

FROM THE CURATOR/EDITOR'S JOURNAL:

December 13, 2004 (Festive China 又一棧, Festival Walk 又一城 / lunch)

[與蔡仍姿的閒談] (a casual conversation)

Dialogue, she and I

第一次對談。又一城。又一棧。

只是閒談著，互相發現，

一起步，就踩著年齡這話題。

比朋輩更早細味趕向盛年的過程。她強調再強調。

不知道兜轉到那個話點子兒，忽然我談起自己如何兜兜轉轉的走過二十年的路，去尋回當年親手而有意識地割斷的創作活動，又如何於此刻總覺自己的視覺語言以至創作的聲音還呼之未出，正在凸現又朦朧。……其實都已成過去，也無所謂，不過說起來總不免變得戲劇化，有點滄桑。我最想說的只有一點，但我終於沒有擺明的：就是我找不到可以在理念上、在叛逆和顛覆的程度、在戲弄文化政治的調皮態度上跟我對等交流的同輩。然後想，為何一定要是同輩？

忽然有感，都怪當時身邊沒有可以啓迪我、可以幫我看遠一點的長輩，（聽起來不太像出於我口的話，）都是在焦慮與熱誠理想中豁出去的癡狂的同輩。其實我也不怎後悔，誰長大都大概如此罷。但，此刻，我很想跟人對話。我和蔡仍姿就正在對話。

Our first conversation turned out to focus on aging, womanhood, and not doing things the same pace the same time with one's peer.

[Dialogue 2: February 4, 2005 (Friday) / 4:45pm at Pacific Coffee, Festival Walk]

Key points: quick capture

*initial interview (unplanned) on facts of her life illustrating:

(a) the “in-between-ness” of her life as an artist and as a person [長久的夾縫狀態 + 衝破界域的態度] with reference to Mathew Turner's comments on her;

(b) the common “points of departure” of her creative process for her works

*Yanchi's suggestion Linda collaborating on a work... texts or more...

*EXCHANGE:

(a) Linda conducted a rough web search for “Choi Yan-chi”: material to be sorted, analyzed and organized.

(b) Yan-chi brought Linda a few articles on art she wrote in the early 1980s for 博益.

*NEXT STEP:

(a) Linda would create a chronology with multiple narrative strands for future discussion and collaborative construction (creative chronology). This will be the guide map for the continuation of the entire project.

(b) To pursue the line of creative styles, Yan-chi will send Linda more writings written

on her.

(c) To pursue further possibilities of collaboration: Linda will send Yan-chi her [Crypto-glyph: Dialogues in Many Tongues in the Hidden Crevices of an Open City](#).

(d) Interview will continue in the next meeting on the key events that scarred her creative career back in Hong Kong since the 1980s

Possible works based on the meeting:

(1) *Re-creation of her lost paintings...* Yan-chi mentioned the earliest painting series she did at CIA (Chicago Institute of Art), which was her conscious attempt to engage with cultural identity – Chinese paintings executed in Western medium, an award-winning series. The paintings are no longer available.

The work can be a huge painting in which she recalls, analyses and critiques her own work. It can also be collaboration with Linda that incorporates her textual input. Another possible work will be Linda doing a tableau-style video as a response.

(2) *Chronology*: a play with narratives (her life, her work, her education, her career, and chronology of the insignificant and the subjective). *This can be a digital work.*

February 3, 2005 (morning)

At Pacific Coffee, Festival Walk

Reflecting on our last conversations and the material researched, it seems the following can be some possible focus:

-文化脈絡 a network of cultural elements

-Modernization of Chinese art

Her first realization in Chicago

[See **early works in Chicago** – Chinese paintings with western media, another instance of what M. Turner calls 錯體]

Yan-chi said the award she received for her works in Chicago was no encouragement – for she was suspected of exploiting exotic (Chinese) values. The irony is: upon her return to HK, it was the so-called “new” things that set off her creative career – that is, she chose to focus on “new” works – 但所謂“新”，就是在 Chicago 所學的很 minimal 的西方野 (Danny Yung’s comments? How important was her acquaintance with Danny?) The progressive sentiments she immersed in took time to affect her work back in HK, step by step, until she started teaching at HK Polytechnic when she could do what she wanted to do. [more in the next interview...]

追索性的繪畫 [painting as action, performative painting]: her paintings form a historical path that is about the search for what painting is about and what painting may disclose for her...

YC recalled herself as a member of the earliest generation of video artists in HK...

Lynn Bloomingdale...Artists' archive established...1985 Barbara Hammon came to HK...

But soon after that YC gave up video art, plus at that point she left HK Polytechnic, that is, she no longer had institutional support to explore new art forms.

成長過程/文化：

覺得自己很不中國 – 生於不絕對中國化/書香世代的家庭

[In M. Turner's 1993 essay "The Disobedience of Choi, Yan-chi," he quoted YC's words: "30 or 40 percent of the installations are out of control – or out of my control – to be completed by the audience...especially if they don't know what they are doing." To this, Turner wrote, "This is not the voice of Modernism's revolt against the Father, an attempt to wrest control. Choi Yan-chi has never rejected tradition; it is for her simply out of reach. Her own father, a second generation Indonesian Chinese, delighted more in playfulness than in playing the stern patrician, yet she never learned his songs or his languages, while for his part he never spoke good Cantonese. So Choi Yan-chi's rebellion took a more subversive route, opposing the strictures of her more dominant Cantonese mother, and everything associated with the ethos of control."] (...essay was written for the exhibition "Raumfarben – room of colours" at the Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, part of the Artists of the World Series...)

