

High Tension: Reconceptualizing interiority in the works of Qiu Miaojin and Wu Ming-yi

by

Thomas M. Mamos

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Department of East Asian Studies
University of Alberta

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Abstract:

This project examines the concept of “interiority”, the thoughts and feelings of other individuals, as a kind of literary device in the works of Qiu Miaojin and Wu Ming-yi. Rather than reinforce binaristic thinking, this considers interiority as a tension between public and private, between self and other, it allows for a line of analysis that can interact with multiple subfields of literary studies and genres. The novels examined in this project act as cases for examining this tension: Wu Ming-Yi’s *The Man with the Compound Eyes* forms an extreme “public” or external example, as the novel intersects with ecocriticism and environmental studies; Qiu Miaojin’s *Notes of a Crocodile* and *Last Words From Montmartre* acts as the “private” or internal counterballast, as it intersects with gender and sexuality studies. This project attempts to read across these sub-fields and to read across genres present in the novels, in order to find points of resonance and commonality in depictions of interiority despite many differences. While examining each of these cases results in their own unique conclusions, more generally they point to possible strategies and modes of being that revise binaristic thinking: an avowal of linear time, the importance of labour in knowledge-formation, and of connection and relationships dispersed amongst many individuals and agents.

Dedication

To everyone – family, friends, teachers, classmates, students – who put up with me while I cobbled this together.

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1. How's your head?

What constitutes the desire for seeking what and how people think? There is no shortage of literary works written and published across languages and milieus that offer the promise of just such an opportunity; to know the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of an individual as mediated through a story. Discussions of the quality of these kinds of representations lie at the very heart of English-language scholarship on modern Chinese literature.¹ Perhaps it is the possibility of experiencing worlds and realities outside of our own, opening one's eyes to alternative ways of being outside of a particular context. Perhaps it can be seen as an attempt to establish control, to explore, chart and categorize unknown frontiers beyond physical forms that constrain and limit. Perhaps it is selfish, cataloguing similarities and differences for the sake of affirming the notion that there exists a universal humanity that connects us all, or alternatively, that insurmountable differences reflect certain value judgements or hierarchies. Whatever the exact constitution of this desire, there lies at its heart a division between self and other; between private and public; between internal states and external circumstances.

It is one thing to think about these questions theoretically, and it is quite another to see how philosophical traditions have responded to it in practice, against concrete examples in accounting for differences across cultures. In Shu-mei Shih's *The Lure of the Modern*, for instance, while

¹ I am referring to C.T. Hsia's germinal text *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, where he consistently critiques particular writers or trends in modern literary history for their lack of interiority. To raise two of many examples: "The romanticism of early modern Chinese literature is completely secular, philosophically unambitious, and psychologically crude. ... In its failure to explore the deeper reaches of the mind and to give allegiance to a higher transcendental or immanent reality, this romanticism, of necessity, was merely humanitarianism [...]" 18. Of Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945), Hsia writes: "Yu Ta-fu was a writer of unique importance in the first period because he alone dared to expose all his personal weaknesses in print and, in so doing, extended the psychological and moral frontiers of modern Chinese fiction. ... [Yu] is also something of a poseur who has pilfered from psychological manuals to supplement his genuine insights," 109. This might be due to personal preference, however, as Hsia has a clear favorite when it comes to novels, as he writes elsewhere: "But even the finest of the modern novels cannot compare with *Dream of the Red Chamber* in depth and scope: for, with all the new techniques at his disposal, *the modern Chinese novelist is, with a few exceptions, too often traditionalist in his lack of philosophical ambition and his failure to probe the deeper psychological truth*. To show his scorn for contemporary Chinese writing, a scholar versed in traditional literature [Shen Gangbo 沈剛伯] would often ask, 'What has been produced in the last fifty years that could equal *Dream of the Red Chamber*?' " Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, 225 with added emphasis.

discussing interiority and capitalism in Republican-era Shanghai, she describes a tendency in the Western philosophical cannon (taking Hegel, Weber, and Marx as examples) to perceive that “the Chinese lacked interiority or ‘the inner man’ and were passive followers of despotic rule.” Shih foregrounds this essentializing tendency and pushes it to its logical extreme: “To continue this line of reasoning, [...] the coming of imperialism and its ‘gift’ of capitalism would then produce a useful **tension** between the Chinese individual and his/her environment, leading to the emergence of interiority. In other words, the Chinese *needed* imperialism to discover the interiority necessary for capitalist development.”² In foregrounding the crude and masculinist bias in this tradition of thinking, Shih’s argument illuminates a framing of the binary between interiority and the external forces (imperialism, capitalism) that affords the idea of *tension*. It should follow that any academic attempt to discuss interiority, especially in the context of contemporary literature across cultures with its global flows of culture and capital, should address this tension by examining (and making problematic) the proverbial weights and pulleys that provide structure to it.

This project focuses on the *tension* (張弛) between public (公) and private (私), between exteriority and interiority, between “other” and “self,” and other various binary oppositions that seem to lie at the heart of considering what and how people think. I use the word tension to

² In the context of discussing writer Shi Zhecun (施蛰存, 1905-2003), she writes: “According to Hegel, without the concept of freedom, the Chinese passively obeyed the external ethics imposed by the state and were incapable of thinking and reflecting – the hallmarks of the Western subject who internalizes morality and rationality. As a sociologist, Weber used the same characterization to explain why the West could develop into capitalist societies while China could not: morality in China was imposed from the outside, hence there was no self-regulated morality from the inside as is necessary for the rationalization of a capitalist society. [...] Marx follows in Hegelian fashion, seeing Western imperialism as the beneficial harbinger of capitalism, which ‘batters down all Chinese walls,’ and ‘draws’ China from barbarism to ‘civilization.’ [...] If we think about imperialism along racial and cultural lines, we might also add that its arrival signals other sources of conflict besides the one between the individual and the natural world. These would be such conflicts inherent in the colonial situation as those between the colonizer and the colonized (political and racial), between native tradition and Western modernity (cultural), and between agrarianism and capitalism (economic), all of which should intensify the tension necessary for the emergence of interiority.” Shih, *Lure*, 349-350; italics in original with added emphasis.

foreground the active, mutually-forming relationship between seemingly-opposing concepts (private opposed to public, self opposed to other, etc.). My choice to articulate this tension in the Sinitic script, a term which, on the surface,³ refers to tension and flexibility, reflects a desire to keep an awareness of cross-cultural differences at the heart of this thesis' research. The idea of public and private, while not "real" in any concrete sense, allows for the articulation of the tension that informs and changes individuals. In examining this tension in literary works and paying attention to the particularity of the milieus in which they arose, this project seeks to explain *how* literary works navigate particular expressions between public and private. To consider interiority outside the scope of the individual, to make it productive as a specific tension between and public and private becomes the overarching goal of this project.

In the two chapters that follow, I take this line of thinking and attempt to take particular cases (authors and their works) and plot them according to their content and reception. For the purpose of this project, I have selected what I deem to be extreme examples of each of these connected terms: few things are more public and exterior than the idea of boundless nature and likewise, there are few things more private sexuality, gender, and private desire that informs their interiority. In terms of the idea of public (公), I examine nature through Wu Ming-yi's (吳明益 b. 1971) novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* and the context of ecocriticism and, in terms of the idea of private (私), I take *Notes of a Crocodile* and *Last Words from Montmartre* by Qiu Miaojin (邱妙津 1969-1995) and the context of gender and sexuality studies. The works of both

³ The literal translation is as follows: *zhang* 張 in this case referring to a bow (弓) being stretched taut while *chi* 弛 refers to a bow that is at the ready. The original context for 張弛 comes from the Confucian classic *The Book of Rites* 禮記, specifically in the section titled "Miscellaneous Records II" 雜記下 on line 123. While the term originally was an analogy describing the skills of King Wen and his son and subsequent ruler King Wu of Zhou in the management of their subjects (as seen in the idioms 一張一弛 and 文武之道), I choose to translate the term more literally.

of these authors (and the subfields that their scholarship exists within), while differing in terms of genre (content), share a common form in exploring the tension between public and private across multiple levels (textual, social, philosophical). Rather than reinforcing divisions between genres and subfields, then, this project seeks to explore alternate methods of discussing interiority beyond one particular orientation or methodology, to show how the particular tension between public and private presented in the following chapters can be made productive beyond well-trodden frameworks.

2. Context

If any attempt to consider interiority is constrained by the particularity of a historical context, then how have others articulated the tension between public and private in other milieus? In the following subsection, I briefly discuss research that analyzes pre-modern texts, under what I see as an inter-related framework of interiority, through which I form my inter aspects of study. Though differing in content (Vivien Ng analyzes “madness,” Maram Epstein analyzes “filiality”), the form of their research provides grounding to the theoretical orientation that guides this project.

In her study *Madness in Late Imperial China*, scholar Vivien Ng traces transformations in legal code and at the transition between the fall of the Ming dynasty (1368-1664) towards the foreign Manchu-led Qing dynasty (1644-1911), explicitly examining discourses surrounding the idea of madness. These changes, according to Ng, reflected a desire to constrain and remodel certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; male homosexuality is one particular aspect of a “private” desire that became a matter of “public” concern during this historical moment.⁴

⁴ “The Qing regime did not hesitate to use the legal code to proscribe ‘aberrant’ conduct. For example, in 1740, the government enacted its first male homosexual rape law. However, this law addressed more than the issue of rape because buried in this statute is the criminalization of male homosexuality, with sodomy between consenting adults a punishable offense. This homophobic legislation had a number of contributing causes, one of which was the political climate of the early Qing period. [...] It is possible that the government regarded homosexuality as the

Madness was another, with legislation attempting to confine those whose interiority threatened or conflicted with external order⁵ while medical discourses are contrasted with folk traditions and explanations.⁶ In the pre-modern period, the “common” view of madness could be seen as resulting from a plethora of external factors, like the budding sexuality of women colliding with the patriarchal mores embedded in society (56-59) and how the environment (in the form of spirits) could punish those who failed to appease them or respect their domain (54-55). One way of seeing these narratives would be to read into the didactic elements of the stories presented (‘Don’t have sex in temples and especially not in front of statues, it’s rude!’⁷). I would instead

ultimate form of heterodox, iconoclastic expression and, therefore, took steps to outlaw it. It is also possible that conservative elements within the government viewed homosexuals as gender anomalies and, as such, portents of a state of cosmic imbalance or disharmony that required rectification.” Ng, *Madness in Late Imperial China*, 18

⁵ Following an incident of multiple homicides committed in Sichuan by an “insane man” around the 1730s, the Yongzheng emperor, interested in curtailing migration and movement of peoples following an attempt to repopulate areas “devastated by the uprisings and banditry of the late Ming period,” approved measures to facilitate confinement of undesirable elements. Ng writes: “For good measure, it was decided that mandatory registration and confinement of the insane should be implemented throughout the empire.” 64-66.

⁶ Within medical discourses, in particular, Ng foregrounds two different tendencies or perspectives in “traditional” explanations for madness: correlative thinking, through terms such as “yinyang” (陰陽), the five phases of matter/energy (五行) which pattern the universe and constitute a cosmological model of understanding phenomena and typically reflected the views of the elite. Chinese physicians put forth and utilized various terms in order to categorize expressions and manifestations of madness (these include *kuang* 狂, *dian* 癲, and *feng* 瘋), and attempts to articulate which aspects of correlative thinking relate to which organs within the body that produce these particular expressions. An example of this kind of analysis can be seen as Ng writes of Tang Dynasty physician Sun Simiao 孫思邈 as follows: “Sun Simiao’s contribution [to the field of medicine] was not so much his description of symptoms of madness – many of the manifestations on his list had already been identified by earlier physicians – as his discussion of its pathology. In the *Qianjin yaofang*, Sun firmly establishes *feng* (wind) as the pathogenic agent for madness: ‘When *feng* enters the cardinal conduit of yang polarity (*yang jing*), *kuang* ensues; when *feng* enters the cardinal conduit of yin polarity (*yin jiang* [sic]), *dian* ensues.’” 36. The other mode of understand was a “common” one, explaining madness as “spirit possession, loss of the soul, and divine retribution” and reinforcing these explanations through ritual and practice. These three primary expressions can be analyzed further: “retribution for sinful deeds,” usually informed through Buddhist stories and discourses as the religions prevalence waxed and waned asymmetrically in the pre-modern period; “possession by malevolent spirits,” spiritual manifestations of non-anthropomorphic beings like rivers or forest spirits in addition to those of angered ancestors; “and separation of the soul from the body.” 51

⁷ “On the grounds of Tianning Temple in Ningbo was a deserted shrine where a statue of the deity Guandi was housed. One day, two young men, taking advantage of the secluded location, committed a homosexual act right in front of the statue. This immediately brought forth a ferocious response from Guandi. ‘How dare you defile this temple!’ he roared. ‘You shall die for this!’ The frightened youths were able to pull up their pants, but the shock was so great that they began to scream uncontrollably, attracting a huge crowd to the usually deserted shrine. After a short while, the parents of the two youths caught wind of the incident and hurried to the shrine to offer a pledge to Guandi that they would arrange for a play to be performed as an atonement for their sons’ sin. Guandi’s anger subsided, and the screaming fit finally came to an end. However, the two youths remained in a daze for another month.” Quoted in Ng, *Madness in Imperial China*, 52-53.

emphasize that, tenuous and mediated as the nature of such stories and anecdotes may be, they reflect multiple aspects of interaction (sexuality, the environment, intimate relationships between people) within the idea of interiority. Madness, what I see as a particular expression of interiority, was never considered as a purely private matter. Ng writes: “[...] unlike England or France, especially in the nineteenth century, there were no special institutions or asylums in China set up for the care of confinement of lunatics. A few homeless or otherwise destitute insane people might have found accommodations in hospitals set up by Buddhist temples, but for those with families, care was typically provided by their kin.”⁸

On the point of family and the importance of the familial unit, then, it seems apt to foreground Maram Epstein’s *Orthodox Passions*; a study which foregrounds the importance of understanding filial love (*xiao* 孝) in discourses and literary texts during the High Qing period.⁹ In order to mobilize filiality in a theoretical fashion, Epstein draws from developments in developmental psychology, precisely the idea of intersubjectivity. This specific term, as Epstein defines it, “focuses on the attention on the self as an evolving construct generated through coparticipation in social interactions [...]. Crucially, personhood is an effect achieved through acts of perception either by self or others. *Having a fully articulated personhood is a social act of dependent on the willingness of others to grant some degree of autonomous subjectivity and the*

⁸ Ibid., 60. Ng goes on to detail how the attempts to get familial units to cooperate with initiatives in collecting information and maintain control over the mentally ill was not very successful. The initiatives set up by the Qing government during this time would continue to be transformed and utilized throughout the start of the twentieth century; an excellent discussion of these transformations in the context of 20th century China, specifically focusing on Beijing, which far exceeds the scope of this project can be found in Emily Baum’s *The Invention of Madness: State, Society and The Insane in Modern China*.

⁹ Epstein’s book argues for understanding this expression of emotion rooted in familial relations in contrast to the prevalence of the contemporary focus on romantic love and puts forth a paradigm that centers filial piety as the core of intimate pre-modern ties in China. On the sentiment of filial love, Epstein writes filiality itself is “hypocognized” in English, seemingly “artificial as a description of an affective concept.” While a relatively uncommon word in English, filiality (孝) as a signifier is connected to a wealth of signified concepts like chastity (節) and loyalty (忠) which reinforce gender binaries; this connection was fostered by the Qing government in an attempt to emphasize “intimate relations as the primary site of moral education.” (39)

agency to act upon it.”¹⁰ Epstein goes on to establish that this “willingness” was informed deeply by traditions such as Confucianism and Buddhism.¹¹

In the context of this project, the importance of Epstein’s research to this project can be summarized with the following quotation:

The idealized Confucian view of political/ethical culture was that individuals should derive their identity from a process of affiliation with ethical norms that were identified with the state. This type of identification also happens in Western nations, particularly during times of war or internal instability when citizens are encouraged to think of themselves as facing dire hardship together. In China, however, it has produced a culture in which individuals identify with public institutions in a way that radically shifts the boundaries between the public (*gong* 公) and the private/personal (*si* 私). 22

As Epstein repeatedly implies, it would be a mistake to assume an individual identity as something that could ever be separate from public formations and their ideologies, or entirely unique to an individual; the idea of intersubjectivity allows for a level of interpretation and distinction between public (公) and private (私).¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 18, emphasis added. The original definition of intersubjectivity from Zlatlev et al. is as follows: “In the simplest terms, intersubjectivity is understood [...] as *the sharing of experiential content (e.g., feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings) among a plurality of subjects.*” Further discussions on the links between phenomenology and cognitive science on the topic of intersubjectivity can be found in Crone and Huemer’s meta-review “Self-Consciousness and Intersubjectivity,” 225-229.

¹¹ These influences are contrasted to the idea of the “subjective unconscious” that developed in the Western tradition: “Rather than define the unconscious as the foundation of the authentic self, [the aforementioned traditions] promote meditation as a technique of self-cultivation, a way to shed this false consciousness so that people can gain a clearer understanding true nature of reality.” Rather than foster an understanding of self that is rooted in the subjective experience of interiority (mind-body dualism, for example), Epstein’s intersubjectivity takes the notion that an individual’s identity is constructed through particular historical traditions and maintained among relations between agents. The idea of the self is not an ontological truth, it would seem, as intersubjectivity mediates and validates it through practices that are particular to historical and cultural contexts. See 19-22.

¹² Epstein’s formulation also shares resonance with discourses at the beginning of the May Fourth movement, although the transformation of intersubjectivity into a presupposed absolute began to become popular during this timeframe. In her study on transnational linguistic shifts in the early 20th century in China, Lydia Liu writes: “In Min Zhi’s [民質] article, ‘Wo’ (I or Self), which appeared in [*Eastern Miscellany*] in 1916, the individual began to evolve into something of an absolute value. [...] In order to justify his claim that the self is the *raison d’être* of

It might seem obvious, but it bears stating that stories – spanning between fact and fiction – are what unites Ng and Epstein in their disparate research. In addition to the Qing legal code and specific penal cases, Ng analyzes medical texts like *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經, itself containing anecdotal commentary describing specific manifestations of madness) alongside literary texts like Pu Songling’s *Strange Tales of a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異).¹³ Epstein examines the changing depictions of filial acts like flesh-cutting (割骨) in Ming dynasty gazetteers (地方誌) in contrast to the anomalous representations of romantic love in the classic Ming text *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢).¹⁴ I am drawn to these studies because they cluster on a set of terms, “relationships” and “madness” that are mediated by the stories (and historical contexts). Their analyses and use of theoretical frameworks may be disparate, but I see a common form uniting them; a focus on the tension between public and private that informs particular expressions of interiority.

existence, Min Zhi drew a distinction between *siwo* (private self) and *gongwo* (public self). **Just as the candle illuminates every corner of the room when it gives out light, he argued, so the pursuit of self-interest will also benefit others. *Gongwo* and *siwo* are thus mutually interconnected and mutually reinforced;** the former is set apart from the latter by a sense of moral commitment in its relentless crusade for individual *quanli* (rights).” Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 89, with italics in-text and emphasis added. For further information on the translingual practice of rights, see Ibid., 279-280. For a further discussion on the different significations of “rights” in comparison to *quanli* 權力 across cultural traditions outside of the scope of “translingual practice” and within the context of contemporary society, see Liu, *Queer Marxism*, 143-147.

¹³ For an extended discussion on medical texts within the period, see Ng, *Madness in Late Imperial China*, 29-51; a discussion of stories from the *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 and the aforementioned *Liaozhai zhiyi* can be found from 51-62.

¹⁴ On the changing discourses surrounding flesh-cutting see Epstein, *Orthodox Passions*, 92-128; on how *Honglouloumeng* was a historical outlier in terms of its emphasis on romantic relationships as opposed to filial ones, see 197-255. Unlike Epstein, I am not emphasizing the importance of filial love in the context of the works I have selected, nor am I attempting to cast the idea of flesh-cutting and other ritual practices entrenched in discourses of filiality in the light of “madness” or mental illness. Rather, I see Epstein’s argument as showing a subjective experience beyond individual, as always being implicated and mediated by others, and the boundaries between self and other in this context are porous and capable of being revised and rearticulated under different contexts.

