

**IT IS NEITHER THIS NOR THAT.
A search for material and spatial representation of
the ‘in-between’ cultural position.**

SIYING ZHOU
0000-0001-9590-3381

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Abstract

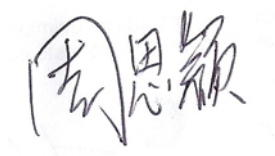
This research, drawn from my own experiences as both an immigrant and a tourist, investigates the cultural space of 'in-between'. I explore the possibility of demarcating this in-between position by working with culturally disparate objects and images to create temporary material artefacts. By constructing an installation, I ask if the unhinged and dislocated cultural experience of the in-between can be transposed to other people.

Using everyday objects, images, languages and commonly practiced activities, I locate four intercultural events, and their related scenarios, in the form of sculpture, videos and performance. Each scenario depicts a propositional mode of cross cultural interaction. Through this creative process, the ideas of the in-between transpire from the dynamic articulation and representation of culture difference. In this research, language, human body, material form and geographic sites are perceived as various forms of cultural representation, manipulated to construct cultural conflicts and negotiation. Incidents, such as, phonetic translation, transformation of one's cultural identity, the appropriation of the existing products and the human intervention of a geographic site, present as the interruption in the signification process of the existing cultural forms. These reveal the openings in the linguistic structure, the idea of the Self, material composition and the cultural identity of a place. Through these openings, the in-between is represented with the notion of cultural hybridity as a unique place of forming culture and the Self.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) *the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters except where indicated in the Preface*,*
- (ii) *due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,*
- (iii) *the thesis is 10,152 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be '周思颖' (Zhou Siying), written in a cursive style.

Siying Zhou

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I. WHERE IT BEGINS

The thinking concerning this research begins at the moment when, on a street in Hobart, I encountered a bilingual sign outside of a restaurant. One part of the sign, in Chinese, reads, ‘夏威夷餐厅’ and in English, ‘Har Wee Yee Restaurant’ (although the accurate English translation should read ‘Hawaii Restaurant’). (fig 1.) The incorrect translation disoriented me: the conundrum is about the text—between what it says and what it means. 夏威夷 is the phonetic parody of Hawaii, just as Har Wee Yee is to the Chinese: 夏威夷. Both words 夏威夷 and Har Wee Yee do not have denotative meaning. Three names, Hawaii, 夏威夷 and Har Wee Yee, lay out a folding linguistic structure with three layers: Hawaii is at the core; 夏威夷 in the middle; and on the outside is Har Wee Yee. The common understanding of the name of a geographic location is curtailed by these layers like a game of ‘Chinese whispers’.

The text does not ‘gloss’ the images, which do not ‘illustrate’ the text. ... each has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty,Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and exchange of these signifiers: body, face, writing; and in them to read the retreat of signs.¹

Here, Roland Barthes argues that text and images do not need a direct explanatory relationship to construct a meaningful context. The embedded signified elements of text and visual are contextualised through spacing. In the space between the text and the images, visual uncertainty is temporarily restrained but settled without a fixed meaning.

Barthes’s perception of reading text and images seemingly offers a hint to understanding the alternate translation of the sign of the restaurant. Following the logic presented by Barthes, I saw that the reasonable rationale of the restaurant sign needed to be grasped through their signifiers. The words: 夏威夷 and Har Wee Yee should be interpreted, rather than be read.

¹ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), xi

Hence, what do they signify? How can they be interpreted in the understanding of a restaurant? If Hawaii, 夏威夷 and Har Wee Yee symbolise three different cultures (respectively, Pacific American culture, Chinese culture and a culture of globalisation that is characterised in the widespread use of English), which of these defines the restaurant or the food served in this restaurant? What does Chinese food, American food or Hawaiian food mean? Does the mis-translation of the sign uncover an intention to present a twisted but realistic idea of multiculturalism, or does it reveal a kind of political revenge from a group of immigrants responding to their English colonial environment? (Translating 夏威夷 to 'Har Wee Yee' could be seen as a way of preventing outsiders from getting the real message, only shared by people in Chinese language community.)

II. INTRODUCTION

In this research project, I investigate this 'in-between' cultural space-found through the restaurant sign-using four intercultural 'events'. With this framework I intend to explore ways to transpose the experience of cultural displacement into the spatial arrangement of an installation work. In each event, the objects, images and actions that signify different cultures are experimentally pinched together to form a propositional intercultural site. The mode of interaction of the four events is illustrated in the diagrams below. A and B, here, represent different cultures.

A \rightarrow B: (exchange) Attempting to contact others who are in a different language community; the invention of a communal communicative means to approach the other.

A \Rightarrow B: (transformation) A self-recreation process; attempting to replace a dominant cultural identity/identities with a new one so that they will be considered as part of the new culture.

A + B: (amalgamation) The physical amalgamation of two or more objects of distinct social and cultural value, to see if the function and signification of both objects remain accessible but sharable.

A (B): (adaptation) interruption of a surrounding dominant culture through physical engagement by persons who carry a different cultural content. The entry activates the articulation of difference through adaptation.

Scenarios used to illustrate these events are drawn from my experience and observation in everyday life as an immigrant and a foreign tourist. Cultural and national identities are discussed and examined from my perspective as the Other. From these events, I probe the material and subject demarcation in discourse on the in-between space. By using everyday objects, images, languages and commonly practiced activities, I situate the scenarios in the form of sculpture, videos and performance. Through this creative process I seek visibility of the values and meanings at the centre of multicultural interactions with the aim of acquiring

the orientation of a 'third other'—a new social status defined by negating any constitutive counterparts in an intercultural negotiation.

Moreover, this research questions if the unhinged and dislocated cultural experience of the in-between can be accessed by the spectator, through a choreographed material environment of an installation work. By experimenting in the presentation of videos and the spatial arrangement of the objects, I have attempted to construct a site where the viewer's cultural and social positions are provoked in an introspective way. During the period of undertaking this research, I have exhibited the works that are produced for this research publicly, in galleries and within class seminars. The audience's physical and emotional responses and intellectual reading of the works allowed me to examine my objective in the production of the works and the experimenting strategies of constructing the installation. The construction of the installation is influenced by the feedback that I have collected from a variety of research presentations and installations in public exhibition.

This research is informed by theories in cultural, linguistic and psychoanalytic studies. Homi Bhabha's theory of the 'third space' is used to understand and locate the in-between cultural space. His arguments on translation, mimicry and the unhomeliness lay out a theoretical framework that allows me to enter the conceptual terrain of the in-between. Additionally, Walter Benjamin's writing on untranslatability and Roland Barthes's definition of language provide the semiotic thinking to uncover new values and meaning provoked from the various forms of representation of the in-between. Finally, Jacques Lacan's ideas about the dialectic relationship between the Self and the Other, and Jacques Derrida's idea about approaching an inner self externally are referenced to locate a psychosocial in-between space.

From reading the video works and projects of Camille Henrot and Fiona Tan, the installation and sculptures by Damien Ortega, the strategies of presentation in Roni Horn's photograph projects and Olafur Eliasson's installations, I searched for methods of communicating the ideas of the in-between through visual narration, material forms and spatial construction.

