INTERVIEW WITH MING WONG …

… on the occasion of his lecture performance “Tales from the Bamboo Spaceship”, his first collaboration with Kampnagel. In conversation with [k] – dramaturge Line Spellenberg he talks about productive anachronisms, space drag and sharp pencils.

Line Spellenberg: In your recent working phase you connect Chinese Science Fiction and Cantonese Opera cinema history. Where do you see – or create – the crossroad between these two seemingly disparate genres? Would you describe it as a sort of productive anachronism to bring these two fields together?

Ming Wong: My practice involves the research of cinema history from different parts of the world, their legacies on the cultural memories of people and how they influence the performativity of identity from the past through to the future. In China, the technology of cinema had a love affair with the stage traditions of popular Chinese opera. In particular, Cantonese opera cinema became an established genre through the early years of Hong Kong cinema history, with a golden era in the late 50s to early 60s. The cinematic works developed an innovative relationship between stage and screen.

The questions in my head were; could the innovation inherent in the artforms be meaningful for contemporary and future audiences? What are the notions of the ‘future’ in societies such as Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Singapore (my own country of origin) where the roots of the Cantonese diaspora are entwined with the circuits of technological innovation and political fallout in tomorrow’s world?

LS: What is the position of yourself in all this? I mean, we have your performance-self in the art works on the one side and on the other side your biographical self.

MW: This project has particular personal resonance, as my grandparents were Cantonese and I stand at a point of cultural no-return. I grew up learning Mandarin in school and picked up Cantonese from Hong Kong pop culture in the 70s and 80s. Over the years the physical origins of that culture have been widely demolished to make way for infrastructures of technological innovation and strategic economic reorganization; linguistically and culturally, Cantonese has seen a decline in its influence. As an artist, I felt a need to address this.

LS: In the past you were known for your drag interpretations of cinematic icons like “Lerne Deutsch mit Petra Von Kant / Learn German with Petra von Kant”, “Angst Essen / Eat Fear”, “In Love for the Mood “, just to name a few. Do you see a connection with these cross-gender and cross-cultural practices of drag with what you are working on right now?

MW: Besides crossing gender, nationality, age, body, language etc., I think dragging through
time, past and future, and dragging through concrete space and virtuality are possibilities that interest me. Let's call it Time and Space Drag 😊

LS: You create these cross temporal and cross cultural hybrids, they are intrinsic in your practice and I can see them especially in the “Tales from the Bamboo Spaceship”: do you understand them also as a criticism against history writing and representation of identity when it comes to mainstream culture?

MW: I guess I'm becoming more acutely aware of my role as an artist, to stand in the tide of mainstream forces and to readjust my own position of perspective and witness. My current preoccupation with traversing time and space and geography may be seen as some kind of archeology of the future.

LS: There is a lot of humor in your work. Do you have specific influences for this comedy aspect in your performance?

MW: Recently I have been re-reading and re-watching “Orlando” by Virginia Wolf and Sally Potter, who channel a certain kind of amusement and arrogance through their work, which I find useful for maintaining a survival instinct.

LS: Some final words?

MW: Ladies and/or Gentlemen, sharpen your pencils, your tongues and your eyes.

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