Scriptorium

藏經樓 <small>(別名〈繕寫室〉)</small>

Linda C. H. LAI 黎肖嫻

Two images have been swelling in my mind during my entire period of creation. The first is a faithful scribe diligently copying, line by line, page after page, day and night. The second image is that of local female workers by the side of an assembly line, repeating the same set of operations in a textile or garment factories in the 1960s.

Female factory workers weaved their quotidian grievances into the strictly mechanistic rhythm of the partially automated assembly line, at the end of which their employers collected products in bulk, whereas their input at each station, mechanically integrated into the final product, would deem untraceable. A scribe might spend months to duplicate manuscripts considered worth reproducing. But once the palimpsest had to be reused, his writing would have to be scraped off before new texts could be written over. The destiny of a scribe's 'work' is 'erasure'.
Hongkong female factory workers of the 1960s and scribes of the medieval time in Europe are somewhat connected: their labor was spent to contribute to the grand advancement of culture and economy while their individual contribution was simply assumed for cooption.

The invisible accumulation of steps in a work process in strict sequential order leading to the completion of a set task reminds me of the meaning of algorithm in computing. Each operation has to be executed with superb precision. The slightest change in the order of steps or irregularities at any step would result in the interruption of the work process or a totally different output.

I decided that my work *Scriptorium* should be a kind of paradox. It is an automated system that churns out new literature and word-art based on its own hidden rules. At the same time, I want to subvert the dull assembly line by turning each work station into an independent site of play and authorship.

One needs to look for our *Scriptorium* as it is not sitting at the crossroad, but once found, it can be a spectacle. This scriptorium is not only a room for the production of manuscripts; it preserves the past, and examines the preservation of the past critically.

Scriptorium, literally 'a place for writing', purposefully integrates installation art, collage/décollage, code-writing (computational algorithm), critical investigation of textual production (cultural studies) and media art – to playfully engage with the "sociology of texts" (Don McKenzie, 1960s and 1970s) and the history of the books (Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier, 1980s and 1990s).
The variety of activities the normal visitors would engage in this work range from book-making, narrative construction (story-making), script design/invention, typographic fixing, and the tracing of original writing on a "palimpsestic" surface. Employing traditional terms in printing and publishing, the work flow can be understood analogically as follows:
Sourcing from the codex➔Punching➔Scripting➔Compositing➔Authoring➔Preparing the exemplar ➔Stereotyping➔Printing➔ Recovering

The work flow, made possible only with visitors' participation, is hidden from the Scriptorium, but scattered around the WMCe4 exhibition venue, and disintegrated into independent graphic and writing events.

Notes: all Chinese-language manuscript material is from Chinese local newspapers in 1934 Hong Kong, whereas English-language material is excerpts from the late American artist-photographer Jo Spence's book *What can a woman do with a camera*.

Reference:

Chartier, Roger, ed., 1989: *The Culture of Print*. Polity Press, Oxford.
_____, 1997: "The End of the Reign of the Book," *SubStance* 82: 9-11.
Darnton, Robert, 1982: "What is the History of Books?" *Daedalus*: 65-83; reproduced in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds.) *The Book History Reader*. Routledge, London, 2001: 9-26.
Finkelstein, David; and McCleery, Alistair, 2005: *An Introduction to Book History*. Routledge, New York.
Genet, Gerard, 1997: *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*; translated by Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky; foreword by Gerald Prince. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

p22   *p23*

這個作品是夢出來的。在思考作品的概念與製作過程中,有兩個意象盤踞著我的思維:在繕寫室或藏經樓裏,抄寫員日夜埋首專注地不停謄寫;與及,六十年代香港的紡織製衣廠裏,一群女工在生產線旁終日重複著相類似的一串工序。

女工們勤快、認真,她們的悲喜盡譜在勞動之中,但當製成品出現後,每位女工在生產線旁注入過的小貢獻便無從追索。抄寫員嗎?他用耐勞在羊皮上刻出來的文稿,到往後另一位抄寫員的手裏時,便必先被刮掉,好讓新的文稿可以被抄了。女工和抄寫員都是不留痕跡地付出過的一群。他們具體的貢獻,最終都被納入步驟繁多、程序緊湊絕不可顛倒的生產線上。勞動者的一小步,成全了龐大建制的運作,社會的大步「向前」。

