SURFACE TENSIONS

Reading Productions of *Tongzhi* in Contemporary Taiwan

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It is probably impossible to think about the English term *homosexuality* in a contemporary context without addressing at some point the shadowy enclosure of “the closet”; in Taipei’s *tongzhi* activist and academic circles it has become increasingly difficult to ignore the presence of “the mask.”¹ While it would be difficult to argue simply that the mask operates in Taiwan where the closet does in Europe, the United States, and Australia—since, for one thing, the language of the homosexual closet [*yigui*] coexists with and interpenetrates that of the mask [*mianju*] in Taiwan—I nevertheless hope to hold the tropes analytically distinct to a certain degree.² This essay, then, considers the mask and the closet and is particularly concerned with some specific questions, which include the following: If the closet is organized around an irresolvable tension between secrecy and disclosure, how does the mask operate in relation to these terms? Is it possible that the mask has other, different investments instead of or alongside them? What perverse relationships might there be between the *tongzhi* mask and the idea of *tongzhi* “identity”? What kind of subject and what kind of “homosexuality” are projected by the trope of the *tongzhi* mask in its various deployments? My project is to chart some of the logics of the *tongxinglian/tongzhi* mask, not necessarily in decisive distinction to those of the homosexual closet, but nevertheless to take account of the mask’s cultural and historical specificity. I am aided in these speculations by a consideration of Ta-wei Chi’s 1995 novella *The Membranes*, which appears in the final section of this essay as a text inhabited by a logic and a subject analogous to those suggested by the mask.

Yin/Xian

I want to suggest the pervasive presence of a way of representing homosexuality in Taiwan that inscribes homosexuality as animated by an incessant movement

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between the poles of the hidden and the shown. The discourse I refer to tends to appeal to the dynamic alternation between the state of *yin* [concealment] and that of *xian* [disclosure], for example, in such phrases as *yin er wei xian* [concealed and undisclosed] or *ruo yin ruo xian* [now concealed, now disclosed], which cluster particularly thickly around figurations of homosexuality. The persistent articulation of homosexuality with a dynamic of *yin/xian* may appear to suppose a structure comparable to the closet in its construction of a homosexuality determined by an economy of the known and the unknown. Below, however, I consider what particular *kind* of “concealment/disclosure” is supposed by this Taiwanese discourse on homosexuality in order to contrast its specific inflections with those of the trope of the closet.

One of the most indicative and economical expressions of this discourse appears near the beginning of Pai Hsien-Yung’s novel *Niezi* [Crystal Boys], which describes the “dark kingdom” of New Park’s society of gay male sex workers and their lovers and clients in 1970s Taipei: “Zai womende wangguo li, zhi you heiye, meiyou baitian. Tian yi liang, womende wangguo bian yinxing qilai le” [In our kingdom there is only dark night; there is no bright day. With the first light of dawn, our kingdom falls into darkness].³ This description, at the commencement of Taiwan’s first novel to deal so directly with the subject of homosexuality, inaugurates the field of Taiwan’s “homosexual literature” by figuring homosexuality in terms of the visual and an alternating current of darkness and light. The “homosexual kingdom” is written as one that is always in the dark, because paradoxically, with the coming of the dawn light that ends the night, which is the kingdom’s only mode of existence, another kind of night falls as the park becomes “darkened” or “invisible” [*yinxing*] once again. The undecidable position of homosexuality in relation to dark and light is indicated as in two short sentences the visual field lightens and darkens through two cycles (“heiye . . . baitian . . . tian liang . . . yinxing qilai”).

The figuration of homosexuality through tropes of *yin/xian* remains pervasive in Taiwanese discourses on the subject. It occurs, for example, both in homophobic assertions that homosexuals “inhabit the dark corners of society” and pleas for them to “come and stand with us together in the sunlight” of authorized public space, and in the *tongzhi*-affirmative language of “coming out” [*xianshen*] as an act of moving from a dark place to a light one.⁴ The light of homosexual disclosure may be represented not only as liberating but as threatening: Antonia Chao notes the pervasiveness of the language of *puguang* in discussions of “outing”: *puguang* [lit. to be exposed to the light] marks the fear that coming out will entail a threatening overexposure.⁵

The centrality of the visual in the cultural production of *tongxinglian* is attested to by the title of Lin Hsien-Hsiu's column in the *Zhongguo shibao* [China Times] since 1994: "Kanjian tongxinglian" [Seeing homosexuality]. Lin's 1997 book bears the same title, framed as a question, and was issued by the major *tongzhi* publisher Kaixin Yangguang [Gay Sunshine], whose appellation must be seen in the context of this discussion as itself rather more than coincidental. Lin explicates his choice of title in terms of the dynamic of *yin/xian*, which characterizes the treatment of homosexuality: it is the homophobic construction of the homosexual as something hidden, which is then susceptible to exposure by the desiring public gaze, which Lin seeks to contest by framing his book's title as a question. The title suggests that such a construction leaves no space for the visual agency of homosexuals themselves in seeing the world. Politically, the title opposes a dominant understanding, in Taiwan as well as elsewhere, according to which homosexuality "can be seen through, read, its veil of mystery lifted aside."⁶

In terms of the logic of the *yin/xian* discourse, though, the interrogative phrase *seeing homosexuality?* also attests to the uncertainty of homosexuality's position with regard to the visible: does one see it, or not? As it is in the "dark kingdom" of *Niezi*, hovering between black night and the shadows of day, homosexuality begins to appear as something on the borders of the visible: *ruo yin ruo xian*, neither unproblematically available to visualization nor actually "invisible," but something that one suspects one has seen but cannot be sure—the *yin*, perhaps, of a shadow or a ghost.

Tactical Masking

Lin's 1997 article "Tongzhi yundongde wutou gong'an" [The mysterious case of the headless *tongzhi* movement] again raises the question of the tense relationship between homosexuality and *yin/xian*. In particular, the article suggests that the mask may serve a function in Taiwan's representations of *tongzhi* that is analogous to the one the closet serves in Anglo-American representations of gayness. Illustrating the pervasiveness of the idea of the mask in discourses on homosexuality, Lin cites such invocations of it as the common, broadly homophobic assertions that "homosexuals 'wear masks' and lead a double life"; that "the true intentions of homosexuals are belied by the falsity of their faces"; and that *tongzhi* should "remove your masks and dance together with us."⁷ Lin notes as well the *tongzhi*-affirmative appropriation of the mask by groups such as the organizers of the public *tongzhi* party at National Taiwan University in February 1997, who called for *tongzhi* participants to identify themselves by concealing their faces with colorful masks.⁸

This appropriation of the mask became the focus of heated academic and popular debate over the efficacy of such a tactic. Lin's article is part of the small explosion of academic discourse on the value of the trope of the mask in relation to the assertion of *tongzhi* subjectivities, which has followed the popularization of the tactic of mask donning. While Chang Hsiao-Hung argues for public mask donning, as a minimal-risk "collective coming out" that has the effects of a resistant "answering back" to media voyeurism and of making a public display of *tongzhi* numbers, and Chao notes that the mask tactic poses an interesting challenge to notions of transparent *tongzhi* "identity," Lin holds that the effacement of individual *tongzhi* identities by the mask must ultimately frustrate the aim of the *tongzhi* movement to secure public recognition of *tongzhi*.⁹ The debate might be summarized as a clash between the view that the appropriation of the mask can help establish a *tongzhi* subjectivity through a strategic "queering" of the symbol of *tongzhi* oppression, and the view that the taking on of the mask in fact shores up the social order that requires homosexuals to play the part of straight subjects. Does the citation of the homosexual mask allow for the establishment of a *tongzhi* subjectivity that is resistant to the social order that oppresses *tongzhi*, or does it further the subjection of *tongzhi* to the order they would resist? I will return to this question from another angle later.

