional abstraction of media from their social embeddedness, done to more precisely disclose how media, as an institution, forge and engineer social relations mediated by asymmetrical viewing habits. On the other hand, the collaboration of communication media, Li Ao's polemical article included, actively welds a spatial continuum that links Li's decrepit home with the robbed bank, symbol of the country's financial order and prosperity, and with many *juancun* houses where mainlanders face eviction, all of which are channeled into tuned-in households. The condemnation that aired via state media notwithstanding, Li's incident solicited a lot of hero worship among Taiwanese, who were led to identify and empathize with other mainlanders. These two instances, one artistic and conceptual, the other social and empirical, then prompt us to recognize both an intermedial network endowed with social characters and a social space that is diffusely mediated. They further involve a third vector—the body—as a site crisscrossed by the mutual trafficking of media and space, thus should also be construed as multiply mediated and spatially dispersed.

As Li Shi-ke's incident forcefully reminded society of the neglected mainlanders and their vanishing homes, stories exclusive to this identity and its living environment soon crossed over to the silver screen, appearing in a group of films emerging along with the New Cinema.<sup>6</sup> Among them, *Da cuo che* (搭錯車 *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?*, dir. Yu Kan-Ping [虞戡平]) is the first to engage with the issue of housing evacuation and demolition. The film created a cinematic surrogate for millions of veteran mainlanders on the island, introducing the screen persona of Sun Yue (孫越), himself a mainland actor who had until then appeared mostly as a leading antagonist in films from the previous period. Sun would go on to reprise the role of the weathered yet affable mainlander in his post-*Papa* career, which eventually brought him to portray Li Shi-ke in 1988's *Lao Ke de zuihou yige qiutian* 老科的最後一個秋天 (*Old Ke's Last Autumn*).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See ch. 5 of Yomi Braester's *Painting the City Red* for a thorough analysis of these films. According to Braester, the filmic presentation of urban construction in fact predates the emergence of New Cinema, one prominent example being Bai Jingrui's 白景瑞 1970 *Jiazai Taipei* 家在台北 (*Home Sweet Home*).

<sup>7</sup> It was reported that in 1988 two film companies competed for the production rights of Li's legendary life, resulting in two feature films—*Old Ke's Last Autumn* and *Dadao Li Shi-ke* 大盜李師科 (*Li Shi-ke the Bandit*)—released in that very year.

## Technology of Displacement

*Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* revolves around the story of Uncle Mute (played by Sun Yue), a mute veteran mainlander who comes to settle in one of Taipei's *juancun* villages following the 1949 exodus. Retired and aged, he ekes out a living by recycling used glass bottles. Although life remains tough, he manages to get by with the support of communal bonds shared in the neighborhood. The bitter-sweet, self-sustaining life in the veterans' community gives the impression of Taiwan's earlier "healthy realistic" films, invoking classics such as Lee Hsing's 李行 *Jietou xiangwei* 街頭巷尾 (*Our Neighbors*, 1963).<sup>8</sup> But such a wholesome quality soon expires as these neighbors realize they are to be dislocated again, this time in the name of urban renewal. As the situation worsens, most of the characters belonging to the community die either accidentally or of illness, with the exception of two women: Uncle Mute's adopted daughter Ah-mei, who eventually becomes an acclaimed singer so busy with concert tours that she can spare no time for her father, even as he lies dying in the hospital; and the Taiwanese widowed neighbor who takes care of Uncle Mute after surviving her husband, brother, and son, the latter dying in a fight with the government officials arriving to dismantle their house. As a result, all the male characters from the *juancun*'s old society are effaced from the narrative, with their diegetic presence displaced onto Ah-mei's commodified singing and the Taiwanese mother's wailings and bemoaning.

The Chinese title of *Papa*—*Da cuo che*, which literally means getting on the wrong car, bus, or train—led to some discussion during its release. Some critics questioned the title's relevance to the story (Si 26), while one outside-the-party periodical offered a political reading, interpreting it to mean the misfortune of those who boarded the ship with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's exiled Nationalist

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<sup>8</sup> One anonymous reader suggests that I link early 1980s films to previous traditions such as *wenyi pian* 文藝片 (literary arts film) in future research. *Papa* might not be the best site to highlight this historical strand because it fits more conveniently into what Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh identifies as the mode of melodrama with its "twists and turns of fate," "emotional excess," "stock personae," "cheap didacticism," and the use of popular music ("Pitfalls" 445). However, the film does echo Yeh's notion of the "distilled *wenyi*," which she mainly associates with Taiwan's Mandarin films of the 1960s, in its sidelining of heterosexual romance and exaltation of filial piety, neighborly love, compassion, and mercy—"humanity" that tends to be "rooted in the pathos of tragedy" ("Pitfalls" 448-49). Similar normative difference can, according to Jean Ma, also be observed between Mandarin *gechang pian* 歌唱片 (the singsong film) and Hollywood musicals (8-9). This then complicates our understanding of *Papa*'s generic formation as it shifts between different narrative modes and musical performativity.



regime (Cheng, Su, and Liu).<sup>9</sup> Taking my cue from this title, I want to suggest that *Papa* relies on the mechanism of *cuo* 錯, or mistake, to relay its narrative, which I read as a series of displacements (錯置 *cuozhi*) taking place in the textual space. On the thematic level, the film tells of the dispossessed life of mainlanders and their dependents at a time of seismic urban transformation. Yet in view of the cinematic medium employed to carry out this subject matter, the mechanism of displacement cannot be fully unpacked without a synchronous nod to the role media technology plays in *Papa*, a work that is for the most part remembered as a commercially successful musical in Taiwan's film history. As a musical film, *Papa* activates and shapes its audio *mise-en-scène* by means of Uncle Mute's mutism, which warrants further analysis.<sup>10</sup> Despite his inability to speak, Uncle Mute is associated with a musical instrument, the trumpet, with which he produces simple notes to accompany his labor as a recycler. The trumpet invokes his past service as a bugler on the front line; during a solo performance in front of the villagers, he visually recollects an intense war battle that he participated in. Thus, although Uncle Mute is deprived of a human voice, he is supplemented with a technical aid—a vocal prosthesis—that forms a bodily relationship with his physical toil and his personal, ineffable memory of the nation's traumatic past.