他們生產的流程叫人想起電腦的運算法則:顛倒任何步驟,就會有完全不同的結果,又或者令最後的出品成為難以預料的東西。

於是,我想到在這作品中走兩極,一方面強化工序流程的機械自動化,同時要活化生產線每一站的獨立性和創造力,也把參與者的活動化為遊戲。

《藏經樓》(又名〈繕寫室〉),在展覽場所設置了一條隱藏的生產線,生產線的每一站自由散落於場中,仿如互不相干。參與者透過既定的界面,獨力完成線上的一個工作。而生產的流程與成品則在另一個貌似獨立的空間呈現出來。我的《藏經樓》不單收藏,也生產;不但保存過去,也以過去為批判現在的起步。

注:這個作品動用的文稿來源,中文資料全為1934年的香港華語日報內容,英文資料則為已去世的美國女攝影藝術家Jo Spence:<What can a woman do with a camera>一書裏的材料。

Technical Artist(技術協力): **Gary NG** 伍紀穎
Scribes (抄寫員): **Doris POON, WONG Chun-hoi, Frank LAM** 潘韻怡, 王鎮海, 林杰恆
Coordinator for manuscript production(繕寫協調): **Jolene MOK** 莫頌靈

Linda LAI (LAI Chiu-han) 黎肖嫻

Linda LAI (LAI Chiu-han) received her Ph.D. in Cinema Studies from NYU, and has been seeking meaningful extension from the discipline to engage in new media and cultural investigations. Lai is a Hongkong-based inter-disciplinary artist and curator, and founder of the new media art group The Writing Machine Collective (2004-). Her works have a strong concern for language and narrativity, grounded in a feminist sensibility that integrates critical theory, film theories and visual ethnography. She has a broad interest in image and text in the context of archiving. Her experimental video works have been exhibited in various experimental and documentary film/video festivals in Oberhausen, Berlin, Vienna, Birmingham, Barcelona, Paris, Hamburg, Jihlava (Czech Republic), Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Seoul, Macao, Hong Kong, and a few cities in the United States. Her digital interactive works include *PUSH: the Quest for a Voice, In Search of a Body* (2003-4, with Theresa Junko Mikuriya, Hong Kong Art Biennial), *I See Where You Are in Central* (2005, with Bryan Chung, Justin Wong and Alan Fong, Microwave International Media Art Festival), and *Who is Singing? - Donald, can you hear me?* (2007, with Lawrence Choi, WMC_e2). Currently she is Associate Professor at the City University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media, and Leader of Critical Intermedia Art.

黎肖嫻為紐約大學電影研究哲學博士,香港城市大學創意媒體學院副教授,跨學科的藝術創作者,以批判理論、電影理論、敘事實驗和民俗田野法的多元結合進行學術及創作活動,對語言在日常生活文化領域和知識建構的問題尤感興趣,作品以不同媒體形式展現,都離不開文字、圖象與資料庫的關係的探討。2004年創辦新媒體群體「文字機器創作集」,公開作品展已完成了三集(2004, 2007, 2008),現為該群體的藝術總監。曾任多個媒體藝術計劃之策劃人及評審。其實驗性錄像曾於香港、奧柏荷辛、漢堡、巴黎、巴塞隆拿、柏林、維也納、伊希拉瓦(捷克共和國)、伯明罕、雪梨、首爾、臺北、高雄、吉隆坡、新德里、澳門,及美國數城市的實驗性媒體藝術活動和紀錄片節展出。數碼互動藝術作品包括《「推」: 探索嗓音、搜尋身體》(陳超敏合作, 2003-04香港藝術雙年展)、《誰在唱歌?…曾特首, 你聽見我嗎?》(蔡子揚合作, 2007)、《咁. 點. 去》(鍾緯正、黃照達合作, 2005, 微波國際媒體藝術節)等。