



Representation of Space/Place in Tsai Ming Liang's *The Hole*

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Abstract

Place is a complicated concept in urban design literature that does not lend itself to a definite interpretation (Arefi, 1999). Different meanings and purposes can be transferred to people when they think about place; some emphasize the epistemological role of the place while others concentrate more on its ontological dimension. Discussion about representation of place has been a prominent thread in film studies. This is a traditional and worthwhile agenda, which has been addressed by film scholars since the 1930s. Although most film scholars work within an aesthetic theoretical framework, they rarely engage with urban design literature to address this question and little is known in the film field about urban design theories that can be employed to analyze a movie.

Here, through a case study of *The Hole* (1997), the most famous movie of Tsai Ming Liang, for whom spatiality is the biggest obsession, I aim to understand how theories of urban design can be used to analyze a movie. This paper argues that for Tsai, place is defined as an event, personal or political, rather than a fixed social or ontological concept and openness, and "change" defined the place instead of boundedness and permanence. Furthermore, this paper argues that Tsai creates a utopian cinema that is based entirely on the characterization of the place and marks the Hole as a cinematography report on space. In this regard, a utopian movie like *The Hole* can function as an educational tool that acts to spark a debate amongst citizens and essentially cause them to think critically about their relation to the world.

Key words: Space; Place; Tsai Ming Liang; *The Hole*; Urban studies

INTRODUCTION

Place is a complicated concept in urban design literature that does not lend itself to a definite interpretation (Arefi, 1999). Different meanings and purposes can be transferred to people when they think about a place; some emphasize the epistemological role of the place while others concentrate more on its ontological dimension. However, in general, it is possible to detect three schools of thought in relation to space/place theories: phenomenological, social constructionist, and multidisciplinary. The first approach is particularly interested in defining the essence of humans beings in relation to place, by emphasizing the role of physicality of place (Heidegger, 1977; Norberg-Schulz, 2007). The second approach is more interested in showing the place as a social construction shaped mostly by human agency (Harvey, 1996). The third approach aims to combine the strengths and weaknesses of the two previously mentioned methods by suggesting that the sense of a place is shaped both in relation to the physicality of place and human agency (Lippard, 1997; Relph, 1976; Thrift, 1994).

Discussion about representation of place and space (and urban space in particular) has been a prominent thread in film studies. This is a traditional and worthwhile agenda, which has been addressed by film scholars since the 1930s marked by the works of Arnheim, Bazin, and, and then the mise en scene and auteur critics of the 1950s-1960s, and later not then the contemporary film theorists of Baudry, Heath, MacCabe, and Bordwell and others. Although most of these film scholars work within aesthetic theories, they rarely sought to engage with urban design literature

to address this issue. This provides us with an opportunity to discuss about urban design literature and to know what lessons these narratives may provide in helping us analyzing the movie. In this regard, analyzing movies is crucial for urban design as movies characterize the way we built images of our world, and even because of the reflection of the flow from the camera's eye, the contemporary society can know itself (AlSayyad, 2006). As Morales has claimed, the metropolis has always been represented in various media through photography or cinema (Morales, 1995). Throughout history, landscape photography, aerial photography, photographs of buildings and people living in big cities, and movies constitute a principal vehicle for information that makes people aware of the built and human realities. The manipulation of objects captured by camera framing, composition, and detail decisively influence people's perception of the work of architecture photographed or filmed.

Given the disproportionate lack of discussion about urban literature in relation to film studies, and the importance of the relation between film and city, through a case study of *The Hole* (1997), the most noteworthy amongst Tsai's works, for whom spatiality is the biggest obsession, I aim to understand how theories of urban design can be used to analyze a movie and what alternative vision, cinema provides for urban design filed to create a space for maneuvers. This paper's major questions are: How is space conceived in the worlds of Tsai, in particular its relation to his renowned film *The Hole*? How do cinematographic images of his movies re-enchant the banal everyday and create a space for maneuvers? How useful are these alternative visions for thinking through the relationship between urban space and its dwellers? In order to answer these questions, I will first review the major theoretical concepts in relation to space/place theory in urban design literature. Then, through a case study of *The Hole*, I will reveal how the sense of place is pictured, discussed, or represented in the cinematic filed.

