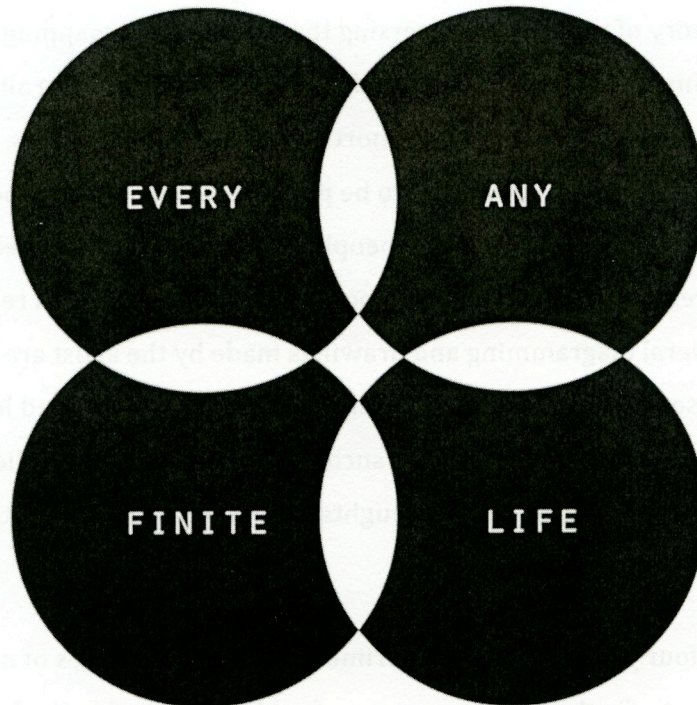


TENG Chao-Ming: *After All These Years*,

29 April – 2 July, 2017



TheCube Project Space is pleased to present artist TENG Chao-Ming's solo exhibition *After All These Years*, an installation developed by TENG Chao-Ming from his previous piece *To Sing or Not to Sing* (2014) that was commissioned by TheCube and the exhibition *ALTERing-NATIVism: Sound Cultures in Post-War Taiwan*. To produce the work the artist dug into the records and documents of the iconic Taiwanese folk song, *Rainy Night Flowers*, compiled them into its chronology, and materialized the result into narrative experiments that foreground the tight networks of agents and processes involved in its development over the past 83 years.

About the exhibition

Rainy Night Flowers tells the unfortunate story and feelings of a depressed young woman using the metaphor of a delicate flower. It was released in 1934 during the burgeoning (and very short-lived) period of Taiwanese-language pop songs under Japan's colonization. This song has been released in records by more than 30 singers and songwriters (most recently in 2016), with nine different versions of lyrics written in Taiwanese, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese. It was performed at numerous political campaigns, memorial and religious ceremonies of all kinds, and wherever some dose of Taiwanese nostalgia/solidarity is in need. The song once earned its -ism status—*Rainy Night Flowers-ism*—coined by people in the 80s who think of it as a mentality that is stopping Taiwan's true independence. It was used by writers to title their books, including a biography of the famous female Taiwanese communist leader, and an examination of Taiwan's economy in the 80s. It was banned several times and rejected (still) by many, while also transformed into

theater plays, movies, novels and most recently the main puzzle to be solved in a video game. It was studied by theorists from a phenomenological perspective, condemned openly by an Ex-President of Taiwan and (after two years) chosen by the Spanish tenor Placid Domingo to perform at his concert in Taipei.

The artist reads this rich history of the song by reversing the conventional mapping of the network of agency. *Rainy Night Flowers*, under this view, has been actively fighting for survival using all possible strategies and tactics for all these years and has finally achieved immortality. *After All These Years*, materializes this view of song's life into a physical space that invites viewers to be part of it. One major component of the show consists of over 100 mirrors (printed with names of people who have been "involved" in the life of the song) that structure the space for reflecting, identifying and positioning the audience. A recording of a "voice-over" of the song is played, and several diagramming and drawings made by the artist are displayed throughout the space. Together they present *Rainy Night Flowers*' life-long ups and downs and lessons learned: how it mobilizes people and institutions from all sectors for such a long period of time, allies with different socio-political-economic environments/thoughts, and raises itself to the status of the representative of Taiwanese folk songs.

TENG's practice for the past four years has been experimenting the possibilities of narratives, using Taiwan as his main examples and inputs. To the artist, our sense of subjectivity and individuality has a lot to do with the stories we tell and stories we were told. We are always interacting with stories and constructing narratives, which shape our understanding of agency, causality, indeterminacy and time. He views this story-exchanging system like a network that is constantly being sculpted. TENG's work provides us with tools and metaphorical concepts that help us mold the network: adding/deleting nodes, building and stretching links. In his own words: "The challenge of making healthy selves and societies is keeping such flowing networks of narratives as lively, open, and energetic as possible. Human beings live by narratives."