Ng and Epstein's research forms a historical foundation for this project, reinforcing three inter-related points which become my privileged aspects of study: (1) wresting the idea of interiority (and by extension, subjectivity) away from the boundaries of the individual, (2) the foregrounding of a dispersed network of relations that form the experience of interiority, and (3) an awareness of the multiplicities of "origins" and possible "treatments" for ameliorating the tension between public and private. My intention is not to attribute a mode of being articulated through research on Ming and Qing dynastic interpretations and apply them directly onto writers from Taiwan, but rather to sketch out a framework for understanding interiority that can be built upon and revised; to provide a flexible definition of what interiority can be. In other words, Ng and Epstein's research forms the foundation of my focus of study, and in the following section, I move to explain why I have selected Wu Ming-yi and Qiu Miaojin and their works under this formulation.

3. Why these writers?

Qiu Miaojin and Wu Ming-yi were born in Taiwan two years apart (1969 and 1971, respectively), and their works showcase two very different views of Taiwan. Qiu graduated from Taipei First Girls High School (alma mater of other well-known writers such as Sanmao 三毛 and Zhu Tianxin 朱天心) and entered Taiwan National University the same year martial law formally ended on the island. While Qiu was on her way to being known writer with her early short stories, it was the 1994 novel *Notes of a Crocodile*, published in the midst of a media frenzy and fascination with lesbians on the island, that began a more substantial recognition in her writing and artistic sensibility.¹⁵ In the same year, Qiu had left Taiwan and was pursuing

¹⁵ Heinrich, "Consider the Crocodile." For a further discussion on the kinds of incidents that occurred in 90s Taiwan regarding mediated-"outings" without consent, like the 1992 TTV news incident [臺視新聞事件] where a news reporter entered a lesbian bar and filmed people along with providing homophobic commentary, see Martin, "The Crocodile Unmasked" in *Situating Sexualities*, 220-221.

graduate studies at University of Paris VIII, studying both feminism under Helene Cixous and clinical psychology. Before committing suicide in 1995, Qiu compiled a manuscript which was published posthumously as *Last Words from Montmartre* in 1996. These two novels reflect a specific sensibility that can be seen in the nascent popularity of non-heteronormative literature of the time, like writers Lucifer Hong 洪凌 and Chen Xue 陳雪. Qiu differs from her coterie of associated writers in her devised presentation of autobiographical experiences intimately woven through intertextual references far outside the national boundaries of Taiwan; her works present a devised presentation of subjectivity that blurs distinctions between the protagonists, author, and cultural figure.

Wu, too, is seen as a participant in a burgeoning literary genre extending out of the post-Martial law period in Taiwan. Following a Ph.D. in Chinese Literature from National Central University, Wu published his first novel in 1997 before pivoting to essay writing and literary theory with essays on butterflies (*The Dao of Butterflies* 蝶道, 2003) and literary theory associated with the developing genre of nature literature (*Liberating Nature Through Writing* 以書寫解放自然：台灣現代自然書寫的探索, 2011). Wu, along with poet Liu Kexiang (劉克襄 b. 1957), can be seen as the most prominent writers of this particular genre in Taiwan.¹⁶ Nature literature is influenced as much from environmental destruction and its subsequent effects prevalent during the pre-martial law period under the KMT government, as well as drawing from, working with and struggling against multiple traditions and conceptions of the idea of

¹⁶ Nick Kaldis, in his essay on Liu Kexiang and the Nature-writing genre in general, sees nature writing as “the *intersection* between the emotional, subjective, imaginative mind we discover through other literary genres such as fiction, *at the moment of its immersion in the natural environment*, the latter being an external, concrete place, *a contextual reality* aside from which the writing at hand would have no motivation or inspiration, no cause to be (or be studied).” See Kaldis, “Anxiety/Reflex,” 88-89. For Kaldis’ citation of Wu Ming-yi’s definition of nature-writing, see 97n1.

nature.¹⁷ At the heart of the genre, in Wu's interpretation, is an interdisciplinary approach that includes literature, philosophy, and the natural sciences; nature writing is deeply woven into concepts like the natural environment, the social environment, human ideologies, governments, and the market.¹⁸ It should come as no surprise that his second novel, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, would tackle all of these issues in a multi-vocal narrative that centers the build-up to and the aftermath following a section of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch colliding with Taiwan.

On the surface, the gulf between the two writers and their genres/styles of writing might seem incompatible to analyze under one framework. Still, both writers unsettle presupposed values and conceptualizations of (conservative) values and views pervasive in local and global discourses. Qiu's novels encapsulate the tension between private desires and public perceptions against the backdrop of post-secondary education, non-heteronormative relationships and intertextual allusions, while Wu's novel extends the notion of subjectivity across subjects and agents throughout an environment while focusing on the interiority of multiple protagonists against the exteriority of climate catastrophe. The texts that I have selected exist within their own networks of scholastic discussion and particular historical moments, and I briefly highlight them here for their discussions inform my own analysis for each other.

¹⁷ "Late twentieth-century Taiwanese environmentalists were inspired by their counterparts in other nations who had been successfully protesting environmental degradation since the postwar period. They translated key Western texts on damage to ecosystems, the first of which was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (trans.1969). This work's relatively rapid translation belies the difficulties plaguing Taiwanese eager to ameliorate and prevent damage to their own landscapes." Thornber, *Ecoambiguity*, 86. For a brief outline of environmental transformations under various colonial regimes in Taiwan leading up to the 1990s, see Williams and Chang, *Taiwan's Environmental Struggle*, 12-21.

¹⁸ 《自然書寫的類型實包含了跨越數個界域（文學、哲學、史學、自然科學……）的若干特質，[...] 它與自然環境、社會環境、人文思潮、甚至政治、經濟皆有深度關涉。》Wu, *Liberating Nature Through Writing*, 38. For Wu's chapter on Liu Kexiang, see 385-414.

In terms of environmental studies, Karen Thornber's expansive *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures*, "explores the multiple ways fiction and poetry highlight the absence of simple answers and paucity of facile solutions to environmental problems" throughout East Asia and across pre-modern and modern representations.¹⁹ Chia-ju Chang and Scott Slovic's edited volume *Ecocriticism in Taiwan: Identity, Environment, and the Arts* aims to foreground "Taiwan's important contributions to international ecocriticism, especially in the context of the emerging 'vernacular' trend in the field that emphasizes the significance of local perspectives and styles, including distinctly non-Western and comparative approaches."²⁰ Jack F. Williams and Ch'ang-yi David Chang's *Taiwan's Environmental Struggle: Toward a Green Silicon Island* goes further in exclusively analyzing economic data and political institutions and their patterns of transformation following the serial colonization of Taiwan in the context of environmental pollution and modification.²¹

In terms of scholarship on gender and sexuality, Hans Tao-Ming Huang's *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan* is critical text. Huang's research not only incorporates and builds on the work done by Wenqing Kang and his germinal study of early 20th century of representations of male homosexual desire in *Obsession*, but also contextualizes those discourses and representations in Taiwan throughout the modern period.²² Petrus Liu's *Queer Marxism in*

¹⁹ Thornber, *Ecoambiguity*, 21. There is no major engagement with Wu Ming-yi in Thornber's discussion of literature from Taiwan; see 495n305 and 497n330. This might be explained by publishing schedules, Thornber's book was published in 2012. Before 2011 Wu had only published 7 works and had received a handful of domestic awards and honors; since then Wu has published 10 other works including *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. Moreover, the majority of Wu's international awards, including a nomination for the Man Booker International Prize for *The Stolen Bicycle* (單車失竊記 2015, translated by Darryl Sterk in 2017), has followed in years following Thornber's study.

²⁰ Slovic and Chang, *Ecocriticism in Taiwan*, xi. In contrast to Thornber's treatment in *Ecoambiguity*, Wu Ming-yi's writing figures into three chapters of the edited volume: Rose Hsiu-li Juan and Kathryn Yalan Chang both explicitly deal with *The Man With the Compound Eyes* (79-93 and 95-109, respectively), while Peter I-min Huang engages with Wu's essays on the literature of mountains and rivers (29-32).

²¹ Williams and Chang, *Taiwan's Environmental Struggle*, 12-73

²² For Wenqing Kang's analysis of the term *pi* (癖, obsession or passion) along with other linguistic markers of male same-sex relations in China, see Kang, *Obsession*, 19-40. Huang builds on Kang's analysis by further examining

Two China's evinces the complex relationships of Marxism and Queer theory not only between theoretical centers (East and West) but also the complex interplay between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait (China and Taiwan).²³ Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich's edited volume *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures* puts forth multiple perspectives that examine the complex field between concepts like the body and sexuality.²⁴

This project, in contrast to those just foregrounded, focuses on the theoretical tension between public and private that both writers utilize to unsettle presupposed values and conceptualizations of (conservative) values and views pervasive in local and global discourses. Qiu's novels encapsulate the tension between private desires and public perceptions against the backdrop of post-secondary education, non-heteronormative relationships and intertextual allusions, while Wu's novel extends the notion of subjectivity across subjects and agents throughout an environment while focusing on the interiority of multiple protagonists against the exteriority of climate catastrophe. Moreover, all three works feature protagonists who are coded, or at least presented in some degree as mentally-ill: in Qiu's writings, we might see the protagonists as struggling with self-harm, suicidal ideation, manic and depressive episodes and rumination; in Wu's, we might see the main femme protagonist Alice struggling with suicidal ideation, depression and dissociation. This coding is pushed further when we consider how Qiu's

and problematizing discourses related to male same-sex relations specifically in Taiwan from the 1950s to the 1990s. He argues that these discourses are inherently rooted in "mental hygiene" (an early guise of contemporary mental health discourses) and domestic media institutions, and that they "moralized" the concept of homosexuality; see Huang, *Queer Politics*, 30-53.

²³ Liu, *Queer Marxism*. 3-30. In addition to highlighting Queer literature on both sides of the strait, Liu argues that Chen Ruoxi's (陳若曦 b.1938) 1986 novel *Paper Marriage* (紙婚, published 1986) is both a textual precedent for Qiu Miaojin's *Notes from a Crocodile* and an example of a creative work of fiction that features Marxian inspiration for queering modes of survival and interpersonal relationships, 85-113.

²⁴ Martin and Heinrich, *Embodied Modernities*. Within the volume, Maram Epstein analyzes two versions of 18th century imperial classic *Yesou Puyuan* (野叟曝言) in order to trace changing depictions of masculinity; see 60-78. Moreover, Fran Martin offers a reading of Qiu Miaojin's *Notes from a Crocodile* along with earlier short stories "Platonic Hair" (柏拉圖之髮, 1990) and "Zero Degree" (臨界點, 1998) in order to demonstrate "how shame and subjective degradation are figured in Qiu's representations of stigmatic bodies," 178; see 177-194.

suicide radically recontextualized her audience's relationship to the confessional diary style of *Crocodile* and their view of *Last Words*' epistolary form following the authors suicide, or how Wu nebulously includes himself in his fictional narrative. This project seeks to consider these complex stories and explore productive modes of being and living with this real tension that is rendered between two theoretical points. The theoretical alignments that I utilize in each of the chapters that follows is an attempt to articulate the productivity in considering this tension.

In Chapter 2, I turn to Wu's novel and the tendency for scholarship surrounding it to focus on the ecological sublime (and other related variants of the concept) as a means to deal with the depiction of climate catastrophe. Rather than follow this trend, I propose a theoretical realignment with McKenzie Wark's *Molecular Red*, specifically her readings of Russian thinkers Alexander Bogdanov and Andrei Platonov, in order to highlight the various forms of labour present within the text. By centering my analysis on the character of Alice Shih through this theoretical framework that explains how systems interact with one another, I demonstrate how this protagonist actively struggles with the tension between an unstable interiority and a polluted exteriority; how she manages to stay alive despite beginning the novel with a wish to end her life.

In Chapter 3, I examine the specific circumstances that surrounded the production and reception of Qiu's novels; I demonstrate how the works navigate the tension between public discourses and private desires and orientations in the context of gender and sexuality through the use of intertextuality. I utilize Michael Warner's *Publics and Couterpublics* in helping me articulate the specific notion of a public as a relation among strangers (along with several other qualifiers) necessary in understanding the method in which Qiu's protagonists deal with and transform the tension between public and private into new forms. Ultimately, I argue that rather

than fixate on Qiu's suicide or individual identity markers, Qiu's use of intertextuality, the allusion and association to other artists across mediums and historical periods, should be understood as the core on which her audience builds an emotional connection to the works.

As I hope my engagement with these writers and their texts and the scholarship surrounding them will show, this tension between public and private is often remediated and woven into other arguments or context. The goal of this project is to pull at these loose threads and follow them until they lead to very different points from their respective scholastic domains. I do this not to denigrate or make subordinate other interpretations and claims, but rather to underscore the multiple embedded contexts that these discourses arise within. In a rapidly changing contemporary moment where many active interpretations spread across languages and contexts, it is crucial to consider *what* and *how* people think critically. I believe that the analysis of the novels of Qiu Miaojin and Wu Ming-yi in this project can offer tentative steps to rethinking interiority, and, by reading these works together, offer new theoretical approaches in navigating the tension between public and private.

雨驟風狂 // Unreasonable Weather Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

介紹 // Introduction

In the 11th issue of *Sixiang* 思想 published in 2009, eco-critic Huang Tsung-Chieh 黃宗潔 interviews Wu Ming-yi on a variety of topics including literary theory, scientific knowledge, and international differences in waste management. During the interview, Wu states:

I think the way we teach science should change. Kids should first learn to be a person before becoming a scientist. Right now, it's the opposite: first we encourage kids to become scientists, but then they have no *conscience*, no *sensitivity*, or *intuition*; all they do is just dissect frogs. But that doesn't seem right at all; they should be *sensitive* first. You should first have to struggle for a while, not with the fear that the frog will up and flee, but rather with whether you should dissect a frog [in the first place]. Once you've struggled with dissection for a while and decided to go through with it, only then could one become a good scientist. Right now, it isn't like that at all; kids just faff about and turn [the act of dissection] into a game.²⁵

Bracketing off the pedagogical concerns and implications of this quotation, what is apparent in Wu's view is the importance of an interiority, a kind of internal resonance that mediates external experiences, in learning about the natural world. Put in other words, Wu sees a division between the objective and rational sciences and the subjective and emotional responses needed for a nuanced understanding of scientific study. It would follow, then, that his following work of

²⁵ 《我覺得我們的科學教育應該改一下，先教小朋友變成一個人，再教小朋友變成一個科學家。我們現在好反過來，先鼓勵他成爲一個小科學家，**那他沒有良心了、沒有感性了、也沒有直覺了**，就解剖青蛙了。但不應該是這樣的，**應該要先感性**，你可能要掙扎很久，不是那種害怕牠會不會跳起來的掙扎，而是該不該解剖一隻青蛙的掙扎，掙扎很久再去解剖的話，他才有可能變更成一個好的科學家。我們現在不是，小朋友互相推來推去，把它當成一個遊戲。》Wu quoted in Huang, "Zouguo die dao," 255. Translation mine with emphasis added.

fiction, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (*Fuyan Ren* 複眼人, initially published in Taiwan in 2011 and translated into English by Darryl Sterk in 2013) would also emphasize this aspect of inner sensitivity.

This chapter, grounded in an understanding of climate catastrophe that pervades the novel²⁶, focuses on one particular character out of the work's sprawling scope that intertwines multiple narratives and contexts. In my reading, *Compound Eyes* offers a radical re-engagement with nature, remediating internal states of its characters and the external environment to explore new ways of attending to both in the face of climate catastrophe. I argue that the character Alice Shih (阿莉思) is the prime connective device that unites all the disparate strands within the text, despite narrative ruptures in chronological linearity or the questionable reliability of the character herself. In fact, this chapter will show how these aspects reinforce the overall theme of the limited, partial, and constrained capability and agency in navigating the degradation of environments exacerbated by industrial development and institutional organizations. Through the appropriation of the theoretical framework presented by McKenzie Wark in her work *Molecular Red*, which too explores fiction and theory dealing with the epistemology of science between diverse thinkers, this chapter will emphasize the novel's central theme of the possibility, no matter how limited or partial it may be, in being productive during apocalyptic times.

²⁶ "Literary scholars approaching [the genre of nature-writing ...] must free themselves from received interpretive conventions and instead seek new, dynamic, open-ended paradigms for analyzing nature writing, paradigms that are developed directly out of the principles they find *within each text*. Otherwise, nature writing will soon be just one more 'area of specialization' on the CVs of sinologists." In Kaldis, "Anxiety/Reflex," 89-90; emphasis in original.

观测气象 // Situating *Compound Eyes*

1.

The Man with the Compound Eyes (hereafter referred to as *Compound Eyes*) “is the first piece of Taiwanese literature to be published by a mainstream English publishing house (Harvill Secker, 2013; Pantheon, 2014) circulated beyond its national borders.”²⁷ Wu’s novel presents a fictional manifestation of a real ecological crisis from a multitude of perspectives and tangential connections clustering around the eastern coast of Taiwan. The particular iteration of this catastrophe in the book, the Great Pacific Garbage Gyre, is the cumulation of the sheer amount of waste humanity has and continues to produce.²⁸ The text foregrounds the material conditions of contemporary reality in the Anthropocene age: earthquakes exacerbated from drilling practices, water pollution from petroleum by-products and poor administrative stewardship, and, above all, a surplus of garbage. These depictions of environmental destruction and struggle against inhospitable circumstances shore up the backdrop of the novel and offer, according to noted eco-critic Ursula Le Guin, “[a] new way of telling our new reality, beautiful, entertaining, frightening, preposterous, true.”²⁹

I begin with a brief synopsis of the novel, where multiple narrative arcs weave together or disintegrate completely, leading up to and following the aftermath of the collision of a trash vortex into Taiwan.³⁰ One of the major characters is named Atile’i (阿特烈), an Indigenous

²⁷ Chou, “Claiming the Sacred,” 73. Harvill Secker is an imprint of Penguin Random House; Pantheon too is a part of the massive Bertelsmann media conglomerate, of which Penguin Random House is a major division.

²⁸ Lebreton et al., “Great Pacific Garbage Patch.”

²⁹ The quote can be seen in the paratext of the 2014 Pantheon edition of the novel, as well as on the now-defunct blog of The Greyhawk Agency (光磊國際版權經紀有限公司) through which *Compound Eyes* found international success first before becoming more popular in its domestic literary market. See “Ursula K. Le Guin recommends” and Dan Bloom’s article in *Taipei Times*, “Shooting for the stars.”

³⁰ Written over the course of a three-year period after learning about the Great Pacific Garbage Gyre, this might explain the “convoluted” and at times sprawling nature of the narrative. See the afterword of the original edition in Wu, *Fuyan Ren*, 365-367. In Wu’s novel, a chunk of the Gyre breaks off, carrying Atile’i towards the eastern coast of Taiwan, where the mass collides with the Eastern coast, bringing about destructive hail and contaminating the

youth from the fictional³¹ Polynesian island Wayo Wayo (瓦憂瓦憂) where limited resources contribute to an enforced form of population control, and his status as a second-born child (次子) means he must follow his island's customs of population control and leave his home to die on the sea on his sixteenth birthday. Rather than perish and join the ghosts of other second-born boys from the island, Atile'i finds himself awash on a piece of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. This piece eventually breaks off and becomes a vortex that collides with Taiwan, where Atile'i survives the collision by swimming to the coast and meets the other major character, Alice Shih (阿莉思). Alice is a native Taiwanese (本省人) writer and professor who finds herself in a depressive episode following the death of her Danish partner Thom Jakobson (傑克森) and their son Toto (托托). Indeed, in the first line of the third chapter, Wu introduces her as follows:

"Alice Shih got up early one morning and decided to kill herself."³² She does not commit suicide, however, as various situations prevent her from doing so: seismic activity leads to the destruction of the home her and Thom built together, the discovery and eventual care given to a

Eastern shore near Haven, which is Sterk's choice for translating the original H 縣, both of which refer to Hualien County 花蓮縣. This collision occurs roughly in the middle of the novel, in chapter 12.

