Trans-Aesthetics:
The Art of Ming Wong between Nation and State

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Figure 1. Ming Wong, *After Chinatown*, 2012, installation view. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou and carlier | gebauer, Berlin. Photograph by Jan Dixon and Emily Dixon.

1. I was in Manchester for a conference and Ming Wong happened to be one of a dozen artists showcasing their works in an exhibition at the Cornerhouse. Typical of his practice, Wong in his video work, *After Chinatown* (2012), directs and acts in two of the main roles of Roman Polanski's original film from 1974 (Figure 1). The action, where a detective and a femme fatale character are caught in a cat-and-mouse chase in one of the world's many Chinatowns, was screened on an outmoded television monitor and accompanied by non-diegetic, stirring string music. Standing in contradistinction to the twelve-inch monitor was a gigantic, wall-wide billboard painted in red and black that advertised the 'film.' On the left hand side of the composition is Wong dressed in a black suit and hat, and on the right is also Wong but dressed in a shoulder-length wig, black shades and a winter coat. Between the figures are the words, AFTER CHINATOWN, painted in bold red against a yellowish background, which represented a spotlight on the words.

2. Beside me in the exhibition space that day were a handful of young female students speaking Mandarin with a Beijing accent.[1] They expressed a marked interest in the artwork which stood out from the rest of the displays. I could sense their heightened reception of the installation from their reactions such as taking pictures of the billboard and with it. In comparison to the other artworks in the gallery, Wong's video art received greater attention given the longer time spent and the more inquisitive behaviour of the students.

They were especially interested in the issue of an ethnic-Chinese man cross-dressing as a European woman on print and screen. Whether they knew the plot of Polanski's *Chinatown* or not, the female students were more interested to pose with the femme fatale than the detective. Coming from a conservative society, the Chinese students' fascination with the image of a cross-dresser intrigued me.

3. Later two of the Chinese students and I were walking towards the town centre when I noticed two salespersons—one male and one female—asking potential customers if they were British in order to qualify for certain financial schemes. Obviously, we were not approached. The question of eligibility and belonging immediately occurred to me. Why were we already deemed ineligible? Was it because of our skin colour or that the salespersons thought we looked too young to purchase their product? From legal and material viewpoints, the salespersons had already disqualified us as potential customers.

4. Through the mediation of queer visibility, I want to review these two problems of reception—Wong's installation for the students and our experience on the street—with the theory of standardisation and legibility proposed by James Scott. In his book *Seeing Like a State*, the author argues that state measures have been used to standardise individual entities so as to reduce political illegibility.[2] One of these measures by the British Empire (and Singapore Republic) has been a state policy of racial division inculcated into the civil and corporate realms. Here it becomes appropriate that the protocol of the salespersons is being 'standardised' by perceptions of skin colour. Or, perhaps the most effective way to determine a British person on the street would be to identify them via their colour because the fact is that whites and South Asians respectively make up the majority and largest minority amongst Manchester residents.[3] Implicit in contemporary state legislation in Europe and elsewhere, skin colour legitimises access, and accessibility opens up doors to eligibility and exclusivity.[4] However, there are pros and cons with being the 'right' colour for the state or corporate world. If one is visibly legible one risks being approached more often on the street and illegibility becomes, as Scott relates, 'a reliable resource for political autonomy.'[5] In this regard, the actor who is illegible is relatively more autonomous or mobile than his or her recognisable counterpart.

5. The Chinese student visitors are a good case in point here. Considered aliens by the British state, they do not conform to any British identity nor are they required to do so. In contrast to the whites, the Chinese's autonomy gives them a personal choice to identify or dis-identify themselves visually with white characters or those in Wong's *After Chinatown*. However, Wong's evident construction of a film scene in Los Angeles becomes legible to the Chinese viewers, allowing them access to the meaning behind the artwork primarily via his own race. Otherwise, the installation would be arguably perceived by non-Chinese viewers as a Chinese mimesis of an American film. Either way, the art becomes an ocular tool for political differentiation, separating the Chinese from the others. This latter group experiences a 'Chinese influence' or what I call a Siniticate culture.[6] Here the film *Chinatown* becomes politically autonomous insofar as it disassociates itself from American national cinema and its attendant nationalist ideologies. Wong's intervention can be read as aiming to render the work somewhat illegible to American and European audiences while allowing for superficial access to a Chinese populace. This creative manipulation can be considered as a process of thwarting standardising practices of state mechanisms; and a transfiguration of national cinema where both local and foreign viewers encounter, or are forced into, moments of displacement or alienation.[7]

