22 *Vive L'Amour*: Eloquent Emptiness

Fran Martin

Vive L'Amour (Tsai Ming-liang, 1994), winner of the Golden Lion at the 1994 Venice International Film Festival, is the second part in a three-part film-cycle by Tsai Ming-liang, the Malaysian-born art-house director working from Taiwan. Following *Rebels of the Neon God* (Tsai Ming-liang, 1992) and preceding *The River* (Tsai Ming-liang, 1996), *Amour* contributes to Tsai's ongoing filmic exploration of the conditions of human subsistence in millennial Taipei.¹ His films' settings amid the city's dismal concrete and neon streetscapes, their minimalist stories of the aimless days and nights of drifting, marginal characters and their austere cinematic style have earned Tsai his name as filmic philosopher of existential anxiety in post-'economic miracle' Taiwan.²

Tsai's films have been discussed by critics within Taiwan and internationally mainly in relation to their distinctive cinematic style and their thematic explorations of post-modern alienation.³ But within Taiwan's local lesbian and gay (*tongzhi*) communities Tsai's film-cycle is frequently analysed in relation to its representations of homosexuality, a topic less often foregrounded in existing English-language scholarship.⁴ Taiwan's *tongzhi* movement, encompassing activist and social groups as well as *tongzhi*-directed cultural production and consumption (including film-making, film-going and film criticism), emerged during the 1990s as part of the series of popular movements proliferating in the wake of the Kuomintang government's lifting of martial law in 1987.⁵ In what follows, I assume the context of *Vive L'Amour*'s production in 1990s Taiwan, in the same cultural moment that saw the emergence of the *tongzhi* movement. Bearing in mind Tsai's films' popularity with *tongzhi* audiences, I consider how *Vive L'Amour* indexes current transformations in constructions of sexuality and family. My approach to Tsai's film thus differs from much existing work less in its methodology than in its thematic focus and its

emphasis on the film's social context. Rather than reading the film as an expression of a generalised, global post-modern malaise, on the one hand, or of nostalgia for a mythic, lost 'Chinese family', on the other, I will suggest that *Amour* indexes a particular moment in the transformation of available discourses on sexuality in 1990s Taiwan. I will analyse the film's representation of *tongxinglian* (homosexuality) through its organisation of space and through the characterisation of Xiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng), the central character who has appeared in a lead role in all of Tsai's films to date.

With its principal cast carried over from *Rebels* (Lee Kang-sheng as Xiao Kang, and Chen Zhao-rong, who played A'Ze in *Rebels*, as A'Rong), *Amour*'s plot concerns the ephemerally intertwined lives of three characters, A'Rong, Mei-mei and Xiao Kang, as they cross paths in a vacant luxury apartment awaiting sale. Mei-mei (Yang Kuei-mei) is an estate agent who spends her days driving between apartment and empty apartment, making calls on her mobile phone in the hope that someone will turn up to view the properties. Taking a break for a cigarette and a drink in a crowded coffee shop in the Hsi-menting entertainment district, she encounters A'Rong, an itinerant salesman who peddles women's clothing illegally on the street outside a department store. After a protracted exchange of glances, A'Rong follows Mei-mei from the coffee shop to a vacant luxury apartment Mei-mei handles, and the two have sex. Unbeknownst to either one, a spare key to the same apartment has been swiped by the third character, Xiao Kang, who makes his living pre-selling funerary niches in a crematorium. At a measured pace, the film explores each character's relationship with the others as they return to the apartment at various times and for various purposes over the days that follow. Mei-mei goes to the apartment in order to show the property to potential buyers (and also to

eat her lunch from polystyrene *biandang* lunchboxes, and to take an occasional nap). A'Rong goes there to have sex with Mei-mei (also to masturbate with a porn magazine, sleep, take a bath in the jacuzzi and eat hotpot with Xiao Kang). Xiao Kang goes there initially to attempt suicide (and, later, to stage a one-man bowling game with a watermelon, model a little black dress, feather boa and heels from A'Rong's merchandise bag, and hide under the bed where A'Rong and Mei-mei have sex, then emerge to kiss the sleeping A'Rong's face).

