



## An Unexploded Firework — The Persona Folds in Hsu Che-Yu's Work

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### *Starting From the Lost of Efficacy of Individual Characteristics*

Hsu Che-Yu's working method, which has a focus on news events, all began with a news story along with illustrations he found about his high school classmate in 2008. As media is becoming a sort of consumption of our era, such type of exaggerated news reports usually concern events that won't be remembered by the readers. Yet to Hsu, this piece of news caused a weird feeling to him due to the physical existence of the person in the news, which was not supposed to show any identity or facial feature. Ever since then, the appearance of the person in the events multiple substitution of the persona became the main theme of Hsu Che-Yu's work.

In 2009, Hsu released his "Breaking News of Spectacle". By reproducing the crime scene back in its physical space, the series places an "anonymous character" (a drawing figure based on Hsu's friend) into the absurdity that we cannot travel through time and "be back in the scene." Following with an imaginary self-statement describing the criminal's psychological state, Hsu inserts the position of "the person concerned" that doesn't exist in news which often employs third person descriptions. In 2011, he started to shift into animation with scene scheduling, editing, and a timeline. Since then, the misplace of personas in Hsu Che-Yu's work (there are always only one male and one female character exist, representing all males and females in the animation), and the way he deals with elapsed time began to show differences comparing to his previous works.

### *The Literary Folding of Persona*

Looked back at Hsu Che-Yu's video works, in addition to the outlined figure of his friend, selected and revised narratives of news events, he began to borrow the power of words in outlining the sense of time and space in the video for his audience, then revealing the secret between the story and persona through literary means since *November 11th 1970* and *Sighing Flowers and Shamisen*. (At the ending of *Delete: The Nameless Men* in 2012 for instance, the voice-over stated the everything he read was written by Hsu.) On the other hand, Hsu started to show his cinemania perspective in the two works (the digital video shows an old-movie-alike shaky texture due to the distortion of film), and even paid a tribute to the famous scene of the dismembered statue of Lenin being moved by the crane on a ship in *Ulysses' Gaze*, directed by Theo Angelopoulos. (This hinted scene was embodied through the broken body in *Delete: The Nameless Men*.) Hsu's cinemania perspective subconsciously placed the author's behind-the-scene identity to the foreground, creating a persona that does not speak directly and has an uncertain position in the image. Even though all the words were spoken by characters in the story, Hsu's persona as the creator is still clearly projected onto them, becoming a reflection point on the 2D imagery twisting time and space in its internal narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> Hsu Che-Yu's later tributes to films in his new works include: *パブリカ*, directed by Satoshi Kon and *A Time To Live, A Time To Die*, directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien in *Microphone Test: To Huang Guo-Jun*, and *The Island of The Greed* directed by Michael Mak in *Re-rupture*.



Hsu Che-Yu's selection and reconstruction of various reading experiences such as News, films (later with fictions and literature), along with the overlapped personal structure in his work reminds us of Luo Yijun's article *The Scarlet Letters* in his debut which shared the same title, following with another article *After The Spitball Is Open*. In *The Scarlet Letters*, Luo's writing rearranged all characters in the book by a Schizophrenia level of folded layers of personas from a "novelist" perspective. When he described his condition as a writer, Luo wrote, "Shit, K is myself I am G, Cheng Lin, Zhang Suzhen..." With only one sentence, he let out all the characters in his story and reconstructed them. The insolvent of the author as a persona made all the characters and event which were originally written on the same flat surface yet place in different times and spaces started to squeeze and fold the paper that carries the weight of the story, gradually creating a Michel Foucault's type of "pil"; A new persona thus began to emerge from the crease that did not exist before.

Back to Hsu Che-Yu, his two recent works, *Microphone Test: To Huang Guo-Jun* and *Re-rupture*, show more literary self rumination and folded persona due to the joining of Chen Wan-Yin, who is in charge of script writing. In *Microphone Test*, Chen became the voice-over, quoting lines from *Safety Check*, an article written by Huang Guo-Jun two months before he committed suicide. At the same time, it's mixed with Chen's self statements, as well as a subjective descriptions of Hsu Che-Yu's two friends who were the prototypes of the animated "nameless men." Starting from *Microphone Test*, Hsu's works are no longer focusing on one single event only, but revealing the uncaptured things by video and make them visible through the complex personas among words and conversations.

### *The Floating Gnome*

If it was in 1995 right above Chongxin Bridge, one can see a gigantic human shaped ballon floating in the air, trying to overhang a washing machine, an inflatable doll, a statue of the greats, a boiling hotpot, a guitar player on performance. Then it drop all of them off from the sky, dashed to pieces. <sup>2</sup>

The title of Hsu's new work "Re-rupture" refers directly to the two events the video was based on: First is the "Rupture In Air Festival" performed over Taipei Chongxin Bridge in May 1995; the second is the taxi riot that took place under the same bridge in August of the same year. At the time, the Taiwan society is highly liberal post 1987 martial law period. In terms of culture, there were the 3rd generation little theatre movement, Taipei Rupture In Air Festival, Huashan Winery preservation campaign, experimental music and underground band performances gradually occupied the young generation's life. These events are different from the anti-martial law protests back in the 80s. That leads to a resistance to authority and elitism in the past, as well as an unfolding of the concepts of body functions, alternative and mainstream aesthetics.

