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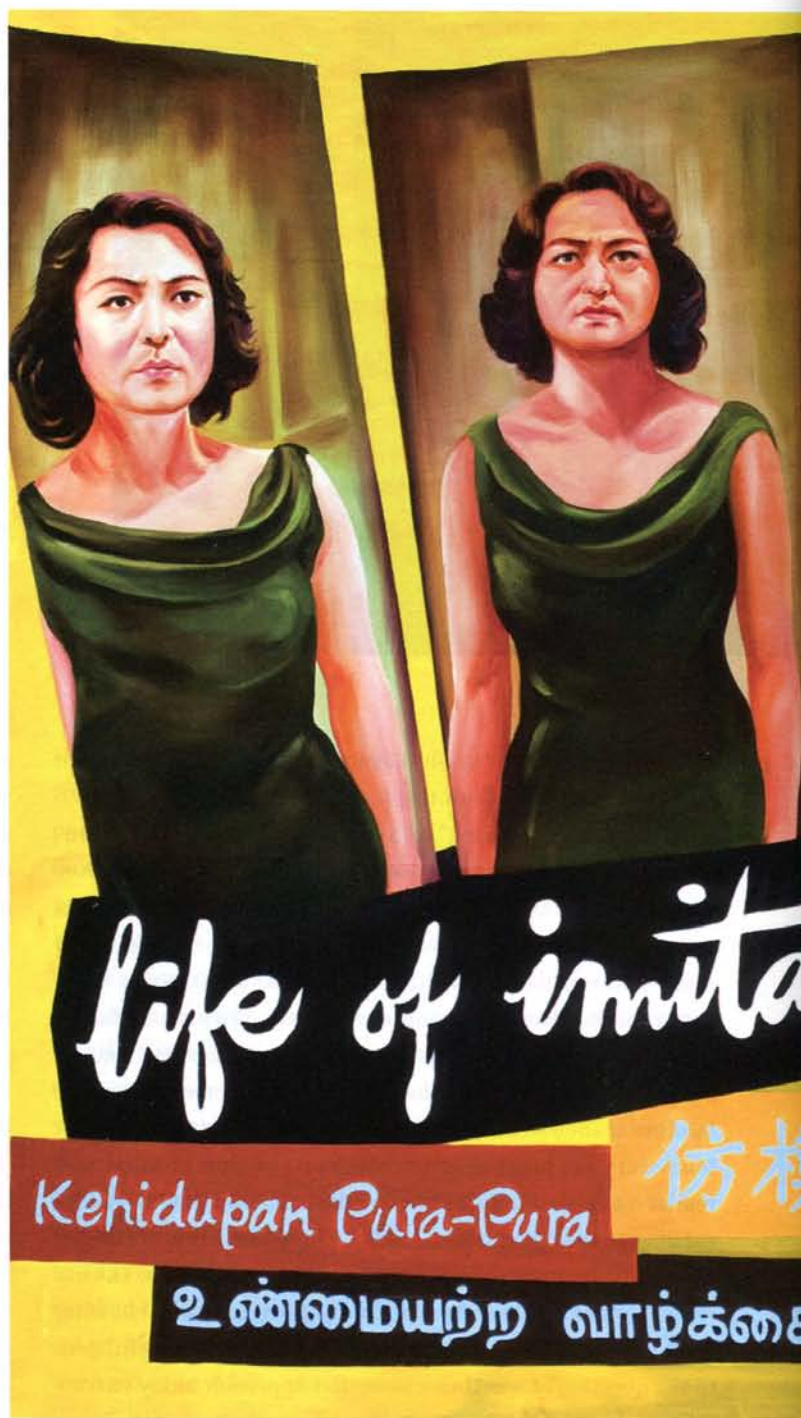
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黄汉明：情景戏剧与混生现实

MELODRAMA AND METISSAGE: THE ART OF MING WONG

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黄汉明的影像作品以一种家庭作坊式的低成本美学持续不断地表达他对种族及性别二元对立论的质疑。他的创作为他赢得众多赞誉之声，甚至是从一些不太可能的角落——比如新加坡的官方机构。贝安吉在文中回顾了黄汉明的创作历程，并探寻艺术家如何运用夸张的自我感去破除各种顽固的二元论。



Harnessing a homemade aesthetic and an unrepentant skepticism of racial and gender binaries, Ming Wong's films have won him critical acclaim from unlikely corners—including the Singaporean official establishment. Angie Baecker looks at the evolution of his practice, asking how his exaggerated sense of self serves to destabilize dichotomies of all sorts.

