

Hu Fang in conversation with Zhou Tao
November 2013 in Guangzhou and Bangkok over Skype

Escaping Beyond the Cloud of Performance

胡昉: 也许我们可以从在这条在运动中的狗进入话题, 当时它在对抗的场面中出现时, 不只你注意到了, 对抗中的其他人也注意到了, 是吗?

周滔: 对, 警察救了这条狗以后, 大家都在拍照, 两边的人都在拍照。在泰国不同的对待中, 狗的出现是很有意思的, 实质上他的出现就像事情在某种程度上的复杂性, 还有, 大家在那一刻, 突然有接近生活这种感觉。

胡昉: 恰恰在这运动之中的生命细节, 消解了覆盖在运动表面的某种重大的含意。联系到你的 research, 它跟广场的空间有关, 在你去曼谷之前, 你已经在广州的城市广场的日常当中捕捉了一些片段, 广场的大型LED灯光赋予了人们奇幻的色彩, 以至有一种摄影棚 studio 的效果。而当你来到曼谷, 在做广场的 research 的同时, 碰到了大型的民众运动, 使得这个公共空间呈现出另外一种戏剧性, 而突然向“此处”和“彼此”的存在关系提出了问题。

周滔: 实际上我觉得他们之间存在着蛮强的联系, 广场这个空间, 给予在此活动的人群某种意识暗示, 广州的广场可能形成了一个人造的、城市的中心, 在广场看人的活动, 形成了一个人人们在巨大的舞台表演的感觉。在曼谷群众的运动更加是这样, 在这几年中, 他们也形成了自己的表演风格和方式, 例如, 伴随着呐喊或是口号, 接下来的十五分钟就有非常舒服的 music 和舞蹈, 大家可以一齐跳舞, 然后有影星来客串演出, 然后灯光, 然后声音这样, 呈现出在广场中间的某种表演特质, 从某种意义上来说, 它存在的时候就有某一种我们所谓现实性的戏剧吧。而且我特别关注很多在细节上的时刻, 比方说, 在广场强烈的灯光下, 你看到那个女的在那摇头, 还有小孩一直坐在那儿, 然后那个灯红的、蓝的、紫的, 一下又黑了, 一下又很亮。他们俩的那种很细腻的动作, 就是很淡淡的, 就像母亲去关心那小孩儿, 但是在那个强光之下, 你会觉得很有剧情, 要发生什么。

Hu Fang: Perhaps we should start the conversation with the dog in the protest. When it appeared in the scene of confrontation, you weren't the only one to notice it; other people in the protest did as well, right?

Zhou Tao: Yes. As the police rescued the dog, people from both sides took photos. The presence of dogs at different demonstrations in Thailand is quite interesting. In fact, their appearance is to some degree similar to the complexity of the situation; suddenly we all feel closer to life at that moment.

Hu Fang: It's exactly these details of life that counteract the significance, in a way, draped over the surface of the movement. In relation to your research, it has to do with the space of the square. Before you went to Bangkok you had already shot footage of daily life in Hua Cheng Square in Guangzhou. People in the square were illuminated by the ethereal light of the large-scale LED light, as if they were at a photography studio. When you arrived in Bangkok to continue research on public squares, you happened to encounter massive demonstrations in which the public space presented another kind of theatricality, and this suddenly raised questions about the connection between here and elsewhere.

Zhou Tao: Actually, I think there is a strong relationship between the two locations. The space of the square gives the people inside it a kind of psychological signal. The square in Guangzhou constitutes an artificial centre of the city; people's activities in the square feel like performance on a gigantic stage, even more so when it came to the demonstration in Bangkok. They have developed their style and form of performance over the course of many years. For example, first you hear chants and slogans followed fifteen minutes later by soothing music and communal group dancing. A celebrity will then typically make an appearance followed by more lights and sound, etc. The performativity of life as revealed in the square is perhaps what we could consider the theatre of reality. I'm particularly fascinated by those moments and details. For instance, under the intense light of the square, you see the woman shaking her head, and the children sitting on the grass for a time, and the light changing from red to blue to purple, fading into black, and then lit up brightly again. All these delicate movements are incredibly dramatic! You almost feel that these movements are maybe too delicate, too subtle, like a mother tenderly caring for her children. But you also feel like there is a certain drama going on under the spotlight, as if something is about to happen.