³¹ In another interview with Mary Woodbury for the eco-fiction blog *Dragonfly.eco*, Wu states that the inspiration for the island culture came from ethnographic research which included materials regarding Lanyu (蘭嶼, also referred to as Orchid) Island and the indigenous people living there, often referred to as the Tao (達悟) or Yami (雅美) people. See Woodbury, "The Man with Compound Eyes". In the context of the overt ecocritical tone of *Compound Eyes*, it is curious to note that Lanyu Island have their own history of environmental protest against institutional development. While the fictional Wayo Wayo island is obliterated in a nuclear explosion initiated by an unnamed military flotilla operating in the ocean in the final chapter of the novel, the real Lanyu Island was the site of a major protest against nuclear waste storage as managed by the monopolistic Taiwan Power Company in 2002. "During the KMT era, about 40 per cent of [radioactive] waste was stored on site at the three nuclear powerplants [the first was built in Chinshan, Taipei County, 1961; the second also in Taipei County, Wanli in 1974; the third in Hengchun in Pingtung County in 1978]. Some 97,000 barrels of the waste [~15 million litres] were also shipped to the remote island of Lanyu (Orchid Island), off the south-east coast of Taiwan and home of the Yami aboriginal tribe, who were hardly keen about this decision but powerless to stop it. In 2002, however, the government [, facing pressure from organized protests,] announced plans to remove the nuclear waste from Lanyu. The problem was where to put it." Williams and Chang, *Taiwan's Environmental Struggle*, 72. Following the Fukushima nuclear incident in 2011, the management of nuclear waste became a renewed concern. However, as of writing, the waste remains on the island. See Freschi, "Taiwan's Nuclear Dilemma."

³² Wu trans. Sterk, *Compound Eyes*, 16. In the original: 《阿莉思一早起來，決定自殺》26.

stray cat with heterochromia which she names Ohiyo, the collision with the trash vortex and the development of her relationship with Atilé'i through the rest of the novel, along with her desire to uncover the mystery of what happened to her husband and child all intervene in her plans to kill herself. In the context of this chapter, however, I want to foreground that Atilé'i never meets any of the other characters in Taiwan, his experience of other humans while on the foreign island are limited to his contact with Alice.

Other significant characters include the Bunun (布農族) jack-of-all-trades Dahu (達赫), and Hafay (哈凡), the Pangcah (阿美族) sex-worker-turned-inn-owner neighbouring Alice's home, both of whom interact and support each other and Alice (along with her psychological state) throughout the course of the novel. Minor characters include Detleft Boldt (薄達夫, the German drilling specialist who had travelled to Taiwan thirty years prior in order to participate in a tunnel-boring project in Eastern Taiwan), Sara Amundsen (沙拉, the Norwegian marine biologist who accompanies and develops an intimate relationship with Detlef as they travel around Taiwan post-collision) and her father (阿蒙森, a well-regarded architect-turned-fisherman-turned-environmental activist), among many others who appear in-text to serve as necessary context. Their stories are augmented by flashbacks to memories of the past, by expository news-reports, by nested stories within the text. There is also the titular figure, to whom I will refer to as the FYR; a literary device that personifies the possibility of change in perspective and appears across individual narratives in the text.³³

³³ In a video interview with Yang Zhao 樣照 following the release of the novel, Wu agrees with the notion that the figure represents the hope that individuals can consider world issues from multiple perspectives, and that this acknowledgement of multiple insights can change our thinking and decision-making processes. See "Yangguang shufang: Wu Mingyi tan *Fuyan Ren*," from 15:47-18:55.

In refusing a chronological linearity and instead travelling between multiple concurrent narrative lines, *Compound Eyes* explores characters' partial histories while situating their beliefs and notions of humanity's impact on nature. These explorations of history are framed through the need for environmental stewardship along with exploring structures of knowledge, represented through particular styles and characters: poetic or literary (Alice), scientific (Detlef, Sara) and local/situated (Atile'i, Hafay, Dahu). By the end of the novel, all these narratives intersect in one way or another through Alice. This veritable surplus of styles, narratives, and themes has resulted in an equally diverse set of scholastic interpretations and critiques, to which this chapter now turns to.

2.

In the context of English-language ecocriticism, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the pervasive influence of Timothy Morton and the impact of his “ecological thinking.” Morton’s writing, along with work of other eco-critics like Christopher Hitt, Ursula Le Guin and Lawrence Buell, has had a profound impact on scholastic consideration of the natural world, and Morton’s bombastic style in particular³⁴ has resonated with scholars attempting to interpret the extended and complex nature of climate catastrophe. Particularly in the case of *Compound Eyes*, Morton’s conceptualization of *hyperobjects* appears repeatedly; I would like to offer an interpretation of

³⁴ To raise two of many examples of Morton’s *tone*: “Being a person means never being sure that you’re one. In an age of ecology without Nature, we would treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas about what counts as people. Think *Blade Runner* or *Frankenstein*: the ethics of the ecological thought is to regard beings as people even when they aren’t people. Ancient animisms treat beings as people, without a concept of Nature. Perhaps I’m aiming for an upgraded version of animism. (I’m also aiming for another good excuse to write about my favorite film, *Blade Runner*.)” Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 8; “On the terrain of media and the sociopolitical realm, the phrase climate change has been such a failure that one is tempted to see the term itself as a kind of denial, a reaction to the radical trauma of unprecedented global warming. That the terms are presented as choices rather than as a package is a symptom of this failure, since logically it is correct to say “climate change as a result of global warming,” where “climate change” is just a compression of a more detailed phrase, a metonymy. If this is not the case, then climate change as a substitute for global warming is like “cultural change” as a substitute for Renaissance, or “change in living conditions” as a substitute for Holocaust.” Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 8.

his concept briefly. It would seem that a *hyperobject* is a categorical catch-all; it refers to something that cannot be understood as a whole, but rather as a series of discreet but mutually complicating instances. Global heating, capitalism, nuclear radiation, algorithms; all of these can be seen as *hyperobjects*, ambiguous “wholes” made up of “fragments.” I see Morton and other eco-critics grappling with and modifying Edmund Burke’s articulation of “the sublime” in the context of ecology and nature.³⁵ Morton’s formulation of *hyperobjects* can be seen as one brook out of many stemming from the river of this kind of aesthetic thinking.³⁶

Several scholars consider Morton’s line of thinking useful in their interpretations of *Compound Eyes*.³⁷ Others have considered the text through postcolonial lenses or a combination of the two.³⁸ There are others who do not engage in the sublime at all.³⁹ There is, however, one

³⁵ “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. *In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.* Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect.” Burke and Boulton, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 57 with added emphasis. Here I see the sublime as the collapse of the tension between public and private; the internal evaporates so that the external can occupy it, which would render the idea of a productive tension, the overarching goal of this project, inert. As such, I do not see it beneficial to utilize this line of thinking in the context of *Compound Eyes*.

³⁶ See Hitt, “Towards an Ecological Sublime” and Bilbro, “Sublime Failure”. My engagement with the term strictly refers to the ecological variant where the distinction between self and nature collapses, and as a result, is very different from the usage of the term commonly associated with discussions of Chinese literature and film as seen in Wang Ban’s monograph *The Sublime Figure of History*.

³⁷ Peter Huang’s (黄逸民) “Posthumanist Ecocriticism” provides a primer to several posthumanist and ecological thinkers, including Morton, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, before providing a brief reading of the text. Prystash’s “Speculative Realism” provides a comparative analysis utilizing the two aforementioned “traditions” through the novel. his observation is shared among other anglophone scholars like Rose Hsiu-li Juan, Serena Shiuhhuah Chou, and Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai.

³⁸ Chou’s “Claiming the Sacred” questions cosmopolitan idealization of eco-critical works like Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* and Wu’s *Compound Eyes*, finding the later to occupy “an ambiguous space between the colonial text, which defines for non-indigenous Taiwanese readers dominant modes of representing indigenous culture, and the postcolonial, which shapes Western perception of authentic Taiwanese experience of the peripheral,” 81-82. This position is built on the argument developed in her earlier article, “Worlding of Environmental Literature,” which she exclusively analyzes *Compound Eyes*. Chang’s “The Role of the Ecological Other” synthesizes Morton’s conception of environmental literature along through a post-colonial framework to discuss the Wu Ming-yi’s works in comparison to South African writer J.M. Coetzee.

³⁹ Wang Rong’s 王荣 article “The Ecological Concern in Marine Science Fiction Across the Taiwan Straits” takes a comparative approach to mainland author Chen Qiufan 陈楸帆’s *The Waste Tide* and Wu’s *Compound Eyes*. Liu Jianhua 刘建华 and Zhu Shuangyi’s 朱双一 article “Sea and Land: Taiwan Marine Writing in an Integrated

piece of scholarship that attempts to address all of these frameworks and more, to which I now turn to.

In his article “The Apotheosis of Montage: The Videomosaic Gaze of *The Man with Compound Eyes* as Postmodern Ecological Sublime”, Sterk argues that the novel, “[...] which begins with limited, seemingly unrelated perspectives and narratives and ends by incorporating them into a larger whole, [tests] the reader's ability to reframe and recontextualize ecologically.”⁴⁰ One might push Sterk’s reading further and argue that the novel tests not only the reader’s ability, but also the author himself, as seen with the various less-than-subtle cameos of the author as a “cynical” and “misanthropic” character interspersed throughout the text.⁴¹ One might begin to question whether these literary cameos, including a meta-textual reference to Wu’s short story of the same name published in an earlier collection of short stories⁴², reflect the Sisyphean task of attempting to write compelling literature in the deeply compromised age of the Anthropocene.⁴³

Sterk continues:

Ecological Whole” argues for understanding *Compound Eyes* as an attempt at shifting our understanding of the logic and histories of genres like Marine literature, as well as our total understanding of nature as an interconnected and integrated whole through discussions of maritime colonialism. Xu Rui-Hong’s 徐瑞鴻 “Practicing and Looking: Visual Culture and the Way of Looking in Ming-Yi Wu’s Novel” overviews discussions surrounding “vision” (視覺, the implicit meaning here being the biological sense of sight) and “observation” (觀看, more philosophical; who can look at what and in what fashion).

⁴⁰ Sterk, “Videomosaic Gaze,” 185.

⁴¹ In the 2011 original, this character is only referred to as M (see pages 70, 92-93, 98, 211, 343-344) while in Sterk’s translation the figure is more clearly rendered as Ming (see pages 53, 72-73, 76, 173, 291). This character is referred to as knowledgeable regarding butterflies and their life cycles, a clear reference to Wu’s previous essays and monographs on this particular order of insects. Cf. n72.

⁴² Wu trans. Sterk, *Compound Eyes*, 291. In the 2011 original, 344. Cf. Wu Ming-yi, “Fuyan Ren”, 186-208. A discussion of the short story that shares a title with the novel can be found in Liou, “Ambivalence toward Mythic and Modern,” 114-121. The short story “Fuyan Ren” was originally published in *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* (中外文學) in 2002 before appearing again the collection of short stories entitled *Tiger God* (虎爺) published in 2003.

⁴³ “... another form of resistance, a scalar one, that the Anthropocene presents to the techniques that are most closely identified with the novel: its essence consists of phenomena that were long ago expelled from the territory of the novel – forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space.” Ghosh, *Great Derangement*, 63.

Instead of all-powerful human beings constructing an all-encompassing context for nature, turning all of nature into a park or a mine, *nature remains for Wu the larger context for human activity*. Nature is no longer simply the object world, manipulated by humans, it is also subjective. A human encounter with anything in nature is therefore intersubjective. The [FYR], who symbolizes the subjectivity of nature as a whole, can therefore be described as a hypersubject. Hypersubjectivity includes intersubjectivity (the relation between, for instance, a man looking up at a cloud and the cloud that is gazing back at him), as well as a leap to a higher ('hyper') level of analysis, an ecosystemic level at which all subjects are looking at one another at once in a sort of holistic gaze that does not cancel out the gazes of individuals (188, emphasis added).

Sterk is careful to cite but steer clear of Morton's theory of *Hyperobjects*, differentiating his use of hypersubjectivity from Morton's by highlighting Wu's own experience with video editing along with close readings from *Compound Eyes*. Sterk describes a particular scene in the last act of the novel, where the sperm whales (avatars of all the second-born children from Wayo Wayo who have died at sea), end up being stranded on a beach following a nuclear explosion that wipes out their island. Sterk writes:

But the most striking example of a mammalian gaze in the novel is the gaze of the sperm whales that commit collective suicide on a beach in Chile. [...] Everyone on the beach where the whales hurl themselves is struck by the sad gazes in their eyes, until the whales die, rot, and explode. Rather than sublime, the spectacle of hundreds of exploding sperm whales seems aesthetically excessive, self-consciously "overwrought" (202).

He provides a brief comparative example of the human-cetacean gaze from the work of another noted Taiwanese nature writer Liu Kexiang (劉克襄) immediately following the above quotation

to draw parallels between the two, before summarizing Wu's depiction as somewhat "ridiculous" (203). I would like to question this assumption briefly. Attitudes towards specific aspects of our natural environment (cetaceans or whales, for example) are malleable and dependent on the quantity and quality of information we receive about them.⁴⁴ *Compound Eyes* depiction seems less ridiculous in the context of more than 300 endangered cetacean corpses ending up in Chile, which occurred in 2015,⁴⁵ or the increasing frequency of mass whale strandings, like the 2017 event in New Zealand.⁴⁶ Wu's intense depiction of pathos for cetacean stranding too seems less ridiculous than the early 20th century European custom of posing, "for group or individual photos on top of dead sperm and other whales," when whales were seen as ungodly beasts, and their beached corpses were undeserving of any kind of sympathetic response except for posing on top of their bodies.⁴⁷ After all, the text itself acknowledges the futility of overwrought emotions, when no matter how many tears are shed on the beach following the death of the stranded whales, "the concentration of salt in the sea would not thereby increase, not in the least."⁴⁸

Compound Eyes shows us nonlinear perspectives across time and space but linked through modernity's deluge of waste, mediated through technology and spectacle and situated

⁴⁴ "One of the central questions ecocritics ask, then, is what normative aesthetic (or aesthetics) best represents the human place in the world? The aesthetic that forms us will profoundly alter the kinds of actions we imagine as possible and desirable. As Lawrence Buell states, 'aesthetics can become a decisive force for or against environmental change.'" Bilbro, "Sublime Failure," 133.

⁴⁵ Vergara, "Massive Stranding". Obviously, there was no "overwrought" display of cetacean self-harm at this particular event, but I find it important to note the parallels between "real life" and "fiction" when they intersect in environmental contexts.

⁴⁶ See New Zealand's Department of Conservation's post on the largest (to date) pilot whale stranding in 2017: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/issues/whale-stranding-at-farewell-spit/>

⁴⁷ Bearzi et al. 2010, "Perception of a cetacean mass stranding in Italy", 650. In addition to providing a history of the mutable nature and depictions of whales, the authors' study also finds that a majority Italian adult witnesses to a cetacean stranding believed anthropogenic factors to cause the event in question, and expressed empathy towards the plight of the whales, which they show has not always been the case in European history. This is also a great counterexample to anyone who tries to make categorical and unsubstantiated judgements regarding Millennial Selfie Culture.

⁴⁸ Wu trans. Sterk, *Compound Eyes*, 300. In the 2011 original: 《海水的鹽分，並沒有因此增添一點》360.

within environmental contexts. In Sterk's reading, this forms the "videomosaic" gaze, which is doubly represented by the FYR, a spiritual being who appears within Alice's literary creation that metastasizes during the events of the novel. On the point of Alice, however, Sterk writes: "Alice would appear to be a textbook schizophrenic. But by the time she has finished writing 'The Man with the Compound Eyes' and *The Man With the Compound Eyes*, she has gotten her act together." (216). It is not entirely clear whether Sterk is referring to Jameson's conceptualization of schizophrenia (itself drawn from thinkers such as Lacan, Deleuze & Guattari) or to the usage commonly associated with psychiatry. Still, I find the moralistic bent in "getting one's act together" curious. I will return to this point in the close reading later, but this reduction of Alice's experience to a particular label that is entangled in multiple discourses, between psychiatry and capitalism, is where I depart from Sterk's analysis altogether.

3.

To restate: the concept of the ecological sublime appears to be a productive term for eco- and literary critics: the term encapsulates the moment of collapse between private self/interiority (私) and nature/exteriority (公) as a subject/object or self/other binary. Morton's formulation, drawing from this aesthetic/philosophical well, proposes a poetic mode of being in which to understand phenomena such as climate catastrophe; his writing channels the *astonishment* of the sublime to stress the interconnected reality individuals exist in, to bring about a change in how people perceive themselves in their environment. In the context of *Compound Eyes*, however, Morton's thinking cannot account for the multiple histories and types of labour involved in the ecological catastrophe and its effects on the characters. By seeking to overthrow anthropocentric thinking by considering all individuals and agents as objects on equal footing, this line of thinking effectively occludes the real histories, full of experiments and failures, that has

contributed to contemporary circumstances and the structures of knowledge that we use to understand them. It is its own kind of anthropocentrism, positing that human beings can be free from asymmetrical relationships and concrete differences; a utopian ideal.

Compound Eyes is not a utopian work of fiction. It is a complex, multi-layered story that foregrounds not only speculative consequences of imperialist, capital-driven expansion and extraction, but also the struggles and transformations of its characters as they open up to one another and deepen their relationships to each other and themselves. There should be another theoretical perspective more suitable in allowing for these aspects to stand in contrast to existing scholarship, one that highlights the work involved in surviving at the end of the world.

分子之红 // *Molecular Red*

I argue that another theoretical framework, one which stresses “designing integrated solutions on a collaborative basis” through a labour perspective, might be more productive in the Anthropocene and the works produced within it.⁴⁹ The theoretical context that McKenzie Wark constructs in *Molecular Red* is one where “the collapse of the Soviet system merely prefigures the collapse of the American one. While the ruins of the first are real and poignant, the ruins of the latter have not quite been apprehended for what they are” (xii-xiii). To this end, she engages the writings of Russian thinkers like Alexander Bogdanov and Andrei Platonov along with American scholars such as Donna Haraway and Kim Stanley Robinson for the sake of:

... reorienting [...] critical thought away from certain dominating tendencies: rather than a speculative realism in philosophy, *a speculative fiction that makes no claims to be a spokesmodel for the object world, let alone the absolute*; rather than an obsession with all-powerful capital and the phantasm of a pure redeeming communism, *a working*

⁴⁹ Wark, *Molecular Red*, xvi.

knowledge of the ways labour and nature confront and confuse each other (xxi, emphasis added).

Put in other words, Wark's project seeks to find points of resonance between early 20th-century Russian thinkers and those following the boom of post-Cold War Californian university funding. I see Wark delineating her perspective away from scholars like Morton and their distaste for correlationism, instead choosing to show science not as some absolute truth, but rather as a testable method to understand the world. Wark mobilizes these thinkers as a way of attending to the pressing need of living in the times of multiplying climate catastrophes.

In the following subsection, I overview the work and highlight key terms and concepts that Wark builds from the first half of her book on Platonov and Bogdanov, charting a course from early 20th century Russia and the power struggles of the Bolsheviks before commuting back to early 21st century Taiwan and *Compound Eyes* itself. Wark's project (and the thinkers engaged within it) attends to modes of living and the understanding of structures of knowledge, attempting to make do with partial frames of experience and the conditions of the present moment in order to build forward to a version of the future. I see this goal as resonating with *Compound Eyes* didactic approach to memory, perception, and the environment; Wu's novel, in my opinion, has more similarities with the struggles faced by early 20th century Russian revolutionaries attempting to navigate extreme environmental constraints and failed developmental projects than differences. By engaging with the work and the two Russian thinkers, I hope to demonstrate how this conjunction between writers finds a productive theoretical base in which to read the speculative fiction of *Compound Eyes*.