Since Lin posits the mask as a parallel to the closet in Anglo-American discourses on homosexuality, we might ask what relation the voluntary donning of masks that conceal the faces of *tongzhi* at public events bears to the act of coming out. The relation is intriguingly ambivalent. On the one hand, the (non)appearance of scores of colorfully masked faces in the public space of the campus or the news report might be compared to the appearance of bodies clothed in T-shirts that do the performative work of coming out for their wearers—in this case, given the mask's ironic and self-conscious reference to the workings of the closet itself, perhaps specifically the T-shirt that proudly announces to the world that "nobody knows I'm a lesbian." That is, those wearing the gaudy theatrical masks favored on these occasions effectively proclaim themselves homosexuals. On the other hand, the act of coming out anonymously [*yingming*] with one's face concealed contravenes the requirement that the addressee of the coming-out speech act knows some basic aspects of the individualized identity of the person coming out, since as an act of disclosure coming out can work only if the speaker's broader social identity is already disclosed. Where the closet is concerned, the statement "I am gay" usually relies for effect on the transparency of the speaker's "I" to the addressee. However, the mask, rather than render the "I" transparent, as an act of coming out must do, makes that "I" unreadable, marking perhaps the installation of a self-consciously opaque or resistant *tongzhi* subject.

The voluntary donning of masks by Taiwan's gay men and lesbians in public seems more than anything else, then, to dramatize the very workings of the *tongzhi* mask, electrifying the boundary between showing and not showing the secret of the individual's *tongzhi* identity, because the mask, as the sign used to disclose that identity, is at the same time the paradigmatic sign of its continuing concealment. The mask tactic generates a disturbing alternating current between the *yin* and the *xian* that effectively reproduces the social workings of the idea of the homosexual mask, which installs homosexuality in just such an undecidable position in relation to visibility and knowledge. The mask tactic thus enables *tongzhi* to perform a theatrically exaggerated enactment of the position of *tongxinglian* itself.

The appropriation of the sign of *tongzhi* concealment as the vehicle for a hedged and partial *tongzhi* disclosure also results in interesting refigurations of the mask's meaning, which tend to problematize a rigid divide between *tongzhi* and non-*tongzhi*. During a speech at the February 1997 *tongzhi* party, for example, a representative of the Tongzhi Kongjian Xingdong Zhenxian (or simply Tongzhen) [Tongzhi Space Alliance] asserted that those not wearing masks were "not real *tongzhi*."¹⁰ Lin identifies this remark as an attempt by the *tongzhi* group to enforce the boundaries of "authentic" *tongzhi* after the style of "gay identity politics." However, it could equally be argued that the mask tends in fact to deconstruct rather than to shore up such a politics, as well as the identity that is its subject. Concealment of individual identity, through concealment of the face, in this case paradoxically becomes the guarantor of "authentic" *tongzhi* identity, while disclosure of the face is regarded with suspicion by the *tongzhi* group: those with faces uncovered fall under suspicion of being "not real *tongzhi*."¹¹ In an odd reversal, a "truly masked" *tongzhi* would be best disguised at this event not by wearing a mask but by revealing her or his face.

But if the most effective mask is no mask, can the mask of *tongzhi* concealment ever be unproblematically removed? Beneath the visible mask worn in public might lurk others: one unmasked-but-*tongzhi* attendant at this occasion suggests the presence of the further, "invisible mask" of the "not-out" *tongzhi*: "Everyone's already wearing a mask in any case; it's just that the mask's an invisible one, unless you're already *out*, but then *out* people wear the *out* mask [i.e., the visible kind]."¹² The layering suggested by such a formulation of the functioning of visible and invisible masks of *tongzhi* identity and concealment is not one that speaks about sexual subjectivity as an interior knowledge. The layering of mask over mask tends to frustrate attempts to posit homosexuality's belonging to the "depths" of the subject; rather, it suggests a model of *tongzhi* subjectivity that is contingent on the shifting surfaces of the social face.

The ambivalent positioning of the mask begins to complicate not only the position of the anonymous *tongzhi* concealed behind it but all other positions as well. One may wonder: Are those not wearing masks *tongzhi* who are “completely out” and do not wish to hide their faces? Are they *tongzhi* who are even more severely “masked” and thus want to pass for people with no intimate relation to the visible mask of *tongzhi* identity? Or are they non-*tongzhi* who “genuinely” have no such intense personal relation to the mask? In what sense can absolute sureness about the identity of a person wearing a mask be generated? Would it not be the easiest thing in the world for an impostor safely to disguise herself or himself as a *tongzhi* simply by concealing her or his face behind a mask? Positivistic assertions of a rigid *tongzhi*/non-*tongzhi* divide are problematized by the mask tactic, in which the very marker of *tongzhi* identity renders identity itself unreadable.

In short, the deployment of the mask tactic problematizes *tongzhi* identity by dramatizing the unstable current of *yin/xian* that animates knowledge about homosexuality. The mask concretizes the questions that it seems most urgent to ask of homosexuality: Is it visible, or invisible? Do we see it, or don't we? Should it be hidden, or exposed? The point made by the mask tactic, then, is not about the “right answers” to any of these questions. Rather, the point made is that it is just these questions and their undecidability that constitute knowledges of *tongxinglian*, which the mask reproduces as a dynamic border state animated by the movement between *yin* and *xian*. To return to the question that I raised above: Does the tactic of mask donning serve to shore up or to imperil *tongzhi* identity and politics? Rather than grasp either horn of this dilemma, I would argue that through its uncanny dramatization of the *yin/xian* alternation around *tongxinglian*, in which homosexuals “appear” [*xian*] as faceless “shadows” [*yin*], the mask tactic tends to defamiliarize not only the idea of identity but also, specifically, the system that makes space for *tongxinglianzhe* only as half-glimpsed nonsubjects. More than simply resisting public voyeurism, the mask tactic implicitly questions the conditions of visibility in authorized public space—conditions that make it impossible for homosexuals to appear as complete or “faced” [*you lian*] social subjects.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that homosexuality has borne an indicative relationship to the mappings of secrecy and disclosure, private and public, in European discourses since the nineteenth century.¹³ Her meditation on the heretofore unacknowledged centrality of the closet to general formulations of knowledge, ignorance, secrecy, and disclosure is made in light of Foucault's observation that after the late eighteenth century in Europe, “knowledge” came to be more and more associated not only with “sex,” in a progressive elaboration of the biblical linkage of cognition, sexuality, and transgres-

sion, but more specifically with same-sex desire. Since from the beginning of the nineteenth century this form of desire became the focus of intensified cultural anxiety, Sedgwick argues, homosexuality became by the end of that century the “one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted *as* secrecy” (73). Thus homosexuality’s tense relationship with the thematics of knowledge/ignorance and secrecy/disclosure, which condenses in the figure of the closet, is a culturally specific one: the result of a particular chain of events in Europe that had the effect of linking sex with knowledge and then, most specifically, homosexuality with secrecy.

In framing my discussion of the construction of homosexuality in Taiwan in terms of *yin* and *xian*, I have implied certain parallels between this construction and the one that has installed the closet and its relations of secrecy/disclosure at the center of knowledges of homosexuality in Euro-American contexts. But even a cursory consideration of the associations and affiliations of the tropes of closet and mask leads to the conclusion that they are not the same thing. If the closet is informed and conditioned by the biblical linkage of knowledge, sex, and transgression, then the mask cites discourses of social shame and status in the everyday language of “face” as *lian* or *mianzi*. It has been argued that the language of *mianzi* and *lian* in modern Mandarin produces the face as the surface on which the relationship of the subject to the social takes place and which makes such a relationship possible.¹⁴ The face “saved” is thus always the properly social one, the one that “meets people” (as in the commonly used phrase *mei lian jian ren*, “to have no face with which to meet people”).¹⁵ *Tongzhi* appropriations of the mask are readable as effecting a rewriting of that language and hence of face itself, a rewriting that cites and reinfects everyday understandings of face and its association with shame.¹⁶ In covering the bodily face, the mask can be read as citing the risk that that face will be endangered or “lost” as the result of a public disclosure of a shameful trait or behavior in the subject. I am especially concerned here with specific, situated citations of face rather than with some stable or transhistorical cultural entity constituting “Chinese” conceptions of face: it is precisely the amenability to contextual transvaluation, rather than any singular or transparent “cultural” meaning, of languages of *mianzi* and *lian* that I find most productive.

