

## A Diachronic Record

A screening, discussion, and vitrine presentation on  
*Writing the Time Lag* by Lee Tzu Tung

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A Diachronic Record is a public programme and vitrine exhibition centred around the film *Writing the Time Lag* (2014–ongoing), an experimental documentary by Taiwanese artist and director Lee Tzu Tung. Initiated in 2014, *Writing the Time Lag* (hereafter *Time Lag*) is informed by an ethnographic approach to collaborative and participatory filmmaking, where activist voices and political narratives shape what the artist calls a ‘microcosm of Taiwan’s complex identity dynamics’. Navigating Indigenous grassroots activism, the film questions how one makes sense of national identity and provides a glimpse into the colonial dynamics of a transnational public sphere.

*Time Lag* (2021) is built off a variety of footage filmed and edited over the past decade. The experimental documentary opens with an annotated diagram of the film’s video progress bar, wherein the structure of the footage is introduced and provides the audience with a perspective of the project’s vast temporal scope. As an assemblage of documentary shots, home footage, interview clips, and found television media, the film centres on the experiences of those involved in Taiwan’s Indigenous grassroots activism community among a broader changing political landscape. These stories are woven together with Tzu Tung’s intervention into the documentary form, which features a prominent editing hand as evidenced in the film’s introductory diagram. Since starting this project, the artist has re-edited the documentary approximately every two years, while incorporating the post-production process into the film footage itself. Their self-reflexive method enhances the authorial subjectivity that both propels and grounds this work, revealing changing perspectives over time and foregrounding a multi-layered and diachronic approach to documenting the subjectively political and historically personal.

This project began with the impact of the Sunflower Movement, also known as ‘318’, on 18 March 2014. Catalysed by the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, a proposed trade treaty between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China, the movement saw demonstrators largely comprised of students and civic organisers occupy Taiwan’s national Legislative Yuan to protest this treaty that would have made the Taiwanese market vulnerable

to Chinese political influence, potentially opening floodgates to an already-precarious state. Amidst this transformative threat of sovereignty, a reminder of Taiwan's interweaving colonial legacies – from foreign European rule to inter-Asian occupation, alongside its modern history of Sinicisation and settler colonisation – resurfaced and forms the bed of contemporary discourse where 'national identity' is produced, performed, and disputed.

Tzu Tung's inquiry into authorial memory delves into the interpersonal relationships of those involved in the Sunflower Movement, Taiwan's Indigenous movement, and #MeToo, with the voices and lens of individuals such as Amis activists Sumi, Lisin, and Kaying; Pinuyumayan activist Kao Minchi; Washington D.C.-based Taiwanese political worker, June Lin; Amis shaman Kating; Truku shaman Don Don; and Han culture workers in the Amis community, Wawa and Chia Chien. Predicated on a horizontal, collaborative working structure, *Time Lag* invites interviewers to become interviewees, amateurs to become camerapersons, and vice versa. While evidencing how political narratives are constructed, codified, and fundamentally iterative, this ethnographic co-authorship also counters the dated ethic of invisibility that traditionally remained 'behind the scenes'. Subverting roles of who tells a story and on what terms, these individuals shed light on the kinds of ethnic and gendered discrimination they face even within the grassroots organising sphere, where the supposedly championed values of dignity and self-determination are violated in a devastating and all-too-familiar reality.

In light of these apparent contradictions – between private and public, personal and communal, and sovereign and subjugated – what emerges in *Time Lag* is an incredibly vulnerable approach to navigating micro and macropolitics that Tzu Tung articulates in their own terms in the proceeding pages of this printed handout. Their approach to a conceptual, research-based practice punctures grand narratives of historicity with a raw embrace of emotional charge. The artist's desire to do right by their interlocutors, including you, the viewer, against the odds of structural forces is a part of the social design of uncertainty we all share when breaching unknown terrain.

The selections in the vitrine presentation at Asymmetry Art Foundation provide an entry point into the ongoing ten-year process of this experimental documentary. Organised on a timeline across the three display cases, film stills from *Time Lag*'s 2021, 2018, and 2016 iterations are interspersed with their field notes and literary influences across this period. The artist's varied approaches to their field notes, whether through index cards, notebooks, online bulletin boards, or a private Facebook account, reflect the different stages and geographies of how this project grew and spanned. For instance, the index cards that guided the cut of *Time Lag* (2016) are inspired by the Taiwanese novelist Wuhe's *Queer and Witches* and *Remains of Life*. Part fictional, part factual, this early storyline weaves Indigenous mythologies with echoes of history and contemporary life. The other literary references in the display case, between Wuhe's *Thoughts on A Bang-Kalusi* and Yi-Hsum (Nathalie) Chang's *A Farewell Letter*, continue looking at the parallels between an ostracised nation and its ostracised communities, giving form to the narrative tradition through which the artist speaks.