6. Issues of displacement and alienation remain strong motifs in the recent work of Queer scholars. The late Josà Esteban Muñoz coined the term disidentification as a process whereby the coloured minority transforms the cultural artefacts of the majority through a performative politics.[8] Other scholars have troubled dominant discourses of sexuality by prioritising racial relations amongst American diaspora.[9] In this essay I contribute to the intersectional momentum and ventures beyond national boundaries by examining Wong's oeuvre as a critical case study in transnationalism. Akin to many of his other artworks that complicate strict notions of identity *After Chinatown* bears the tendency to evoke multiple national and cultural stereotypes: American, British, Chinese, German, Polish and Singaporean. This trans-national and trans-cultural 'blurring' or 'passing' of visual aesthetics provides both western and Asian viewers

common leverage in grasping and eradicating cultural and political differences inherent within the reception of the artwork. This transgression of multiple modalities is predicated on the conceptual method of what I call 'trans-aesthetics.' This new analytic frame differs from earlier theorisations of aesthetics because it is neither a categorical appropriation nor a societal negotiation. Trans-aesthetics provides a more subtle and subliminal form of understanding than Judith Butler's radical politics of gender performativity and imitative parody.[10] Wong's aesthetics, for instance, do not represent a melodramatic or hyper-realistic dramatisation of gender as performance and also do not enact a stereotypical sexualisation of race beyond what was depicted by the original filmmakers.

7. Instead, trans-aesthetics coheres with the aspirations of decolonial and queer politics against the reification of the trans subject—in dress, gait and speech—as a dystopic symptom arising from the neoliberal policies of cultural privatisation and globalisation. Rethinking queer theory from a transnational perspective, in this essay I unveil the complicity and deceit behind the subliminal homo-normalisation of cultural figures and explore the artist's singularity in decolonising the cultural and capitalist repetition and homogenisation of gender, language and race. To the extent that Wong's re-presentations and subversions of European and Asian filmic icons transgress the gendered and cultural limits of the nation-state it is through the conjunction of aesthetic 'passing' and 'trans-ing' that the queer politics of trans-aesthetics becomes activated. Before I elaborate further, I want to discuss how prevailing theories of nation and state can be applied for a more critical comprehension of Wong's artworks and their reception. I then engage questions of Wong's aesthetics with theories of homonationalism and statelessness.

Ming Wong and homonationalism

8. The idea of nationalism evolved via eighteenth-century German political philosophy through to twentieth-century decolonial discourses. Notwithstanding the 'classical' social thinkers during the age of imperialism—Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim—a standardised form of methodological nationalism has reduced so-called nation-states to a symbolic form of modernity.[11] Two recent lines of criticism have evolved within postcolonial studies in this regard. For Kuan-Hsing Chen, nationalism is a limited concept that merely installs local elites in the place of the colonisers and constructs national independence and sovereignty as anti-colonialist reactions.[12] And the bond between the former colonisers and former colonised is sustained via their misidentification with a singular national consciousness. As a counterpoint, Walter Mignolo suggests that the rise of the plurinational state, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, can thwart an erstwhile elitist hegemony used to discriminate against non-national refugees within what he calls a modern/colonial state.[13] Before proposing an analogy of the artist and the refugee in the nation-state, I want to interrogate how the distinction of queer nationalism from mainstream nationalism has reinstated the imperial hierarchy between the legible and the illegible.