As the Taiwanese critic Jiang Xun notes, each of the character's occupations represents an aspect of the underside of Taiwan's 'economic miracle'. Mei-mei is a middle-person in the property boom, but cannot legitimately share in the luxury lifestyles she sells – her working-class accent makes a stark contrast with her expensive-looking outfits, and her own apartment is decrepit by comparison with the five-star properties she handles.⁶ A'Rong possesses heightened mobility in two opposite senses: he earns enough for regular trips to Hong Kong to buy merchandise; yet at the same time, selling his wares in the informal street economy, he is forced into an uneasy state of perpetual motion by regular police raids on the floating market that hovers at the doorstep of the high-end department store. Xiao Kang, meanwhile, letterboxes ads for the tiny funerary niches that are often the only viable option on a small island where skyrocketing land values have put a grave site in a traditional cemetery outside most people's reach.

Along with Taiwan's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, the structure and practice of the family (or *jia*, a term meaning both 'family' and 'home') has also transformed over the past three to four decades. Post-1960s generations have abandoned the villages for the big cities of Taipei and Kaohsiung, and the agricultural basis of village economies has been rapidly eroded with the expansion of first the manufacturing and more recently the service sectors. As many commentators have observed, Tsai's film-cycle foregrounds the resultant crisis and reconfiguration of the *jia* in turn-of-the-century Taiwan.⁷ While *Rebels* and *River* both deal directly with *jia* at the level of the story by foregrounding Xiao Kang's relationship with his father (played in both films by Miao Tien), it is in *Amour* that the idea of *jia* and its apparent absence is most arrestingly present at a symbolic

level, in the metaphor of the empty apartment. Taiwanese feminist scholar Chang Hsiao-hung argues convincingly that what we see in *Amour* is not so much a dramatisation of the tragic breakdown of some mythic 'traditional Chinese family', as has been suggested by some, but rather an 'emptying out' of the *jia* itself that compels a fundamental re-thinking of its significance in relation to current transformations in Taiwan's society and culture.⁸ In what follows, I will consider how Chang's notion of the emptied-out *jia* can help us think through other, related interpretations of the film's various figurations of 'emptiness'. In particular, I will suggest a possible correlation between the film's representation of 'emptiness' and its figuration of *tongxinglian*.

Like *Rebels*, *Amour* and *River*, and other Taiwanese films including *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993), the independent film *The Love of Three Oranges* (Hung Hung, 1998) frames the subject of homosexuality in relation to the *jia*.⁹ Also like *Amour*, this quirky first-time feature from Hung Hung examines a complex interplay between three characters: young lesbian lovers Star (also called Pony) and Mimi, and Star's high-school boyfriend who has reappeared after two years away on military service. Near the beginning of the film, Star has a conversation with her ex-boyfriend in which she tells him that she and Mimi plan to have a baby and raise the child together. When he asks how she means to do this, Star implies that she's prepared to have sex with a man in order to get pregnant. Shortly thereafter, she begins to have regular sex with the ex-boyfriend. Mimi grows jealous, and a love triangle is formed that resolves, at the close of the film, with Mimi's marriage to Star's ex-boyfriend/lover.

At one point, the ex-boyfriend secretly reads Mimi's diary. Mimi has written: 'Star's high-school boyfriend showed up. Star says she can't forget him, because she was once pregnant with his child. If what is between [Star and me] cannot produce a real child, then do our kisses count as real?' In this question, the lesbian love between Mimi and Star is constructed by Mimi as 'false' because it does not promise the presumed 'realness' of reproductive heterosexuality. Mimi's question crystallises the tension between homosexual love and the reproductive demands and desires of the *jia* that suffuses and organises the film as a whole. In Ang Lee's *Wedding Banquet*, the reconciliation of the desires of a gay son with the

demands of his family that he enable his ageing father to 'hold his grandson' (*bao sunzi*) is achieved by the creation of a situation in which the son becomes able to produce an heir, as it were, *despite* being gay. Indeed, the tension between patrilineal heredity and homosexual desire is a central theme of Tsai's film-cycle as well, and comes to a climax in *River*.¹⁰ All these films suggest that in the context of contemporary Taiwan, where the requirements of the *jia* are socially and psychically entrenched in the lives of individual sons and daughters, the imperative to familial reproduction remains a force to be reckoned with in the elaboration of liveable ways of being for *tongzhi* subjects.