The closet of homosexual secrecy in Euro-American discourses historically refers to a private room, an inner chamber, a hidden space or retreat. Since secrecy can work as “the subjective practice in which the oppositions of private/public, inside/outside and subject/object are established, and the sanctity of their first term [is] kept inviolate,” homosexuality *as* secrecy pertains to the private interiority of the subject.¹⁷ Thus the closet in which homosexuality resides is imagined as a spatial expression of, and a refuge for, the private depths of the

monadic self hidden and enclosed in it; the individual who bears this self might of course also come out of the closet and appear publicly as a gay man or a lesbian. The mask of *tongzhi* concealment in Taiwan discourses, meanwhile, is imagined and deployed as a theatrical costume for the face, a disguise, a false countenance articulated less to the dyad of private/public than to that of shame/social status through its relationship to contemporary conceptions of face in the language of *mianzi* or *lian*. Further, the subjectivity projected by the discourse of face produces its effects on the metaphorical facial *surface*; it is not imagined as inhabiting the person's "interior depths." The mask does not enclose a deep self but dissimulates a social surface; it is not about private spaces but about social enactments. Again, while *coming out* refers to a spatially imagined emergence from an enclosure, *xianshen* refers to an act of "showing" [*xian*] the "body/self" [*shen*] before implied spectators. The association of the term *xianshen* with the term *xianshen shuofa*, which refers to the method of teaching others by example, strengthens the link between *xianshen* and social performance, again privileging situated enactment over ontological exposure.

It might be objected that the trope of the mask presupposes a "true face" beneath it, just as the closet presupposes a "real self" within it—and the metaphor is in fact sometimes used this way in *tongzhi* writings that set the "false face" [*jiamian*] against the "true face" [*zhenmian*]. The metaphor of the *tongzhi* mask, however, makes difficult the notion of a final, true face awaiting disclosure beneath the false face of the mask, partly because of the historicity of the language of face, which is not centrally organized by a true/false economy.¹⁸ This is aptly illustrated in a 1997 article on *xianshen* by Wang Haowei. Meditating on the pleasures and dangers afforded by the exposure of *tongzhi* identity, she writes: "The reason [*xianshen*] feels good is that it breaks everyday repression [*yazhi*], allowing you to show a face that you previously dared not expose—but why does this repression happen in the first place? The reason is that it can be dangerous for you not to suppress this beautiful face: people unaccustomed to seeing you may try to stifle [*kuo*] your face."¹⁹ Wang's argument at this stage seems precisely to map the repressive hypothesis onto *tongzhi xianshen*: the *tongzhi* is possessed of a face that she or he usually "dare[s] not expose," which Wang immediately designates the "true face" (53). It is necessary to "repress" the true face—implicitly, by means of a false one—because if she or he does not, others may take it upon themselves to do so violently. It would seem that the mask (not explicitly invoked here, but certainly implied) simply represses the truth of *tongxinglian* with a false appearance, beneath which the true face at all times abides.

However, with the progression of Wang's careful argument on the many

contingencies bearing on *xianshen* (she considers the different effects produced, depending on in what social or institutional context *xianshen* is performed, to whom *xianshen* is addressed, what precisely one comes out as, and which political affiliations are implicit in the act of *xianshen*), the model of *xianshen* that she has proposed becomes harder to maintain. Near the end of her article Wang writes: “The *xianshen* that *tongzhi* want is the proud display of a face bright with radiance [*rongguang huanfade liangxiang*], not the forced, ignominious exposure before the public of a face covered in dust and dirt [*huitou tuliande bei qiang ya shi-zong*]” (57).²⁰ Wang’s point here is the one made by her article as a whole: it is the conditions under which *tongzhi* decide or are forced to perform *xianshen* that determine not only their feeling about the experience but also the face that is revealed. When *tongzhi* willingly choose to perform *xianshen*, they show “a face bright with radiance”; in a forced outing by homophobic media, the *tongzhi* face is “covered in dust and dirt.” Wang’s choice of words highlights the extent to which face, rewritten by *tongzhi* to think through the effects of homosexual exposure, continues to work as a set of discourses whose logic is one of contingent social effects rather than one cloven by a true/false binary. The question is less which face is “real” than which conditions produce which face and, crucially, how to take control of those conditions to produce the best face. In this reading the “beautiful face” [*meilide lian*] of which Wang writes is lit less with the light of inner truth than with that cast by the favorable conditions of a politically empowered *tongzhi xianshen*.

The amenability of the mask’s logic to public enactment is attested to by the recent appropriation of the mask as a literalized practice and performance by certain groups, including not only the *tongzhi* groups discussed above but also the *gong chang* [licensed sex workers] who mobilized in late 1997 to protest the Taipei City Government’s decision to revoke their licenses and make prostitution illegal in the municipality. These women organized public meetings and repeatedly attempted to secure hearings with the city government; they also appeared as a group in general demonstrations against government policies. On these occasions the women were distinguished by their floral-patterned traditional hats and matching cloth masks over the lower part of the face; their eyes were often hidden behind dark glasses. The mask, then, has become available as a theatrical sign to various groups, who display their conspicuously masked faces in public. In doing so, they cite the discourse on shame and face, but the reference need not be a “straight” one: for example, for already “out” *tongzhi* who nonetheless wear the mask when demonstrating in public, the reference to the shame they are supposed to feel becomes a critical citation. Several Taipei sex workers who participated

in the 1997 Autumn Struggle March [*qiudou*]—under a pink banner proudly appliquéd with a hat-and-mask insignia—symbolically removed their masks on a stage before the crowd. For them, the appropriation of the mask cited the discourse on shame only to contest it with an insistence on their rights to sexual and economic autonomy.

The *tongzhi* groups' and the sex workers' appropriation of the mask cites the authoritative discourse on shame and face to effect a critical "looking back" at that authority. The point is made more clearly by a comparison with another kind of public masking: the "proper" citation of the shame/face discourse by disempowered subjects who shield their faces in self-defense, such as illegal sex workers or other lawbreakers arrested in raids and filmed against their will by TV news cameras.²¹ These enforced maskings of necessity follow the rules of the system, which would accuse the transgressive of being shameless, that is, of "not wanting face" [*bu yao lian*]; in the shamed face covering, the subject's face is symbolically negated.²² The assertive, willful self-masking of the *tongzhi* and the sex workers, by contrast, directs the accusation of "not wanting face" ironically back at its point of origin, effectively addressing the critical authoritative spectator: "It is *you* who allow me no face."²³