Looking back into the 90s, the 1985 born Hsu Che-Yu said : "There's some futuristic feature of these things that happened 20 years ago, sharing the same desires we hold today. These have not yet become art history with no defined expound. They are just about to confront art history. Such power, conflicts and excitement of being at the edge of art history are totally comparable to the materials themselves from the 90s." Such rumination from Hsu is also shown through the washing machine he overhang on site. At the time, Wu Zhongwei, the artist who organized the festival, had an extremely detailed proposal, including descriptions of having a huge human-figure shaped ballon flowing above Chongxin Bridge: "It is an art of piling, creating a cave that everything co-exist. The enormous gnome carrying all the human desires will

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<sup>2</sup> quotes from *Re-rupture*.

be floating above Taipei city.”<sup>3</sup> The main function of the balloon is to overhang all kinds of objects during the event: a boiling hotpot, a washing machine, a performing guitar player, a statue of a great man....., then drop them and smash them on the ground. Ideally by the end of the event, the crushed objects would form a huge ball. (But not even after a full day of the event officially started, the balloon busted and fell into the river. Nothing was lifted up in air, nothing was destroyed .) “Wu’s washing machine was not artistic or logic at all at the time. On the contrary, it was even a non-art or anti-art approach. But on site, we intensionally hanging it up with extreme cautiousness and care, the put it under spot lights.” As Hsu said. Since we cannot go back to history, then why are we bring it up again now?

### *Re-write On The Crease*

In fact, the real main character is none of the ones you’ve mentioned above but the folded paper. Me unfolding the paper itself has denied all the curiosity that drives you to search for truth, the cheap sympathy, and the sickly mania for deductive inference of human nature. A piece of dirty napkin with residual cosmetics reveals more love, hate and desire than them.....<sup>4</sup>

If the main story line of this work is the “Rupture In Air Festival” in the 90s as the curator of Broke Spectre, also the patron expected, the taxi riot and the small scaled statue of Chiang Ching-kuo made by Wu Zhongwei’s father Wu Erqu are only as if interludes in the whole video. But to Hsu Che-Yu who’s born in the 80s, the Rupture In Air Festival” in the 90s was not something he would participate as a primary school student. On the contrary, the frequently shown news of riots on TV, creating Taiwanese great politician’s statue, the artist Wu Erqu who made the models in Lilliputian Theme Park<sup>5</sup>, and even a quote from *Ghost in the Shell* in the video are more likely to be Hsu’s real life experience of events in the 90s. As he said, “I was thinking of the city that represented by Chongxin Bridge at first, then associated with Rupture Festival above the bridge and the taxi riot under the bridge right away. The establishment of National Taxi Union as the voice outside the party almost happened at the same time. Those are the only events in the 90s I recall in my memory.” He placed these events alternately in his work, creating a montage structure. As his former attempts in *Microphone Test*, Hsu Che-yu and Chen Wan-Yin try to show a collective public social state through more private individual memories.

In Re-rupture, the main story teller, voice of the voice-over is the guitar player (Li Na-Shao) who was hanging up to 8-floors high in the air next to Chongxin Bridge. “We (Hsu Che-Yu and Chen Wan-Yin) decided to find a guitar player who’s in our age and still composting and active. We have inserted his own story in to the video as well and hope to speak out the things we want to say though his eyes and mouth.” When Hsu talks about the hanging scene, he thinks the hanging guitar player implies some sort of image of a prophet or Eye of Providence. The funny thing is, Hsu’s camera did not have a god view that’s coming from this prophet. Instead, he used a fourth person perspective that is hard to define: layered with the script writer Chen Wan-Yin’s eye, artist Hsu Che-Yu’s thoughts of the 90s, and Li Na-Shao’s sight looking back to the audience as he finished the performance in the end. The guitar player, who is symbolizing some sort of prophet, hanging up in the 8-floor high air, is having his body opened after its suspension

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<sup>3</sup> quotes form Wu Zhongwei’s proposal for the festival in 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Luo Yi-Jun, *After the Spitball Was Unfolded, The Scarlet Letters*, Taipei: United Literature Publications, 1993. P53.

<sup>5</sup> “Wu Erqu designed the mini Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in 25:1 scale as well as the Lilliputian Theme Park. Apart from creating these tiny works, he also painted the biggest portrait of Chiang Kai-shek in the world, which was published in 1980 during the grand opening of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.” Quoted from *Re-rupture*.



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and pause after the performance. In the end, he is no longer the persona that's overhanging because of the Rupture in the Air Festival, but a person with his individuality and personal life experience. He is hanging up now in front of the public, recreating the meaning of the event, as if a unexploded firework ignited in 1995.