This paper is divided into four main chapters. In the first chapter, I define the key ideas about the in-between and the third other. The second chapter is arranged around the four propositional intercultural events. In the third chapter of this paper, I recount the choices of building a spatial structure for an installation, formed in relation to other artists' ideas and approaches. In the last chapter, I attempt to conclude this practice-lead research with the thoughts about what these material presentations of the in-between space have revealed.

CHAPTER 1: IN ORBIT AROUND THE CONCEPT OF 'IN-BETWEEN'

The state of the in-between relates to ambivalence in the practice of cultural identification and the experience of cultural difference. In the circumstance where multiple cultural elements are articulated simultaneously, the idea of culture and the usual divisions associated with it are disrupted. The uncertainty about existing knowledge shifts the perception into an undefined in-between place. However, the consciousness of the in-between is not merely developed in the display of a numerous different cultural elements. Rather, it reflects a complex representation of cultural hybridity and the cultural difference.

The notion of hybridity and cultural difference are comprehensively explained in Homi Bhabha's critiques about the kind of multiculturalism used to propagate cultural diversity. In an interview with Johnathan Rutherford, Bhabha argues that an emphasis on cultural diversity conveys an ideology of universalism, which leads to an ethnocentric interpretation about cultural differences. The policies of multiculturalism that are based on the idea of cultural diversity present cultural difference as a governing subject that is only allowed within an authoritarian hierarchical structure.² In his view, the emphasis on cultural difference recognises and allows the 'unequal, uneven, multiple and potentially antagonistic'.³

Bhabha further states that in-between spaces are created in the articulation of cultural difference.⁴ In the realm of the in-between, multiple cultural signs that indicate different ideological systems and historical traditions are not laid out like a list of terms, distinct from one another; rather, they appear as the intersected, overlapped and interrelated constituents. Thus, the in-between reflects the 'dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference'.⁵

² Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha", in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990). 208.

³ Ibid. 208.

⁴ Ibid. 209.

⁵ Ibid. 211.

The idea of the in-between is intimately reflected in Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' and represents the 'third other'. Bhabha explains that the 'third new', distinct to any existing entities, is not produced from the process of tracing two original moments at a culturally hybrid situation, but rather, the third space allows other positions to emerge.⁶ Through physical representation, the in-between articulates the condition for intercultural interaction: negotiation and translation; and in this interaction, the third space is envisioned and new definitions, meaning and visions are produced.

As a liminal place, the in-between offers a unique perspective and strategy for the discovery and establishment of a selfhood. According to Bhabha, the articulation of cultural difference is the self-identification and differentiation from the Other;⁷ and when this self-identification occurs within the in-between, the concept and division of the Self/Other are informed by intercultural experiences. By interacting with a different culture (the Other), the Self is 'discovered' and a self-identity is established.

Fiona Tan, in her book *Scenario*, explains that she attempts to 'catch herself' in the exercise of writing back and forth between Dutch and English.⁸ For Tan, the act of translation becomes the method of registering herself with the 'right' consciousness, as well as, of encountering 'beautiful accidents and enlightening corrections'.⁹ By repeatedly switching between Dutch and English, Tan flits between different modes of being. By doing so, she draws a passage between both cultures and internalises the Other. As a result, she constructs the in-between position within herself. Bhabha clearly illustrates the process that Tan experience-the formation of a psychological in-between space:

Suddenly, the ungraspable thought is yours, but only in the dispossessive spirit of that doubly articulated pronoun. To say that a concept or a thought becomes yours is to say that it becomes my thought, my concept: but it is never in my

⁶ Rutherford, "The Third Space", 211.

⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

⁸ Fiona Tan, *Scenario*, (Amsterdam: Vandenberg & Wallroth; Rotterdam: NAI publisher, 2000), 38.

⁹ Tan, *Scenario*, 39.

possession, in was never my property, because the thought is also yours – it belongs to you, too.¹⁰

Thus, the in-between indicates a process that affirms multiple aspects and it also implies a process of defining Self through negation of Other. The awareness of the in-between is often induced from multiple negation of Self: meanings, identity and positionality are sometimes recognised and described from the expression-‘It is neither this nor that.’

In her TV documentary, *May you live in Interesting Times* (1997), Tan perfectly exemplifies this strategy of identification through negation. She begins with the objective of discovering her selfhood: ‘Who was I? Where did I come from?’; and to achieve this, Tan locates and interviews her dispersed family members around the world. By the end of the documentary, Tan concludes that her identity is defined by ‘no’s:

‘I am not Chinese. My self-definition seems an impossibility. An identity defined only by what is not.’¹¹

This ontological dispute, represented by Tan, is a reminder of the inadequacies of existing cultural taxonomies. However, by acknowledging the void, value is reassigned because the void demands re-justification, re-evaluation and re-interpretation. From this void, a third other signifies of a new value created in the ontological fracture.

Additionally, the idea of in-between is an interplay of the past, present and future. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that to touch the future is to return to the present and rewrite ‘cultural contemporaneity’ and ‘our human, historic commonality’.¹² The past is recalled in this kind of rewriting with the present, and it actively adjusts itself to affect and create the present. The past, present and future do not relate to each other in a continuum. An in-between time circuit is created by the future’s return and the summons of the past

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts On Third Space”, in *Communicating in Third Space*, ed. Karin Ika and Gerhard Wagner (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). Under “Preface,”, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unimelb/reader.action?docID=357844&ppg=16#>

¹¹ Tan, *Scenario*, 163.

¹² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

into the present. In this in-between temporality, the third other contributes to a history of the present without a past or future.

Finally, the third space indicates the process of doing/making where the in-between position is created and the idea of in-between is informed. In his analysis and arguments about the third space, Bhabha lists an array of actions to describe this 'doing' such as articulation, enunciation, translation or negotiation, etc.. This is especially evident in recent work developed from analysis of Walter Benjamin's idea of 'afterlife'. Much like Tan's translation exercise between two languages, Bhabha claims that the afterlife is born in the middle of translating.

He [Benjamin] celebrated distinction between 'what is meant and the way of meaning it' to which I've already alluded is the ground on which translation raises a new so to speak the afterlife of the original from within the very midst of its flux and fate.¹³

Through performative means possibilities are created and the incommensurability of the third space is imparted.

Taking these ideas and the understanding about the in-between, I examine them through four possible events that activate this the third space.

¹³ "Homi Bhabha: Translation and Displacement." YouTube video, 1:27:04, posted by CUNY The Graduate Centre, May 26m 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVQcdbSV6OI&t=1203s>

CHAPTER 2: FOUR PROPOSITIONAL EVENTS

In this chapter, the ideas of in-between outlined in the previous chapter will be contextualised and scrutinised through four propositional events and the process of the material representation of these events. Seven artworks will be addressed in total to navigate my research discoveries and the conceptual journey that I have undertaken for this research project.

Event one: (A → B: A bad translation makes a ‘bad’ cross-cultural approach.)

