

Article

On Dissipation: *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and the “Death of Cinema”

Anders Bergstrom

Department of Communication Arts, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1, Canada; ajbergstrom@uwaterloo.ca

Received: 29 September 2018; Accepted: 23 November 2018; Published: 27 November 2018



Abstract: This paper explores the cinematic meta-theme of the “death of cinema” through the lens of Taiwanese director, Tsai Ming-liang’s 2003 film, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. In the film, the final screening of the *wuxia pian* classic, *Dragon Inn*, directed by King Hu, provides a focal point for the exploration of the diminished experience of institutional cinema in the post-cinematic age. Using the concept of “dissipation” in conjunction with a reappraisal of the turn to affect theory, this paper explores the kinds of subjective experiences that cinema can offer, and the affective experience of cinema-going itself, as portrayed in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. More specifically, in theorizing the role of dissipation in cinema-going, this paper explores the deployment of time and space in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and how it directs attention to the bodily action of cinema-going itself. The result is a critique of the possibilities of post-cinematic affects, rooted in an understanding of the way that late-capitalism continues to dominate and shape the range of experiences in the contemporary moment.

Keywords: affect; post-cinema; subjectivity; temporality; perception; embodiment

1. Introduction: The “Death of Cinema” and the Post-Cinematic

The transnational art cinema (a term favored by film scholars for the set of heterogenous film practices that emerged around the world after the Second World War) has frequently taken cinema itself as a self-reflexive subject of reflection, as for example, in Fellini’s *8½* (1963) or Godard’s *Contempt* (1963). More contemporary manifestations of self-reflexive cinema have often taken a nostalgic bent on the subject, even as they employ contemporary film-making techniques and utilize the networks of distribution and reception of late global capitalism that have in many ways given rise to such nostalgic pining. Thus, films, including *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)—discussed in this essay—or more recently, Martin Scorsese’s *Hugo* (2011) or the Oscar-winner *The Artist* (2011), have, in their treatment of cinema-going, engaged, either obliquely or directly, with the question of the “death of cinema” by showing what cinema-going was in the past, and implicitly comparing it to the present. This meta-theme raises a question that is relevant to the debate over the ontological status of cinema in the 21st century: what is the relation of “the disappearance of the individual subject” in postmodern discourse, as Fredric Jameson terms it (Jameson 1991, p. 16), to the changes in the experience of film-going in the “post-cinematic” era?

The post-cinematic as I define it here, involves the changes in cinematic practices spurred by the transition to moving images in media other than celluloid projection and theatrical spaces, the minimal terms of what film scholars André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion have termed “institutional cinema” (Gaudreault and Marion 2012). These other media include various forms of television broadcast and transmission, cinematically rendered video games, and more recently, internet-based forms of media on web-streaming services such as YouTube and Netflix. As even a cursory consideration of the origins of television as a mass media in the 1950s suggests, the post-cinematic refers to more than a specific historical moment of transition, but rather to an ongoing shift in patterns of dominance

amongst particular image-based cultural practices. Arguably, the beginning of the post-cinematic can be dated back to the 1950s, and television's gradual displacement of theatrical cinematic screening as the dominant cultural force in world, and especially American culture (Pautz 2002).¹

Like other processes of technological and paradigmatic change, the post-cinematic follows different patterns of adoption and negotiation in different locales and in different cultures; the specific role of cinema-going in Taiwan, in relation to other East Asian film markets and cinematic movements, for example, serves as an important context for understanding how film like *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* deals with the question of the "death of cinema." In engaging the question of the post-cinematic, important antecedents to Tsai's film include the New Taiwanese Cinema of the 1980s, in terms of style and global art house appeal, while it references the popular Chinese-language martial arts cinema of earlier years. Rather than suggest a clean break with the past, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* portrays "post-cinema" as an ongoing process of transformation; it does not directly address media practices other than institutional cinema, but it rather concerns the gradual decay of the older form. It can be seen as concerning "the relation (rather than mere distinction) between older and newer media regimes" (Densen and Leyda 2016, p. 2). As Shane Densen and Julia Leyda phrase it in the introduction to *Post-Cinema*, these transformations of media practice are:

not just after cinema, and [. . .] not in every respect "new," at least not in the sense that new media is sometimes equated with digital media; instead, it is the collection of media, and the mediation of life forms, that "follows" the broadly cinematic regime of the twentieth century—where "following" can mean either to succeed something as an alternative or to "follow suit" as a development or a response in kind. Accordingly, post-cinema would mark not a caesura but a transformation that alternately abjures, emulates, prolongs, mourns, or pays homage to cinema. (ibid.)