In her 20s, YC decided the life she wanted –she married a man who is many many years older than herself...韓志勳 Hon Chi-fun...

YC talked of her commitment to the relation... Of Hon, she said he is a very unusual person; got a very hybrid cultural make-up

His "tradition" (傳統) 比其他人更傳統 (e.g. compare 王無邪的水墨)

韓：傳統道德（人與人的關係）也是守禮、守約；但“傳統”做成矛盾

刻意做 Hippies... 蔡：“我感染了，就好像經歷了。”

Subject positions: always negotiating between conflicting forces, e.g. feeling uneasy with her role as a wife...

Personality...喜歡有個人的空間 need personal space

[Another cross reference from Turner's essay: "she married one of the foremost modern painters in Hong Kong, Hon Chi-fun. And her own paintings and installations are not free from a recrudescence of the wounds and sutures produced by the first artists to apply the invasive language of modernism to Chinese traditions. Yet by comparison Choi Yan-chi's work seems almost evasive. Her slack, over-painted canvases, the evanescent surfaces of gauze, mirrors, lights and water that make up her installations, all slip naturally across cultural as well as spatial boundaries, disobediently overrunning the frames set up to contain them.]

Discontented with "art work as object"...and yet lack of contemporaneous colleagues within the art community; no one to share her struggles, feeling rather lonely...at the same time feel

much closer to the performing art sector...; therefore admired teamwork.

[?] participated in [?] Laurie Anderson's early work as a young artist..

Being included in the 1st VAS as member (even without making the effort to be a member...)

群體出現？若有若無...機緣啓於《中國旅程》(三)(1980)...榮念曾

1980 Danny Yung's invitation...YC joined the production of *Journey to the East 3*...made slides and set film projection design; installation work...friendship with Yung preserved...

(although many people have fallen out of their relation with Yung)

王守謙...早期 partner mediating her collaboration with Yung

What kind of community was Choi expecting? – real dialogues

真正可對話的, such as classmates at the Chicago Art Institute...they are the eyewitness of her changes in the late 1970s...her search for new directions between performance and installation..

Some quick thoughts for possible components of the catalogue:

Chronology...

Multiple, self-narrative; nodes, points...

解說：

早期的作品人並不一定明白；常給人問可不可以給我看看你的作品，看了大多啞言

-- 我不是好的說客或 performer...

[我問]可否用三四句說話去概括你作品想探討或處理的？

[答]都跟空間有關，時間、人的存在、活動

[我問] What kind of art and art activities? How to define it, call it (to make people recognize)?

[答]“不能把自己固存於某種既定形式，懂得自己站在中間界線去創作，有時會個人些，絕對些會比較好。”

Want to be a reflexive artist... Turner describes her as “always between boundaries.”

February 6, 2005

Progress Report (written) presented to PS Board Meeting on Research Exhibition re: Choi Yan-chi

(I'll be out of town...Tim or Warren will deliver this in the meeting if necessary...)

(1) Have met with Yanchi twice: Dec 13, 2004 and Feb 3, 2005

(2) Have begun basic Search:

→ Linda: web and literature search (some basic info compiled on her works)

→ Choi: provided articles on art she wrote in the early 1980s *** These are the very few essays she has done, as she described.

→ More writings on her and on her works will be sent by mail to Linda in the coming weeks

(3) Initial Interviews: some key ideas have emerged...

*"In-between-ness" or "falling between cracks"? [在夾縫中的狀態] as predominant quality regarding her choices in life, career, artistic creation etc.

*Difficulty in communicating to others what kind of work and what kind of artist she is...

*Her early paintings (award-winning) in the Chicago Art Institute days... were her early attempts to create a dialogue between Chinese and Western paintings... Few people have seen them. Not sure whether they are available...

*Her creative method...concept-driven...

*Engaged in video art in the early 1980s

*Earliest significant cross-disciplinary engagement was with Zuni and Danny Yung. In her view, their collaboration had been a significant factor in her career.

(4) Next steps / possible works emerging from the two meetings (tentative only):

*A multiple-narrative chronology (this can be turned into a work or pure text for the catalogue): her works, career as an artists + more interpretive chronologies (personal, subjective) + her account of the history of HK art scene...

***Re-creating the lost paintings: not just re-creating, but to turn the work into an act of recalling, analysis and critique. In our conversations, this can be a *huge painting*, a collage of text and images, or even a tableau-style digital video...**

*Assembling more writings on and by her

*Gathering available fragments of her other early works: video, 《中國旅程》之三 etc.

*Choi is very keen on doing one piece together with Linda... Shall see how that proceeds...

We agreed to continue to meet regularly (once a month)...

March 24, 2005

At Choi's studio in Kowloon City

Her studio used to be their family residence. (They've just moved.) Typical of a residential flat in terms of the division of space into rooms...except all I saw was books, books, paper, paper, paper with art works, paintings, etc. etc. YC set up a slide projector. I was curious how we can do a slide show with so much sunlight coming in. Ah! There were blinds (full sheets) one could draw down to hide the windows and for slide projection...

Today, we exchanged views on a number of general issues, about curatorship, about art education and art organizations. But mainly I was watching YC's introduction of her works from Chicago – most of them now only surviving in slide format. She talked about each slide and each work, one by one, alongside the recalling of titles and background info, she also made connections to other more daily life matters such as the community, friends and teachers, and her own struggle with creative directions with each work...

