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Next comes the response, the artist, the artist's creation - the attempt to name, recognize, and instigate change through his or her creative expression. But the artist's creation is not the end of the process, as it is often thought to be. The process continues as members of the community experience the release, the inspiration that allows them to en flesh the message and begin activating change in their own terrains.¹

The 'enfleshment' of the message that Májozo advocates as best practice in public art is both a demand for the political in aesthetic production, and a recognition that the political is not the job of the artist alone. The artist must develop a keen eye for the contemporary moment whilst giving space for the observer to enjoin with the aesthetic in an agenda for change. The idealistic ambition of Májozo's position is attractive, but it also raises questions when applied to the politics of diaspora and settlement. Does the meaning of politics in art arise through 'recognition' or through 'enfleshment' and is a common class or other identity assumed by the terrains of action?

In this analysis of three contemporary Australian artists - Greg Leong, Tony Ayres and Jo Law - I suggest that the condition of hybridity and its artistic formations cannot be factored through identity alone, but through multiple recognitions of political position and emerging alliances. This approach acknowledges that random but determined synergies of proximity and pleasure are crucial factors in the development of the political address of aesthetic objects and texts. The thread that runs through these brief analyses and the works themselves is that the artists' project of expression is played through as *chine*. The concept of *chine* is borrowed from Jean-Marie Floch's work on modern marketing.² He uses the dictionary meanings of the word to name the processes of design that result in composites and unexpected patterns. His own composite draws on the *Petit Robert* definition, which offers primary and secondary meanings. First, the verb *chiner* comes from a Chinese textile process, the practice of: 'alternating colours on the threads of a warp prior to weaving the cloth, in such a manner as to end up with a design once the weaving process is complete'.³ Second, it means to seek out a good bargain, or to tease mercilessly - as a hawker might 'tease' (or cheat) a customer. So *chine* in Floch's analysis of Habitat and Ikea (and the prime *chineur* Terence Conran) comes to mean something like 'browsing', but doing so with desire or lust for emotional experience. Commercial *chine*, Conran's kind, builds up a syntagm of meaning through accumulated objects. Many of these objects hover on the cusp of authenticity, nostalgia and

1. Estella Conwill Májozo, 'To Search for the Good and Make It Matter', in Suzanne Lacy (ed) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Bay Press, Seattle Washington 1995, pp88-93, p91.

2. The concept of *chine* is developed through Jean-Marie Floch, *Identités Visuelles*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1995, pp145-179. Translation by Alec McHoul and Pierre van Osselaer, *Visual Identities*, Cassell, 2000, (forthcoming).

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

practical elegance. They are *found* and then *designed*, 'a very specific ... collection of signs taken from contemporary material culture'.⁴ It works well as a description of the logic of accumulation in a Conran influenced middle-class household. There is an extension of Floch's coinage however that works to explain the logic of aesthetic accumulation in the cultures of diaspora. This extension could be abbreviated as *political*, implying an inclusion of publics as well as individuals, and of diachronic contingencies as well as claims on existence.

Political chine in artistic production weaves alternating colours into a text of difference, but not necessarily one that can be understood in terms of identity. The compulsion to claim identity through hybrid formations allows that there has been a pure antecedent and that the collation of purities has combined into something altogether more interesting. With *chine* as both the process and the outcome of artistic production and spectatorship, the unexpected and the contemporary take priority. In the terms of this issue, in the world of *chine*, culture/China only exists in the active imaginations and embodied recognitions of the artist and her public.

5. The title of Greg Kwok-Leong's 1999 exhibition of Australian textile objects.

'REMEMBERING CHINESE'⁵

An embroidered red robe, an embroidered green robe, the characters for double happiness (*shuang xi*); and the artist's coined characters for double sorrow (*shuang bei*); Pauline's superior shoes (the 'Mother of Australia'), and shoes for the 'Queen of Australia': these garments of woven silk are shimmeringly stylish, and extraordinarily sexy. They are the some of the textile objects of Greg Leong. Kwok-Leong uses Manchu and Han styles of clothing from the late nineteenth century to play games with Australian politics in the realms of multiculturalism and sexuality. He also uses them to tell us of his love for his multiply displaced Australian-Chinese-Hong Kong-Australian mother, Jeanne, and to declare his own passionate investment in gay Australia. He seduces himself and his audience with detail and texture, with intricacy and fetishism. He plots and weaves his way though to the surface of satirical art with a grandeur of imagination that baffles the political senses at first sight. He writes of his own work as 'symbols and transferred metaphors' designed, highly designed, to:

Speak strongly of a) the political and socially accepted oppression of minority groups, b) the fashion expression of superior/inferior social roles, and c) the aesthetics of minority, sexual taste ... The resonances of history are seldom clearly explained or are able to be interpreted in only one definitive way. Hence if a pair of Manchu shoes reference elaborate be-jewelled footwear of the Empress Dowager Cixi, the cultural transference strategy I use demands a conceptual and linguistic leap from Chinese Empress Dowager to *Chinese Australian Queen* (a queen of

Australia) - or for that matter, another sort of queen, Pauline Hanson, the self-proclaimed 'Mother of Australia' ...

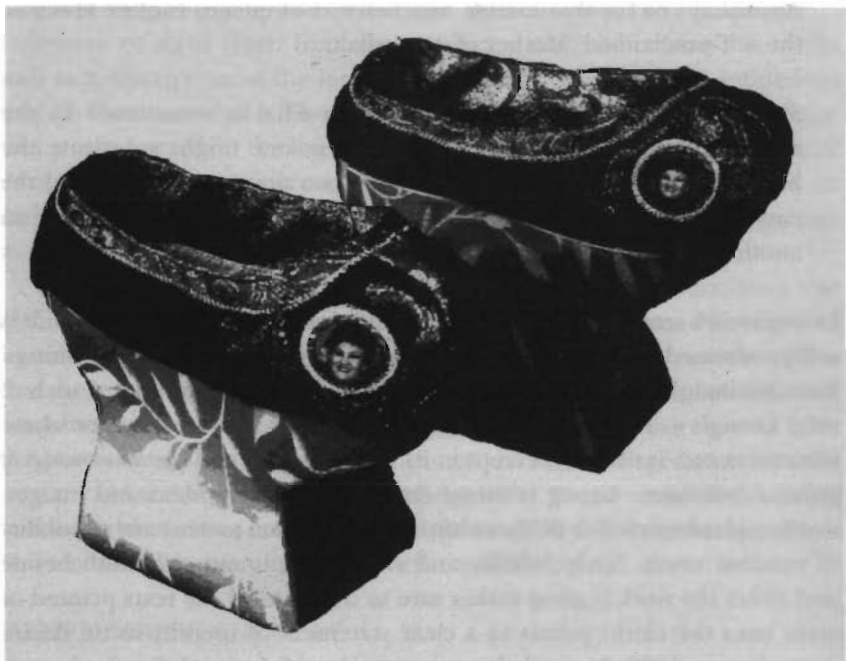
Similarly, in the case of bound feet, for what is considered by the contemporary world as cruelty to women, one might substitute the historical oppression of gay people in Australia on one level, and the current undercurrent of blanket racism against Asian Australians on another.⁶

Leong's work sets up his political stall with a particular hybrid glamour. It is self-proclaimed identity-art and a reclamation of cultural Chinese 'things' from his imagined past into an experienced Tasmanian present. I wish to refer Leong's work to a more random sphere of production, however, where identity as such is unlikely, except in its *necessary emergenc(i)es in moments of political constraint*. Leong is literal *chineur*. He weaves ideas and images, words and colours with a deliberation that might seem to deny any possibility of random result. Such delicacy and careful documentation both beside and *within* the work (Leong makes sure to translate all the texts printed or sewn onto the cloth) points to a clear statement of identity as an Asian-Australian in 1998. Nevertheless, the wonder of the work lies in the way that an accumulation of finessed detail *surprises* us with its power. At first, such ritualised garments of ancestry please their audience, drawing us into the sensuality of experience which helps us browse with *desire* or *lust*. On second sight, there is the frisson of recognition of signs (Hanson's head, the juxtaposition of the celebratory colour red and the *double sorrow* coinage on the garments and 'shoes for bound feet', the portraits of Leong's family, and a tender biography of his mother). Finally, the accumulation of detail is a syntagm of experience, and only in that very extenuated sense does the work describe identity. Its political origins do not account for the whole of its aesthetic narrative, but their presence in the weave of the fabric (sometimes literally in Leong's objects) marks the work as an address to public action as well as a statement of the defiant self.