It is also with Uncle Mute's trumpet that the film's acoustic leitmotif is first sounded. Containing a few simple notes, the tune serves more as a lyrical accompaniment than as a narrative device in its early appearances. Later, as Ah-mei embarks on her international tour, and as the *juancun* complexes are razed to the ground, a forlorn and dislocated Uncle Mute is heard playing the tune by Ah-mei's composer boyfriend, thanks to whom the rhythm gets rendered into a full song, "Any Wine Bottles for Sale." Following Uncle Mute's tragic death, it is the song's performance by a grief-stricken Ah-mei that ceremoniously ends the film. Now

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<sup>9</sup> According to Raymond Wong (黃百鳴 Huang Baiming), producer and co-founder of Hong Kong's Cinema City, the film initially built upon the farcical plot of a group of people who took the wrong train from Taipei to Kaohsiung, but the blasé script was soon scrapped. Since they couldn't come up with a better title, Wong and his colleagues decided to keep the original one even as the plot had been largely revised, now becoming a family ethical melodrama (Wong).

<sup>10</sup> Mute characters are not uncommon in films of this period. The most famous example is the deaf-mute photographer played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai (梁朝偉) in *Beiqing chengshi* 悲情城市 (*A City of Sadness*, 1989), a role that has yielded much interpretation with regard to the repressed nature of history under the rule of the Kuomintang. In "Pingguo de ziwei" 蘋果的滋味 ("The Taste of Apples"), the third and final part of the omnibus film *Erzi de dawanou* 兒子的大玩偶 (*The Sandwich Man*, 1983), we also come across a speech-handicapped child coming from an impoverished *juancun* family. By the end of the story, this child will receive an education in the US, where she will learn the "civilized" language of the West.

filled in with lyrics, the song becomes Ah-mei's first-person remembrance of her father, with the refrain chanted recurrently in the Hokkien topolect, "Any Wine Bottles for Sale" (酒罈倘賣無 *Tsiú-kan thang buē-bô*), a phrase her schoolmates once made up to mock her father's low occupation, thus also marking the singer's belated affirmation of her humble descent.<sup>11</sup> Ah-mei's final performance of "Wine Bottles" is rearranged with heavy metallic beats, synchronized by rock singer Julie Su (蘇芮 *Su Rui*), and set in a full-house stadium space. While Uncle Mute's simple tune develops into Ah-mei's intense emotional release, the pathos this supposedly triggers is undermined by the camera's constant cuts to the audience, who appear nonchalant. This suggests the commercial prowess the song creates on the one hand, while something true to the context of love and alienation is irrevocably lost in transmission on the other. Indeed, "Any Wine Bottles for Sale," along with another number from the film, "The Never Changing Moonlight" (一樣的月光 *Yiyang de yueguang*), soon became the two most popular hits both in Taiwan and the broader diasporic context.<sup>12</sup> Newspapers reported that *Papa* was enthusiastically embraced by audiences in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong mainly because the musical numbers hooked local audiences almost immediately. It was only later that they piqued these listeners' curiosity about how the music could be appreciated narrative-wise ("Dingzhe yueguang"; Gao). The songs' travel circuit within Sinophone communities thus often escapes their original sites of embedment: it participates in a chain effect of displacement that abstracts Uncle Mute's life story and the socio-historical specifics that qualify his experiences, turning them into

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<sup>11</sup> Another implication of this humble descent has to do with Ah-mei's songstress-orphan identity. This identity harks back to the tradition of singsong movies in early Shanghai and Hong Kong cinema, where orphans and foundlings abound. Early on in a public screening scene in *Papa*, the villagers gather to watch *Lan yu hei* 藍與黑 (*The Blue and the Black*), Shaw Brothers' 1966 epic of a wartime romance, and they listen to Linda Lin Dai's 林黛 character—an orphan adopted and raised by a forbidding matriarch—sing in a cabaret. For a thorough tracing of the songstress movies from 1930s Shanghai to post-war Hong Kong, see Jean Ma's recent book *Sounding*. On the orphan motif in post-war Sinophone cinema, see Zhang Zhen's study "Ling Bo" as well as Ma (151-53).

<sup>12</sup> Although "Any Wine Bottles for Sale" became an instant hit, it was soon banned by the government owing to the fact that its composer Hou Te-Chien (侯德健) "fled" to the mainland, an act considered high treason then (投共 *tougong*). This anecdote, however, did not prevent the song from entering the public sphere. During the film's post-screening discussion on July 31, 2015 at Treasure Hill (寶藏巖 *Baozangyan*), Taipei, director Yu Kan-Ping stated that exactly because the song was removed from the records, it became highly profitable for street vendors, whose pirated cassettes sold like hot cakes. This is yet another example of displacement surrounding the film's sonic circulation, which exceeds the film proper to involve the governing technology of the state as well as a counter media sphere formed among the public.

profitable entertainment on a transnational scale. Consequently, even Ah-mei's flamboyant performative body cannot be exempted from this displacing process.