9. Jasbir Puar understands certain versions of nationalism as a unilateral and affective process flowing only from the homeland to the diaspora.[14] The reverse course is on the other hand always held with suspicion by the state. As an American activist-academic and citizen, Puar decides to use her privilege to disrupt forces of homonationalism through an engagement with the neoliberal economy of queer tourism. Dismayed by the lack of lesbian-friendly spaces, Puar aims to expose the diminution of 'lesbian visibility' within the global tourist economy by embarking on a search for companies and organisers that could shape a queer travel landscape through 'lesbian desire.' However, her method emerges as flawed. In the first instance, Puar's concept of homonationalism, formulated as a portmanteau of nationalism and homonormativity qua a neoliberal investment, is always already a negative dialectic.[15] Whether we read it with or without Theodor Adorno's critical appraisal of dialectics, the queer subject—being anti-national and non-normative—is doubly or always already negated in this economy.[16] Secondly, Puar's citizenship and mobility allow her to be legally more legible than other queers of colours; her physical presence legitimises bio-political difference. Her personal *testimonio*, to use John Beverley's sense of the term, is used to 'move' marginalised voices from the periphery to the centre and reveals her deeply problematic intellectual position of speaking *for* people of colour, both in the homeland and the diaspora.[17]

10. I will unpack this second criticism a little more since I have dealt with the first problem elsewhere.[18] Avoiding the popular tourist queerscapes of Greece's Lesvos and Mexico's Isla de Mujeres, Puar decides to travel to a guesthouse in New Delhi, India, to witness and experience homonormativity. She intends to carry out research on the possibility of a transnational lesbian space. Given the small number of queer tourist localities in the world, her a priori ability to 'choose' a destination very much situates her as a part of a homonational movement and enables her as a privileged Sikh-American to label her trip as 'a queer return par excellence.'[19] While we can gloss over her antenatal displacement as a third- or fourth-generation member of the Indian diaspora, her 'inhabitation' of the guesthouse is an assemblage of the categories of class, religion, gender, sexuality and nationality. Traversing these multiple subjectivities, Puar arrives at an indigenous space which is supposedly male-chauvinist, heteronormative, occupied by a Hindu majority and one that also gives legal protection to Indian nationals.[20] Instead of a desire for differences, Puar *negotiates* her own multiple identities vis-à-vis other excessive spaces of inaccessibility in terms of what her body forces her to do, but not to be. This trans-aesthetic impetus gives her access to a space that she eventually *inhabits*.[21]

11. On arrival, Puar's presentation of gifts to people who she refers to as her 'queer friends' perpetuates the Maussian symbolic exchange that is always already reciprocal.[22] In this case, not only has Puar brought her extra-familial, queer self, but she has also brought gifts with queer significances.[23] Her queer gifts are delivered in person as if any object that deviates from their normative standards could be intercepted by the postal authorities on the pretext of being part of a terrorist assemblage. This precautionary practice recalls Judith Halberstam's claim of the souvenir shop as happily heteronormative, where queer subjects fail to be materially seduced by the 'straight' objects.[24] Like their heteronormative counterparts, queer objects would also have to gain homonormative legibility. Otherwise, they would be censored from mainstream visibility. Puar's gift exchange thus reveals her imperial relations with queer acquaintances or people with queer associations in India. By claiming that she has dealt with both 'the local and the global,' it becomes apparent her itinerary is one which inscribes her body *repeatedly* within an exclusive space of homonormativity. That is, she becomes complicit with the manifestation of homonationalism in India. Relying on a critique from Henri Lefèbvre, this phenomenon can be delineated by the very 'activity in space [that is] restricted by that space'—such as the guesthouse visited by Puar. This is also a space that 'decides what activity may occur, but even this "decision" has limits placed upon it.'[25] In other words, the things which bodies are allowed to 'do' in homonormative spaces cannot necessarily transcend the mandatory a priori form of the spatial entity. Whether the space has been colonised or normalised by a certain sexuality, language, class or race, it remains a determinant of the intuitive imaginary.

12. Further, I contend that, for the erstwhile subaltern subjects of the global south, postcolonial theories should be applied across discursive tropes instead of being studied unilaterally. With Puar's transgressing the borders of the 'Third World' in view, we can consider how Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the grand dame of post-colonial theory, advised young academics to '[say] "no" to the "moral luck" of having *access* to the culture of imperialism while recognising that [we] must inhabit it, indeed invest it, to criticise it.'[26] Yet Puar has done the opposite and participated in the consumption of the queer subaltern. Equivalent to Spivak's claims for 'a political configuration where "decolonisation" cannot be narrativized,' Puar's reactionary approach to homonationalism represses the subaltern further whenever she speaks for them and therefore makes them illegible.[27]