WHAT ARE SPACE AND PLACE?

There are three different ways to approach place in urban design literature: phenomenological, social, and multidisciplinary. The phenomenological approach formed in relation to Heidegger's writings on place (Heidegger, 1977). According to Heidegger, dwelling is one of the main capacities of human beings (Heidegger, 1977). Dwelling relates directly to "thinking". To be human is to think or reflect upon one's situation in the world and establish one's *project* therein. Thinking is how we become *aware* of ourselves and our *space*, and dwelling is an engagement of thought about the way that we relate to our surroundings. By analyzing the images of rural landscapes in Germany, Heidegger argued that architecture is a highly valued art capable of expressing

the essence of human beings. With this in mind, he defined "dwelling" as a term to express the situation when architecture becomes a place and lets a human "be" in the world and think about it. As soon as an individual builds his house on earth, he starts to live in the world; however, just when he is capable of dwelling, the world really becomes inside and he can experience it as a human being. Here, the act of dwelling is the way that he "is" the way that humans "are" on the earth; the activity which cannot happen at any type of building and needs a proper and well-elaborated form of physicality.

Inspired by this approach, architectural theoreticians like Schulz (2007), when discussing the sense of the place, mostly consider it as a feeling created by the physicality of a building, and they emphasized the role of physicality to understand the sense of place. For them, place becomes a concept when a building is built and a person can live in it, so the act of building a house is not merely a way to create a space for living; it is an essential condition for humans to come into the world, be in the world, possess a world, and think about the world. Given this, as Sack highlighted, the role of physical place in our world runs a lot deeper than all the social or political forces in creation of places. It is the essential forces that brings together these forces and in part produces them (Sack, 1992).

Contrary to the first group was a second school of thought in urban design that argued that there was no place before humans beings came into the picture; once there were humans the place emerged as men ascended to civilization. These scholars emphasized more the role of human agency and power structure over place. Given this, they argued that meaning formation of a place should be based on the way that human beings experience the world. In this context, they mostly argue about how places were socially constructed in the context of unequal power relations and how the discourse of domination and exploitation worked through the medium of place.

David Harvey is amongst the leading scholars in this school. By referring to urban landscapes of Baltimore, he argued that place is a social construct. In his words, "Place, in whatever guise, like space and time, is a social construct. This is the baseline proposition from which I start. The only interesting question that can then be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?" (Harvey, 1996, p. 261).

Saying that a place is a social construct means that a place is not natural and that its meaning is attributed to it by human forces. Accordingly, if human beings give meaning to a place, they also can undo this process. This thought produces profound implications, as accepting it means that human beings can change how things happen in the future by their own power. To argue that a phenomenon is socially constructed is equal to saying that humans are able to change place by their own power.

For Harvey, this concept of place has a deep political impact. As Harvey argued, place discourse has been

used most of the time by capitalist forces to create a safe exclusionary heaven to continue domination over human beings. In this process, he noted that the place discourse is used to construct us (people who belong in a place) and them (people who do not). Hence, a certain group is excluded based on race and class and sexuality in place-based environments.

Finally, authors like Henry Lefebvre, Edward Relph, and Nigel Thrift showed why none of the physicality of place and human agencies is sufficient to understand the complexity of place (Lefebvre, Kofman, & Lebas, 1996; Relph, 1976; Thrift, 1994). This category of authors aimed to broaden the social construction school of thought and link physical structures, human subjectivity, and human feelings to define place. In this way, these scholars encouraged readers to consider the place as an interconnection of bodies, objects, and flows. Place here is defined as an event, personal or political, rather than a fixed social or ontological concept. In this sense, openness and change defined the place as opposed to boundedness and permanence.