The translational process generates interstitial spaces. According to Walter Benjamin’s theory about untranslatability, the slippage between the object of the sign (the denoted object of a word) and the mode of intention of the sign (the socially interpreted meaning of a word) is produced during the translation.¹⁴ Even though equivalent words are found in the target language, the cultural and social context assigned in the original words cannot be fully translated. The translated text is always invented as the new like the afterlife. Homi Bhabha develops Benjamin’s theory further as he believes that this afterlife is born in interstices and in ‘the middle of’.¹⁵ By interpreting the afterlife as being ‘embryonic, anticipated, imminent,’ Bhabha concludes that the new ‘emerges in the midst of the making’.¹⁶

Bhabha and Benjamin’s arguments about untranslatability and the afterlife suggest an interruption of the intercultural engagement. When language is perceived as the form that summarises and represents a particular cultural practice, translation becomes an event in which two cultural communities make contact with each other. Translation highlights cultural difference through the linguistic difference between the languages, while bridging this gap. In opening remarks made by Andre Aciman¹⁷ to Bhabha’s lecture, *Translation and Displacement*, Aciman states that the importance of translation is in its ability of connecting

¹⁴ Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making”, Under “Preface,”.

¹⁵ “Homi Bhabha: Translation and Displacement”.

¹⁶ “Homi Bhabha: Translation and Displacement”.

¹⁷ When Andre Aciman gave this speech, he was the director of The Centre for Humanities, Graduate Centre of City University of New York and the coordinator of Critical Theory Certificate Program.

We and *They* in a relationship that dislocates us from our world and relocates us to the world perceived by others.¹⁸ Hence, while untranslatability suggests a permanent difference between two cultures, the afterlife is pointing to an in-between cultural place where this gap is possibly reconciled.

Benjamin and Bhabha's acclaimed new can be perceived through another type of translational means—the phonetic translation. This kind of translation engenders a different type of intercultural engagement, as phonetic translation produces a different kind of misunderstanding and miscommunication. It encloses a unique cultural in-between space and provides a different dynamic of forming the relationship between *We* and *They*.

The propositional scenario: It's neither Chinese nor English.

Work title: *The National Anthem of AO-SSU-CH'UI-LEE-A*

Medium: HD video in length 2'28".

In this scenario, a Karaoke video is created for the Australian national anthem, titled *Advance Australian Fair*. The lyrics shown on the screen are the result of a continuum of two phonetic translations between English and Chinese. Firstly, the English words in the original lyrics are translated into the Chinese characters in terms of the matching sound. Then, the translated Chinese is turned into phonetic syntax written in Wade-Giles phonetic marks.¹⁹ Consequently, under the impression of singing in Chinese, the participant, in fact, follows the animated text on the screen and pronounces the distorted sound of English lyrics. In a symphonic tune that ends with the sound of a cheering and hand clapping crowd, this karaoke video transmits the overtone of a carnival spirit and acceleration of an exuberant atmosphere. Channelling a cheerful mood, the video asks for the participation. (Fig. 2)

¹⁸ "Homi Bhabha: Translation and Displacement".

¹⁹ Wade-Giles system is a Romanization system for Mandarin Chinese and widely used by English speakers to pronounce Chinese words.



Fig. 2. Siying Zhou, *The National Anthem of AO-SSU-CH'UI-LEE-A*, 2016. Photographer: Vivian C. Smith.

The process of two phonetic translations creates rupture in the constitutional structure of language. These openings are structural in comparison to the translational interstitial spaces in Bhabha's arguments. In this Karaoke video, the Romanised Chinese leads to Chinese characters that indicate English words. The once coherent structure of language, which is constituted with the linguistic elements-written form, pronunciation and meaning, is disjointed and partially replaced. The languages, relative to their conventional style, are perceived as fragmented. For example, the written form of the English language is removed and replaced with the phonetic, Romanised Chinese. The English language is only detected through the articulation of the Romanised Chinese, and it is then that meaning is conveyed. Whereas, the Chinese language, without its radicals and denotation, is only apprehended like a ghost through its Romanised form.

In the fragmentation of these languages, the Romanised Chinese becomes a new hybrid linguistic form that signifies both linguistic value systems. According to Roland Barthes, 'language is a social institution and a system of values'.²⁰ Language, is not only valorised by the grammatical rules of writing and speech, but also ascribes values to the social conventions. Language is 'a system of contractual values',²¹ as Barthes defines. These two sets of values are seamlessly bound together as a whole in the operation of a language. By replacing the written form of one language with another, the phonetic translation breaks the correlation of assigning these two values. The translated text is ruled by the grammatical value of one language and the social value of another one. For example, the Romanised Chinese syntax is produced according to the Latin linguistic rules. For people who are familiar with Latin linguistic systems, the pronunciation value of Romanised Chinese is comprehensible. Additionally, as Romanised Chinese denotes Chinese characters, people who know Chinese may also access the corresponding meanings. There is a limitation to accessing the full set of values in both constitutive language groups. This binary value can only be transpired through the articulation of the translated text.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape 1967), 82

²¹ *Ibid*, 82.

By reflecting two language value systems, this hybrid linguistic form is the sign that signifies two cultures and indicates a unique relation between the two. The cultural groups connect, not only as original text and translated text, but also as the original and the mimic. It is a self-centred intercultural relationship. Under the guise of self-removal, the refusal to go beyond the notion of *Us* is the objective of mimicry. The mimic is a new presentation of the original, a branched-out new identity, rather than a secondary double. Adopting the position of the mimic is a self-centred approach; in that while it may appear to be for your convenience, it is in fact for my convenience. The real purpose of that project produces an ambivalent image of the Other.

In this Karaoke video, the two-overlaid phonetic translational processes make this passive interest of contacting the other shared across two cultural groups. The interchangeability between the original and the mimic, undermines the traditional hierarchical power structure in the mimicry and renders the phonetic translation as the strategy of creating a temporary commonality to overcome the cultural difference-‘I mimic your tongue so that you could understand me for now’. The desire to connect and relationship with the imitation are both dismissed after the articulation and the translation are accomplished.

Bhabha suggests that the misunderstanding of the meaning of the translated word can be an advantage, through the act of signification, to a disadvantaged class of people.²² Due to the slippage in different types of the arbitrariness of the sign, the commanding power attached with the original text is not delivered to the translation subject and becomes dysfunctional. Although there is no meaning exchange in phonetic translation, a linguistically recalcitrant force transpires in the divergent communicative relationship between the original and the translated. In the discussion about the colonial mimicry, Bhabha describes that ‘a recalcitrance (the mimic) that coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power...poses an immanent threat to both the normalised knowledge and disciplinary powers.’²³

²² Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts On Third Space”, under “Preface”.

²³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.

In this work, the Australian national anthem, performed through karaoke, is an exoticised reproduction of the anthem. By producing the 'close-enough' copy of the original, the mimic reduces and diversifies the master's originality. While the karaoke song reverses the formal and authoritarian representation of Australian identity, it recharges the patriotic spirit in an entertaining environment. The fulsome celebration of the Australian identity and patriotism in this video work suggests sarcastic disbelief and protest. In fact, the work becomes a foil to the Australian nationalism embedded in the national anthem.

On the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website, it states that the Australian national anthem should be performed in English.²⁴ By performing in accented English, read from Romanised Chinese, the question is raised: Are the lyrics in the video still considered as English? And if not, in singing the song is the performer enacting a seditious act?