13. We can discern a similarly repressive aesthetic inherent in Wong's creative practice. Exploring his use of language, Lilian Haberer describes Wong's artistic technique as an 'adaption situated between re-enactment and restaging.'[28] Not only does he rely on language to emphasise his own foreign identity or illegibility to the locals but he also utilises language as a 'return' to the essence of the original work. Whichever film that Wong imitates—Fassbinder, Polanski or P. Ramlee—Wong transcends the boundaries between the local and the foreign, the authentic and the simulacra, the right and the wrong. As much as this observation is applicable to the trope of language it is equally coherent with that of the nation. With regards to his appropriating of scenes from national cinema, Wong's transformation of gender

and race becomes an embodiment of homonationalist ideals. In other words, Wong's play on fashion, language and skin colours arguably essentialises the political hegemony of the respective national cultures. From the wearing of wigs and moustaches, speaking only the lingua franca and painting his face and body black or white to camouflage his own skin colour, Wong prescribes national meaning as determinedly lingual, gendered and racial. Akin to Puar, he repeats the nationalist stereotype that has been portrayed on screen and becomes an accomplice to standardisations of culture that are promoted by the state.

14. That said, national cinema is however not defined solely by the socio-biological traits of race, gender or language. There are also the aspects of financial support for industry players and cultural practices of audience members that need to be taken to account.[29] To the extent that this and other criteria can limit the identities of film characters and cinema patrons, national cinema is imbued with diverse meanings and hermeneutics. If Wong and his curators were to pass off his theatrics as merely cross-dressing and speaking in a foreign tongue the interest of critical reception would be greatly reduced. This is where queer theory can challenge the reified perception of the artwork. To apply Puar's parochial concept of homonationalism, Wong's *After Chinatown* would be interpreted racially as an ethnic Chinese gay man performing an imitation of the white detective and grand dame in an American Hollywood film noir. As much as this geopolitical reading is contingent to the critical ideas of reverse mimesis the native/alien binary narrows the hermeneutic possibilities of aesthetic meaning.[30] Instead a critical review of the entire installation can allow for a more integral appraisal of the dynamics between the material and the political.

15. In the first instance, Wong's artwork should be framed as a total work of art, or in the Wagnerian sense of the term, *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Wong's juxtaposition of film, theatre, sound and visual art is trans-disciplinary, and because of this structural assemblage the artist's integrated imitation of each and every form becomes immensely challenging.[31] To determine the success of Wong's art we can employ recent methodologies used in trans-cinema studies. An example is how the film scholar Song Hwee Lim borrows the term 'passing' from Gender Studies to argue that certain filmic material can also 'pass' to become a part of another national culture via the trope of 'ethnic passing.'[32] As a case in point, Wong's imitation of the white characters in *After Chinatown* transcends both ethnic and national borders between Chinese and American. 'Passing' as metonymy can be extended to problematise the legibility of generic or conventional categorisations. That is, in what ways do Wong's creations 'pass' the disciplinary boundaries of the various genres—film, theatre, sound and visual art? In comparison to the original version of the film how did he make each new work 'pass' technically and aesthetically for his unacquainted viewers?

16. In view of the standardisation theory of James C. Scott we can frame the reception of Wong's art as analogous to the normalisation of trans identity and behaviour. From the early work of Butler, Halberstam and other scholars, theories of gender performativity and its variations have been used to reconsider trans representations.[33] For Wong's artworks to 'pass' as imitations of the original there must be an intention of 'aesthetic passing.' In other words, viewers must not detect any distortions of the original. The artwork becomes as 'authentic' as the original version and can be read as assimilating into the very of national cinema. Akin to how bi-gender behaviour has been imitated or performed Wong's installations can be considered an embodiment of the transnormative discourse par excellence.[34] That said, what is more critical for our purpose here is the efficacy of his aesthetic in 'passing' as one of the cultural phenotypes determined by the state, on which I will now elaborate.