A CHINESE SINGAPOREAN man in an emerald green dress looks into a mirror. He tremblingly tells his character's black mother—here played by an Indian Singaporean actor—"I'm white. White. White!" On a dual screen, another Indian Singaporean actor simultaneously delivers the same lines, this time to a Malay Singaporean actor playing his character's black mother. The two sets of male actors are performing a pivotal, emotionally charged scene from Douglas Sirk's 1959 Hollywood blockbuster *Imitation of Life*, in which Sarah Jane, a young American woman of mixed race descent, disowns her ailing black mother Annie.

But in this iteration, the scene is a video installation by Ming Wong, recasting Sarah Jane and Annie with male actors from Singapore's three main ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, and Indian, making praxis of the country's ubiquitous CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) categorization system. With each shot, the actors rotate roles, further destabilizing the racial binaries otherwise ascribed to them. The men are all too old to pass for Sarah Jane and too young to pass for Annie. Dressed in cheap wigs and ill-fitting cocktail dresses, the effect is both visually preposterous and mesmerizing, sustained in equal parts by the melodrama of the original and the complete dissonance of the new.

Ming Wong describes the inversion of race, age, and gender roles as a total "miscasting," assigning male where female is called for, substituting CMIO for black and white, inserting young for old and old for young. It's a common tactic employed by the Berlin-based Singaporean artist, who frequently mines world cinema for source materials that he then remakes into video installations, "sweding" the original (to use the term for a slipshod remake of a popular film from Michel Gondry's 2008 comedy *Be Kind, Rewind*) on his own terms. He couples the appropriation of content with breakdowns in conventional filmmaking, using a decidedly low-budget aesthetic (cheap costuming, choppy editing, comi-

梁俊德
《一生模仿》
2009年，海报
222 X 228 厘米
艺术家收藏
Neo Chon Teck
Life of Imitation
2009
Billboard poster
222 x 228 cm
Artist collection

屏幕中，一位身着翡翠绿晚礼服的华裔新加坡男人望着镜子，用颤抖的声音对他所饰演角色的黑人母亲说道（此处母亲的扮演者是一位印度裔新加坡演员）“我是白人，白人，白人！”与此同时，另一屏幕中，一位印度裔新加坡演员说着同样的台词，而这次该角色黑人母亲的扮演者则是一位马来裔新加坡演员。这两组男演员演绎的是道格拉斯·瑟克1959年执导的好莱坞大片《模仿一生》中的一场重要的感情戏，剧中年轻的美国混血女孩莎拉·简当面否认自己与她病重的黑人母亲安妮的血缘关系。

上述的重复表演镜头其实是黄汉明的一件录像装置，他分别用华人、马来人和印度人这三个新加坡主要族群的男演员来重新饰演莎拉·简和安妮，这种做法参照的是新加坡通

用的CMIO(华人、马来人、印度人及其他的首字母)种族分类系统。在每场戏中,演员们轮换角色,进一步消解强加在他们身上的种族二元论。以这些男人的年纪,演莎拉·简显得太老,演安妮又太年轻。他们头戴廉价的假发套,身穿不合身的晚礼服,整体视觉效果既怪诞不经又引人入胜,原片的通俗煽情与新片的全面颠覆同样给力。

黄汉明把他对种族、年龄与性别角色的置换描述成一种彻底的“角色分配失当”——把女性饰演的角色分配给男性,按新加坡的CMIO种族分类系统替换黑人和白人,还让年轻人和老人的角色互换。这种置换是这位客居柏林的新加坡艺术家常用的策略。他从世界电影库中挖掘素材,将之翻拍成录像装置,以他独有的方式“廉拍”原作(该词用来指粗制滥造地恶搞翻拍流行影片,源自米歇尔·冈瑞2008年导演的喜剧片《小心倒带》)。他结合了对影片内容的挪用以及对传统制片模式的解构,运用一种绝对的低成本美学(廉价的装扮、业余的剪辑、露馅的绿幕拍摄)将隐藏在幕后的种族、语言及文化问题带到台前。