The felt effects of these concrete transformations of media practices and the turn to affect in arts and humanities scholarship are linked by what I call in this essay, the "dissipation" of cinema. These various transformations and theoretical turns have a significant impact on the future of transnational art cinema more broadly, as well as its memorialization as a form of collective, shared experience (i.e., collective memory). If the institutional form of cinema, conceived of as the theatrical screening of celluloid images of photographic derivation, is indeed "dead", what role does cinema that continues to engage in more traditional modalities of production, distribution, consumption, and narrative structure have to play?

One obvious manifestation of the post-cinematic shift in screen cultures is the decline of the movie theatre—such as the Fuhe Grand Theater portrayed in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*—as a vibrant center of collective urban life, as cinematic cultures move increasingly to various forms of private cinematic consumption. While much of the discourse surrounding the medial transformations ushered in by digital cinema focuses on the changes in how films and images are manufactured and created, at the same time, these changes have radically transformed the experience of cinema-going and film consumption. These transformations resonate on both the level of what kinds of subjective experience cinema can offer and the affective experiences of film-going itself.

The Taiwanese film *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* self-reflexively offers an occasion to consider the waning of the collective experience of institutional cinema in its elegiac portrayal of film-going. Director Tsai Ming-liang is a Malaysian-born Chinese filmmaker who moved to Taipei in his twenties. With his feature debut, *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992), and subsequent features, Tsai made a name for himself as a chronicler of urban Taiwanese life, frequently tackling taboo and shocking material. In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, with its long takes and infrequent camera movement, Tsai tackles the place of cinema-going in late capitalist society, and its relation to both the films and theatres of the past. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*

¹ Movie attendance in America dropped dramatically in the post-war era, from a peak of 4.7 billion admissions in 1946, stabilizing at around 1 billion admissions per year in the 1960s.

is set in a run-down Taipei movie theatre on its final night, and framed almost entirely through a screening of Chinese director King Hu's classic *wuxia pian*,² *Dragon Inn* (1967), the first film that Hu made in Taiwan after leaving Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong in 1966. While it does not explicitly address alternative modes of cinematic consumption, Tsai's film suggests that cinema-going's waning as the dominant cultural medium in the wake of post-cinematic medial transformations, leads to a loss of understanding of film history and of subjective experiences. As portrayed in Tsai's film, the act of cinema-going is not romanticized, nor is the film overly reverential in its approach to film history: much of the film's focus is on the experience of being in the theatre rather than what is on the screen. Given the kinds of film experiences that the film elegizes, what meaning can still reasonably be derived after the move to more private modes of cinematic experience? *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* asks how cinema's affective dimensions continue to function in relation to the subject, given the new formulations of consumption and affective experience in the post-cinematic age, and, at the same time, offers a portrayal of lost affective dimensions to the cinema-going experience.

2. Cinema-Going and "Dissipation"

In her work on contemporary Chinese cinemas, Jean Ma has argued that the presence of a queer "spectrality" in the films of Tsai Ming-liang reflects the director's larger political project "that envisions resistant forms of subjectivity through alternative [anachronistic] habitations of the present" (Ma 2010, pp. 98–99). As noted above, Tsai presents an example of a transnational Chinese, marking his relationship ambivalent to both Taiwanese cinema and the historical legacy of *Dragon Inn*. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is reflective of both the cinema's (diminishing) role in the process of globalization and modernization, and its simultaneous function as a repository of history and memory. Cinema in this understanding is an anachronistic medium, though not obsolete, as its trace remains in the post-cinematic technologies that follow it. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, viewed in affective terms, portrays the movie theatre as the site of affective intensities—specifically, as an intentional space in which to experience responses to cinematic stimuli that may manifest in expressions of desire, enjoyment, disgust, or surprise, and which may subsequently trigger memories and emotions. These intensities have the potential to disorder understandings of the self as possessing a rationally constituted, bounded identity. Cinema points to the mediated nature of subjectivity, which can in turn prompt the recognition that the self is constituted through the work of pre-subjective processes with social, political, or economic origins, or even the recognition of the ways in which the origins of the self are never as pure as a singular subjectivity, and may cross national, sexual, and temporal boundaries.

