Temporality and the Modern Subject: Effects of Memory in Lai Sheng-ch'uan's *The Other Evening, We Put Up a Show of "Hsiang-sheng"*

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"Modernity" is in crisis in the west, not only because its original project has been "incomplete," as the contemporary German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas rightly proclaims, but the legitimacy of its "originality" must not be left unchallenged, according to the French post-structuralist critic Jean-François Lyotard. To Habermas, the "modern" captures the collective consciousness of we "moderns" and positions us in such relationships to our past, our tradition, and our history that in the end, it presents itself as the ultimate transition from the old to the new, the ultimate transformation of the "past" into the "present." In the rational framework of the Germanic mind, "post-modernity" – the irrational rupture of contemporary society – is a blatant evidence of "anti-modernity" and ought to be considered "false negation of culture."

To the equally non-compromising view of the deconstructionist, though, "modernity" implies a total disintegration of value-bound beliefs, and a recognition of the "lack of reality" of contemporary reality in those parts of Europe and America now labelled the post-industrial, late-capitalist West. As a corollary, Lyotard daringly represents the current state of sociocultural upheavals in the "advanced" cultures as a crisis of the "postmodern condition" – one in which all forms of totality, of what he calls "the grand narratives" have lost their credulity, and "language games" become our only tactics of survival.

Some of the implications of this debate for China's move toward "modernization" – culturally, ideologically and historically – will be

considered in this paper with respect to the specific conditions of (i) narrative temporality, (ii) the modern subject, and (iii) the effects of memory and the network of what might be called "memory relations" implied through the textual production of history, the past, or the time lost, hidden, in the unconscious underworld of human desire. Through an analysis of the treatment of time and the deployment of narrative strategies in a recent theatrical text by the contemporary Chinese dramatist Lai Sheng-ch'uan 賴聲川, I hope that not only the ostensible text, but also the unconscious subtext of our cultural dilemma might become more accessible to the modern mind in crisis.

The Other Evening, We Put Up a Show of "Hsiang-sheng" 《那一夜，我們說相聲》 was a theatrical innovation put on by the Performing Workshop (表演工作坊) of Lai Sheng-ch'uan in 1985. In a creative attempt never preceded by any other Chinese play-wright in the modern period, Lai uses the traditional form of *hsiang-sheng* (相聲, comic dialogue) to express his modernist view on the declining history of *hsiang-sheng* itself, now envisioned as a symbol for the entire tradition of Chinese culture.

Captured in a tragic-comical mode typical of the "modern" sensitivity, and brilliantly performed by the two comedians Li Li-sh'un 李立群 and Li Kuo-hsiu 李國修, who play the multiple roles of talk-show hosts, imitation geniuses and traditional *hsiang-sheng* masters Shun T'ien-hsiao 舜天嘯 and Wang Ti-pao 王地寶, *The Other Evening* is not only a story about our past, our history, our roots and our future, it is also an ambivalent representation of the possible links between tradition and modernity. Through remembering – through the remembrance of *hsiang-sheng* as a dialogic medium of cultural communication and historical representation from the early years of China's modernization to the present crisis in our modernization process – Lai and his performing team evoke among the audience today a distant reality, a forgotten history, an estranged feeling, and (yet) a sensitivity so familiar. Memory plays on the unexpected movements of time, plays on the uneven colors and shades of the remains of our past, and calls into existence, into doubt, the temporal directionality of the advanced, technologized development of our human values toward the unknown future of post-modernity.

This paper is, therefore, an attempt at tracing the effects of memory – the modern Chinese's representation of and communication with their past – on the construct of human subjectivity. By highlighting the productive "undecidables" in *The Other Evening*, I intend to look at a cultural text

that is both sensitive and tolerant to the disintegrating values of its tradition; I discover a subtext of culture that is both sensitive and tolerant to the "other" end of its history, its historical development toward modernization. I try to show how differences (in time, in value, between technology and passion, between utopia and nostalgia, between commodity and sensitivity) might be organized in such a way as to produce polyphony and dialogism. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotope" or the time-space construct of narrative, I argue that, for the modern subject in question, the "past" always finds its way to haunt the "present," to invest the so-called discourse-NOW, because of its paradoxical inaccessibility to us moderns, to the time-frame of our own historical presence, of our story-NOW.