In this Karaoke event, the cultural position of in-between is acquired via the bodily experience of participating with the karaoke. The translational intercultural relationship is only activated through the action of singing. During the reading and articulating, the participant delivers a translational process *in situ*, interpreting the language on the screen into a different language. While the action of singing is merging with the translational activity, the participant is experiencing a split in their action of singing. The distortion of the lyrics impels the participant to experience the singing through three disjointed actions: reading, articulating and listening. The disjointed actions open a time and a mental space for the participant to think and implement the action of translation. The difficulty of recognising the syntax on the screen, forces the participant to give attention to what they read, say and hear. In the process of resolving these three actions, a kind of sense is worked out between them. In a split second, ideas about language, translation and, subsequently, cultural identification are brought into question.

²⁴ "Australian national anthem protocols", *Australian Government, Department of the prime minister and cabinet*. Last accessed September 4, 2017. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/australian-national-anthem/australian-national-anthem-protocols>

While the participation reifies the idea of in-between, it expands the content of the Other/new. The participative component confers the new contingency and incommensurability. The participant's diverse responses to the Karaoke video and their idiosyncratic performance constantly renew the presentation of this work and contextualise the provoked discussion about the in-between cultural position.

Event two: (A \Rightarrow B: A failed self-identity recreation.)

In this event, two scenarios are proposed in the production of two bodies of artworks.

The propositional scenario 1: I am neither the person whom I know nor the German whom I want to be.

Work title: *How many German dishes ought I to eat to become a German? How many German jokes ought I to know to be more German?*

Medium: Performance/ Installation/ Two channel HD video in length 19'13".

In 2016, I received an opportunity to undertake a three-month-long artist residency in Berlin. My in-between status shifted from being an immigrant who could confidently participate in linguistic conversations with the surrounding dominant culture, to a foreign tourist who could only respond to the surrounding social environment in a limited and naïve scope. This provided an excellent opportunity to challenge some of the thinking of this research, and in response to this reorientation of myself I initiated a participative project about the authenticity of German culture. The project was based on two questions: 'How many German dishes ought I to cook to become a German?' and 'How many German jokes ought I to know to be more German?'

To start addressing these questions, I asked a number of people who identified themselves as German to name a German dish for me. Participants determined the amount of detail that they would convey about these dishes i.e. how it is prepared, what it tastes like. Subsequently, the participant was invited to a dinner where their described German dish was cooked and served. At the dinner, the participant was asked to tell me a German joke. In total, the project took place over five weeks. I had five German participants, cooked

seven German meals (five for participants, two for myself) and heard five German jokes. (fig. 3)

From this ephemeral performance project, I developed two installation works using the collected video and photographic documentation of the cooking and dining events.

The first installation was constructed specifically for a group exhibition, titled *Ohrwurm*, at Meinblau Projecktraum gallery. The work consisted of a large photographic print pasted to the wall, a two-channel video work and the texts of the two questions printed onto two plates. At the opening event, Kartoffelpuffer (potato pancakes) were served under the condition that anyone eating had to use provided chopsticks as the tools for getting the Kartoffelpuffer from the plate to their mouth. (fig. 4)

The second work developed from the residency project, is a two-channel video work. On one channel, the process of cooking the meals is shown; while on the other, a puppet head made from a potato is delivering a monologue. In the monologue, the corresponding cooking experience and the associated dining experience with the German participant, is reviewed to assess the intakes of German quality in the Self. After the video of the cooking actions and speeches are played, photographs of the completed and plated dishes are shown with complement of the voice narration interrupted by the video clips of the collected jokes being told. (fig. 5)

With the hunch that I would not be able to become a German, I devised an in-between psychological site where the German identity and culture were discussed and negotiated with the cultural identities that I was carrying. Through a series of bodily experiences, I diminished the presumed 'clear' boundary between myself and a 'genuine' German; and as result, I discovered the position of the Self in relation to the German. In this scenario, the cultural engagement was interwoven with the interrogation of a selfhood. The cultural difference was articulated through the journey of self-forming.



Fig. 3. Siying Zhou, *How many German food ought I to eat to become a German? How many German jokes ought I to know to be more German?*, 2016.



Fig. 4. Siying Zhou, *How many German food ought I to eat to become a German? How many German jokes ought I to know to be more German?*, 2016.

The definition of the German culture is questioned and destabilised by the translated English recipes that are obtained from Google, the idiosyncratic operation of cooking, my personal taste and the participant's divergent understanding of the German culture. Meanwhile, the idea of the Other becomes ambivalent. In fact, in this journey of approaching the Other, I invent the Other inside me as a different self. There is an intimate similarity between the process of self-formation and the production of culture. According to Bhabha, culture is a knowledge field that appears incomplete and is constantly replenished in the act of signification and of producing symbols.²⁵ The development and formation of a culture is not only created in relation to the contradiction of other cultures, but also influenced by its own interpellative activities. Interpellation is a translational process. In order to reify cultural meanings, there is 'the process of alienation and secondariness in relation to itself'.²⁶ By splitting multiple cultured selves, the cultural translation is internalised and transformed into an internal interrogation between the multiple selves. In the two-channel video work, this introspective activity is presented in the scene where the potato head, in my voice, asks 'am I more German?'

From the project question: 'How many German dishes ought I to cook to become a German?', the activity of eating is posited as the main method of cultural engagement, as well as the transformation of one's cultural identity. In this method, the mouth provides an important in-between space connecting the external world and the internal organic mechanism and psychological being.

In Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Jean-Luc Nancy's *Ego sum*, he states that the mouth is understood as an agent that allows the idea of uniting the soul and the body.²⁷ The mouth is the place that transfers '*quasi permixtio*' (the mixture of some parts) into '*unum quid*' (one thing).²⁸ Derrida suggests that ego is exposed, perceived, touched and changed through the opening of mouth.²⁹ By opening the mouth, one dislocates the internal and the external; thus, eating becomes a process of mixing the internal and external elements through the

²⁵ Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha". 210

²⁶ Ibid. 210

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University press, 2005), 26-28

²⁸ Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 26-28

²⁹ Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 32-34

natural mechanical process of oral muscle movement. It changes the self in both psychological and biological ways. As particular food carries a particular cultural value, this value is considered to be inherited by the eater.

In the Berlin project, as the German dishes are not-quite German, consumption of the not-quite German results in becoming the third other. I am no longer 'me' before these German food, nor the German I thought I would become. The installation of the video work therefore becomes a physical representation to the third other.

'When you have one, you get one. When you have two, you have got something else.'³⁰

Here, Roni Horn describes the reasoning for using the doubling aesthetic as a conceptual strategy in her project titled *Bird*, (fig. 6) where she places photographs of bird models in pairs to 'invite careful scrutiny from the viewer'.³¹

Horn suggests that an incommensurable new can be generated in a binary relationship of the two alike components. This new, as an extension of the existing discourse drawn from the constitutive elements, in return, destabilises and re-contextualises the definitions of the elements. Using the logic of Horn's work, I play the two-channel video work on two TV sets that are placed face-to-face. The TVs position the audience in the mist of their 'conversation'. The search for German selfhood in the video becomes complicated through the spectator's gaze that bounces between two screens. It does not only identify someone who is cooking, nor the one after eating the food, nor the one potato head, nor the one who is hidden in the darkness. The depicted self is not quite German yet and no longer the original self any more. The third other is potentially imagined.

