

What's so queer about *Happy Together*? a.k.a. Queer (N)Asian: interface, community, belonging

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Belonging: an audience in Australia

Sometime around 9 pm, the foyer upstairs of the art deco Forum Theatre on Flinders Street, in the city, is packed with an assemblage jostling and pushing as an anticipating crowd awaits to be seated. The grand staircase is alive with excited bodies waving to their acquaintances below. On the ground floor, queuing by the ticket booth, is a thickening ticket line seamlessly flowing out onto the street. Around the entrance door, we see more fake blond hair with black roots than real blondes with real roots, fluttering in the blustering cold wind. The scene is young, twentythirtysomething and cosmopolitan. Designer-clad, PVC and zips, tangerine and lime, grunge and hip.

From the gaze of the regular 'gold pass' corner, this spectacle distracts. The crowd tonight is an aberrant assemblage, typically known in Australia as an Asian crowd, the kind one would only glimpse in the streets in Chinatown, or at the Metro dance club on 'Asian nights', or at the 'rice corner' at the gay pub, The Peel, or as 'mediatized' anonymous faces in suburbs such as Footscray in the West or Springvale in the South-East. The Asian crowd distracts. It threatens the high pomposity of the predominantly Anglo arthouse audience. The image is the Debordian spectacle of society when the shock of strangers is allayed as reception is turned into distraction.

*In Melbourne, there is usually an Asian attendance at the annual film festival. Apart from the cinemas in Chinatown, the festival circuit is one of the only few conduits of Asian film circulation in Australia. However, at the screening described above, the crowd is predominantly Asian. The crowd is here to watch a Wong Kar-wai film: a much hyped gay film, *Happy Together*. For those newly-Renaissanced sticky rice queens clasping each other's hands, the Asian crowd comforts. The chance to catch their icon, Leslie Cheung, in homo-action, is merely an added bonus. Groups of action cinema fans in homeboy wear hang out together and feel at home here. It is usually imagined that they frequent the Chinatown cinema on a Sunday evening, with their biological family in tow, to join the family entertainment-seeking crowd. Wong Kar-wai's marginal outside-of-kinship-characters resonate with them as do Tarantino's with the global others. A gold-pass holder queries, 'How do they hear about this festival? Where did they find out about it?'*

At 9 pm on the 8 August 1997 in the Forum Theatre, the scene, rather than the film itself, is the star attraction. There is excitement in the air as chinky chicks meet samballites and network with other Asian lesbians.¹ Poofsters meet other poofsters, hets meet bis. Asians meet other Asians. All young, twentythirtysomething, outside and out of the traditional Asian family. At this screening, visibility lives in a marginal space. As familiar faces are encountered, acquaintances renewed and new contacts made, there is an overwhelming sense of pride

about being Asian and out. In this space, queer is imagined not through an alternative community, but through time, through shared networks and connections between places, people and stories. In this instance, the interface is a Wong Kar-wai film, a cybernetic-like grid that reorders the tropes of the Asian family, the Anglo-Saxon gay and lesbian communities and the predominantly Anglo arthouse festival audience. The narrative is the story of becoming queer and Asian in Australia. At 9 pm on the 8 August 1997 at the Forum Theatre in Melbourne in Australia, a mobile community emerges, happy together. Momentarily, a space is transformed and a belonging is formed. Such is the shock of signification, a synthesis of articulation. Here, criss-crossing different time-zones across the Asian diaspora, from Buenos Aires to Hong Kong to China to Taiwan to Australia, a transnational immigrant space stakes its place. Hear, in a venue foyer, a diasporic crowd awaits a diasporic film.

Introducing the interface: Queer (N)Asian and diasporic Hong Kong cinema²

This paper attends to the relationship between diasporic media and diasporic queer formation by exploring the cultural circuit of Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997) as an agent of diasporic Asian–Australian queer visibility.³ In particular, it examines how *Happy Together* interpellates Hong Kong's first modern Cantopop star, actor and Asian gay icon Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing,⁴ as an interface for articulating an emerging diasporic Asian queer identity. This interface is a transnational imagination called 'Queer (N)Asian'.⁵ 'Queer (N)Asian' expresses how diasporic media interpellates diasporic queer formations.

Queer (N)Asian is constituted in the disjunctive new 'scapes' informed by Arjun Appadurai's (1996) global cultural flow. Characterized by three features, it is an emergent horizon that critically deploys the instabilities of 'queer' and 'Asian'. The first feature is that it contests the orthodoxy of East and West. Hong Kong cinema between the transitional years, 1984–1997, highlighted this contestation as a globally popular and postnational screen for diasporic interpellation. During this period, the post-Declaration cinema expressed the identity-crisis experienced by the colony. In *The East is Red* (Ching Siu-tung 1993) for example, the transsexual martial artist, aptly named 'Asia The Invincible', exemplifies the deployment of 'transsexuality' and 'Asia' to highlight the cinema as a cultural model that experienced both British and Chinese modernities, combining and reconfiguring the contingencies and contiguities of West/East, capitalism/communism, and pluralism/autocracy.⁶ The consumption of Hong Kong cinema as a travelling technology in the queer Asian–Australian diaspora, for example, has produced a new self-conscious Asian and queer visibility constituted in such a tactical deployment.