It is for this reason that Mimi asks herself whether lesbian kisses can be considered 'real' if they cannot produce children. In asking this question, Mimi follows the lead of a dominant culture that has tended to construct *tongxinglian* as an unreal, empty, or ghostly counterpart to reproductive heterosexuality. As Naifei Ding observes, in the 1990s literary movement of *tongzhi wenxue* (queer literature), *tongxinglian* was frequently aligned with ghostly or cipher-like non-human (*feiren*) forms. Ding interprets this tropology as demonstrative of the fact that *tongxinglian* transgresses the rules of the 'human' when the human is defined by its relationship of interiority to the heterocentric *jia*.¹¹ For example, the popular *tongzhi* author Hsu Yoshen begins his first novel, *Man Betrother, Man Betrothed* (*Nanhun Nanjia*), a semi-autobiographical coming of age story, with the following words, figuring the narrator's gay life as a posthumous state: 'The year I turned thirteen, my queue stood on end – you know what I mean: I died. Because that year, I realised I was an incurable homosexual.'¹² Similarly, Chen Xue's lesbian short story, 'Searching for the Lost Wings of the Angel' commences with the protagonist's description of herself and her lover as insubstantial beings suspended between worlds, wingless 'angels': 'We're both angels who have lost our wings. Our eyes are fixed on a height attainable only in flight; our bare feet stand on the searing, obdurate earth, and yet we have lost the direction mankind ought to have.'¹³ Qiu Miaojin, author of the now-classic lesbian novel *The Crocodile's Journal* (*Eyu Shouji*) parallels her lesbian protagonist's story with that of an anomalous urban crocodile which lives invisibly among the people of Taipei yet at a distance

from them, due to its inability to disclose its true identity.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the queer Gothic fiction of Lucifer Hung (Hong Ling) is peopled by vampires, werewolves, demons and other such unquiet spirits.¹⁵ Following Foucault, this figuration of *tongxinglian* by *tongzhi* authors through cipher-like, non-human figures can be interpreted as a reverse-discourse: a form of resistance to the dominant discourse that would place *tongxinglian* beyond the bounds of the human due to its perceived threat to the reproductive, heterosexual *jia*.¹⁶ In the light of this conceptual linkage between *tongxinglian* and the cipher, in what follows I want to read *Amour's* often noted foregrounding of emptiness alongside its representation of *tongxinglian* in the character of Xiao Kang.

Vive l'Amour reveals an obsession with emptiness on several levels. First, at the level of the graphic space of the screen itself, many shots appear empty by virtue of the harsh composition with simple blocks of flat colour dissected by stark lines produced by architectural frames like balustrades, window frames and doorways. This composition is seen in the first shot, a close-up of a key hanging from a lock in a deserted corridor, ultimately grabbed by an out-of-focus Xiao Kang. The shot is dominated by the vertical lines of the walls and doors in the corridor, and the camera remains fixed on these solid architectural forms before and after the blurry human forms enter and exit the frame, giving an impression of the ephemerality of this human movement against the stolid substantiality of the concrete artifice. Similar shots, with flat screen space dissected by harsh framing devices that seem both to circumscribe and render trivial the movements of the characters, proliferate throughout the film.

The film's soundtrack, too, is characterised by an uncomfortable emptiness. There is a brutal refusal of dialogue and extra-diegetic music; we hear instead the inconsequential sounds of everyday life: traffic, other people's half-heard conversations, footsteps, the characters' breathing, the sounds of Mei-mei and A'Rong having sex, construction racket, Buddhist muzak in the crematorium, the ringing of cash registers in convenience stores and supermarkets, dogs barking in the distance, the calls of street vendors, sirens, Mei-mei's mobile phone's ring-tone.

The film's most concrete representation of emptiness is of course its depiction of the three-dimensional architectural spaces of the apartment. This

Vive L'amore: A'Rong and Mei-mei cruise each other.

apartment in which the three characters uneasily cohabit is conspicuously devoid of settlement: it is minimally furnished, but lacks the comforting detritus of everyday life. The bedroom in which Mei-mei and A'Rong first have sex, for example, has a double bed but no bed-linen, and is otherwise unfurnished except for a lone pot plant and a bedside rug. The other apartments Mei-mei handles are just as cavernous and impersonal, if not more so. The second apartment where we see Mei-mei, squatting in the foreground dwarfed by the desolate vacancy of the space, is a huge void made by two units knocked into one. Given the depressingly useless expansiveness of this space, in which surely no-one could imagine actually living, Mei-mei's cheery greeting to prospective buyers rings with a certain irony: 'Come in, come in – the place is pretty big!' It is these most thematically and diegetically central representations of emptiness that occasion Chang's argument on the key significance of the emptied-out *jia*.