³⁰ "Roni Horn Interviewed by Dayanita Singh," YouTube video, 10:56, posted by Louisiana Channel, October 1, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhaMDSDQ-rQ&t=520s>

³¹ Philip Larratt-Smith and Roni Horn, *Bird*, (Göttingen; London: Steidl; Thames & Hudson, 2008)



Fig. 5. Siying Zhou, *How many German food ought I to eat to become a German? How many German jokes ought I to know to be more German*, 2017.
Photographer: Vivian C. Smith.



Fig. 6. Roni Horn, *Untitled, No.1*, from the series of *Bird*, 1998.

In the interpellative process of forming a self, the incommensurable new might not always be immediately detected by the Self, but is easily observable to others. The third other can be informed internally through the slippage between the perception of oneself and one's interpretation of others' perception of the Self.

The propositional scenario 2: I am neither the Jo whom I think nor the Jo whom you know.

Work Title: *Just call me 'Jo'*

Media: plastic sheet, hairs, steel, a mirror, bricks. 150 cm (L) x 70 cm (W) x 61 cm (H).

After returning from the Berlin residency, I attempt to approach this same scenario from a different position. I am looking at this from the internal as opposed to the external. I produced another artwork to extend the contemplation about the internalised Other that became apparent from my Berlin project of cooking German food and collecting German jokes.

A futon is made of plastic sheets with a distinctive cross pattern of stripes, stuffed with soft fibre fillings. The plastic sheet makes the outer layer of the futon easily recognisable as the material of ubiquitous cheap bags used to transport goods for travel. On one side of the futon, two English letters 'JO' are embroidered with hairs. A mirror is attached at one end of the futon and held erect with a stick. The futon reclines against a metal structure.

(fig. 7)

In the anthropomorphic view that the futon is a human body, the complex and unclarified selfhood is not only evoked by the mixed material forms of representation of cultural practice but also from the ambiguous borderline between the representation of the Self and the Other. If the plastic sheet, like the skin, gives the futon body a dominant identity with its own cultural, political and economic values and suggests an innate attribute of this identity, the letters 'JO', in the understanding of the abbreviation of a person's name, becomes the social sign that indicates the psyche, as well as, a particular cultural identity.



Fig. 7. Siying Zhou, *Just Call Me 'Jo'*, 2017. Photographer: Vivian C. Smith.

In developing Jacques Lacan's theory about 'the Ideal-I...determined and constructed by the big O, "the Other"', Christina Emanuela Dascalu states that 'the subject (a self) is determined both literally and metaphorically by the "letter"'.³² A person's name has a tremendous impact on forming one's identity and fate. By giving itself a name, the subject Self creates another identity that matches the one projected by the Other. Hence, 'JO' potentially articulates a self that is defined by others, and an identity that is agreed upon and recognised by the subject Self. The internal expression of the selfhood is represented through the materiality of the 'JO'. The hairs are stitched on the surface and the letters are, as if, biologically shaped with the element that grows from inside outward through the plastic skin. In the condition of cultural hybridity, the name's ambivalent articulation of the Self complicates the identification process of cultural selfhood. Given that the name is another form of cultural representation, the culturally signified identity of the name 'JO' becomes quite blurred. This is because the difference inhabited by the futon body is unclear. It could be either an identity that is inherited through an innate process, or an identity that is acquired socially.

Moreover, the uncertainty of self-perception is informed by the narcissistic relationship between the mirror and the futon body. The mirror provides the futon an external gaze, in which the futon can see itself. As the mirror faces inwards, the reflected image is obscured from the public eyes, but easily accessible to the futon. The mirror self does not scrutinise the futon Self, but the mirror also presents the futon's difference. With this difference, an ongoing psychoanalytic process of self-forming is envisioned. In the physical space between the futon and the image in the mirror, the production of the Other is imagined.

Event three: (A + B: An alien object with an ambiguous purpose.)

For this event, two sculpture works are produced to investigate the cultural in-between spaces embedded in everyday products.

It is common practice to alter the available and existing products for one's own benefit. Through the changes applied to the physical forms, the original function of the products is

³² Cristina Emanuela Dascalu, *Imaginary Homelands of Writers in Exile. Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee and V.S. Naipaul* (Youngstown, New York: Cambria Press, 2007), 53.

removed and revised, and a new social relationship is established. If the social function of artefact and human relationship with them are perceived as a set of cultural values, the physical form becomes a repertoire of the cultural signifiers. Manipulation of the material composition of the artefacts would intervene and shift their existing signification relationship, thus signifying an intercultural activity.

Damian Ortega's installation and sculpture works often present the material status of in-between-a process of changing or transformation.³³ In his works, the materials are used as a major means for representing the examination and experimentation of propositions and hypotheses. By dissecting the physical form of existing objects into the smallest components, Ortega creates openings to assess the attached values of the materials and subsequently suggest new meanings and value systems through the represented materials. These objects map out a new connection between existing value systems and acknowledge the commonality and difference between them. Ortega's projects, *Homos* (1996) and *Prometheus* (1992) provide good examples. In *Homos*, twenty new objects and images are presented in a hybrid fashion in response to the Spanish words with the prefix homo-. For example, a mango is attached to a knife handle because, in Spanish, the word for 'knife handle' is also the same as 'mango'. (fig.8) For the word 'Homógrafo', two products are put together because they have been sold in one shop at the same price.³⁴ (fig.9) In *Prometheus*, a conflictual and ironic situation is articulated from an electric light bulb in which its internal structure is replaced by a used candle. (fig.10)³⁵ Ortega highlights the commonality of the two products and removes the functioning values from both. The new object is read as only a proposition.

³³ Jessica Morgan, "New Order", in *Damian Ortega: Do It Yourself*, ed. The Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston: Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc., 2010), 9.

³⁴ Damian Ortega, *Damian Ortega: The Beetle Trilogy and Other Works with Texts by Eungie Joo, Hari Kunzru, and Alama Ruiz. November 4, 2005 – January 15, 2006*, (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts and REDCAT, 2005). 38-40

³⁵ Ortega, Damian, 40

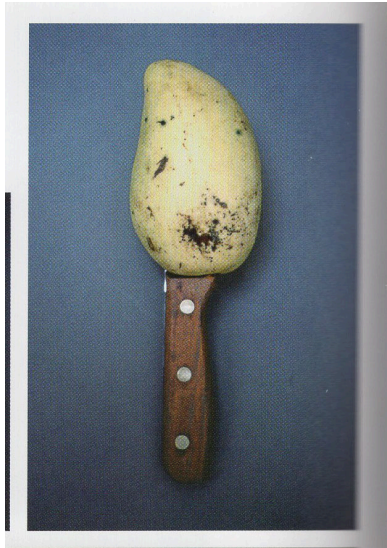


Fig. 8. Damian Ortega, *Homónimo* (*Homonym*), 1996.



Fig. 9. Damian Ortega, *Homógrafo* (*Homographic*), 1996.