The urban emergence of gay and lesbian Asian–Australian culture(s) in Melbourne in the last five years attests to the second feature of Queer (N)Asian as that which supports a transnational Asian queer connectedness. This is evident in recent critically-acclaimed Asian–Australian films such as *China Dolls* (Tony Ayers 1997), *Sadness* (Tony Ayers 1999) and *Boy-Serpentine* (Hang Teng 1999). They strategically deploy Asian, Australian and queer normatives to narrate new desires that simultaneously inscribe both a 'sticky rice' and a transnational imagination. This imagination acknowledges the incommensurabilities of narrations mapped by the irreversible crossings of the marginal spaces of, for example, the privilege of virtual knowledges reproduced in the circuits of electronic mail, the interfaces that charge the under-

ground of 'invisible' Asian queer spaces in Melbourne, the global iconomies of heterosexual, homosexual, Oriental and Occidental imaginings, and together, the international itinerary maps that connect shared stories – stories that are ignited in part through common and contradictory desires of consumption, circulation and reproduction of Chinese, Asian, Western, Australian, straight and queer discourses.

The third feature suggests that a transnational Asian queer connectedness produces an identity that disrupts the post-Stonewall, Anglo-Saxon model of coming out as a narration of sexual identity. Writing on a series of East Asian and diasporic Asian films that reflect gay identity-formations, Chris Berry (2000, forthcoming) notes that one of the major differences between the dominant Anglo-Saxon post-Stonewall and an East Asian gay representation lies in the process of 'coming out' and the social mapping of family and kinship. Unlike most Anglo-Saxon post-Stonewall cultures where 'coming out' involves a process of leaving the blood family and joining alternative communities, the process of 'coming out' in most neo-Confucian postcolonial Asian cultures surfaces as a problem within the networks of kinship and its obligations that make up the blood family, and contains the individual into it. Here, visibility appears as something that is lived in marginal spaces and, for the most part, these spaces are not alternative, but mobile communities.

These features inflect the politics of identity mobilized by different modes of address, reflecting different subject-positions and self-definitions. In the following, this paper highlights how Queer (N)Asian is produced by the constitution of identity as a critical practice. It demonstrates this through an examination of Leslie's self-parodic performance in *Happy Together*.⁷ This performance shows how the instabilities of both queer and Asian are critically deployed using the practice of hyperbole. Cutting into the power of representation in such a way that it draws on and covers over the codes and conventions that it undermines, such a practice exposes the (Asian gay and lesbian) stereotype by turning the object into the subject in its moment of (queer and Asian) self-articulation. As an emergent cultural formation constituted in mobility and belonging, Queer (N)Asian disrupts dominant (Asian, mainstream, diasporic and heteronormative) representations to highlight the practice of identity constituted in the politics of self-enactment and self-representation.

The journal of disclosure: narrating an effect of pretence

Sometime between the 11th and 12th of September 1996, whilst on location in Buenos Aires shooting Wong Kar-wai's 1997 Cannes award-winning film *Happy Together*, cinematographer Christopher Doyle writes in his journal:

We start with the first love scene – supposedly en route through the North of Argentina – in a love hotel of a small town somewhere near the Tropic of Capricorn. Leslie is called Bao Wing (my focus puller's name) and Tony is Ah Ming (my gaffer). They have cut their names into a heart shape in the wood paneling of the wall.

Tony and Leslie are finding a way to touch and feel their way around the scene. I'm lost and searching. 'It's a Milonga', Wong is complaining ... 'stop moving as if it's Rock and Roll!'

We clear the room. It's just Wong, me and 'the boys'. Don't know how or why, but Tony's 'on top'. Don't know why or how, either, where I am is both as evocative and discreet and we could hope to be.

It's a beautiful and sensual scene. Tony and Leslie really look great in bed. But Tony is devastated when it's all done.

'Wong said all I had to do was kiss' he confides to me... 'now look how far he's pushed me'.

Leslie is in a spirited, bitchy mood: 'Now you know how bad I've felt all these years pretending I want to put my thing in that extra hole that women have!'

(Doyle 1997:56)

'When is saying something doing something? And how is saying something doing something?' Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick (1995) ask in their introduction to *Performativity and Performance*.⁸ What is the relationship between enunciation and utterance? How does saying that he is 'pretending I want to put my thing in that extra hole that women have' effect the status of Leslie's performances? What is the effect of 'pretending' and what does it mean in the context of Leslie, his 'place' in Hong Kong cinema and his status as an Asian gay icon?