Alexander Bogdanov [1873-1928] was Bolshevik cultural theorist, physician, and might also be known as the “founder of Soviet SF [science fiction].”⁵⁰ While seen historically as a Russian thinker⁵¹ and practicing a kind of formalistic thinking between scientific study and Marxism, he is not a Russian Formalist. His liminal position between various distinct areas like Marxism, medical science, and ending up on Vladimir Lenin’s wrong side might explain his lack of visibility in discussions of systems theory, science and technology studies (STS) and epistemological discussions of science.⁵² One of Wark’s first recuperations is in bringing forth Bogdanov’s phrasing of “nature”: “Nature is [...] a category without a content. It means simply *that which labour encounters*” (4). Remember that Sterk writes that Wu sees nature in a similar light: “[...] nature remains for Wu the larger context for human activity.”⁵³

One of Bogdanov’s major philosophical works was *Empirio-monism* (eventually condensed into another work titled *The Philosophy of Living Experience*), which draws on the influence of positivist thinkers such as Ernst Mach (1838-1916), which further explores the relationship between structures of knowledge and sensory experience. Within Mach’s conception of empiro-criticism, a framework of thought in physics that stresses relativity and warns against understanding anything as absolute, Bogdanov establishes a productive mode of thinking for his own theories against the “would-be materialism of [Fredrich] Engels and [Georgi] Plekhanov” (6). While Wark goes on to provide readings of Bogdanov’s utopian works of science fiction (*Red Star* and *Engineer Menni*) in order to demonstrate the revolutionary’s awareness of

⁵⁰ Gerould, “Bogdanov,” 271.

⁵¹ Bogdanov was born Alexander Malinovsky in Sokółka, Grodno Governorate in modern day Poland, which at the time was part of the Russian Empire. The name Bogdanov comes from his wife’s middle name and was used after Bogdanov joined the Social-Democratic movement before becoming fast (but not lasting) friends with Lenin and helping found the Bolshevik fraction.

⁵² Wark, *Molecular Red*, xvii-xviii. His writings have been brought to bear in other contexts however: The online resource maintained by Brill contains a digital index to current research in regard to his writings, and can be accessed at <https://bogdanovlibrary.org/current-research/>

⁵³ Sterk, “Videomosaic Gaze,” 188.

molecular flows and “metabolic rifts” that occur when terraforming nature, it is *The Philosophy of Living Experience*, informed by Machian thought, that gives readers the tools to understand Bogdanov’s theoretical framework.

From his labour-based perspective, Bogdanov’s writing stresses the impossibility of an absolute and eternal philosophical truth because truth or knowledge is always cobbled together through collective experience predicated by a historical moment. Wark writes: “Proletarian class experience calls for the integration of forms of specialized knowledge, just as it integrates tasks in the labour process. More and more of life can then be subject to scientific scrutiny. The task of today’s thought is *to integrate the knowledge of sciences and social sciences that expresses the whole of the experience of the progressive class forces of the moment.*” (15, emphasis added) This idea of substitution, where one form can be used to understand another, is at the heart of Bogdanov’s idea of *tektology*:

Labor causality and substitution are two versions of the same proposition. No substitution is forbidden in advance. Each production of a causal series by labor points to other possible causal series. Bogdanov, who was not a particularly poetic writer, nevertheless advocates a poetics of knowledge formation. This will become his *tektology*, which is at heart a poetics of the experimental substitution of one relation for another which in turn has to be tested in practice. Not all substitutions will work. For instance, there is a limit to how much *metabolism* will explain about agricultural chemistry or the totality of collective labour (27-28).

There are several terms within Bogdanov’s *tektology*, a kind of early precursors to cybernetics and systems theory which Wark casts as a kind of formalistic thinking with its own suite of terms: “environment, conjunction, linkage, ingression, disingression, boundary, crisis,

selection, equilibrium and degression” (49): Conjunction breaches boundaries between concepts⁵⁴, “Cooking is a conjunction of fire and water,” linkage is the development of connections between systems in the environment which leads to ingression; their development. Disingression is where an ingressed system fails, and the counter-positioning of this decay is referred to as equilibrium, while a crisis is the appearance of instability between systems. Degressive systems are like the rotting fruit or old corpses in the garden of systems, “often a matter of a waste product externalized”; egressive systems have protocols or “leadership” in their ordering and execution of sub-systems (55-56). Applied towards the setting of *Compound Eyes*: the environment is Taiwan, spread across time and indexed through interconnected instances and narratives. Conjunction is a process of interaction between established agents/proper nouns within the story. Boundaries exist between agents but exist at multiple levels without hierarchical subordination; they serve to delineate proper nouns but are frequently breached. They can be seen in their negation through the breaching of Taiwan/Alice/Idealized Modernity/The Past and Garbage Vortex/Atile’i/Idealized Premodernity/The Present boundaries, for example. Linkage is how those proper nouns interact, with the creation of new systems being referred to as ingression. When linkage no longer produces changes in a productive mode but rather a paralyzing one, it is referred to as disingression. The crisis occurs when the coast of Taiwan becomes disingressed following the collision of the plastic vortex (which itself is a degressed system, the waste of modernity) – equilibrium is an *ideal* for achieving a stabilization between disingressive systems. In my reading, Wu and Bogdanov share a key resonance point in the ideal

⁵⁴ Despite the divide in time/place/method/ideology, Morton comes up with a similar formulation in the idea of a *mesh*, cf. Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 83-85. Curiously, this aspect of Morton’s formulation does not figure into other scholastic formulations in considering *Compound Eyes*.

of the equilibrium, an unrealizable concept that can only be struggled for as opposed to achieved, and the emotional register that tempers their writing as a result.

Andrei Platonov (1899-1951) is another writer mobilized by Wark, who shares many similarities to Bogdanov, due in no small part to Platonov taking part in proletariat culture movements and writing initiatives created under Bogdanov's directives as part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus.⁵⁵ Works of Platonov, such as *Chevengur* or *Dzhan*, capture a kind of melancholy over the power of communism in much the same way that critics see Wu's *Compound Eyes* as addressing the failures of capitalism. In Wark's discussion, she first notes the key point of similarity between the two Russian thinkers and moves to read them together in a productive fashion. She writes: "[Platonov's] key works can be read as pressing even further the pessimistic note in Bogdanov: the impossibility of designing a *dynamic equilibrium* of human and natural processes. His is a writing that always returns to the entropic, to the residues that can't be recycled into a molar narrative line."⁵⁶ Rephrased, Platonov is attuned to the struggles of minor perspectives that deviate away from idealized narratives.

Wark's analysis zeros in on Platonov's works of fiction, which trace the happenings of sub-proletarian characters; one of the critical insights Wark develops from her readings of Platanov's oeuvre is the *secondary idea*. Wark: "No matter how spiritual [the primary idea of] the communist leap of faith is, it only lives on in people's bodies, and bodies have wants. The secondary idea preserves against the melancholy that attends the first ... The secondary idea does

⁵⁵ "Andrey Platonov is now known as one of the best and most paradoxical chroniclers of the Russian Revolution and postrevolutionary society, with works such as *Chevengur*, which tells the story of Soviet Russia during the Civil War, *The Foundation Pit*, which treats the construction of the new Soviet society, and *Happy Moscow*, which thematizes the dream of happiness in modern civilization," Lane, *Andrey Platonov*, 2. Platonov has not been engaged with to the same degree of which Bogdanov has in anglophone scholarship, probably due to the lack of extant works and few translations into English. Bora Chung's "Cost of Electrified Utopia" provides a brief overview of some of Platonov's stylistic features in his depictions of sub-proletariat life.

⁵⁶ Wark, *Molecular Red*, 66.

not dream backwards from the absolute time of a future horizon. It works outwards, from a particular present situation, looking for lines out of cramped spaces” (81). In Wark’s readings, Platonov’s thinking champions the idea that being *comrades* is a choice our species-kind can make, but we are fundamentally animals with particular ideals and goals bounded within structures of skin and bone that need to have basic needs of survival met. Rather than turn nihilistic at the gulf of difference between the present and an idealized future, the *secondary idea* acts as a mediating device that can channel focus and attention in a present moment into the motivation required for continuing onwards. Throughout her reading, Wark finds other resonances in an early precursor to the agential realism of Karen Barad in Platonov’s definition (or rather, organization) of technology and prescient insights into the complex interplay between human activity and the environments they take place in (104-105).

Writing in a way which addresses the “Anthropocene blues,” a term that Robin Tsai uses to describe a melancholic mood found in many the characters in *Compound Eyes* share,⁵⁷ Wark reads Platonov as follows:

Sadness is the mood by which the divorce between the sensation of the world [reality] and the idea of it [expectation] is felt and thought. This rift can be ignored, and thought can go its own way, leaping fatally into the void. Or, **grief can be shared**. The *comrades* are the ones with which we share life’s task of **shoring up its impossible relations to a recalcitrant world**. All we can share are the same travails, and **we are only comrades when we share all of them** (105-106, italics in original with emphasis added).

The primary idea that results from attending to this rift is inherently personal and coloured by experience: the *secondary idea* is much more along the lines of how an engineer would go about

⁵⁷ Tsai, “Speculating Extinction,” 870.

fixing a design problem. Wark: “Living things are each other’s comrades, even in their struggles against each other. Our species-being is lost from shared life when we make a fetish of a particular idea, a particular love, or a particular labor” (106-107).

As I have done for Bogdanov, so too, for Platonov; I propose to reposition the theory extracted from Platonov in the context of *Compound Eyes*. Attention must be paid to the residual aspects of experience, the things which do not easily subsume into grander narratives. The idea of trash, both material and imaginary, sticks and collects to the story not synecdochally, I argue, but realistically. Trash in *Compound Eyes* is a presentation of the sheer deluge of plastic objects and waste in our contemporary lives. Discarded objects like binoculars, tubing and plastic tablecloths in *Compound Eyes* do not “disappear” (不可能消化) when lost or recycled. Garbage cling to us and remains implicated in a contemporary moment and uncaring of any sort of theoretical orientation that could explain it.⁵⁸ Ideals are necessary, but they are, by design, tragic; *secondary ideas* prevent a melancholic mode from developing into a nihilistic version. Comrades are the individuals with whom one shares the burden of participating in a catastrophic world, agents in relationships across race, gender, class, or species. These aspects provide the depth of character presented within *Compound Eyes*; in the face of climate catastrophe, the development

⁵⁸ “Ali picked up a section of hard plastic tubing that had probably floated around in the ocean for decades and said, ‘We can process glass bottles easily, but nobody knows what to do about these older plastic tubes. You know what? The past few years the government’s poured tons of funding into reducing the amount of garbage in the vortex, but it’s actually a scam. Think about it. Where is the trash supposed to be buried after it’s been cleaned up? All the incinerators, landfills and advanced trash-sorting facilities on the island wouldn’t have enough capacity to digest it all. You think Ilan and Taipei will welcome all the garbage out of the goodness of their hearts? Dammit! Japan and China have been passing the buck, but garbage is fair, and now the ocean currents have broken the vortex up and everyone’s getting [their share].’” Wu trans. Sterk, *Compound Eyes*, 156. In the original: 《阿力隨手拿起地上一根可能漂流了數十年的硬塑膠管，說：「其他玻璃瓶什麼的還好處理，但這些早年做的硬塑膠管根本不知道該怎麼辦。你知道嗎？前幾年政府雖然投入大量經費削減垃圾渦流的垃圾，但其實是個幌子。為什麼呢？因為垃圾清除后要埋在哪裏？整個島的焚化廠、掩埋廠，和比較先進的分解廠，根本不可能消化這些垃圾。你以為宜蘭、臺北會那麼大方接受這些垃圾嗎？他媽的。日本跟中國已經在踢皮球了，不過垃圾很公平，現在洋流已經把垃圾渦流打碎，大家都會收到屬於自己的那一份。」》190-191. Sterk chooses to translate 公平 as “fair,” but it might also be read as “impartial” 公道. Another way of translating the sentence might be: “Trash does not play favourites” (垃圾不偏私).

of relationships between agents is the central bulwark against a total nihilistic disavowal of life. Fetishization, defined here as the overinvestment of attention and focus that leads to reliance on / inability to function without its object of desire, results in the disintegration of the sole support structure in the face of dire external circumstances. The subtle and nuanced friendship that develops between Detlef and Sara along with Dahu and Hafay are the most persuasive examples of this in the work.⁵⁹ That this cohort's final appearance in the novel is the realization that the road they are traveling on has disappeared is, in my reading, not some reckoning with the sublime but rather the acknowledgment that there is no escape from their environment; they remain together in the face of a crumbling human world.⁶⁰

Allow me to overview the theoretical tools that we have extracted thus far: From Bogdanov, we have the flexible concept of *nature*, the rejection of any form of conceptual eternity or absolute knowledge, the (primary) idea of uniting fields of study together through metaphorical substitution (*tektology*) and the formalist terms in which to analyze with; From Platonov, we have the *secondary idea* as a mitigating measure to the primary, the hope of surviving a reality with *comrades*, along with an awareness to *fetishization*. The linkage between the two writers reinforces the theme of an impossible equilibrium: perfect harmony can never be achieved, but one must struggle to make living possible for all comrades in spite of this. There is, of course, much more within *Molecular Red*, but short of reproducing the work in full, there is no ideal way to bracket off the rest of the work as Wark hybridizes ideas from the Russian

⁵⁹ "The relationship between Hafay and Dahu seemed like what was between [Sara] and Detlef, just not exactly. It was like an article without an explicit thesis." Ibid., 241. In the original: 《哈凡跟達赫比較像她和薄達夫之間的關係，不過不太像，很像是一篇沒有顯題化的論文。》288

⁶⁰ "Dahu, Hafay, Umav, Anu [Dahu's uncle], Detlef, and Sara all got out of the cars and stood at the edge of the road that led into the sea, speechless. And the resolute Pacific kept delivering wave after distant wave." Ibid., 294. In the original: 《達赫、哈凡、鄔瑪芙、阿怒、薄達夫和莎拉都走下車來，他們站在這條通往海的公路前面，什麼話也說不出來，而大洋仍堅定地從遠方，送來一波一波的海浪。》348-349.

writers to scholars dealing with similar concepts clustered around late 20th century California. We do, however, have enough to begin a reading at least; this chapter would like to ask the reader to allow further citations as needed as it turns to a close reading of *Compound Eyes*, which pays particular attention to the character of Alice and her interiority.

槩括《複眼人》// Rereading *Compound Eyes*

以住宅為內移 // Building a House as (Dis)Ingression

Alice and her home, the dwelling that is referred to as The Sea House⁶¹, are metaphorical counterparts to one another. This conjunction is first foregrounded when the reader encounters Alice, having recently tendered her resignation to her academic position at the local university in Haven. She considers the futures of her students as she leaves her career:

These kids imagined they were on the way to some mysterious destination, but there really wasn't anything where they were going, just an empty space like a basement, a place heaped with junk. She tried to keep sympathy in her eyes, to let her students think that she was still listening and interested in what they had to say. But Alice was just a shell through which air was blowing, all words like stones being tossed into an empty house that didn't even have windows.⁶²

This is the first instance of a metaphorical substitution of Alice for a house, a theme that repeatedly continues throughout the text. The text portrays her situation as an outer form (軀殼) providing minimal resistance or function; the prospective paths of her students mirror this perspective as they also lead to trash and waste. It would seem that all roads lead to ruin.

⁶¹ 《海上住宅》 in the original.

⁶² 17. In the original: 《這些孩子還以為他們的生命正要走進什麼神秘的地方，但其實那裏頭什麼都沒有，不過是個空空的，堆放雜物的地下屋而已。她盡量讓自己的眼神露出最後一絲溫暖的餘光，讓他們以為她在聽他們說話，對他們仍深感興趣。對阿莉思來說，現在空氣只是進進出出這個軀殼，所有的話語就像石子丟進連窗子都沒有的空房子裏。》27.

She travels home and observes scattered memories of Thom and Toto between remarks on the unsightly nature of highways as a convenience to connect travellers to weekend getaways. As she returns home, seemingly resigned to ending her life, a realization prevents her from continuing: “It would just be too cruel to leave the poor fish [in her aquarium] to wait, bewildered, helpless and speechless, for death once she died first.”⁶³ This marks another leitmotif of the text, the repeated and minor intervention of other agents in Alice’s self-destructive plans. In order to ensure a better life for the fish, she leaves and enlists the help of an interested student who happily accepts a free aquarium, and after returning and giving the fish away, Alice retires to Toto’s former room to ruminate on her circumstances. Her actions, however, have already intervened at the level of ideation, her suicide matters less in light of securing continued existence for something else.⁶⁴ That night she survives an earthquake, and the following morning Alice realizes the sea has finally breached the boundary of her home: “[She] found herself standing on a remote island in the midst of an immense ocean, as frothy waves rolled relentlessly across the distance toward the shore.”⁶⁵

One might already have a good sense of the kind of poetic sensibility Wu’s text evokes, but prodded further, one can see a tension beginning to organize in the text. The obvious reading would be to see the development of infrastructure supporting tourism that mars the natural landscape as an external nature being impinged upon by humans’ inner desires. This is further augmented by Alice’s past, the death of her husband and her child whose body was never found, impinging on the present moment of her experience. While these observations may correlate

⁶³ 22. In the original: 《而此刻做最後的巡視時，阿莉思卻發現魚缸還沒有處理。一旦自己先死，魚就這樣莫名其妙，毫無抵抗能力地在那裏無聲無臭地等待死亡未免太可憐了。》033.

⁶⁴ 24, in the original on page 36.

⁶⁵ 26. In the original: 《【……】發現自己彷彿站在一座海上的孤島上，遠方的浪帶著無數細密的泡沫，非常固執地，一道一道朝陸地而來。》38.

(human/private/past and nature/public/present), what I find most interesting is how these tensions are rendered in the construction of her home and the exposition regarding her child and partner.

It might be easy to overlook the importance of Alice's house, as the reader does not learn specifics regarding its construction until the fifth chapter; spliced between other narratives like the literary equivalent of channel-surfing.⁶⁶ Still, examining it further reveals the surprising hollowness and illusory nature set against the sound construction of the dwelling. Crudely put, the once "romantic" and "mischief making" post-grad Alice was in search of adventure and desire to write a successful novel. Through a patchwork of experiences across Scandinavian countries, she meets and falls in love with Thom over the course of three months before they both travel to Taiwan and start a new life together. Beyond what might be read as an equivalent to a particularly obnoxious dating profile, Alice learns very little regarding Thom's background in terms of concrete details.⁶⁷ She too shares little of her past. The two of them form symbiotic stereotypes: the educated book-worm free from the confines of academia ready to transmute experience to literary gold, and the virile and attractive white man in search of adventure; both obfuscating their pasts in search of an ideal present through their relative privileges. This kind of

⁶⁶ The other narratives are extended across time (the first chapter deals with Detlef Boldt and is set thirty years in the past on Taiwan while drilling into a mountain to build a highway) and space (chapters two and four deal Atile'i, the second offering an ethnography of Atile'i's departure from the island and the fourth with his encounter with the spiritual avatars of the other exiled Wayo Wayoan youth and his attempts at surviving on a chunk of the Great Pacific Garbage Gyre). This kind of aesthetic roller-coaster is much more enjoyable to read through as opposed to summarizing or reproducing it in a scholastic fashion.

⁶⁷ "[Thom] had cycled all over Africa. He had navigated a sailboat across the Atlantic and drifted onto some deserted island after the boat broke down. He had trained in Baji-style Kungfu. He had run across the Sahara with an ultramarathon team. And he had participated in an interesting sleep experiment, which revisited the research done at Midnight Cave in Texas in 1972 by revising certain experimental conditions. He had spent six full months thirty meters underground." 46. In the original: 《【……】他曾騎單車環非洲，駕駛無動力帆船橫渡大西洋，其間並曾因船故障而漂流到不知名小島。他還練八極拳，跟過長跑隊伍橫越撒哈拉，並且在幾年前參與了一項有趣的睡眠實驗。那實驗重做了一九七二年德州 Midnight Cave 的洞穴睡眠研究，修正了當時的一些實驗條件。他因此在底三十多公尺的地方，代理整整半年。》61

ridiculous stereotyping even causes its depictions to cringe at their own behaviour.⁶⁸ It is on these ductile caricatures that the Sea House is built upon.