The most renowned of authors in this category is Edward Relph, who insisted that both physicality of a place and social parameters are essential to understand place (Relph, 1976). By developing the ideas of Heidegger and based on phenomenological¹ interpretation, and by reading of modern urban landscapes, Relph sought to built upon the ideas put forward by Heidegger and Shulz. He emphasized the role of physicality in the creation of place but contrary to Heidegger, Relph noted that a place, in a deeper sense, does not need any fixed location. For him, a ship constantly changing its location, a gypsy camp, and an Indian camp could be self-contained places. Furthermore, contrary to Heidegger, Relph thought that the meaning of place should be done first in relation to human understanding and not just through analyzing the meaning of its location. In harmony with the social construction school, Relph mentioned that the only way for human beings to be human is to be "in place" and know where they are. Given this, meaning formation should be based on the way that humans experience the world in relation to place. In contrast to the writings of the social construction group, Relph emphasized the role of human feeling in the creation of a sense of place. He stressed that with place, humans hold a deep unself-conscious association. People possess a personal experience with places; they have a feeling about them and identify with them. Places are at the center of their roots, they belong to them, they feel safe and secure there; places are fields of care and concern and points of orientation. Hence, Relph insisted that it

is not just the system of domination that shapes human subjectivity in relation to a place. Personal experience also has an important role in the creation of subjectivity.

By developing the ideas of Relph, scholars who wrote from the same perspective expounded upon human feeling and especially the concept that a place is not a fixed entity with measurable attributes. They mostly argued that places are never finished but always becoming. As an example, Seamon noted that through daily performances and participating, human beings become familiar with a place and consider themselves part of it (Seamon, 1980). Accordingly in their thoughts, human agency in place is not just controlled by structure or social constructs; this structure can be challenged by the daily and repetitive performance of human beings. As Thrift argued, places are occupied by individuals engaging in diverse activities, so they are never fixed but constantly changing (Thrift, 1994).

What can one conclude from the literature? Without doubt, one can agree with Arefi that place is a complicated concept which does not lend itself to a definite interpretation (Arefi, 1999). Different meaning and purpose can be transferred to people when they think about place; some emphasize on the epistemological role of place, while others concentrate more on its ontological dimension. Secondly, although urban designers discussed the meaning of place in different mediums like architectural environments, this question is rarely discussed in relation to art mediums like cinema. In fact, very few people refer to artistic mediums like cinema or photography to understand this issue and the way the space is discussed there. However As Roger argues, people's sense of environment in the city is a wholly artificial construct shaped indirectly through the mediation of an artist's gaze to regard certain compositions as more pleasing than others (Roger, 1997). So, a land never exists primarily as a landscape, and the formation of the former into the latter requires all of the artistic medium elaboration (Roger, 1997). The role of cinema in this regard is crucial; movies characterize the way we built images of the world, and even because of the reflection of the flow from the camera's eye, the contemporary society can know itself (AlSayyad, 2006). As example, the metropolis has always been represented in various media through photography or cinema (Morales, 1995). Throughout history, landscape photography, aerial photography, photographs of buildings and people living in big cities, and movies constitute a principle vehicle for information that makes people aware of the built and human realities. The manipulation of objects captured by

¹ Husserl's notion of intentionality aims to describe and understand phenomena as experiences wherein human consciousness takes in information and makes it into the world. According to Relph, while the meanings of places are rooted in their physical settings and activities, they are not the property of them but of human intentions and experience. Hence, what the environment represents is a function of our own subjective construction of it.

the camera framing, composition, and detail decisively influence people's perception of the work of architecture photographed or filmed.

Given the disproportionate lack of discussion about place in art medium and its important transcendental role—in the next part I aim to conceptualize how space is pictured and represented in cinema and what lessons can be derived regarding the relationship among spaces, places, and actors. To achieve this goal, I will analyze *The Hole*, a movie directed by Tsai Ming Liang. As Hsu argues, in Tsai's films, spatiality is his biggest obsession and spaces have always played important role in the narrative (Hsu, 2007). According to him, "Tsai's films are like an anthology of enclosed dwellings in which different types of enclosure, bathrooms, elevators, closets, hallways, apartments, cheap hotels, sauna bathhouses, theatres, etc., are meticulously filmed (Hsu, 2007, p. 137)". Before analyzing the movie and in order to help readers understand the context of the movie, I will first introduce Tsai Ming Liang.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION OF TSAI MING LIANG