正是对语言、视觉生产和身份认同的既定符码的颠覆置换,使黄汉明渐渐赢得国际关注。他的作品《一生模仿》是对瑟克原创影片《模仿一生》的戏仿,曾作为新加坡国家馆的一部分亮相2009年威尼斯双年展,并为他赢得双年展“扩张的世界”单元特别提名奖。如此一来,多年没有被国际画廊的他签约了前卫艺术空间维他命,迎来了今年在华盛顿西雅图Frye美术馆举办的首个美术馆个展——这真是一份姗姗来迟的关注。

自传特质

尽管黄汉明影像作品的材料来源五花八门,但一种强烈的自传特质始终贯穿其中,尤其是他承袭的对艺术影响深远的华人传统以及新加坡的建国历史。黄汉明生于1971年,父母是讲粤语的华人,他自认为个人经历是同代人的典型:祖父母从华南地区移居到新加坡,二战期间经历过日军的占领统治、出生之时离新加坡脱离马来西亚统治宣布独立仅有几年的时间。

黄汉明的作品《一生模仿》和《马来四传》反映的正是这段历史及其相伴相生的种族困境。在《马来四传》中,黄汉明一人分饰的十六角均取材于马来西亚战后人气艺人比南利扮演过的电影角色;在每一出小品剧中,他都以夸张煽情的方式重新演绎了穆斯林世界的性禁忌。熟悉比南利表演艺术的观众能从中识别出马来文化的种种特质,因为很多原本的对白如今已经融入大众文化,因此黄汉明要求本土观众暂时悬置他们对他的不信任感,接纳以华人的身份所饰演一系列马来角色。《马来四传》与《一生模仿》都明确地探讨了主宰新加坡国民话语的身份政治论题——在新加坡,多样的种族构成造成的是悬而未决的同化还是认同的问题。

语言是黄汉明的另一个核心兴趣点,他在家说粤语,但在天主教学学校里学会了普通话。作品《华样年华》再现了王家卫同名电影里的关键片段。在外国观众眼里,《花样年华》也



《马来四传》,2005年,四屏录像装置,黑白有声

Four Malay Stories, 2005, 4-channel video installation (shot on DV, 4:3, black and white with audio)

许是最能代表香港的电影。黄汉明请了一位白人女演员同时扮演张曼玉、反串梁朝伟。演员一会儿穿上张曼玉的经典旗袍,头发盘成动人的发髻,一会儿又脱下旗袍换上梁朝伟的白衬衫、长裤。但真正动人的一段是演员学习广东话发音。在最终装置中,三个屏幕同步播放相同的场景:第一个是早先拍摄的镜头,女演员用粤语念台词的样子显然十分吃力;在第二个屏幕上,她正越来越轻松地使用着这门外语;最后一个屏幕显示她用粤语已经对答如流了。

从伦敦到柏林

黄汉明最初在新加坡南洋艺术学院学习中国书法,随后在新加坡一家英语剧院工作,撰写了音乐剧《菖与英》,该剧改编自十九世纪一对泰国连体双胞胎弟兄,即传说中的“暹罗双胞胎”的真实故事。这个音乐剧为新加坡这个不以文化输出特别著称的国家迎来巨大好评与商业成功,并在二十世纪九十年代末到亚洲各地举行巡演,最终成为在中国上演的第一部英语音乐剧。

正在他因为写《菖与英》而崭露头角的时候,黄汉明离开新加坡前往伦敦大学学院莱德艺术学院就读,并于1999年获硕士学位。他的毕业创作《第三空间里的蜜月》拍摄了一场有一位新郎、两位新娘的假婚礼片段。新郎是新加坡和英国混血,而他迎娶的两位新娘分别为英国人和亚洲人。在每一次场景切换中,两位新娘交替着换穿对方的白色婚纱和红色的中式传统吉服。影像展开了两种文化相互融合的象征性想象,而不是重弹“东西方”危机这种陈词滥调。