Goodbye, Dragon Inn achieves its shift of attention to these aspects of subjectivity through both its form and content. Formally, it fits into the loosely defined movement that has been labelled "slow cinema:" contemporary art house films with very little camera movement and very long average shot lengths. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* has only 86 shots over its run time, with an average shot length of 53 s (Reitere 2011). While featuring mostly very long shot durations, it does at one particular moment utilize a series of very quick shots to create emphasis and draw the viewer's attention. I discuss sequences involving both long shot durations, as well as the shot involving quick cuts, below. The film's longest shot clocks in at over 5 min, while in the one sequence featuring quick cuts, these last less than a second. The formal effect of slow cinema overall is to draw attention and focus to the events happening (or not happening) within each scene, rather than the relation between shots.

As far as content, the film is mostly framed around the screening of *Dragon Inn*, though the film-within-the-film ends at around the one hour mark of the film, and the last several minutes feature characters leaving the confines of the movie theatre. The film features little in the way of discernible

² The *wuxia pian*, literally translated as "martial arts chivalric story film," is a genre of Chinese film featuring martial arts and heroes set in ancient or pre-modern China. While popular from the beginning of Chinese cinema, King Hu contributed to its revitalization in Hong Kong and elsewhere with his film, Reitere (2011).

plot, but what plot it does have focuses on the work of the theatre's two employees—a projectionist (played by Tsai's regular collaborator, Lee Kang-sheng) and a ticket collector (Chen Shiang-chyi)—on a rainy closing night, showing them slowly going about their duties as the movie plays. A Japanese tourist (Kiyonobu Mitamura) enters the theatre seeking shelter from the rainstorm raging outside and finds himself in the center of an increasingly strange experience of cinema-going. The rather sparse crowd that occupies the mostly empty theatre is primarily interested in the extra-cinematic pursuits of food and sex, rather than the flickering images projected on the screen, and show little interest in the importance of *Dragon Inn's* place in the history of Taiwanese cinema. However, two aging actors who starred in King Hu's film, Chun Shih and Tien Miao, are in the theatre, and spend most of the screening enraptured by the image of their past selves; the latter is accompanied by his grandson (ironically, one of the only cinema-goers to be fully engaged with the film is one whose own temporal relation to *Dragon Inn* and the movie theatre itself is anachronistic). After the screening the actors regard each other and comment on the fact that "no one goes to the movies anymore." This is one of several moments in the film that recognize temporal displacement and the loss of particular experiences, an example of the boundary-crossing that cinema makes possible.

In its portrayal of a sparse audience, a few of whom are watching the film while others search for different kinds of connection and affective experience, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is attuned to the diminished experience of institutional cinema in the post-cinematic age, even as it inversely focuses on a traditional modality of consumption. While the broad impact of the post-cinematic is not explicitly addressed, the setting of the empty, diminished cinema points to the way that cinematic modalities have increasingly moved to other medial experiences, and leaving the theatre, once the center of cinematic culture, consigned to the margins of cultural authority. In its focus on the experience of communal cinema-going, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* offers a meditation on the uncertain fate of institutional cinema, and offers a eulogy for the end of a cinematic age. Furthermore, it links affective experience to time and space, and implicitly memory. For instance, the reaction of Chun Shih and Tien Miao to *Dragon Inn*, and their dialogue near the end of the film, shows the complex interactions of affect, memory, and subjective experience. Memory can be shaped by affect, and vice versa.

My use of the term dissipation, explained below, in this context describes how cinematic practices have become both scattered and less communal, but at the same time points to the particular structures of feeling that characterize the affective experience of the postmodern world of global capitalism: these include structures of alienation, of dispersal concomitant with ubiquitous networks, of the financial flows of global capitalism that determine new markets across and in spite of national borders, and of the prevalence of video screens and moving images, both for consumption and surveillance. I use dissipation here in its multiple connotations and associations, which I believe lend the word a salient descriptive power in the situation that *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* portrays. In its most colloquial sense, to speak of dissipation is to describe the process of slowly disappearing or becoming diminished in some way. I also allude to the scientific usage of the word, which describes the loss of energy by conversion to heat. Dissipation involves a loss of the thing in question, its gradually being used up.

This sense of dissipation in relation to cinema is suggestive of the diminution of collective film-going, which *Goodbye Dragon Inn* portrays. In the film's opening shots, the theatre is full, the audience enjoying a classic of Taiwanese popular cinema. But the bulk of the film portrays the theatre as nearly empty, the projectionist and ticket collector nearly alone in the cavernous building, unable to reach each other due to both the physical space and their own prescribed roles. The theatre itself is spent, dirty and damaged. The employees themselves reflect this dissipation, their affective demeanors—disinterest, lack of urgency, emotional inexpressiveness, loneliness—a key element in how Tsai creates an evocative and atmospheric portrait of diminished cinema-going. It is notable however, that the one point the ticket collector expresses a change in her affective demeanor is a moment when she pauses and allows herself to be caught up in *Dragon Inn*, the light of the screen dancing across her face. This is the sequence that departs from the "slow cinema" editing patterns of the rest of the film,

with the long takes replaced by a series of quick cuts back and forth between the screen and the ticket collector's face.