July 1, 2005

C:這幅用一層層的紙，在上面畫完後再撕下來，然後從新再畫上去。產生一層層的效果。因此有些色和效果不是用普通繪畫的技巧，而是透過材料轉化出來的。那時我十分醉心去做這些東西。

這批作品也我對自身年紀的一種的感覺的反影，而作品就是我的說話。.....

但批作品經已給我全部毀掉了，現在想來也真是頗傷心的一件事。

L: 為什麼要毀掉這些作品，是不想留住那些感覺？

C: 其實當時我是頗傷心的。在完成這批作品並回到香港後，發覺在香港沒有人可以和我溝通得到。

L: 在前一次的訪問你也這樣說過。

C: 對，因此我開始質疑自己作品的價值，有一種不知為什麼而畫的感覺，好像畫出來的畫都只是礙著空間。

L: 你把這批作品帶回港後才在香港毀掉它們？

C: 對。當時常常有一個感覺，就是在香港是沒有人可以和我溝通。

L: 你好像很強調這一點。

C: 是嗎？從這批作品很明顯可以看到：好像自己有很多話要說出來，但又不知如何說。所以在整個製作中，重複著一個不停畫但又同時不斷覆蓋，然後又再畫的過程。

.....

C: 這幅是用一些 4 X 8 尺的板做，總共是 4 尺 X 12 尺。是一幅頗大的鏡/畫。[Yanchi is referring to a set of paintings presented in an exhibition at the HK Arts Centre, titled *on the wall off the wall and the environment*]

L: 這幅也掉了？

C: 對，其實當年應該堅持一點。我常常強調沒有人可以溝通，是因為我覺得自己在香港的存在很奇怪。好像當年王無邪看完這個展覽後，告訴我說：「我們中國人在香港是很難畫西洋畫的，因為我們根本沒機會到博物館去看別人的油畫，所以我們是不懂用顏色的。」他最後一句的意思其實是說我不會用顏色，他不認為我用的顏色是顏色。

L: 但你那時其實是剛剛從芝加哥回來？

C: 對。

L: 那你是否同意他的說法？

C: 當然不，但當時我四周都是這類人。

L: 憑你剛剛所說的，再加上之前兩次的訪問，其實都可以解釋到你為什麼會覺得 *lonely*。比如你之前談到 *concrete painting*，在 70 年代的芝加哥或者美國發源。但當代藝術的一些新的概念和實踐，往往都要花十五至二十年的時間才可以來到香港。要待在一個很大的時差後才可以同等 *solid* 地在香港被接受，或許現在會快點罷？

C: 現在也沒有兩樣。

L: 所以當你離開芝加哥(*concrete painting* 的)發源地，離開了那個創作基地後。發覺在香港是不會有人接受這些東西，甚至會聽到類似你剛才說的這些聲音。

C: 即使到了現在，香港要開 Visual Art School，我仍然在想這個問題。正如現在他們知道我

在做什麼，但他們是不會 recognize 我做的東西。

L: 他們永遠不知道現在你在做什麼，然後十年後才發現「為什麼我們不做這些東西？」

C: 不是，即使到了現在，在我的學校裡。他們那一輩仍然不 recognize 我(當年)做的這類東西。

L: 那他們的藝術史知識真的很落後了？

C: 他們根本沒有藝術史的知識。其實我都感受良多，我們這群人都看得到香港所遇到的問題，現在我正在想如何教我將來的學生。

L: 你是否同意，很多事情如果不從藝術史出發是根本沒法子談？根本沒法子去說服那些人把眼光放遠點。我贊成你的說法，即使到了今天，很多人仍然跳過了整個世紀的美術史，完全不知道有些曾經發生過的事情，卻可以對你有諸多要求。好像 concrete painting，從現在廿一世紀的觀點來說，那經已是個過去的運動，但仍然有一群從外國學成回來的人，不知道原來當年的香港已經有人做這類作品。似乎歷史的記述不能把何時何人所做的事，和藝術史內出現的 movement 連繫起來。所以我們便常常覺得我們什麼也沒有。

有時你跟一個初到貴境的人以外國的尺度去說我們沒有什麼，那種 What do you know about us? 的感覺又重新走出來。

C: 對。我想，為什麼只有香港的創作人特別要去面對這個問題？

.....

L: 記得 Hector 去看韓志勳的展覽，看後就驚異的說：「原來香港竟然有這個人！」他什為興奮，還立刻在一次的課上加上韓志勳的畫作進行解說。

C: 對，就是這個問題。為什麼香港會是這樣？然韓志勳是香港其中一個，有他的能耐去生存到現在的創作人。在展覽之前，當我去幫他做那本書時，我們覺得要辦成一個他的回顧展是件遙遙無期的事。.....之後幾經辛苦終於辦成他的展覽。很多去看過的人都十分開心，而他們開心的原因就是和 hector 一樣。雖然作為一個展覽，暫且拋開香港不談，本身也是十分扎實的。但就是有很多「原來香港也有這些東西！」之類的回應。這正是悲哀之處，過了這個展覽後又如何？

L: 不過我也問過很多身邊的人。雖然有，但也不是很多做當代藝術的人去看過他的展覽。

C: 或許他們覺得這些東西與自己無關，有「不是我這一代的東西」之類的想法。但這正正是香港現在所面對的問題。我們這班所謂有一定份量的創作人，每人都抱有一些理想，即使各自的理想有沒有開花結果也好，但我們始終未能到岸。所謂的到岸就是要有一個 recognition。這包括兩個層次，第一就是 community 內對我們個人的 recognition。而基於很多複雜的理由，原來要達到這一點也不容易。但即使去到這一步也並不足夠，我們真正要有的是一個更大的 community 的 recognition，即是香港對我們個人的 recognition。要有這種 recognition 才有用，但這方面就真的是遙遙無期。我想我們都要面對這個頗嚴重的問題，如果「不到岸」的話，香港的創作人都要浮游於這一種不甘的感覺上。我想不只我有這一種感覺。