从莱德毕业以后,黄汉明留在伦敦,创作了更多具有鲜明戏剧特质的影像作品。作品《哈姆雷特问题》和《谁干的?》是黄汉明在伦敦时期的代表作,都是以戏剧的方式挑战语言及英语经典文本的稳定性。黄汉明把《哈姆雷特问题》称作一首“乱炖的莎士比亚十四行诗”,影像中他自己穿着看上去像是廉价万圣节装备的莎翁服装,再往脖子上套一圈自制的绉褶边,最后贴上纸胡须。他试图表演哈姆雷特的



《华样年花》，2009年，三屏录像装置，彩色有声，4分17秒
In Love for the Mood
 2009, 3-channel video installation
 (shot on HD, 16:9, color with audio)
 4 min. 17 sec.

cally conspicuous green-screening) to bring the underlying racial, linguistic, and cultural valences to the forefront.

For inverting so many assumed codes of language, visual production, and identity, Ming Wong has been the subject of increasing international attention. *Life of Imitation*, Wong's appropriation of the original Sirk film *Imitation of Life*, appeared as part of the Singapore Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale, earning him a Special Mention for "Expanding Worlds." After years without international representation, he joined the forward-thinking Vitamin Creative Space's roster, and has received his first solo museum show this year at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington—attention that has been a long time in coming.

As much as the sources for Ming Wong's filmic works are diverse, strong autobiographic interests hold them together. Wong's Chinese heritage and the construction of the Singaporean state loom particularly large. Born in 1971 to Cantonese-speaking Chinese parents, Wong considers his history typical of his generation: His paternal grandparents migrated to Singapore from southern China, living through

Japanese occupation during World War II, with Wong born only a few years following Singapore's subsequent independence and separation from Malaysia.

Both *Life of Imitation* and *Four Malay Stories* are clear manifestations of this history and its accompanying racial dilemmas. In the latter, Ming Wong plays sixteen different Malay characters from films by popular post-war Malay entertainer P. Ramlee; in each vignette, he re-enacts Muslim sexual taboos in condensed melodramas. Audiences familiar with P. Ramlee's legacy recognize touchstones of Malay culture, with much of the original dialogue having entered popular culture; Wong further asks native audiences to suspend their disbelief and accept an ethnic Chinese in a host of Malay roles. Both *Four Malay Stories* and *Life of Imitation* make for explicit explorations of the identity politics that dominate the national discourse in Singapore, a country whose diverse ethnic composition is underscored by unresolved questions of assimilation versus recognition.

Language is another core interest for Ming Wong, who spoke Cantonese at home but learned Mandarin at Catho-

经典独白“生存还是毁灭”，但却扭曲了每行句子，在嘲讽着莎翁这位英语世界最受推崇的剧作家的同时，也使得以离经叛道的方式重置的神圣文本获得了一种荒诞主义诗歌的美。

在2003至2004年间拍摄作品《谁干的？》时，黄汉明有更充足的资源和演员班子去对同样的题材进行更为深入的挖掘；这一次做的是对英国经典谋杀悬案进行重新想象。由于英格兰艺术委员会的财力支持，黄汉明请到多种种族背景的演员来塑造休息室谋杀案中典型的角色类型，而种族角色的分派则特意参考了艺术委员会文化差异监测表中所列的人种类别。这些几乎是清一色的第二或第三代英国人演员在片中轮番使用不同的口音说台词：先是RP标准英式口音，然后用他们想象中的祖、父辈的外国口音。在包厢里，这些身为非裔黑人、加勒比黑人、亚洲人、东亚人、中东人、拉美人、塞浦路斯希腊人、东欧犹太人以及爱尔兰人的后代的演员们，试着用他们从来不会说但在小时候可能就已经很熟悉的方言口音来表演。这一群体的权力动力围绕着位于群体中心的警察，而方言口音在这里则起着权力通货的作用，借助在标准英式口音与想象的种族化口音之间进行切换来表现不同角色与警察之间的关系。