All this emptiness contributes to the sense of an existential vacuum that commentators have frequently noted in Tsai's films, a sense that concretises for many in this film's closing scene, in which Mei-

mei weeps inconsolably for a full four minutes in the muddy construction-site void of what is to become Da'An Forest Park.¹⁷ And yet, in the light of the film's parallel thematisation of *tongxinglian*, this emptiness may turn out to signify something in excess of the existential ennui so routinely attributed to Tsai's films. When contextualised in relation to the prevalent cultural logic that links *tongxinglian* with notions of emptiness, *Amour's* parallel thematisation of these two subjects seems quite clearly overdetermined. The metaphors of emptiness, and the emptied-out *jia* in particular, can be interpreted as encoding an implicit reference to *tongxinglian*, associated as that subject is with cultural anxieties over a *jia* 'emptied out' from within through a failure of heterosexual reproduction. In this sense, the film's paralleling of the homosexual theme with its obsessive focus on graphic, architectural, aural and metaphysical emptiness rehearses the familiar cultural logic that makes *tongxinglian* merely the cipher of heterosexual plenitude. To consider what the film does with this idea, having raised it at a connotative level, necessitates a closer analysis of the film's denotative representation of *tongxinglian*.

Underpinning *Amour's* subtextual reference to *tongxinglian* through its foregrounding of emptiness and the emptied-out *jia* is its explicit representation of *tongxinglian* through the character of Xiao Kang. As Chris Berry observes:

We are given plenty of material enabling us to interpret Hsiao Kang [Xiao Kang] as a young man gradually coming to terms with his homosexuality: the attempted suicide is followed by a growing interest in Ah Jung [A'Rong]; a scene in which he tries on some of the women's clothes Ah Jung is selling; and finally, the morning after he has hidden under the bed on which Ah Jung and Mei-Mei are having sex, a scene in which he tentatively kisses the sleeping Ah Jung.¹⁸

In addition, Xiao Kang's character can be read as conforming to the representational convention that links *tongxinglian* with the realm of the ghost and the cipher. Jiang Xun remarks:

If Yang Kuei-mei is a salesperson of homes for the living, then Lee Kang-sheng is a salesperson of homes for the dead. An atmosphere of death saturates the ghoulish presence of the Lee Kang-sheng character: he seldom speaks; tries again and again to kill himself; and lives a hermit-like existence in the apartment awaiting sale whose key he has stolen.¹⁹

Drifting about the city on his scooter peddling funerary niches, with his characteristically expressionless demeanour, Xiao Kang indeed appears rather ghostly. His ghoulish air is particularly intense in the scene in which he wears a somewhat formal and old-fashioned black suit and tie, and sits in a dimly lit café solemnly stapling his name-card to his niche ads that urge potential customers: 'Be together with your ancestors.' This written exhortation, on which the camera lingers, explicitly cites the ideology of the continuing family line while also elliptically intimating the 'death' of this model – since the precondition for getting together with your ancestors in a funerary niche is that all of you are dead. This linkage of familial ideology and death in Xiao Kang's advertising material reinforces the triangulation between *jia*, ghosts and *tongxinglian*, according to the central logic in which *tongxinglian's* perceived threat to terminate the family line and effectively kill off the *jia* is deflected defensively back onto *tongxinglian* itself,

which is then, in place of the *jia*, made to appear 'dead' and ghostly. This scene, where a spectral and (it will emerge) probably homosexual Xiao Kang quietly prepares his ads for final resting places for dead families represents a key point in the film's interrogation of the homophobic syllogism that opposes 'human', '*jia*' and 'life' to 'non-human', '*tongxinglian*' and 'death'.

Elaborating on the same theme is the scene in which Xiao Kang watches a group of office workers play a corporate bonding-style game similar to musical chairs. In the game, the odd one out calls out a rhyme answered by all the other players, who are organised into three-person make-believe family units: 'I want to move house (*ban jia*)!' 'Who wants to move house?' '[Mothers/fathers/sons/everyone] move house!' Following this, there is a general upheaval as the 'families' rearrange themselves in a new configuration. Throughout the game Xiao Kang, again wearing the black suit, watches silently from the sidelines, utterly separate and apparently unseen by anyone including one man who has to pass directly by him to enter the office where the game takes place. Xiao Kang's invisibility and insignificance to the players in the 'family game' again aligns his character with the extra-familial ghost or cipher.