〔談到 1984 年理工年代做的大浪灣環境裝置藝術〕

L: 你當年在理工所做的東西，是今天理工不會容許去做的，那時理工真像一個 art school 般。

C: 對，我們離開後就很不同。

L: 當年，好像中大藝術系都不會做你們那類的東西。

C: 對，那時真的很厲害。而且當時理工在王無邪等人之下，他們有些想和中大抗衡的想法。所以那時自己身心時間都十分緊張，好像每天都在做四份不同的工作。理工、家庭、自己的創作和

小孩子。所以因此竟然去了做這些東西(performances)。

L: 你的意思是，如果當時不是在重重擔子之下，你們可能會花多些時間在繪畫上？

C: 我覺得我有很多條發展路線本應不是這樣的。如剛才所說，為什麼我把自己這麼多的畫作都掉了？其實有些時候是自己沒有想透徹便跳了去做第二種東西。

L: 但你剛才給我看的東西難道不算是一些進展？還只是用自己的熱情去做而已？

C: 我想的是，為什麼香港不能有 artist？(笑)。我想如果不是這些遭遇的話，有些事情是可以發展得好些。……我們心理上太「嬉皮」，相信什麼是也可以順其自然，而且可能自信心太強，也沒有想過要計劃些什麼。

L: 是否有自己要負上責任的想法？

C: 我的想法往往是，總之用自己的方法做好它。常常有這種自以為可以辦妥的想法。……最辛苦是在 1998，99 年左右。那時好像所有事情都崩潰了。

L: 因為韓志勳生病？

C: 自己內心也生病了，支撐了這麼多年，亦一路以為自己可以支撐下去，支撐家庭，支撐自己的創作，支撐事業，甚至支撐婚姻。但去到那個時候，就真的崩潰了。所以到了現在，你找我一起談作我的回顧，自己也期待可以(在創作上)再次復出。也覺得現在是可以慢慢(復出創作)。當年(80 年代)做那些作品時，真的是很辛苦。

……

C: 我很喜歡芝加哥藝術學院，但她亦有其短處。那時是所謂的後嬉皮年代，影響所及，芝加哥在教與學上都明顯地走到了理想的極端。例如在教學上，當時的老師是很怕和避免給予學生任何方面的 instruction 的。他們不告訴你做得不對，也避免建議你如何做可能會更好。在技術上他們是要避免教授任何技巧。我們只從一個 inductive 的方式去吸收，十分重視 critical sections，他們要求你從自己的作品去解釋，去找尋答案。我當然很喜歡和尊重這一套教法。但對我來說，在學習過程中有些東西好像不太清晰，有些理論我要到今天才知道。當然，有可能當時根本還未有那些理論。

L: 你希望當時別人看了你的作品後會有多些實在的回應，但你認為當時在這方面並不足夠？

C: 對。很長的一段時間內完全沒有這類回應。

L: 當時的老師們是不是假設到來的學生都是完全自主的藝術家？

C: 對。

L: 那老師的角色是什麼？像個生命的啟發者？

C: 對。當時有個令我印象深刻，而我亦很喜歡的老師 (James Ostler)，屬於很飄逸很不實在那類。是我自己選擇去修他的課的。那本應是個教理論的課，但他第一堂已經在做 performance。他本身是個 land artist，第一堂我剛進課室時，沒有老師，只見地上有一堆布，是染了色用來做降落傘的布，等了一會仍見不到老師，然後地上那堆布慢慢充氣從地上升起。跟著老師就出現了，他與我們談什麼是 defiance — 如果父母要你努力讀書之後成為律師或醫生之類那是不是 defiance? 之後他好像寫了本 *Eighty definitions of Arts*。他那時經已開始反對觀念藝術，是個甚先進的思想家。真的很喜歡這位老師，但也知道最終會失去這位老師。就是太飄逸了，沒有電話也沒有地址，他的生命就是這樣子。

現在回想，真的很享受當時的方式，但壞處是他們太極端地要推翻傳統的教學模式。

.....

L: 《山呼無色》和《赤層》這兩個作品和 Rauschenberg 還有沒有關係？為什麼覺得它們是現代中國水墨畫？

C: 去美國之前曾經跟隨呂壽琨他們習畫。那時做過的東西我覺得有需要去跟進。不過同時又有 out of place 的問題，又缺乏其他人可以溝通。而且去到美國再做現代水墨畫那類東西又會很奇怪。當其時 70 年代，人們談的不是現在談的全球化，而是 modernism。要有一個絕對 art language 的潮流。因此我當時在創作上感到很辛苦。當時的導師推動 Imagists，也是一個很知識份子的人。當他看到我的作品《山呼無色》時，他問到 “Why do you use an art language that I can’t understand?” 他對我的批判是為什麼我要用這個 element？我是不是要標榜自己的身份？在 modernism 當道的那個時代，人們不熱衷於討論文化身份。他們談的是 internationalism。

L: 正如你所說，你本是抱著赤子之心去見識藝術世界，然後發現如 Rauschenberg 的作品十分吸引，並嘗試從中尋找一些線索去聯繫到自己的創作。可是那邊的導師卻對你有別的期望？

December 1, 2005

[Yan-chi already started talking to M. Turner for possibilities of contributing an essay to the catalogue.](#)

June 15, 2006 Festival Walk (after talking to two young artists)

Confirm “bi”- or “tri”-lateral parallel historical discourse: Choi’s, HK art development, (other media/arts/culture...)