Implicit in the grammar of narration is enunciation (Benveniste 1971; Lacan 1977; Silverman 1983; Metz 1991). Through Doyle's citation, Leslie-as-enunciator, is made present through the conscious utterance of 'I'. However, a paradox surfaces when the result of the speech act is considered. From the utterance of 'how bad I've felt ... pretending,' the subject of enunciation highlights the truth because it discloses the act of pretence. From the verbal result of what is spoken, the act of pretence highlights a lie. This is because the enounced is located belatedly, at the expense of coming after the speech act.⁹ When Doyle's quote frames the icon's discursive construct that is embedded in the notion of 'pretending,' his citation of Leslie's speech act functions as a performative that enunciates 'how saying something can be doing something' (Parker and Sedgwick 1995:16). The movement from 'saying' to 'doing' is enabled by the paradoxical and belated modes of address between enunciation and enounced that exposes the lie underpinning the affect of pretence. It narrates the (lie of) heteronormativity evident in the film's construction of the characters.

The space of the destination through the construction of the characters

Typical of Wong's *auteur* style, multilingual *Happy Together* (in Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish and English) is an embedded narrative with multiple layers of subtexts and interpretations. Briefly, by way of contextualizing Leslie's part in the film, the focus here will be on two main tropes, that of space as context and identity as repetition, to suggest that, as self-parody, Leslie 'queers' what is essentially a straight film. The film belongs to the genre of the 'road movie' where the travel metaphor becomes a search for 'home' and 'identity' through the three male protagonists' (individual and collective) quests. This section first examines the characters in order to establish the narrative function implied by the space of the destination. Next, it is argued that the hyperbolic performance of Leslie-as-Bao-Wing problematizes the space of the destination. This performance highlights the cultural function of the destination as a self-reflecting and auto-referential space. Represented and reproduced by the diegetic tropes of the spaces of 'south,' 'Argentina' and 'Taiwan', this space reinscribes Hong Kong and the historical dispersion of the Asian diaspora.

In *Happy Together*, a film inspired by the 'gay' writings of Manuel Puig, Leslie plays a male hustler called Bao Wing. Bao Wing is a 'straight-acting' gay prostitute

financially stranded in Buenos Aires while travelling and partying through Argentina with his 'straight-acting' boyfriend, a Hong Kong Chinese gay man, Yiu-Fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai). The film, rushed into completion before Hong Kong's enforced return and consequently awarded the best direction in the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, can be read as an allegory of Hong Kong's return to China, evident in its subtitle, 'A Reunion'. This reunification trope of 'starting over' is driven by the two gay protagonists, each bearing the mark of their own 'British National Hong Kong place-of-origin-passport' and both leaving Hong Kong to 'start over'.

Happy Together is Wong Kar-wai's first attempt at exploring explicitly gay-related content. Wong repeats his use of paired protagonists in films such as the Big Brother and his lackey in *As Tears Go By* (1988), Yuddy and the sailor in *Days of Being Wild* (1991), the hit-man and his assistant in *Fallen Angels* (1995), the two cops and their two lovers in *Chungking Express* (1994), and The Evil East and The Poison West in *Ashes of Time* (1994). In *Happy Together*, however, he appears to have reinforced rather than undercut the trope of binary epistemologies. Consider for example, the construction of his characters. Yiu-Fai is the more responsible and the more reserved of the two Hong Kong protagonists. He is nostalgic and consequently is unable to seize on present opportunities. He is the one who works, cooks, and desires to reconcile with his father/family. He is unable to reciprocate propositions from the film's third protagonist, Chang (Zhang Zhen). Yiu-Fai is also the one who reaches their 'ultimate' destination, the Iguassu Falls. Bao Wing's pursuits are pettier and he is less nostalgic. His transient life comprises fleeting one night stands and anonymous toilet beat cruises. He indulges in spontaneous outbursts of wantonness, impetuosity and excess. Always the one who leaves and the one who returns to 'start over', Bao Wing with his passport hijacked by Yiu-Fai, never leaves Buenos Aires and never arrives at the destination, the Iguassu Falls.

Here, the film's didactic treatment of the characters exposes the straight-laced moral discourse of the narrative: excess of any nature is not tolerated. Even the 20 year-old Chang who is running away from Taiwan to leave his unhappy life at the noodle-stand run by his family, as well as to avoid the country's compulsory national army service, eventually appears to have been 'contained' at the end of the narrative. For instance, in the beginning he appears to be questioning his sexuality as his voice-over mostly revolves around his observations on Yiu-Fai. He rejects women's propositions and his voice-over reveals to us that he thinks Yiu-Fai has a 'nice voice'. He spends his time hanging out with Yiu-Fai at the bar, in the work kitchen and together with him, playing soccer with the locals. At the end of the film, Chang, through a chasteness that neither proposes nor consummates (with Yiu-Fai or anyone else), reaches his destination at the Lighthouse and returns to Taiwan.