但日渐增加的生活开支让黄汉明不得不离开伦敦，迁往柏林，那里相对低廉的生活花销以及活力十足的侨民社群已经吸引了大量年轻艺术家、作家和寻欢作乐的人。对黄汉明而言，这次环境的变动不仅仅是一次搬迁，而是一次巨变。这次经历成为作品《跟裴特拉·冯·康特学德语》的自传式起点，它是对法斯宾德1972年电影《裴特拉·冯·康特苦涩的眼泪》的局部再现。原剧中，冯·康特是一位成功的时尚设计师，她爱恋并最终失去她的欲望对象，失恋的悲伤在她生日那天达到了顶点，她躺在卧室地板上，手里攥着一瓶烈酒，孤独地叫喊咆哮。

对德国和德语完全陌生的黄汉明将以上的电影段落演绎成一段对德语这门新语言的另类介绍，他跳过初学一门外语的传统对白——问好，谈论天气或食物——代之以背诵裴特拉情绪崩溃时所说的一段痛苦的长篇独白。的确，关乎心灵的事情对于真正的交流是更为根本的东西。戴上裴特拉那与众不同的金色假发，霓虹套衫和大领花，黄汉明自己学着用裴特拉的话语来描述他自己的痛苦、绝望和不安全感，在裴特拉的苦楚以及他自己甫迁至柏林的自我怀疑之间找到某种近似的情感宣泄，他形容自己是一个已近中年的面临淘汰的“单身、同性恋、少数族裔的中生代艺术家”。

前往威尼斯

从那里开始，他顺理成章地一步步通往威尼斯双年展。第二年，他重拍了另一部法斯宾德的经典电影《恐惧吞噬心灵》，以自己一人饰演全部角色来打破原剧中的种族、性别和语言多元主义，用粗糙的德语重新演绎了埃米和她的阿里的故事——一个中年清洁女工爱上了一个比她年轻很多的从摩洛哥来的外地工人。在作品《吞噬恐惧》之后他就得到威尼斯双年展的委托，其中包括《华样年花》以及《一生模仿》两部作品，后者与新加坡最后一位电影海报画家梁俊德画的气息繁华

lie school. *In Love for the Mood* recreates pivotal scenes from the similarly titled Wong Kar-Wai film, perhaps the one single movie recognized by foreign audiences as quintessentially Hong Kong. Wong hires a Caucasian actress to play both Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung's roles, twisting her hair into an impressive bun when she dons Cheung's famous cheongsams and slicking it down for Leung's white collared shirts and slacks. But the real spectacle is her performance, delivered in Cantonese learned phonetically. In the final installation, three screens simultaneously play the same scene; the first is an early take, the actress struggling visibly with her lines. On the second screen, she is increasingly comfortable with the foreign language, and the third is her smoothest delivery of the Cantonese dialogue.

HYBRID BEGINNINGS

ORIGINALLY TRAINED IN Chinese calligraphy at Nanyang Art Academy in Singapore, Ming Wong began working in Singapore's English-language theatre, writing the book to *Chang & Eng the Musical*, a dramatization of the lives of the nineteenth-century Thai-born conjoined twin brothers that inspired the term "Siamese twins." The musical was a critical and commercial hit for Singapore, a country not particularly known for its cultural exports, and toured throughout Asia in the late 1990s, eventually becoming the first English-language musical to be performed in China.



《跟裴特拉·冯·康特学德语》，2007年
单屏录像装置，彩色有声（老式电视，耳机，白色毛毯），10分钟
Learn German with Petra Von Kant/ Lerne Deutsch mit Petra Von Kant, 2007, single channel video installation (color with audio, old TV set, earphonea, white blanket), 10 min.



《谁干的?》，2003/2004年，单屏录像，彩色有声，10分钟
Whodunnit?, 2003/2004, digital video (shot on DVCAM transferred to DVD, color with audio), 10 min.