Other materials converse with each other as connections are drawn across Taiwan; in Taipei, the Tafalong Community, the Katratripulr Community, and the Dowmung Community; as well as Hong Kong, Chicago, Seattle, and New York. The Anti-Black Box Curriculum Movement and its New York solidarity demonstration appear on one end of the display, to be further referenced in the artist's journal entry. Elsewhere, commentary on the PTT2 Bulletin Board System evidences the inherent contradictions of tradition and settler-colonial time in the Katratripulr Community, with an IP address from Taipei. Entangling the affective politics of intimacy and shame, these texts renegotiate the conventions of belonging amid radical societal changes.

Five years after the onset of the Sunflower Movement, we have encountered an apparent fizzling of the spirit. In their final log on the PTT2 Bulletin Board System in 2019, the artist remarks on the emotional toil of these activities, of what seemed like a revolutionary era coming to an end. Those involved in the activist scene seemed to have left this sphere or have otherwise moved on.

This atmosphere of post-revolutionary malaise was punctured when the New Power Party informally collapsed in 2021. In response, the artist broke their indefinite hiatus to edit this latest version of *Time Lag*, and return to the legacy of the Sunflower Movement. By an Anglophonic logic (left to right), the end of this timeline is also where the display begins; in 2024, Tzu Tung leaves us with a new index card that reflects on where we stand today. Despite the structural realities embedded in their work, their comments are not an attempt at diagnosis. These are annotations that perhaps tune into a zeitgeist, an atmosphere, or an intensity. Or, perhaps, they try grasping at something else.

Rachel Be-Yun Wang

July 2024

## A message from the artist (EN)

If I watch the screening of *Writing the Time Lag* with you in-person, I would probably cover my face with both hands. In 2024, ten years after the initial conception of *Writing the Time Lag*, I am still able to work on this project and converse with my 24-year-old self. In the early days of making this film, I listened to a lecture by Taiwanese novelist Wuhe. He said:

I see my literary peers living amidst the rush of competitions, alluring awards, and bewitching opportunities to display themselves. Meanwhile, I find myself petrified when I look externally, unable to develop my own language. Therefore, I made a significant decision for myself: to return to Tamsui [a district in New Taipei City] and seclude myself for ten years. Creation should be joyful. During this time, I conducted field research in my own way. I believe that only through grounded practice can an external theme or idea enter my internal world and mature into my unique language. Creation would then flow naturally, and no longer be a torment or pain.

I remember these words moved me to tears back in 2014 in Chicago, as I envied such a painful yet luxurious resolve. *Writing the Time Lag* is an experimental documentary I began filming after Taiwan's 2014 Sunflower Movement. I took a leave of absence from art school, joined the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the New Power Party (NPP), and worked in Washington D.C. and various political spheres. I carried this belief of total artistic immersion and ventured into different fields and environments. Today is the tenth year of this luxurious practice.

Before *Writing the Time Lag*, my previous work was a short film called *Waves* (2011). During its filming, I experienced a series of sexism and violence within the film industry so severe that, despite just starting to win some film awards, I had already lost my immunity to survive in the industry. *Writing the Time Lag* began with the intention of documenting the changes in Taiwanese national identity after Taiwan's Sunflower movement, yet I

naturally gravitated towards stories of sexual discrimination and violence in the protests. Using a participatory video approach, I interviewed many Taiwanese indigenous queer individuals and women. For *Writing the Time Lag*, I declared to my friends and myself: ‘It must be filmed with an all-female crew’.

This vitrine is filled with images, writings, and notes I have accumulated over the past ten years. They are like prophecies of time lags: artistic endeavors are directed towards the future, yet governed by the past. *Writing the Time Lag* is a film that is edited approximately every two years, with versions from 2016 (20 minutes), 2018 (50 minutes), and 2021 (70 minutes). This format allows me to stand in the present, look back, and reflect on the changes in Taiwan’s political narrative and my own positionality every two years. Curator Rachel Wang has asked me what I would include for the 2024 version? During Taiwan’s recent #MeToo movement, I finally exposed the 10-year-old experiences from the making of *Waves*. Even more, as a witness for another sexual harassment case, I saw another side of one of the interviewees of *Time Lag*. Further, the 2024 election and recent events in Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan seem to add a post-script to the Sunflower Movement. – In my *Time Lag* fieldnotes, I recorded then-contemporary events on the left-hand page of my notebook, and used the right-hand page to speculate on what might happen in one, two, or even five years later. Filming reminds me of the tale of Urashima Tarō, who traversed to the alternative realm of the Dragon Palace. He brings back a forbidden treasure box to the human world, and opens it out of temptation. The box reveals that he was gone for at least 100 years and restores his true age as an old man. Like Tarō, who covered his face upon confronting this time lag, I also find myself covering my face when memories are projected from the forbidden box. It’s not just the shyness of me being with the audience in the same time and place, but also the fear of dialoguing with the past, at this ‘now’ that was once the future.