What is not shown in the film is the corollary of this empty movie theatre. In the post-cinematic landscape, film watching is increasingly becoming spread out as viewers consume more and more media alone, either on home video (DVD/Blu-ray discs, for instance) or, increasingly, through online streaming services such as Hulu, YouTube, and Netflix. This aspect of "dissipation" is reflected in the sense in which the term describes a waste or a squandering of resources: a loss occurred through carelessness or disregard for the resources at hand, in this case, the legacies of film history and the collective undertaking of film-going; it relates to dissipated or dissolute living, over-consumption, excess, and self-indulgence.

This understanding of dissipation in relation to cinema can be generally understood in the way that cinematic viewing practices have changed to allow for increasingly private and unregulated forms of film consumption like "binge-watching" (or, perhaps less openly discussed, the possibility of watching films on your iPhone or iPad in such private places as on the toilet). The public character of the movie theatre, in which being seen going to the movies was to partake in a particular form of modern life, is lost. The film touches briefly on this lost experience of cinema in the above-mentioned interaction between Chun Shih and Tien Miao after the screening, in which the actors reflect on the fact that no goes to the movies anymore. We can read this as a kind of waste, as none of the other patrons recognizes the fact that the stars of the film were present for the screening. A particular experience of personal engagement with history is lost on the viewers for whom the movie theatre space is not primarily a space for watching a movie.

Formerly public practices, such as cinema-going, become increasingly privatized in the process of dissipation. While the film does not go so far as to suggest that there are no cinemas beyond the one featured in the film where a viewer could see a film on the big screen, the dialogue between Chun Shih and Tien Miao suggests a general falling-off in cinema-going in Taiwanese (and broader) culture, not just at the Fuhe Grand Theater. Likewise, in this context, the consumption of particular images of private (or taboo, as in many of Tsai's films) acts become something different when done so privately, changing the character of cinematic consumption. The shared perceptive experience of publicly displayed images of private acts, such as sex, psychological violence, or humiliation, in which the viewer is made to experience the collective discomfort (or not) of the cinema audience, reminds one of shared human experiences. The move to private consumption, where such images are increasingly served up for individuals to consume on their own, changes the character of the affective experience, in which the pleasure and pain of other human beings becomes just another commodity.

In this meta-filmic discussion prompted by *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, I would suggest that the idea of post-cinematic affect can be characterized by an over-abundance of cinema. The idea is that the digital revolution has made cinema more accessible than ever before. However, even taking into account the black- and grey-market trading of film files on services such as BitTorrent, or the existence of unauthorized online streaming, a cursory examination of such services shows an overwhelming mass of cinema from both the past and the current era remains unavailable online or in any digital format (Dixon 2013; Marsh 2016; McAlone 2016; Petersen 2013). Such seemingly democratizing technologies, which ostensibly provide greater access to the classical and global art cinema fare, nonetheless still serve to privilege Hollywood and mainstream cinema, reinforcing the interests of global neoliberal finance, and resulting in the inaccessibility of massive swathes of film history. Arguably this is the larger context in which any notion of film as a distinct medium exists today. Therefore, dissipation is descriptive of both a loss and a kind of overwhelming force. Cinema-going has become dissipated in the post-cinematic era, in terms of the loss of the movie theatre as the site of institutional cinema, but also by the loss of certain kind of film history, even as at the same time there is ostensibly a surfeit of cinematic material for easy consumption. It is these specific aspects of dissipation—the loss of the theatre and the loss of a certain experience of film history, and thereby collective memory—that are the subject of Tsai's film.

3. Cinema-Going and Affect

One of the key notions forwarded in the turn to affect theory in the arts and humanities, as popularized by Brian Massumi and others, is affect's ability to "produce ideological effects by non-ideological means" (Massumi 2002, p. 40). Affect theory suggests that cinema's ideological effects are found not in the ability of a cinematic representation to structure a subject, but in its ability to express "a kind of free-floating sensibility that permeates our society today," without being "attributed to any subject in particular" (Shaviro 2010, p. 2). Bolstered by the findings of neuroscience, affect theorists turn attention to the neglected role that bodily affective forces play in reasoning and meaning-making. However, as Ruth Leys describes in her cogent critique of Massumi and others, "What the new affect theorists and the neuroscientists share is a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes 'too late' for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behaviour usually accorded to them" (Leys 2011, p. 443).