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In the introduction to his play, Lai admits that *The Other Evening* is a representation of the modern men's relationship with tradition; it is not to be taken, however, as an evening show of *hsiang-sheng*, but rather as a dramatic performance that consists of a series of five *hsiang-sheng* shows. The ultimate idea, Lai maintains, is "to express [our] views on tradition through the very form of tradition" (*The Other Evening* 10). And this tradition, as it gradually becomes clear for Lai's audience, signifies – by virtue of its textual inscription in the story and history of *hsiang-sheng* – not only an ensemble of past shows, past events and past values reminiscent of the history of *hsiang-sheng* as an art-form, but the collective unconscious of a Chinese people lost amid their ambivalent memory of what constitutes "modern history" for them.

To remember, to represent history is to cast the specific relationships between subject and event into a continuous, temporal process – to delimit a time-space of discourse for the historical subjectivities to take shape in a continuum. A look at the overall narrative structure of *The Other Evening* may help us understand how subjectivity is constituted through discourse, and history activated via narrative:

Discourse Time (Plot)	**Subjects of Discourse**	**Story Space (Locale)**
Prologue: 1985	Nightclub hosts: Comedians A & B	The Chinese Capital Club, Taipei
Episode #1: "Love in Taipei", 1985	*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, modern time Taipei	Taipei: City Life
Episode #2: "Television and I", 1962	*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, Taipei in transition	Taipei: Rural Life
Episode #3: "Air-raid Shelter", 1943	*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, wartime Ch'ung-ch'ing	Ch'ung-ch'ing: Life in the seclusion of a private Shelter
Episode #4: "Memory and Amnesia", 1925	*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, Pei-p'ing after Revolution	Pei-p'ing: Life remembered and forgotten
Episode #5: "Terminus", 1900	*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, Pei-p'ing before Revolution	Pei-p'ing Life experienced as dreams and habits
Epilogue: 1985	Nightclub hosts: Comedians A & B	The Chinese Capital Club, Taipei

It is obvious that the theatrical time-space constructed as the play moves from the Prologue to the Epilogue is undoubtedly one of discourse – for it is through acting, remembering, and story-telling that the narrative engages both the subject(s) of enunciation (Lai's actors/Comedians A & B/*Hsiang-sheng* actors Shun & Wang, at various stages of the play) and the subject(s) enunciated (Characters or personae of dramatic representation, evoked through and within the discourse of the various "speaking subjects"). And the entire discourse of "The Other Evening" is triggered off by the sudden disappearance of the two famous *hsiang-sheng* actors Shun and Wang. The loss of the authentic masters, and hence of the authentic art of *hsiang-sheng*, enables, or rather, forces the two comedians A & B to assume the roles of Shun and Wang, and opens up an occasion for them to lead the audience into a journey of time, a journey in which their desires and anxieties, their laughters and sorrows, would be given channels of expression.

The journey, however, is ultimately a journey into the past. Another look at the overall structure of the play would tell us that its plot is organized in a reverse chronological *order*; or that, to use Gerard Genette's distinction put forth in his *Narrative Discourse*, the Discourse Time reverses the Story Time:

Discourse Time (Plot)		**Story Time (Chronology)**	
Prologue	1985	#5	1900
#1	1985	#4	1925
#2	1962	#3	1943
#3	1943	#2	1962
#4	1925	#1	1985
#5	1900	Prologue	1985
Epilogue	1985	Epilogue	1985