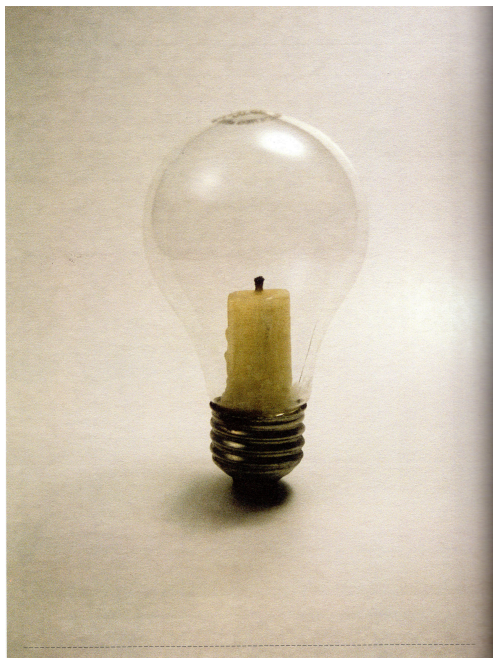


Fig. 10. Damian Ortega, *Prometeo* (*Prometheus*), 1992.

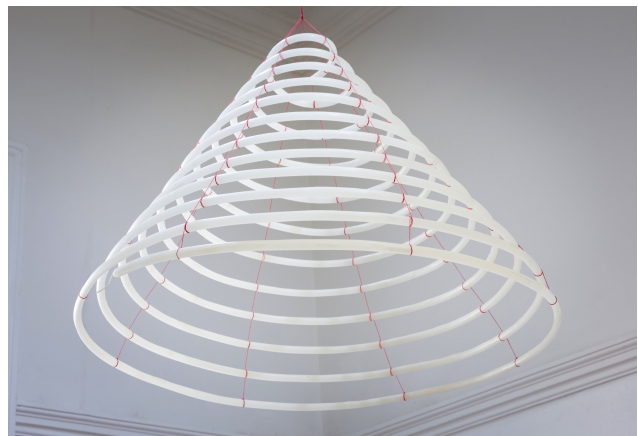


Fig. 11. Siyong Zhou, *A candle coil*, 2016.
Photographer: David Marks.

The propositional scenario 1: it is neither candle nor incense.

Work title: *The candle coils*

Media: Wax, cotton threads. 1200 (W) x 1200 (L) x variable height

A large candle coil made from wax and incense was produced as an intersection between two burning activities and their ideological causes. It was made in a circular form with ten spirals, the largest of which spreads out to about one meter in diameter. Suspended from the ceiling from its centre point, it dropped down into a cone shape. The circles of the coil were connected with red strings. A piece of white cotton thread could be seen coming out of one end of the coil. (fig. 11)

This artefact contains the possibility of referencing things other than themselves, histories that the viewer may be able to bring to them. The material features of this work act like phantoms casting memory and knowledge, implying how the object should be perceived. However, its opaque formal genesis intervenes in the reading. It is both a candle and an incense stick but it is neither. The hybrid material form interrupts the usual trajectory of cognition because the viewer cannot perceive the whole.

By referencing Orgeta's methodology, the candle coil presents the attempt to generate a dialogic site between different cultural practices through material manipulation. The amalgamation of the material forms of incense and candles, acknowledges two burning rituals that are practiced for different ideological beliefs within the same object. By attempting to perceive the object as either candle or incense, you are perceiving either one and not the object in its entirety. What then occurs, is an optical dissection the whole structure. However, in the process of one or the other, the viewer perceives the joints between the two components. This allows the viewer to position themselves at the material openings and see the composition process of a physical form. Through the fracture, different signification relationships of the components become visible and conflictual. The process of cognition turns into an invisible activity of seeking for a compatible point among the different value systems. The Other is indicated through this process. As Ortega has shown in his works, this Other represents the new perspective position and proposes the possibility of forming a new relationship between human and the material world.

For the candle coil, the incomprehensible material form indicates different ideological beliefs in which different burning rituals have been developed. According to the Taoist belief, the purpose of burning is to mediate the path between the human world and the supernatural world. The smoke of burning incense creates a threshold between a corporeal human world and the world of spirits, gods and the dead. Hence, a coil form is designed to serve this belief for having an elongated burning period and a long term of connection. Whereas, the candle burning is, especially white candles, used in the Western culture for remembrance and symbolised as the light of God or Christ for Protestantism and Catholicism. Often the long vertical flame of the candle is rhetorically interpreted to reflect a transcendent spirit, and a pure and uplifted soul.

Within the form of the candle coil, these two burning rituals are literally merged into one. In the imagination of the burning: the candle burns along the spiral path of the incense, and these two ideological positions are requested and placed together for comparison and analysis. From the candle coil, we begin to see common responses towards death, gods and the world of unseen, a shared emphasis of the spiritual practices in everyday life, and the similar approaches used to relate to the non-human world. However, the impracticality of the structure is apparent when the burning is imagined. With a basic knowledge about the laws of physics, and a general understanding about wax material, it is not difficult to foretell the hazards of burning a wax candle coil: the candle flame will melt the candle structure above. Instead of having one slow and consistent flame, it will develop into a mass of fire. In compressing materials of two cultural signifiers together the hybridised design sabotages the objectives of both rituals with its material structure. This envisioned dysfunction turns the candle coil into a sign that represents and enhances the cultural difference.

In another case, the manipulation of the material form of the artefact changes the product relationship with human. Through the alteration, while the functionality of the artefact may not necessarily change, the signification of artefact is changed. Thus, the artefact now draws a different social group and echoes a social convention different from the original social practice. The new form of the object appears hybrid and becomes a sign that sits in the middle of the two cultural practices and relates to both cultures.

The propositional scenario 2: It is neither made in Australia nor China.

Work title: *Serve hot water in 24hrs*

Media: neoprene, cotton threads and various porcelain teapots and cups. In various sizes.

The stubby holder, a product invented in 1980s Australia for the purpose of keeping beer bottles and cans cold³⁶, were purchased from souvenir shops and transformed into the cover for porcelain teapots and bowls. These pots and bowls are resourced from local OP shops and are popularly used crockery by people from the East Asian region. (fig. 12)

In this work, the intercultural negotiation—the in-between cultural place takes place in the emendation of the stubby holder. Through cutting and stitching, the patterns of Australian iconic symbols on the stubby holder's surface are destroyed and fractured. The disjointed images on the surface of the new artefacts literally disrupt the articulation of the Australian culture. The interior void space of the stubby holder that once was expected to be filled with the beer bottles, now, is loaded with crockery. The design of the crockery hints a different cultural practice from the one that the stubby holder implies. The Chinese characters and dragon patterns on the surface of the crockery recalls the oriental style. The materiality of the crockery indicates that the new cover is to keep the heat, instead of the cold. The cultural difference is visualised from the contrast between the surface of the stubby holder and the crockery. The repurposed stubby holders describe the shape of the crockery. However, the fragmented Australian iconic graphics on the new cover does not only disrupt the cultural references that the Chinese products previously represent, but also contradicts the previous function of the stubby holders. The new covers become a hybrid sign that constitutes the interpellative process of two different cultures. They no longer signify only one Australian identity and value. They rather become a cultural component that contributes to the understanding of the Asian culture. This new form provides each culture extra content from an external perspective. In other words, the new artefact, as the result of multicultural engagement, is the material form of the in-between and a dynamic presentation of cultural difference.

³⁶ "What is a stubby holder?," *Coolaz*, last accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.coolaz.com.au/stubby-holder-history/>



Fig. 12. Siying Zhou, *Serve Hot Water for 24HRs*, 2016-2017.

