

## Tsai Ming-Liang, *What Time Is It There?*

What could drive a full-grown adult to pee in a bag? Early in Tsai Ming-Liang's tender new film, *What Time Is It There?*, a young man named Hsiao Kang tiptoes through his family's silent apartment in his pajamas. He pauses near the bathroom, listening, poised on his toes like a ballerina. Then he dashes back to his room, where he fishes a plastic bag out of the garbage and empties his bladder.

Hsiao Kang's skittishness is on account of his father, who has died only a few days before. Afraid the old man's spirit still lurks in the apartment, Hsiao Kang cowers in his room by night and seeks distraction on the job by day; he works as a street vendor, hawking watches out of a suitcase. After he sells his own watch to a young woman named Shiang-Chyi who is leaving for Paris, Hsiao Kang channels his grief into a fixation on her and the French capital. He begins to set all his wares to Paris time and to fiddle with Taipei's public clocks as well. Meanwhile, with Hsiao Kang's watch on her wrist, Shiang-Chyi drifts alone through Paris and finds herself troubled by ghosts of her own.

As in much of Tsai's previous work, the characters bend under the weight of their unresolved relationships. But this film also carries an obvious personal charge. Both Tsai and

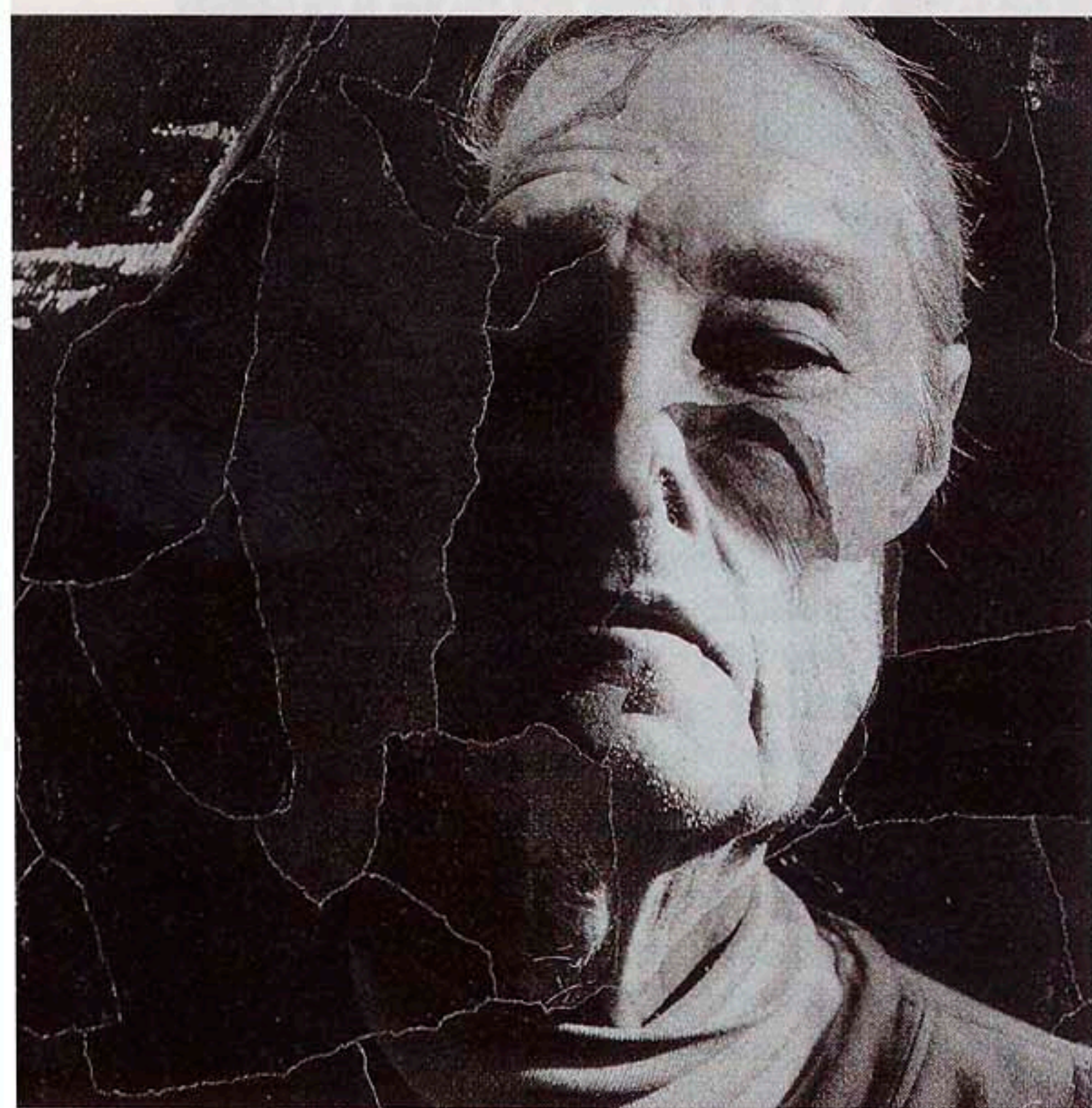
the star of all his films to date, Lee Kang-Sheng, lost their fathers in recent years, and the somber, melancholy tale feels like an effort on both men's part to find closure. When Hsiao Kang's Francophilia leads him to purchase a video-disc of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Tsai doffs his cap to the French master of this sort of diaristic moviemaking. (Truffaut's own longtime collaborator, Jean-Pierre Léaud, makes an appearance, turning up as a middle-aged *dragueur* in a Paris cemetery.)