我觉得这种不是我们所说的形式上的戏剧，而是存在于现实空间中的某种灯光呀和其他特质属性，给予的这种戏剧性，使得特定的灯光和他们行为动作之间会形成非常强的穿透，给予了行为一种全新的轮廓。

胡昉：对，在今天，各种社会形态中的公民表达，正在塑造不同表达的空间形态。你说到的光线，就像舞台上的灯光，又给予一个公共空间一种舞台的魅惑，这个舞台使得每个人似乎都具有表达的可能性。在广州的素材片段当中，我看到了这种表达的某种程序性，程序性是介于兴奋，沉迷和梦幻之间的一种东西，它似乎是对日常乏味的一种解脱，但又进入到另一种设定的舒缓方式中。广州这个舞台的绚烂，似乎使得个人也可以融入到对未来的想像以及趋近到某种对未来的承诺当中；而在你所说的曼谷的情况里面，个体进入到一种更为主动并共同在创建未来的想像当中。我不清楚是不是这些都涉及到我们今天对未来的一种愿望的投射，但它在广场这个公共空间的呈现，似乎进一步反映了在今天的社会空间中，一种缓解地带的必要性，它是各种表达在寻求聆听的中间地带，但通常会被虚化为灯光和视觉的表演。

周滔：曼谷的政治是非常复杂的，牵涉不同的权力之间的角逐，不同的群体，不同的目的，我在广场上感觉不到对泰国将来的愿望会如何能够达至某种共同的理解，反而是他们睡着了的时候，可能他们的幻想欲望才真正的释放出来。就是说，你可以感觉到从他们的身体里面释放出来的力量。因为睡着了以后，灯光和音乐一直在那儿进行，全部的人躺在广场上，然后你会感觉到在这群体中会生成某一种和他们的身体相关的诉求和表达。也许，这反而帮助我们进入到对未来的一种想像当中。这跟在广州的广场，人们非常 enjoy 的一种状态，就像你说的沉醉的这种状态是有一些不同的，但同样的，广场中浮现出集体对未来的欲望，这种能量可能凝聚在那一块由灯光照亮的夜空里，在那一块空气中悬浮着欲望云团，他们在期待这片雨，是不是？对，我觉得就是有这种感觉。我想我的工作，实际上就是把这种发现，这种观察剥剥剥，一层一层地逐渐呈现出来。

I don't think of it as formal theatre, but rather as a kind of theatricality rendered through the specific nature of the lighting as well as other characteristics of the space. The particular light and people's movements penetrate each other, bringing out a completely new outline to their actions and behaviours.

Hu Fang: Yes, the various social forms of civil expression today are, in turn, shaping the different spatial forms for these expressions. You talk about lights, which are similar to lights on a stage, which perhaps give the public space the charm of the stage, a stage that provides everyone with the possibility of expression. In the footage shot in Guangzhou, I noticed a kind of procedure in this expression, a type of procedure that lingered between excitement, indulgence and fantasy. It appeared to serve as a break from the banality of the everyday, but meanwhile it also became a preconfigured mode of pacifying. The splendid stage of Guangzhou seemed to enable everyone to submerge into the imagination of the future, and to approach a certain promise or vision for the future. While in the case of Bangkok, individuals were more proactively constructing a collective imagination of the future. I'm not sure whether both related to the projection of our present desires into the future, but the presence of this in the square as a public space seemed to reflect the necessity for a transit zone in today's social space—a middle ground in which all forms of expression seek understanding. However, this is often fictionalised into lighting and visual performance.

Zhou Tao: Politics in Bangkok are very complex and involve rivalries between different powers, groups and objectives. I couldn't comprehend how different aspirations for the future of Thailand could achieve some kind of common understanding. But as people started falling asleep, perhaps that was the time their imaginations and desires were really released. In other words, you could really feel these energies released from their bodies. Even as they lay asleep, the light and music were always there. As all these people were lying on the square, it was then that you felt maybe this collective would generate a certain demand and expression that was relevant to their bodies. Perhaps this energy was what could help us realise our image of the future. This was different somehow from the state of enjoying oneself in Guangzhou's Hua Cheng Square, which you described as indulgence; but what was the same was the collective desire for the future that emerged from the square—an energy that perhaps condenses in the illuminated night sky, a cloud of desire floating in the air, and the rain that people are looking forward to. That's how I feel at any rate. I think my work is about stripping away these observations layer by layer and then gradually presenting them.