In boldly exhibiting themselves before the critical gaze of the social collectivity, both the masked *tongzhi* and the masked *gong chang* contravene a central condition of the continuing "tolerance" of their presence in culture. This condition is what Liu Jenpeng and Ding Naifei identify as the silence or, more exactly, the "reticence" [*hanxu*] of *tongzhi* regarding their own social presence.²⁴ Liu and Ding argue that a refunctioned version of the class-bound classical aesthetic and moral value of *hanxu* is pressed into service specifically for the purpose of homophobically "protecting the face" of the social itself. For Liu and Ding, the resilience and pervasiveness of *hanxu* as a homophobic strategy is attested to particularly by its paradoxical permeation of even self-consciously *tongzhi*-affirmative accounts. The Hong Kong writer Zhou Huashan, for one, in reproducing a now popular account of "traditional Chinese views on sexuality," has written that "Chinese tradition is silently tolerant [*moyan kuanrong*] of homosexual sex, rather than openly accepting of it."²⁵ In Liu and Ding's analysis, Zhou's privileging of a reified (and illusory) Chinese tradition of silent tolerance only reproduces the homophobic system that values *hanxu* in order effectively to keep *tongzhi* from speaking as such and thus perverting the will to wholeness and consensus of "Chinese society." Paradoxically, the silent tolerance that Zhou attributes to Chinese tradition is in reality constituted by the social system's assurance that it is *tongzhi* who are forced to keep silent.²⁶ Equally disturbing is the fact that *tongzhi* who refuse to

conform to the masking demands of *hanxu* not only risk being read, in a local context, as behaving offensively but also risk being cast, in an implicitly transnational analysis such as Zhou's, or Bret Hinsch's, as "inadequately Chinese."²⁷ Thus *tongzhi* masking in the name of the "Chinese tradition" of silent tolerance—the upholding of the mask as a demonstration of the individual's successful performance of *hanxu*—works also in close relation to a kind of protonationalism, which may either be overtly homophobic or present itself as *tongzhi*-affirmative and which brings to bear the full force of "Chinese culture" as the standard for reading the concealments and disclosures of *tongzhi*.

Locally, though, the "polite" reticence of non-*tongzhi* interlocutors on the subject of the possible *tongxinglian* of an employee or a family member, and also the reticence reciprocally demanded of *tongzhi* on the subject of their own sexual preference, serves to "protect the face" of the social. Liu and Ding write: "It is not at all clear that *tongzhi* in Taiwan are less oppressed at present simply because they suffer no obvious public violence. Here the force of homophobia may be expressed not in spitting in your face but rather in *conscientiously protecting the faces of other people* in order to maintain a complete and perfect formal totality."²⁸ This force, correctly identified by Liu and Ding as a homophobic one, which seeks to "[protect] the faces of other people" from the sight of an openly *tongzhi* face, is also brought to bear on the question of the masked *gong chang*. The feminist activist Wang Ping has suggested that a strange reversal occurs in the masking of *gong chang* with traditional sun hats and masks: originally meant to protect farmers' faces from the sunlight, these hats and masks, worn during public demonstrations, make the point that the *gong chang*'s faces—being shameless—are now supposed somehow to endanger the "light" of the decently acting, unashamed [*guangming zhengda*] public.²⁹ Thus both the *tongzhi* and the *gong chang* masks have a further function with respect to discourses of face. Constituted by silence and by a carefully policed social invisibility or quasi invisibility, they serve as symbolic barriers between the face of the sexual dissident and the face of the censorious culture in which she or he exists: the mask can be read as effectively protecting the latter as much as the former. By appearing in public gaudily clad in their masks, *tongzhi* and *gong chang* refuse precisely that which is most expected of them: their sparing the face of the public from the traumatic recognition of their presence.

In such contestatory citations of the discourse of face, these sexually "improper" subjects negotiate new articulations of this discourse with sexual transgression: the knowledge dissimulated by the mask—or in motion between the states of *yin* and *xian*—is increasingly understood as sexual knowledge; the

face at stake, as a sexualized face. In this sense *tongzhi* and *gong chang* deployments of the mask contribute to a contemporary remaking of face as much as they rescript narratives of sexual identity.

I have suggested that the mask reinfects the preoccupations of the closet away from private/public and toward shame/status, and away from enclosure/exposure and toward social enactment. Further, while the metaphorical logic of the closet suggests the enclosure of homosexuality as the inner depths of an individual who may later emerge as a gay subject, the mask emphasizes the socially performed character of sexual identity. In pointing up the distinctions between the two tropes, I am not proposing some irreducible difference between them, for example, that the trope of the closet inherently implies a notionally legible, though concealed, sexual identity, while the trope of the mask must render identity unreadable. As Sedgwick and others have made clear, the practices that constitute the metaphorical enclosure of the closet, when considered in all their weird complexity, tend decisively to undermine one's faith in sexual identity conceived as a final or stable state of persons.³⁰ Conversely, as Wang Haowei's initial argument shows, the trope of the mask may be taken up to project a presumptively true face hidden beneath its dissimulating surface. The meaning of either trope, then, can be produced only by its functioning in its specific citations. As a metaphorical structure that organizes knowledge and ignorance, *yin* and *xian*, speech and silence (and silence as speech) around *tongxinglian*, the mask, like the closet, offers an effective tactical position from which to interrogate the notion of a transparently homosexual identity. This is especially the case, perhaps, given the genealogy of the mask and its consequent privileging of social surfaces and enactments. But regardless of what might be said in speculative or abstract terms about the mask as a trope, it is more productive to ask how the mask produces knowledges of *tongxinglian* in its specific, situated deployments, for example, in the *tongzhi* mask tactic and in the instance of textual masking that I read below.

Before that reading, however, there is something else to be said about the mask in relation to sexual identity. Understood as a false face, the mask begins to problematize not only the idea of identity but also that of the integrated social subject as symbolized by the integrity of the facial surface. For if the public may once be "tricked" by the false face of a *tongxinglian* mask, how can it ever be certain that any face is the final, authentic one? Since the mask plays on the counterfeitability of the authentic face, it logically implies the possibility of an endless series of masks, where each one removed is replaced by another that is equally suspect, as suggested by the *tongzhi* above who notes that beneath the material mask of public collective *tongzhi* performance may lie the invisible mask of the

“not-out” *tongzhi*. Read in this way, the layering logic according to which the mask operates means that the mask highlights surfaces in a further respect: the surface is the dimension of the layered masks themselves and, consequently, perhaps also of the *tongzhi* subjects conditioned by them.

If the *yin/xian* of the *tongxinglian* mask suggests an undecidable dynamic current between the states of *yin* and *xian*, then the subject enabled by the homosexual mask is both *yin* and *xian*, or neither *yin* nor *xian*, (dis)appearing through the implied series of removable faces like the shadow [*yin*] that is rendered visible [*xian*] by an absence of light and matter. The *tongzhi* subject produced by the prosthetics of the mask then raises another question: What is the status of this elusive subject with the infinitely removable, repeatable face? What is said by representing *tongxinglian* subjects as having removable, layered faces, and what might be salvaged from such a construction?

Textual Masking

If the clothing is torn away, the naked body may be disclosed; but if the fleshly body is sliced open, the soul will not necessarily be revealed—what will be encountered is only a layer of infinitely extending membrane.
—Back cover blurb, *The Membranes*

Ta-wei Chi's 1995 novella *The Membranes* is animated, like the trope of the *tongzhi* mask, by the logic of the prosthetic body part, which problematizes identity by throwing into question the possibility of corporeal integrity. In this novella, though, the body as a whole, rather than the face, becomes the site on which questions of *yin/xian*, knowledge/ignorance, and authenticity/inauthenticity are played out. In the epigraph above, the soul that fails to be revealed by the body is the sign of the impossible authentic identity of the subject: as the body becomes fragmentary and incrementally removable as clothing or flesh, the possibility of discovering a core of authenticity recedes ever further. The visceral surface of the layered membrane usurps the place of the soul, the bodily membrane becoming the sign for the deferral of subjective interiority. As an infinitely repeating surface, and as an infinitely removable body part, the membrane becomes, for this *tongzhi* novella, analogous to the *tongzhi* mask. With a logic akin to that of the mask, the membrane questions the possibility of uncovering a final, interior sexual subjectivity; the missing inward self is symbolized in the also absent integrated organic body. Further, replacing the legible mark of the soul on the body with the interpretive blockage that is the membrane may say something about the homophobic

desire to read and make *xian* the “truth” of *tongxinglian* as the real face behind the mask.

