

## Queering Traditions: Contemporary Art & Extraterritoriality (Freiburg, 4 Nov 23)

E-WERK Freiburg, Eschholzstrasse 77, 79106 Freiburg, Nov 04, 2023

Registration deadline: Nov 1, 2023

Dr Heidi Brunnschweiler

What can contemporary art achieve for multiple identities and plural narratives of history in illiberal contexts?

The symposium with renowned scholars from Sinophone history, media, film and literature studies will explore the significance of contemporary art from Hong Kong, Mainland China and their diaspora in relation to extraterritoriality, both as a historical irresolvable internal contradiction and as a theoretical concept in the sense of the film scholar Victor Fan.

With Fan's double determination of extraterritoriality (as a historical dilemma and a theoretical concept)\*, the existential experiences of the Hong Kongers can be related to those of the LGBTQI+ community in Mainland China. Both are subjected to illiberal state power that restricts expression, plural lifestyles and multiple narratives of history from the outside. This lack of (democratic) rights of self-determination has triggered existential identity- and sense-uncertainty through feelings of de-differentiation, de-subjectification and de-autonomisation.

The contributions to the symposium address the following questions:

- How are the crises caused by extraterritoriality addressed in contemporary art from Hong Kong, Mainland China and the diaspora?
- What can contemporary art contribute to negotiating the sense-uncertainty and the crises of identity and belonging caused by extraterritoriality?
- To what extent is contemporary art able to present alternative genealogies and narratives of identity and belonging through strategies such as Queering Traditions?
- How can transnational / translocal artistic and activist alliances and solidarities contribute to a sustainable political sphere in the sense of Jürgen Habermas by articulating an "ethics of openness" (LaBelle)?

In addition to the academic contributions, two short film screenings provide insight into current artistic film and video practices.

PROGRAM (venue: E-WERK Freiburg, Eschholzstrasse 77, 79106 Freiburg)

9.00-9:30: Arrival and Exhibition Tour: Homeland in Transit, Artists from Hong Kong, Taipei and the Diaspora

9:30-9:45: Welcome by Dr. Heidi Brunnschweiler and Angelika Li (Co-Curators of Homeland in

Transit, Freiburg Edition), Introduction Symposium: Contemporary Art and Extraterritoriality by Dr. Heidi Brunnschweiler (Galerie für Gegenwartskunst, E-WERK Freiburg)

9.45-11.15: SESSION I – Extraterritoriality / Transnational and Affective Communities: What role can contemporary art play in negotiating crises of identity and belonging caused by extraterritoriality?

Introduction and Moderation by Dr. Hongwei Bao (University of Nottingham)

9:45-10:15: Ontodiversity: Digital Existence and Hong Kong Independent Cinema, Dr. Victor Fan (King's College London)

Independent cinema has always played a pivotal role in negotiating Hong Kongers' extraterritorial position. After the crackdown of the 2019–20 protests, Hong Kong independent cinema has been put under the spotlight of major international film festivals around the world. After a wave of protest documentaries (2019–21), more experimental fiction films and documentaries including *Decameron* [Rita Hui, 2021], *Drifting Petals* [Clara Law, 2021], and *Blue Island* [Chan Tze-woon, 2022] began to emerge, which offer more self-reflexive and self-reflective views on how collective traumas and memories affect – and are in turn affected by – how a Hong Konger defines themselves.

In my presentation, I argue that contemporary Hong Kong independent cinema offers filmmakers and spectators an opportunity to reconnect the relationship between feeling and thinking, which is crucial in the process of political individuation, subjectivization, and autonomization. Such a connection, however, has been pre-empted in most control societies today under what Antoinette Rouvoy and Thomas Berns call algorithmic governmentality: the direct management of affective intensities by collecting, processing, and turning biopolitical lives into big data. In this light, independent cinema offers a more mindful way of rethinking our interdependent relationships with one another. It resists the party-state's microperceptual and microtemporal control of one's everyday life by putting into question how one's perception is in-formed personally and sociopolitically and how such perception can be remediated to acknowledge our ontogenetic diversity: our ontogenetic interdependencies and connectedness as well as our differences and mutual asymmetries.