Just as soon as he became known as the *Chang & Eng* guy, Wong left Singapore to study at the Slade School of Art at University College in London, completing his MFA in 1999. His graduation piece, *Honeymoon in the Third Space*, featured footage of a fake wedding with one groom and two brides. The groom, of Singaporean and British ancestry, marries two brides, one British and the other Asian, who switch in and out of one another's white wedding gown and red Chinese wedding dress in each scene. Rather than reusing the tired rhetoric of a crisis between "East and West," the film imagines the embodiment of the union between two cultures.

Following his graduation from Slade, Wong remained in London, producing more video works with distinctly theatrical qualities. *Ham&cheesomelet* and *Whodunnit?* are two emblematic works from Wong's time in London, each questioning the stability of language and the British canon through theatrical gestures. Wong describes *Ham&cheesomelet* as a "scrambled Shakespeare sonnet," filming himself in what looks like a budget William Shakespeare Halloween costume, complete with DIY frills around the neck and a paper mustache taped on. Wong attempts to deliver Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, but mangles every line, making a mockery of the English language's most treasured playwright while simultaneously offering up an absurdist poetic beauty to his unorthodox rearrangement of a hallowed text.

Whodunnit?, filmed in 2003 and 2004, gave Ming Wong

the resources and the cast to make a more probing exploration of the same themes; this time it is the classic British murder mystery that is re-imagined. With financial support from Arts Council England, Wong hired a multi-ethnic cast to portray the character types typically found in drawing-room murder mysteries, casting specifically for each ethnic category found on the Arts Council's cultural diversity monitoring form. The cast of mostly second- or third-generation British actors delivers their lines in alternate accents: first in RP, or received pronunciation, the standard for British English; and then in the imagined foreign accent of their parents' and grandparents' generations. By the boxes, actors of black African, black Afro-Caribbean, Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, Greek Cypriot, Eastern European Jewish, and Irish descent, try to take on accents they've never had but might have been familiar with while growing up. The power dynamics of the group circle around the police detective at the center of the group, and accent functions here as the currency of power, shifting between RP and imaginary, racialized accents to express the subject's relation to the detective.

LONDON TO BERLIN

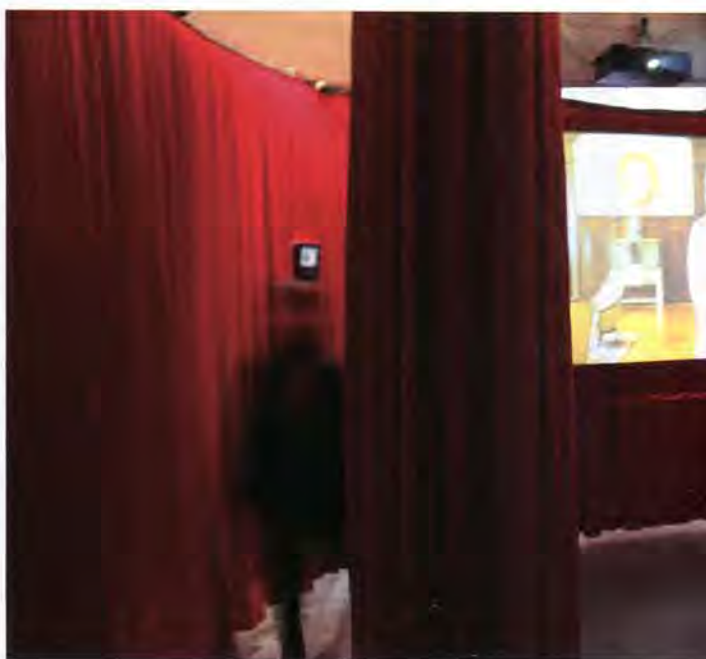
WHEN THE RISING cost of living cut Ming Wong's time in London short, he moved to Berlin, a city whose cheap