If *The Other Evening* is a drama about modern men's remembrance of tradition, the presentation of its own history (as a modern-day *hsiang-sheng*) – the re-presentation of the past events that constitute that history – must take place *as* theatre in the form of a huge *temporal misplacement.* Some characteristics of this chronological disorder, of what Genette calls "anachrony," are as follows. (i) As evidenced by the different arrangements

of Discourse Time and Story Time, the plot consists of a significant interruption of time that lasts, on stage, for a period of five episodes, almost the entire length of the performance as a whole. In other words, instead of following the normal sequence of temporal/historical progression, the plot is invested with a giant spatio-temporal dislocation which is in turn held together by a chain of five anachronous (i.e., chronologically misplaced) events. (ii) Each episode in the play, as an anachrony, moves increasingly away from the moment of discourse at which the narrators and the audience share a common "presence." Thus, as Lai's actors take on the roles of two local comedians playing the master *hsiang-sheng* couple Shun and Wang, and as the audience are well aware of the transmutation of these personae and the time-space realities they imply, the plot proceeds in reverse order (of time) and carries the viewers, together with the subjects they view, further and further away from the initial frame of discursive enunciation and theatrical communication. Hence, while the Discourse Time runs against the Story Time and moves gradually and systematically into the past (from 1985 [Prologue], through 1985 [#1], 1962 [#2], 1943 [#3], 1925 [#4], to 1900 [#5]), the span of time, or what Genette calls *distance*, between the Discourse-NOW and the inceptions of the various anachronies grows greater and greater.

The combined effect of this plot development, of this nostalgic journey into a lost tradition, is to create an enormous disorder in the audience when, after seducing them through episodes of increasingly distant (hence difficult) memories, the master imposters Shun and Wang (now of Pei-p'ing, 1900) pronounce their very non-existence by remembering, re-enacting, the events that marked their own deaths. The temporal displacement is completed as the narrative circuit comes full circle, and, in the Epilogue, Discourse Time and Story Time meet for the first time (but also the last) in the entire performance of *The Other Evening*, when we all, audience and actors, put up a show of *hsiang-sheng* and enjoy (for we do) that show of disorder, misplacement and anachrony highlighted as a result of a theatrical game played on our reluctance – and our desire – to remember.

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The anachrony begins with an episode entitled "Love in Taipei," through which comedians A and B, in an attempt to carry on entertaining the audience in the absence of the renowned experts of *hsiang-sheng*, Shun and

Wang, improvise an encounter by chance between Shun and a woman who (when she intended to break up with her boyfriend) has dialed the wrong phone number. The imitation *hsiang-sheng* put on by the two nightclub hosts (by the two TV stars now acting for Lai's Performing Workshop) is an explicit parody of the sterotypes and clichés dominating the lover's discourse in contemporary Taipei. And just as A and B's account of the supposed meeting in a city café between Shun and his "lover" is triggered off by an accident (the disappearance of the "real" masters of *hsiang-sheng*), the lovers' discourse is also made possible by a seemingly un-premeditated human error (the mistaken phone call). For mistaken identities, it does seem, would provide a framework for the anachronous adventure into the past to take shape. It gives the audience an excuse to appropriate the theatrical text (with its well dislocated time-space frames of reference) for their own nostalgic walk through history. Each individual – each subject of discourse found speaking and spoken to within the theatrical anachrony of mistaken identities – is thereby licensed to organize his or her sense of history, of tradition, with reference to the evoked stories generated by the disorder of time and temporal representations. And, to borrow the words of Robert Weimann, "the concept of tradition is [therefore] unthinkable without the appropriation (or repression) of the two contradictory orders of language and temporality within, and through, the use of [here, the theatrical] text" (*Structure and Society in Literary History* 274). Hence, when (all of a sudden) Shun tells Wang that he seemed to have met the woman before (in their previous lives) in the T'ang Dynasty, and that when they looked into each other then in a teahouse in Ch'ang-an, he felt (all of a sudden) that they had met before (in their previous lives) in the War Era, and so on (*The Other Evening* 66-7), the past is obviously being constructed, or evoked, as a chain of multiple and perhaps mistaken identities. It is a chain of memory governed, however, less by principles of recognition (for Wang refuses to listen to Shun reconstructing the entire chain) than by principles of displacement and dislocation (evidenced in the last scene of the episode, in which, Shun, running after his imaginary lover, disappears with her amid a crowd of their contemporaries).