In *Papa*, Ah-mei's stage performance and her singing voice are technically dissociated, if not rendered utterly incompatible. This dissociation is made evident by the complaint about actress Liu Shui-chi's 劉瑞琪 (who plays Ah-mei) stiff dancing steps and her awkward lip sync (Si 26). The failed synchronization is especially palpable in the final performance of "Any Wine Bottles for Sale." Throughout this sequence, Liu/Ah-mei's body gets trapped in a small square space. Her limbs swing restlessly; her lips fall out of sync with the lyrics, which now unleash their force in full swing via Julie Su's resounding voice. Here the body/voice split reinforces Alan Williams's observation about recorded numbers in musical films, which rely on close miking as the paradigm of sound recording, thereby creating a sense of "spacelessness" regardless of camera movement and the distance variation it produces (151). It is exactly this spaceless illusion that enables the rock hit to exceed the diegetic space and its material milieu, asserting an independent life in the smooth space of the Pan-Asian record market. With the help of recording technology, the music goes everywhere and nowhere at once. Superseded by Julie Su's disembodied voice, Ah-mei's exhausted body becomes leftover material on screen. Hence her body belies cinema's pretension to be a coherent time-space construct, while also embodying it as a composite reliant on artificial synchronization, through which integral times and spaces often find themselves at odds with each other.

The motif of displacement thus operates not merely on a representational or thematic level. It is immanent to the technology of representation itself, driven by cinema's mediation that colludes in excluding Uncle Mute's voicing space, hence muting him for a second time. Such a view on the technics of displacement focuses not upon what is told but upon *how* it is mediated; it construes cinematic technology as self-reflexively mediating, and acquiring, its social characters. It further goads us to take heed of the heterogeneous constitution of a single film, opening up an intermedial terrain that involves the contention between the mute vocal cords, the trumpet, popular music, dancing bodies, and more. Apart from a relation based on media competition and mutual displacement, which ultimately taps into a transnational space catering to commercial operations, the following sections reveal more details about the intermedial processing in *Papa*. These details demand a rethinking of the textual space, wherein media serve as both active entities and as underlying infrastructures.

## The Transparent *Juancun*

*Papa* was released in 1983, the year that saw the budding of Taiwan New Cinema. The film is often placed in this category and shares many of its characteristic features: the enlisting of a young promising director, the address of social issues involving the everyday struggles of lower-class citizens, and the allegorical property that informs Taiwan's agonizing grappling with its socio-economic transformation. Yet *Papa*'s place as a New Cinema film is more equivocal than it seems. Produced by the Hong Kong-based and commercially oriented Cinema City (新藝城 *Xin yi cheng*),<sup>13</sup> the film draws heavily on popular music to relate its tragic theme, which is cast in an emotionally excessive mode à la Hollywood melodrama. The musical-melodramatic staple triggered an enthusiastic response from the audience, leading the film to hit the big screen eight times within five months. Naturally, *Papa* became the best-selling Chinese-language film of 1983 in Taiwan, an honor that rarely graced its New Cinema counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

*Papa*'s precarious state both as a New Cinema film and as a commercial attraction can be further detected in its incongruous structural design, as many

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<sup>13</sup> One of the anonymous readers advises me to elaborate on the "Hong Kong factor" in relation to the film industry in Taiwan. While Hong Kong's New Wave is often cited as an important source of inspiration for Taiwan New Cinema, a more specific impact comes from the independent production strategies adopted by the emerging filmmakers, including Ann Hui (許鞍華), Tsui Hark (徐克), and the executive group at Cinema City. Unlike previous studios, the independent production system, spearheaded by Cinema City, was adept at matching and soliciting investors and distributors, building and strengthening its audience base, and developing more creative leeway for the directors. It soon motivated filmmakers in Taiwan to establish their own studios, although the Taiwanese counterparts were more focused on stylistic exploration and less attentive to managerial efficiency and public taste (Lu 284-89). I would further identify Sylvia Chang (張艾嘉 *Chang Ai-chia*) as the key figure in making the Hong Kong factor realizable in Taiwan. Appointed as the director of Cinema City's Taiwan branch, Chang participated in the initiation and production of such films as Edward Yang's *Haitan de yitian* 海灘的一天 (*That Day, on the Beach*, 1983), Yu Kan-Ping's *Da cuo che*, Lin Ching-jie's 林清介 *Taishang taixia* 台上台下 (*Cabaret Tears/ Send in the Clowns*, 1983), and Ko Yi-Chen's 柯一正 *Daijian de xiaohai* 帶劍的小孩 (*Kidnapped*, 1983), in all of which except *Da cuo che* she also played the leading role. These directors associated with Cinema City often went on to set up their own film studios. See also Ji Er's article "Xin yi cheng" on Cinema City's commercial operation in its beginning five years.

<sup>14</sup> In *Taiwan New Cinema*, an anthology edited by Hsiung-ping Chiao that appeared when the movement seemed to have run its course, *Papa*'s director Yu Kan-Ping is included as a New Cinema member, but the only review of the film collected in the book, written by veteran critic Edmond Wong, accuses the film of "never showing heartfelt concern for its characters and their social surroundings" (373). It is suspicious, then, that Chiao's book counts *Papa* as a TNC film only to *negatively* prescribe what the movement should be like.

critics have so noted and criticized (Zheng 55; Si 26). Whereas in the first half of the film *Uncle Mute* dominates as the central figure who accompanies Ah-mei's growth, and has her surrounded by loving elders and joyful playmates despite the mishaps that constantly befall them, the second half turns to Ah-mei's rising stardom, and plots Uncle Mute's increasing withdrawal and final death. Just as the first narrative strand is cut short by the *juancun* community's inexorable dissolution, the realistic mode also gets "tainted" by Ah-mei's ensuing musical performances, whose artificial spectacles glut the screen no less than four times in the latter part. However, given the socio-historical changes Taiwan underwent at the turn of the 1980s, I consider this stylistic incongruity less as the director's lack of mastery than as the film's reflexive incorporation of the historical juncture itself. Such a structural break subsequently materializes into the displacement of an old medium by a new one, a displacement that functions both in the film's textual and textural spaces.