Choi’s history is a history of burden for many people of her generation:

-lack of recognition

-baptized by frontier art concepts and knowledge of art movements from the West, but lacking in a mature local (HK) environment that would understand their excitement...

Both Choi’s Chicago period (conceptual painting) and late 1980s/early 1990s period (performance + installation) invoked sadness. I felt that in Chicago she was loaded with Hon Chi-fan’s influence and burdened by her Chinese-ness as well as the mission to “modernize” Chinese painting imposed on to her by her occidental mentors. Because of this, I felt she had somewhat wasted her face-to-face presence with the Fluxus members. Their works had fascinated her, and yet she was legitimately marginalized in the name of her ethnic origin. The impact of the Fluxus was not absent except that it did not reveal itself until after she returned to HK from Chicago. Back in HK, she was indeed among the first to cross discipline – to marry paintings with sculpture and later on with installation, video and performance, a situation that has almost become the norm by the late 1990s. I felt that Choi was rather lonely at that point. With the art scene predominantly powered by the discourse

of contemporary Chinese art, there was no one who understood Choi's practice enough to engage in a meaningful dialogue with her. (Of course, I also felt that Choi was not almost the very articulate type who was able to detail her art practices to her contemporary colleagues at that time against a historical and conceptual context.)

An idea for the opening: give a group of artist the script derived from *As Slowly As Possible* and do a performance.

***I talked to YC about this later. She prefers to re-work *Object-activities*.

July 11, 2006 Pacific Coffee, Festival Walk

Confirmation with writers and who's still writing...

A general discussion of how what to do with the PS venue:

- (a) to focus on presenting documents and visual illustrations? Not a very interesting approach – that should be the book's job
- (b) to focus on presenting a new work by YC – that was one element that came up in the very beginning of the exchange...that our dialogue should result in creative activities – this is good, but how is it a retrospective?

...

It seems we need to think of both the PS and the 1a venue/show together to see how they may complement one another....

I suggested that PS's space is better for installation work, which in YC's "repertoire" is more embracing: it leads to painting and performance as well... 1a has great and better space for her paintings... once can walk/stroll through more meditatively...

July 12, 2006

Outline – summing up

[mainly for catalogue, but will be adapted and presented for the main exhibition at P/S]

*network of acquaintances as a series of maps...

*photo-series/photo-collage/drawings.....in response to transcriptions of "As Slow as Possible" and "Object-activity"

*Performance (opening) based on the transcriptions

*Re-modeling of former installations (playing with space) – (at exhibition)

*包袱: fine arts (CUHK) and its mission to make art flourish

Essays to come:

-Ivy Ma (on painting)

-Matthew Turner

-Cheung Mei

July 14, 2006

I asked Christina (Assistant Curator at PS) to check for me what kind of permission we need to get to do a performance on Po Yan Street and nearby areas such as the staircase and landings around Pound Lane.

July 21, 2006

Christina got back to me.... We'll have to get permission from 4 to 5 different government offices to make the thing work. I felt perhaps we'll just do it – and turn it into a happening, something that looks like an unexpected incident on the street....

August 6, 2006 Pacific Café, IFC phase II, 8:00pm

After my downtown check-in for my London flight (11:05pm) and my meeting with Cedric, I met with Yanchi, Ivy Ma and Kim to review the overall design and flow of the book. The key components:

Feature essays... + images of works juxtaposed with texts (from my interview notes with YC, from reviews on her shows, from catalogues and program notes...) + multiple chronology (I shall juxtapose YC's biographical and work information with periodic division on HK arts' development by various writers... + data lists..

Principles / analogies:

- the book should be compared to sedimentary rocks, multiple layers...;
- no image should be for pure decoration or illustration purpose: the normal image and text hierarchy should be abolished; image and texts flow into each other to form a continuous narrative;
- emphasis on open-endedness: spatial arrangement, sequential ordering, juxtaposition and classification all have implicit narrative functions...The book should not draw conclusions for its readers, but via a deliberate sense of order, possible readings [in plural form!] are suggested.
- centering Yan-chi, and yet de-centering her by assembling views that may comply or contradict one another.

In my check-in luggage, I had two huge folders for this project, one filing writings on YC and her works, the other her own writings. (Bit by bit, she collected more and more of her

published writings...there are, unlike her initial estimation, many more pieces she has done than she can remember...)

September 4, 2006

今天，我請了蔡仞姿和曾德平到我的大學跟我的學生談話。仞姿提到八十年代的香港藝術景象比現在新鮮熱鬧，有不少精彩的年輕藝術家。曾德平也在旁輕輕點頭。田邁修為這結集寫的文章也把香港八十年代初的藝壇描述為遲來的、但燦爛的「前衛」（或先鋒）時期。我心裏倒是有點難受。一來，八十年代正是我逃離純藝術的年代；那就是說，我和很多人都錯過了這一瞬的光芒了！說現在，我覺得現在一個年輕人要談創作，已經沒有了過往那個界限分明的領域。同時，新媒體朝向的跨界，在技術與技術操作上的純熟程度要求奇高，非單靠熱誠或靈感或創作空間與資源的提高就可以。如果有人要我選擇，我想我會固執的選擇現在◎無論建制化和政策化如何發揮有形無形的操控作用，藝術創作不再是小圈子的權利，由先入為主的經濟背景去作第一回合帥選。有幾個人在快樂，或是很多人在求存。我選擇後者。

Today, I also asked Mo (my student, a dancer and choreographer) if she is interested in adapting *Object-activity* into a performance of movement through Po Yan Street. I gave her a copy of the transcript of the piece's video documentation Yue-jin did. She said right away that she's interested.