Are such theories of affect truly something new, or do they merely serve the same functions once performed by metaphors such as "subconscious" or "unconscious" thought? Such an account of the waning of conscious thought remains deeply appealing as it turns on a description of cinema that avoids placing too much emphasis on the notion of a viewing subject (here I refer to the concept of subject beyond that of a viewing body, but as a philosophical concept of a defined, stable source of self-knowledge. This conception of subjectivity is something that has been challenged by the discourses of postmodernism and posthumanism, in Jacques Derrida's challenging of the role of language as a structural model for meaning, and the general post-structuralist denaturalization of binary structures, for example), while acknowledging that any interpretation or meaning making is grounded in an embodied viewing experience. As Steven Shaviro describes it, "Our existence is always bound up with affective and aesthetic flows that elude cognitive definition or capture" (Shaviro 2010, p. 4). Therefore, the "affective subject" of the contemporary moment is one constituted by the various stimulating flows of media, finance, and the society of control, rather than the translation of conscious, perceptive experiences. In *Post Cinematic Affect* Shaviro notes how such a shift in experience is typical of contemporary global capitalism, which defies representation in its abstract "web of exchanges, displacements, and transfers" at the same time as it remains "suffocatingly close and intimate" in its intrusion into all aspects of life (Shaviro 2010, p. 36).

However, like for Leys, aspects of this articulation of affect theory do not entirely satisfy me: for one, because it does not account for the role that narrative continues to play in global cinema. Ideologically focused readings of films are, in the affective account, retroactive narratives that are created by a rational subject organizing the bodily affective forces that impinge upon them and are often seen as perpetuating master narratives of metaphysics and meaning. Affect is seen as liberating, precisely because it cannot intentionally recreate such narratives. What cinema studies requires is a way to describe the function of contemporary media works in a world where digitization and global capitalism have decentered cinema as the dominant cultural medium and have dissipated film-going as an experience.

In its elegiac tone, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* contributes to a certain kind of narrative that is anchored in its particular environment, one that focuses on space and time in a way that is lacking in narratives about more diffused modes of consumption. In its treatment of the loss of affective experience, the film holds up memory, enacted in particular cinematic forms and histories, as a potential mass structure through which to approach the question of subject formation, without falling back to positivist and metaphysical assumptions about the stability and legitimacy of such formations. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* makes a case for traditional cinematic modalities—of distribution, consumption, and, yes, narrative—to be refigured as radical spaces for the expression and constitution of subjectivities. The notion of a "death of cinema" (more specifically, "institutional cinematic forms") both engenders a transformation of, and results in a loss in the potential of the cinematic metaphor to express human experience. Thus,

in its treatment of affect, collective-historical memory, and embodied, subjective experience, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* acts as a focal point for these converging discourses.

The film is attentive to not only the cinema's diminishing role in the processes of globalization and modernization but also to cinema's simultaneous function as history and personal memory. As Ma notes, "*Goodbye, Dragon Inn* presents the screening of a film as a central narrative event, mirroring and implicating the situation of its own audience, but also further developing this reflexivity as the basis for a historical consciousness of the cinema and the subcultures to which it gives rise" (Ma 2010, p. 100). The historical consciousness that Ma identifies is an awareness of the place of the cinema in Taiwanese history, manifested in the form of *Dragon Inn*, as well as the spatiality of the theatrical space itself as a signifier of the urban relationship with modernity. In contrast, the post-cinematic moves the space for such expressions out of the darkness of the cinema and onto the portable and omnipresent screen, which in its ubiquity is both fragmented and pervasive. Yet, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* shows the impact of cinema history on personal experience and the way that collective and personal memory are merged in the act of cinema-going. The aforementioned scene when the ticket collector is transfixed by the dance of light on the screen is a striking example of the potential affective experience of cinema-going, as the monotony of the ticket collector's job is broken by her experience of the movie playing on screen. Such an experience would not be possible if she had to take out a portable screen to watch the film. The film highlights this example of the kinds of collective and the personal memory-making that are possible only in such an intentional space as the movie theatre.