In the first half, Uncle Mute's village, though shuttered from the outside world, maintains a high degree of intercommunication and transparency by itself. Together the villagers live the lives of their neighbors, experiencing a plethora of emotional fluctuations—the festive reunion during the lunar New Year, the attentiveness to a fierce row taking place next door, the grief over a neighbor dying in a devouring fire and another by drowning. With its imbricated layout and ubiquitous porosity, which largely derive from the makeshift materials chosen to construct what were thought to be temporary abodes, the *juancun*'s labyrinthine composite emerges as a prevailing form of mediation that sustains the traffic of bodies, information, senses, and affect in village life. Not only does the *juancun*'s architectural form enable daily exchanges between residents of similar social background, thus functioning as a social writing pad on which a collective identity is reinscribed, it also binds them into an affective coalescence, positing architectural mediation as the very basis of this emotionally charged melodrama.

If a mediated perspective of the *juancun* architecture invokes a paradoxical sense of material connectedness and instant emotional involvement, the joining of the *juancun* architecture with the mobile movie camera further produces a sense of intermedial immediacy. This effect finds vivid depiction in Taiwanese writer Chu Tien-hsin's 朱天心 short story, "Xiang wo juancun de xiongdimen" 想我眷村的兄弟們 ("Reminiscence of My Fellow Brothers in the Military Dependents' Village," 1992), in which she reminisces about the good old days growing up in the *juancun*. Towards the end of the story, the narrator asks her readers to assume a pair of camera eyes before inviting them on a journey along a path on which she has had

dolly tracks paved. These tracks wind their way into the back alleys of an imaginary *juancun* composite, teeming populated by middle- and low-ranking soldiers and their families. In the form of a long tracking shot, the narrator guides us past these concatenated spaces of interiority, introducing each of the young faces we pass behind the invisible walls—it is obvious that they will all grow into celebrities whom Taiwanese will become familiar with (among them is Lee Li-chun [李立群], famous actor who plays a tragic second-generation mainlander in *Papa*) (Chu 96-98). Through the intermediation and interpenetration of architecture and cinema, the walls built to define each housing unit are cancelled, hence doubling the effect of transparency and movability. With the compartmentalized structure now suspended, the journey proves to be unending. Snippets of images caught in separate domestic spaces turn into an endless flow of *mise-en-scène*, resembling the rhizomatic sprawl of memory that eventually merges with the *juancun*'s extended architectural layout. As Chu steers her readers along their journey of remembrance, she also leads them to tread on a land of intermediation, with memory deriving its distinctive form from the intermingling of cinematic apparatus and architectural materiality.

In *Papa*, one peculiar *mise-en-scène* that figures architecture and cinema's intermediation can be found in the glass walls circumscribing Uncle Mute's home. Fancily designed in a way that seems unusual for a poor mainlander family, the walls are made of used wine bottles Uncle Mute has collected. Not so much an ostentatious decoration (as some critics suggest) as a porous interface, these walls betoken the fluid and interdependent lifestyle the mainlanders' community shares. They foreground architecture's role in affording, amassing, and shuttling everyday occurrences involving those living within a stone's throw. They also resemble the cinematic mode of address, mirroring the reciprocal exchange between the enframed fictive world and audiences' prompt emotional response to it, both mediated by the translucent silver screen. With this self-referring capacity, the glass walls assume what literary scholar Kate Marshall terms "corridority" in her study of infrastructural architecture in modernist American fiction, a notion that suggests an open-ended relation between social constructions and their textual representation. "Within a fictional form saturated with self-conscious, self-reflexive self-descriptions," Marshall writes, "corridor stands out as an image of the transport mechanisms of communicative sociality" (24). In a similar manner, the glass walls stand for the mutual transaction and molding of experiences, senses, and social relations intrinsic to both *juancun* dwelling and cinematic viewing. The wall's transparency embodies the effect of "mediated immediacy," which is doubled by

*juancun* and cinema's superimposition. It thus comes as no surprise that when the bulldozer arrives to dismantle the village, it is first depicted as violently tearing down the glass walls, a gesture toward the historical decline of a society and its transparent way of living. With the *juancun* community's disintegration, a new mode of film viewing—and, emphatically, *listening*—also suggests itself to the screen.

### Ambient Attunement

As the fate of demolition befalls the *juancun* community, Ah-mei's newly acquired apartment matter-of-factly takes precedence. However, rather than shifting the diegetic space to the apartment unit, whose obstructiveness and anonymity pervade the films of Edward Yang and Tsai Ming-liang in the final two decades of the twentieth century, *Papa* ushers in a new medium that asserts its power by way of the film's popular numbers. Adapting a rock-and-roll format, these numbers introduced to the Taiwanese audience the legendary stardom of Julie Su, whose titular album *Da cuo che*, also her first Mandarin one, was released a few months prior to *Papa*'s premiere and is often credited for the film's success. The fact that these hits caused a great sensation and changed Taiwan's popular soundscape needs to be placed within the context of the emergence of rock music in Taiwan.