Event four: (A (b): Two arbitrary acculturation acts.)

In an immersive and sensational way, a place—a geographical location—imparts all the cultural, political, historical and geological values to people who enter. As an outsider when you enter a space, how do you know what is the dominant culture? Different cultural signs compete with each other to produce a dominant narrative of that place. To carry out activities at that place is to interact with the dominant culture and also to create dissonance in the existing cultural structure. Two video works were produced to examine two different human intervention in two different types of places.

The propositional scenario 1: It is neither the present nor the past.

Work title: *An Uncanny Serenity*

Medium: HD video in length 00'28'08''

The propositional scenario 2: It is neither Australian nor Chinese.

Working title: *Steamed Hot Cross Buns.*

Medium: Two channel HD video in length 10'02''.

One depicts a white candle coil burning at an Australian bush site from dusk to dawn. (fig. 13) The other shows two connected events within a domestic place. A cooking lesson of the making hot cross buns that was carried out in the backyard of my parents' suburban house. This cooking event was followed by the kitchen activity of taking tea with the buns as the accompanying snack. The two events are performed by my parents. The cooking lesson is given by my father. He shares the buns with my mother at the kitchen table. (fig. 14)



Fig. 13. Siying Zhou, *An Uncanny Serenity*, 2017.



Fig. 14. Siying Zhou, *Steam Hot Cross Buns*, 2016.

Both videos depict an interruption, by human activities, at a site belonging to the dominant culture. In the video of the candle coil, the dominant Australian culture is hinted to by the depicted native vegetation: large ferns, eucalyptus and gum trees. As the bush site is disturbed by the implied human trespass and the burning event, the traditional view on Australian identity that is associated with bushland is challenged. The Australian bush is the psychic place of Australian identity. It holds the history of many people who lay claim to it—the aboriginal, the colonial, the explorer and the migrant. It is presented as the mysterious, a refuge, melancholic, freedom, the uncultured, the unmanageable, the remedial, mythic, a void and the sacred. This review is reflected in Don Watson's book titled *The Bush*. Watson comments Australian bush as 'both real and imaginary':

'In the imaginary bush, the life is the life of the Australian mind. It feeds the nation's idea of itself.'³⁷

By depicting the disturbance and the dissonant content, the video recalls the traditions of colonial landscape painting and imagery, while it reinvents them. In the tradition of the symbolic representation of landscape, especially 19th century images of the Australian landscape, the application of the panoramic frame and unfolding composition—the picturesque land in the distance with human and animals in the centre or the front area of a flat surface—were used to create a reflection of social order and the desire for assimilation.³⁸ The order created for the images of the Australian landscape established a visual norm for the white audience in the colony or back in the home country. The unfamiliar and strange figures, such as the native flora, fauna, the aboriginal people and the Chinese community, became comprehensible to them and read as the expected content in the context of the Australian land. (fig. 15) Representing the colonial desire of assimilation, the subject of the *Strange and the Other* is coloured into the 'normal' that fits the same cultural lens. The candle coil in the video is analogous to the exotic figures in the early images of the

³⁷ "The Bush by Don Watson review – driven by the burning truth", Paul Daley, The Guardian, published September 22, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/22/the-bush-by-don-watson-review-driven-by-the-burning-truth>

³⁸ Meighen Katz, "A Civilised People? Landscape, Art and National Identity in the Nineteen Century." In *Not as the Songs of Other Lands: 19th Century Australian and American Landscape Painting*. Melbourne: Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2017, 38-43

Australian landscape. The candle object contrasts to the bush by representing a different order and force from those prior that have inhabited at this site; by representing the human trespass and a destructive intrusion into the imagined complete and balanced ecosystem. Moreover, in the video, the sequential images of the bush site are captured from a fixed camera lens position. It references the fashion of framing the landscape in photography.



Fig. 15. James Taylor (artist), Robert Havell and Son (engraver), *The entrance of Port Jackson and part of the town of Sydney, New South Wales, 1823.*

This video also brings the discourse of the sublime and the Australian landscape into new relief. The image of Australian landscape is presented through the influence of the artistic and aesthetic discourse of the sublime. In the introduction of the course titled *From the sublime to the ridiculous*, Damien Freeman, the lecturer, states that the ambivalence of the aesthetic pleasure is produced from the sublime experience of both the beauty and the terror.³⁹ The peculiarity of the candle's form is contrast to the picturesque background of the bush land. The candle intensifies the awe, the mystery and the liberty of the bush. While it enhances the mysterious and outlaw characteristics, it also challenges the colonial perception of the bush.

While the video is recollecting the elements from the past and historic lens, it is presenting a new image of Australian bush and mapping out the cultural landscape in the contemporary Australian bush environment for the future. The candle burning and the daytime passing depicts the content of presencing. With the emphasis of the present, the image of Australian landscape with the candle coil rewrites the traditional imagery order for a new perspective of viewing and interpreting the Australian bush. This perspective is powered in a different technological time. In the video, new horror and beauty are established and interpret sublime in new context. It suggests the new context pertains to the culture of immigration and diaspora, as the landscape with the candle presents the image of a site of migrants and intercultural activities.

On the other hand, in the home cooking lesson of the hot cross bun, Australian culture is suggested, by the backyard image of the Twelve Apostles, as the main culture outside of the backyard. The Twelve Apostles is known as a famous tourist site in Victoria, Australia. Conventionally, the backdrop creates a visual illusion of another place, and in the context of the cooking lesson it might suggest a better, more suitable and appropriate environment than the actual site. It implies which culture the presented dish 'authentically' belongs to. Through cooking, this culture is desired, approached and touched.

³⁹ "Sublime: the pleasure of the overwhelming. A learning curve lecture series with Damien Freeman", *The Art Gallery of NSW*, last accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/calendar/sublime/>

However, this imagined Australian culture is subverted in the depicted teaching activity of cooking Chinese hot cross buns. The activity of cooking Chinese hot cross buns echoes the negating activity that Bhabha analyses in introducing the idea of the unhomeliness. By cooking hot cross buns, my father declares that he is not only here—the backyard/Australia, but also be *somewhere else* and *for something else*—the public space/China. He, as a recalcitrant character, shows his recognition of the main culture and demands a reciprocal recognition of his existence from the main culture. Such negation

‘captures something of estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.’⁴⁰

In the video, my father is not only talking to the camera, but also to his imagined future audiences. By carrying out this lesson, he brings a sense of world into home and gives the future world an aspect of a home.

At borderline place of the backyard, the cultural displacement entails the dislocation of home and the world. Various cultural elements are repeatedly challenged, broken and rebuilt in the socio-political freedom that is offered at the backyard. Meanwhile, the private views and acts seep out from the backyard and affect public life and the formation of culture. If this featured event posits the liminal social position of the backyard and highlights its capacity of articulating the condition of ‘extra-territory’, the wide camera frame suggests another middle place between the actual location and the imagined site: the backyard that is partially hidden behind the backdrop. In a wide frame, the video montages the images of two locations, the backyard and the Twelve Apostles. Although the cooking event takes place in front of the backdrop, conceptually it is positioned in between these two locations.