胡昉：在这里面，是不是似乎有一只无形的手在引导着现实进行你所说的“排演”？在某种意义上这种力量是无形的。虽然个体可能呈现出一种无意识的举动，但实际上，当你透过影像，在更大的范围去看的时候，这些举动进入到某种“排演”的区域。它出现在一个无限拖延，或是说不断延长的现实发生过程。有点像你刚才说过的，盘旋在上空的东西。而你的影像观察并不是进一步确定了广场空间在现有社会中的秩序，或是说，对社群表达的一种肯定；而更多的是提出了很多问题。

周滔：我觉得这个所谓的问题，最终来说是一个悬置，就是说，时刻不停在延伸。不是一定要发生什么，而是如何从影像到这个世界的循环关系中，体会到现实背后悬浮着的微尘。实际上，我的很多反应是身体性的，不自觉的。

胡昉：通常所说的影像方法，对你来说是身体的一部分，是感触，感 / 触现实一种温度的一层媒介，或者说是你的一层皮肤。

周滔：实际上这是身体的一部分，也许也是属于我的，对，因为我这种感觉或者是这种行走，都从身体这里发出。

我以前做过这样的一个事儿，就是我在一个城市里，比方说你坐在公园里，我就是没事儿的时候，就会去跟一个陌生人坐在一起。我可能会跟他保持一点距离坐着。其实我们内心都会有几分钟的角逐，或者说是一个感觉。有人是无所谓的，有人就会注意这个。但其实我也不是会关心我与陌生人的距离感，不是这样的。我觉得是一种和事情呆在一块儿的状况。看起来我是一个很表面的一个“呆”，但实际上我觉得，它比起表面上的参与又更复杂一些。

胡昉：通过跟影像的共生，实际上你在观察的同时，也让自身进入，成为对现实存在的一种测试。恰恰是因为影像和现实空间，在今天有一种奇怪的同构关系，例如，你可以看到，广州的广场空间在今天是如何被影像化，从而邀请人们进入一个具有梦幻特质的影棚化的空间。

Hu Fang: Does it seem like there is an invisible hand guiding reality to become performance in the way you stage things? In a sense, this power is invisible. Individual actions might appear as unconscious, but in fact, when you look at the broader scale of events through images, these actions enter a kind of performative zone, the formation of a reality of infinite delay and extension. It's a bit like what you said, hovering over something. The observation within your images does not further confirm the existing social order in the square. In other words, it does not serve as an affirmation of the community's expression; instead it raises many questions.

Zhou Tao: I think the so-called question is ultimately a suspension. That is to say, time is always extending. It's not about what *has* to happen, but instead how to experience it, through the cycle of image to the world, the dust suspended in reality. As a matter of fact, I often react bodily and unconsciously.

Hu Fang: What we usually consider a method or genre of cinema, for you, it's part of the body, a sensory experience, a medium to feel and touch reality. In other words, it's your skin.

Zhou Tao: It's actually part of the body, and maybe also part of me, yes—since my feelings or my way of walking all start from the body.

I've done such things before. When I found myself in a city not doing anything particular, I would go into a park and sit down next to a stranger. I might keep a little distance between us. My thinking was that if they remained so... Actually, we both would sense a period of psychological competition, or perhaps just a feeling. Some people were indifferent, but some would pay attention. It's not that I'm concerned about the distance between the stranger and myself; that's not really the case. I think it's more a matter of staying with something. It might seem like I am just "staying" literally, but actually I think it might be a little more complicated than just the literal participation.

Hu Fang: Through symbiosis with the image; in fact, while you observe you also become a test of reality—precisely because there is a strange isomorphic relationship between image and reality today. For example, you can see how the space of Guangzhou's square is being imaged, which in turn invites people into a dreamy studio-like space.