Ming Wong and statelessness

17. In a recent article discussing identity politics and cultural asymmetries the geographer Elaine Ho proposes that Singaporeans in the diaspora 'fashion' their way of life and style of thought by differentiating particular cultural practices and racial stereotypes as western and Asian. They then present themselves as a cosmopolitan group of 'transmigrants' vis-à-vis their national origins.[35] An interesting observation to extrapolate from Ho's research are the dynamic and mutable transformations of the phenotype in

connecting with or disassociating from the 'host' or other culture. Whether Singaporeans have managed to assimilate into, for example, the British lifestyle or not there remains the recognition of cultural differences. In an age of neoliberal governance, these cultural phenotypes—everyday production and consumption—are mostly determined by state policies, which may or may not involve regulation and standardisation. Thereby, from the perspective of the state the subject will be legitimised if the government 'sees' his or her cultural congruence with the state agenda.

18. Correspondingly, the communicative efficacy of an artist's creation is subjected to the state's ability to 'see' and 'pass' the cultural asymmetries inherent within the artwork. In other words, the artist needs to 'fashion' his or her work with a cosmopolitan outlook in order to present the work within the state's borders. This position brings us to the problem of how the state addresses the issue of cultural legibility such as justifications for national culture and the subsequent shaping and delimitation of citizens' cultural development. Thinking about how someone 'becomes' eligible for citizenship in the United States of America, Judith Butler identifies four dispositions that qualify a person to be granted entry. These conditions are: a person's language ability; their financial contribution to the state economy via taxes or other means; ease of integrating into the socio-cultural fabric; and a distinguishable ethnic identity.[36] To the extent that these criteria perform an operation of standardisation and legitimisation they also place those who do not qualify into a 'situation of destitution, dispossession and displacement.'[37] In other words, the invention of a state discourse simultaneously creates a mode of statelessness.[38]

19. While Butler has applied this idea solely to the geographical and material conditions of state affiliation we can extend her argument into the realm of politics and aesthetics.[39] Foremost, a state constitution and parliament is itself a total regulation of the human subject as well as the ideas and objects that come into being. Agreeing to be conscripted under the law of the state is equivalent to surrendering one's right to deviate from the state's norms and decorum; and statehood disciplines citizenry by requiring its constituents to adhere to certain standards of presenting oneself within and without the state, to the extent that the citizen aims to become an embodiment of the state and its politics. This could very well be an explanation of the ontology of state formation, transformation and deformation, but what remains are the dynamics between the state and its citizens that constitute constant negotiations of the very conditions of being with and in the state. Such a political system will always be correlative because the ontologies of the state and that of the self are co-determinants of each other.

20. Likewise for the Singapore arts scene, state regulation restricts the means of producing and consuming the arts amongst its citizenry. By insisting on the legibility and comprehensibility of art works, not only does Singapore demand a standardisation of aesthetic discourses but it also aims to control the people's perceptions and reactions. A set of classification and censorship guidelines have been included in the state constitution as an aesthetic framework to which all must comply.[40] Comparable to how the state deals with refugees, the state assumes the authority to select and reject artworks based on their legibility within or without the state's aesthetic borders. Aesthetic minorities within are discriminated against and risk not being given platforms or funding to present their works and ideas.[41]

21. Two of several strategies that artists have used to circumvent such state policies include tailoring aesthetics to match the state's requirements and 'passing' their worldview as 'legible.' The first tactic, related to what I discussed as aesthetic standardisation, is when one resigns into a kind of political asceticism, practises self-censorship and churns out state art. From a performative perspective, Butler sees a contradiction between the state's exercise of freedom and its assertion of equality.[42] That is, you continue to be a creative artist but you have to conform to a certain standards of production. This method appears hypocritical and authoritarian. A second option is for the artist to 'pass' as a subject of the state; his or her artworks have to be legible enough for state regulators to condone the existence of the works within state boundaries. Akin to how trans people 'pass' the socially constructed gender binary this artistic strategy requires the artist and the artwork to 'pass' under the gaze of the state. But this is a subversive tactic of art-making that takes on an aesthetic of doing and being trans.