In the early 1980s, the mention of rock music might not have struck one as something new, given the island's exposure to American pop culture in the previous "US Aid" era (美援 *meiyuan*, 1951-65). According to Shin Hyunjoon and Ho Tung-Hung, American popular culture first took hold via a "clustering" effect, materializing near Zhongshan North Road in Taipei, where the headquarters of the American army stood (94). In this area and a few others across the island, numerous pubs and clubs mushroomed in the service of pleasure-seeking American soldiers. It was also in these spaces that some Taiwanese singers learned and honed their craft—for instance, before rising to nationwide fame, Julie Su earned her living by regularly performing soul music in a military club in Taichung. Most performers working in these clubs trained themselves to impersonate various singers and genres with adeptness, but they seldom went beyond that to create their own music.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> During this era, rock music also enjoyed a limited reception among more privileged *juancun* families, providing second-generation mainlanders with a rich subcultural space to compensate for their double alienation from their parents' motherland and from native Taiwanese society. The reception of American rock among rebellious *juancun* youths finds its most gripping expression in Edward Yang's *Gulingjie shaonian sharen shijian* 牯嶺街少年殺人事件 (*A Brighter Summer*

However, in 1982, one year before *Papa's* release, things changed decisively. The still young Luo Dayou (羅大佑) released his debut album *Zhi hu zhe ye* (之乎者也), which signaled a new brand of rock music in the making. According to Luo, many of the songs in the album were composed after he first arrived in Taipei, where he had a strong impression of how the city was transformed by the Ten Major Construction Projects, launched during the 1970s to strengthen the nation's infrastructural service (Xiao and Zhou).<sup>16</sup> This experience led him to write the legendary "Lugang Village" (鹿港小鎮 "Lugang xiaozhen"), in which the singer contrasts Lugang, a religious center and historical port village in central Taiwan, with modern Taipei, and famously chants "Taipei is not my home, where neon lights do not exist" in a distressed tone. Luo's distinct fusion of the younger generation's urban outcry with the rock format bequeathed from the Americans soon brought about the generic turn in the music industry. The pressing issue of urbanization now vibrated through Taiwanese popular music just as it pervaded New Cinema work. Songs released in the wake of Luo's album, such as Julie Su's "The Never Changing Moonlight"<sup>17</sup> and former folk singer Lee Shou-Chuan's "The Future of the Future" (未來的未來 "weilai de weilai") were effectively used in films that proffered some final visions of Taipei's illegal ghettos.<sup>18</sup> No longer confined to the cluster of American clubs, rock music in Taiwan came to register a social ambience that fostered a public sensorium keenly aware of the worsened condition of city dwelling.

Here I link the idea of ambience to the musical notion of attunement, which, as Thomas Rickert suggests, can be defined as "wakefulness to ambience" (8). In his elucidation, musical expression helps sound out the centrality of local environs in fusing a "worldly affect-ability" that brings musical elements in accord with their embedded environment. Focusing on the rock hit of an African-American funk band of the 1970s, which confronts the problem of ghettoization menacing young black

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Day, 1991), which Yueh-yu Yeh regards as representing Taiwan's "postcolonial rock" phase (Yeh, *Gesheng* [*Phantom*] 155-76).

<sup>16</sup> Most of the Ten Major Construction Projects were launched in suburban or rural areas rather than Taipei, such as the construction of the nuclear power plants, the first national highway, the ports of Taichung and Suao, and the international airport in Taoyuan. I take Luo's statement here to mean the changes caused by urbanization that he acutely felt when arriving afresh in the city.

<sup>17</sup> The song is composed by Lee Shou-Chuan (李壽全), with lyrics written by Wu Nien-jen (吳念真) and Luo Dayou himself.

<sup>18</sup> The tune of Lee's "The Future of the Future" rises at the end of Wan Jen's 萬仁 *Chaoji shimin* 超級市民 (*Super Citizen*, 1985). Winning a Golden Horse award for Best Film Song, it later went into Lee's classic album *8 1/2* (1986). See also Lee's recollection of creating "The Never Changing Moonlight" for *Papa* in his interview with Lan Zu-wei.



lives, Rickert discusses how the song goes beyond mere opposition to social injustices to awaken “the need for a deeper, richer, more inclusive sense of home,” as the song’s title “The World is a Ghetto” poignantly suggests (242).<sup>19</sup>

In *Papa*, the adoption of Julie Su’s “The Never Changing Moonlight” exemplifies how places can be worked into an urban ambience, and how this musical film suggests a way of tuning in to the world. The number marks one of the film’s most elaborate song-and-dance sequences, which shows Ah-mei and a cohort of young dancers bobbing and shaking their bodies in several outdoor spaces. However, not all of these scenes survived the final cut. In a recent post-screening discussion, director Yu Kan-Ping suspected that those at the helm of Cinema City did not want the film to last too long for commercial reasons, so they decided to remove at least half of the song from the edited print.<sup>20</sup> While the possible heavy-handed execution of displacement has severed some crucial scenes from the film, those omitted remain otherwise undisturbed and relatively unseen in the space of the Internet, now accompanying the complete music video that lasts five odd minutes. These dislodged dances include those set at Longshan Temple, on a skywalk near Taipei Main Station (which no longer exists), and a messy construction site. Together with the scenes featuring a traditional market, a major commuting bridge, and Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, which all remain embedded in the film, they form the complete montage sequence that comprises the music video of “Moonlight.”

It is with these recovered scenes that a sense of ambient attunement can be registered in the filmic space. Throughout these scenes, the camera assumes several angles, shifts between different distances, and seems to feel most comfortable when observing its subjects from high above, thereby dwarfing Ah-mei and the dancers to allow the city to preside over them. During the bridge section of the song, the dancers are literally put on a bridge—a skywalk—and dance. The skywalk dance is swiftly intercut with empty shots of the city and with scenes of dancers waving and swaying amidst the passersby alongside busy traffic. The collaboration of editing

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<sup>19</sup> My evocation of Rickert might risk abstraction and disregard of context, but I consider his notion helpful as I go on to illustrate how a musical number creates urban ambience by intermedial means in *Papa*. Besides, music remains a central theme in Rickert’s notion of ambience (see the Introduction of *Ambient Rhetoric*, 28-33), and in the chapter titled “Ambient Dwelling,” Rickert relies specifically on Anglo-American rock hits, treating them as a medium through which dwelling can be intricately channeled into the materialities of its immediate surroundings.