September 7, 2006 (Thursday) Pacific Coffee, Festival Walk (10:30 am)

Met with the two designers, Kim and Ivy... I came up with a tentative outline. More or less the same core ideas presented in August, but with more instructions on the Glossary session, which was a decision I made while traveling in Europe. There's too much to work on and to show in the book... perhaps a glossary list may handily provide a structure to contain the diverse concerns of YC's...

Book title:

[Re-]Fabrication:

Choi Yan-chi's 30 years, paths of Inter-disciplinarity in Art (1975-2005)

Outline of the general flow of the book's content:

- (A) quotes + images + transcripts from performance
- (B) Editor's/Curator's notes
- (C) MT's essay
- (D) Chan Yuk-keung's essay
- (E) Cheung Mei
- (F) Choi Yan-chi's essay
- (G) Multiple chronologies

- discourses of local art development
- Yanchi's biography
- artists / curators who enter the chronology via writing about and/or working with Choi
- artists who have formed Choi's history of art writing
- events and crises that Choi had engaged with

[This part should be a multi-linear chronology that runs horizontally in many pages, heavily indexed, pointing to other internal references.]

(H) "Memorials...a Re-fabrication" (images of Choi's work with

(I) Glossary list: key words, key concepts, frequently used expressions

- sculpture 雕塑
- painting 繪畫 (This session will end with a reference link to Ivy Ma's essay on painting indexed in the "essay collection" session.)
- photography 攝影
- art education 藝術教育
- urban art 都市藝術
- discourse on local art development 對本地藝術發展的論述
- the marginal and the alternative 邊緣觀點和另類藝術實踐

[Under each topic would be key quotations from Yanchi's writing and interview. Refer to Table I]

(J) Essay collection:

- Ivy Ma's writing on painting and Choi's work
- Lo Kwai-cheung's piece on his experience of Choi's performance work
- Choi's key writings (to be confirmed)
- Other selected writings on Choi (just a few)

(K) A dialogue between Choi and Linda

(L) Epilogue: how to research on a veteran artist

(M) List of key works by Choi

(N) Staff list and acknowledgement of sponsors

***Should we include the two large tables on Choi's writings and writings on Choi?

=====

Key analogy of the book:

*Visual/textual poetry flowing across pages + dictionary/index

*"rhizome" – full of internal connections...

September 22, 2006

Yan-chi sent me a posting to call for donation of books for her main installation piece...

尋訪參與者

關於書

我作過了一系列以書為發揮的作品。

張微寫了以下的回應:

“
，架上的書愈來愈多。

由一張張薄薄的紙（紙與紙之間幾乎沒有空間）累積至一定厚度的書，以空間佔有率來計，是家居中最經濟的物件。但對於一個閱讀者來說，書頁和書頁之間，就有如地底深處一層一層的沉積岩，每一層都壓縮著難以計算的距離。每閱讀一個字，就如把沉積岩內的一片樹葉、一條魚的生命展開、還原。

在家居環境中，合上的書是最沈默低調的物件，

如果我是蔡仞姿，當我拿著書，把它放進金魚缸，每放進一本書，水位就升高一點，直至書的數量剛好把水位升至完全將自己淹蓋。那一刻的碰撞，表面上是符號的加法，其實是能量的互相消解，意義的互相吞噬。

現實中，多少知識分子自甘跳進水裡，潛沉當中，守著自我的最低限度安身立命，放棄陸上發聲的可能。偶爾你可能會看到從水底升起的氣泡，盛著他們的慨歎。

在面對蔡仞姿這件作品，我不能發笑，那平靜的水面叫我不安，如果這是一件傢俱，我更願意相信它是一座紀念碑。 ”

這段回應或許沉重，但我們對書或各自有心中的想像，十一月我將作兩回書的裝置，一回在 Parasite, 一回在 1A 的牛欄書展現在尋訪參與者,請給我們一、或兩本以上的書，它將會被沉了油中，是二〇〇六年一次新的體現。

September 25, 2006

Today, I made final revisions to the brief of the retrospective exhibition for press release purposes.

[Re-]Fabrication...

Choi Yan-chi's 30 years: paths for Inter-disciplinarity in Art (1975-2005)

This is a research-based retrospective of Hong Kong visual artist Choi Yan-chi's artistic creation, surveying the meandering paths she has walked through: from painting to the deconstruction of the genre, from the play with material to installation, from photography and video to performance, from the quest for and burden of "Chinese-ness" to the struggle to move into conceptual art... The many trajectories mapped out in Choi's works and pursuits speak of not only the artist's soul-searching journey for integration and contextualization in

her own art practices, but also, reflexively, the many crises and opportunities emerging in the history of the visual arts in Hong Kong. Other than pure documentation of Choi's works and writings by and about her, the artist will re-create some of her past works to build a dialogue between the past and the present. [Re-]fabrication, therefore, replaces conclusive retrospection and, instead, opens up more questions integral to the practice of an artist. Perhaps, ultimately and rather implicitly, the research process, the making of the catalogue, and the negotiation for [re-]fabrication comment on the status quo of art education in the territory.