Voice-over: TSAI Pao-Chang

About the artist

TENG Chao-Ming (born and lives in Taipei) graduated from the Media Arts and Sciences program from MIT School of Architecture and Planning. Recently shows (selected) include *2012 Taipei Biennial* (TW), *Dojima River Biennial* (JP, 2013), *ALTERing-NATIVism—Sound Cultures in Post-War Taiwan* (TW, 2014), *Discordant Harmony* (Art Sonje Center, Korea, 2015), " RR ZZ " (Gluck 50, Italy, 2015), *Hiroshima Trilogy: Part III* (Hiroshima MOCA, Japan, 2015), *Public Spirits* (Warsaw CCA, Poland, 2016).

Organizer | TheCube Project Space (2F, #13, Alley 1, Lane 136, Section 4, Roosevelt Road, Taipei, Taiwan) thecubespace.com

Exhibition Sponsor | National Culture and Arts Foundation

TheCube Project Space is sponsored by Ministry of Culture, Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei City Government, RC Culture and Arts Foundation and Dr. Chen Bo-Wen.

Voice-over script

I don't know if there's anyone here that's older than me. I suppose most of you are younger? To be honest, I think 80-plus years is a pretty short time. But because most of you won't live to the age of 80, it's easy for you to think that 80-plus is a big number. Yeah I know what you're thinking, every time my name is brought up, there's a sense of senility in the air. But I don't mind. I only care if I'm still alive. As far as I'm concerned, the most fundamental thing about being alive: you're not alive if no one calls you, holds your hand, or responds to your name. You cannot exist as "you" alone. Here's what I think: whether or not it's intentional, or perhaps a lot of times you just need a way to return to the past in your head, a way that is least exhausting. I care not at all about the reasons behind. I'll be there as long as you call for me. More omnipresent than God himself.

In the past 80-plus years, I have persuaded, conned, or cajoled people into working with me. If we count the people who adore me and who despise me, the numbers are probably more or less the same? For me, this is the greatest compliment, and the best ratio. I've been through so much before I have finally earned my status. Now come to think of it, I must admit I am gifted, but I also have worked painstakingly hard.

I am a song.

Ever since I was born, I have been sojourning in the human mouth. I'm familiar with the vibrations of the tongue and vocal cords, as well as the myriad odors in everyone's mouth. I have been suffused with an overwhelming amount of melancholy. And that's precisely why I can shepherd people out of their sorrow. There's "rain," "night," and "fallen blossoms" in my name. Now, blossoms are a curious thing. Once they fall on the ground, people simply stop paying them any attention. More effective than any setup, this tragic imagery tugs at the heartstrings of the largest target audience. Who doesn't have a moment when they feel like they've hit rock bottom? This universal connection has allowed me to win almost everyone's heart in the past 80-plus years, without fail. My other natural advantage is that most of the time I exist in the form of sound. As long as someone calls for me, I can get right into anyone's head that the sound reaches, whether you like it or not. Just like smell. With music, three to five verses can transport people to any place, any moment in time, fast and hard.

I became very popular after I had been born. It was a time when me and a bunch of like-minded friends occupied everyone's and anyone's mouth and ears on the island. Then came a social upheaval the year I turned four. Call it luck or not, for the first time I changed into a different body. Ditching that bemoaning, desolate face I'd been wearing, all of a sudden I began drumming up support among the public for fighting for the Imperial Japanese Army. And it dawned on me how powerful I could become with multiple, mercurial identities. Time after time I transform myself, assiduously adapting to different milieus where I connect myself to various parts, or disassemble into more mutable combinations. It never concerns me whether I should be "here" or not, or whether I should be "me." I just focus on looking for the next stepping-stone, the next occasion where I can sustain myself. I relish the moment when people scream my name, or flourish my avatars, as do I enjoy lurking in the tiny corners of the human mind, conceiving ways of staying unseen. As time goes by, I've become more proficient, scrupulous, turning my existence into a distributed system in this world. Always allow myself to be an exception, always allow myself to be elusive, so I can challenge the human desire to understand, and I get to design clues to trick people into thinking they have deciphered the mystery, but in fact falling into a deeper trap. This is how I grapple with the societal makeup and the volatile zeitgeist. For me, the most artful way of using people is allowing them to use you at will. If "use" sounds too much like a dirty word, how about "collaborate"? Or "win-win"? Keeping this sense of fluidity is basically the core strategy in my entire game plan. I have one goal and one goal only: immortality, if everything goes as planned.