Upon their return to Taiwan, they move into inhospitable living quarters provided by the university Alice now conveniently teaches at. Thom leaps at the opportunity to learn mountain climbing now that he has started to settle on a foreign, mountainous land. His passion for mountain climbing leads him out of Taiwan frequently, leaving Alice to her own devices as she ruminates on living conditions that do not match up to her privileged ideal.⁶⁹ What finally ties him down is Alice's purchase of land of a recently deceased writer that she happened to know⁷⁰; from the memory of their experiences in beholding the architecture of Erik Gunner Asplund (1885-1940) they decide to make their memories material. The construction of the house becomes Alice's *secondary idea*, the thing that keeps her going in the face of the growing tension between ideal and reality:

⁶⁸ "[Alice's] mind would always wander when she talked to [Thom], even recalling lines of poetry [from John Keats' 'Ode to Melancholy']: 'For shade to shade will come too drowsily.' Oh no, Alice thought, this isn't good." 46. In the original: 《她覺得跟他說話時常覺得心不在焉，沒有焦點，甚至會想起一些詩句，「For shadow to shadow will come to drowsily, 糟了，」阿莉思想，「糟了，不妙，糟了。」》62.

⁶⁹ "As the days went by, Alice became more and more anxious that this sexy guy might up and leave her at any time. She wanted to let go of him, but a certain expression of his – melancholy, profound yet innocent – was just so appealing. She almost felt that the rot in this humid residence had seeped into her heart. She did not know what to do." 48. In the original: 《日子一久，阿莉思對這個既性感又像隨時會拋下她一走了之的男人產生嚴重的焦慮感，她一面想放棄他，一面又被他每回出現時滄桑、深邃又天真的眼神引起，幾乎以為自己的心和這間潮濕的宿舍一樣快腐爛掉，不知如何是好。》64. In Platanovian terms, it is clear that Alice is dealing with the consequences of fetishization, doubled in the emotions she experiences and the humid rot from her living conditions.

⁷⁰ Kee, the writer whose land is purchased by Alice following his death, witnesses his wife get taken away by the sea as caused by a tidal wave stemming from a deep sea earthquake from the inside of a public toilet. After two weeks of unsuccessful police investigation, Kee commits suicide by inhaling the smoke of his burning manuscripts. Here we can see that Chekhov's gun has been fired; the act of suicide has been completed by another auxiliary character who serves no function other than providing the literal foundation for the construction of the house. 48-49. In the original on pages 64-66.

Before construction began, Alice pledged all her assets to secure a big loan from the bank. Building the house allowed her to extricate herself from her stuffy, unimaginative academic life and let *her orient herself toward a specific goal*.⁷¹

This specific goal takes visceral shape through the linkage of Thom and Alice, resulting in a new complex within the organization of their lives; the unexpected but ultimately welcomed birth of Alice and Thom's child named Toto.

Wu Ming-yi carefully details the various types of labour and systems of knowledge accessed by Thom and Alice: the former takes advantage of libraries in learning architecture and the local topography while making careful modifications to the original design inspiration, while the later bears their child and manages the development of the garden. The author goes so far as to write himself into the story in the first of several appearances.⁷² This particular aspect might be lost amongst all the other interwoven asynchronous narratives of the chapter, but it only further demonstrates the immensely complex processes on both a material and psychological level, tied together in the figure of Alice's house. It is precisely amongst these various correlations, spread across and implicated in multiple levels of the text, that the ingression of Alice's house takes place upon, and it seems that the reason the overall structure manages to survive until the end of the novel is through the amount of detail given to its physical construction.⁷³

⁷¹ 53 with emphasis added. In the original: 《房子要動工之前，阿莉思動用了自己所有的條件跟銀行貸了一大筆錢。蓋房子這件事使她可以在令人煩悶，且毫無想象力的學術生活中的抽身，讓自己有位為某種目標活著的感受。》70

⁷² “[Alice] had an acquaintance named Ming, a colleague at the university, who had written some literary essays about butterflies. Alice asked him to list species that would be appropriate for a coastal property and teach her how to plant them.” 53. In the original: 《她的同校同事，有一個曾寫過一些蝴蝶散文的小說作者 M，跟他頗為熟識，因此阿莉思請他幫忙列出適合種在海邊的植物清單，並且教她適當的種植方法。》70. Cf. n41.

⁷³ Thom spends several years planning and constructing the house, the process involves a full suite of green technologies, 3D modelling and calculation of erosion rates.

At the moment that Alice awakens on a “remote island,” she experiences not only the “frothy waves” of the sea but also of memory; bubbling, expanding and dissipating against the house. Against her suicidal ideation and the earthquake, the house continues to stand, although, in a reversal of her act of giving away the aquarium, the first floor of Alice’s house now has fish swimming against the tile that she and Thom had laid out. As the boundaries between correlations becomes more porous, Alice no longer regards her decision to end her life as meaningful. Her mental state, the earthquake, and the past all intersect within the location of her dwelling, and it is the combined weight of these theoretical forces that cause her to abandon any vestige of hope or motivation, even in suicide. Amongst all these floating perspectives and experiences which accompany the breaching of the boundary between the outside environment and the internal state of the house, Alice finds a reason to stay alive in the shape of a cat, “like a beating heart,” which becomes her new *secondary idea*:

Suddenly, there was another burst of roaring. Might be an aftershock. Alice’s body had regained the ability to react. She automatically grabbed the box in which the kitten was sleeping, intent on finding a place to hide. Only a few minutes earlier, Alice had still been hoping to die, but now, in the flesh at least, she needed to stay alive.⁷⁴

It is through other agents and stimulation, the cat that she names Ohiyo signifying a tender memory of Toto and the shockwaves that threaten its life, that Alice chooses to stay alive. In effect, the memories and materials that exist within Alice’s house no longer hold their original weight. They are remnants – positive, negative, and every permutation between the two, extended across time and space – of a past system and become the materials for her physical and

⁷⁴ 57. In the original: 《突然間從某處再次傳出一陣隆隆隆隆的巨聲，可能是餘震吧，阿莉思的身體有了對抗的力量，竟反射性地抱起紙箱，想找一個躲避的地方。就在幾分鐘前阿莉思人希望自己最好死去，但此刻，她的身體卻直覺求生了。》75

mental survival. Other characters also have to reckon with their pasts, often routed through their dwellings and meteorological events. Only Alice, however, repeatedly returns to her abode, utilizing and transforming the detritus of her life into new methods of survival.

分散結構而聯合學說 // Degressed Systems and New Linkages

The earthquake reveals the hollow but surprisingly durable construction of Alice and her dwelling, built on the fumes of a honeymoon romance and the mystery of selective histories and made concrete through research and labour. At the moment that the plastic-like nature of this construction is revealed, Alice orients herself towards a new priority in her new cat companion Ohiyo. Through this encounter, Alice reorganizes her priorities; rather than reminiscence on the past, she instead chooses to engage with new systems of knowledge in order to care for her new focus in life, the new member of her home. In the following subsection, I focus on *how* Alice does this by focusing on the period before and after the trash vortex collides with Taiwan.

Following the earthquake and the continued deluge of memories and seawater into her home, “Alice [begins] getting used to things she couldn’t understand coming in with the tide.”⁷⁵ For the sake of her new furry companion, she makes a visit to a veterinarian while questioning her actions along material lines of thinking.⁷⁶ A new kind pattern emerges in the text: memories of the past intrude and Alice turns to specific formations of knowledge and restructures her own method of thinking.⁷⁷ The more Alice begins to consider systems of knowledge and constructs

⁷⁵ 116. In the original: 《阿莉思已經漸漸習慣海潮帶來一些她不能理解的事物。》144.

⁷⁶ “[...] Alice could not understand why on earth she was investing in new ‘property’ for the sake of this tiny living thing when she had obviously spent the past little while getting rid of most of her own possessions [in preparation for suicide.]” 74. In the original: 《而阿莉思也不能理解，明明前一陣子紛紛「處分」了自己大部分的物質財產，現在幹嘛又為了這個小生命開始替牠購置「財產」。》95.

⁷⁷ Alice endeavors to banish the ghost of “productivity” and a learned association to a hyper-critical academic attitude by beginning to write with pen and paper as opposed to a keyboard. The boundary of Alice’s perspective reveals itself when she attempts to buy some hemp-based paper notebooks, and the clerk chides her perspective that is constrained by the contemporary capitalist moment and its occlusion of the historical uses of hemp in the creation

alternate forms of information (poems, drawings, copying field-book entries), “[the more] *it was like her mind contained a forest, a mountain.*”⁷⁸ Here one can see a clear reorganization of elements between internal and external: the process of engaging and reproducing mediated forms of knowledge causes Alice to cultivate a representation of the natural world within her mind. It is through this engagement and reproduction of mediated knowledge that she makes her grief productive, and it is through Ohiyo’s presence in her home that keeps her from committing suicide:

Sometimes Alice would think and think or write and write and end up falling asleep at her desk. At some point Ohiyo would always give herself a shake and spring out the window. [...] Watching through the backdoor window, Alice saw Ohiyo squeeze headlong through a thicket of grass. She didn’t know whether it was a coincidence, but the most solitude she could stand before getting suicidal was two or three hours, and just when Alice’s thoughts tended in that direction Ohiyo would make a nimble entrance. [The cat’s] meowing was just the thing to ward off Alice’s thoughts of leaving the world, as if someone had deliberately bolted the invisible gate that led toward the land of death.⁷⁹

of paper: “Maybe she’d fallen into a kind of intellectual trap.” 117-118. In the original: 《【……】也許是自己陷入了這樣「用比較方法的」的思維。》147.

⁷⁸ 119, emphasis added. In the original: 《【……】就放佛她腦袋裡有一座森林，有一座山。》148.

⁷⁹ 117. In the original: 《有時候阿莉思想著想著，或寫著寫著就趴在桌上睡著了，Ohiyo 總在某個時間點，抖抖身子，往窗外跳去。一開始的時候，阿莉思怕牠一去不回，後來發現牠不但也學會了跳板凳登岸的絕活，也學會游泳。一開始的時候，阿莉思從往後們的窗口看著牠，看到牠頭也不回地鑽進草叢李消失不見。不知道是不是湊巧，阿莉思容忍自己獨處的極限他越是兩、三個小時，超過這個時間點，尋死的念頭就會重新回來，而 Ohiyo 總是恰好在阿莉思開始動念時，輕輕巧巧地出現在她的眼前。牠的喵喵聲恰如其分地擋住了阿莉思離世的念頭，就象是有人刻意地她把往死亡那個方向一道看不見的門上，拉上門栓。》

This quotation crystalizes Alice's experiences before the collision; spending her days by reorganizing her thoughts through research, staving off loneliness and remaining centered, both in her fleshy body and the metaphorical skeleton of her house, by her cat.

The reader of *Compound Eyes* does not learn what happens explicitly to Alice during the collision; whatever loose sense of linear time is loosened by the wave of trash that floods the island as the trash vortex desynchronizes the island.⁸⁰ What one does learn is mediated through Hafay's experience of watching her own home collapse under the incoming wave, as she bears witness to the event:

As if in response [to Hafay's home breaking apart], the Sea House itself half-collapsed, and all its contents [...] got dumped on to the beach and mixed together with a hodgepodge of smelly plastic refuse that the wave had strewn upon the shore. It was as if all the world's garbage had been collected here.⁸¹

What Sterk's translation occludes is that all this refuse, including the contents of Alice's life from the objects in her dwelling, forms a new *system* 混一體. Much like a chemical reaction, in mixing various material aspects and associated memories along with the sea and land, the collision results in a substance (物體) or a system (體制) that subsumes Alice's home; all the world's objects end up mixed together (混在一起). The contents of Alice's entire life have effectively become garbage, while the stitched-together (混編) and forever-altered form remains.

⁸⁰ After the preceding quotation, Alice looks out the window to see a newly ingressed system of cameras and news reporters ready to document the incoming trash vortex, "[turning] toward her as if they were synchronized," 120. [《【……】很默契地轉了過來。》148] Alice is beheld by the system and dives into the water to escape; Dahu and his daughter Umav both witness the event from the perspective of the cameras while watching the broadcast in a restaurant later in the chapter. When we rejoin Alice's narrative, she awakens and watches her house become ruins through the broadcasted stream in the hospital room that she finds herself in.

⁸¹ 131. In the original 《不遠處海上房屋，像是呼應的，最前面那間屋子也半塌下來，屋裏的東西也被傾倒而出【……】和浪拍打上來的各式各樣發臭的塑膠垃圾混一體，像是世界把被遺棄的事物集中到這裏來。》162.

Still, “[the] first thing that crossed her mind after waking up in [the] hospital was Ohiyo.”⁸² Her *secondary idea* remains firm and a mobilizing force, as Alice, against “reason,”⁸³ flees the hospital to return in search of Ohiyo.

In a similar fashion to the way a hermit crab requires a new shell after growing, Alice abandons the old skeleton of her house after she embraces a perspective extended through her past research. This pattern reproduces itself once again in the second half of the novel. Alice follows Ohiyo into the woods where she first interacts with Atile’i, and they quickly become *comrades*. They form a new linkage of knowledge by spending time with one another and teaching each other their languages while surviving in the wilderness together.⁸⁴ Throughout the rest of her narrative, Alice’s willingness to change, to learn, to orient herself towards things expands beyond singular or individual desires. The surplus of overlapping frames of experience resist any easy ordering while remaining a productive point of tension in how Alice navigates her environment.

In contrast to the version of Alice at the very start of the reader’s interaction with her, the ending of *Compound Eyes* presents a very different individual. From the roof of her nearly submerged home, Alice watches Atile’i leave Taiwan and attempt to sail back to his own island. As she loses sight of him, she abandons the dwelling and swims towards the new shoreline:

⁸² 138. In the original: 《醒來後第一件事，她第一個想到 Ohiyo，這時恰好電視上的新聞畫面，停留在滿目瘡痍的海灘上，阿莉思一眼就看到 Ohiyo。》170.

⁸³ “Contrary to what I might like to think, my life is not guided by reason; it is ruled, rather, by the inertia of habitual motion. This is indeed the condition of the vast majority of human beings, which is why very few of us will be able to adapt to global warming if it is left to us, as individuals, to make the necessary changes; those who will uproot themselves and make the right preparations are precisely those obsessed monomaniacs who appear to be on the borderline of lunacy.” Ghosh, *Great Derangement*, 54.

⁸⁴ In a crucial reversal of her original state as a “house without windows,” Alice states: “Perhaps because I don’t think [Atile’i] can completely understand me, I often feel like talking to him. *It’s like talking through an open window.*” 175 with emphasis added. In the original: 《也許是因為我認為他無法完全理解我講的話的關係，也許時候，我反而願意對他說話，就像對一扇敞開的窗戶說話。》213.

Now she is walking alone up toward the path through the loveless and pitiless forest. She met Atilé'i for the first time along that path; she used to take it with Thom to get water from the stream. She walks and walks, and the moisture on the stalks of grass gradually soaks through her shoes and wets her toes, slowly gets into her eyes. Suddenly Alice feels something furry brush past her leg. Ohiyo. It's Ohiyo. Alice is happy she still has someone to say *Ohiyo* to. Without Alice noticing, Ohiyo has grown into a beautiful cat. Alice has to do something for this little survivor.⁸⁵

Far from an "empty house" with no windows or someone who has decided to wall herself in, the boundary between Alice and her external environment is porous and malleable. It is malleable to a degree where the water in the environment travels from her feet toward her eyes. On one level, this might be seen as a poetic expression of the sorrow and melancholy Alice is experiencing after seeing her comrade off. Still, on another, it can be seen as a troubling of a presupposed system of causality. The boundary between Alice and her environment is permeable, active; dew collecting on the grass doubles as tears welling up around Alice's eyes. Against all that Alice has lost, she still has a reason to continue living; it is her willingness to engage with various systems of thinking and attempting to make them productive that provide the structure to this secondary idea. This new version of Alice is no longer beholden to the ruins of her past life; she is present, mindful, and connected to the sensory experiences of her environment as she chooses to focus on what is most important to her while becoming *sensitive* to her environment.

⁸⁵ 302. 《此刻她孤身一人走在路上，朝向那個既沒有愛也沒有憐憫的森林邊緣：那裏她曾和阿特烈第一次相遇，也是多年前傑克森到野溪取水的小徑。她走著走著，草莖上頭的水氣慢慢滲透到球鞋裏，慢慢滲透到她的眼眶。突然間，阿莉思感到有個毛絨絨的什麼正在摩擦著她的腿。Ohiyo。是 Ohiyo。阿莉思為自己人有一個對象可以這樣呼喚而感到高興。不知不覺中，Ohiyo 已經變成一隻漂亮的大貓，她得為這個仍然活著的小東西做些什麼。》362-363 in original.

山雨欲來風滿樓 // Conclusion

Compound Eyes is a worthy work of fiction because of its unflinching engagement with a genuine (and very depressing) reality of climate catastrophe through a speculative mode. While it certainly enshrines emotions and affective registers at its core, the work, I argue, moves beyond a hierarchical understanding of the world; it consistently foregrounds the effects of climate change with no transparent model of causality. Through this chapter's appropriation of Wark's theoretical framework presented in *Molecular Red*, I see Wu's novel stressing the importance of creating new linkages between agents and embodied systems of knowledge in a rapidly degrading environment. It refuses any grand narrative or idealized goals, but provides a multitude of systems and connections, possibilities of survival through the organization and cooperation of others. Wu's writing emphasizes the necessity for interacting with multiple modes of knowledge, emphasizing how much of what constitutes learning is more often not constituted through remembrance, revision, and repetition.

As Alice journeys throughout the novel between past and present, processing and recontextualizing her past experiences and trauma, the only thing consistently keeping her tethered to the disintegrating reality is her feline companion, who single-handedly (paw-edly?) keeps her tethered to the living world. To mutate a sentiment from Donna Haraway: *Cats are not an alibi for other themes; cats are fleshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Cats are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. **They are here to live with.***⁸⁶ This chapter has argued that character of Alice, complex and fragmentary as she is, models a kind of behaviour that attempts to grapple with hopelessness and melancholy pervasive in the contemporary moment and exacerbated by the ever-growing visibility of climate

⁸⁶ Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, 97-99 with added emphasis. Haraway's original context discusses dogs as opposed to cats.

catastrophe. Wu Ming-yi's novel puts forward a grim future where the only possibility of hope is extended across connections and relations that contain the possibility of interaction beyond human-limits. If it is possible to be hopeful in the face of an oncoming storm, it can only start from the labour one is willing to do, and with whom one is willing to live with.

酷兒的反公界 // A Queer Counterpublic

Qiu Miaojin's *Notes of a Crocodile* and *Last Words from Montmartre*

介紹 // Introduction

In her autoethnography entitled *The Surrender* (2016), [Veronica] Scott Esposito writes of her life experiences navigating gender, film, and desire between three separate essays bounded together. It should have come as no surprise to see Qiu Miaojin's [邱妙津 1969-1995] name listed in one of the repeating aspects of the work, a mini-reading list of various writers and artists across disciplines and cultures that acts as a concluding note throughout the last essay. Esposito writes: "In 2014, the year I decided to take a walk, I was reading *The Testament of Mary* by Colm Tóibín, Balzac, Anne Carson, *Confessions of Felix Krull* by Thomas Mann, John Williams, Gilles Deleuze, Frederic Jameson, Naja Marie Aidt, Chris Kraus, and Qiu Miaojin."⁸⁷ The walk mentioned in this quotation refers to Esposito's first time leaving the security of her home to walk the streets of her neighbourhood while performing a feminine identity.

Qiu Miaojin's inclusion on this diverse reading list of thinkers scattered across time and place warrants further discussion of her particularity. In the same year that Qiu's first novel *Notes of a Crocodile* (hereafter *Crocodile*) was published, Zhu Tianwen's *Notes of a Desolate Man* won the *China Times* Literature Award in 1994. Two years later and one year after Qiu's suicide, *Crocodile* won a posthumous "honorary" version of the same award Zhu received in the year preceding and her final novel *Last Words from Montmartre* (hereafter *Last Words*) was published. By the end of the decade, Qiu Miaojin became something of an cultural figure in the genre of the canon of early 1990s Taiwanese "Queer Literature" (酷兒文學): while not present for the development of the local literary scene, her works became important for many young

⁸⁷ Esposito, *The Surrender*, 107.

queer people at this time.⁸⁸ Qiu's legacy continues to extend beyond Taiwan, as Bonnie Huie's translation of *Notes of a Crocodile* 鱷魚手記, published by NYRB in 2017, won the Lucien Stryk Asian Translation prize in 2018.⁸⁹

Qiu Miaojin's writings can be seen as similar to other popular writers from Taiwan (Zhu Tianxin 朱天心, Ch'i Tawei 級大偉, and Chen Xue 陳雪) who rode a wave of popularity in 90's Taiwan following the end of Martial Law that was enacted and maintained by the KMT (國民黨) Nationalist government.⁹⁰ However, Qiu's departure from Taiwan early in the 90s and her suicide in Paris leaves the artist absent from taking part in the increased visibility of the *tongzhi* literature [同志文學, literally "same will" or "comrade" literature] movement.⁹¹ In her germinal collection of translated queer contemporary literature from Taiwan entitled *Angelwings*, noted scholar Fran Martin writes: "[...] with the exception of Qiu Miaojin, who suicided at the age of just twenty-six in 1995 -- [all the authors represented in this collection] were actively involved in the development of Taiwan's intellectual and political *tongzhi* cultures throughout the decade." (19) I will return to situating Qiu momentarily, but it is from this key distinction that I wish to begin my line of questioning.