It is clear, therefore, that the evocation of whatever that would be experienced as "the past" is based on a theatrical, textual principle of non-representation. For tradition seems to sway constantly on the verge of disintegration; to know and understand it means (necessarily) to re-present it as that which it is not, or else the representation (of an absent reality)

will never be realized. In this sense, Lai's drama is produced to demonstrate how, in remembering our "past," we would have to *objectify* it (in the true sense of the word). We, audience and performers, in putting together our show of *hsiang-sheng*, would have to throw our "past" away, throw it out and cast it off – cast it against the common ground of our communication which is the incidental time-space construct of the theatrical text itself. Very appropriately, or so it seems, Lai opens his show for us with these remarks by the two comedians:

B: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen!
A: This is a very special evening tonight!
B: It surely is.
A: Whether we know one another or not, the very fact that we are sharing our time together under the same roof this evening means that there's something unusual about it.
B: Surely.
A: A very special arrangement of destiny!
B: Surely ... This? ... Is this a special arrangement of destiny?

(*The Other Evening* 42)

Destiny, like history itself, must be objectified and articulated before it is marked off as a region of lost memories, or a span of forgotten intervals hidden in the continuum of all the events designated as "past."

The Other Evening, as I have indicated, remembers history and relates us to historical events by evoking those moments of the "past" through the dramatic and discursive re-enactments in episodes of imitation *hsiang-sheng*. Since it is drama, each re-enactment by the two imposters of *hsiang-sheng* masters attempts not only to conjure up within the theatrical framework events which happened *then* (in 1985, 1962, 1943, 1925 or 1900), but also, for the most part, to bring home to the audience the temporal realities of the remembered past by maintaining the *duration* of its discourse equally as long (or as short) as that of the story related. Genette characterizes this relation between the Discourse Time and the Story Time as that of a dramatic "scene," in which, as we all know, the time spent in presenting an event roughly equals and coincides with the time needed for that "story" to be represented. A scene is conventionally deemed

"dramatic" when it allows an audience to *live through* (as it were) the events thus conjured up. This device of drama, obviously enough, forms the dominant mode of presentation used throughout *The Other Evening.*

Take Episode #2, "Television and I," as an example. Here, Wang speaks about how the new television set he bought (being the only TV set in the whole village) has attracted hundreds of uninvited guests to his house all at a time. The entire scene of this episode is a farcical demonstration of the hyperbole by Wang, who, in a typical *hsiang-sheng* manner, constantly shifts roles between a partner of Shun the master-actor and an owner of a new TV set trying desperately hard to entertain a mob of fellow villagers that come to attack his homely peace on an unseemly Sunday morning. He reconstructs the scene for Shun and the audience by reliving the most dramatic moments of it. And while showing us the highlights of the event, he takes time to articulate the drama in as many words as it would have been necessary to organize his initial responses with. The result, I suggest, is a Discourse Time that would last long enough *for* the audience to experience its duration as that of the actual Story Time. In other words, though the theatrical discourse is spoken in the non-representational mode of the master narrators, and though as audience of *hsiang-sheng* we are well aware of that, we still feel the reality of the Discourse Time as if we were confronting the Story Time without mediation. Temporality, manifested in the duration of such a dramatic scene, is by itself the articulation of narrative verisimilitude.