On its publication *The Membranes* drew frequent critical comparison with two other texts: the U.S. film *Bladerunner* and the Japanese *manga* and animation series *The Ghost in the Shell*.³¹ All three texts thematize cyborg bodies and the question of humanity, and all are characterized by melancholia over the waning of the human, as symbolized by the organic human body, after the perfection of technologically replicable humanoid bodies. Leaving aside the intriguingly complex networks of cultural communication and influence that produce the three-way conversation among these particular Taiwanese, North American, and Japanese texts, the interesting question here is about the way in which *The Membranes* rewrites interrogations of the meaning of bodies specifically in relation to homosexuality. The disturbances of the integrated or authentic subject/body that haunt postmodernist fictional and theoretical texts come, in this novella, to bear on the representation of the subject of *tongxinglian*. Indeed, the notions of unreliable, piecemeal subjectivities that emerge from the tropes of mask and membrane, as well as from science fiction texts like *Bladerunner* and *The Ghost in the Shell*, seem particularly pertinent to thinking about *tongzhi* subjectivities, which are always precarious at best. Once again, an important question is how the unavoidable instability in *tongzhi* identification might be mobilized in pursuit of productive ways of imagining *tongzhi* subjects.

The complex, interweaving plotlines of *The Membranes* are fraught with speculation on the meaning of the body in the world of the twenty-first century, which is inhabited by humans, androids, robots, and cyborgs. Momo, the protagonist, is a young beautician in the suboceanic T City. It is revealed that she spent three years of her childhood in the hospital awaiting a major organ transplant because she had been infected at birth with the LOGO bacterium. During her stay in the hospital Momo was accompanied in her antiseptic bubble by another young girl, Andy. The first revelation about the uncertain status of Momo’s body occurs when it transpires that Andy was in fact an android, designed to provide the organs that Momo required for her transplant. A question then arises after the operation and Andy’s ominous disappearance: which parts of Momo’s body are “hers,” and which come from the android? Momo’s knowledge about her own body becomes ever less reliable as the narrative progresses. How is she, and how are we, to locate the division between the “real” (organic) and the “false” (prosthetic) body? What are we to conclude if that mark proves impossibly elusive?

Since I propose to read *The Membranes* as centrally concerned with homosexuality, the question arises of where the homosexuality is in this text. The answer

that immediately presents itself is that it is hardly anywhere. The narrative seems, rather, to revolve around questions about the body. What constitutes it? Who controls it? How is knowledge of bodies produced? These questions are played out on the singular body of Momo: she is never in a “homosexual relationship,” nor does she ever have “homosexual sex” or ponder the question of “homosexuality,” nor does the narratorial voice linger over these issues. Indeed, in comparison with most other short stories in this 1996 collection, *The Membranes*, and in Chi’s first and third collections, *Queer Senses* (1995) and *Fetish* (1998), *The Membranes* is remarkable precisely for its lack of a direct thematization of homosexuality.

Yet homosexuality circulates in the story as a sort of omnipresent subtextual preoccupation: the text’s own “unknowable shadow” [*bu kezhide yinying*].³² Although the text does not linger over the representation of homosexuality, it is nevertheless the case that every sexual relationship in it “happens to” occur between members of the same gender.³³ Given that the trope of the membrane is most commonly encoded, in the novella, in representations of skin, it is also hard not to read more than a passing significance in the observation that “since the AIDS vaccine had achieved complete effectivity in the year 2009, in that year the terror that people had once had of AIDS transferred itself to the skin diseases that now engulfed the world” (16). If the “terror” inspired by HIV at the close of the twentieth century is in large part rooted in a hatred of homosexuality, the transfer onto the membrane of the human skin of the energies associated with this fear prompts a reading of that membrane, and by extension of *The Membranes* itself, as an encoding of homosexuality. Again, there is a certain “queerness” to the deconstruction of normatively heterocentric Freudian sex/gender theory when the young Momo finds herself disconcerted by the presence of “her” penis and wants nothing so much as to be rid of it; her wish is fulfilled when a subsequent operation rids her of this “superfluous piece of flesh” [*duoyude yikuai rou*] (37).

Further, the novella, which commences with Momo biting into a ripe peach, makes regular reference to “sharing the peach,” or *fentao*, a classical code phrase for homosexual liaison.³⁴ *Fentao* is cited most prominently in the myth of Momo’s origin: as a baby, she was found inside a giant peach by her mother and her mother’s Japanese lover, who were themselves “sharing the peach.” Momo’s mother explains the phrase to her as signifying the women’s “unusual friendship” [*bu xunchangde youyi*], as does Momo’s own name, the Japanese for “peach.”³⁵ Significantly, the Chinese character chosen to transliterate the Japanese *momo* literally means “silence,” an association whose resonance with the subject of *tongxinglian*, and specifically with masking, is clear.³⁶ It is silence, too, that annihilates

Momo's consciousness at the conclusion of the narrative: on discovering that her life's subjective experience has been authored by a power external to herself, "Momo . . . found that she had lost the capacity for speech. . . . silence drowned her."³⁷ In the final phrase here, *chenmo yanmole ta*, silence literally equals death.³⁸ Momo's name, combining the meanings "silence" and "peach," seems already to encode (at least) a doubled connotation of *tongxinglian*.³⁹ The question then arises of whether Momo herself is readable as in some sense a figure for *tongxinglian*. It will be interesting to bear this consideration in mind during the discussion of the legibility of Momo's body in terms of *yin/xian*.

In these ways *tongxinglian* appears not as the subject of an overt textual investment but as a fleeting, half-glimpsed presence in a number of "casual details" and encoded references. Yet it is perhaps the studied nonchalance of, for example, the suggestion that in this future world normative sexual relationships occur between people of the same gender that highlights the impossibility of making such a claim nonchalantly in a social context in which *tongxinglian* remains highly controversial.⁴⁰ That is, the palpable strain of the casualness of references to same-gender sex attests to the impossibility of a truly casual reference to this subject, and hence it implies *tongxinglian*'s more-than-casual significance for the text as a whole. It is also the positioning of this story that suggests that references to same-sex sexuality are more than incidental. If, as I have suggested, it is the lack of a direct thematization of this subject that becomes remarkable here, this is because the story is positioned in a self-described collection of "queer science fiction" by one of Taiwan's best-known "queer writers"; it is surrounded by stories that speak directly and repeatedly about homosexual desire and sex acts. The question, then, is not whether it is possible to find *tongxinglian* in this text but what is said by the text's relegation of *tongxinglian* to the secondary signifiatory levels of casual detail and connotation.

Since the unabashed directness of the representations of *tongxinglian* in the other stories in the collection demonstrates that the opacity of such representations in this story is probably not due to fear of censorship or moralistic criticism, I would argue that the relegation of *tongxinglian* to a secondary level of representation here serves as a rhetorical enactment of the logic of *yin/xian*.⁴¹ The subject is rendered connotatively in this text not because it cannot be written about directly but because the use of connotation enables a thematization of the relations of *yin* and *xian* that magnetically adhere to *tongxinglian*. The text's clamorous "silence" on this subject—since "Silence" [Momo] is also, literally, its subject—paradoxically suggests that *tongxinglian* is the text's central *yin*. In its suggestiveness and opacity, moreover, the text demands a reading "through" itself

to the *yin* subject, causing the reader effectively to reproduce, as I have done here, the reading practice of homophobia that desires, impossibly, to bring *tongxinglian* once and for all safely into the realm of the *xian*. In compelling this ill-fated search for definitive evidence of *tongxinglian*, the text reproduces that subject as located between *yin* and *xian*.