Despite the milieu in which Qiu's writing circulated and the audience that received them being located within early 1990s Taiwan, the works continue to travel beyond their borders through translations into various languages, and Qiu's writing continues to find new audiences.

⁸⁸ The quotations surrounding the term here signify the "glocalization" [global localization] of queer theory and discourses within Taiwan, cf Martin, "Introduction" in *Angelwings*, 17-18 & 28n38. In an afterword to the 2012 edition of *Last Words* published by Guangxi Normal University Press, author Chen Xue writes how *Last Words* became a classic 經典 for a generation of youth in Taiwan that were navigating discussions of discrimination and gender identity; 215.

⁸⁹ American Literary Translators Association, "Announcing the Winner of the 2018 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize!"

⁹⁰ Martin, "Introduction." in *Angelwings*, 3-5.

⁹¹ Ibid., 9-10

This begs the question: why? Why do people from all over the world, across languages and cultures, continue to read Qiu's writing? While scholarship on the two works has foregrounded many important aspects like the historical moment of production, this chapter takes a different path. I argue that it is specifically Qiu's technique of intertextuality, the forging of connections between disparate works of art which proliferate throughout two novels, that should be considered a determinative factor in the appeal of her works. Utilizing Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* and its explorations of Habermasian theory of the public sphere as a counterpoint to existing scholarship on Qiu, along with a reading of *Crocodile* and *Last Words* together, I argue that the novels, in the absence of their author, can be seen as constructing a queer public: *Crocodile* orients popular discourses and mediations in Taiwanese society surrounding homosexuality against itself satirically, while *Last Words* implodes its own form through the destabilization of boundaries between self, time, and place. Reading these two works together acts as a bridge, allowing for an interpretation with which to trace and chart the transformation of Qiu's writing between the two novels, both laden with depictions of suffering and negative affect. I do this to consider ways of viewing the artist and her writing in more nuanced terms in addition to detailing productive modes of being through the tension between public and private.

寶島的沼澤地 // Situating Qiu Miaojin

On how to love well: instead of embracing a romantic ideal, you must confront the meaning of every great love that has shattered, shard by shard.⁹²

- Qiu Miaojin trans. Bonnie Huie, *Crocodile*, 211.

⁹² In the original: 《活在世界上對待愛情的態度，與其說是圓成一個理想永恆的愛情想像，毋寧說是去面對一個又一個荒誕殘缺愛情意義的責任。》191.

Qiu is a complex and multifaceted writer: her works often blur a presupposed division between the author and protagonist, medium and message, content and form. She illustrates this clearly within the end of the first notebook of *Crocodile*, self-reflexively describing her writing process as taking her diaries and journals and recrafting them into stylized “[...] manuals that can be read as admonitions for young people.”⁹³ The references to her own life, like the matching periods of attending university between *Crocodile*’s narrator and Qiu’s own post-secondary experience, reinforce the impression that these are personal experiences. Tze-lan Sang writes that it is the strength of Qiu’s “persona,” “[...] its painful, emotional engagement with the stigmatization of lesbianism in Taiwan,” which has connected so many to the nickname Lazi⁹⁴, the only name given to the first-person narrator running throughout the novel. During the 1990s, the appellation “Lazi” became common between erudite lesbians in Taiwan (something like the English *lez*, or the variant *lala* 拉拉 popular on the mainland.)⁹⁵ A similar technique of blurring author and narrator can be seen in *Last Words*, where the blurriness is pushed to a radical degree -- the novel implodes distinctions between agents in conversation, time and place, and even gender through tracking six weeks of letters between the narrator and her ex before culminating the formers suicide.⁹⁶ No sardonic allegories for the plight of queer people in Taiwan as cartoon animals can be found in *Last Words*. Instead, the epistolary novel tracks the raw and recursive

⁹³ Qiu, *Crocodile*, 33. In the original: 《【……】像圖解的幼兒手冊》28.

⁹⁴ Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 261. 拉子: *la* referring to the narrator’s strength in “recruiting”/“pulling” [拉 is often seen on doors to know whether to push/pull] people into student associations and the narrator’s world in general; *zi* denotes a particular (a bottle 瓶子, a cup 杯子, Confucius, 孔子 etc.) It is not, as Nicholas Jose sees it in his review of Qiu’s translation into English by Bonnie Huie, a reference to diarrhea. Cf. Jose, “Bittersweet Rose.” The name is given to the narrator by a pair of friends, Tun Tun and Zhi Rou, that Lazi ends up recruiting into her student association and becomes close to the pair.

⁹⁵ Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 262-264. In the context of the book overall, Sang places Qiu as the first *lesbian* writer in the sinophonic literary sphere, in comparison to other earlier writers who wrote *tongzhi* literature like Zhu Tianwen and Bai Xianyong 白先勇.

⁹⁶ Heinrich, “Transgenre,” 165.

emotions following a break-up between the narrator and love-interest(s) that “[...] challenges the limits of any genre.”⁹⁷

Before I embark on further drawing from the scholarship on Qiu, I want to foreground the particulars of the theoretical alignment I have chosen to contrast against others. I will return to this topic in greater detail in the following section. Still, for now I offer the following definition of a “public,” courtesy of noted literary scholar and Queer theorist Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics*. Warner writes: “I suggest [...] that the idea of a public as a metacultural dimension; it gives form to a tension between general and particular that makes it difficult to analyze from either perspective alone. It might even be said to be a kind of engine of translatability, putting down new roots wherever it goes.”⁹⁸ The point of Warner’s research on the formation of publics is that they enable “[...] reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexivity circulating discourse, a social entity” (11-12). Rather than appealing to an Andersonian mode of “imagined communities,” Warner’s formulation puts forth the notion that it is *attention* paid to specific discourses and texts which bind strangers in modern and contemporary societies. This attention tends to be organized along with visual sensory data which allows an individual imaginary access into these social entities. Counterpublics emerge from the margins of dominant discourse, utilizing similar methods of distribution and interaction, in an attempt to change the mainstream. The most visible example of this kind of [counter]public might be the current “alt-right”/“national supremacy” movement, which organizes itself and its participants along the lines of discourse and structures of knowledge.⁹⁹ It is not the goal of this paper to argue that Qiu’s writing constructs a kind of

⁹⁷ Heinrich, “Transgenre,” 162.

⁹⁸ Warner, *Publics & Counterpublics*, 11, emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Warner, “Conversations with History,” 29:48.

public similar to these contemporary formations. Instead, I am attempting to show how the term can be used to articulate a category of relationships between texts and agents that is at once entirely imaginary but perceived as real; real enough as to mobilize new connections and understandings across time and place.

One might already see why Qiu's stylized yet personal writing style engenders multiple responses across many lines of thinking. A great deal of scholarship on Qiu's writings have zeroed in on the author's identity: whether in the context of understanding the specifics of lesbian performative "roles" of *T/Po* in Taiwan at the time (these roles can roughly be understood as bearing similarities to the English terms butch (*T*) and femme (*po* 婆));¹⁰⁰ the coterie of writers associated with the *tongzhi* literary scene and their characteristics;¹⁰¹ the various depictions of animals and their significations as they relate to Qiu;¹⁰² or the differences between the raw materials of Qiu's diaries (published in 2006, following the special ten-year anniversary of her suicide in an edition of *INK Monthly* in 2005,¹⁰³ along with new versions of *Crocodile* and *Last Words* from INK Publishing in 2006 as well) and the stylized works of "fiction" utilizing theory from Giorgio Agamben and Jean-luc Nancy.¹⁰⁴ On the point of theory, Qiu's works have been refracted through the frameworks of Freud,¹⁰⁵ Foucault and Benjamin,¹⁰⁶ and frameworks inspired by Daoist texts¹⁰⁷; this is to say nothing of the myriad of dissertations and conference papers where other graduate students profess their interpretations and frameworks to account for

¹⁰⁰ See Martin "Stigmatic Bodies," 180-181 & Liou, "Desire, Gender, and Writing."

¹⁰¹ Lin, "Reliance and Violation between the Center and Margins."

¹⁰² Zhuang, "Monsters, Hunger, Metaphysics." and Tsai, "Comrade Elegies and their Pure Love."

¹⁰³ *INK Literary Monthly*, 22 June 2005. This issue contained excerpts from Qiu's diaries, interviews with friends and fans, unreleased scripts, and copies of notations from margins of manuscripts.

¹⁰⁴ Chen, "Figuring Identity".

¹⁰⁵ Hsu, "Dream Writing."

¹⁰⁶ Zhu, "Existential Aesthetics."

¹⁰⁷ Liu and Ding, "Crocodile Skin."

Qiu's writing. Fran Martin writes: "The array of disparate responses to Qiu's work says something interesting not only about the multivalent interpretative possibilities enabled by Qiu's writing itself, but also about the global and local contexts of queer and feminist cultural criticism in Taiwan [and the world] today."¹⁰⁸ It is precisely the "multivalent interpretative possibilities," primarily stemming from a milieu outside of 1990s Taiwan, that I now turn to foregrounding briefly.

Qiu's personal tone and outpouring of emotions has been analyzed by Ari Larissa Heinrich's "In Memoriam to Identity: Transgender as Strategy in Qiu Miaojin's *Last Words from Montmartre*," which explores the "excessive emotion" within the text as a series of letters between "Reader" and "Author," mirroring to a certain degree the format of *Last Words* itself.¹⁰⁹ Rather than following a line of thinking which reduces the works to author's identity or sexual orientation, Heinrich sees the forms of gender depicted in *Last Words* as, "one of several means to an end, including (but not limited to) the act of writing itself, *the possibility of generating connections with other artists and authors across space and time*, and, relatedly, the act of leaving a true and original record of one's spiritual life to create moments of resonance in future readers. [...] The novel's resistance to the enforcement of gender binaries contributes to, but does not cause, happiness, which is instead the province of art."¹¹⁰ In addition to happiness, art

¹⁰⁸ Martin, "The Legacy of the Crocodile," 8. Fran is specifically referring to the waves of discourse within Taiwan following the years after Qiu's death on interpretations surrounding the author's works, but I believe the point still stands, as scholarship on Qiu has roughly doubled since this newsletter has been published.

¹⁰⁹ Heinrich & Dowd, "Transgender as Strategy," 569. Heinrich explains further that Qiu is consistent in presenting "a moody, alienated narrator, the details of whose life bear a conspicuous resemblance to the author's" throughout her works (569). The alienated nature of the author's protagonists should not imply a stunted affect, however, as Heinrich argues that excessive emotions are the central aspect of her appeal: "the articulation of emotion, which is often ugly and uncomfortable and dismissed as mental illness, can be difficult to accept as art; [...] instead of editing and crafting emotion, Qiu's narrator is unapologetically and painfully open, especially about love and anguish. In the context of Taiwanese society at the time (and indeed in many contexts, both past and present, all over the world), this openness about difficult emotions could be seen as a radical act." (573-574).

¹¹⁰ 573 with added emphasis. The appeal of Qiu's writing is bearing witness to how freely she writes of her own experience navigating gender and relationships to others, how Qiu transforms her suffering and negative feelings into "moments of resonance" available for readers to connect with. Heinrich himself notes his own attachment to

is uniquely equipped to play with form and content of political issues as well, as Xiao Ruifu argues in his article “An Alternative Perspective: Reading/Writing Chiu Miao-chin’s [*Crocodile*] and Derek Jarman’s *The Garden*.” In his examination between *Crocodile* and Derek Jarman’s *The Garden* (1993), named as an influence in-text, he arrives at the term “interart” (藝術間) in order to explain Qiu’s use of intertextuality.¹¹¹ Tze-lan Sang’s chapter “The Autobiographical Lesbian” in her monograph *The Emerging Lesbian*, focusing on the political implications and formalistic elements within *Crocodile*.¹¹² Her chapter stresses several key points: how Qiu, despite her suicide initially leading into typical discourses of “sad” queers killing themselves becoming fodder for media-propagating institutions she so clearly inculcates within *Crocodile*, actually revises conventional narratives associated with female same-sex desire;¹¹³ how Qiu, by

Qiu’s writing after translating *Last Words*: “It was like living with Qiu for five years although in some ways we had been together much longer. [...] Qiu was, or is, like a brother to me. I find that easier to say in Chinese than in English. I know other readers feel as I do.” (575-576)

¹¹¹ Xiao, “Alternative Perspective,” 55. Drawing on David Bell and Gill Valentine’s formulation of “pre-queer” and “queer” perspectives, Xiao writes: “The [perspective of] lesbians and gays in a pre-queer world is one of ‘accepting the control and torment of [heterosexual patriarchal] restrictions,’ while the queer world wants to ‘embrace any kind of person who rejects following the control of heterosexual patriarchal systems; [embracing anyone who can] play with the rules of the game.’” 《女同性戀與男同性戀之「前酷兒」(pre- queer) 世界是「受界限所支自己/折磨的」；酷兒要的是「擁抱任何拒絕按照異性戀父才霍社會所制定之遊戲規則玩耍的人。」》39. Xiao sees Jarman and Qiu as two queer artists who do just this; play with the “rules” of their respective mediums in order to disrupt dominant publics; the author sees the artists’ individual works *The Garden* (1990) and *Crocodile* as united in their exploration of homophobia 恐同意識型態 and visibility 可見性 (42).

¹¹² Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 255. It is important to note that the chapter preceding Sang’s analysis of Qiu deals exclusively with the formation of lesbian identity and lesbian-focused activism within Taiwan following the end of Martial Law in 1987. Sang writes: “Many of the popular stereotypes in Taiwan concerning female same-sex love originated in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European male-authored literature on sex, which sought to catalogue sexual perversions and describe same-sex desire, including female same-sex desire, in terms of pathology, psychological abnormality, and gender confusion affecting only a minority. These stereotypes have acquired global significance because of the hegemony of Western science and popular culture in the twentieth century. Lesbian activist discourse also runs counter to traditional Confucian family values. Many lesbians must, therefore, exile themselves from the patriarchal family in order to be themselves.” (227-228).

¹¹³ Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 268-270. Sang highlights the Kraft-Ebbing theory of gender inversion and female sexuality (in vulgar terms: the more a female is attracted to women, the more “mannish” – and by extension, predatory – said female becomes. Sang does this to show how *Crocodile* reverses this discourse: the [younger] narrator (again, who could be seen as a *T* or presenting as a soft-but) does not pursue the typical femme, but rather is pursued by the [older] femme. The narrator spurns the romance regardless, temporarily choosing to withdraw from romantic relationships from the pain caused by her own interpretations, inherently colored by heterosexual patriarchal discourses. In other words, Qiu problematizes the articulation of non-heteronormative relationships.

demonstrating emotional vulnerability, inherently challenged dominant discourses politically by showing individual consciousness as opposed to a collective one (273); how Qiu “relentlessly attacks the media’s invention of homosexuals as a mystical, biologically distinct species” through her allegory and implication of media companies within the text (265-266).

In making a case for lesbian identity, however, Sang focuses on the female relationships within Qiu’s novel while occluding the other major (male) characters and the extent of their influence in their relationships to Lazi.¹¹⁴ The other major analysis of *Crocodile* in English by Fran Martin contains no mention of these male characters as well.¹¹⁵ While not dismissing the importance of particular expressions of identity, (as the navigation of the various forms of homosexual identities is pertinent and necessary in certain contexts¹¹⁶), this chapter moves to provide a more telescopic reading of Qiu, reading across her two novels rather than centering on a particular one. As Sang briefly cites Habermas’ discussions on the public sphere earlier in her study (13-15, 229-230, 254), this chapter moves to utilize Warner’s conceptualization of Habermasian theory, one which includes but does not idealize queer formulations, to provide a theoretical basis to explore further the tension between public and private in Qiu Miaojin’s novels.

¹¹⁴ Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 263. The male characters Meng Sheng, with whom Lazi has a complicated relationship including a one-off sexual encounter with, and Chu Kuang, Meng Sheng’s on-and-off boyfriend and friend to Lazi, are not mentioned by name. This occlusion seems striking when one considers that Meng Sheng is introduced in the first notebook of the novel, and he remains an important character throughout the story. The last scene the reader encounters Lazi is in the penultimate chapter of the novel, as she confronts and ultimately flees from Meng Sheng, who has become an addict after his volatile relationship with Chu Kuang.

¹¹⁵ Martin, “The Crocodile Unmasked: Toward a Theory of *Xianshen*” in *Situation Sexualities*, 2003. It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze the complexities between the multiple layered forms of sexual orientation (or lack thereof) in the combination of all these characters on the spectrum of sexuality. My goal in highlighting this lack of discussion of male characters is not to force masculinity into discussions that make space for discussions of lesbianism, but rather to trouble any clear distinction of sexual identity in the first place.

¹¹⁶ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, “The word ‘lesbian’ is a term that is only really meaningful in political contexts,” 44. In the original: 《[...]》（同性戀這三個字其實是有在政治上才有意義的修辭）》59. Note how the original uses the generic medical term for homosexuality *tongxinglian* 同性戀 as opposed to a lesbian-coded variation like 女同性戀.

公界與反公界 // *Publics and Counterpublics*

No single history sufficiently explains all the different ways these preconditions come together in practice. Yet despite this complexity, the modern concept of a public seems to have floated free from its original context. Like the market or the nation - two cultural forms with which it shares a great deal - it has entered the repertoire of almost every culture. It has gone travelling.¹¹⁷

Warner's project, drawing from research on early American discourses and the formation of subcultures that grew from and entrenched themselves within structures of distribution, aims to provide a framework for accounting what he sees as a new social entity arising within modernity. He argues that developments within the liberal bourgeois tradition, including changes in economic and philosophical thinking, have slowly but surely constructed a division, "between public authority and private freedom [which] has always been in tension with other views, most notably with civic humanism since Machiavelli." (43)

Tracing arguments from Arendt to Habermas to Foucault before ultimately returning to Kant, Warner demonstrates how much of the notion of "a public" is routed through distinctions between public and private, and how much is lost in one category when focusing on the other. Drawing a key distinction from Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" Warner writes:

Kant recognizes that there are publics, such as the reading world, that do not correspond to any kind of polity. They enable a way of being public through critical discourse that is not limited by the duties or constraints of office or by loyalties to a commonwealth or nation. *These critical publics may, however, be political in another*

¹¹⁷ Warner, *Publics & Counterpublics*, 10.

or higher sense. They may set a higher standard of reason, opinion, and freedom – hence the subversive potential in his picture of enlightenment. (45-46, emphasis added)

Warner uses Kant's differentiation as a historical anchor to ground his interpretation of Habermas' writings on the public sphere. Warner sees Kant's idea of a reading public developing "through a wide range of cultural and social conditions that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [including systems of distribution of media, development of salons and the concept of the economy, into ...] 'the abstract counterpart of public authority' and 'came into an awareness of itself as the latter's opponent, that is, as the public of the newly emerging *public sphere of civil society*.' The public in this new sense, in short, was no longer opposed to the private. It *was* private." (47) However, this is not the only transformation that occurred between public structures and private identity:

The important point for [Habermas] is that the emancipatory potential of the public sphere was abandoned rather than radicalized and that changing conditions have now made its realization more difficult than ever. [He] stresses especially two such conditions: the asymmetrical nature of mass culture, which makes it easier for those with capital or power to distribute their views but harder for marginal voices to talk back; and the growing interpenetration of the state and civil society, which makes it harder to conceive of the private public sphere as a limitation on state power. These tendencies amount to what Habermas calls a 'refeudalization' of the public sphere - in effect, a second 'structural transformation.' They produce a public that is appealed to not for criticism but for benign acclamation [or to be turned into spectacle]. (49-50).

