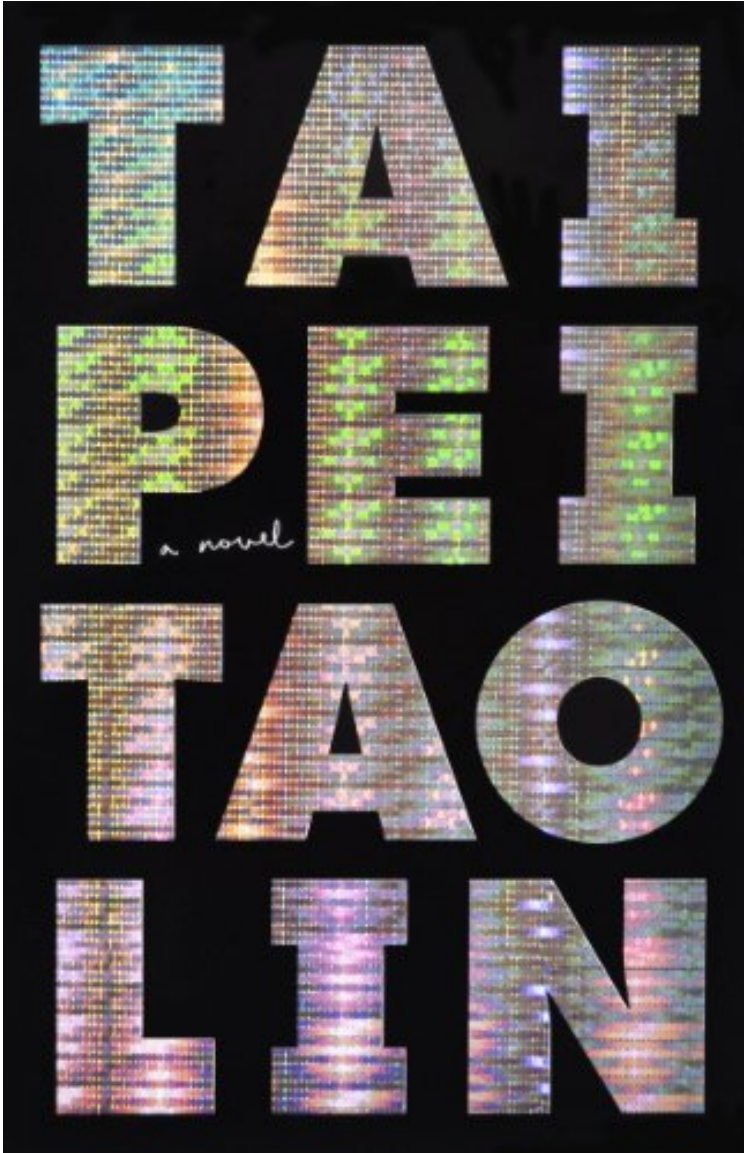


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# Taipei



*Par Tao Lin*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom one of this generation's most talked about andenigmatic writers comes a deeply personal, powerful, and moving novel about family, relationships, accelerating drug use, and the lingering possibility of death.Taipei by Tao Lin is an ode--or lament--to the way we live now. Following Paul from New York, where he comically navigates Manhattan's art and literary scenes, to Taipei, Taiwan, where he confronts his family's roots, we see one relationship fail, while another is born on the internet and blooms into an unexpected wedding in Las Vegas. Along the waywhether on all night drives up the East Coast, shoplifting excursions in the South, book readings on the West Coast, or ill advised grocery runs in Ohiomovies are made with laptop cameras, massive amounts of drugs are ingested, and two young lovers