<sup>20</sup> This is the director’s supposition, cited from his post-screening talk on July 31, 2015 at Taipei’s Treasure Hill.

and mise-en-scène effectively bridge the choreographic spectacle with the lively scenario of everyday bustle, blurring the line between artificiality and the natural flux of materials and bodies. It prepares the audience for subsequent dances at the construction site, where the city looms large through sharper, canted angles and complex lines of composition. The construction site dance also concurs with Julie Su's singing of "high-rise buildings are everywhere to be seen" (01:20:26-01:20:32). There the dancers are staged variably atop, inside, between, and before the buildings under construction, engaging the entangled scaffolds, architectural contours, and uneven skyline as part of the city's messy mise-en-scène (Figs. 2 and 3). While the cinematic language dramatizes the grandiose construction plan of the city, the fictive world to which Ah-mei belongs is woven into thick particularities of everydayness, composing a symphony of attunement between fiction and reality, between staged physical craft and urban ambience. With its intricate coordination among varying camera angles, editing techniques, and a contrapuntal relation with lyrics and music, the sequence contrives its urban ambience with an intermedial approach; ambience is itself a forged effect of verbal, visual, sonic, and somatic expressions, relying on the synergistic capacity of media technologies to sound out its attunement.



Fig. 2. *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* (1983). Courtesy of Yu Kan-Ping.



Fig. 3. *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* (1983). Courtesy of Yu Kan-Ping.

While the outdoor dances express the kinesthesia of the city's public spaces, their embodying and empowering capacity is transmitted with the emergence of a distinct media environment. The dancing sequence is at once a rock number, a dance performance, a music video, and a segment of the film, the latter being the parasitic body that accommodates all of the others. As the sequence ends, its final scene is remediated via a television screen, which Uncle Mute and the neighbors watch with excitement in their *juancun* residence (Figs. 4 and 5). At this moment, music video disjoins itself from the cinematic screen; its appearance on TV allows us a look into the construction of a layered mediation and its full circuiting space. In this circuiting space, the *juancun* house is jolted into proximity with the urban center, while the dancing bodies draw on the popularization of music videos and cable TV to transport the embodied effects across both spaces. This layered mediation further complicates the binary of embodiment and disembodiment, for among the entangled media technoculture, the experience of embodiment can begin to claim a widely mediated and “disembodied” life of its own without being tied to the presence of an essentialist body.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Or, in media scholar Bernadette Wegenstein's words, “embodiment always outlives the body” (11); it morphs into the process of mediation, revealing “mediality as corporeality” (36). On the affinities between body and media as foregrounded in contemporary advertisement culture, art installations, and architectural designs, see Wegenstein. See also Mark Hansen's incisive foreword



Figs. 4 and 5. *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* (1983). Courtesy of Yu Kan-Ping.

The media layering discernible in the TV scene suggests a dual relation between mediation and urban spaces. On the one hand, throughout the “Moonlight” dances’ diffusive mediation, media gain a distributive agency that convenes

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to Wegensein’s book, in which he explains the important breakthrough for the humanities once embodiment is conceptually differentiated from the body.

different sites together, while embodiment assumes polylocality, extending its reach from the original dance spots to the home broadcasting scene.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, the outdoor dances are situated between two *juancun* scenes, the first showing Uncle Mute and the neighbors disputing the negative impacts of Ah-mei's soaring career, and the second presenting the same set of people who now hail Ah-mei's live performance on TV. Because they also form the film's first song-and-dance sequence, the outdoor dances can be said to stand at a structural nodal point that cuts the film into halves, as well as at the generic hinges between realistic and musical modes of expression. Yet while the dances mark the rupture where the architectural mediation of *juancun* increasingly gives way to the musical mediation of rock hits, their intermedial and polylocal constitution defies such clear-cut textuality. By linking Ah-mei's live dances with her TV audience, and by tracing the radiation of the city's construction enterprise from the center to the very margins it affects, the intermedial nexus maps out an adhesive topography alive with "worldly affect-ability."

On the other hand, the manifold mediation of the "Moonlight" dances also exposes the construction of urban spaces to be uneven and disjointed. Whereas in the context of commercial filmmaking, polylocal dances are likely used as an attractive feature of the postmodern collage,<sup>23</sup> the intermedial trajectory carved out by "Moonlight" reenacts a power distribution that is asymmetrical by nature. The layering and framing of media suggest modernity and modernization as neither homogeneous nor synchronous, but unequally disseminated and multiply mediated. This is made visible when, after showing Uncle Mute and the neighbors cheerfully applauding Ah-mei's performance, the film cuts to her childhood playmate and admirer, the second-generation cab driver Ah-ming, who looks both disdainful and frustrated. Ah-ming refuses to be absorbed into a naïve spectatorship, for he understands all too well the unbridgeable gap between him and Ah-mei, whom he can now only reach via technological mediation. With this fleeting yet explicit cut to Ah-ming, the film alludes to a possible crack, a reflexive moment that could lead to possible noises, dissonances, and disturbances in the smooth process of intermedial attunement. Later on, Ah-ming will fiercely protest the demolition of

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<sup>22</sup> I borrow the term "polylocality" from Yingjin Zhang, but my sense of the word differs from his in that I wish to highlight the intermedial constitution intrinsic to any trans-locale cinematic activities.