22. Within such a political regime, the creative artist is arguably analogous to a refugee waiting to gain entry into the country. The artist, the refugee and the trans person are all queer subjects seeking to obtain entry to their respective economy. Not only do they have to make certain compromises themselves but they also have to highlight the relevant phenotypical traits that will allow them to 'pass' and belong. Similar to Singaporean trans-migrants assimilating to the cosmopolitan, the artist has to 'fit' or 'pass' the aesthetic criteria set by the managing curators, directors and their supporters. Here an artist becomes standardised or ostracised. This latter group, as Butler claims, are not only disqualified from membership of the state but are also 'qualified' to be accorded the status of being stateless.[43] Correspondingly, people who do not conform to gender or creative norms become classified as suffering from gender identity disorder or harbouring a subversive and anarchist agenda. These political deviants are banned from having a citizenship, a gender or any involvement in the local art scene.[44]

23. Putting these ideas into context, if we were to use Butler's four criteria to assess Wong's *After Chinatown* or his other output, a pertinent question to pose is whether the artworks would 'pass' the state's political gaze. Typical of his artistic style, Wong imitates dramatic acting on a small television screen while speaking the original language of the film. He exhibits all his projects in the country where the films and funds originated and identifies himself as a Singaporean of Chinese ethnicity. These characteristics posit him readily within the legibility of the state citizenry, at least those pertaining to the United States. While Butler's example concerned the translation and performance of the American anthem in Spanish, our subject here is Wong's appropriation of various national cinemas juxtaposed with his own postcolonial ontology and aesthetics. It is not simply the metamorphic and repetitive transformation of his body and voice but the 'passing' of the total work of art as nationalist under the gaze of the state.

24. To resolve this critical conundrum I would like to theorise this particular technique of art practice—that negotiates with the authority of the nation-state—as a form of trans-aesthetics. Trans-aesthetics are concerned with 'passing' state standardisation and gaining a political legibility that transcends the capitalist and racist foundations of homonationalist ideologies. The idea of trans-aesthetics extends and expands upon what Halberstam and Quinn Miller have discussed within the transgender phenotypical materiality of queer visual culture as the simultaneous presence of 'the abstract and the figural.'[45] The concept of trans-aesthetics also shares Jean Baudrillard's own understanding of the term, albeit without a hyphen, as an amalgamation of the economic, the political and the sexual within the aesthetic of the artwork.[46] Trans-aesthetics, pulled together by the hyphen, includes these connotations as well the artist's everyday life and work vis-à-vis the standardisation directive of the nation-state. However, the hyphen in the neologism is important to signify the supplementary nature of producing and consuming the artwork. That is, trans-aesthetics will always be in excess of any singular aesthetics.

25. Precisely because Wong's artworks are always 'qualified' as both belonging and not belonging to the nation-state—that is, being transnational and transgender—they will be understood as always and already Singaporean and non-Singaporean. Transported and transformed within and without the geographical and ontological borders of other nation-states, Ming Wong's trans-aesthetics have provided the artist with a leeway to 'pass' various cultural criteria standardised by the state. His work has become more legible to the nation-state without veering into the reified evocations of homonationalism. Wong's trans-aesthetics provide both western and Asian viewers a common point of entry into visual art, subversively challenging cultural and political differences. The onus now lies in the audiences' ability and willingness to look past the phenotypical standardisations of the nation-state and its actors in order to achieve the ideal integration of aesthetic and political autonomy.

Notes

[1] Mandarin being the national language in China can be heard in distinct regional and international accents, such as those by Shanghainese, Taiwanese, Malaysians and Europeans.

[2] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

[3] Statistics show that White British and (South) Asian British made up 69.9 and 11.3 per cent respectively of the Greater Manchester population in June 2009. See Neighbourhood Statistics, Office for National Statistics.

[4] Cf. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[5] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 54.

[6] Cf. Jun Zubillaga-Pow, 'Trans-mothering on Singapore's Siniticate screens,' in *Transnational Chinese Cinema*, ed. Brian Bergen-Aurand, Mary Mazzilli and Wai-Siam Hee, Los Angeles, CA: Bridge21, 2015, pp. 95–111.

[7] Gender and sexuality also act as significant categories of (il)legibility as discerned in Lilian Haberer's review of Wong's earlier output in 'Wong's restaging of language and identity,' in *Fassbinder NOW: Film and Video Art*, ed. Deutsches Filminstitut – DIF and the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation, Frankfurt: Deutsches Filminstitute Filmmuseum, 2013, pp. 258–65.

[8] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: MN: Minnesota University Press, 1999.

[9] These scholars include Rey Chow, David Eng, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Martin Manalansan and Celine Parreñas Shimizu. See also my 'Trans-mothering on Singapore Siniticate screens.'