September 29, 2006 *What really is painting?*

WHAT REALLY IS PAINTING?

September 30, 2006

Yan-chi asked if "[]" is really necessary, and whether if it is already good enough to use "Re-fabrication" for the name of the exhibition and book. I responded, like a good postmodernist, that nothing less than "[Re-]" could sufficiently communicate my point. The use of "[]" and " –" as well as "Re" surely is a deconstructionist practice, indicating the recurrent mutual referral of speech, action and its consequence (how they flow into one another, become one another via endless re-iteration), the staying open of the paths of writing/speaking/(meaning-)making, i.e. what Derrida describes as "*diferance*." However, I really have no intention to explain this to the public, especially not in the kind of language in the previous paragraph. *****later on, I turned my thoughts here into the poems now appearing on the title page of this book...to visualize the process of "[]" and " –" and "re-" rather than do an exposé...**

October 1, 2006 *What is painting? How to write history?*

As an invested researcher in cultural histories, I have moved diligently between two extremes: I entrench my studies in the micro, material process of the everyday, in concrete objects, physical details, routines and single activities; and yet I am most fascinated with broad trajectories; the former I owe to Michel Foucault, and the latter, the power of *longue duree* (long duration) proposed by Braudel and other members of the French Annales School...

Connectivity... Every artist, in fact every single work, is a nexus, a nodal point through which many on-going historical processes cut through, and a concrete location interpellated by multiple discourses.

October 3, 2006

Yan-chi asked if *[Re-]Fabrication* should only be the name of the exhibition part of her retrospective and not of the publication. I insisted that the book, too, is definitely a form of re-fabrication, no more no less.

October 4, 2006

Quick action required... Today, I saw a 2-minute short video piece which was an in-class exercise done by a few of my students. I was very impressed by the choreographic and compositional exactitude of the piece, plus a very self-conscious articulation of multiple, contrastive time-scaling and carefully designed sound. I talked to them right away after class. I asked if they were interested in adapting *Object-activity* into a chamber piece for video. I felt this could be the solution as I had become more and more uncomfortable with the potential danger I would put Mo in for a street performance. (Po Yan Street is full of traffic the whole day!)

October 9, 2006

Bonnie, Ryan, Josie and Lo-ching got back to me about *Object-activity*. Although I gave them no background information (and certainly no copy of the original performance), they told me they felt something about politics and oppression... I was amazed. Thus we started talking about setting up a short video piece.

I gave them some basic rules to work with: (1) a tableau shot and sustained stillness as the basic visual grammar with restricted but purposeful use of close-up inserts and movement; (2) movement of performers should stick close to a *tableau vivant* style; (3) play with multiple time-scale; and (4) play with flatness of picture to reveal depth of field.

(In the week that followed, I was in Taipei. But we had good exchanges. A team was formed, basic artistic solutions set up... They had lots of wonderful ideas and I emphasize it's their interpretation of the work and I would not be in the position to finalize the idea of their work.)

October 19, 2006

Today I started to work on the two open forums tied to the exhibition at 1a (November 18) and PS (November 25). For the PS forum, titled "The Practice of Art and the Practice of Criticism: a projective dialogue for art education in Hong Kong," I wrote to Pamela, Leungpo

(Anthony) and Matthew Turner.

-----Original Message-----

From: Linda Chiu-han Lai

Sent: 19 October 2006 08:07

To: Turner, Matthew

Subject: Can you be our guest?

Importance: High

Hi Matthew,

I would like to invite you to be a panelist for an open dialogue with Choi Yan-chi, whose 30 years' research-based retrospective will open at Para/Site on November 10.

Would you be already back in HK to make it for November 25 for a dialogue with Yan-chi and other art writers and organizers?

This is part of PS's on-going "HK Artists of the 1980s" series, after Oscar Ho, Kurt Chan, Ricky Yeung and May Fung, which you should be very familiar with.

The panel is titled "The Practice of Art and the Practice of Criticism: a projective dialogue for art education in Hong Kong." Other guests we are inviting include Pamela Kemper, Antony Leung, Jeff Leung and Cheung Mei, and we're still in the process of confirming their presence. I'll be moderating the discussion.

Thanks, Linda.

October 20, 2006

>===== Original Message From "Turner, Matthew" =====

>hi Linda,

>Indeed i will be back in hk next month, though i haven't yet made a decision about dates. Still, i ...will let you know at the beginning of next week...

>your idea of presenting both artists and critics as 'practitioners' is very interesting. It's true that good critics are thin on the ground in hk and macao. i know this is often seen as a problem, (well, May Fung always says it is) which, apart from funding sources, may be why the subtitled aim of the dialogues is "for art education in hk". Still, there are critics like Jaspar Lau (just read his v. good pieces in *Yishu*), who himself refers to Frank Vigneron and even Leung Man-to as critics with a great deal to offer.

>

>However, even if there were 'too few' critics i'm not sure that is a problem so much as a characteristic of the place. Apart from critics, there may not be too many high profile cultural commentators, innovative curators or

imaginative collectors either but, again, i'm not sure that any of this has made life more difficult for artists. Perhaps it has made life easier, for both in China and elsewhere the shrill media barrage of self-important critics, powerful collectors and superstar curators is often (privately) felt by artists to be more a curse than a blessing.

