

## *La Mise Hors Scène Screen Memory*

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### **Abstract**

Regarding *mise-en-scène*, in Antonin Artaud's letter to theater critic, Benjamin Crémieux, Artaud candidly expressed that "*mise-en-scène* itself" could act as a safeguard to "another language". Reading this today, it reflects well upon Jacques Rancière's *Les sorties du Verb*. In Jean-Francois Lyotard's essay, *L'Acinéma* (1973), Lyotard expands *mise-en-scène* to become motions inside and outside the borders of frame, creating a re-discussion about reality and truth using the concept of "*la mise hors scène*". It invites the readers to use their own various perceptions to compensate for the scenes outside of the text, prompting them to reconstruct a performance in their own minds. From the aesthetic perspective of "*la mise hors scène*", this paper discusses how in some works of Taiwanese theater reportage and people's theater, the history and writing re-translate within the body, dispatching the body back into the body as an expression of historical writing. Then, "screen memory" is served to "recover" covered-up history as a "self-presentation" approach to imaging. Finally, this paper examines the re-translation of words, the redistribution of cultural location, and how images files can be "watched and read".

Keywords: *La Mise Hors Scène*, Screen Memory, theater reportage

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## Introduction

*The time has arrived to go to Liuzhangli.  
We must now hear and study, record and discuss.  
(Wandering Xianshan. Scattering Paper Money)  
- Chen Yingzhen, Spring Worship, 1995*

In 1964, Song Feiwo produced the script for “The Wall” based on Jian Guoxian’s original Japanese and Chinese text, which was called “Taiwanese Single-Act Opera”. Song Feiwo also broadcasted the “The Wall” in the Taiwanese language on Taiwan Radio Station. The grand occasion of the performance of “The Wall”, in addition to the enthusiastic response of the crowds brought about the curse of censorship. Wu Zhuoliu believes that the primary application of the “Taiwanese language” is to get in touch with the social classes of that time period. The ‘body language’ and ‘dialogue’ on stage both constitute the “stage arrangement”. An uproar occurs when the viewer is directly touched by the different aspects of the stage. Through the inquisitive search of a Taiwanese script, dialogue, body language and public involvement, which all simultaneously and collectively reflect the desires of the open public play, it also serves as the counterpart to the creative potential of participants. How can history and the written word be reinterpreted as body language? How does one arrange the body into an expression of a historical event? To me, it becomes the specific question of the relation between verbal expression and body language. If the on-stage arrangement is considered to be a type of orderly combination for the “pre-theater”, then the off-stage arrangement uses the reality from beyond the stage, integrating the off-stage reality into the scene, so that the invisible lens is made up for by the ongoing written word and body language.

Therefore, I began to search for the verbal expressions themselves found in written plays, the aim of the writing system, besides the public stage, the dramatic literature, and the dramatization of an event, and also including the outside-stage arrangement assembled by text, dialogue and body which the system also constitutes the experimental region of thought, a spiritual stage, in order to express the written word as body movements, aiming towards the corporal experience. In reality, this form of writing is no different from looking into the context, it is also no different from the position of each script. It exists in front, within, without and behind the corporal expression, unlike journalistic reporting, the script implies an artistic political disposition of the necessity of reconstruction(distinct from a fabrication). The so-called reconstruction referred to here signifies the permission for a person who is able to describe, witness and act to reconstruct, represent, identify and act an event following a different method(perhaps anew). The event here represents the existence of the reconstruction, however, the method of reconstruction embodies the intangibility of the event, it cannot directly become the event itself, but through the reconstruction, we are able to acutely engrave our perception of the moment from this historical event to accumulate the depth and weight that resonates with a different historical time period. If your aesthetic experience can impact the political realm then this kind of reconstruction will be the tangible reality that touches the event.