Now, how far-reaching someone's influence is, is not something I can predict. Which is why I never say "No" to any request to collaborate. This way, whatever the outcome, at least I'm remembered as being nice. Ask those who are good at chatting up how they do it, they would tell you, "Don't be picky." My principle is to find those who await fulfillment and adjust my body to fill in those vacancies. I do everything in my power to enter someone's mind, to become that person. Oxymora and paradoxes are my favorite tactics, and just when I have made sure that person is confounded, I nudge them into thinking my way. I greet everyone with no assumptions. Did you know that this was rule number one

when they trained special agents during the Cold War? Assumptions would tie you down and cripple your mission. Look for those who are alone and helpless. They are your best shot, easiest to shepherd. Or look for those with a loudspeaker. They need to hide behind someone like me, in order to coax and wheedle. Naturally the ideals they project through me are bound to crumble or fade. When they want to bail, or when I get jaded, I simply move on to the next target. No attachment whatsoever.

I've been called all kinds of names: fence-sitter, opportunist. These moral judgments serve nothing but to conceal the disparagers' cowardice. I completely understand why you all applaud the so-called consistency: to stay on your path, to persevere. This whole pursuit of consistency only illustrates how weak humanity is: you don't want to waste your time trying to comprehend, you want an easier route to respond or to anticipate. But isn't it boring — this life of reflexive nature? I mean look at your knees — do you honestly want to be like them? And that maxim "The very beginning mind itself is the most accomplished mind of true enlightenment?!" This type of self-help cliché is the definition of an overstatement. People who say these things are the true fence-sitters. To those people I have only this to say, "Who do you think you are?" With all these hackneyed maxims you can't even live up to half of them. So it's all just a ploy to make yourself feel better. I'm an extremely pessimistic optimist. I consider "being loathed" a blessing, and I can't ask for anything better. To be loathed is to leave a mark in people's mind. Whether I'm upheld or trampled, it's all the same to me. I want to maximize the effects of every moment I'm in the spotlight, to captivate and swarm into as many minds as possible, to sway and dominate as many bodies as possible. In 2002 there was a concert of a famous tenor who called for me on the stage. I did not hesitate. I had foreseen exactly what kind of future awaited. It was imperative for me to take advantage of him and that stage, to dig hard in order to build a monument for myself. You know how the second an impression is formed it is very, very hard to change. Even though you realize later on that impression was clearly not true. Rationality, evidence, you name it, all of it has already gone right out the window. Everything I have done and every disgrace I have endured is all part of a plan — to seize the best opportunity when it knocks, to allow my energy to blanket a dense network, my tentacles wriggling into the furthest depths of this network. Oh humans, they can never break free from their insatiable urge for a sense of belonging, this thirst for being part of something greater than themselves. A scene like this is the perfect occasion for me to become that greater something.

And that was probably when my reputation reached its zenith. If the past few decades of experience have taught me anything, it is the thing to which this target audience feels inferior. It is absolutely key...now if you think about reputation, it is something you garner by accomplishing what others cannot. Either you procure admiration, or you accumulate power. Both incite fear. Under the influence of my reputation, coupled with the scene and emotional contagion, the audience falls right into my hands. All those people present, whether they saw the rain or the sun, felt the tears or the music, everything was adding to my reputation. In the short ten minutes thousands of people chanting my name, I knew the die had been cast. As I wandered freely in and out of their bodies, watching these people dissolve into me, every effort I had made was amplified, bit by bit, inch by inch, until my whole existence enwrapped the audience. Me on their lips, these people so enthralled in their singing, began to lose that precious individuality they had thought they had, and metamorphosed into a collective consciousness. In that particular moment, *I* was the audience; *I* was the collective consciousness.

Ever since then, my plan had been basically on autopilot. No effort required. Once you enter the human consciousness, people start justifying things through imagination and memory. You must have heard of this rule of negotiation: to convince someone is to let them believe that it's their own decision. And then you fabricate a coincidence, which helps linking the past and the present. In this way people who hated me now have no choice but to pretend they like me. As I'd like to stress, love me or resent me, it's all the same to me. People are scared of losing control. It's why they find me riveting, and the same reason they find me repulsive. My only dread is people's apathy.

Finally I'd like to talk about patience. I have always believed that time is on my side. Time is your best ally. Cultivate your sense of rhythm. You need it to give people an illusory sense of security in order to paralyze them. You need it to stay arresting. You need it to engage those not yet in your sight.

Thanks for being here today. Any comments, suggestions, I'm all ears.

(Translation: Catherine Yu-Shen Hsieh)