From the construction of the three male protagonists, it can be concluded that both Yiu-Fai and Chang are 'rewarded' in their quests through the neo-Confucian 'values' of decent hard work, thrift and normativity. The film's plot succeeds for both of them: they both reach their respective destinations. In the course of such a resolution, it appears that Wong has undermined the performative thrust of the film. The 'gay' theme appears to be contained by restraining Bao-Wing's decadent excess. Such a narrative affirms and accumulates the force of the history of homosexual oppression without questioning the historicity of the force of its politics. Within this frame, it is imperative that we ask who is represented by whom in what use of the term, 'gay'?

Who is enabled? Clearly, in this film, it is the fixity of the neo-Confucian fetish of the hardworking 'Asian' stereotype constructed through Yiu-Fai and Chang.

Comments from, and interviews with, both the filmmaker Wong and the actor Tony Leung around the film appear to have maintained its matrix of heteronormativity and homophobia. For example, when Wong brought the poster of the film (two men embracing) to Cannes, Tony commented that 'foreigners will see the subject matter as minor' and he felt that the poster shoot was 'really awkward' and the scene 'average' (Wolverine 1997). Similarly, when speaking to Nina Davidson (1997) from Hollywood Online, Wong disavowed any same-sex specificity by making the point that '(the) film can happen between a man or a woman, or two women, or a man and a priest, so it's about human relationships ... I always imagined if I make a film about two men, the story should be like this.' Reiterating this point elsewhere, Wong said, '(w)hat I wanted to convey is a love story between two people. Love is a word that doesn't differentiate between sexes, so one should not view the film from a 'gay film' angle,' and stressed that the film 'absolutely isn't about homosexuality ... and asked people not to misunderstand it' (Wong 1997). Here, the filmmaker's citational authority functions as an instance that supports the dominant artefact of heteronormativity. Through the diegetic evidence, Wong's narrative maintains this authority by repudiating the gay theme and reinforcing the straightforward construction of the characters.

As a film which the Asian and gay communities have taken pride in,¹⁰ the discourse of homophobia appears to have undermined the emergence of an Asian queer spectatorship. In *Happy Together*, the homophobic erasure of gay visibility has revealed the straight morality of its discourse through the oppressive force of its narrative, abjecting and displacing the 'gay' story onto the diegetic space of Argentina. Such a substitution of location is dependent on the concept of fixity because the narrative of gayness can be articulated only as a form of displacement, as an other outside of a heterosexual selfhood, Hong Kong. This form of visibility and visibility is problematic because it is not independent of epistemological binarities. In the following, it is argued that Leslie's self-parodic performance problematizes the straightforward and homophobic narrative of *Happy Together*. As a result, it destabilizes the normative positionality connoted by the cultural space of the destination.

Leslie's performance: the Iguassu Falls lampshade

At the end of the film, Leslie remains the only one left in Buenos Aires. Here, his performance poses as the ambivalence that is the problem inscribed in the space of the destination, the Iguassu Falls.

Leslie's final sequence in the film is pivotal in formulating the cultural significance of the Iguassu Falls. The scene begins with Leslie returning to the room he has just rented, previously occupied by Yiu-Fai. He organizes the packets of cigarettes and cleans the floor. At this point, Wong's stylistic iconography of the digital clock foregrounds the metaphorical spatiality that compresses and momentarily freezes Hong Kong's 1997 time-space. The frame reads: '23.59.' As the camera waits, the turn of the dial returns to zero on all four counters of its digital display. At this moment, the extra-diegetic music begins. Leslie sits by the table and starts to fix the broken

lamp. He switches it on and watches the lampshade as the carousel with the film negative reproduction of 'The Iguassu Falls' starts to rotate. He begins to cry. This is interrupted by a quick cut of an extreme close-up of the lit-up lampshade. The next cut is the closed front door of his bedroom, framed from the ground floor of the Hotel Riveria building. We then see Bao Wing sobbing uncontrollably on the couch. At this point, Yiu-Fai's voice-over fades in with 'I finally reach the Iguassu'. The next frame is an aerial view that captures the cataclysmic force of the rapids at the real Iguassu Falls. Yiu-Fai's voice-over continues, 'Suddenly I think of Ho Bao Wing.'

What I believe is significant here is the relationship between the real Iguassu Falls and that of its reproduction, the Iguassu Falls lampshade. The Iguassu Falls, situated on the border between Brazil and Argentina, can be argued as the 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992: 6-7) metonymically occupied by Hong Kong. The film seizes on its spatial significance when Yiu-Fai's voice hits the cultural history invested in the site of the waterfall. Through what is enounced in Yiu-Fai's voice-over, the waterfall diegetically locates and converges onto the narrative space occupied by Bao Wing. Here, the signifier of Bao Wing exposes the performative of the Iguassu Falls.