Tsai Ming Liang, born in Malaysia and educated in Taiwan, is among the new wave directors in Taiwan who have a tendency to follow modernism/postmodernism aesthetics, minimalist style to explore various facets of contemporary Taiwanese society (Lim, 2007; Martin, 2007). As Lim argues correctly, Tsai's films form an interlinked series or cycles, with a few actors participating in several of his films normally playing similar roles. Given this, a collage of Tsai's work form an auteur type of cinema both technically and thematically. Technically, he is mostly famous for the recurrent use of long takes, deep focus and static camerawork, and created cinema that has become famous for its lingering quality. In fact, with the use of long takes, he built the ability to portray his characters in lonely situation for a significant amount of time. Lack of narrative momentum and psychology, and a focus on human physiology and bodily needs, also are prevalent elements in his movies (Luca, 2011).

Thematically, Tsai is mostly famous for representation of the marginality in cinema. Images of marginal sexualities, homelessness, women, and immigrants are prominent in his works, mostly due to Tsai's first feaatures, *Rebels of Neon God* (1992), *Vive L'Amour* (1994), and *The River* (1997), often referred to as Taipei Trilogy. Furthermore, representation of everyday life and private lives of individuals is another prominent theme in his work (Martin, 2007). His cinema depicts the images of solitary characters doing normal activities like eating, showering, masturbating, crying, urinating, wandering through the city. In his movies, most of the characters are *flâneurs* walking through the built spaces

created by city development as they explore the city's dark corners, back alleys, decrepit theaters, and so forth. Images of contemporary Taipei, but not necessarily nostalgic ones, characterize his movies. In this regard, he pays special attention to the problem of urbanization in Malaysia and he is, "particularly sensitive to the enormous speed of change in recent Taiwan society in terms of political climate, cultural ambience, and urban mentality" (Hsu, 2007, p.135). In these images, he is famous for representing the image that recreates the sense of alienation. Here, families are mostly dysfunctional and characters rarely engage in social contact. Sex is portrayed as a mechanical instrument without creating any emotional bond between characters.

THE HOLE: STORY

In a cadre of ten movies about what the year 2000 might look like, Haut et Court and TV/La Sept-Ane asked Tsai-Ming to direct *The Hole*. Considering the impact of global warming on human life, Tsai-Ming decided to direct a movie about the impact of a fictional epidemic called "Taiwan Fever" on human life.

The movie is set seven days before the year of 2000. Contrary to other works of Tsai, where most of the action happens in a city, here a grim apartment is used to set the movie. The movie starts with a dark screen and the sound of an ambulance siren. As the credits roll, we hear the voices of city dwellers on the radio and TVs explaining their dissatisfaction about the government order to evacuate their apartments. Among the people who decided to not quit are a man and woman who inhabit a shabby apartment building. The man is a shopkeeper who works below the apartment and the woman is a government employee. Due to the run-down nature of the apartments, the woman downstairs had to call a plumber to investigate a water leak in her unit. After visiting the apartments, the plumber locates a leaky pipe in the man's upstairs apartment. But, instead of fixing the leak and replacing the pipe, the plumber digs a hole in the man's floor and the woman's ceiling. In this case, although both have to face the deadly threat of Taiwan Fever, the situation for the woman downstairs is much harder than that of the man upstairs. Her apartment is flooded by a mysterious leak, and she also has to struggle with the man upstairs who continuously intrudes in her affairs by looking through *The Hole*, and also the unsympathetic male plumber who has no interest to fix *The Hole*.

In a conventional romance, the situation in which man and women were trapped in their apartment would lead to a happy ending through a series of comic incidents. However, *The Hole* did not follow the convention; instead what the audience is presented with in the rest of the movie is the recurrent themes discussed in Tsai's films, like the discussion of societal dysfunction, the isolation

and the loneliness caused by resulting alienation (Fred, 2000). Therefore, in this movie the woman downstairs and man upstairs do not fall in love with each other and Tsai uses the situation to discuss their gender differences and its impact on their power relationships (Chang, 2008). In this regard, the characterization of the spaces in the movie has an important role to transform the message of the movie.