I would argue that this “refeudalization” is precisely what the allegory of the crocodile is addressing. Discourses within *Crocodile* regarding the reptiles show various perspectives within the public which trickle-down (tabloids publish first, and people gossip second) and reinforce tendencies of viewing queer people/crocodiles as Other, cultivating desire for fragments of knowledge regarding those “creatures” within the media. Crocodiles exist in the novel between reading publics that are engaged by tabloids and rumours in order to judge and exoticize them. Queer people have to contend with civil/political publics, fixated by the virality of how crocodiles reproduce and perceiving it as a threat to heteronormativity; systems of governance seek to control and contain them for the purpose of the safety of the nation-state.¹¹⁸ Warner’s project is, however, a productive one: he seeks to provide points of commonality that publics share, which I now turn to contextualize in the context of Qiu’s writing.

Short or reproducing Warner’s entire essay, some general points about the nature of publics can be understood. They coalesce around texts and create a relation among strangers, and this relation is maintained by attention. They are also constrained by their milieu, the historical conditions along with their mediums and methods of circulation. When considering the many translations of Qiu’s novels (the aforementioned English translations by Huie and

¹¹⁸ This is best exemplified by the following quotation from *Crocodile*, where debates between Pro-Croc and Anti-Croc organizations are staged on a televised debate and framed under the context of national security. “The following day, the Bureau of Health and Sanitation and federal law-enforcement authorities issued a joint statement: ‘Effectively today, we have designated this month as National Crocodile Month in order to give crocodiles nationwide an opportunity to turn themselves over to the registrars of the Bureau of Health and Sanitation or the National Police Agency, to whom crocodiles must provide their names, which will be made public. Scheduling of treatment and a pledge of compliance will also be undertaken at that time. Any late registrations who are discovered will be subject to penalties which will be administered separately.’” Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 208. In the original: 《從今日起，訂一個月內為「鱷魚月」，接受全國鱷魚自由投素，凡本月內想衛生署或警政署等記者，將不予以公姓名，並給予治療及生活保障，逾其未登記而被發現著則科以刑罰，罰則別議。》188.

Heinrich, French,¹¹⁹ Italian,¹²⁰ German,¹²¹ Spanish,¹²² and Japanese,¹²³ even being reprinted in Mainland China¹²⁴), along with a readership extended far beyond the boundaries of the 1990s political scene in Taiwan but connected through the attention paid to the novels, one can begin to apprehend how Qiu and her novels form a public.

Warner's project can be aptly summed up in the most abstract qualification for a public, that it is a "poetic world making." He writes:

If I address a queer public ... , I don't simply express the way my friends and I live. I commit myself, and the fate of my world-making project, to circulation among indefinite others. However much my address to them might be laden with intimate affect, it must also be extended impersonally, available for co-membership on the basis of mere attention. My world must be that of strangers.¹²⁵

A sentiment that shares this focus on the potential of interpersonal connections can be found in Qiu's writings, as Lazi states in second chapter of the eighth notebook of *Crocodile*:

"When all is said and done, human civilization is ugly and cruel, and the only thing to do is to raze it to the ground, and that's because kindredness is the one true constant between you and anyone else."¹²⁶ This sentiment matures by the time *Last Words* was completed, where the narrator, after ruminating and recursively considering the faults and flaws in her romantic

¹¹⁹ Qiu trans. Péchenart, *Dernières lettres de Montmartre*. This edition also contains a foreward by Hélène Cixous, one of Qiu's teachers during her graduate studies at University Paris VIII. Cixous appears obliquely within *Last Words*' Letter 10.

¹²⁰ Qiu trans. Pozzi, *Ultime lettere da Montmartre*

¹²¹ Qiu trans. Hasse & Helmer, *Aufzeichnungen eines Krokodils*

¹²² Qiu trans. Mora, *Cartas póstumas desde Montmartre*.

¹²³ Qiu trans. Tarumi, Huang & Shirouzu, *ある鱷の手記*. The Japanese edition appears to be the first translation of Qiu's novels to be published (2008).

¹²⁴ The novels were also reprinted within Mainland China by Guangxi Normal University Press in 2012.

¹²⁵ 121.

¹²⁶ Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 215. In the original: 《[...]畢竟生存裏有絕大部分是醜陋和冷酷的疆域，唯有善能融化這片疆域。所以人與人之間所存在的永恆因子是一種屬善的基本關係。》195.

relationships, writes that human nature “has its fatal weakness, but ‘love’ means embracing the whole of human nature, the bad within the good, the benign with the malicious, the beautiful within the tragic.”¹²⁷ Put in so many words, through Warner’s framework, one can trace how Qiu’s novels transition from grappling with issues surrounding homosexuality at the end of the 20th century Taiwan towards a nuanced and passionate account of accepting the flaws of human nature; from the ashes of the public that *Crocodile* burns down bursts forth the (counter)public that Qiu crystalizes in *Last Words*.

To summarize Warner’s arguments, the metacultural dimension of an indexed text routed in particular contexts and extended over time and space constitutes a public. The idea of the public can be seen as superordinate to the concepts of readership, authorship, and reception. By virtue of paying attention to these texts, individuals become connected to this network through the grammar, the characters, the author, the scholarship, and other contexts related to the text. This chapter so far has endeavored to consider *Crocodile* and *Last Words* in this specific light, as opposed to following a narrative that reinforces divisions between author and audience, a work of art and its viewer, between time periods and languages. In the following section, I amalgamate Warner’s framework, which exists on the metacultural level, and apply it at the level of literary analysis in order to elucidate the intergeneric nature of Qiu’s writings as a public.

教澤永懷 // Rereading *Crocodile* and *Last Words*

Crocodile and *Last Words* are nothing if not cerebral novels attuned to the emotions between queer individuals rooted in the university experience while gesturing to the human condition. Through (de)constructing the time spent in academia (*Crocodile* and the acquiring

¹²⁷ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, 141. In the original: 《人性有致命的弱點，而「愛」也正是在跟整個人性相愛，好的壞的，善的惡的，美麗的悲慘的[……]》182.

of an undergraduate degree; *Last Words* and attending graduate school in a foreign country) and foregrounding the media that accompanies and informs these periods of time and the relationships that occur therein, Qiu constructs a literary public. By relentlessly indexing directors, musicians, novelists, painters and poets throughout the works, the novels provide the metaphorical infrastructure through references both oblique and overt to other works of art that are embedded in an affective register. By attending to this indexing in the following section, it is my claim that it is this mode of citation that accounts for the appeal and engagement with the public that the texts create.

我的世界一定是陌生人的世界 // “My World Must Be That of Strangers.”

1.

In Qiu’s novels, people, places, and things are blurred into complex narrative webs, where distinctions between subjects and objects bleed into one another against the undertow of raw emotions; like the forms of a watercolor painting being rearranged by a geyser. Any sense of direction (linear or chronological) between the works, their characters, the reader and author are consistently complicated in the face of the devised presentation of failed relationships. This is most clearly evinced by the difficulty in drawing distinctions between Qiu Miaojin (the individual author) and the protagonists of her novels (Lazi, who is given her appellation well into *Crocodile* from her friends Tun Tun and Zhi Rou, and the narrator of *Last Words* who is occasionally referred to in the second-person as Zoe).¹²⁸ Rather than attempting to sift through how certain presentations of the protagonists may or may not

¹²⁸ “Finally, deep into the novel, we at last encounter yet another iteration of the narrator’s gendered self: Zoe, a “second-person” character who openly embraces the trappings of gender ambiguity, while still somehow communicating to readers that this is the same character who has been narrating passages all along.” Heinrich & Dowd, “Transgender as Strategy,” 571.

correlate to the individual Qiu Miaojin, it is more productive to consider the idea of a public as a theoretical concept which encapsulates (but does not resolve or make light of) the differences and commonalities presented within the texts. Put another way, by reading these two novels together along with the framework provided by Warner, Qiu's public can be seen as the mediation between artist, work, and reader; a connection that is routed through the numerous intertextual allusions that proliferate both novels.

The key to understanding why these two novels should be read together can be seen in two separate quotes from the novels which converge on the same point. In the second chapter of the sixth notebook of *Crocodile*, Lazi has entered the senior year of her undergraduate degree and is coming to terms with her attraction to women. Specifically, as she considers letting the rest of her friend-group know this personal detail of her life, the first-person narrator writes:

Now that I was on my way to breaking free of the prison I had been living in, I was dying to be close to someone, and this was the same feeling that the old me had once extinguished in myself. And so I made up my mind that I would learn to trust through a relationship in which lust had no part. First there had to be love and equality, so that the relationship would be built on pure trust. A lightbulb had gone on in my head: I had to take responsibility for my state of misery.¹²⁹

In *Last Words*' a similar sentiment repeats in the twelfth letter, although growing more significant in scope and outside of the constraints of interpersonal love itself. The narrator professes to the reader:

¹²⁹ Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 155-166. In the original: 《由於她們自己伸向我的信任基礎，是我開始蠢動著想從監牢裏翻出去與人剖腹相見的渴望，這在過去是要被我趕盡殺絕的，我決定要試著責任一個人類——不涉及情欲，以平等的真誠了解與關懷為前提，建立趨向完全信任的關係。爲了這靈感閃現的念頭，我知道必須把自取其辱的挫敗下場全擔起來 [...] 》137.

Sincerity, courage, and honesty will deliver humanity. I've realized this since coming to France. With sincerity, courage, and honesty, one can face death, extreme physical pain, and even extreme psychological pain. One can resist persecution from individuals, society, or government. To live in preparation of adversity and finding ways to preserve your core values – this is what it means to learn 'how to live.' I think the hardest thing in life is to 'respect others' because only after you've attained a thorough understanding of someone can there be any real respect to speak of.

*Without 'wisdom' there can be no real sadness.*¹³⁰

Juxtaposing these two quotations, one can begin to understand the overall sentiment that links the two novels. Between the two texts, Qiu articulates a framework in navigating intersubjective love: a decentering of the notion that lust is an adequate reason to pursue a relationship; a sense of equality (or understanding) which forms trust in equal parts with the desire for love; and a responsibility to oneself in managing negative emotions. One learns through relationships, not because of them. When moving beyond intersubjective relations to more extensive orientations like positions in society through organizing forms, relationships must be mediated through concepts like "sincerity, courage, and honesty" as the method in which to live authentically. Living authentically does not mean living without negative emotions, but by remaining sincere (in how one manages goals and objectives in relation to others), courageous (in connecting with others and demonstrating vulnerability) and honest (to one's own sense of self and ethics) in the face of these relationships, one can develop

¹³⁰ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, 85-86 with emphasis added. In the original: 《真誠，勇敢與真實，才是人類生命的解救。這是我來法國所學到最重要的事。這真誠，勇敢與真實是隨時可以面對著死亡、肉體的極限痛苦，甚至是精神的極限痛苦；也是這真誠，勇敢與真實才能抵抗來自他人社會政治的迫害。保持自身生命狀態「隨時隨地」的真實，而尋求讓自己的最敏狀態可以保持真實的「生活條件」，才是學習「生活」。到目前為止，我認為人生中對我最難的是「尊重他人的生命」，因為唯有徹底地諒解折後才有尊重可言。沒有「智」是不可能悲的。》110-11.

respect for others. Developing these relationships results in wisdom, a melancholic and situated understanding of how the forms of relationships operate and pattern our lives – these forms can connect individuals to a higher (imagined) humanity.

It is not enough to attend and “take responsibility” for this sadness/wisdom combination, a difficult enough task in and of itself. Every relationship presented within *Crocodile* and *Last Words* carries a hue of tragedy which has its root in this sadness and contributes to their dissolution. If one were to examine the human relationships within the novels exclusively, it would seem that the insights and advice provided by the works, to “take responsibility” and to “respect others,” have not come to pass. One must look to another category of relationships depicted within the novels – the intertextual relationships established within the texts that undergird the affective pull within Qiu’s writings. Through intertextual relationships, Qiu’s narrators, and by extension readers of the works, learn and pattern what is important to them in parallel to the human connections in the works which demonstrate the trials and tribulations of non-heteronormative romance. Human relations exist to be experienced, but it is through the intertextual relationships presented in the texts that these experiences are rendered meaningful. Put crudely, one is never really alone as long as there is access to works of art that validate and furnish the full range of emotion provided by human relationships.

Intertextuality in Qiu Miaojin’s novels forms the core of its public. This argument is best summed up at the end of the thirteenth letter of *Last Words*, where the narrator writes: “*Work, for only in working can everything be forgotten!* my teacher once said. *Beethoven, Landowski, Angelopoulos and other artists are teaching me this*, and in this life what I really

want to become is an artist like Angelopoulos – to become a ‘shaman.’”¹³¹ The goal of Qiu’s narrator is stated clearly alongside the names of other artists: they want to be a transformative artist. By indexing and engaging artists engaged in many different mediums (music, sculpture, film) and located across milieus (18th-century Germany, early 20th-century France, late 20th-century Greece), the narrator of *Last Words* reveals that, through their works being interpreted by the narrator, artists and their works actively contribute to an understanding in how to live authentically in the face of sadness/wisdom. I will return to the idea of “shaman” momentarily, but this quotation is but one example of many instances of intertextuality present within Qiu’s novels.

2.

The multitude of different intertextual in Qiu’s novels can be understood as sharing a common factor, what I will refer to as “strangerhood.” Reformulating Warner’s points regarding the impersonal/personal mode and the relations between strangers implicit in publics, I propose the idea of strangerhood as productive in identifying a particular dimension consistent in the many linkages in the texts.¹³² At its core, strangerhood refers to an aspect of relations in which the asymmetry between subjects (often insurmountable and spread across time and space) leads to transformations of the self. These transformations can be seen as oriented between two poles or tendencies – mobilizing and inhibiting.

¹³¹ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, 98, italics in translation with emphasis added. In the original: 《（工作吧，唯有工作能遺忘一切！）老師這麼說，Beethoven、Landowski、Angelopoulos，所有的藝術家都在這麼教導我，我這一生真正想成爲的是想 Angelopoulos 那樣的藝術家的——成爲「巫」的一生。》125.

¹³² My engagement with the term “strangerhood” here strictly refers to an attempt to amalgamate Warner’s formulation into a single term. This occludes a great deal of writing on the topic of strangers, another resource for further reading on this term would be Shaun Best’s *The Stranger* (published by Routledge in 2019) which overviews major engagement with the term from Georg Simmel to Pierrie Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida.

The mobilizing pole contributes to a productive mode in which works can be taken up from their original contexts and reincorporated and mutated into others. This aspect of “strangerhood” accounts for the numerous intertextuality allusions between the works; the differences between contexts within the alluded works acts as a productive difference to be explored within the texts. This mobilizing tendency can be cannily summed up by a quotation from *Last Words*’ narrator within Letter Twelve: “Tarkovsky was right. The responsibility of the artist is to stir people’s hearts and minds toward loving others: to find the light and the true beauty of human nature within this love.”¹³³ Qiu’s narrators in these novels, and by extension, the novels themselves, are devised constellations of other artists, their works, and their themes; all bound together through the specific milieu of their construction and publication. The reader of these devised constellations, in turn, can become a part of the public they construct. By paying attention to the numerous references woven between the novels, a reader can access and engage with an artistic universe that is at once removed from any specific milieu while also involved with an empyrean goal of empathy and understanding across time and space. My interpretation of the word “shaman” (巫) from an earlier quotation drawn from *Last Words* speaks directly to this kind of goal, one that transcends empirical reality in an attempt to communicate with the unknown. In considering both novels together, Qiu’s works develop through the relationship of “strangerhood”; an active relationship that transforms connections between art and artist in seeking genuine connection free from the fetters of lust and heteronormative ideologies. These relations, between author/artist and reader/audience, cannot be known in advance or investigated

¹³³ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, 88, emphasis added. In the original: 《Tarkovski 說的很對，藝術家的責任是喚醒人類愛人的能力，在這個愛人的能力裏在發現內在的光，內在關於人性的真善美。》114.

objectively. Still, Qiu's novels index these relationships alongside the raw emotions captured in the depictions of personal experiences; one cannot read these novels without also navigating the intertextual linkages.

As I mentioned earlier, there is an inhibiting pole within "strangerhood" as well. This tendency can best be seen in the two following quotations. As the narrator of *Last Words* puts it so clearly:

It's simple. I can't show my true self to people because I am 'other' to them, and this agony warps me. **'Otherness' prevents society from accepting your true self so that you are powerless to *be* your true self.** This is why a so-called 'social life' has been so traumatic for me and why I've never been able to live the life of authenticity and dignity that I crave.¹³⁴

In *Crocodile*; specifically from the eighth chapter of the first notebook:

How can the world be this cruel? A human being has only so much in them, and yet you must learn through experience, until you finally reach the maddening conclusions that the world wrote you off a long time ago, or accept the prison sentence that your crime is your existence. The forced smiles on the faces of the lucky ones say it all: It's either this, or getting stabbed in the chest with a bayonet, getting raped, dragging yourself onto the highway overpass, or checking into a mental institution. *No one will ever know about your tragedy*, and the world eluded its responsibility ages ago. All you know is that you've been crucified for something, and *you're going to spend the*

¹³⁴ 86, italics in the translation with emphasis added. In the original: 《【……】簡單地說，因為這種「他人性」而是我的生命被迫在他人面前不能「真實存在」，收到扭曲與傷害，由於這些「他人性」，人類不能接受一個人真實的樣子，甚至由於他人的不接受，自己也滅有能力活在自己真實生命裏。這是我的生命在社會裏受著劇烈的傷害，無法與這些性質相處的原因【……】》112.

*rest of your life feeling like no one and nothing will help you, that you're in it alone.*¹³⁵

Both of the passages selected speak to the struggle with alienation that occurs within a contemporary society on the level of the individual: it is nearly impossible to lead a life that is filled with authenticity or dignity when a subject's very existence (especially minor subjects delineated across sexual preferences¹³⁶) is considered criminal or against a pre-conceived natural way of being. The tension between private and public in this kind of configuration *warps* individuals; one cannot know oneself or the other, which means respect and sincerity cannot occur in a society where publics and institutions organize and pattern everyday life according to capitalistic, heteronormative and reductionistic narratives.

Whether on the streets of Taipei surrounded by crowds of undergraduates at National Taiwan University or in Paris attending political meetings and navigating graduate school while writing a thesis, Qiu's narrators deal with this sense of loneliness amongst others by turning to works of art and their creators, renegotiating and remediating their concepts into new arrangements and patterns.

¹³⁵ 21, emphasis added. In the original: 《世界怎麼能怎麼殘忍，一個人還那麼小，卻比尋體會到莫名其妙的感覺：「你早已被世界拋棄」，強迫把「你活著就是罪惡」的判刑塞給他。然後世界儀原來的面目運轉宛如沒任何時發生，規定他以幸福人的微笑出來：免除被刺到插進胸脯、被強暴，也不用趴在天橋上和關在精神病院，沒有任何人知道你的災難，世界早已狡猾地跳脫掉它肇禍的責任。只你有自己知道你被某種東西釘死，你將永遠活在某種感覺裏，任何人任何辦法都沒有用，在那裏面只有你自己，那種東西把你和其他人累都離開，無期的監禁。》17-18

¹³⁶ "As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown so well, [the closet] is a name for a set of assumptions in everyday life as well as in expert knowledge: assumptions about what goes without saying; what can be said without a breach of decorum; who shares the onus of disclosure; what can be known about a person's real nature through telltale signs, without his or her own awareness; and who will bear the consequences of speech. [...] We blame people for being closeted. But the closet is better understood as the culture's problem, not the individuals. No one ever created a closet for him- or herself. People find themselves in its oppressive conditions before they know it, willy-nilly. It is experienced by lesbians and gay men as private, individual problem of shame and deception. But it is produced by the heteronormative assumptions of everyday talk. It feels private. But in an important sense it is publicly constructed." Warner, *Publics & Counterpublics*, 52.