In the film, Bao Wing is the one who bought the lampshade when they first arrived in Argentina. He is also the one left with the lampshade at the end of the film. As the 'owner' of the lampshade, Leslie-as-Bao-Wing introduces a performative made intelligible by the high camp kitsch lamp. It distances the politics of the tacky 'reel' from the modernity invested in the monumental 'real'. The lampshade displays the established signs of a kitsch cynicism reinvested as its totem. It superimposes onto the icon and displaces the codes that invest it as such. The lampshade defies, subverts and displaces the codifications indicated by the icon – the real Iguassu Falls. First, the lampshade is defiant because it reproduces, through its carousel and its film negative of Iguassu Falls, the image as 'cheap' and 'tacky'. Second, it is subversive because the 'reel' lampshade displaces the 'real' monument as institutionally iconic. Third, the 'reel' lampshade introduces a destabilizing ambiguity into the real of the waterfall. It constitutes at the same time as it revels in its difference, because it opens up a critical distance between the copy and the authentic. Like the mobility of the diaspora, the lampshade re-routes the established discourse and exposes the sublime ecstasy of a differential reversal. This ambiguity opens up a critical distance that is constituted in the differential repetition between the reel and the real, and highlights the emergence of identity.

The reel and the real: the journal mocks the stereotype

In Christopher Doyle's (1997: 70) photographic journal of *Happy Together* is a heading that reads 'Leslie needs love'. Superimposed on a double page centre-spread of Leslie modelling a Chanel-style black and white leopard faux fur jacket, donning a bouffant, and wearing Mother of Pearl sunglasses and delicate elbow length white satin gloves, Doyle writes:

(I)n high heels he walks like a (trick)-tired whore. Make-up looks pasty: weekend-cross-dresser-hides-stubble fake. We like the ensemble. But Leslie is ill at ease: 'Am I convincing?'

'Convinced(,)' (n)ot 'convincing' is more what he need(s) to be! So we preen and powder him some more.

'Am I a woman? A real woman?' he asks his mirror more than us.

'You look great..' we all try to sound re-assuring: Not the slightest bit 'camp' ... we stop just short of 'Leslie, you're beautiful'. I'm sure he can manage to say that much himself.

(Doyle 1997: 70. Parenthesis mine)

In this photograph from the journal, the image of Leslie-as-private-weekend-transvestite transforms the performance of the star through a hyperbole that mocks the stereotype. Here, it is argued that through representing as the melancholic and (eternally) feminized young Asian gay man, the hyperbole of Leslie performs as the interface that inscribes the queer Asian body politic: (1) in parodying the character Bao Wing, Leslie-as-queer questions the stereotype; (2) as an emergent, transitional third space, Leslie-as-queer constitutes identity, self-inscription and self-knowledge.

It should be noted that Leslie does not cross-dress in the film. The journal is extra diegetic, inserted into the filmic economy as a form of deconstruction and maps the fieldwork of participant observation. This discourse highlights the practice of ethnography. As the discursive evocation of the culture of the film, Doyle's publicly published photograph of Leslie-as-weekend-transvestite constitutes an aberrant moment that writes the ethnographic fragments of the film. As an aberrant cultural moment, the deviant photograph of Leslie-as-weekend-transvestite forms part of the space of a heterotopic elsewhere that frames the performative present of the film. When Doyle's photograph (the image of Leslie-as-weekend-transvestite) is juxtaposed alongside the stereotype of the sad young gay man (Bao Wing) on the couch, it exposes the primacy of what 'to-be-looked-at'ness means.¹¹ In other words, such a juxtaposition opens up a critical gap that defamiliarizes the images of the transvestite and the sad young gay man. Like the tacky lampshade that defies, subverts, displaces and re-routes, the two re-enacted stereotypes highlight the mechanisms naturalized in the specular processes of construction and codification. In reproducing himself as the straight-acting male hustler Bao Wing, Leslie-as-weekend-transvestite highlights the simultaneous constitution of deception and disclosure. Both hustling and cross-dressing foreground the trickster's performance in such a way that the narrative of disclosure calls to task the deception of either the one or the other. When Bao Wing is situated alongside the 'reel' Iguassu Falls at the same time that Yiu-Fai is at the real Iguassu Falls, the 'reel' Iguassu Falls anchored by the signification of Bao Wing exposes the hegemonic specularity, connoted by Yiu-Fai, that governs the rules of the real Iguassu Falls. Here, the narrative of disclosure highlights the deception inherent in the primacy of 'being-looked-at'ness through a syntagmatic chain of signification. It is plausible to suggest that Leslie-as-transvestite-whore-hustler is to the high-camp, kitsch lamp as straight-acting, gay Yiu-Fai is to the artefact-real waterfall. This is not preposterous at all when the effect of pretence exposes the normative lie of the narrative. Such an effect is enabled through the self-conscious performativity of camp and succeeds as an ethnography of *Happy Together* because only *The King of Movies and Songs*, as metaQueen exemplar, can lament before the presence of a fake waterfall lamp.¹² This ethnography lays open the constructedness of the (Hong Kong cinematic) artifice.