Such changes I identify with the post-cinematic have enacted a change in the experience of modernity in the various urban centers of the world. As James Tweedie points out in his essay on Taipei and the globalization of the city film, "new studies of the cinema and the city [betray] an awareness that the experience of urban life has changed remarkably under the multiple pressures of globalization" (Tweedie 2007, p. 117). These pressures can be understood as extensions of the ubiquity of capital and are manifested in developments in digital technology that have reconfigured the relationship between the cinema and modernity. These developments include the ubiquity of cable television, high-speed internet, and smart phones. Arguably implied by the nearly empty movie theatre in Tsai's film, or at least symptomatic of it, the screen culture of the modern Asian megalopolis is defined not by long amounts of time spent in a movie theatre, but by people watching YouTube videos on their smartphones while riding the subway, or by the video billboards that seem to cover every building and wall in cities such as Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Taipei. The "cinematic city", as conceived of in classical film theory, is defined by different orders of relation between the viewers and screens than it is in the experience of the post-cinematic era, differences between public and private spaces, large and small screens, and different forms of agency in determining the mode of viewing.

In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the act of film-going is understood as something that is out of time: the emanations from its screen literally come from another era. The act of attending a movie in the theatre is anachronistic, as noted by Tien Miao to Chun Shih at the end of the film as they are leaving, "No one goes to the movies anymore." Consequently, none of the theatre's sparse crowd explicitly notices the two actors as the stars of *Dragon Inn*. The theatre itself is decaying and rundown. In one sequence, the ticket collector replaces buckets that fill with the water dripping from the leaking roof. The theatre is a place out of time, out of the past, and as such, its temporal existence is coming to an end. The images on the screen are present in front of the viewer, but they speak to a specific past in which an object or person passed before the camera.

In contrast, post-cinematic virtual cameras are no longer defined by this particular temporal configuration: for instance, video devices have the ability to live stream, radically shortening the distance between filming and viewing, and blurring the boundary between film-going and surveillance. Densen has described the post-cinematic camera as offering a direct line to our innermost processes of becoming-in-time, transforming the relation of the viewer and the camera to the world (Densen 2016). The traditionally conceived movie theatre then, as Tweedie describes it, is "rendered obsolete in an age

characterized by new media and consumption habits” (Tweedie 2007, p. 125). This obsolescence is signaled in the film by the nearly empty theatre, and in the decaying and worn out building.

This physical decay of the theatre is another example of cinema’s dissipation. As Jean Ma points out, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* eschews “any attempt to reconstruct an image of the theater in its former glory” (Ma 2010, p. 100), instead giving the viewer a detailed look at the decay and the deterioration of a once vibrant space. To use Ma’s language, the theatre in its run down existence points to the “anachronistic” nature of the theatre as both a site for the celebration of film culture, but also as an important destination for gay men in Taipei (ibid., p. 101). The film pays attention to the details of this space, to the seats, back rooms, washrooms, and the projection booth in almost over-sensuous detail. For instance, in one extremely slow take, the film tracks the ticket collector as she makes her way through the back hallways of the theatre to the projection booth, only to miss making a connection with the projectionist. It is in the detailed physicality and long takes portrayed on the screen that the distance between post-cinematic consumption and experience and the one in the film are made explicit. Rather than present for us the theatre in its glory, Tsai asks the viewer to contemplate the place of the movie theatre in the contemporary era, and thereby, implicitly, what (reduced, diminished, dissipated) place it might still play in film culture as a whole.

While it might be tempting to simply attribute the sensible differences in the experience of cinematic time to Jameson’s formulation of postmodernity and the flattening of historical experience, there is something else, in terms of the stimuli and affective dimensions that each results in. For instance, the darkened theatre focuses the eye in different ways than on a smaller screen, and the viewer has a different relationship to the home environment than to the public space of the theatre in terms of control of environmental factors and interruptions.

4. Temporality and Embodiment in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*

The tension between the decay and loss of the theatre and its ironically continuing importance plays out in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* through the intangibility of the cinematic memories that it portrays, an intangibility that mirrors the attendant impossibility of a metaphysical underpinning for the subject in the post-cinematic era noted above. Furthermore, the changes to the way that we experience the viewing of a particular film—which has material effects and constitutes a particular relationship to the self vis-a-vis the screen—are made manifest in the film’s attention to the details, both pleasant and annoying, of the theatrical experience. The material experience of film-going in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* can be seen in the ways that the various theatre attendees impinge on each other’s personal space, placing their feet in each other’s face, or crowding each other at a bathroom urinal, as the affective forces generate stimuli beyond the pleasures emanating from the screen: for the theatre goers, the sensations of touch and smell, of sticky floors or popcorn, that accompany the experience, go beyond the visual and aural senses that are primarily associated with the cinematic. Ironically, as noted above, the most notable moment of cinematic pleasure in the film is the ticket collector’s acknowledgement of the film on screen. Her pleasure is furthermore located outside the regime of capitalist consumption, as she has not paid for admission to the theatre. Instead, it is a momentary break from her job, the bulk of which involves cleaning the bathrooms, which the patrons use to cruise for sexual partners, and sweeping up after the lights go up. One of the film’s most striking sequences is the over 5-min long, stationary shot of the post-screening theatre, in which the ticket collector sweeps up and the viewer is left to reflect on the empty seats of the theatre.