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London and New York: Routledge: 1990.

[11] Daniel Chernilo, *A Social Theory of the Nation-State: the Political Forms of Modernity beyond Methodological Nationalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, and Daniel Chernilo, 'The critique of methodological nationalism: Theory and history,' in *Thesis Eleven* vol. 106, no. 1 (2011):98–17.

[12] Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 77–01.

[13] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 236–38.

[14] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 149 and 171.

[15] Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as 'a politics that *does not* contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a *demobilized* gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticized gay culture anchored in *domesticity* and *consumption* [emphasis in original],' in 'The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism,' in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 175–94, p. 179.

[16] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge, 1990.

[17] John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

[18] Jun Zubillaga-Pow, 'The negative dialectics of Homonationalism, Or Singapore English newspapers and queer world-making,' in *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Culture*, ed. Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012, pp. 149–60.

[19] Jasbir Puar, 'A transnational feminist critique of queer Tourism,' *Antipode* vol. 34, no. 5 (2002):935–46, p. 941.

[20] One crucial point to highlight is that her trip was taken during the reign of the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party, which is a strong advocate of Hindu nationalism, as oppose to her hereditary Sikhism.

[21] Puar, 'A transnational feminist critique of queer tourism,' p. 941.

[22] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls, London: Routledge,

2002

[23] We can also compare the semantics of the situation with how Julie Y. Chu has theorised material flow as part of a system of risks and rewards, in *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

[24] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 2.

[25] Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith, Wiley-Blackwell, 2004 [1974], p. 143.

[26] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York and London: Rouledge, 1993, p. 62.

[27] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, New York and London: Routledge, 1990, p. 297. Puar's sympathies for the unethical profiling of Sikhs or the Asian cyber-bullies that killed a white student from Rutgers can also be considered as futile philosophical experiments in the guise of a queer-of-colour critique; see Jasbir K. Puar, 'Coda: The cost of getting better: Suicide, sensation, switchpoints,' *GLQ* vol. 18, no. 1 (2012): 149–58.

[28] Haberer, 'Wong's restaging of language and identity,' p. 260.

[29] Cf. Paul Willemen, 'The national revisited,' in *Theorising National Cinema*, ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, London: BFI Publishing, 2006, pp. 29–44.

[30] Cf. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

[31] Cf. Adele Tan, 'Finding (in)imitable form: Wong's rehearsal of the nation,' *Contemporary Visual Art+Culture Broadsheet* vol. 38, no. 2 (2009): 124–27.

[32] Song Hwee Lim, 'Is the trans- in transnational the trans- in transgender?,' in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* vol. 5, no. 1 (2007): 39–52.

[33] For examples, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, and Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998.

[34] I follow the late Leslie Feinberg in the use of the term bi-gender to refer to the binary gender construct of a single person; see *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998.

[35] Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, 'Identity politics and cultural asymmetries: Singaporean transmigrants "fashioning" cosmopolitanism,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration and Studies* vol. 37, no. 5 (2011): 729–46. See also her '"Flexible citizenship" or familial ties that bind? Singaporean transmigrants in London,' *International Migration* vol. 46, no. 4 (2008): 145–75.

[36] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*, London and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007, p. 6.

[37] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, p. 10.

[38] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, p. 54.

[39] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, pp. 11 and 15.

[40] Recent arts and cultural policies are collected in the *Renaissance City Plans* and *Arts and Culture Strategic Review*.

[41] On some of the issues regarding artistic governance, see C.J.W.-L. Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007.

[42] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, p. 66.

[43] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, p. 15.

[44] Cf. Ray Lagenbach, 'Representing state desire and the sins of transgression,' in *House of Glass: Culture, Modernity, and the State in Southeast Asia*, ed. Souchou Yao, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001, pp. 70–94, esp. p. 75.

[45] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York: New York University

Press, 2005, p. 124; Quinn Miller, 'Queer exteriors: Transgender aesthetics in early gay and lesbian advertising,' in *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders and Politics of Transition*, ed. Trystan Cotton, London and New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 76–91.

[46] Jean Baudrillard, 'Transaesthetics,' in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict, London and New York: Verso, 1993 [1990], pp. 14–19.

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