REPRESENTATION OF "SPACE" AND "PLACE" IN THE MOVIE

In the movie, both the man and the woman live in identical boxlike apartments and the fact that they live on different floors has a fundamental role in their power relation (Chang, 2008). Consequently, at first it seems that space plays a negligible role in the story, but as the movie visualizes, top-down domination only becomes obvious after a hole, hereafter *The Hole*, is created between their apartments. In this regard, space does play an important role to convey the message of the film.

In general, discourses about space and place function in two ways in the movie. First, through the focus of the movie on *The Hole*, the director elaborates his perception about the functional role of space and place in the movie. Secondly, as a utopian movie that narrates the story of two individual at the end of the world, the director offers some innovative spatial utopian approaches to convey their message. In this regard, Tsai creates a cinema that is based entirely on the characterization of the place and marks *The Hole* as a cinematographic report on space.

THE FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTIC OF SPACE AND PLACE REPRESENTED IN THE HOLE

In one way, we can say that *The Hole* is not a story about two characters living at the end of the world. It is mostly a story of *The Hole* itself and how it transforms from a space to a place through different artistic strategies. The definition of Yi-Fu Tuan in relation to space and place is helpful to understand the way movies define these concepts, their interrelation and functions. As Yi-Fu Tuan argued "space and place require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). In harmony with Tuan's definition of place, the essential way that Tsai establishes place in this movie is repetition. *The Hole* created by the plumber is a good example of the establishment of place through repetition.

The two main actors of the movie return to the hole several times, and consequently that location develops into "centers of felt value" (Tuan, 1977, p. 4). Here, the male character gets in touch with *The Hole* on different occasions and at each level his feeling toward it sharpens. The first night, the man upstairs comes home in a drunken mood. As soon as he sees the hole in the floor, he vomits into it. The next night, he peeps across the hole to observe the activity of the woman downstairs. In this process, slowly and with repetition, the man becomes interested in the hole and eventually does not want anyone to take it away from him. As movie progresses, he does not let, for example, the plumber fix the hole when he comes back, and more interestingly, after the departure of the plumber, the man removes the debris around the hole, cleans it and lies down to it and caresses it. After a while, he places an umbrella into the hole, makes it bigger and collects the rubble. Most importantly, when he sees the woman downstairs get infected by the virus, he starts to cry around the hole. In fact, the creation of the hole has a direct effect on his life and transforms its meaning. Before the appearance of the Hole, his life consisted of doing repetitive routines: getting up early in the morning, using the elevator, working at his store situated at the ground floor, opening the door of the store, waiting for a customers, fetching a can of sardines to give food to a stray cat, and finally sitting down outside of his shop and drinking beer. However, after creation of the hole, he finds the ability to engage in new adventures, becomes more active in his apartment, and eventually tries to save the life of the woman through the hole.

The same process also happened for the woman. Although at the beginning, she considered the hole as a space to which she had no feeling and as a threat that needed to be blocked, patched, and erased, but as time passed, she becomes interested in the hole and considers it as a meaningful place toward which she shows emotion. For example, in one case, she starts to flirt with the plumber on the phone by looking directly at the hole. Here, the presence of the hole provided the opportunity for her to have phone sex with the plumber while at the same time having a sexual fantasy about the man upstairs (Chang, 2008; Hsu, 2007). In this regard, *The Hole* functions as an index to increase the desire of the female subject.

Tsai here portrays the place not just as a natural phenomenon but as an environment that has a political meaning. While the top-down domination only becomes obvious after a Hole is created between the apartments, as a place embedded with political implication, *The Hole* also gives the man an opportunity to see the suffering of the woman downstairs and help her. In this regard, *The Hole* helps the man to understand that patriarchy cannot simply be dismantled by efforts of the woman and those of the man are also necessary. In this regard, in the final scene of the movie, the man lifts the woman

out of her apartment by offering her his hand. This gives both genders an opportunity to start a new life devoid of differences, biases, and antagonism through the possibility that the presence of a place, here the Hole, created for them.