come to learn what it means to share themselves completely. The result is a suspenseful meditation on memory, love, and what it means to be alive, young, and on the fringe in America, or anywhere else for that matter. Extrait 1. It began raining a little from a hazy, cloudless-seeming sky as Paul, 26, and Michelle, 21, walked toward Chelsea to attend a magazine-release party in an art gallery. Paul had resigned to not speaking and was beginning to feel more like he was moving through the universe than walking on a sidewalk. He stared ahead with a masklike expression, weakly trying to remember where he was one year ago, last November, more for something to do than because he wanted to know, though he was not incurious. Michelle, to his left, drifted in and out of his peripheral vision far enough away for pedestrians to pass unknowingly between them like a slow, amorphous flickering. Paul was thinking the word somewhere, meditatively as both placeholder and ends, when Michelle asked if he was okay. Yes, said Paul automatically. As they entered a building, a few minutes later, he sort of glanced at Michelle and was surprised to see her grinning, then couldn't stop himself from grinning. Sometimes, during an argument, feeling like he'd been acting in a movie and the scene had ended, Paul would suddenly grin, causing Michelle to grin, and they'd be able to enjoy doing things together again, for one to forty hours, but that hadn't happened this time, partly because Michelle had grinned first. Paul looked away, slightly confused, and suppressed his grin. What, he said in an unintentionally loud monotone, unsure what he felt exactly, and they entered a large, mundane elevator, whose door closed slowly. What, said Paul at a normal volume. Nothing, said Michelle still grinning a little. Why are you grinning? No reason, said Michelle. What caused you to grin? Nothing. Just life. The situation. Entering the party, on the fifth floor, Paul realized he'd said vaguely negative things on the internet, at some point, about a person who was probably in attendance, so walked quickly to Jeremy, an easy-to-talk-to acquaintance, and asked what movies he'd seen recently. Michelle stood at a near distance, partly in view, then obscured, then fully in view before approaching, with what seemed like a sly smile, to ask if Paul wanted a drink. Jeremy was calculating aloud the per-hour price of a two-part biopic on Che Guevara when Michelle returned with a beer. Paul thanked her and she moved away in an intermittent, curving, crablike manner, seeming relaxed and disoriented. She wants to be alone, thought Paul with some confusion. Or she wants to let me be alone. An hour later they were holding their third or fourth drinks, sitting on chairs in a dark corner, facing what seemed to Paul like one group of sixty to eighty friends. Loud, dancey, mostly electronic music currently Michael Jackson played from unseen speakers. Paul was staring at an area of torsos. In his previous relationships, he knew, he had experienced dissatisfaction, to some degree, as an empirically backed enthusiasm for the future, because it implied the possibility of a more satisfying relationship with someone he hadn't met; with Michelle, whom he felt closer to than his previous girlfriend, she'd told her this a few times, truthfully dissatisfaction felt more like a personal failing, a direct indication of internal malfunctioning, which he should focus on privately correcting. Instead, he vaguely knew, he was waiting for Michelle, or some combination of Michelle and the world, to endure and overpower his negativity to be the solution in which he would irreversibly, untraceably dissolve. He sipped his wine, thinking about how Michael Jackson had been using ten to forty Xanax per night, according to the internet, before he died last summer. Paul distractedly scooted his chair toward Michelle and, with unclear purpose, touched her shoulder, tentative and reckless as a child petting a large dog looking elsewhere. Expecting the bored expression of ten minutes ago, when they'd looked at each other noncommittally as she returned to her chair with another drink, Paul was surprised by Michelle's severely, actively almost seethingly depressed expression. Michelle's face reddened antagonistically, in reflexive defense, it seemed, because then she appeared frustrated and a little confused, then shy and embarrassed. Paul asked if she wanted to leave soon. Michelle hesitated, then asked if that was what Paul wanted. I don't know. Are you hungry? Not really. Are you? I don't know, said Paul. I would eat somewhere. One night, months ago, they had sat on a curb on Lafayette Street to continue an argument in a resting position. Paul had become distracted by Michelle's calm, intelligent demeanor and had begun to forget why they were arguing, even while speaking in an agitated voice, as he became fixated, with increasing appreciation, on how Michelle liked him enough to not simply leave and never see him again, which she could do which anyone could always do, Paul had thought, suddenly intrigued by the concept of gratitude. Do you want to eat at the Green Table? If that's what you want, said Michelle. Okay. When do you want to leave? After I finish this glass of wine. Okay, said Paul, and scooted his chair halfway to where it had been. I'm going to introduce Kyle to someone. I'll be back in like five minutes. Paul couldn't find Kyle, 19, or Kyle's girlfriend, Gabby, 28, his suitemates in an apartment off the Graham L train stop in Brooklyn and was returning to Michelle when he realized he'd walked past Kyle, standing drunkenly alone in a dense area of people, as if at a concert. After