<sup>23</sup> Scholars have associated the fad of music videos and the MTV phenomenon with the postmodern culture of simulation, collage, and commodification. See, for example, E. Ann Kaplan's pioneering study in the late 1980s.

his home and engage in a fight with an executive official, an act that eventually claims his own life.

### Coda: Political Dissonances

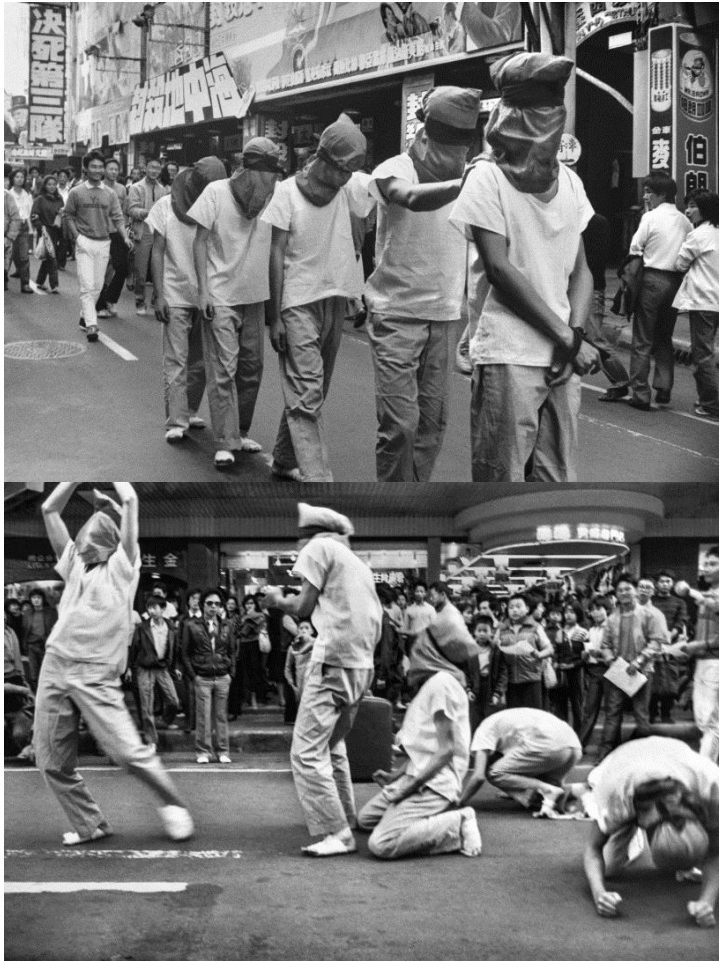
By way of the outdoor dances, *Papa* casts an enamored last look at the *juancun* residence while shifting resolutely to a youthful topography. The younger generation now occupies public spaces to act out their pent-up urban angst, producing kinetic momentum that also circles back to their birth origins via the film's editing function. One question that remains unaddressed is whether the aesthetic representation of intermediation and the transference of embodied effects depicted in the film have any social validity.<sup>24</sup> In this last section, I briefly touch upon an occupation event carried out by Chen Chieh-jen and his friends, which was staged on the renowned movie street (Wuchang Street) in Taipei's Ximending area in October 1983, exactly where and when *Papa* was released. In citing this event, I hope to illustrate how bodies, like those in *Papa*'s outdoor dances, can function as a portable medium that transports dwelling experiences to other bodies of the audience, which, in Chen's case, further created crevices in the veil of close supervision that shrouded the island during its martial law period.

As a child, Chen Chieh-jen grew up in one of the *juancun* villages in the southern part of Taipei, right across from the nation's Judge Advocates Bureau, where the Kuomintang imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes executed political criminals. The artist remembered witnessing "blood and bodies" near where he lived (Li, "Lian shi" 451), which drove him to consider the material presence of a state machine that had subjected many to violence and annihilation (Lin, "Yingxiang" 31). This awareness persisted during his service in the military, where his body suffered extreme discipline and regulation, and he began to play with the idea of claiming back his body, of "placing [himself] at the brink of breaking the martial law, having a head-on collision with the institution" (Chen 150). This idea materialized into a street performance titled *Jineng sangshi disanhao* 機能喪失第三號 ("Dysfunction No. 3"), which took place at Ximending's movie quarter, one of Taipei's most visited entertainment spots, at a time when neither assembly nor parade was legally allowed. On the scheduled date, Chen summoned a couple of friends, all dressed to appear as political criminals—masked and fettered like the Li Shi-ke figure in the video work he went on to create the following year—and then

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<sup>24</sup> I thank Professor Hoyt Long for pointing out this question for me.

embarked on a silent procession along the street. All of a sudden these paraders burst into fits of screaming, roaring, beating and convulsions, triggering various reactions from the onlookers, some wondering whether it was communist spies that were arrested (Figs. 6 and 7). Surprisingly, plainclothes police and garrison agents, who were planted aplenty among the crowd, only identified themselves later and did not arrest any of Chen's people after questioning the cause of their conduct.



Figs. 6 and 7. Chen Chieh-jen, "Dysfunction No. 3." Courtesy of Chen Chieh-jen.