First, the photograph disrupts the film's frame by introducing the transitional third space. Through parodying the 'reel' hustler (from the film), the 'real' transvestite

(from the photograph) momentarily exposes the epistemological crux that stabilizes the binary between reel/real, straight-acting/high-camp, male-hustler/transvestite-whore, authentic-flesh/artificial-cosmetic, etc. This tactic of differential repetition is enabled by the practice of self-parody highlighted in appropriating the conventions of the Asian gay stereotype, twisting it around and queering it. Second, he textualizes and visualizes as the self-articulated trope of the transnational Queer (N)Asian. This is because, in parodying the character Bao Wing (the Asian gay male hustler), Leslie-as-queer (the Asian gay icon) mocks the Asian gay stereotype (the effeminate Oriental wanna-be-real-woman-transvestite). The performance is marked by its inability to distinguish the stereotype from the re-enacted, as what is 'in place' and already known as fixed is the character of Bao Wing, and what is unstable is Leslie's euphoric repetition. This presents a heightening of the codes and conventions inscribed in the fantastic play of the fact: himself-as-himself as a melancholic (young) gay man. In his self-enactment, he displays the exaggeration of the colonial, indigenous and sexual identification already foreclosed in its field of identifications. From the local ethnography of the film text, he cathects as a fetish that destabilizes the global inscriptions of the heteronormative, homophobic, colonial, indigenous and heterosexualized anomaly of the 'Asian' gay man caught by the transnational forces of Oriental and Occidental imaginings and desires.¹³ Through the instabilities of his image as the (eternal) young man, his body as feminized male spectacle, his parodic tease with the closet interface as drag King and fag Queen of stereotype, Leslie embodies this queer trope which produces an ambivalence in the performative present of the space of the Iguassu Falls reproduced in the tacky reel of the lampshade. His bold overstatement emerges as a form of self-articulation that exposes the understatedness of the 'gay' narrative. Like the fake, plastic 'artificiality' (Garber 1992: 16) of the trick-tired transvestite whore pretending to be a male passing as female enouncing as a 'real woman' reproduced as gay hustler, and simultaneously deconstructing the primary means of 'being-looked-at'ness, Leslie as the viewing object, is now looking at the viewing subject looking. Notwithstanding the implied signification of camp in the cult cinema arena, and notwithstanding the cultural desire invested in Canto cinema spectatorship, Leslie's self-parody articulates an emergent Asian queer subjectivity through the hyperbole of the metaQueen, the faggot and the queer. What is significant in Doyle's journal is an enunciation of disclosure. As an affect of pretence, it exposes what the viewing subject has reproduced – the lie of normative positionality. In 'coming out' at the time between the 11th and 12th of September 1996, Leslie's performance, through a destabilizing strategy of hyperbole, preposterously queers the normative positionality of *Happy Together*.

This tactical visual intervention constitutes the identity of the object-as-subject. At the same time that he discloses his misogynistic pretence, he reproduces a parody of his own stereotype in the (ethnography of the) film, articulating himself as the self-ethnologizing site of the technology of the (Hong Kong cinematic) interface, as a cybernetic grid caught between the global forces of historicity and diasporic virtuality. In the following, it is argued that Leslie-as-transnational-queer disorients and renders the deformation of not only the universality of the West as standard, centre and dominant; he also decentres China (the Middle Kingdom/the East) as the epistemological and ontological privilege of (diasporic) Chinese identity. This

auto-referential strategy enunciates the film as an interface for a queer and Asian transnationalism.

The transnational Queer (N)Asian interface: mapping third-space and south-space through the tacky reel

As argued earlier, it is in the tacky reel of Iguassu Falls that the space of the performative present emerges as a discourse of the Asian queer body politic. In the film, the space of the Iguassu Falls is constantly reproduced through repetition, from constant references to it as 'the ultimate destination'. Clearly, Leslie, as the queer link that exposes the stereotype, functions as the site for an interface.

The queer interface, as virtual and hyper, is also transnational, exemplified by the film's high-density flashes of road grids that converge at the point of (Hong Kong) transition to expose the cybernetic grid of the interchange: North, South, East, West. This culture is further characterized by the film's numerous stylistic iconographies such as the space of south and the space connoted by the number three converging on the semiology of the present discursive sign that is the co-temporal exchange of the global and transnational cross-road. In this regard, it is argued here that what the tacky reel of the Iguassu Falls virtually realizes is an interrogation of the emergence of such a third space, reproduced in the film through the diegetic space of the location, Buenos Aires. Let us start over again, preposterously.