10:15-10:45: Home and Homeland in a Trans / national Perspective, Dr. Jens Damm (University of Freiburg i. Br.) and Dr. Federico Brusadelli (University of Naples)

What does Fan's conceptualization of extraterritoriality mean for notions and affective experiences of home and homeland? In Hong Kong? For queer activists and artists in Mainland China? In Taiwan? In the diaspora? How does it relate to concepts and practices of "self-determination", both on an individual and collective level?

Fan's conceptualization of extraterritoriality will be explored in connection to the concept of "self-determination". The latter, in its multilayered articulations (from the individual sphere, including sexual self-determination, to the political level) constitutes a privileged observation point for a discussion on how notions and affective experiences of home and homeland – and ultimately of personal and collective "sovereignty" – are lived and represented in Hong Kong. The discussion will be expanded to include Taiwan, Mainland China, and the diaspora. By this token, different configurations and practices of extraterritoriality will be linked and compared, while addressing different modalities of "queering" homeland, nationhood, and traditions.

10.45-11.15: Discussion SESSION I

11.15-11.45: Break

11.45-13:15: SESSION II – Contemporary Artistic Strategies Emerging from Extraterritoriality:

How are the crises caused by extraterritoriality negotiated in contemporary art from Hong Kong, Mainland China and their diaspora? Introduction and Moderation by Dr. Victor Fan (King's College London)

11.45-12.15: Mobilizing the Sounds of Silence: Creative Activism for Political Participation in Hong Kong,

Prof. Andrea Riemenschnitter (University of Zürich)

Under the tightening stranglehold of the Beijing regime, post-handover Hong Kongers face a rapid dismantling of their limited rights and freedoms, which generations of Chinese immigrants had patiently wrested from the British colonial elite in the past. Many of them had been forced to start from scratch upon their arrival, taking lowly jobs as servants and laborers. Determined to sacrifice their own dreams in order to provide better living conditions for their offspring, they were supported by a sizeable group of gifted writers, artists and intellectuals who had fled the very regime that now rules over the postcolonial city. Together, Hong Kong's Chinese inhabitants turned the barren, borrowed place into a beloved home, thus successfully inaugurating a local, cosmopolitan, and predominantly Cantophone modernity. As it becomes more and more risky openly to interrogate, contest, or subvert the CCP's nationalist master narrative from within, many Hong Kongers decide to leave the city, taking their uprooted, portable homeland along. The persevering population, among them ascendant and established artists, directors, and writers, turns to (absent) sound as the aesthetic signifier of their suppressed activism, thus representing the turn from hope for equal rights – including measureable political participation – to despair. The keynote will address the ramifications of Hong Kong's repeatedly silenced story as enacted in the umbrella generation's emergent literary, visual and multimedia art productions. It aims at exploring the tactics of voicing (through) silence, with a focus on the latter's performative affordances.

12.15-12.45: Digital Censorship, Dr. Winnie Soon (Artist, London) and Prof. King-wa Fu (Hong Kong University)

How do the regulatory environment and the technological possibilities shape the politics and poetics of what can be voiced and can be listened to?

Data today occupies communication, affective relationships and infrastructure via network protocols, censoring and filtering algorithms. According to Data Relations digital publication writer Yung Au, 'All of us have lived through some form of erasure. That is the experience of having our sentences cut short. Or the experience of being the subject of the moderation that occurs across communication infrastructures.'

We have experienced, in one way or another, various forms of curated information by human and machine forces. The talk will be about the artwork *Unerasable Characters* which is based on Weiboscope - a data collection and visualization system - that has been regularly sampling timelines of a set of selected Chinese microbloggers who have more than 1,000 followers or whose posts are frequently censored. The talk explores the politics of censorship and poetics of erasure within the context of digital authoritarianism. It presents the sheer scale of unheard voices by technically examining and culturally reflecting the endlessness, and its wider consequences, of censorship that is implemented through technological platforms and infrastructure.

