

Public issue 17

Talk

Edited by Christina Ritchie & Jacob Wren

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Preferences:

James Carl & Lin Chun

Collaborative works, 1993–1995

Lin Chun and I first met in August 1993 in the city of Xiamen (Amoy) in Fujian Province on the southeast coast of Mainland China. I was traveling there at the time, photo-documenting aspects of the traditional popular cultural renaissance that was then taking place in much of Southern China. Equally, I had come to Fujian to search out members of an infamous, and by then defunct, collective known as “Xiamen dada,” which counted Lin Chun and Huang Yong Ping among its members. I found Lin employed as a professor in the Fine Arts department of Xiamen University and during the course of my stay, we initiated a series of collaborative, performance-based works.

Foremost among our concerns in this work was to consider the nature of exchange and collaboration which informed our relationship as artists, friends and cultural strangers. Conversation formed the “ground” in this relationship, and as such, it became a basic material element in several of these works. The process of sharing a language (primarily Mandarin, a second language for both of us) manifested itself most commonly in the sharing of pen, paper, and Chinese-English dictionary. Alongside photo documentation, various drawings, notes, and scraps of paper remain as indices of these works. As well, each of these collaborations was fundamentally concerned with exploring varieties of time: we approached the durational form of performance through “found” temporal structures, for example, tides, seasons, global time zones.

As a series, the works are entitled Preferences, an English approximation of the Chinese conjunction derived by combining homophones for our Chinese family names, Lin and Ke. (Foreigners in China are required to adopt a Chinese name.) In Lin’s dialect, as in other Southern Chinese dialects, the distinction between an initial “N” sound and an initial “L” sound is undifferentiated. As a result we were able to arrive at the Mandarin title “Ning Ke”, a conjunction which expresses a sense of the English “would rather...” as in “I would rather have a bottle in front of me...”

The series of photographs reproduced here on pages 77–89 constitutes an abridged version of *Preferences #4*, entitled “Tea”, which took place on my return visit to Xiamen during Chinese New Year in 1995.

Preferences #1, “Patience”, August 1993

Location: Xiamen, China.

Properties: Two inner tubes, a one-litre bottle of local beer, a bottle cork, candles, matches, various foodstuffs, pen and paper, Chinese-English dictionary, high-powered sunscreen, camera.

Time: Low to high tide.

Action: Conversation upon barnacle-encrusted shoals in a local bay, scaled at low tide, under the early morning sub-tropical sun. Various activities (candle lighting in the wind, sunscreen anointment, map drawing, eating, drinking, written and spoken conversation) performed in an attempt to endure the heat and the time required for the tide to turn at approximately 2 pm. Rain falls for the first time in weeks. Man saved from drowning as he is washed up on razor-sharp barnacles. Everyone sheds blood. As both the tide and the storm climax, notes and drawings made are stuffed in empty beer bottle, which is corked and tossed out on the receding tide, cross-breeding the European castaway fable with an Imperial Chinese drinking game. Return to shore on rented inner tubes.

Cameo: Kenneth Dean in the role of Saint Bernard.

Preferences #2, “Pacific Rim”, August 1993

Location: Xiamen, China and Vancouver, Canada.

Properties: A clock, a watch, a paperback copy of Kobo Abé’s *The Box Man*.

Time: Xiamen, 9 am; Vancouver, 5 pm; that is, exactly the same “time,” disregarding international time zones.

Action: Photo-documentation of undisclosed activities occurring at precisely the same moment on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Preferences #3, “Adjusted Seasons”, October 1993

Location: New Jersey, USA, and Xiamen, China.

Properties: A box filled with autumn leaves collected in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Action: Box of fallen leaves collected by J.C. in New Jersey, mailed to L.C. in Xiamen, to be shaken from the box from the roof of L.C.’s residence in a sub-tropical simulation of autumn.

Preferences #4, “Tea”, February 1995

Location: Xiamen, China.

Properties: Pentax point-and-shoot camera, Chinese-English dictionary, pen and paper, table and chairs, tea, teapot and cups.

Time: Period required for self-timing camera to consume a 36-exposure roll of film at the rate of one shot every three minutes.

Action: Casual conversation and consumption of Fujian specialty, oolong tea; in the background, shoals which formed the site for *Preferences #1*, “Patience.”



12:11:36



12:11:42



12:11:48



12:11:54



12:12:00



12:12:06



12:12:12



12:12:30



12:12:18



12:12:36



12:12:24



12:12:42



12:12:48



12:13:06



12:12:54



12:13:12



12:13:00



12:13:18

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