的广告牌同步展出，以此纪念那个时代及其留下的遗产。

对黄汉明而言，威尼斯之行是一次绝对胜利，他在国家馆展出的作品赢得双年展评委会特别提名奖，更重要的是，它也许还是2009年双年展中被谈论得最多的作品之一。漫长的困惑阶段终于过去，黄汉明的艺术价值得到了证明，他被当作英雄迎接回国，按新加坡文化部的说法，他起到了向海外宣传国家文化软实力的正面作用。但这些嘉奖却激发了黄汉明对于自身及其作品内部的另一种自传性质的审视与考量，在威尼斯期间，他开始拍摄《生死威尼斯》，作品依据的是卢奇诺·维斯康蒂于1971年拍摄的托马斯·曼经典小说的电影版。又一次，黄汉明分饰所有主要角色：包括年老的作家古斯塔夫·冯·奥申巴赫，以及他痴迷的对象塔奇奥。与此同时，艺术家将作品的语境一路升级直至融入威尼斯双年展的现场（黄汉明演奥申巴赫的段落切入了丹尼尔·伯恩鲍姆策划的“制造世界”展览的参展作品、陈佩之创作的《为了萨德的施虐》的现场；而当黄汉明演绎塔奇奥时，他又漫步于立陶宛国家馆代表艺术家西尔维纳斯·肯姆匹纳斯的《管道》现场）。在原著小说与维斯康蒂的影片里，冯·奥申巴赫和塔奇奥都分别象征了死亡与青春，理智与激情这两个对立的极端。

黄汉明的作品从不缺少对性的表现，频繁的异装行为和感官刺激在他的作品中比比皆是，但却不曾得到充分的表达。然而在《生死威尼斯》中，性这一主题得到充分表现，黄汉明将一段典型的同性叙事改编成关涉其个人的文本语境。而地点也越来越开始发挥其独立的作用。他以前拍摄作品的地点都是相对简单的戏剧场景——比如裴特拉·冯·康特的卧室、一间英式的休息室，或者20世纪60年代香港的一家餐馆。但在这部作品中，威尼斯这个地点的角色意义与漫游其中的人物一样重要。冯·奥申巴赫与塔奇奥在片中几乎没有言语交流，反而是当代的空间（威尼斯双年展）与历史上被神圣化的地点（在它被摧毁改造成奢华公寓的前几天拍摄的位于利多岛的历史建筑德班大酒店）这两者构成了它们之间的互动。最近，黄汉明前往那不勒斯旅行，把皮埃尔·保罗·帕索里尼的影片《定理》翻拍成自己的作品，在原片中，一位陌生访客来到意大利的一个资产阶级家庭，成功引诱了家中的每个人，导致这个家庭濒于毁灭；而在黄汉明的作品中，他再度出演全部角色，那不勒斯作为地点被置于前景，地点的真实性与黄汉明的纸板猜字游戏的虚构性之间形成了鲜明对比。

然而，对情景戏剧的运用才是理解黄汉明作品的关键线索，近来对于该形式的理论研究将之封为后神圣时代特有的艺术形式，通过将互相冲突的社会力量进行超戏剧化，俯身于人们习以为常的生存模式。情景戏剧的核心是“演出来”，以夸张过度的表演来拒斥现实中的压抑、妥协和失望情绪。黄汉明的影像所构建的魅惑的文化想象凸显了原本隐而不见的关于性、语言、种族的界限。他创造的裴特拉·冯·康特既代表着一种精神焦虑的唯我论，同时又是一次讽刺性的决裂，而他对世界电影所作的“廉拍”则是一种富有想象力的模式，在那些构成全球社会结构稳定性的不成文法则上留下了划痕。



cost of living and dynamic expatriate community were already attracting scores of young artists, writers, and revelers. To Wong, the relocation was more than just a move; it was a sea change, and he took the transition as the autobiographical starting point for *Lerne Deutsch mit Petra von Kant*, a partial remake of Fassbinder's 1972 film *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*. In the original, von Kant, a thriving fashion designer, loves and loses the object of her desire. The grief of her loss peaks on her birthday, when she lies alone, raving on the floor of her bedroom, a bottle of hard liquor in hand.

Ming Wong, new to Germany and its language, recreates that scene as an alternative introduction to this new tongue. He skips over the more traditional starting points for learning a foreign language—greetings, weather, food—in favor of memorizing Petra's anguished monologue of emotional breakdown. Surely, matters of the heart are more essential to true communication. Donning Petra's distinctive blonde wig, neon jumper, and floral choker, Wong teaches himself to describe his own bitterness, despair, and insecurity in Petra's words, finding a cathartic parallel between Petra's anguish and his own self-doubt upon moving to Berlin, a self-described "single, gay ethnic-minority mid-career artist" on the verge of middle-age and wash-out.