周滔：广州的广场空间一不小心就变成好莱坞科幻片，一种大片的场景，似乎影像和现实形成某一种共谋关系。在好莱坞大片中间，所有人的表情、动作、形态都不是日常的，但有趣之处就在这儿，恰恰就是一个其貌不扬，而且动作不那么雅的人的出现，就可以把这个梦给破坏掉，比如说，在曼谷广场的喷泉里，人们会洗澡，他们会躺在那里洗，因为夏天很热，其实就是有点把好莱坞大片搞砸了。

胡昉：从《现实之后》到《蓝与红》，你觉得这是在发生一个什么样的变化？在《现实之后》这个片子里面，它的场景也是在不同的空间之间转换的，从亚热带的广州，湿热的、充满野生的状态，连结到了人为地控制温度、环境的巴黎。作为一个隐喻，地点的转换提示了作为个体是如何在不同程度的现代制度空间里面穿行的。影片的最后，你拿着一个灯出现在雪地里面，穿着短裤，在严寒中用自己的体温寻找某个东西。在《现实之后》里面，作为整体场景其中的一个行为的要素，你还是作为行为的参与者出现在影片中。而在《蓝与红》里面，你完全隐身镜头之后，如果你曾用“翻身”这个词来形容影像和行为主体的关系的话，那么我可能会说现在是“盘旋”。“拍”作为一个动作，实际上不再是一个有明确表态的行为，说“我要用影像来进入现实”，或者说“这个影像是表明一个态度”。你变得更加“轻盈”了。像空气一样渗透进现场，但这个“轻盈”是基于你所面对的这个现实更加沉重了，因为你面对的是人们被环境改变，或者是试图改变环境的一个巨大的动力。你面对的动力如此剧烈，是否导致你在影像上也会形成一个不一样的跟现实对话的方式？

周滔：是的。我觉得在《现实之后》从广州绿色亚热带，去了巴黎以后就是天天下雪。你怎么处理这个情况呢？觉得我的介入有一种“对着干”的感觉。是对环境的一种反应。巴黎城市规划相对完整，没有太多的浑浊、模糊的地带。很难用这种广州的工作来同样搬到巴黎去进行。但我觉得这样的问题就特别有意思。我从广州去到巴黎，在广州弄一段，然后就有“下一段是什么呢？我就等着它来破解我之前的行为”这种感觉。

Zhou Tao: The space of the square in Guangzhou could easily become a Hollywood sci-fi movie, a scene from a blockbuster, in which image and reality perhaps form some kind of conspiracy. In a Hollywood blockbuster, there is nothing ordinary about the expressions, movements or figures, and the interesting thing is precisely that when some humble-looking person appears, whose behaviour is far from elegant, the dream is all of a sudden destroyed. For instance, because it is so hot in the summer, people bathe in the fountain in the square in Bangkok. They even lie down, which actually messes up the blockbuster image a little.

Hu Fang: What changes are there from *After Reality* to *Blue and Red*? In *After Reality*, the scenes also flit between different spaces, from subtropical Guangzhou—hot, humid, thick with vegetation, wild and uncontrollable—to Paris, where everything is artificially controlled, from the temperature to the environment in general. As a metaphor, the conversion of locations indicates how individuals traverse spaces of different modernities. At the end of the film, you appear in the snow with a light, wearing shorts, draining your own warmth into the cold, in search of something. In *After Reality* you appear as an element of the overall scene, as one of the participants in the performance, whereas in *Blue and Red* you are completely hidden behind the camera. While you use the phrase “turning over” to describe the relationship between image and subject, I might say “hovering” instead. “Shooting” as a form of movement is in fact no longer an action of clear indication, by which I mean using images “to enter into reality” or “to suggest an attitude”. You become much “lighter”, permeating through the scene like air. But does this “lightness” come about because the reality you are facing is becoming heavier? Is it because you are seeing people being changed by the situation, or by a tremendous force trying to change the situation? You’re dealing with such a drastic force; does it ever lead you to construct a different dialogue with reality in your image?

Zhou Tao: Yes, one of the questions in *After Reality* is how to deal with the transition from Guangzhou—a green, subtropical environment—to a snowy Paris. I think my intervention is somehow “confrontational”, a reaction to the situation. The urban planning of Paris is fairly comprehensive, and there is hardly anywhere turbid or ambiguous. It’s difficult to apply the same working methods in Guangzhou and Paris, but I think this is exactly where things become interesting. Going from Guangzhou to Paris, I had already produced one part in Guangzhou, but then what was the next part? I felt like I was waiting for something to crack what I had previously produced.