I placed the footage of Kating Hongay, the grandmother performing a purification ritual, at the beginning of the film; she passed away seven days

after our interview. In addition to myself, everyone who has participated in this work has stored a piece of their soul, their will, in the memory cards. These past lives exist in the digital realm, to be animated again as photons that are beamed into and absorbed by the viewer's retinas in this optical behavior. On April 29, 2016, in the process of *Time Lag* field research, I once wrote:

‘If possible,’ she said, as the whole village gathered around the old woman to listen,

‘We must trace back to the source of the stream, the boundaries of language, the load points of time. There, we will find not a stone, not a dream, but a needle for weaving. You must pick up that needle, lift the entire story that falls along the stream, carefully bend the world into a U, and stitch the beginning and the ends together. That’s what a story looks like, a rainbow with no gravity.’

Lee Tzu Tung  
July 2024



## A message from the artist (CN)

如果我有機會跟你在現場一起看放映，我雙手大概會把臉蓋起來。2024 的我竟然還能跟著這個作品工作，跟24歲的自己對話。在製作《時差書寫》的時候，我曾經聽小說家舞鶴的演講，他說：「我看到文學圈每天同儕的競爭、得獎、妖舞奪目，但看著外面、卻沒辦法發展自己的語言。於是我做了一個很大的決定：回到淡水，閉關了十年。創作應是幸福的，這段時間，我用自己的方式田野，我覺得真正的實踐，才能讓一個主題從外在進入內在，轉化成成熟出自己獨特的語言，創作時候，就不會有那麼大的煎熬與痛苦。」

--- 記得當年在芝加哥聽到這段話，我淚流滿面，多麼多麼地令人羨慕，這種既痛苦又奢侈的決心。《時差書寫》是我從 2014 年台灣太陽花運動後，開始拍攝的實驗紀錄片，我便從藝術學校休學，加入了民進黨、時代力量，在華盛頓 DC 與不同的政治場域工作，我帶著這種對創作上徹底實踐的認同，進入不同的地方田野。

在拍攝《時差書寫》前，我有一部作品叫做《海浪》，在拍攝這部短片的時候，我經歷了電影圈性別歧視及暴力的經驗，嚴重到，即使我才剛開始拿一些關於電影的獎項，但我已經喪失了在電影圈存活的免疫力。《時差書寫》原意是拍台灣 318 後台灣國族認同轉變的狀況，但田野過程裡，卻不自覺地被運動裡性別歧視及暴力的故事吸引。片裡，我以參與式影片的方式，訪問了多名台灣原住民酷兒及女性，「時差書寫」，當時的我說：「一定要是一個全女性的劇組。」

展場中充滿這十年間，我留下來的影像、寫作與筆記。他們就像是時差的預言：走向未來的創作，被過去決定。《時差書寫》是一部每兩年剪接一次的電影，它有 2016（20分鐘）、2019（50分鐘）、2021（70分鐘）版本，這個形式是能讓我站在此時此刻，每兩年一次回看、反思台灣政治敘事上、自我心境上的變化。策展人問我，那我 2024 年的版本要做什麼呢？近期，我終於在台灣 #MeToo 運動裡，把十多年前做《海浪》時的經歷說了出來。甚至，因作為另一起性騷擾事件的發聲者，我看見了《時差書寫》某位受訪者的另外一面。--- 在做《時差書寫》田野時，我會在筆記左頁記錄「今日」所發生的事，右頁自由書寫一年、兩年、甚至五年後「同日」會發生的事。創作，是浦島太郎逛了海底神

宮，寶盒被放映，我卻摀住了臉 — 那不僅僅是你我同在一个現場的羞怯，也是因為在「現在」這個未來，對辯證過去而感到的畏懼。

我將 Kating Hongay 阿嬤除穢的影像放在片頭，他在被訪問後第七天過世。除了我、在這部參與式作品裡受訪的人，也將一片靈魂與意志儲存到了記憶卡裡面。而這些發生的過去，也預定在未來觀眾的視網膜前爆開。2016 年4月29日，在這時差的道途中，我曾經寫下：

「如果可以，」現在，現在整個村落的人都來到老婦的身旁聽她說的話。「我們要上溯溪的源頭、上溯語言的邊界、上溯時間的載點，在那裏會找到，不是一顆石頭、不是一場夢境、而是一根編織用的針。你要拾起那針，將一整個沿著溪垂墜下來的故事提起，小心地將世界拗折成一個 U，並將頭尾相縫起來。那就是一本故事長的樣子，一條萬無重力的虹。」

李紫彤  
7月2024年

*Writing the Time Lag* (2014–ongoing) is a project directed by Lee Tzu Tung.

Producer: Huang Yu Fang

Executive Producer: Li Yi Feng, Wu Jia Jing

Cinematographer: Wang Ai Ru, Lee Tzu Tung

Editor: Lee Tzu Tung

Script Advisor: Chen Betty

Editing Advisor: Hsu Yating

Music: Hsu Yenting

Sound Editor: Lee Tzu Tung

Set Designer: Tseng Yenting

Performer: Liu Wawa

Performer: Guan Hsian Mei

Narrator: Giwas Gigo

Amis-Chinese Translator: Afan Lekal

English-Chinese Translator: Lin Ying Chu, Cheng Yi, Huang Shu Lin

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For more information please visit [asymmetryart.org](https://asymmetryart.org).