## Scene I: Liuzhangli public cemetery

Regarding this context, I want to dissect it from two different perspectives. The first perspective: The first version of the script published in 1995 by Chen Yingzhen as “Spring Worship”, using the literary forms of reporting theater, from the scene inside the memorial tombs of Liuzhangli public cemetery, summoning the spirits of White Terror victims, Xu Qinglan, Huang Fengkai, Zhang Tianding, using the written word to re-express the brutality of the 1950’s era White Terror. The play, “Spring Worship”, directed by Zhong Qiao, premiered on March 14, 1994, at The Taipei Hainan Road Art Museum. According to Chen Yingzhen, the production of the script for “Spring Worship” is related to the article, “Roar! Hanaoka!” which was published in the July 1986 edition of “RenJian” magazine. Due to the introduction by Wang Molin, RenJian cooperated with the “Immortal Bird” theater troupe, which was lead by the Japanese theater activist Shi Feiren, to perform the Mandarin version of the play, “Roar! Hanaoka!” in Taiwan in the form of journalistic drama. This is Chen Yingzhen’s first experience with journalistic drama.

“Journalistic drama is a type of literary form. Likewise, journalistic drama, in essence, is a type of drama. However, it is fundamentally different from other types of literature and drama due to the fact that its reporting is based on reality thus possessing elements of journalism, immediacy and timeliness. Fictional elements are not allowed, neither is the fabrication of any imaginary things that concern human, time, business and karma issues. In terms of the methods of expression, as long as reality is strictly adhered to, then one can employ all types of novels, poems, prose and other forms of literary techniques as well as all types of theatrical techniques.” - Chen Yingzhen (1995: 66-67). Journalistic drama uses slide projectors to display news reports and historical photos on the stage to create a historical impact. However, journalistic drama should refuse any “illusions” or “man-made scenes” caused by the theatrical performance and ensure viewers can approximate the historical reality. In the script of “Spring Worship”, Chen Yingzhen arranges a historical maiden “chorus” to serve as the primary narrator while simultaneously including off-stage sound effects and monologues to compose the main contents. The reconstruction of “Journalistic drama”, on one hand, must strictly adhere to realism to describe humans, things and events, while, on the other hand, must be open to the imitation of and emotional triggers of real events. The former allows the viewer to experience tangible history while the latter drives the transformation of understanding into perception. The writer, viewer and actor all interact on this two-sided field.

The other scene is found in the main topic of “Roar! Hanaoka!” published in Renjian Magazine including large quantities of wood engravings by Xinju Guangzhi, Longpin Erlang and Mu Dajie regarding the Hanaoka Mine Incident(木刻連環画集 花岡ものがたり, 秋田：無明舎 October, 1981 First Edition.), and also an article by Wang Molin called “The Weeping found in Historical Fault Lines”. In the article, Wang Molin mentioned his request to Shi Feiren to designate an actor for the journalistic dramatization of the Hanaoka Mine Incident, “ For ‘Journalistic drama’, there is no need to memorize the script just read directly from the lines as the main purpose is to use your voice to touch the audience, it is not necessary to rely on so-called ‘body language’ to express the drama’s depth. Isn’t the good thing about this form the fact

that everyone can immediately become a participant of this play.” (Wang Molin 1986:29). Besides the historical witnesses, Liu Zhiqun and Li Zhenping, this journalistic drama also invited a Japanese veteran, Masao Ōtsuka, who was a participant in the Three Alls Policy during the Second Sino-Japanese War to serve as a historical witness. We can view the Hanaoka Mine Incident through historical witnesses and the presentation of historical photographs, moreover, the actors (Japanese and Taiwanese) who narrate the historical events, the images (wood engravings) and the eyewitness account of the other historical incident. This diverse group of people, who are able to describe, witness and produce, each can utilize their individual experiences to simply integrate into the historical event in order to let the audience have a vivid impression. The journalistic drama work of Taiwan Public Theater director, Zhong Qiao, “Testimony” (2015) and “Horse Carriage Etude” both use this form to reconstruct and retell the history. Everytime “we hear and study, record and discuss” is all for the embodiment of the written word, to allow the hidden meaning to be expressed so that the historical event can be seamlessly arranged on stage along with the impact of language beyond the scene in order to strengthen the historical experience.