In its concern with the attempt to differentiate “authentic” from “impositor” bodies and body parts, *The Membranes* imagines the possibility of a legible body, whose skin would speak to its reader of its own authenticity or inauthenticity through marks on its surface.⁴² In this reading the narrative is about the failed search for the eloquent mark of (in)authenticity on Momo’s skin. Insofar as Momo can be read as a stand-in for *tongxinglian*, the narrative’s compulsive reading of her body mirrors, and critiques, the homophobic desire delineated by Lin, to lift aside the “veil of mystery” on *tongxinglian*.⁴³ The representation of Momo’s skin as a text that frustrates attempts to interpret its secret, yet is compulsively read and reread by Momo and by the narrative itself, dramatizes the positioning of *tongxinglian* as something of which transparency is continually, homophobically, and impossibly demanded.

The following passage is exemplary of the body reading in which Momo and the narrative obsessively engage. After the young Momo learns that android body parts are commonly used in transplants for humans, she deduces that Andy’s body may now in some sense be internal to her own:

That day after Momo got home, she stripped off her clothes straight away and stood in front of the dressing room mirror looking at her own naked body. It seemed both strange and familiar.

She was overcome with unease and put her shirt and skirt back on, and her thick overcoat, then wrapped herself up in her quilt. She wished she could forget that there was a body joined on below her head. She understood what had happened, but she didn’t know how to face her own body. When Mummy had said that Andy was still with Momo, that she would always be with Momo, had it meant that Andy’s body and her own had been combined into one? These two hands, did they come from Momo, or from Andy? Whose belly was this? There was no little willy, so this soft place underneath her belly button must once have been Andy’s flesh! There were no scars: it wasn’t visible which parts of her body were borrowed from elsewhere. And what about the fingers of her hands? Were they Andy’s? . . . no matter how she puzzled she couldn’t understand it.⁴⁴

This passage nicely thematizes the frustrated desire to make *xian* the mark of the inauthentic by reading it off the skin, as Momo regards her body in the mirror in search of a sign that will allow her to read from it vital information about its origin and constitution. This is the point at which Momo's body first becomes strange to her; the confusion of its familiarity and strangeness is reflected in her desire both to scrutinize it in the mirror and to cover it over completely and forget its presence beneath her thinking head. The separation between head and body is repeated as Momo feels that "she doesn't know how to face her own body" [*ta ye bian bu dongde ruhe miandui zijide shenti*]. The verb *miandui* implies both standing in a position of direct confrontation to something and the bodily "face" itself. It is as though the body [*shenti*] and the face [*mian*] had come apart, both in the sense that the body cannot be "faced"—as if it had become faceless—and, relatedly, in the idea that consciousness stands outside the body, which it then tries to face [*miandui*] from the outside.

The disintegration of the subject as body, both in this passage and in the novella as a whole, thus commences with the separating off of the head and face, with an effect comparable to that of the mask. The difficulty of "facing" the body—of replacing its missing face—introduces the possibility of removable or layered body parts.⁴⁵ The body becomes further fragmented as hands, belly, genitals, and fingers are considered separately, suggesting again an economy of removal and prosthesis. Momo desires to be able to read clearly which parts of this piecemeal body have come from the "false" body of the android and which are her "own"—to discern which parts of her flesh have been displaced by parts taken from elsewhere. But the failed attempt to make the body's *yin* into *xian* in this way begins to suggest the impossibility of finally locating an answer to these questions; the search for a final demarcation line between the real and the false body part leads only to the peeling away of every part of the body.

Since nonhuman flesh is manifestly unmarked as such, the mark that Momo seeks is not one unique to the nonhuman but is a liminal one that would mark the divide between human and nonhuman skin: it is the scar signaling their union and separation. The scar becomes the privileged, and signally absent, demarcation line between real and false skin and thus, in effect, the marker of the unnatural, the desired guarantor of the body's legibility. In the passage above, scarring is mentioned twice, each time with the purpose of noting its ominous absence. Momo, considering her own body, reflects: "There were no scars: it wasn't visible which parts of her body were borrowed from elsewhere" [*Meiyou bahen: kan bu chu-lai ta shenshang you naxie difang shi wai jiede*]. Mummy speaks of the lack of scars ambivalently as a sign both of the operation's "success" and of

the unspecified “price” that has been paid: “Do you know . . . the price that must be paid for such a perfect, scarless operation?” [*Ni zhidao . . . weile . . . dong yichang wanmeide wuba shoushu, yao hua duoshao daijia?*]. This question adumbrates the possibility that the very absence of scarring may become legible as a marker of some other, ominously unguessed-at truth. Momo finds her own skin “so smooth and without any trace of a wound or a scar, as though there had never been any operation on this beautiful young body—but, her own, body? Was the body her own? Or Andy’s?” (74). The scar’s absence prompts Momo’s final unresolved speculation on the scope of the transplant: since there are no marks on her skin to tell of the operation, the possibility arises that her entire body is foreign to her, scripted in a language she cannot interpret. Analogously to the layering mask, which refuses to yield the desired true face, the scar’s absence also intimates the inadequacy of a binary language of real/false to the question of that body. The alien element that is neither real nor false flesh, and that replaces the eloquent scar with an interpretive blockage, turns out to be the membrane, extending beneath the skin’s surface, frustrating or redirecting attempts to decode a final, interior meaning of this body/subject. The price of the absence of the scar’s decisive demarcation is the more complex form of difference represented by the disunity, multiplicity, and nonfixity of the layered membrane, which displaces the language that would read the body in the terms of real/false and internal/external.⁴⁶

The membrane’s effect is perhaps expressed most clearly in the story of Momo’s client who bears the name of the mythical heroine of the *Mahabharata*: Draupadi [*Zhuobadi*]. Like the Draupadi of the Indian epic, she is clothed in multiple, layered saris: Momo is astonished to see her remove first a purple sari, then an indigo, a blue, a green, a yellow, an orange, and a red one.⁴⁷ The queerly rainbow-clad Draupadi finally appears to be naked. Yet she now removes another layer, a “transparent skin in the shape of a human body,” composed of the high-tech protective skin product “M-skin”: a membrane standing between Momo’s eye and Draupadi’s final nakedness.⁴⁸ Meaningfully, Draupadi addresses Momo: “I’ve removed a further layer of clothing. So, how could you be sure that I was naked just now?” (77). How could one be sure even now? Draupadi is more like the epic heroine than she initially appeared: by virtue of the membrane, she too is “infinitely clothed”; the removal of each layer reveals only a further triumphant blockage to the spectator’s desire to behold her nakedness.⁴⁹ The invocation of the legend of Draupadi prompts a reading of this infinite extension of layers specifically as a defense, since the *Mahabharata*’s Draupadi uses her infinite series of layered saris as protection against the humiliation of a public stripping. Her story, rescripted here in the rainbow colors of Taiwanese queer science fiction, resonates

strongly with the *tongzhi* mask tactic. By implementing the mask, with its tendency to complicate what counts as the real face underneath, *tongzhi*, like Draupadi, protect themselves against and critique onlookers' desire for their shaming *puguang* [exposure]. The layering that characterizes the *tongzhi* mask, then, works in this text as the membrane's mechanism.⁵⁰

But by making explicit the logic that is only unevenly implicit in the *tongzhi* mask, the membrane *concretely* figures the impossibility of a final homosexual exposure. The epigraph to this section of the essay states that while clothing conceals the body, the body contains not an authentic soul but only infinite membrane. The "slicing open" of the body in this passage in search of the true self at its heart, like the stripping of Draupadi in search of the elusive nakedness beneath her clothing, mimics the desire betrayed by homophobic invocations of the *tongzhi* mask. Such invocations insist that homosexuality wears the false face of deception, under which lurks its deviously concealed reality; the desire is then aggressively to slice away the false face of the *tongzhi* mask to reveal homosexuality's "truth," to insist on a complete and legible divide in the same way that Momo frantically searches her skin for the absent scar. But the passage above, like the novella as a whole, refuses the satisfaction of this desire, maintaining that beneath the deceptive surface of *tongxinglian* is found not the mythical space where the "real" homosexual subject would lie, fully formed and awaiting disclosure, but a series of membranes, stretched between the "false face" and the elusive interiority of the *tongzhi* subject, attesting only to the unceasing interplay between those two slippery systems. The membrane becomes readable as the volatile bar between *yin* and *xian*: like the mask, it inhabits the location that delimits knowledges of *tongxinglian*. But it is also the hyperextension of the logic of the mask, the mask with all possibility of the "real face" beneath it decisively excised. Accordingly, Momo's attempts in *The Membranes* to get to the bottom of her condition by reading the resistant text of her skin lead only to the revelation that "she" is literally *not there*, where she believes she is; her self is effaced as it becomes evident that "she" is no more than a lone organ hallucinating human subjectivity inside a faceless machine.⁵¹