some indecision, briefly motionless, Paul turned around and asked if Kyle wanted to meet Traci. Kyle nodded and followed Paul outside the gallery, to a wide hallway, where six people, including Traci described earlier by Kyle as really hot, by Paul as her blog gets a lot of hitsshook hands with one another. Paul grinned uncomfortably as he stared at one person, then another, thinking he had absolutely nothing to say, except maybe what he was currently thinking, which didnt seem appropriate and also kept changing. He noticed Michelle sitting alone, against a wall, around thirty feet away. The front of his head felt extraneous and suctioned as a plastic bag, stuck there in a wind, as he walked to her, aware she had probably seen him grinning at Traci, and asked if she wanted to go now. Do you? said Michelle. not standing. Yeah, said Paul looking toward the gallery. You can talk to Kyle more, if you want. I dont want to, said Paul. It seems like you do. I dont, said Paul, who viewed friends mostly as means to girlfriends, he knew, contrary to Michelle, who valued them as ends (theyd discussed this a few times and concluded, to some degree, that Paul had his writing, Michelle her friends). Im just going to say bye to him. Ill be right back. When he couldnt find Kyle in the hallway he walked robotically into the dark, crowded gallery thinking lost in the world in a precariously near-earnest tone. Kyle was standing with a group of people in a sideways manner that didnt clearly indicate if he knew them or not. He looked at Paul with an expression like he was thinking what to say, then like he was going to insult Paul, then less like hed chosen to refrain than like hed lost interest. I think Michelle feels like Im not giving her enough attention, said Paul slowly. Thats funny, said Kyle after a few seconds. Because Gabby, after one of our parties, said you gave Michelle so much attention and were always next to her talking to her, but Im always talking to someone else, and that I dont love her. What did you say? That I love her and give her attention, said Kyle with a bored, self-loathing expression. Paul couldnt find Michelle in the hallway, discrepant and vulnerable, in the bright off-white corridor as a rarely seen animal, then turned a corner and saw her crouched on the floor, sixty to eighty feet away and not apparently doing anything. Paul, walking self-consciously toward her, vaguely remembered a night, early in their relationship, when he somehow hadnt expected her to enlarge in his vision as he approached where shed stood (looking down at a flyer, one leg slightly bent) in Think Coffee. The comical, bewildering fearequally calming and surprising, amusing and foreboding felt as she rapidly and sort of ominously increased in size had characterized their first two months together. It had seemed like they would never fight, and the nothingness of the future had gained a framework-y somethingness that felt privately exciting, like entering a different familys house as a small child, or the beginning elaborations of a science-fiction conceit. Then, one night, in late April, after cooking and eating pasta together, Paul had complained meekly, without looking at her face that Michelle never helped wash dishes. Michelle stared at him silently a few seconds before her eyes became suddenly watery, the extra layer of translucence materializing like a shedding of something delicate. Paul stared back, weirdly entranced hed never seen her cry before crawling across his wood floor, over his yoga mat, dizzy with emotion, to hug her and apologize. In May he began complaining once or twice a week (that certain things Michelle did were inconsiderate, that he felt neglected) and, by July, most days, was either visibly irritated or mutely, inscrutably despondent, as if he alone had a vast knowledge of horrible truths, which, he knew, he didnt but could still feel good, to some degree, after coffee or alcohol or, when easily attainable, prescription drugs, most recently methadone, supplied by Michelles friend who had fallen down stairs, which theyd ingested once every four to six days for five weeks, ending three weeks ago. One night, since then, Michelle had told Paul it seemed like he hated her and Paul, after a around ten seconds, had cited a day theyd had fun together, then had grinned and said no illogically when Michelle correctly said theyd been on methadone that day. Why are you sitting so far away? Im waiting for you. You said you wanted to leave an hour ago. Outside, on the sidewalk, Michelle walked quickly ahead with her hands in her jacket pockets, as if to better escape Paul with a more streamlined form, though also it was still raining. Paul asked what she wanted to do. I dont know, she said. Im not hungry anymore. They crossed Tenth Avenue in a diagonal, not at an intersection, through headlights of a stopped taxitwo or three people were closing their umbrellas, getting in onto the opposite sidewalk and continued downtown, bodies bent against the wind. Wait, said Paul. Can we stop walking for a minute? They stopped, facing the same direction, on the sidewalk. Whats wrong? said Paul after a few seconds, slightly accusatorily. Youve been ignoring me all night, said Michelle. I moved close to you and hugged you, when we were sitting. Once we got inside you walked away and started talking to other people. You walked away from me, said Paul. I felt confused. A deli worker standing under an awning was looking into some unspecific distance, honestly uninterested. Ive never felt you act this way before, said Michelle unsteadily, looking down, suddenly tired and scared, the protest of her having dispersed to something negotiable. For a few days, two or three months

ago, she had considered studying abroad in Barcelona next spring, which would've meant four months apart.