The way that Tsai characterizes the meaning of place means that, for the director, both physicality and social parameters are essential in understanding place (Relph, 1976). Before creation of the Hole, there was no interaction between two neighbors, so the act of building a Hole was not merely a way to create a space; it was an essential condition for a man and a woman to think about the world and understand its social, political, or cultural paradigms. Given this, Tsai considers that physicality of a place brings together these forces and in part produces them (Sack, 1992). However, as the movie shows, the place here is not merely a physical environment, but rather a contested site of gendered desires, fantasies, and power relationships that interconnect bodies, objects, and flows. In harmony with Harvey's position, discussed in literature, here the man upstairs could exercise power over the woman because his location at a higher floor gives him a better level of accessibility to place compared with the woman's (Harvey, 1996).

THE SPATIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF SPACE AND PLACE REPRESENTED IN THE HOLE: UTOPIAN IMPULSES OF THE HOLE::

In this movie, one can hear five lively popular musical numbers of the 1960s by Grace Chag, the Hong Kong singer and movie star. They are "Calypso," "Tiger Lady," "I Want Your Love, Achoo Cha Cha," and "I Don't Care Who You Are." Although these interludes are set in the same run-down spaces of the story's fictive world, they clearly are portrayed as ruptures in relation to the temporal continuum of the film's narrative (Ma, 2011). The presence of this music in conjunction with bleak structures of reality gives the possibility to read them as utopian impulses. Peggy Chiao argues that "these old songs and films represent a kind of utopia ... a beautiful world where vivid emotion can find a direct and externalized expression, by contrast to – or as a critique of – a social reality in which feelings are repressed and masked" (Chiao, 1998, pp. 12-13). In this regard, they are in sharp contrast with the rest of the movie and the relation between the music scenes and the rest of the film is full of humor, melancholy, and sadness (Neri, 2008). As Neri wrote, "we see the characters secretly watching each other from deserted staircases, and all of a sudden the music starts and the very same actors, dressed up in gorgeous suits, dance together and find the words with which to reveal their mutual love. Moreover, the girl is sicker and sicker, contaminated by the mortal virus that is decimating the population, and the next song is a funny

musical number based on the sneezing of the dancers. And it is only in the musical that the hole that divides the two apartments is crossed, and the couple can finally live out their romance" (Neri, 2008, p. 395).

Given their utopian impulses, to understand the spatial characteristic of the space and place in the movie, it is more relevant to analyze the movie in relation to utopia, as in utopia space has always played an essential role in construction of the genre. To achieve this goal, I will first define utopia.

Utopia is an imaginary society described in a great detail, which is generally located at a specific point in time and space and is presented to the contemporary reader as an infinitely better society than the one in which he or she lives. According to Choay, utopia is a literary story written in the first person in which two descriptions are introduced: a critical analysis of a society and the proposition of an ideal society (Merlin & Choay, 1988). As Choay argued, the space has a fundamental role in utopia as the ideal society is created and maintained in place by the mediation of a spatial model, a therapeutic and reproductive instrument.

In harmony with utopian structure, the Tsai-Ming movie has two parts: firstly, through the images of narrative, it created a Kafkaesque vision of a contemporary Taiwan society, and secondly, the images of music represent an alternative, utopian world. In the following section, the paper will analyze how space is represented in these two universes.

THE SPATIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF UTOPIA REPRESENTED IN THE NARRATIVE UNIVERSE OF THE HOLE

The narrative of the movie is a representation of the images of reality in Taiwan society. In these spaces, people live in a "Kafkaesque world where humans are constantly running the risk of being annihilated, destroyed, or regressing back to an animal-like status" (Hsu, 2007, p. 139). The mise-en scenes in these spaces are mostly designed to show the Kafkaesque world of the characters and to exaggerate the absurdity of living in such situations. Two strategic mise-en-scenes have been used in this regard: the strategy of deemphasizing narrative and that of creating mutual tension between spaces and bodies.

The strategy of deemphasizing narrative has a crucial role in the movie to transfer the critical message of utopia (Chen, 2007). In the Hole, dialogues are rare. In fact, less attention is put on the story; for example no background information is given about the characters. Given this, the camera of Tsai shows certain indifference to human interpersonal communication (Luca, 2011). Inversely, the director puts more emphasis on the spaces in which the actors are situated rather than the actors themselves

(Luca, 2011). Consequently, the Hole does not follow the conventional method used in the cinema in relation to space and body interconnection. In conventional cinema, there is a mutual relation between space and place, as each shot without a character is considered a dead time that can cause anxiety for the viewer and make the transition of the narrative problematic (Frgacs, 2000). In this regard, bodies are mostly situated at the center of the shot and as soon as they leave the spaces of a shot, a new shot will begin. It is safe to call this an anthropomorphic cinema, as it is defined mostly by the presence of a human body.