The pessimism of this image highlights the fact that the model of the subject with endlessly removable faces or endlessly peelable membranes describes an often impossible position: the model is accurate in the visceral immediacy with which it figures the violent desires arrayed against attempts to articulate and assert new, critical sexual subjectivities. There is little to be gained by simply "celebrating" tropes, like the mask and the membrane, that describe such precarious positions. But the idea of a *tongzhi* subject that frustrates attempts to locate its interi-

ority through a proliferation of resistant surfaces may suggest useful ways of provisionally imagining sexual subjects that are, at least, inured to homophobic demands for transparency. The logic of the membrane and the mask installs a *tongzhi* subject who claims her or his identity—"I am a *tongzhi*"—while that "I" remains opaque. Thus *tongzhi* effects are produced without the necessity exhaustively to make plain the homosexual subject: hundreds of masked faces representing *tongzhi* congregate in Taipei's public spaces; a *tongzhi* story is written without a clear *tongzhi* subject. Chang Hsiao-Hung suggests the aptness of Butler's formulation of the impossibility of ever stepping from the shadow of the closet to theorizing the mask tactic: "What the 'collective coming out' [effected by the mask tactic] emphasizes is perhaps not so much the absolute numbers of *tongzhi* that are seen, but the way in which they are seen. As Butler has written, 'Before, you did not know whether I "am," but now you do not know what that means.'"⁵² Or—what may amount to the same thing—before, you did not know whether "I" am, but now you do not know what that means. In the instances of both mask and membrane, the *tongzhi*-affirmative refusal to make *tongxinglian* appear transparently before spectators or readers rescripts the cultural positioning of *tongxinglian* as in motion between *yin* and *xian*. Each instance exploits *tongxinglian*'s undecidable positioning in relation to visibility and legibility, making plain that attempts to read *tongxinglian* are more likely to illumine the desires of the reader than to bring to light the final word on the *tongzhi* subject.

Notes

An earlier draft of this essay appeared under the title "Yigui, mianju, mo: Dangdai Taiwan lunshuzhong tongxinglian zhutide yin/xian luoji" [Closets, masks, and membranes: The homosexual subject's *yin/xian* logic in contemporary Taiwan discourses], trans. Ta-wei Chi, *Chungwai Literary Monthly*, May 1998, 130–49. Chinese names and terms in this essay conform to the Hanyu pinyin system of romanization except where a different conventional spelling exists or where individual authors favor a different spelling (e.g., Antonia Chao, Lin Hsien-Hsiu).

1. *Tongzhi* translates roughly as "gay and lesbian." Also used in this essay are *tongxinglian*, "homosexuality," and *tongxinglian zhe*, "homosexual person."
2. It often proves strategically useful for those engaged in *tongzhi*-affirmative work in Taiwan to understand the operations of *yin* and *xian* around *tongxinglian* in the light of the sophisticated ways in which the closet has been theorized in English-language work. See Ta-wei Chi, "Yiguide beiwanglü" [Memo on the closet], in *Wan'an Babilun* [Sexually dissident notes from Babylon] (Taipei: Tansuo Wenhua, 1998), 260–63;

- and Lin Hsien-Hsiu (Lucas Lin), “Sheide yigui, sheide xing huanxiang?” [Whose closet, whose sexual fantasy?], in *Kanjian tongxinglian?* [Seeing homosexuality?] (Taipei: Kaixin Yangguang, 1997), 48–56.
3. Pai Hsien-Yung, *Niezi* [Crystal Boys], 3d ed. (Taipei: Yunchen, 1992), 3. For a discussion of this passage and, more generally, of the positioning of *tongxinglian* in relation to tropes of light or whiteness and dark or blackness see Antonia Chao (Chao Yeng-ning), “Chugui huo bu chugui? Zhe shi yige youguan hei’ande wenti” [To come out or not to come out? This is a question about darkness], *Saodong* [Stir], no. 3 (1997): 59–64.
 4. For example, Gian Jia-Shin writes, “Nütongxinglian zai Taiwan shehui zhong mimi cunzai, yin er bu xiande qingkuang, yi you shu shi nian zhi jiu” [Lesbians in Taiwanese society have had a secret, hidden-away existence for several decades] (“Huanchu nütongzhi” [Bringing out Taiwan lesbians] [master’s thesis, National Taiwan University, 1997], 120). The previously hidden existence of Taiwan’s lesbians is invoked here to serve as a contrast to their improved situation since the late 1980s, when a burgeoning lesbian culture of bars, social groups, publications, and self-naming strategies began to allow lesbians to come out as never before. Gian also uses the character *yin*, placing it in opposition to *xian* [disclosure], as used in *xianshen* [to come out]: her phrase is *yin er bu xian* [hidden and not disclosed].
 5. This fear is expressed in the argument made by some *tongzhi* groups that a complete public coming out by their members would result in uncontrollable media voyeurism. See Antonia Chao, “Mianju yu zhenshi: Tongzhi yundongde yige fansi” [Masking the real: A reflection on Taiwan’s gay rights movement] (paper presented at the Academia Sinica conference “Cultural Performance and Anthropology,” Nankang, 6–7 June 1997), 6.
 6. Lin, *Kanjian tongxinglian?* 46. In making this point, Lin refers to Michel Foucault’s arguments on the construction of homosexuality as an object of sexological and psychiatric investigation in nineteenth-century Europe (*The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 [New York: Pantheon, 1978]). Lin sees this construction of an infinitely investigable homosexuality reproduced in contemporary Taiwan.
 7. Lin Hsien-Hsiu, “Tongzhi yundongde wutou gong’an” [The mysterious case of the headless *tongzhi* movement], *Saodong*, no. 4 (1997): 63.
 8. Chao, “Mianju yu zhenshi,” 8. The party was convened to protest the Taipei City Government’s withdrawal of funding promised for a public *tongzhi* party. I read pleas for *tongzhi* to “remove your masks and dance together with us” as broadly homophobic in light of the way such pleas have been hypocritically used in cases of *tongzhi* outing, such as the one that occurred during the December 1995 student elections at National Taiwan University. Nine student representatives were outed by two other students by means of a public letter bearing the title “Rang women zai yangguang xia zuo pengyou—qing tongxinglian pengyou zouchu hei’an” [Let us be friends in the sunlight—we ask our homosexual friends to come out of the darkness]. See Chao, “Chugui huo bu chugui?” 62–64.