I see this material experience of cinema-going as being something that is lost in the dissipated experience of the post-cinematic. The post-cinematic disorders the experiences of public and private in new ways. While the home viewing of films can be seen as the privatization of formerly public acts, the film-going experience portrayed in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is one of private, intimate moments that are enacted in public spaces such as the theatre. Ma suggests that “Such a manner of portrayal emphasizes the historicity of the theater, its anachronistic existence as a remnant of an obsolete and marginalized film culture, exemplified on the one hand by the golden age of the *wuxia pian* and King

Hu as the reigning auteur of this era, and on the other hand by a subculture of cruising that has marked the theater as a destination for gay men" (Ma 2010, p. 101). At the same time that the film offers a requiem for the movie theatre; it represents a kind of "queer nostalgia," to use Ma's terminology (Ma 2010). The thematic visibility of the gay subculture in Taiwan, relegated and repressed until relatively recently in that society, and in Taiwanese films more generally, belies the furtive, dark, hidden spaces of the theatre that are portrayed as the site of queer desire in Tsai's film.

Goodbye, Dragon Inn illustrates how the theatre space, in its public nature, creates the possibility for private, intimate encounters that are ironically dissipated in the post-cinematic. In one such illustration, the movie theatre's bathroom serves as a public/private space in focus. The sequence opens with Japanese tourist at the urinal, with two men, one on either side at the urinals next to him. The long line of empty urinals beyond them suggests that such anonymous intimacy is intentional. As they urinate, in a sequence that humorously seems to go long beyond what one might expect from the act of urination, two men exit a bathroom stall, one shortly after another, suggesting that they were engaged in some kind of sexual encounter in the stall. The movie theatre offers a space for such encounters, providing a kind of plausible deniability to those seeking gay encounters without being ambiguous about their desires.

Another such scene occurs in the dark and narrow back hallway of the theatre, as the Japanese tourist approaches another theatre patron (played by Tsai's regular collaborator, Chen Chao-jung) with a cigarette, staring intently at him as if wordlessly expressing a desire he himself is not aware of. After lighting his cigarette, Chen comments "Do you know this theatre is haunted? This theatre is haunted," and after pausing a moment, simply states, "Ghosts." The Japanese tourist moves intimately closer to him, placing his head on his shoulders until the other man leaves. As the stranger walks away, the Japanese tourist states, in Japanese, "I am Japanese." The entire sequence runs nearly three minutes with only the two exchanges of dialogue. The long take and dim lighting create a space for intimate encounters in a public space, between people who do not even share the same language.

In this way *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* links cinephilia and a certain experience of homosexuality as being out of time, and belonging to a different era, even as they find a full, or at least more diffused, expression in contemporary society. For instance, the ostensible triumph of gay rights in modern societies makes certain kinds of gay experiences obsolete: or, to put it another way, there is no need to cruise for partners in a movie theatre bathroom stall when one can celebrate one's desire openly and, in many contemporary societies, get married. Similarly, since cinema is everywhere and always available, why sit in the dark at a certain time and put up with the distractions and discomfort, as portrayed in this film?

This challenge to the notion of progress is essential to my reading of Tsai's film and the understanding of cinematic dissipation. While I have argued that the post-cinematic in one sense can be understood as the triumph of the cinematic over all other medial forms, there is a sense in which the particular affective experience of viewing the film in the theatre is significantly different from the normative mode of viewing in the post-cinematic era. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* articulates an asynchronous relationship with post-cinematic temporality, and points to the unique affective experience of the collective act of film-going.

Tsai's characteristic use of long takes and the theatre spaces forces the viewer to be attuned to the non-linguistic, phenomenological experience of the theatre space: noises, movements, and distractions that impinge upon a rational and affective body. A sense of the temporal is essential to narrativization, as in temporality's relation to the minimal structuring principle of repeatability or iterability; thus, cinema acts as the meeting point of the rational, structured self, and the affective structuring forces that I have identified in the film, including desire, enjoyment, and annoyance. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, in its attention to the bodily action of film-going, reminds us of the embodied act of viewing itself, and the way that time and space play out in experience.