Paul thought of how they'd kept delaying buying plane tickets to visit his parents in Taiwan in December, which was next month, he knew as if in tacit understanding that their relationship wouldn't last that long. Paul felt himself trying to interpret the situation, as if there was a problem to be solved, but there didn't seem to be anything, or maybe there was, but he was three or four skill sets away from comprehension, like an amoeba

trying to create a personal webpage using CSS. "I'm just naturally losing interest," he finally said, a little improvisationally, and Michelle began quietly crying. "I didn't expect this at all," she said. "I've felt good about us the past two weeks. I thought we've been closer than we've ever been. I think I was affected by the study-abroad thing," said Paul nearly inaudibly, confused how she'd thought they'd been close the past two weeks. "Go back to the party. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Wait. I don't think we should leave each other now. Have a good time with your friends," said Michelle sincerely. "Wait. What friends? We'll talk tomorrow," said Michelle. "If we leave each other now it's over. It doesn't have to be like that. I only go to things to find a girlfriend," said Paul paraphrasing himself, and they stood not looking at each other, for one or two minutes, as rain from faraway places disappeared into their clothing and hair. Paul felt surprised by the friendly tone of his voice as he asked if Michelle wanted to eat dinner with him, in a restaurant. "I don't want to talk to you right now," said Michelle. "I don't want to be in a relationship where it's like this. I don't either," said Michelle. "I'm going back if you don't want to do something. I want to go home. Good night. Okay," said Paul, and turned around, aware they hadn't parted like this before. He crossed 22nd Street and turned to cross Tenth Avenue and saw

Michelle disjunctively running and walking toward him, stopping at a red light with the posture of a depressed teenager. Paul thought of how she liked Nirvana a lot, and she crossed the street, slowing as she neared and stopping within arms reach. Paul, she said after a few seconds, and touched his upper arm, as if to offer a way back, through her, to some prior intimacy, from where they could tunnel carefully elsewhere, or to the same place, but with a kind of skill this time, having practiced once. Paul remained still, unsure what to say or think. Michelle lowered her hand to her side. "What are you doing?" she said, somewhat defensively. "What do you mean? Aren't you going back to the party?" "Yeah. I said I was. Fine," said

Michelle. Paul felt passively committed to not moving. "Why are you standing here?" "You came back," said Paul feebly, and four to six people approached from the direction of the party. Michelle stepped into a soil-y area, lower and darker than the sidewalk, and leaned between spires on a metal fence, with her left

profile obscured by her long, dark hair toward Paul, who stared dumbly at the gently convex curve of her back, thinking with theoretical detachment that he should console her and that maybe the discomfort of her forearms against the thin metal of the fence had created a location, accessible only to herself, toward which she could relocate, away from what she felt, in a kind of shrinking. "Do you want to eat dinner with me somewhere?" Michelle turned toward him a little, moving her head to see through her hair. "What are you doing?" she said in a tired, distracted voice, and leaned back on the fence without waiting for an answer. After a vague amount of time Paul heard himself asking again if she wanted to eat dinner with him, at the Green Table, one of the few restaurants they wanted to but hadn't tried, then she was walking away, her long legs scissorlike in their little, orderly movements. It would take her thousands of steps to get anywhere, but she would get there easily, and when she arrived, in the present, it would seem like it had been a single movement that brought her there. Did existence ever seem worked for? One seemed simply to be here, less an accumulation of moments than a single arrangement

continuously gifted from some inaccessible future. *Revue de presse* A New York Times Book Editors Choice [A] modernist masterpiece. . . . True, his characters are young people living in Brooklyn. And he writes about the Internet. But we should stop calling Tao Lin the voice of his generation. Taipei, his new novel, has less to do with his generation than with the literary tradition of Knut Hamsun, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Musil. Benjamin Lytal, *New York Observer* Here we have a serious, first-rate novelist putting all his skills to work. Clancy Martin, *New York Times Book* Mr. Lin casts a spell in Taipei. . . . [It is] his strongest book. At its best, it has distant echoes of early Hemingway, as filtered through Twitter and Klonopin: its terse, neutral, composed of small and often intricate gestures. . . . its about flickers of perception, flickers that the author catches as if they were fireflies. Dwight Garner, *New York Times* "Amazing. . . . He's actually the best writer about what it's like to be f\*cked up on drugs that I've ever read." John Horgan, author of *The*

*End of Science* "The most moving depiction of the way we live now. . . . unutterably moving." Michael Silverblatt, *KCRW's Bookworm* One thing I like about Tao's writing is how beside the point for me 'liking' it feels it's a frank depiction of the rhythm of a contemporary consciousness or lack of consciousness and so it has a power that bypasses those questions of taste entirely. Like it or not, it has the force of the real. Ben

Lerner, author of *Leaving the Atocha Station* [A] novel about disaffection that's oddly affecting. . . . for all its emotional reality, *Taipei* is a book without an ounce of self-pity, melodrama, or posturing. *Publishers Weekly*, starred review