## **Scene II: The Unseen film**

In 2016, I went to Hong Kong to interview the theater worker Mo Luoru and discuss the ongoing oppression of theater; the other interviewees were the Hong Kong Woofers Ten artist-activists Li Hofeng and Chen Sanmu, we discussed the impending June 4 Tiananmen Square incident memorial parade, and in 2015, “Emerald Street Incident”, a complete story of street activism. In the archives of “Emerald Street Incident” street theater, besides information regarding the 1989 Hong Kong parade in reaction to the Tiananmen Square incident, the related five year activities organized by the Woofers Ten and an archival collection of many years of emerald street demonstrations, there was also a picture sitting on the disorganized archive shelf, Wei Chenguang. In 1989, Chen Guang was assigned to be an army photographer, during that time, he took quite a few photographs of the Tiananmen Square incident, while reporting back to authorities, he hid three rolls of film. The rolls of film remained hidden from the public eye for twenty-three years. In 2012, one of these rolls of film was released to public for the first time. This reminded me of Zhang Weixian’s younger brother, Zhang Cai, the founder of the “Xing Guang Theater Research Group”, who, in 1960, destroyed many incriminating rolls of film from the 2/28 massacre. As Zhong Qiao described in an article “First Generation Photographer -- Zhang Cai” in the December, 1988 edition of “Ren Jian Magazine”

“On the day of the February 28 incident, I received a phone call from a friend who said there was a demonstration going on at the traffic circle. With my camera packed, I immediately rushed to the scene, as I saw more and more people assembled, I grabbed my camera and took a photograph of a frustrated and outraged face, also going along with the protestors’ slogan — follow the road to the government bureau. He said that while he was at the demonstration, several people in the crowd angrily pointed at the man behind the camera. “After I explained several times, they finally eased up” - if my memory doesn’t fail me, Zhang Laoxian, with the usual nonchalant tone, said “A few years ago, I burned all of these photographs.”

“Burned!”

“That’s right.”, he said.

I asked him if he had any regrets, he laconically said no. (p. 36)

From a historical lens, a form of orientation towards disaster victims, recording the suffering that occurred just before one’s eyes, providing clear evidence; like standing from the perspective of the victim, the lens facing the oppressor, in pursuit of a sharp analysis of the public’s view of the two intertwining sides forming history, a criticism of the incident. In reality, the two types of drama, camera lens and reporting, in fact, literature and reporting have much in common. In the middle of April this year, Zhong Qiao produced “The Etude of the Carriage”, directed by Lin Jingjie. While discussing journalistic drama, the substandard theater member, Li Zheyu, brought about plans on his own regarding the unmarked graves of the Liuzhangli White Terror, “Red Words Group 2014-1949” as an experienced reference, suggesting the use of eye covers by journalistic drama actors just like the “Cover” of the White Terror time period. This group of innocent souls, who no longer have mouths or tongues to defend their actions, buried in unmarked graves at Liuzhangli after being killed by their own nation (historical scene), however, in 2014, the Ministry of Finance State Property Department issued a report of suspected ‘embezzlement’. The meaning of this gradually changing political absurdity is that the society at the time collectively turned a blind eye. Confronting the cover-up (reenactment) is not only about entering that period of history but it is also about creating a new identity, re-understanding our space and re-distributing relationships. The lens of ‘Reenactment’, on one side serves as a hind mirror facing the past, scanning the records of incriminating evidence, whereas, on the other side it is the perception of the cover-up by the society at that time, an anatomical remodeling, so to speak.