“Dysfunction No. 3” was regarded by theater critic Wang Mo-Lin as among Taiwan’s first street performances, which he also considered to be the vanguard of the Little Theater Movement. Prospering in the mid-1980s, the Little Theater Movement crucially shifted traditional theater from the proscenium stage to flexible and intimate spatial relationships with the audience, from being script-centered to on-the-spot improvisations, and from treating human bodies as signs and realization of acting methods to using them as a medium that actively negotiates its terms with the environment (Wang 146-54).<sup>25</sup> Especially palpable in Chen’s street performance is how the human body is plunged into a rich pool of external stimuli, demanding its instant response to intense police and political pressure on the one hand, and the visual consumption of the street spectators on the other. This responsive mode of body training, while not yet systematically adopted until the mid-1980s, might have also been emergent in *Papa’s* outdoor dances. It is of particular note that Lin Lee-chen (林麗珍), the choreographer who designed all the dances for *Papa*, was also associated with the theater movement during the period.<sup>26</sup> In 1985, she collaborated with director Zhuo Ming (卓明) to produce Lanlin Theatre’s (蘭陵劇坊 *Lanling jufang*) adaptation of Qu Yuan’s 屈原 *Jiu Ge* 九歌 (*Nine Songs*). Partly an archaic ritual practice, partly a modern-day “musical opera,” their rendition simulated an imagined environment alive with nature’s primordial forces, only to be hollowed out later by the contemporary pursuit of material indulgence.<sup>27</sup> The modern part’s distinct blend of rock music (performed

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<sup>25</sup> Besides Wang Mo-Lin’s pioneering study, see also Weihong Bao’s illuminating article on the appropriation of Meyerhold’s biomechanical acting and Grotowski’s paratheatrical practice by the Little Theater Movement. In the article, Bao also traces the eerie body performances she observes in Tsai Ming-liang’s *Tianbian yiduoyun* 天邊一朵雲 (*The Wayward Cloud*, 2005) to the auteur’s apprenticeship during the theatrical movement.

<sup>26</sup> Lin Lee-chen is perhaps known to the younger generation because of a recent documentary *Xing zhe* 行者 (*The Walkers*, dir. Singing Chen, 2014), which chronicles a decade’s worth of creative output from the artist’s Legend Lin Dance Theatre (無垢舞蹈劇場 *Wugou wudao juchang*). Also included in the film is an excerpt that shows Lin coaching the dancers on the set of *Kidnapped*, a New Cinema film directed by Ko I-Chen in 1983. Very different from her current ritual theater, which embraces Taiwanese folk cultures, Lin mainly engaged in modernist choreography in the early 1980s (for example, her existentialist solo performance *Wo shi shei* 我是誰 [*Who Am I*] of 1982). I have yet to locate the literature on Lin’s early career that would allow comparative insights into her choreography in *Papa*.

<sup>27</sup> This moralistic critique is paraphrased from the performance description on the website of Electronic Theater Intermix in Taiwan, where an 18-minute video recording of Lanlin’s production of *Nine Songs* is archived. Vignettes of the performance can also be found in the documentary *Lanling jufang* 蘭陵劇坊 (*Lanling Theatre Troupe*, dir. Lee Chung, 2012), together with a few interviews with Zhou Ming himself and other participants.



live by the late Simon Hsueh [薛岳]) and potently expressive bodies resembles *Papa's* outdoor dances in that both employ heavy metal beats to condition the dancers' body movements, rendered mechanical and hyperbolic at once in response to the experience of modernity. Along with "Dysfunction No. 3," they all stage the body as a conduit through which external stimuli are processed and negotiated, fulfilling the avant-garde notion of the theater situated between the protean environment and the performer's body.

For Wang Mo-Lin, it was not until the police intervened that the real performance of "Dysfunction No. 3" began. There the boundary between political interrogation and artistic exhibition became blurred, with one collapsing into the other (Wang 153-54). And just as the police enacted their roles as real-life police, the surrounding viewers grew even more curious and restless, causing more and more of them to join the crowd. In his recent recollection of the event, Chen seriously pondered why the police refrained from arresting them for obviously violating the Assembly and Parade Act. The most sensible explanation, it seems, is that the onlookers had unintentionally formed a large assembly that, the police worried, could have turned into an uncontrollable mob. By staying huddled and watching ardently, they also made the police's secret surveillance no longer maintainable. Thus for a moment, the closely watched street malfunctioned. The supervising subjects were forced into a position of non-action, of being looked at, while the space of controlled entertainment morphed into an impromptu site of aggregation and improvised theater (Chen 151-52). In this live theatrical space, visual hierarchy and direct governance were bent and vexed by an audience who stood in-between, who were "opaque, sight-blocking, and anti-visual" (Guo 66) in shielding the performers from the direct penetration of power—who functioned as a medium. Unlike in Chen's 1984 video work where the Li Shi-ke figure was put under a transparent gaze and then literally penetrated by an invisible gun, the 1983 street occupation staged bodies as thick and dense, as capable of disrupting the police's efficient mediation of martial law decrees, thus creating "a head-on collision" not with the institution *per se* but between different forms of mediation.

Eventually, these commotional bodies refer back to their scene of origin, to Chen's experience of dwelling at the city's edge—both in the *juancun's* marginalized settlement and at the symbolic frontier where he came so close to seeing the naked operation of state power. The suturing of ideological tenets to their material underpinnings is exposed as seamy and incommensurable at the city's edge, where traces of remnants, excesses, ambiguity, and contradiction abound. These lingering traces bear upon the inhabitants of the periphery, producing bodies with

overloaded bodiliness and doubled identities—both criminal and exploited mainlander, adoptee and pop idol, disciplined subject of an invisible jurisdiction and its firsthand witness. These identities are not so much signified or represented as mediated by flesh, whose embodied affect is carried over to the center, transfiguring ordinary urban scenes into an intermedial force field. Just as intermedial practice welds a spatial continuum of affect, social effects, and action, it is necessary for the technology of intermediation to reveal our dwelling spaces as inherently fissured, jointed, and haunted.

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