The reconstruction of a scene is certainly not the only device employed in the theatre to align narrative time with reception time. Very often, the playwright has to resort to the use of summary techniques in bringing about certain highlights within a particular level of the enunciated. In Episode 2, for instance, Wang must describe how some three hundred unexpected guests from his village managed to squeeze into his house to see his newly bought television set. To relate to his audience how the crowd of enthusiastic viewers took turn in entering the house and taking their seats in front of the TV, Wang summarizes:

> An half-hour shift would take place automatically: those who had a seat must now stand, and those who stood can now find themselves a seat; then, an hourly shift would also be observed: those inside the house must go outside; those outside, move in.
>
> (*The Other Evening* 87)

Hawkers, we are told, were able to find their ways through to sell snacks to the audience in Wang's house. And during the shifting periods, the situation was comparable only to the "turmoil and chaos of war" (*ping-huang ma-luan* 兵荒馬亂) (*The Other Evening* 90). The verisimilitude of these details, it is obvious, would not have been rendered possible without what Genette calls the *summary* device, through which the narrator would reproduce the duration effects of the Story Time within a much shorter span of Discourse Time. The time of representation, in other words, captures – by reducing – the actual duration of the time represented. By focusing on the level of enunciation, the narrative discourse condenses the time that is spread out on the level of the enunciated.

If the effective relation between Discourse Time and Story Time is best organized in drama by the "scene" (in which DT = ST), and in narrative by the "summary" (in which DT < ST), then with *The Other Evening* the two ways of representing duration in text come together and interact freely with each other. For the play, as we know, is as much a dramatization of several *hsiang-sheng* discourses as a narrativization, a narrative performance of a larger *hsiang-sheng* which is in turn the summation of a series of seemingly unrelated dramatic moments. The fascinating effect of this is brought out in a most hilarious fashion in Episode #3: "Air-raid Shelter." There, the Shun and Wang of wartime Ch'ung-ch'ing carry the audience way back to the 1940s, when Japanese airplanes constantly bombarded the city, then considered the last front of defence for China. In a scene set against the historical backdrop of China on the verge of disintegration, Wang relates to his friend Shun, a fellow citizen and *hsiang-sheng* actor of Ch'ung-ch'ing, how he spends his life regularly inside the protected area of an air-raid shelter which he shares with only a couple of close (i.e., relatively well-off) friends. With the most skillful techniques of *hsiang-sheng*, Wang demonstrates to us how life could be within such a privileged, private shelter. With exaggerations of the best comical sort, he shows us all the routines of life (all the extravagant eating and drinking habits) that were dutifully maintained by many a peace-loving, peace-endurable Chinese. The result, all in all, is a comedy of the best tragical kind.

Much of the comedy is created around a huge, 400-year-old bottle of wine that was handed down from history by the ancestors of Lao Ts'ui, the owner of the private shelter. To pass time, to live their lives inside that hidden corner of history in a little known part of Ch'ung-ch'ing, Lao Ts'ui was generous enough, determined enough, to dig up that invaluable

bottle of wine which his family, since the time of Ming Dynasty, had treasured up for future use. With his heavy Szech'uan accent, Lao Ts'ui seriously pronounces that the wine "has a history"; and in so many words he thus recounts to his friends in the protected shelter and to us audience in the protected theatre the unnamable history of some powerful spirits treasured up in the dark realms of our collective memory (*The Other Evening* 107). Similarly, after drinking from the deep secrets of the wine, Lao Ts'ui recites, from memory, his version of the complete Three Hundred Verses from T'ang Poetry (*T'ang-shih san-pai-sou* 唐詩三百首), thus:

> Wang (impersonating Lao Ts'ui, with his heavy Szech'uan accent): *T'ang – shih – san – pai – sou –*.
>
> (*The Other Evening* 111-2)

History, in other words, is never presentable in its entirety; and any form of totality can only be evoked precisely as such, at the level of representation, through contracted *forms* of its enunciation. For all forms are by nature contractions, much as history, much as memory is by nature the drawing together of minute details or master discourses of our life for which the subjects of enunciation are thus made responsible. As subjects of these discourses, the audience must be ready to both receive and deliver an interpellation. Faced with the articulation of history, or with the reconstruction of memory, one must be ready to assume the role of an enunciating subject – to speak up (to spit it out) and make oneself heard and recognized among the unlimited plurality of voices all competing for the ultimate expression.