但明显的，《蓝与红》与《现实之后》是有所不同的，如你说的这个行为性的变化，在《现实之后》的那种迎击的行为在《蓝与红》里面是很难发生的，无论怎样的行为身体表演形式来介入都是非常无力的，身体从介入变为了与现实如何相处。自我身体的后退，影像的撞击却在另一个维度上形成了身体，“重影”促使地表与皮肤的叠合与延展，这个无形的“身躯”破除了肉身，获得未知性的物质体验，是轻盈的。我笔记中提到“不挣扎——而摇晃的身形正从大脑薄膜上滑出”，我想就是一个对于行为性变化的反映。

胡昉：这在某种意义上，有点像我们一开始说到的运动当中的那条狗一样，它出现在一个重大事件当中，恰恰当我们不能够关注到个人命运的时候，它把我们拉回到现实的立足点——实际也就是舞台背后，我们所寄生的日常空间。我感觉这个影片和广场有关，但它跟你之前对日常性以及这种在现实过程中的排演的关注息息相关。

周滔：之前我会涉及到自身某些行为，就像在《南石头》，或《现实之后》所作的；我在那时候就已经开始酝酿，表演性如何可以不用通过“我”这个层面中呈现出来。我觉得这种对现实的观察和发现当然里面也会有一些表演和排练，但这些表演更多的是随着它而来的可以让我不断逃到了这种表演的云团之后、背景之下。表演会寄生于哪个层面？这个问题是很有意思的。比如有人看了这些素材之后，会问：是真的么？不是你弄的吧。我说，全都是真的呀，但它还是会很模糊，这也同时模糊了电影类型的边界。

胡昉：这里面还有一个潜台词就是说，它也意味着模糊了我们的安全区域：当你游移在真实跟虚构的界线时，它将引发观者的一种焦虑，对于无法确认与现实关系的一种焦虑。

周滔：我希望这片子尽量呈现出没有头，没有尾，就是说，不知道怎么会有一段这样的东西。完整的模式必然有一个参考，让我们感觉到是怎样比较完整，但我需要的强度比完整重要得多。我觉得身体的这种感知，摄像机对于身体的一个延伸，这种关系所能达到的某个强度，是对这个现实过程的一个最好的介入。

Obviously, *Blue and Red* is quite different from *After Reality*. Like you said, the change in performativity, the kind of “confrontational” performance in *After Reality* was difficult to include in *Blue and Red*. In fact, I felt extremely powerless in my ability to intervene in whatever form of performance or action. The proposition changed from using the body as intervention to determining how best to stay within reality. The body had to retreat, while the impact of the image formed a body in a different dimension. A sort of “doubling” occurred as the skin and the earth’s surface coincided and extended. This invisible “body”, breaking from the flesh while gaining a material experience of the unknown, was light. My manuscript mentions “not to struggle” and “shimmering figures slipping out of a thin layer of film in the brain”, which I think reflects this change in performativity.

Hu Fang: In a sense, this is a bit like the dog in the protest, which we mentioned at the very beginning. It appeared at a major incident and just as we began to be less concerned about the fate of individuals, it pulled us back to the foothold of reality—that is, the reality behind the stage, the everyday space that we are parasitic on. I think this film is related not only to the square but also to your long-standing concern about the everyday and the performativity of reality.

Zhou Tao: I used to employ some performance of my own, like my appearance in both *South Stone* and *After Reality*. At the time I had already started to consider how to represent performativity on a level without “me”. I think the observation and discovery of reality—of course there are still performances and rehearsals, but these performances are more or less inconsequential—allows me to constantly escape beyond the cloud of performance, underneath the background. On what level does performativity exist? This is an interesting question. For example, some people watch the footage and ask: Is it real? Did you stage it? My answer is that it’s all real, but it’s also ambiguous, and at the same time it blurs the genres in cinema.

Hu Fang: Another subtext is that it's also meant to blur our comfort zone. When you wander across the line between the documentation and the fiction, it triggers anxiety in the spectator—the anxiety of being unable to register their relationship with reality.

Zhou Tao: I hope this film shows no beginning or end; that is, you don't know how such a thing ever came into existence. Integrity necessarily requires a reference so that we can sense how integral it is relatively, but the density I needed was much more important than integrity. I think the relationship between the body's perception and the camera as an extension of the body can achieve a certain density, which is the best intervention into reality.