Even when the film treads on messy emotional terrain, it remains carefully controlled. Tsai's camera never budes, and he builds his narrative from meticulously framed shots. His subdued palette of muddy greens, gelid blues and chalky whites blends Hsiao Kang's Taipei and Shiang-Chyi's Paris into a single, washed-out urban landscape. But the film isn't entirely stiff and ponderous. Tsai's touch is gentle, and the film's abiding sadness is all the more affecting for its hints of sly humor—as when Hsiao Kang's mother begs him to spare a cockroach for fear it is his reincarnated father.

**WILLIAM COHEN**

Tsai Ming-Liang's *What Time Is It There?* was released by Winstar Cinema in January 2002.

## Chambliss Giobbi



Chambliss Giobbi, *Combined Head of Edward and Elinor Giobbi*, 2001, Collage and beeswax, 12 x 12".

Chambliss Giobbi's fractured images reverberate with rhythmic patterns of meter and timbre. He takes black-and-white photographs of heads, limbs, bodies or

landscapes, tearing up the multiple prints to create a picture in Cubist time. After the photographs are ripped they are fused under a layer of encaustic like motion trapped in amber. Pieces of bodies and hundreds of minutes combine to make one densely loaded image that moves like a flip book as you stare. Elements of Futurism and "The Twilight Zone" meet in these pictures, layering what begins as artifice with an unsettling feel.

In his most recent work, Giobbi conjoins the heads of his father and mother to create a composite parent, an image simultaneously male and female. The black-and-white portraits are torn and rearranged once again. Beard stubble suddenly becomes soft skin, jarring to the eye as it travels over unexpected transitions. Each distinct face is irrevocably lost as identities become fused. The viewer succumbs to a feeling of quiet panic.

At times, Giobbi's subjects seem inside out, cut apart and revealed like a Francis Bacon portrait in which guts are as readable as faces. Facial and body proportions distend subtly to the point of seeming mildly freakish; the viewer feels as if she is caught looking at something indecorous or overly intimate.

Giobbi wants the viewer to feel as if a witness to a "private cathartic moment"—not as voyeur, but observer. He wants us to take a straightforward look, not an embarrassed glance.

The biggest works measure eight by five feet, the scale of an oversized door. These photographs, of a nude woman by a rumpled bed, or an everyman in suit and tie, pulse with switched-on movement. Emotional reels of many years seem to convene at one moment, shattering the figures' black-and-white worlds. In contrast, there are small, reconfigured black-and-white landscapes that have the push and pull of good abstract painting. The point of view in these small studies of displacement is from facedown in the grass, with one eye trained on a leaf, the other gazing off in the distance.

Moments of high and low drama, dreams of genetic mutation and metamorphosis travel through Chambliss Giobbi's work. They are futuristic fairy tales, and like any good fairy tale, there is no moral—just mystery, and an attempt at understanding through facing the macabre.

**MIMI THOMPSON**