By engaging with the two poles of “strangerhood” in *Crocodile* and *Last Words*, Qiu Miaojin’s writings afford a productive method of engaging with oneself and with the other by centring “strangerhood” within her writing. By connecting and realigning so many varied works and weaving personal experiences between them, *Crocodile* and *Last Words* shows readers that knowing the self or the other ultimately is always a foregone conclusion, but one can “read” laterally between many works of art and their creators (to whom one can also never fully know) to evince a new identity beyond the trappings of gender and sexuality, to be a part of a new public. Through the deployment of this technique, Qiu demonstrates her love and appreciation for the artist she aligns within the novels, and the reader models their own emotions to *Crocodile* and *Last Words* accordingly. In other words, through engaging with the tension between public and private, Qiu’s novels allow readers to renegotiate their own relationship between two sides of the spectrum; private emotions and public works of art. Intertextuality enables the reimagining of a world in which the exploration and modulation of this tension through works of art is of the highest priority; intersubjectivity enables an opposition to activities and modes that are rooted in capitalist and heteronormative narratives. Mobilizing and inhibiting tendencies in these works are the reflections of the tension between public and private present in my reading of the text. Navigating this tension as a reader of Qiu’s works is part of the reason why her writing remains so engaging outside of her original circumstances.

我的话一定是陌生人说的 // My Words Must Be That of Strangers

First and foremost, the intergeneric formal nature between the two novels needs to be addressed. In the third chapter of the fifth notebook of *Crocodile*, the reader finds the first instance of the epistolary form: a letter from Lazi to Shui Ling where Lazi explicates her

complicated feelings and fears regarding their relationship with references to Andre Gide (133) and Abe Kōbō (136). This form of devised letters expressing complex emotions is reproduced and refashioned upon throughout *Last Words*, with the two aforementioned authors explicitly reappearing in Letters 20 (141-142) and 7 (41), respectively. In both novels, these references take the same form: the narrator(s) grapple with shame, heartbreak, and resentment to their romantic partners in the style of letters that incorporate overt references to other artists in trying to make sense of these feelings. The differences between these artists are elided for the sake of manifesting the complex interiority of the narrator, as *Crocodile*'s narrator writes to her love interest: "Even if [the example of Abe Kōbō's *The Box Man*] isn't quite the case here, it should give you a sense of my shame and the extremes I've been pushed to."¹³⁷ Intertextual references may not appropriately capture the particularity of the personal experiences presented in Qiu's novels, but they can begin to express the extremes or polarity (極化) of the delicate tension (微妙的難堪) present in the texts.

Modern artists are not the only intertextual linkages present in the novels, as the *Classic of Poetry* (詩經) appears in both texts at critical junctures. In *Crocodile*, the *Classic* is referenced in the second notebook as a missed class that could have brought the narrator and Shui Ling, her femme love interest, closer together (55). The text acts as an index, marking the decision to spending time with Shui Ling which culminates in the first significant argument since they have begun courting. Ultimately, their argument leads the narrator expressing the desire to end the relationship and move on (56). The *Classic* is referenced again in *Last Words*, with Letter 18 almost entirely constructed of a select quote from the text:

¹³⁷ Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 136. In the original: 《【……】或許例子並不容當，但之於我微妙的難堪，稍稍可代表它的極化。》121.

In life or in death, however separated

We pledged our word to our wives

We held hands

We would grow old together¹³⁸

This four-line quote from the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry acts as a substitute, an intertextual connection in place of an actual letter. That twenty-one words (or sixteen characters in the original) that trace back to the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) can be understood metonymically as a chapter in Qiu's novel— a terse variation of the themes presented in *Last Words* – is a testament to the intertextual nature that pervades both *Last Words* and *Crocodile*.

A prominent triad of intertextual references between *Crocodile* and *Last Words* can be found in three Japanese writers of Modernist Literature referenced throughout the texts: Mishima Yukio (三島 由紀夫, 1925-1970), Abe Kōbō (安部 公房 1924-1993), and Murakami Haruki (村上 春樹 b. 1949). The three artists are centered in the very beginning of the first page of *Crocodile* and effectively set the tone of Qiu's novels to follow as they reappear throughout *Crocodile* and continue to be referenced in *Last Words*.¹³⁹ From the first page of *Crocodile*, the three aforementioned Japanese authors are placed in a satirical context where they are trying to win over the affection of *Crocodile*'s allegorical reptile by promising to bring it various

¹³⁸ Heinrich trans. Qiu, *Last Words*, 122. In the original: 《《詩經·邶風·擊鼓》：死生契闊，與子成說。執子之手，與子偕老。》 157.

¹³⁹ In *Last Words*, Murakami is referenced in Letter 2 in the context of the pet bunny the first-person narrator and their love interest Xu shared before it died: “Suddenly I wanted to cry, thinking how I hadn’t failed you, how I’d never again see that adorable little white body, how I’d finally experienced first hand what it means to ‘bury with your own hands,’ how Haruki Murakami had described burying two cats in six years. How many Bunnys and how many secret loves would I have to bury in the beautiful, lonely city of Paris?” 17. Mishima is referenced along with Osamu Dazai in letter 10 (60) in the context of suicidal rumination.

“presents” (玩具) the next time they come by.¹⁴⁰ This scene is spliced into the conclusion of acquiring a university degree, and the engagement with the act of writing of the novel itself, creating a fragmented and self-aware introduction to Qiu’s public. What is most important is the third-last line of the chapter, as the narrator writes: “Even if this book is neither popular nor serious, at least it’s sensational.”¹⁴¹ The tone of the rest of the work is set: self-aware but ridiculous, erudite but crude, proud but self-deprecating. Moreover, it is essential to note the narrator’s goal is not to circulate a text in the hopes that it becomes widespread or serious, but rather that it is “sensational” (聳動): the verb here signifying stimulation (鼓動) or arousal (激動) or shaking of a body part (shrugging 聳肩, for instance). The aim of *Crocodile* (and by extension, *Last Words*) is explicitly laid out. In its circulation, the works are not meant to be part of the dominant public, nor as a serious critique to it, but rather as a catalyst for alternative connections between the reader of a work and the author, explicitly routed through the works of others.

Beyond the triad of writers, each of the two novels takes a film director as inspiration as well: *Crocodile* explicitly states that Derek Jarman lies as the inspiration for the novel itself,¹⁴² with the narrator of the novel even taking the name of the British director during a party hosted for the allegorical crocodiles of Taiwan. *Last Words* develops the idea further by actively engaging with the filmography from Greek director Theo Angelopoulos (1935-2012) throughout

¹⁴⁰ These presents include “hand-sown lingerie” from Dazai, “the most beautiful picture frame on Earth” from Mishima, and a hundred copies of Murakami’s Waseda university degree plastered over the walls of the Crocodile’s bathroom. Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 5.

¹⁴¹ Qiu trans Huie, *Crocodile*, 6 with emphasis added. In the original: 《如果既不暢銷又不嚴肅，那就只好聳動了。》6.

¹⁴² Ibid. “The material that crocodile provided and [Derek Jarman’s] cinematic techniques prompted me to write this novel.” 140. In the original: 《再加上當時鱷魚被我安置躲在茶藝館地下室，使我決定寫這部鱷魚提供資料，賈曼提供技術的小說。》125.

the novel. In *Last Words* fourth letter, directly addressed to Xu, the narrator writes of Angelopoulos' filmmaking:

I love this artist precisely because I recognize this unfinished quality of his; and so this film [1991's *The Suspended Step of the Stork*], which White Whale found clumsy and inferior, is to me as satisfying and joyous as any of his other films. I can't explain the difference between loving a film and loving its director (someone might mistake this for blind idolatry). I suppose I'm being ridiculous, but it's difficult for me to put into words. *There is no other way for me to draw near to him or pay homage to him besides my writing.*¹⁴³

The act of writing of her own experiences along with including musings and critiques of the work brings the artist closer to the narrator – actively influencing the construction of the work itself – and provides a conduit in which to channel emotions. I see this as explicitly confirming the argument that Xiao brought up in regard to *Crocodile* and Derek Jarman: Qiu's novels can and should be seen as “interart” (藝術間), the creation of a space (or in Warner's terms, a public) *between* artists and their works. In the vulnerable state following a break-up, the narrator of *Last Words* repeatedly collapses the distance between works of art and herself; the work is a disintegrating spectacle of powerful and devised affect mediated through intertextual connections outside of the text.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Qiu trans Heinrich, *Last Words*, 29 with added emphasis. In the original: 《我愛他這個藝術家正是因為我懂得、我看出、我愛他的此種質素，所以白鯨覺得拙劣的這部片子仍然和其他的片子一樣令我滿足、快樂，我沒辦法叫其他人明白愛一部片和愛一個藝術家有什麼不同（別人會誤以為盲目崇拜），我想我有點風，但這部分情感是不可言說的，只有一樣在我的作品裏跟他碰面，跟他致敬了。》 37-38

¹⁴⁴ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*: “For me, the distinguishing features of this spiritual topographic map of European cinema have been formed by my experiences of the past three years. Oh Xu, I beg you not to cast me aside because I'm far away, oh don't casually cast me aside here in Paris.” (95) & “*The Suspended Step of the Stork* I can watch again the day before my birthday. The accordion music is so joyous that I just want to keep singing and singing along with it. I'm a total nutcase, aren't I?” (29).

More importantly, however, is the self-reflexivity of address within the works, both personal and impersonal, which undergird this affective experience of reading. Consider the following quotation from the ninth chapter of the second notebook in *Crocodile*, where the narrator's romantic relationship with Shui Ling is already under duress, and the reader bears witness to an awkward plot recap of Francesco Rosi's (1922-2015) 1987 film *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, adapted from the novella by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, between the two lovers:

This is a metaphor. I can drone on and on about my own love story, which takes place in the short distance between Wenzhou Street and campus. Or I can throw in a few samples a la hip-hop or reggae. These readymades serve as interludes to keep you from getting sick of the monotonous commute back and forth between these two locations, again and again.¹⁴⁵

While the original wording is slightly different (see previous footnote), the overall point remains the same through Huie's translation: there is a self-conscious awareness of the "monotonous" nature of the depiction of the relationship in the novel as much as there is an explicit attempt to find resonance with other forms of media; the tone of writing which oscillates between self-depreciation/awareness is a reflection of this tension. It should then come as no surprise as this tendency is reinforced within *Last Words* with an implicit reference to *Crocodile*. In a subsection entitled "A Memorandum" (記事) of Letter Six, the narrator writes:

¹⁴⁵ Qiu trans. Huie, *Crocodile*, 60 with added emphasis. In the original: 《這就是隱喻。我的愛情只是往返與溫州街和校園之間的單調弦綫，如何振盪出腹裏的饒舌或雷鬼樂，可以假借愛情的「現成物」，編輯其中的綫索成自己肚腹的手風琴。》51. Note that the original is different than Huie's translation in terms of metaphor: while Huie opts for the idea of the endless repetition of "commuting", I offer my own more literal interpretation as contrast: "This is a metaphor. My love is just a single droning string [of a musical instrument] between campus and Wenzhou Street. By means of oscillating the rap or reggae music out from the belly/mind, [I] can make use of love's "readymades", editing between the strings to create [my] own belly-accordion."

My life in Paris also started to blossom. Even Shu Ren, who had always refused to open up to me and had disappeared for such a long time after moving, dropped by to say he had enjoyed reading my novel. (This is the second person to tell me this recently. The other is an editor at my publishing house. *Strange to realize that the book could provide some solace to others.*) Shu Ren liked the book so much that even bought my earlier short stories, though he couldn't get through them. I told him the new novel I was writing was an even better novel and that another collection of stories would come out soon.¹⁴⁶ I told him not to bother with the stories and that I'll give him a copy of the new novel.¹⁴⁷

Qiu's narrator acknowledges her public: the previous novel, the reading audience, the editor at the publishing house, and the future works are all referenced and connected. That the narrator of *Last Words* would eventually refer to the "even better novel" (the one that is being read by the reader) in the penultimate chapter of itself as, "an unintelligible collection of hieroglyphics with no words and a plot that had long since disappeared" should be expected.¹⁴⁸ From the first chapter of *Crocodile* to the end of *Last Words*, Qiu Miaojin's use of intertextuality provides the proverbial infrastructure for the formation of a queer counterpublic. Members of this public demonstrate a kind of self-reflexive tension between private and public, are passionate, politically-minded and situated in non-heteronormative relationships. With each new translation

¹⁴⁶ This appears to be a reference to *Jimo de qunzhong* 寂寞的群眾 (*The Lonely Multitude*), a collection of two shorter stories ("Ha—jiu" 哈——啾 and "Macheluo wajie duanjian" 馬撒羅瓦解斷簡; the titles translate to "Achoo!" and "Macheluo's Incomplete (records of) Disintegration") along with the titular novelette, originally published September 1995 by United Literature Publishing (聯合文學). *The Lonely Multitude* originally won a "Recommended" award from United Literature in 1990 while Qiu was still attending university.

¹⁴⁷ Qiu trans. Heinrich, *Last Words*, 32 with added emphasis. In the original: 《在巴黎的生活開始開花結果，連一直不肯對我開放的怨人，搬家後消失已久，最近也自動出現，並且狗速我他很喜歡我的第一本長篇小說（這是最近第二這樣告訴我的人，另一個是出版社的編輯，這使我明白到這本書是真的可以安慰道人），還去找了我更早的短篇作品來看，但是看不下去。我告訴他我正在寫一本更好看的長篇小說，而且要出版另一本短篇集。我說短片看不下去救不要看，等著以後給他看新長篇小說。》42.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 140. In the original: 《唉，若說這是一本軼散了全部情節的無字天書，那也是對的。》181.

of the works, the reach of this counterpublic grows and reaches new readers far removed from the original context; readers who, despite their differences, are connected and directed through intertextual linkage and can become members of Qiu's public.

中途夭折 // Conclusion

It is easy to let the trope of suicide define and colour the scholarship (and by extension, the public) surrounding Qiu Miaojin's writing. The rising writer was greatly affected by the tension of romantic relationships outside heteronormative discourses in the milieu that the texts were written in, and there is an attenuation to suicide throughout *Crocodile* and *Last Words* as romantic relationships are torn apart and fail. Nevertheless, *Crocodile* demonstrates Qiu's commitment to foregrounding disparate works of art as avenues for understanding the complexity of emotions, while *Last Words* explores a transformation of the self through the works of others, renegotiating other artists' artistic output in effecting a transformation of the self. As I have attempted to demonstrate, it seems antithetical to Qiu's writing practice, which so actively foregrounds intertextual linkages between diverse artists in navigating the narrator's experiences, to reduce the novels to Qiu's identity or their original context.

By foregrounding the original milieu in which Qiu's two novels originated and the particularity in this socio-historic moment in Taiwan, this chapter has shown the initial circumstances of circulation in the creation of a public. Through discussing scholarship on Qiu, I have attempted to highlight the author's complexity and particularity along with inclinations to reduce or categorize the author to a specific mode of understanding. In utilizing Warner's framework of *Publics and Counterpublics*, I have appropriated a method of understanding the novels and their author beyond a singular focus on identity in order to focus on the active relationships that constitute the text. By reading the novels together through this framework, I am attempting to shift the discourse away from the finality and implications of the authors' suicide,

and instead celebrate the importance of art and its connective power despite differences in time and place.

In the face of all the existential dread and foregrounding of suicide and self-harm that pervades the novels and despite the self-reflexive attention drawn to them, Qiu's works remain their own stylized expression of the particular experiences and media that contributed to their formation. Through dissolutions and betrayals of romantic relationships, problematic depictions and articulations of gender expression and sexuality, and even her suicide, Qiu's writings retain their appeal because of the raw emotion routed through intertextual references that index the exploration of a new mode of being. This mode is not shackled to humanist notions about what a person is, but rather decentered among works of art and material expressions of emotions; it is a way of being that is circulated amongst strangers; a way that, despite calling attention to its own apprehension and modesty, is committed to the project of a poetic world-making.

結局到了 // Coda

Often the impression seems to be that public and private are abstract categories for thinking about law, politics, and economics. And so they are. But their power, as feminism and queer theory have had to insist, goes much deeper. A child's earliest education in shame, deportment, and cleaning is an initiation into the prevailing meaning of public and private, as when [they locate their] 'privates' or [are] trained to visit the 'privy.' [...] Public and private are learned along with such terms as 'active' and 'passive,' 'front' and 'back,' and 'top' and 'bottom.' They can seem quasi-natural, visceral, fraught with perils of abjection and degradation or, alternatively, of cleanliness and self-mastery. They are the very scene of selfhood and scarcely distinguishable from the experience of gender and sexuality.

Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 23-24.

It should be noted that we now use the words 'internal' and 'external' in their usual, spatial sense; but for tektology, the science about organizational relationships, their meaning must inevitably be a different one. The microbes of various illnesses are spatially located inside the body, but tektologically they are an *external* force to it, for they do not belong to its organization; this is another organizational form alien to the body and contending with it. On the other hand, if several workers work at one machine, then as far as their system of collaboration is concerned, their relation to this machine, which binds them together, is an *internal* connection of the system, although this is a relation to a spatially-external object.

Alexander Bogdanov trans. George Gorelik, *Essays in Tektology*, 187.

The aim and scope of this thesis project has been to complicate the idea of interiority by contextualizing the writings of two writers from Taiwan through disparate theoretical orientations and formulations across fields and disciplines. I have attempted to show a historical basis for my understanding of interiority as a tension between public and private through the research of Maram Epstein and Vivien Ng's research on filiality and madness. For Wu Ming-yi's novel, I have endeavoured to articulate how the protagonist Alice Shih is much more than a signifier for schizophrenia by depicting the kinds of labour and relationships she engages in despite her suicidal ideation that frames her narrative. Through orienting towards a labour-based perspective by drawing from McKenzie Wark's presentation of Russian thinkers Alexander Bogdanov and Andrei Platonov, I have pursued a reading of *Compound Eyes* that centers Alice's experimentation in reconstructing life experiences, developing other ways of living and

mediating the tension between interiority and exteriority. In examining Qiu Miaojin's novels and scholarship surrounding them, I have tried to show how the pervasive intertextual allusions and citations in the texts operate as mediating devices for powerful and complex feelings; through Michael Warner's formulation of "publics," I have argued that this intertextual technique forms the proverbial infrastructure which compels readers to invest emotionally in the works. Despite the apparent differences between the writers from Taiwan I have engaged in, I see them (and the theoretical orientations that I pair with them) as united in their grappling with the tension of public and private across agents, genres, places, and time.

By casting such a wide net of analysis and by focusing on the contemporary moment, there is a risk of over-extension in analysis and interpretation; "going too far" and "doing too much" in some aspects are fears that are equal to "not doing enough" in others. There are many other possible articulations of this tension that can be analyzed and considered: different authors from other regions, forms of media beyond literature and across genres and time/space, and through more diverse theoretical orientations and formulations. Despite this risk, I see a more significant benefit in going beyond well-travelled theoretical orientations routed in psychoanalysis or historical approaches. The novels featured in this thesis have compelled me to deconstruct, question, and reorganize the structures of knowledge that inform concepts such as gender, sexuality, and the environment as a whole. This has, in turn, resulted in a desire to consider other perspectives and circumstances in theoretical frameworks. Both novels actively work against any clear notion of causality and feature a surplus of philosophical correlations and complexes, it is from this *tension* that I have attempted to assemble theoretical structures to help guide this project.

While any experience of interiority is particular and unique to an individual and their milieu, certain strategies and patterns can be understood when considering the concept as a tension between public and private. In Wu Ming-yi's *Compound Eyes*, reading books and connecting with one's immediate surroundings can be a proactive source of in spite of ecological catastrophes, as Alice struggles with suicidal ideation and forms new relations and connections. While Qiu Miaojin ultimately chose to commit suicide, her novels *Crocodile* and *Last Words* repeatedly stress the importance of the connective potential of art in connecting people across time and space. The appropriation of theoretical frameworks provided by Wark and Warner have provided terms and schemas necessary to rethink entrenched discussions surrounding these works, while Ng and Epstein's historical research has grounded lines of thinking surrounding subjectivity and depictions of madness. The various threads collected in this project call attention to the internal changes and reorganizations of subjectivity needed to live amongst rapidly changing external circumstances.

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