And toward the end of this expression, relations of time are marvellously manipulated for the best effect. Contracting (or stretching) the narrative form, by contracting (or stretching) the temporal form, becomes easily the major device used here to control the duration of the theateical experience. The different relationships can be tabled thus:

	Discourse Time	**Story Time**
1.	[Wang: *T'ang --- shih --- san --- pai --- sou ---*]	[Lou Ts'ui: *T'ang --- shih --- san --- pai --- sou ---*]
	[DT] = [ST]	
	Relation : Scene	
2.	[Lou Ts'ui: *T'ang --- shih --- san --- pai --- sou*]	[The signified time/history/ memory of *T'ang-shih san-pai-sou*, the Three Hundred Verses from T'ang Poetry]
	[DT] < [ST]	
	Relation : Summary (through farcical contraction)	

By the same token, when Lou Ts'ui attempts to recount to us the "history" of each and every minute detail of life locked inside his private cell, when he proceeds to relate to us rather automatically the story of either a wooden horse (which he used to play with as a child) or a bamboo stick (which he now used to stir the wine), nostalgia takes over and memories of any length are contracted – or rather, stretched out – into the monotonous form of an unending genealogy (*The Other Evening* 107). The dramatic effect of this is pure farcical absurdity, whereas the ideological, mnemonic effect is to drive home the idea that while every bottle of wine "has a history," its persistent continuity often remains an inarticulate flow of undrinkable spirits on the level of conscious representation. The subject of history becomes a subject of memory – lost, remembering, lost again, remembering once more, never confident enough to speak unambiguously of "the past" as a living presence.

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Elucidating Lacan's psychoanalytical contribution to our understanding of narrative temporality, Ronald Schleifer remarks that "time exists between the power of its illusory felt presence and our articulated knowledge of it which . . . erases its presence" (881). Citing Heidegger, he also reminds us that in narrative, "temporality is not a thing . . . but a 'concept' that

must be represented" (877). With *hsiang-sheng* – whether as narrative or as theatre – time dwells in the form of its re-presentation. As order, as duration, temporality comes with the narrative, with the drama, and through its particular trajectory in the theatrical space, it walks its way down the stage, into the auditorium, and captures its subject speaking, laughing and enjoying himself, articulating herself, as an illusory presence, a phantom reality.

To articulate time, therefore, is not only to objectify and represent it; it is, in the last analysis, to erase the very object of its representation, and nullify it through the process of its very articulation. This is what Lai allows his two *hsiang-sheng* actors to do (to us) in the last two episodes of his play. In Episode #4, "Memory and Amnesia," Shun holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge in Human Memory and is testing his theory on the memory of Wang. It is Shun's belief that since Wang claims to have an excellent memory, the latter must live a very painful life. Remembering, as the self-acclaimed mnemonist argues, naturally entails suffering – for the past is apparently dominated, in this case, by moments of painful experience (the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 being one of those moments highlighted in Wang's recollection). Subjectively, however, Wang refuses to be named the unhappy one; he would insist, to the point of absurdity, that remembering all that is to be remembered, he leads a most happy life nevertheless. Their argument, of course, can come to no end. Meanwhile, the expert's own ability to remember is questioned. Without a second thought, Shun puts himself in the category of the other extreme. He is proud of his total lack of memory, for amnesia grants him happiness – for, presumably, according to my earlier assumption, to remember nothing is to represent no "past," to articulate no "time," to refuse to objectify, i.e., to relate oneself in relation to another, to nullify (in effect) one's sense of being. To thus forget oneself, forget your time and your history, is (ironically enough) to be happy.