The film begins with Tony and Leslie partying their way down South. A convertible crosses the Tropic of Capricorn. Tony shacks up in the Hotel Riveria in Buenos Aires, and works as a tourist tout for a tango nightclub called 'Bar Sur'. Tony works, Leslie tricks. Leslie flees, is bashed and returns. And it starts all over again (and again). One night, outside the 3 Amigos Bar, they board a bus number 33. They dance to a song called 'Milonga for 3.' Tony gets work in a Chinese restaurant. He meets Chang. They don't fuck. Tony gets to the Iguassu Falls. Chang is at the Lighthouse called The End of the World. Chang returns to Taiwan. Tony arrives in Taiwan and tries to visit Chang. They narrowly miss each other.

In this synopsis, what is repeated is the number '3' and the trope 'south.' For example, the space of the 'southern' hemisphere is alluded to by the southern geographical meridian, 'The Tropic of Capricorn'. Buenos Aires is also known as 'Paris of the South'. The 'sur' of the bar is also 'south.' From the numerical repetition of the number 3, a third protagonist enters the narrative. From Taiwan, the third Chinese space. These two signifiers of 'south' and 'three' are pertinent in the context of transnational Hong Kong-in-transition and diasporic Asian and Chinese cultural formation.

It is argued here that the number '3' and the trope of the south perform as the third space of Hong Kong's postcoloniality and diasporic cultural translation. In the diegesis, it is the space of Taiwan (Chang) that interrupts the Hong Kong couple. Indeed, a fight ensues between Leslie and Tony because of Chang. When the film ends with Tony on the monorail in Taiwan, we are left not knowing whether he really is returning to Hong Kong. As either one or the other (of the other China), Taiwan can be considered as the third space that disrupts the reunification between Hong Kong and the Mainland. After Hong Kong and China, Taiwan is also the third location within the Greater Chinese transnational global network. Taiwan, after Macau in 1999,

is also the (potential) third space of return (to China). Clearly, these performatives point to Taiwan as the emergent third space in the Hong Kong transnational and diasporic imaginary.

The trope of 'south' has marked itself as the pivotal space of Hong Kong's postcoloniality. Reflecting on the exodus of refugees from communist China to Hong Kong in 1949, Hong Kong writer Ng Ho writes that for many left-leaning commentators or Communist sympathizers at that time, this exodus was defined as 'going south' (Ng 1994: 31–34). As the south of the south of China, Hong Kong, from the place of destination, has also become a space of exile and exit. The trope of going south can also be inserted as the travelling metaphor of the Chinese diaspora: here, it is diegetically that which underpins the history of the Chinese diaspora in Argentina and South America. For the Asian diaspora in Australia, it is also a critical and geographical distinction (Yue and Hawkins 2000, forthcoming).

'South' also performs as a preposterous Buenos Aires image-world for the shared south-space of Hong Kong, evident in the film's aesthetics and its stylistic iconographies such as the allusion to space and time. Located on the flipside of Hong Kong, Argentina maps as its heterotopia. This is evident through, for example, the *mise-en-scene* that includes the setting, such as the claustrophobia of the small bedroom in Hotel Riveria, the claustrophobic confines of its kitchen, the narrow streets made to look abject through the fish-eye camera, the high-density establishing shots surrounding Argentina, Buenos Aires and Hotel Riveria and the (transitional) passageway of bridges. Usually over-exposed and hazy with the luminescence of a green hue, the film's strategic lighting effect defamiliarizes at the same time that it re-inscribes the ambience of return, emoting the preposterous futility of a melancholic loss re-routed through the frenzied buttons of post-production anxiety.¹⁴ Hence, the use of black and white for the first one-third of the film and colour for the rest. Argentina's allusion to Hong Kong is evident, especially through references to different time-zones and the montage of 'upside-down' edits that interject and interrupt as its self-same and pre-post cybernetic and heterotopic virtuality. Like a spatial and temporal loop, the diegetic emergence of Buenos Aires is a point of transition that produces the cultural emergence of Hong Kong, but on the other side. In its virtuality, Hong Kong highlights the shared space of Buenos Aires as an everyday world, evident in the diegesis, where events happen and engage people with physical and material consequences.

Clearly, such a movement constituting the culture of emergence is preposterously reflected in the tackily reel performance of Leslie-as-Bao-Wing. Leslie's self-parodic performance constitutes the identity gap that (dis)closes Doyle's photographic reproduction as the autoethnographic space of an heterotopic elsewhere. The ethnography of *Happy Together* highlights Leslie as an interface for Queer (N)Asian. As Hong Kong's first modern Cantopop icon and as the 'rice poof' as queen and king exemplar, in coming out, Leslie is going in: self-articulating in the intended name of self-writing, identity and self-inscription. This is what's so queer about *Happy Together*.

