

INTERVIEW WITH TAO LIN: WHAT HAPPENED IN "TAIPEI"

JULY 2, 2013 TUESDAY

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Interview with Tao Lin: What happened in "Taipei"

Tao Lin's tech-savvy characters in "Taipei" supposedly represent the current generation's prevailing apathy.



Author Tao Lin emailed Gawker daily updates on his life until they asked him to stop.

By Noah Kalina

By **Joe Kleinschmidt** June 26, 2013

Under a mountain of inked paper and Adderall, Tao Lin worked tirelessly on "Taipei."

Crafting his third novel — an alienating piece of comic fiction — required copious amounts of drugs and hours of editing. Starting with nearly 25,000 pages of material, the Brooklyn-based artist and writer stayed up nights to find the autobiographical novel's structure.

"I had a huge pile—probably 600 pages," he said, recalling the point where "Taipei" came together. "From there, for three months, I tried to find something that would work as a novel."

Soft-spoken and painfully self-aware, Lin speaks about his writing with plain precision. Over the phone, the guise of an Internet provocateur diminishes. Now that the 29-year-old landed Vintage Books to publish "Taipei," he's forced to answer questions about his own success. Bewildered, he pauses for a few seconds.

"I just don't ever think that word," he said.

Between chronicling his Xanax consumption on Vice and writing about shoplifting, Lin garners a reputation as simply a literary novelty. He occupies a social media sphere of self-promotion via Tweets and extreme transparency.

His irony-laden second novel, "Richard Yates," followed characters named Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning (with no relation to the actual child stars). He even published a profile of himself as a "Great American Novelist" mocking Time's bombastic coverage of Jonathan Franzen.

"I can't believe I did that," he said. "That actually has a lot of really accurate information. But people will just say whatever they want to say."

"Taipei" proves the author's gift exceeds the confines of a Tumblr page—the story follows an author named Paul as he traverses the art world in New York and visits family in Taiwan. Lin writes with a cold detachment that seems clinical at first, but he gives much-needed insight into the apathetic world of iPhones and anti-depressants. His characters talk about Wikipedia pages and take MDMA, all the while never quite exuding the ironic gestures that "Richard Yates" propped up. Lin's self-described style, a "concrete literal" prose, feels almost claustrophobic, but Paul's trip starts to break through the shell.

"In the first trip, Paul thinks of Taipei as a fifth season outside of his life in America, which he starts to feel is becoming really repetitive," he said.

"Taipei" does not give off the same novelty appeal of "Richard Yates," but exceeds its base comedy. Although the novel is supposedly his "magnum opus," Lin vows to strive for stranger territory next time out.

"I never want to write the same thing twice," he said.

What: "Taipei" with Tao Lin

Where: Paper Darts Pop-Up, SooLOCAL, 3506 S. Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis

When: 7 p.m., Wednesday

Cost: Free

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