### **Scene III: Screen Memory**

While Bishop was analyzing Nikolai Evreinov’s historical reenactment, *The Storming of Winter Palace*, he described how the masses use drama to create their own identity, when the past and present overlap, historical events are transformed into ‘immanent’ memory. The historical reenactment itself must undergo strict rehearsals in order to create a screen memory, even better than the original event, so that the secondary events of the revolution become focal points in the collective imagination, even it will confuse those who actually experienced the original events. (Bishop, 2012:59) In psychoanalysis, "mask/screen/hidden memories" represent the stated events in reality whereas the present context pollutes the mind, causing it to imagine an altered story rather than the original. Through focusing on smaller events peripheral to the primary event, one unconsciously avoids or suppresses one's suffering involving the main event. In such a situation, the key point is how the primary subject can be acted out? Namely, inquire how the main subject can be acted out(permeated with interpretation and imagination) as a scene from memory, that way the main subject can be meaningfully analyzed instead of stubbornly focusing on the minute realistic details of the original. In the book, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, 2002, the anthropologist, Faye D. Ginsburg describes how "shielded memory" becomes a method for aboriginals to 'revive' covered-up history in order to implement a self-description approach. This is not an easy task, when the 'outsider/researcher' studies

an 'exotic culture/subject' through the media, how can he find the truth about the culture? Or will the "current" identity be self-stated? The method of photography, the process of discussion, the translation of words, the distribution of cultural positions, finally, even the archives can be "inspected and read", are all part of the path that must be handled with utmost sensitivity. In this regard, Ginsburg is partial to using the method of "shielded memory" to reveal how the image of the present cultural identity can be obscured, how it can be constructed and how it can be perceived. Based on the three arguments above, we will turn our "shielded memory" lens towards the 2014 Luleqian where Li Junfeng and others planned the "Emerald Street Incident -- June 4 Rolling Street Theater". This street performance does not attempt to reenact the original scene or repeat the June 4 Tiananmen Square Incident but, rather, it focuses on a demonstration that occurred on the morning of June 7, 1989, in Yau Ma Tei and how Hong Kongers were inspired by the June 4 Tiananmen Square Incident to action through protests, strikes and boycotts.

When *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, the three hour documentary directed by Richard Gordon and produced by Carma Hinton, showed Chai Ling receiving the controversial video clips of American journalist Philip Cunningham, I rewinded the scene several times before pausing the video and began searching for the full context of the interview. There is a short description of these controversial video clips on the "Tiananmen Square" documentary website, one of which includes Chai Ling and an open letter from Feng Congde, a documentary film producer (dated May 28, 2009 and June 15, 2009) as well as a description of the film's response to the open letter. In response to the fact that the film has not been revised for many years, several articles of the letter continue to be published by Feng Congde regarding the montage clippings in the "Tiananmen Square" documentary that result in "narrative", "translation through words", "reporting and personal testimonies", "image shaping" and other issues stemming from historical realities and timing. These articles and others can be found on the "June 4 Archives" website.

## **Conclusion**

Due to the nature of montages, some of the context is obscured, the event itself is constantly being met with skepticism and threats to the copies, because of the questions regarding the copies, besides the files found in these documentaries, the movement continues to spread. Recorded images bear some sort of original crime, but to some extent because the media is different, it no longer bears this original crime even though the lens is at the scene and the witnesses are at the scene, but once the "narrative structure" is taken into account then the focus is on the unrestricted confrontations of the different scenes. Whether or not we can say, the attempts at off-stage arrangement exist, that is, the 'distance' between the events and the copies, but through the 'distance' we can continue to hide, then walk, then view, then happen, at the same time, the people who can describe and view this event can help use eliminate our position of "passive perspective" so that we will be expelled from the fixed consciousness. At least from a certain image from the official history can we remove the third person narrative. Jacques Rancière argues in *The Emancipated Spectator* that "drama is a form of aesthetic construction for a collective -- the perceived context of the collective: in a way, the collective occupies time and space as a series of life positions and attitudes, early on, they transformed the perception of the human

experience through any political forms and organizations (...)." Rancière, 2009:6)

Beginning with the search for the written word, the old souls of historical events collectively express the harsh sound, on-stage sound arrangement, drama and the superposition of reality of the daily fragmentation of occupied space, the repetition of the personal testimony all verbalize to "We are going to be alive...because of you". Words as expressed through the body, the off-stage arrangement of this stage may just allow my physical action to be a translation in a simple request for a personal story: He wrote from a script.

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