In addition, the fragmented view of the backyard reveals so little information about the place that it can be read as a ‘non-place’. The lack of characters and history in the presentation of the backyard evokes a discontinuity of the past and emphasizes the

⁴⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 13.

happening *in situ*. Although my father shows his accumulated knowledge and skills of cooking in the instructions, his past self remains mysterious and unreadable in the introduction of the invented food. The interrupted tradition is continuously shown in the scene of the kitchen. The mix of cultural elements captured in the video—the Chinese furniture, a jar of jam, Vegemite, Chinese tea set and Chinese hot cross buns, intervene the depiction and presentation of a tradition. The history of individual items is faintly referred to and used for the random domestic activities. Bhabha argues that the domestic life is adjusted and understood in an in-between temporality through which the division between the opposed spheres of life is questioned by the hybridity and a different 'within'.⁴¹ In this case, the dialogue in-between the past and the present takes place on a personal and domestic side.

⁴¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 19.

CHAPTER 3: MISE EN SCÈNE

Can the experience of the in-between be transposed to others? Can the discourse of the in-between be openly presented to others for participation? Can the identity of the third other be temporally imposed to others?

Through looking at the practices of Camille Henrot and Olafur Eliasson, I constructed an installation with the works that I have produced for this research and discussed above. By placing the works together in one confined room, I form entropy of information. Each work with its unique narrative and subject holds an information and activity centre in the space and requires different responses from the viewer.

Multiple sounds and voices are played out from the video works through the speakers. Each video with its sound track includes a blank session between the start and end, and plays in a particular length, consequently, they turn the space into a noisy chaotic space where they play simultaneously and overlap each other. In other moments, they set the silence in the space when they are in intervals. The unpredictable pattern of sound, appearance and multiple paralleled narratives immerse the viewer with overloaded information and disturb the viewing experience. In this way, the viewer is nudged into a 'midpoint' to find an order, similar to that in Henrot's video work *Grosse Fatigues* (2013). (fig. 16) Her video is the 'midpoint between entropy and order, a median state: Everything is infinitely multiplied and overcoded, there is a similarly multiple wealth of available systemisations'.⁴² If one system gives an order to chaos, when multiple equal systems are put alongside each other, they cancel each other.⁴³

⁴² Diedrich Diederichsen, "The Absent Centre: Camille Henrot's Film between Postcolonialism and Digital positivism," *Parkett*, vol. 97, 2015, 128

⁴³ Ibid, 129.



Fig. 16. "Camille Henrot 'Grosse Fatigue'", Vimeo video, 7'27", posted by Collectif Combo, February 8, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/86174818>.

This conceptual 'midpoint' is presented and affirmed through a physical arrangement of the works. In the installation, the works are dispersed over different areas of the room. There is no one viewing point where the viewer can stand at and see all the works. Especially, the screen base works which demand particular viewing positions and certain attention spans from the audience.

In order to access the displayed contents, the viewer has to walk, turn, stop and repeat. During the series of body movements, there are always things seen and unseen. This fragmented view of the works impels the spectator to change their position constantly and places them at an interval space and time, which is between the work that they have just seen and the work that they are about to see. Moreover, the manoeuvres among the works form various views of the installation for the spectator and provoke a variety of overlaps and interpretations as individual components are brought into relationship.

By offering this fluid perceptive position, the installation provides an open finish and imparts an incommensurable meaning. In conversation between Olafur Eliasson and Timothy Morton, Eliasson mentions that being lost in a space, like a labyrinth, emerges and reveals ontological questions.⁴⁴ If what you see informs what you know, where we position ourselves critically pertains to what composes our knowledge and perception of the world. The complex external environment is a stimulating force that impels an introspection about selfhood that shapes a Self.

Following Eliasson's view that the spatial experience impacts on the formation of the Self, I perceived the possibility of referring to the cinematic technique of 'suture' in the construction of the physical layout of the installation. A successful suture means that the spectator voluntarily makes themselves absent and allows the fictional character to form a point of view for them.⁴⁵ With the decentred orientation and multiple viewing perspectives, this installation offers the viewer a fragmentary perception to read the contents that argue about the in-between cultural position and the 'third other' selfhood. With reference to the

⁴⁴ "Artist Talk: Olafur Eliasson & Timothy Morton", YouTube, , posted by Moderna Museet, October 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYht9r9xdA8>

⁴⁵ Tan, *Scenario*, 167

various hybrid forms of representation of cultures, the disrupted and disjointed physical experience directs the viewer to step into the role of the third other. In her book, Fiona Tan says 'to emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.'⁴⁶ Within this installation, the opportunity is given for the viewer to momentarily take on the identity of the immigrant—the *third other*.

Besides the physical navigation, this installation impacts on the viewer's self-perception by provoking of a consciousness of humour. Humour can be produced from incongruity. In Sarah Crowest's PhD dissertation, she highlights that 'humour arises as a response to disrupting the expectations of the listener or viewer in some way.'⁴⁷ James Beattie states that 'laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable or incongruous parts or circumstance'.⁴⁸

Incongruity of cultural signs is seen as trope within every works in this installation. Different cultural contents are depicted and represented through unexpected and conflictual forms. The sense of inappropriate and wrong pokes the viewer to laugh. However, laughter also entails from an internal reasoning. The answers to the questions: why am I laughing? What am I laughing at? reveal a particular cultural position where the viewer currently or previously stands. By offering the humorous materials, the final installation of my work offers a different navigation system through which the viewer introspectively reviews and adjusts their own cultural perspective.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 35

⁴⁷ Sarah CrowEST, "An Unaccountable Mass: Bothersome Matter and the Humorous Life of Forms" (Ph.D., University of Melbourne, 2012), 219

⁴⁸ CrowEST, "An Unaccountable Mass: Bothersome Matter and the Humorous Life of Forms", 219

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

By using objects, languages, videos and actions I pin down the signs of cultures into various materials, linguistic, conscious and geographic locations. By changing the material constitution, creating dissonance in images, exchanging linguistic syntaxes, altering the way of doing, and transforming physical building of a human body, I provoke propositional intercultural dialogical relationships. Within the proposed cultural interactions, the third other emerges in a tangible form and the location of the in-between becomes accessible.

The unknown is sometimes developed from the seed of the known. The more information we obtain, the more difficult it is for us to perceive the clarity between interconnected and multifaceted reality and who we are. To the immigrant, whose life has been assigned to be culturally hybrid, the exposure to diverse knowledge and information through migration often opens a state of the unfixed and unknown. In such a state, the usual boundary between things and the common definition of things are dismissed, subverted and reset in the conflict between different sets of knowledge and theories. In the journey of pursuing bliss, the essential principle is not to reach absolute accuracy but to find the balance point between things.

To return to the restaurant sign that set off this research with its use and misuse of language, I envisaged a conceptual sphere of in-between, a realm of the unknown and hybridity, encompassed in the common practice of cultural cognition, translation and acculturation. It is embedded in lived reality and everyday life. In this realm, everything is synthetic; nothing can be simply depicted in a particular culture and fully comprehended in a conventional way. Cultural fragments are assembled and constructed together like Frankenstein's monster for the purpose of cultural appropriation. The authenticity and meaning of things are eliminated, manipulated and regenerated through the process of translation and imitation. As a result, things become ambivalent and have the status of being in-between.

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