## 12.45-13.15: Discussion SESSION II

### 13.15-14.15: Lunch Break

14:15-15:00: Screening selected and presented by Angelika Li and Ellen Pau, 52HZ (2022) 15'48", followed by a roundtable discussion with the artists Isaac Chong Wai, Anson Mak and Ellen Pau.

As part of her Video Talks series Angelika Li presents a recent video work by the pioneering Hong Kong video artist Ellen Pau. After the screening there will be a roundtable discussion about Ellen Pau's work and the videos shown in the exhibition *Homeland in Transit*, Freiburg Edition by Anson Mak (*The Black Wall*, 2022) and Isaac Chong Wai (*The Silent Wall*, 2014). Video Talks series is a screening programme curated by Angelika. Since 2020, it features video works dating from 1989 to 2023 by celebrated Hong Kong artists from different generations including Luke Ching, May Fung, Kong Kee, Law Yuk Mui, Leung Chi Wo, Lo Lai Lai Natalie, Anson Mak, Map Office, Angela Su, Winne Yan and Yim Sui Fong.

### 15.00-15.30: Break

## 15:30-16:45: SESSION III – Session Queering Traditions

To what extent is queer contemporary art able to imagine alternative genealogies and narratives of identity and belonging? Introduction and Moderation by Prof. Andrea Riemenschneider (University of Zürich)

15:45-16:15: Queering Traditions: The Fantastic and the Everyday, Dr. Hongwei Bao (University of Nottingham) and Diyi Mergenthaler (University of Zürich)

Hongwei Bao and Diyi Mergenthaler will explore how queer Chinese artists living in different parts of the world make use of various historical and cultural traditions to articulate their identities and create a site of belonging. Case study artists include LA-based queer Chinese video artist Andrew Thomas Huang, Vancouver-based queer Chinese photographer artist Alger Liang, Melbourne-based performing artist Scotty So, and Guangzhou-based queer Chinese dancer Ergao. Some of these artists draw on the ancient myth of the Rabbit God to imagine a queer Chinese heritage; others take inspiration from rural Chinese lifestyles and everyday aesthetics to reimagine what contemporary dance can be. These artists and artworks demonstrate that traditions are not static; they can always be reimagined by marginalised communities to articulate identity, community and politics.

## 16.15-16:45: Discussion SESSION III

17:00-17:45: Screening & Discussion Queer Squad Freiburg / Frankfurt.

Wei Zhao, *A Story of Wedding* (婚礼故事), 2021, 22 Min, China and France

Hao Zhou, *Frozen Out* (被排斥), 2021, 5 Min, China and USA

The short films presented by Queer Squad Freiburg and Frankfurt address the complexity of queerness in the context of the Sinophone diaspora. Influenced by gender fluidity, cultural difference and migratory experience, queerness becomes an expression of diverse constellations of identities. The stories documented illustrate the differences in the various living realities that diasporic individuals are facing, while at the same time providing insight into the shared struggles, trauma and emotions that shape their identity formation.

18.00-18.30: Synthesis Symposium / Final Remarks Dr. Jens Damm (University Freiburg) and Dr. Federico Brusadelli (University of Naples): How can transnational / translocal artistic and activist alliances and solidarities contribute to a sustainable political sphere in Jürgen Habermas' sense by articulating an "ethics of openness" (LaBelle 2021: 40)?

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Registration:

Participation is open to all interested.

Please register and pay in the daily fee via the following link:

<https://e-werk-freiburg.reservix.de/tickets-queering-traditions-symposium-in-freiburg-im-breisgau-e-werk-saal-am-4-11-2023/e2165341>

A limited number of places is available at the ticket office onsite at 4 November 2023.

Tickets/Conference fee:

30 € for employed persons

15 € for students, pupils, unemployed persons, severely disabled persons.

2 coffee breaks and a small lunch are included in the conference fee.

Location:

E-WERK, Saal

Freiburg, Eschholzstrasse 77

D-79106 Freiburg

Reference:

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