Destination: belonging at home

Me and you ... And you and me ... No matter how they tossed the dice ... It had to be ... The only one for me is you ... And you for me ... So happy together

Left turn from The Forum Theatre into Little Bourke Street, Chinatown, 11.35 pm. Car loads of blunt voices whirl past me as I savour the busy midnight air on a full stomach and a head full of 'happy together'. A rotten egg falls at my feet, splattering a foetid yolk that slips down my shiny new boots.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at Problematizing Asia: First Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Conference, Asia-Pacific/Cultural Studies Center, National Tsing Hua University, 12–16 July 1998, Hsinchu, Taiwan.

1. 'Samballite' is the unofficial coalition group identity for 'SAMBAL', a closed electronic mailing list. 'SAMBAL' is an acronym for 'Singapore and Malaysian Bisexual and Lesbian Network'. For further information, contact sunbird@aol.com.
2. The theorization of Hong Kong cinema in this paper extends Ackbar Abbas's (1997) notion of Hong Kong as a culture of disappearance, suggesting instead that Hong Kong is a culture of mobility (Yue 1999a). As such, this paper positions Hong Kong cinema as a cinema of diasporic mobility and a travelling cultural formation.
3. Similar to the anti-heteronormativity of 'queer', the mobilization of the term 'Asian' in this paper is intentionally strategic. 'Asia' and 'Asian' function both as a discourse of regionality, as well as a performative.
4. Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing, nicknamed 'Gor Gor', is described by many in Hong Kong's popular media industries as Hong Kong's 'first modern Cantopop icon' (Yang *et al.* 1997: 225). This paper utilizes Cheung's first name, Leslie, to synchronize with his everyday vernacular popularity in Hong Kong and across the Chinese diaspora. When spoken in English, 'Leslie', as an androgynous name, also reflects the ambiguity of gender.
5. The concept of Queer (N)Asian as an emergent horizon of transnationality inflects the imagined community engendered by the activist group, Queer Nation.
6. The character 'Asia', as castrator and castrated, male and female, man and woman, lesbian and heterosexual, emerges as the space that interrogates the place Asia. Connoting different meanings to different groups, 'Asia' problematizes the space of, and power within and between, the newly realigned and repositioned nation-states of Asia. Its queer displacement ontologically disrupts the orthodoxy of Communist East and the capitalist West.
7. It is imperative to consider the politics of self-parody when deploying it as a strategy. Judith Butler's (1993) emphasis on the constraints of performativity is significant here. The subversive nature of parody is dependent on the structures that constrain not just prohibition and taboo, but also the structures that enforce other hegemonic norms such as class and race. Whether the parody of stereotype is enough to displace the dominant codes that structure it, or whether the denaturalization of its structures functions as a vehicle for the reconsolidation of hegemonic norm is an area of contention. Precisely because there is a danger that mimetic activities may be seen as utopic and idealistic, it is imperative to stress that a critical deployment is always contingent, and the politics of subversion demands an interrogation of normativity. The strategy of self-parody in this paper inflects an ideological critique of the normative positionalities of 'queer' and 'Asian'. Hence, the emphasis is on destabilizing their hegemonic heteronormative authorities.
8. On further theorizations of the performative, see John L. Austin (1975), Jacques Derrida (1988), Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997).
9. Margaret Morse (1998) recently argues that 'a gap' is opened up between the utterance and enunciation that produces meaning as well as enables it to lie (Morse 1998: 13). As a space of 'virtuality' characterized by 'fiction of presence' (Morse 1998: 20), this gap highlights an instant emergence of a realm that is virtually shared through a world made meaningful by images so that '(i)images have been transformed from static representations of the world into spaces in which events happen that involve and engage people to various degrees in physical space.' (Morse 1998: 21, italics in original)
10. *Happy Together* was promoted as a feature and fundraising film in various *tongzhi* (queer) community events in Hong Kong in 1997. It was also screened in Singapore as an AIDS

- benefit night in 1997. Its poster was auctioned in Seoul in 1997 to raise funds for the emerging queer film festival. In Australia, the distributor, Siren, launched the video release of the film during the 1999 Queer Film and Video Film Festival. Clearly, gay pride also indicates a reclaiming of the film from these homophobic discourses.
11. Writing about film as ethnography, Rey Chow (1995) argues that ethnography is autoethnography, and its task is a writing of the self and the subject. As such, its postcolonial perspective as previously ethnographized, is to understand that 'being-looked-at-ness, rather than the act of looking, constitutes the primary event in cross-cultural representation' (Chow 1995: 180). Chow suggests that autoethnography constitutes the site of the third space of cultural translation in the form of co-temporal transactions between different cultures and different social groups that deploy different signs that are not synthesizable to one set of languages or representations.
 12. *The King of Movies and Songs* is the title of his comeback album in 1996.
 13. On the 'Asian' gay man and lesbian as global anomalies, see Fung (1995); Yue (1996, 1999b); Manalansan (1994).
 14. For an account of how Wong has reconstructed the narrative in the post-production process, see Doyle (1997: 166–176).

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