And yet, given his amnesia, Shun must at least remember something. He must represents himself, projects himself through the memory of some of his "past," of part of his "history." For as a modern man, he must be able to position himself in relation to tradition and organize subjectivity in terms of temporal, i.e., memory relations. The metanarrative, though forgotten, must finally be retold in different time and space; its traces would have to be remembered – in the memory machinery of the theatre – by different subjects, through different discourses, with the power of a collective

dreamwork. It is to these effects, I believe, that Shun tells his *hsiang-sheng*, and remember his only "past," as the story of life and death. With vivid details, he relates to the audience how he was born – how he took the trip into this world from out of his mother's womb; he relates to us how he dies, how he has died, how we all have died before – how he walks in his own funeral procession, how he walks himself to the verge of this world in a mood of dreamy nostalgia, a time of some future forgotten.

"Memory and Amnesia" allows – compels, the audience to think through the present via the collective act of remembering. Insisting that "everything has a history," memory evokes the past as a present, and systematically occupies the subject of history, seducing her to tell a story, to invent a narrative, and imagine the impossible, the unknowable. For, as Richard Terdiman points out in his recent article "Deconstructing Memory," the essential power of memory as a discourse lies in its "unforeseeable *productivity* of its representation" (29). Cultural crisis, in many ways, is therefore a mnemonic crisis as well, for in a period of stress, "a culture's text *do nothing but* register time" (18). If the collective memory system of a culture is "the mechanism by which ideology materializes itself" (20), then *The Other Evening* might well be read as a theatrical recollection and reproduction of those traces of history that allow us to witness how the "past" invests the "present" through imaginary discourses, and see how "history became the discipline of memory" (19).

And though we can have no real memories of the "future," its presence is accessible to us through the temporal, narrative and ideological relations with which we link it with the "past." We see our future, we imagine the time ahead of us, when we look back into the past and recognize how we are here today. Death is regulated by life, which is in turn made possible by previous memories of death, and of birth, etc. Shun demonstrates this effect of memory through his "soliloquy" in Episode #4, just as Wang shows us, here and now, in the theatre, in Episode #5, how he *dies*. He cannot remember the Great Earthquake, but can remember himself sleeping right through it. When he awoke his house was gone: he must have gone as well, himself. But he remembers nothing specific about that disastrous event of history. Instead, he recalls how he was fascinated by the unending funeral processions. Some very extraordinary by-products of the Earthquake were brought into the procession of history – coffins from all over China. These, the living dead remembers.

But this is not all that is remembered. On the very same day, when

the earth quaked, Wang dreamed that he was on the stage, alone, facing no audience, telling endless stories to an empty auditorium, creating timeless soliloquies, uttering inarticulate *hsiang-sheng* narratives without a partner. All one remembers is, in a way, the eternity, continuity and inevitability of time itself. And yet not "time" as an abstract, transcendental "idea," but "time" as a concrete "thing," a material sign, a cultural narrative, a discourse of memory. *The Other Evening* brings home to us a strong sense that the "past" – that artifice which needs to be represented – tends to slide into the amnesia of history if it is not constantly retold in narrative. The modern subject would be lost as well, if history must evade memory. For, as Terdiman puts it, "when time is out of joint, nothing preoccupies the mind as much as time. The pasts invests the present because of its paradoxical inaccessibility" (15).

And so, when Shun and Wang the *hsiang-sheng* masters allow us to remember ourselves in the theatrical time of *The Other Evening*, and when comedians A & B bring us back to the nightclub of Taipei, we must agree, and will remember, that it was indeed a very special time we had, *The Other Evening*, when we all, you and I, put on that show of *hsiang-sheng*, and put that up against the fading memory of our history, against the backdrop of our collective unconscious.

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