Further associating Xiao Kang with the ghostly, Xiao Kang's growing interest in A'Rong in *Amour* parallels Xiao Kang's 'haunting' of the Chen Zhaorong character, A'Ze, in *Rebels*. In that film, Xiao Kang's haunting of A'Ze as the incarnation of the rebellious boy-god Nuozha is foreshadowed and paralleled by the 'haunted' lift in A'Ze's government apartment building. The lift always stops unbidden on the fourth floor (*si* meaning 'four' being a homophone for *si* meaning 'death') because, as the girl A'Gui remarks just before A'Ze and Xiao Kang cross paths and Xiao Kang begins obsessively to shadow the other boy, 'There's a ghost on the fourth floor, isn't there?' The fourth-floor ghost in A'Ze's building is soon joined by the spirit of Nuozha in Xiao Kang, who haunts A'Ze throughout the days that follow. In *Amour*, Xiao Kang again haunts the Chen Zhaorong character, A'Rong.

But while Xiao Kang exemplifies the ambivalent metaphor linking *tongxinglian* with the ghost and the cipher, the kiss scene between him and A'Rong reworks the film's paralleling of *tongxinglian* with emptiness in a new way, and to different effect. This

scene, in which Xiao Kang emerges from under the bed where A'Rong and Meimei have had sex, to lie down with A'Rong then kiss him, represents a key turning point for the film both formally and thematically. After Xiao Kang appears from under the bed where A'Rong sleeps following Mei-mei's departure, the camera follows Xiao Kang as he creeps around the bed and enters the dark alcove that leads to the door. But after hesitating a while, Xiao Kang – once again, with a certain spectral air – soundlessly re-emerges from the darkness of the alcove into the light of the room and stands immobile for several moments, still framed by the dark rectangle of the door alcove, gazing at the slumbering A'Rong. Finally, he walks out of this dark frame towards the bed. The next shot is a high-angle mid-shot of the two men lying on the bed, with Xiao Kang, like some shy novice vampire, gathering his courage and drawing slowly towards A'Rong's inert form, lips parted. Interestingly, during Xiao Kang's lengthy approach, a series of (perhaps incidental) children's shouts is faintly audible in the background, as though somewhere in another part of the building a child were perhaps waking and getting ready for school. The cries of the invisible child are too faint to make out with certainty, but in the clearest of them, the child seems to call urgently: 'Baba!' ('Daddy!'). At the moment when the film's most direct depiction of homosexual desire is taking place on screen, such a desperate plea to the father from a unseen child fits aptly into the cultural scheme that I've argued this film, like the others in Tsai's film-cycle, addresses: the crisis of the patrilineal *jia* that *tongxinglian* is presumed to occasion.

From the mid-shot of Xiao Kang's approach to A'Rong, the film cuts to its only extreme close-up: of A'Rong's out-of-focus face across the lower foreground of the shot as Xiao Kang approaches from over his shoulder. With this unprecedented filling of the screen by a human face, the alienating distance of the previous scenes, dominated by medium and long shots, is challenged for the first time. This shot is also conspicuous as the only close-up with two faces in frame: the sex scenes have been mainly mid-shots, often with only A'Rong's or only Mei-mei's face in frame at one time. In this sense, too, the kiss scene breaks the formal rules that have governed the film up to now and replaces emptiness, distance and solitude with fullness, proximity and union. Follow-

ing the shot with A'Rong's face in the foreground is a close-up from above with the two men's heads against the background of the white bed, now facing each other as A'Rong rolls over in his sleep and throws an arm about Xiao Kang. The shot is graphically arresting in its contrasting of the pale background with the darker tones of men's faces. As Xiao Kang draws slowly nearer to A'Rong, the empty white space separating the two men is bridged and finally overcome by Xiao Kang, when he gently kisses the other man's lips and their heads fill the screen to the all but total exclusion of the white background.