The conventional approach about the meaning of space is in harmony with Harvey's view about space and place, namely that place is defined by the presence of humans (Harvey, 1996). However, in the Hole, instead of directing the audience's view to a defined body in the scene and to make clear the relation between space and body, the camera often chooses to select several points of interest simultaneously and expand domestic spaces while neglecting the centrality of human bodies. For example, in the final scene when the man upstairs gives a glass of water to the woman downstairs, by situating the camera in the kitchen area, the director gives the audience a view of the run-down kitchen with its leaking water and simultaneously the images of the woman's body lifted up by the hand of man. Another example that accentuates the relation between space and bodies is related to the scenes where spectators could only view a part of the bodies that are positioned at an extreme edge of the frame. Finally, in the movie, there are several images of endless corridors that are often empty or inhabited by lonely characters. Framed centrally and through a wide-angle lens, these lengthy images of corridors with discernible end points provide a superabundant sense of spatial fullness that is in direct contrast with the images of lonely person walking through them.

Because of these unconventional techniques of Tsai in relation to space and body, bodies and spaces have a relationship of mutual tension that accentuates the loneliness of the characters. Here, no fixed body is considered as the source of power in the image, and it causes difficulty for the audience to know how to control the image and why. In this way, these images disrupt the audience's conventional ways of viewing films, in which the source of power is clear in the image.² This technique opens the possibility of viewing the film as a critique of contemporary society. The resulting images that have no traditional center of control can be read as a direct representation of modern Taiwan society, in which everything has little relation with past values as the traditional forms of life were becoming outdated. As a result, actors could be defined freer than ever before as their relation to other spaces and bodies in the movies is

less important, and they could freely walk as they like. However, they need to accept the fear of living in a world where nothing is known to them and where there is less information about the source of power and all human associations are ruled only by the logic of economy.

THE SPATIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF UTOPIA REPRESENTED IN THE MUSICAL UNIVERSE OF THE HOLE

The music of the movie is a representation of the images of alternative everyday spaces in Taiwan. In contrast to a Kafkaesque world, the movie represents a musical world characterized by sweet kitsch and visual excess. These spaces contrast with the bleak reality of constant rain and peeling wallpaper in the apartments. In all of them, the woman downstairs wears colourful clothes and sings high-energy songs. The movie provides spaces in which the woman and man, the very same actors, dressed up in gorgeous suits, dance together and find an escape from the banal and stilling reality and reveal their mutual love. As Hsu argues, "Her performance style here is campy, exaggerated, sexual and seductive in songs like "Calypso," "I Want Your Love," and "Vixen." She cavorts with the singers and dancers in the stairwells and elevators, spaces that used to be dull and confined but are now glittering with colourful light and glitzy beauty (Hsu, 2007, p. 144).

As Levitas argues, the function of utopia is not escape, compensation, or a description of a plan for the future; rather, utopia is mostly an educative and explanatory tool (Levitas, 1990). What one can see in the musical universe of the movie is in harmony with Levitas's ideas. First of all, the utopian images of the songs have an educative rule. Here, by using a utopian approach, the habitual values of man and woman are thrown into disarray; they escape from the reality of life that surrounds them in their apartments, and they enter utopia's proper and newfound space with an opportunity to educate themselves. So, in harmony with Levitas's arguments, in this movie, utopian songs are not just fantasy and a depiction of a world completely separated from the reality. As Ma argued, as film progress, we begin to discern a casual connection between the songs and the reality (Ma, 2011). For example, "the attitude expressed by the singer in Tiger Lady is anticipated by the woman's resistance to the invasion of her privacy, her declaration of romantic intent in "I Want You to Be My Baby" echoed in the coy glances that the woman shoots at the man as she lingers on the balcony, apparently aroused by his presence" (Ma, 2011, p. 131). Indeed as Levitas argues, the point in utopia is not to go elsewhere, but to use elsewhere as a reflection on where we are and to grasp the limitations and benefits of

² For more elaboration of this topic, please refer to Baudry (Baudry, 1974).

a utopian society that incorporates all of these elements. In line with Levitas's arguments, in the movie, through the utopian vision, the spectators can easily understand the limitations of their own society. So, thanks to Tsai's educative role of utopian visions, spectators can visualize a completed different society and ultimately diagnose the limitations of their own world.