>

>Besides, in Hong Kong and Macao there are many very excellent commentators and interpreters of contemporary art -- i mean the artists themselves. Being on the fringes of the contemporary art scene over the past 25 years it always seemed to me that artists are more perceptive and articulate more than their critics. True, they rarely write (though they talk a lot!) but i suspect that this is less a question of skill than the reality of hk which forces everybody to prioritise their time and energy. It is also (and i kind of alluded to this in Yanchi's catalogue essay) because the tolerant individualism that characterises art in the hk-macao region does not lend itself to critical comment.

>

>well, back to work for me, and i'll be in touch soon....

>

>best wishes to all, mat

October 21, 2006

From: Linda Lai

Sent: 21 October 2006 17:28

To: Turner, Matthew

Subject: critics Vs artists

Hi, Matthew, great to hear from you and thanks for your sharing. it's good to know that the chance is open for us to have you as our guest.

I can't agree with you more that whether critics are doing a great job or not, artists prosper or struggle all the same. I myself don't engage too much in art criticism as I have plenty of doubts exactly what it is for and how it functions and who actually benefits. I believe in historiography...in the broadest possible sense of the term.

when i conceive a possible dialogue to take place while Yan-chi's re-visioning and re-fabrication is on, I had the following in mind:

(1) Despite her primary engagement in art-making, Yanchi's entire career is consistently involved in art criticism, critique of the art institution and art education, and she has been negotiating the dialectics (not balance, in my view) of these different roles. That is why I want to have a panel in which the intricate relation between these roles within a person can be drawn out for discussion.

(2) I believe in connectivity...i.e. every single artist and every single role is a point (or a node?) in a network of things. The degree to which a node extends and diverges itself is crucial, and an often overlooked reality in the context of history-writing by which narrative realism often suppresses and abandons irregularities.

(3) I want the guest speakers to talk to Yan-chi about the re-construction of her works and from there to chat about how and whether her multiple roles play a role in her "growth" (I don't like this word but can't think of a better term for now). I want her to benefit from such an open dialogue so she discovers --instead of assumes -- the mark she has made in her artistic (and expanded artistic) pursuits...

(4) Art criticism does have a role to play (that's my intuitive response) -- but what, how and why? Perhaps the assumed symbiosis of art-making and art criticism is not necessary and should be scrutinized. Perhaps art criticism should be re-assigned a more dialectical function? I'm not sure, but I would like to see some discussion and some debates...

(5) Even in terms of criticism, I'm definitely for an inter-disciplinary approach...for which I also presume criticism not as assessment, or assignment of achievement values, or the writing a single art work into the proper discourse of art historical development..., but discovering a work's multiple connectivity, for the sake of opening up and engaging people in dialogues... Perhaps the community building aspects and the encouragement of dialogues itself can stand alone as sufficient goals for art criticism.

(6) I also share your implied sentiments that it would be great if good artists themselves are also good critics and commentators of contemporary art...

(7) I like to see debates, disagreement, undoing of safe and comfortable conclusions...

Yes, I can see you frown... I admit I may be too much of an idealist, or a dreamer...

So, I'm still looking forward to some miracle happening so that you're actually going to make it back for November 25 (the forum), if not November 10 (the opening)...

Best,
Linda

October 22, 2006

Date: Thu, 26 Oct 2006 12:41:23 +0100

From: "Turner, Matthew"

Subject: RE: critics Vs artists

To: Linda Lai

Hi Linda, ...i do like your ideas. Far more than critics, i suspect, it is the artists themselves who do most influence sensibilities, insinuate interpretation and induce policy shifts. Criticism without text, as it were, must include discreet lobbying, curating and even gossip. Gossip may be an unacknowledged form of criticism, particularly important if we accept your 'nodes' observation, or the idea that contemporary art is always about other art.

on the other side, criticism (i'm, still thinking about Jaspar Lau) may use art as a platform for something else -- in JL's case, about modernity.

but apart from these rather intense issues i was also reflecting (with Choi Yan-chi) on curiosities of art and criticism. For example, though i know -- theoretically -- that text is just as changeable as images in its meanings, from the practitioner's point of view i know that i can bear to look at my painting over time while i never, ever re-read articles etc. once they've gone to press. maybe that's just me, but it would be interesting to hear if others felt like this.

... talk to you soon, mat

October 26, 2006

The document file with all the texts to flow into the images of YC's works now is 22 pages long.

October 31, 2006

After a whole day of work, I finally arrived at 1a at around 7:00pm, 90 minutes later than I planned... I promised Yan-chi to come to see the paintings at 1a and responded with automatic writing. I started, as we planned... After a few trial pieces I suddenly felt very uncomfortable. My graffiti-like free flowing written text on the wall was too loud, and seemed to destroy the prominent sense of cohering elegance of the whole venue. Although I like works with many subtle layering, although I like clash and uneasiness for a work's impact, I was not sure if that should happen with YC's painting retrospective. YC later on had most of my automatic wall writings removed except two sets. However, I truly regretted not having asked her to take a photograph of those writings...as one of them made reference to my father-in-law who just past away... What is left now is 20-minute video footage with a profile view, full long shot of me standing on a chair drawing on a wall.

November 1, 2006

The opening of *[Re-]Vision* at 1a. A beautiful exhibition... As YC said, it flows like a book. I was late, again, exhausted, from 6 hours of teaching. Being in a spacious environment makes me want to cry. Yes, I haven't yet found the chance to grieve..., and that I was not there at his funeral...

Had a nice conversation with Wallace on interdisciplinary approaches...

May Fung said she's studying the exhibition diligently to prepare herself for the forum on Nov 25. I told her I welcome pointed questions. She said she would certainly would bring pointed questions, such as why using "[]" and " –" for "Refabrication."