5. Conclusions

Dissipation, experienced as the over-flowing of affect, rather than opening up the space for alternative subjectivities, is never attributed to any particular subject at all. What actually occurs in the post-cinematic era is a loss of particular cinematic experiences, even as the sheer number of cinematic experiences increases. The irony of the post-cinematic is that, through the proliferation of viewing practices, experience becomes more singular, less open to the affective flows of communal experience, and therefore more dissipated.

Goodbye, Dragon Inn offers a kind of elegy for such communal experiences, without pandering to nostalgic memory. While the loss of the movie theatre as a focal point could be seen as freeing, as post-cinematic images proliferate beyond the theatre space, the dissipated cinematic experience can actually be quite limiting. This critique of post-cinematic affects, rather than being reactionary or anti-technological in nature, stems in part from a critique of late-capitalism and its abstraction of affective experience, which dominates and shapes the range of experiences in the contemporary moment. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* points to the way that the dissipation of cinema-going has rendered it more disjointed, fractured, and ahistorical, and the loss of a particular regime of visual–tactile relations.

My use of the term dissipation has hinged on this question of the post-cinematic era being characterized by either a surfeit or waning of affect. The answer to this question will have significant repercussions for how we interpret the radical potential of post-cinematic technologies, and how global capitalism continues to shape the potentiality of cinematic experience. As the theatre space wanes as the locale in which the cinematic is primarily experienced, the affective impulses of the cinematic experience will still be experienced by viewing bodies through the mediation of a screen.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- 8½*. 1963. Directed by Federico Fellini. Rome: Cineriz.
- Come Drink with Me*. 1966. Directed by King Hu. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers.
- Contempt*. 1963. Directed by Jean Luc Godard. Rome: Rome Paris Films.
- Densen, Shane. 2016. Post-cinematic Affect, Collectivity, and Environmental Agency. Paper presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Atlanta, GA, USA, April 2.
- Densen, Shane, and Julia Leyda. 2016. Perspectives on Post-Cinema: An Introduction. In *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film*. Edited by Shane Densen and Julia Leyda. Falmer: Reframe, pp. 1–19.
- Dixon, Wheeler Winston. 2013. *Streaming: Movies, Media, and Instant Access*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Dragon Inn*. 1967. Directed by King Hu. Taipei: Union Film Co.
- Gaudreault, André, and Philippe Marion. 2012. *The Kinematic Turn: Film in the Digital Era and its Ten Problems*. Translated by Timothy Barnard. Montreal: Caboose.
- Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. 2003. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. Taipei: Homegreen Films.
- Hugo*. 2011. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Hollywood: Paramount.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Leys, Ruth. 2011. The Turn to Affect. A Critique. *Critical Inquiry* 37: 434–72. [CrossRef]
- Ma, Jean. 2010. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Marsh, Calum. 2016. It's hard out there for a cinephile: The annoyance of not being able to watch a video due to your 'region'. *National Post*. June 20. Available online: <https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/movies/its-hard-out-there-for-a-cinephile-the-annoyance-of-not-being-able-to-watch-a-video-due-to-your-region> (accessed on 7 July 2016).
- Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- McAlone, Nathan. 2016. Netflix's US catalog has 32% fewer titles than it did in 2014—Here's why. *Business Insider*, March 25.

- Pautz, Michelle. 2002. The Decline in Average Weekly Cinema Attendance, 1930–2000. *Issues in Political Economy* 11: 54–65.
- Petersen, Anne Helen. 2013. The New Canon. *LA Review of Books*. October 7. Available online: <http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/deartv/77/> (accessed on 7 July 2016).
- Rebels of the Neon God*. 1992. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. Taipei: Central Motion Pictures.
- Reitere, Elina. 2011. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003, Taiwan, Province of China). *Cinematics*. June 27. Available online: http://www.cinematics.iv/movie.php?movie_ID=8388 (accessed on 19 December 2018).
- Shaviro, Steven. 2010. *Post Cinematic Affect*. Washington: Zero Books.
- The Artist*. 2011. Directed by Michel Hazanavicius. Paris: La Petite Reine and ARP Sélection.
- Tweedie, James. 2007. Morning in the New Metropolis: Taipei and the Globalization of the City Film. In *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts*. Edited by Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Robert Chen. New York: Routledge, pp. 116–30.



© 2018 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).