The utopia visions also have an explanatory role in the movie. As Hsu argues, Tsai always use some tricks to transform the meaning of everyday spaces and to suggest that these spaces always contain other possibilities (Hsu, 2007). The musical world is characterized by kitsch and visual excess. In all of these scenes, the woman downstairs wears colorful clothes and sings high-energy songs. Through the use of visual excess, the director transforms the dull everyday spaces into a new environment that contrasts with the bleak reality that shaped them, and the musical songs in this movie in fact provide new aesthetic and cultural dimensions for spaces that we usually ignore. After seeing the images of songs in the movie, spectators cannot look any more at these everyday spaces with the same lens. They will start to transcend their meaning by attributing to them the transcendent quality of the images that have been given to them by utopian visions. The possibility to transform the meaning of everyday spaces supports my previous argument that for Tsai, place is defined as an event rather than a fixed social or ontological thing, which is characterized by openness and change instead of boundedness and permanence. Here, through daily artistic performances, the main actors transform the meaning of space. In this regard, the movie argues that the political structure of place can be challenged by the daily and repetitive performance of human beings in the form of art. Here, as Morales argues, the manipulation of objects captured by the camera's framing, composition, and detail decisively influence people's perception of the work of architecture photographed or filmed.

CONCLUSION

In *The Hole*, one is dealing with a cinematographic report on what a space is, what is its role, and how the space feels. Here, Tsai creates a cinema that is based entirely on the characterization of the space, since it is the duration of the camera on the space that establishes the meaning of the film, not the drama. This works due to the elaborate application of different mise-en-scene strategies used by Tsai, like the strategy of creating tension between space and bodies and the strategy of deemphasizing narrative. Rephrasing the famous Deleuze quote, it is safe to say that here action-images disappear in favor of purely visual images of what a space is, and the sound images of what it says. In other words, the Hole offers a type of cinema in which one action does not lead to another action, but that they are brought to a center, gathered up, and collected

by the fact that they all refer to a common *space*. This emphasis on film's mise-en-scenes and the role of space rather than narrative progression marks the Hole as a cinematography report on space.

Tsai's conception of place is similar to the way that place is defined in the writing of multidisciplinary groups in urban design literature. Here, place is defined as an event, rather than a fixed social or ontological thing. In this sense, physical structures, human subjectivity, and human feelings all define place. Tsai invite audiences to consider place as an interconnection of bodies, objects, and flows. Place for him is defined as an event, personal or political, rather than a fixed social or ontological thing and openness and change define the place instead of boundedness and permanence. Here, through daily performances, participation, and repetition, the main actors become familiar with the space, find feeling about it, and transform it to a place. In this regard, the movie argues that place is not just controlled by structure or social constructs; this structure can be challenged by the daily and repetitive performance of human beings, especially through the manipulation of art and camera and creation of utopian drivers. In this regard, the Hole uses some tricks to transform the meaning of everyday spaces and to suggest that these spaces always contain other utopian possibilities.

While on the surface this utopian cinema lets an audience investigate how space, time, and other contextual constraints affect the possibility of understanding a place, at a deeper level, it provide a possibility for an audience to grasp a more open, relational, and inclusive definition of place in which art could be considered as disruptive tool to re-enchant the meaning of space. As Levitas argues, the point in utopia is not to go "elsewhere," but to use elsewhere as a reflection on which we are and to grasp the limitations and benefits of a utopian society that incorporates all of these elements. In line with Levitas's arguments, in the movie, through the utopian vision, the spectators can easily imagine the limitation of their own world. In this regard, the Hole can be read as an educational tool to make the citizens think about their life in the world. Here, the movie can function as an educational tool to spark a debate among citizens to sensitize them to think critically about their world.

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