9. See Chang Hsiao-Hung, *Yuwang xin ditu* [Queer desire: Gender and sexuality] (Taipei: Lianhe Wenye, 1996), 59; and Chao, "Mianju yu zhenshi."
10. Chao, "Mianju yu zhenshi," 8.
11. This point is made by Chao: "The donning of the mask turns out to be the 'real' coming out, which is to say that it in fact contravenes the condition of the mask's logic [i.e., the protection of individual identities]" (ibid., 9).
12. Anonymous interviewee of Chao, quoted ibid., 8. The italicized words were spoken in English.
13. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994), 71.
14. Hsien Chin Hu, "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face,'" *American Anthropologist*, no. 46 (1944): 45–64. On "face" see also Angela Zito, "Silk and Skin: Significant Boundaries," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 119–20.
15. This is the face that would be lost, for example, by the victims of "homosexual blackmailers," who pick up men for sex and later extort money from them on threat of a disclosure that would cause them to lose face, that is, to become *jian bu de ren* [unable to face people]. See Zheng Guoliang, "Tongzhi xianrentiao" [*Tongzhi* bandits], *Lianhe bao* [United daily], 7 June 1997, 7.
16. It is risky to appeal to "Chinese" languages of face, since, on the one hand, it is historically associated with highly orientaling representations of Chinese people, and, on the other, such an appeal might be read as culturally essentialist. I hope here neither to reproduce orientalist knowledge systems in which discourses of face are associated with the obfuscation of "truth" nor to invoke a transhistorical "Chinese" conception of face. I discuss only the ways in which face is used in everyday speech in Taiwan and the resistant appropriations of that speech by *tongzhi*. Andrew Kipnis shows how the persistent association of the English term *face* with a false social appearance has its roots in the writings of American missionary Sinologists such as Arthur Smith, whose writings on *mianzi* and *lian* are probably responsible for the entry of the term *face* in this sense into English. Kipnis shows how Smith's interested representation of the supposedly Chinese concepts of face was linked to the idea of a "false social appearance that covered an unseemly reality"—tellingly, the "seeming propensity of Chinese servants to lie to their Western masters" ("Face: An Adaptable Discourse of Social Surfaces," *positions* 3 [1995]: 123, 120).
17. D. A. Miller, quoted in Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 67.
18. Kipnis makes this point: "Both [*lian* and *mianzi*] differ significantly from the English face. Face is a social appearance that is outward—that may not and probably does not correspond to an underlying reality. . . . The issue of correspondence to an underlying reality is simply not important with *mianzi* and *lian*. Rather, *mianzi* and *lian* involve what I call constitutive visibilities" ("Face," 127).
19. Wang Haowei, "Buyao jiaochu yaokongqi: Tongzhi yao you xianshende zhuquan" [Don't

- give up the remote control: *Tongzhi* must have power over *xianshen*], *Saodong*, no. 3 (1997): 52.
20. Wang's use of set phrases [*chengyu*] here makes for an awkward translation. I have translated her words more or less literally to highlight their connection with face.
 21. See Lin, "Tongzhi yundongde wutou gong'an," 62.
 22. I am indebted to Ding Naifei for suggesting the link between the mask strategy and this accusation, as well as for discussing this section with me in some detail.
 23. Cf. Rosalind C. Morris's discussion of the resistant public self-display of transgendered Thai *kathoey*s in relation to Thai notions of *sia naa* [losing face] ("Educating Desire: Thailand, Transnationalism, and Transgression," *Social Text*, nos. 52–53 [1997]: 65).
 24. Liu Jenpeng and Ding Naifei, "Wangliang wen jing: Hanxu meixue yu ku'er zhenglie" [Reticent poetics, queer politics], in *Xing/Bie Yanjiu: Ku'er lilun yu zhengzhi* [Working papers in gender/sexuality studies: Queer politics and queer theory] (Chungli: Center for the Study of Sexualities, Department of English, National Central University, 1998), 109–55.
 25. Zhou Huashan, quoted in Liu and Ding, "Wangliang wen jing," 109. See Bret Hinsch's similar account in *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. 162–71.
 26. Liu and Ding, "Wangliang wen jing," 109–13.
 27. *Ibid.*, 147–48; Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 171.
 28. Liu and Ding, "Wangliang wen jing," 120; my emphasis.
 29. Wang Ping, speaking at a public discussion of strategies addressing rape, organized by the National Activist Alliance of Female Students, 1976 Café, Taipei, 21 December 1997.
 30. Sedgwick, *Epistemology*; Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–31; Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out," in Fuss, *Inside/Out*, 1–10; Julia Creet, "Anxieties of Identity: Coming Out and Coming Undone," in *Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects*, ed. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (New York: Routledge, 1995), 179–99.
 31. Ta-wei Chi, pers. com., December 1997.
 32. Ta-wei Chi, *The Membranes* [*Mo*] (Taipei: Lianjing, 1996), 78. The "unknowable shadow" that I mention here refers specifically to Momo's inevitable discovery of her body's status, which draws closer as the text progresses.
 33. Same-sex desire or sex occurs between Mummy and her Japanese lover, between Mummy and Draupadi, between Momo and the female android Andy, between Momo and Lola, and between the male android Andy's "master" and various male "youths."
 34. Giovanni Vitiello, "The Fantastic Journey of an Ugly Boy: Homosexuality and Salvation in Late Ming Pornography," *positions* 4 (1996): 298; Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 15–33.

35. Chi, *The Membranes*, 4.
36. See Liu and Ding, “Wangliang wen jing.” The character read as *momo* in Japanese is read as *tao* in Mandarin.
37. Chi, *The Membranes*, 93.
38. The translation of this slogan in Chinese is *chenmo dengyu si*. HIV is arguably another half-concealed signified of this text, given its focus on the mysterious LOGO bacterium of Momo’s youth and on the waning of bodily integrity.
39. Further, the *mo* of the novella’s title and the *mo* of Momo’s name are homophones for a character in Chi’s partner’s given name.
40. This point is made by D. A. Miller in relation to male homosexuality: “In a culture where variously sharp excitements (sexual and phobic, of bodies and minds, in women as well as men) greet the mere nomination of the subject, a truly offhand reference to male homosexuality must hardly be credible” (“Anal Rope,” in Fuss, *Inside/Out*, 122).
41. Cf. Miller, “Anal Rope,” 124–25.
42. The legible body also encodes a possible reference to the morally stigmatized or the pathologized homosexual body, which gives away its secret in visible form. See Lee Edelman, “Homographesis,” in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3–23. The legible body is further suggested in Chi’s novella by the function of “M-skin,” whose memory function allows Momo to “read” from the used M-skins of her clients their bodies’ sensory memory of the past seven days. Thus Draupadi, who introduces the technology to Momo, promises, “I will teach you how to read the body” [*Wo lai jiao ni ruhe yuedu shenti*] (Chi, *The Membranes*, 78).
43. Lin, *Kanjian tongxinglian?* 46.
44. Chi, *The Membranes*, 65.
45. The loss of Momo’s face becomes complete later, beginning when she discovers that the visual “diary” that Mummy writes for her—it is in reality the collection of CD-ROMs containing Momo’s illusory life’s experience, which have been uploaded into her brain—shows her life *from her own point of view*. Thus, ominously, her own face fails to appear in the diary (Chi, *The Membranes*, 90). Subsequently, it is revealed that Momo’s deluded brain has been located for the past twenty years in the body of a worker-android, whose facelessness is also emphasized (101).
46. The membrane’s mechanism is at one point translated into the language of Derridean *différance*: “*Différance*, *yanyi*: the true meaning that you want to pursue continuously spreads and shifts; meaning is like a shiftless, ever-fleeing chameleon that feeds on air alone” (Chi, *The Membranes*, 92).
47. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Draupadi,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 179–87.
48. Chi, *The Membranes*, 77.
49. Spivak, “Draupadi,” 183.

50. The layering of the membrane may also be read at the level of the text of *The Membranes* itself: layer after layer of meaning peels back as the reader, like Momo, discovers progressively more about Momo's conditions of existence; each revelation necessitates a revision of previous assumptions while raising the possibility that it, too, will eventually be stripped away.
51. Chi, *The Membranes*, 101. Chi himself suggests that, to the extent that Momo encodes the signification of *tongxinglian* itself, the waning of her subjective interiority, when it becomes clear that she is scripted by forces outside her control, implies a writing of *tongxinglian* as the opposite of deep subjectivity: it shows itself, rather, as the contingent product of the systems that effect its cultural inscription (*Wan'an Babilun*, 180).
52. Chang, *Yuwang xin ditu*, 60. The quotation from Butler is taken from "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 16.

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