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Identities

Queer, Women, Art, Sport and Taiwan

Dr Stephen Wilson

In the recent Phaidon publication *Art and Queer Culture*¹ (Lord and Meyer, 2013), under the section ‘Document G – Queer Worlds (1995–)’, the editors state that ‘queer’ (a term used here as a strategy of living) has been reclaimed by gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people and other sexual minorities as a deviant means to self-description. To call oneself ‘queer’ is to confront but also to defy the violent uses to which that word has been put in the past.

Queer as an overarching attitude suggests a critique of the contested normalization and corroboration of non-normative sexualities into the mainstream, for example in areas such as patriotism. How are these attitudes reflected back into the institutions of art? Is there a point in recent history when art institutions, public spaces and national museums have confidently realigned queer history? Has contemporary programming of queer art become institutionalized and normalized in itself and hence turned to appealing to notions of good taste and ‘positivism’?

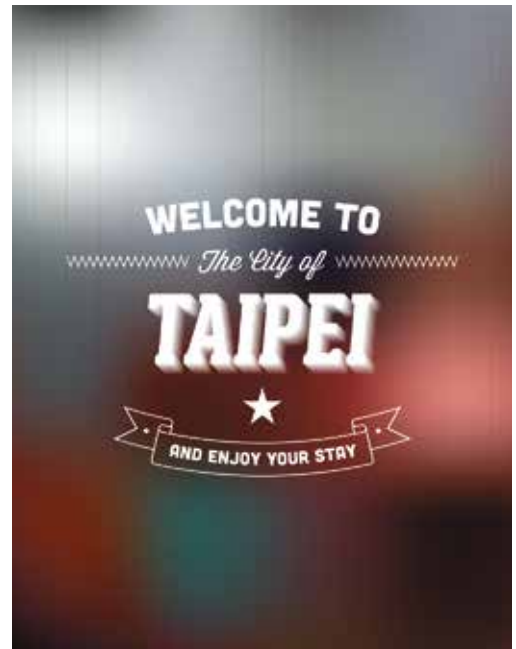
Whether online space produces a less commodified realm of possibility remains to be seen, but Jennifer Doyle’s blog *The Sport Spectacle* deftly conceives such nuances between the mainstream and representations of marginality. Doyle, who was the US-UK Fulbright Distinguished Chair at CCW in residence at the TRAIN Research Centre in 2013/14, examines the politically charged unequal relations between sport, contemporary art, performance and experimentation. This shows in the blog post *Sexing the Stop: Rousey vs McMann* where Doyle looks at the role of the referee: “gender difference impacts how referees see woman athletes. And gender difference also impacts how spectators see refereeing decisions. It can be hard to distinguish between these two things in reading a referee’s decision.”

Doyle addresses vital connections surrounding gender reception within

contemporary sport and media while simultaneously linking contemporary art practices to these same demands. I would like to add, in response to this theory of public reception in sports, ‘woman artists’: when, where and how does gender play into our reading and assessment of how women athletes and artists perform and are treated? Doyle is asking us to think about expressions that purport to give new understandings of identity, with questions such as: why are woman footballers far less acknowledged in mainstream media than their male equivalents? Can the limited space encapsulated by single-sex male/female teams propose alternative binaries? It is through Doyle’s observations that it becomes clear that such historical prejudices can be quickly applied to contemporary art and culture.

Visibility in itself is not a trope; it needs to retain the momentum of criticality.

Through expanding criticality beyond art – to include sport for example – and familiar western discourses more fruitful outcomes may be drawn. The subject of national and personal



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identity surfaced during a research visit to Taiwan in February this year, where I became conscious of how individual identity in Taipei is subject to continuous precarity: exposed to the marginal transitivity of 'glocal' and transnational Asian identities and fraught historical boundaries. The socio-political sphere of contemporary Taipei is continuously engaged with responses to less detectable forms of transnational post-identity construction². It seems that global circumstances increasingly open the door and allow room for once coreperiphery identities to take a more visible stage as well as address a fundamental question: what militates and necessitates a 'periphery identity'?

One example exists in the documented histories and support of present day LGBTQ Taiwan. Taiwan, unlike its nearby neighbours in Mainland China or Singapore, has garnered envy and attention for its progressive policies towards LGBTQ rights. Given the success of LGBTQ Taiwan, it is doubly important to consider that Taiwan is co-dependently tangled into a difficult and complicated relationship to mainland China. As Takamori Nobuo writes in recent conference paper *Internal Asia*: "Taiwan has to change its status from a 'state' to a 'region', while China becomes 'Mainland'. It might be quite difficult for other states to imagine such a situation that a 'state' is forced to degrade its sovereignty. Nevertheless, such political reality enables Taiwan to flexibly switch its status between 'state' and 'non-state', and develop different strategies and ways of observation according to external circumstances." (Nobuo, 2013)

It seems that retaining Taiwan's precarious sovereign status in relation to mainland China has allowed for relative open-mindedness in the area of LGBTQ rights. As already stated, visibility in itself is not a trope; it needs to retain the momentum of criticality. For this to happen marginality needs to hold on to some notions of resistance and precariousness in order to retain freedoms and not become subsumed in national and cultural projects of self-affirmation and capitalist-driven positivism.

1

In collaboration with Phaidon Publishing and the CCW Graduate School Public Programme, a lively panel discussion was held on March 20th 2014 with Prof. Richard Meyer (co-editor of *Art and Queer Culture*), Irene Revell (Dir. Electra Productions) and Dr Stephen Wilson (UAL chair). The discussion looked at various positions within queer studies, identity based practices and contemporary art in 2014.

2

Post-identity is a term which contests the static and stereotypical formations of identity construction. A contemporary response to this term is stated in the former feminist genderqueer artist collective LTTR (Lesbians to the Rescue) in their refusal of such a fixed subjectivity. As written and noted by Julia Bryan-Wilson in 'Repetition and Difference: LTTR' (2006): "LTTR thus underscores the insufficiency of the term 'identity politics' without dismissing the politics of identity".

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