In some ways, the kiss scene looks forward to the conclusion of *The River*. In particular, the soft, blue dawn light that illuminates this scene adumbrates the dawn that greets Xiao Kang and his father in the Taichung hotel at the conclusion of the later film. In *River*'s final scene, Xiao Kang walks out onto the balcony and wanders off-screen for a moment, then returns, looking about him in the light of the new day in what Tsai has interpreted as a gesture of hope.²⁰ Even more specifically, the close-ups of Xiao Kang and A'Rong's faces as they lie in bed foreshadow another scene with two men in bed: Xiao Kang and his father in *River*, after they return from the sauna where they have unwittingly had sex together. In *River*, as in *Amour*, the scenes of Xiao Kang in bed with another man are remarkable for their use of close-ups and the absence of the harsh architectural framing devices that have created the sense of claustrophobia in each film up to that point. In both films, Xiao Kang's sexual connection with another man marks a crucial shift in the film's formal composition, suggesting the defeat of distance by closeness, and the overpowering of emptiness by the plenitude of a different kind of love. In one sense, the queer plenitude of these films seems the opposite of the existential emptiness critics frequently read in Tsai's oeuvre; yet this plenitude is also fixed in a dialectical relationship with emptiness insofar as it is the unravelling of older social systems that at once occasions existential crisis and creates space for new ways of being.²¹

In the ways outlined above, *Vive L'Amour* references the homophobic cultural logic that opposes *jia* to *tongxinglian* and relegates the latter to the realm of ghostliness, emptiness and unreality. But it cites that system only to destabilise it by suggesting, at the last

moment, that love between men might, on the contrary, occasion a hitherto unimagined fullness and connection. Additionally, in direct contradiction of the system that opposes *jia* to *tongxinglian*, of the three main characters it is Xiao Kang, ghostly as he may be, who seems most eager to turn the eerie apartment into a kind of alternative *jia*.²² As Chang observes, it is he who devises a scheme to make a washing machine of the jacuzzi by adding detergent and dirty laundry, and he also goes food shopping and prepares a hotpot meal to share with A'Rong. Appropriated and re-imagined in these ways by Xiao Kang, the space of the apartment becomes a liminal one, somewhere in between the familial *jia* and a new kind of 'post-*jia*' social space that is as yet in the process of being imagined: a space, perhaps, where non-traditional forms of love and intimacy might be more fully elaborated.²³

Thinking of the empty apartment, in the way Chang suggests, as a liminal space that indexes the need for a new kind of social space makes it possible to rethink the figures of ghost and cipher along similar lines. Ghosts, too, are liminal figures, hovering unquietly between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Equally, the cipher-like beings such as angels, crocodiles and vampires associated with *tongxinglian* in fiction and film could be interpreted as liminal figures caught between humanity as it is currently imagined, and something new, and emerging at a time when, as Taiwan's *tongzhi* groups insist, what is urgently required is a collective imagining of new ways of being human – new ways of thinking and practising culture and sexuality in social contexts so thoroughly transmuted. In this sense, *Vive L'Amour* contributes to the 1990s wave of *tongzhi* cultural production that re-works *tongxinglian*'s association with emptiness and ghostliness to figure a nascent sexual subjectivity, struggling to emerge into the anxious spaces excavated by cultural transformation.

NOTES

1. Tsai's films, *The Hole* (Tsai Ming-liang, 1998) and *What Time is it Over There?* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2001) utilise the same pool of actors once again (Lee Kang-sheng, Yang Kuei-mei, Miao Tien, Chen Zhaorong and Lu Yi-ching (formerly known as Lu Hsiao-ling)) and extend the general theme of urban alienation. However, the use of song-and-dance

sequences in *Hole* sets this film apart stylistically from the first three, to a certain degree, and it is questionable whether the story traceable in the first three films is continued in *Hole*. Miao Tien plays Xiao Kang's father again in *Time*, but again the transnational setting (Paris and Taipei) sets this film apart to a certain degree from Tsai's first three features.