From there, it's a familiar path to the Venice Biennale: the next year, he remade another Fassbinder classic, *Angst essen Seele auf*, destabilizing the racial, sexual, and linguistic pluralism of the original with Wong in every role, acting out in rough German the story of Emmi and her Ali, a middle-aged housekeeper who falls for a much younger Moroccan guest worker. *Angst essen* is followed by commissions for the Venice Biennale, including *In Love for the Mood* and *Life of Imitation*, the latter accompanied in the exhibition by lush billboards



《生死威尼斯》
2011年，展览现场
广州维他命空间
Life and Death in Venice
2011
Exhibition view
Guangzhou Vitamin Creative
Space



《吞噬恐惧》，2008年，单屏录像，彩色有声，27分钟
Angst Essen/Eat Fear, 2008, single channel video (color with audio), 27 min.

painted by Singapore's last surviving billboard painter, Neo Chon Teck, in a further tribute to the times and their legacy.

VENICE AND EVERYTHING AFTER

VENICE WAS AN unqualified triumph for Ming Wong. His pavilion, which earned a Special Mention from the Biennale's prize committee, was perhaps more importantly one of the most commonly discussed pieces in the show's 2009 edition. Professionally validated after a long period of doubt, Wong was fêted as a hero back home in Singapore, doing good by the Ministry of Culture's imperative to exert soft cultural power abroad. But the accolades inspired another autobiographical reckoning within Wong and his oeuvre, and while in Venice, he began filming *Life and Death in Venice*, based on Luchino Visconti's 1971 film version of Thomas Mann's canonic novel. Again, Wong plays all major roles; in this case that of the aging writer Gustav von Aschenbach and the object of his obsession, Tadzio, all while updating the context of the work to include the Venice Biennale (Wong as von Aschenbach takes in Paul Chan's *Sade for Sade's Sake*, shown in the Daniel Birnbaum-curated main exhibition "Making Worlds," while Wong as Tadzio wanders through Zilvinas Kempinas's *TUBE* in the Lithuanian Pavilion). In both the novel and Visconti's film, von Aschenbach and Tadzio represent the polar binaries of death and youth, intellect and passion.

Sexuality had never been silent in Ming Wong's work, filled with repeated instances of cross-dressing and sensual charge. But it had never been given its full expression. In *Life and Death in Venice*, however, sexuality is given its full expression, as Wong adapts a quintessentially homosexual

narrative to a personally inflected context. Increasingly, location too begins to play its own role. Previously, Wong had filmed his work on relatively straightforward theatrical sets—Petra von Kant's bedroom, a British drawing room, a 1960s Hong Kong eatery. Here, Venice itself plays as large a role as the characters who wander through it. Von Aschenbach and Tadzio hardly exchange words, their interactions are framed instead by the contemporary (the Biennale) and the hallowed (the historic Grand Hotel des Bains on the Lido, filmed just days before it was destroyed for conversion into luxury apartments). Most recently, Wong traveled to Naples, filming his own version of *Teorema* by Pier Paolo Pasolini. In the original, a bourgeois Italian household is shaken after an unknown visitor seduces every member of the family; in Wong's version, he again acts out every role. Naples itself is brought to the forefront, its authenticity set in contrast with Wong's cardboard charades.

But it is the role of melodrama that is essential to understanding Ming Wong's works. Recent critical explorations of the form have hailed it as a form for a post-sacred era, allowing the hyperdramatization of social forces in conflict to embody the ways of being that are assumed in our lives. Melodrama "acts out," using a dramaturgy of excess to reject the repressions, accommodations, and disappointments of the real. Wong's films create a mesmerizing cultural imaginary that highlights otherwise latent sexual, linguistic, and racial boundaries. His Petra von Kant is an anxious solipsism but also an ironic rupture, his "sweding" of global cinema an imaginative mode that brushes against the otherwise unspoken codes that underwrite global society's constitution. 🍷