2. Jiang Xun, 'Body Heat and Salvation' ('Tiwen yu jiuduxin'), *Vive L'Amour* (screenplay) (*Aiqing Wansui*), Tsai Ming-liang et al. (Taipei: Wanxiang, 1994) 144–151.
3. Chuck Stephens, 'Intersection: Tsai Ming-liang's Yearning Bike Boys and Heartsick Heroines', *Film Comment*, 32 (Sept.–Oct. 1996): 20–23; Tony Rayns, 'Confrontations', *Sight & Sound*, 7 (March 1997): 14–18; Richard Read, 'Alienation, Aesthetic Distance and Absorption in Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive L'Amour*', *New Formations*, 40 (Spring 2000): 102–112.
4. But see Chris Berry, 'Where is the Love? The Paradox of Performing Loneliness in Ts'ai Ming-Liang's *Vive L'Amour*', *Falling For You: Essays in Cinema and Performance*, eds Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 147–175. For Chinese-language discussion of Tsai Ming-liang's films in relation to *tongzhi*, see Ke Jiazhi, 'A River Flowing Toward the Dawn: Tsai Ming-liang's Films and My World' ('Wang liming liutangde he – Cai Mingliangde dianying yu wode shijie'), *Isotope Electronic Bulletin* (Tongweisu Dianzibao), 28 April 1998: <www.south.nsysu.edu.tw/scid/today/isotope/98/04/isotope980428.html> (15 November 2001); Chang Hsiao-hung, 'An Erotic Map of Taipei' (*Taipei qingyu dijing*), *Queer Desire: Gender and Sexuality* (Yuwang Xin Ditu: Xingbie, Tongzhixue) (Taipei: Lianhe Wenxue, 1996), 78–107; and Chang Hsiao-hung, 'A Queer Family Romance: The River's Mise-en-scene of Desire' ('Guaitai jiating luomanshi: Heliu zhongde yu wang changjing'), *Queer Family Romance* (Guaitai Jiating Luomanshi) (Taipei: Shibao, 2000), 111–141.
5. For more detail on this history, see Fran Martin, 'Queer Comrades: The Emergence of Taiwan's Literature of Transgressive Sexuality', *Angelwings: Contemporary Queer Fiction from Taiwan*, trans. and ed. Fran Martin (University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).
6. Jiang, 'Body Heat and Salvation', 148.

7. See, for example, Berry, 'Where is the Love?'; Chang, 'Erotic Map'; and Chiao Hsiung-ping, 'Lonely Taipei People' ('Gujide Taibeiren'), in Tsai *et al.*, *Vive L'Amour*, 152–156.
8. For an example of a nostalgic reading of the breakdown of the *jia* in Tsai's cinema, see Chiao, 'Lonely Taipei People'; Chang, 'Erotic Map', 96–97.
9. Chris Berry has written at length on the tendency in East Asian film to represent homosexuality in relation to blood family. See for example Chris Berry, 'Asian Values, Family Values: Film, Video and Lesbian and Gay Identities', *The Journal of Homosexuality*, 40, nos 3/4 (2000): 211–232.
10. For an extended discussion of this question, see Fran Martin, 'Perverse Utopia: Reading *The River*', *Situating Sexualities: Queer Narratives in 1990s Taiwanese Fiction and Film* (Hong Kong University Press, forthcoming).
11. Ding Naifei in discussion in 'Homosexual Politics' ('Tongxingliande Zhengzhi'), *Visionary Essays in Sexuality/Gender Studies (Xing/Bie Yanjiude Xin Shiye)*, vol. 1, ed. He Chunrui (Taipei: Yuanzun, 1997), 189–229.
12. Hsu Yoshen, *Man Betrother, Man Betrothed (Nanhun Nanjia)* (Taipei: Kaixin Yangguang, 1996), 8 (my translation).
13. Chen Xue, 'Searching for the Lost Wings of the Angel' ('Xunzhao Tianshi Yishide Chibang'), trans. Fran Martin, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 7, no. 1 (1999): 51–69 (51).
14. Qiu Miaojin, *The Crocodile's Journal (Eyu Shouji)* (Taipei: Shibao, 1994).
15. For a detailed account of the *tongzhi wenxue* movement, see Martin, 'Queer Comrades'.
16. I find the idea of the cipher particularly suggestive due to its double meaning: both 'non-entity' and 'code'.
17. But Chang interprets the construction site as an optimistic metaphor, and actress Yang Kuei-mei understood this scene to represent hope, since as she cries her face is illuminated by a ray of sun. Chang, 'Erotic Map', 102–105; Tsai Ming-liang interviewed by Shelly Kraicer, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 8, no. 2 (2000): 579–588 (582).
18. Berry, 'Asian Values', 170.
19. Jiang, 'Body Heat and Salvation', 149.
20. Tsai Ming-liang, 'A Life of Desire, Repression, and Fragmentation' ('Yuwang, Yapo, Bengjiede Shengming'), interview with Chen Baoxu, *The River* (screenplay) (*Heliu*), ed. Chiao Hsiung-ping (Taipei: Huangguan, 1997), 52–76 (59); see also Martin, 'Perverse Utopia'.
21. Cf. Chang, 'Erotic Map', 104–105.
22. On this point, see *ibid.*, 100.
23. *Ibid.*, 103.

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Author/s:

Martin, Fran

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