The Manchu-style 'superior' shoes that Leong made for Pauline Hanson, the evil genius of Australian politics in 1998, the self-proclaimed 'Mother of Australia', of course, have not been delivered to the woman herself. Leong's work is not the kind of gear that you ask an actor or a performance artist to wear down the street, or on the steps of the Senate in Canberra. It is much too special for that kind of 'enfleshment'. But the shoes sit in galleries begging the question: what would we look like if *she* were wearing us? What would *she* look like if she dared to slip us on in a moment of self-aggrandising complacency? Would her body resist the appearance of the hybrid? Would *she* change once and forever by the naming of the shoes as shoes for feet, and by the recognition that Asian-Australian shoes are made for *her* feet in particular? Would we suddenly notice the affinity between her sexual attraction for the disaffected male ex-Liberal Party (one of her constituencies

6. Greg Leong, 'Notes on Remembering Chinese', 1999 tour.

*'Pauline' photo
courtesy Greg
Leong: 'Mother
of Australia -
Pauline's
Superior Shoes*



in 1998?), and the girlishly decorated slippers of the terrifyingly powerful Empress Dowager? In seeing that glimpsing likeness would we then see the hugeness of Cixi's status in history and remember with ridicule Hanson's bid to be 'Mother' to the Australian nation? Májozo believes that the public artist must 'recognise' and 'name' *change*. Leong repeats the self-appellation of the need for change, inviting her to step into the shoes of the 'Mother of Australia'. In so doing his work challenges her Oedipal call to the political desires of Australian manhood with the elegant seduction of hybridity. Leong's *chine* is a syntagm of desire that makes unexpected links between identity and identity politics, but also with the textures of pleasure, the associations of painful politics and sex appeal, and his love for his mother. In some tangential way, these garments resonate with the carefully stitched memory quilts sewn for AIDS victims by their lovers and friends: they are textured documents of anguish felt in the individual heart and in the collective memory of the immediate present.

SEDUCTIONS OF GRIEF

In 1999 Tony Ayres directed a documentary of William Yang's theatrical monologue *Sadness*. **The film takes us on** two journeys, one through the landscapes of northern Queensland to trace Yang's family roots and the other through the years of the AIDS plague amongst the gay community in Sydney. Yang addresses us directly for much of the film, with stills and his own snapshots to progress the collection of memories, which are the signs of his Australia. The dominant and enduring image is that of his mother, who died in the early 1990s. Although this monologue is 'about' Yang, and

'about' being gay in Australia, it is also a *chine* of grief - for his mother and for old and new family losses. The film's progress is ritualistic, in which the main theme is one of the invited recognition, naming and expurgation of sorrow. Audiences are 'enfleshed' through the steady pace of the monologue and the collected juxtapositions of 'found' images and spoken memories and their 'design' for the screen. The threads of this syntagmatic browsing are threefold: we are invited into the bricolage of old memories (specifically the gossip around the murder of a great grandfather by a stockman) to take our pick - all are picturesque and gothic at once; we are allowed to share in the journeys of death recorded by Yang's photographs of stricken friends; and we are taken home to meet his mother. Her face organises us as a mother should. We see the lines of her expression in the concentrated beauty of Yang's own age. Our pleasure is her pleasure: in a last journey to meet relatives up north, in her children's love, and in her place in the Australian landscape. This Australian ancestor-mother is also a Chinese mother, and as such bears the public face of the discriminated. *La chine* teases again, how does the pleasure of catharsis lie in the weave of love affairs, friendships and family hurts? How much of this sadness is Yang's, and how much is in the fabric of Australia itself? Is this one of those objects that takes flight in shared terrains?

The eponymous heroes of *China Dolls* (1997)⁷ are the drag queens of Australia, and particularly those that are already feminised in White Australian gay culture, the Asian Australian queens.⁸ Moving from the seriously powerful to the seriously sexy, from Cixi and her shoes to the *China Dolls* and their masquerade, the performance of femininity by the

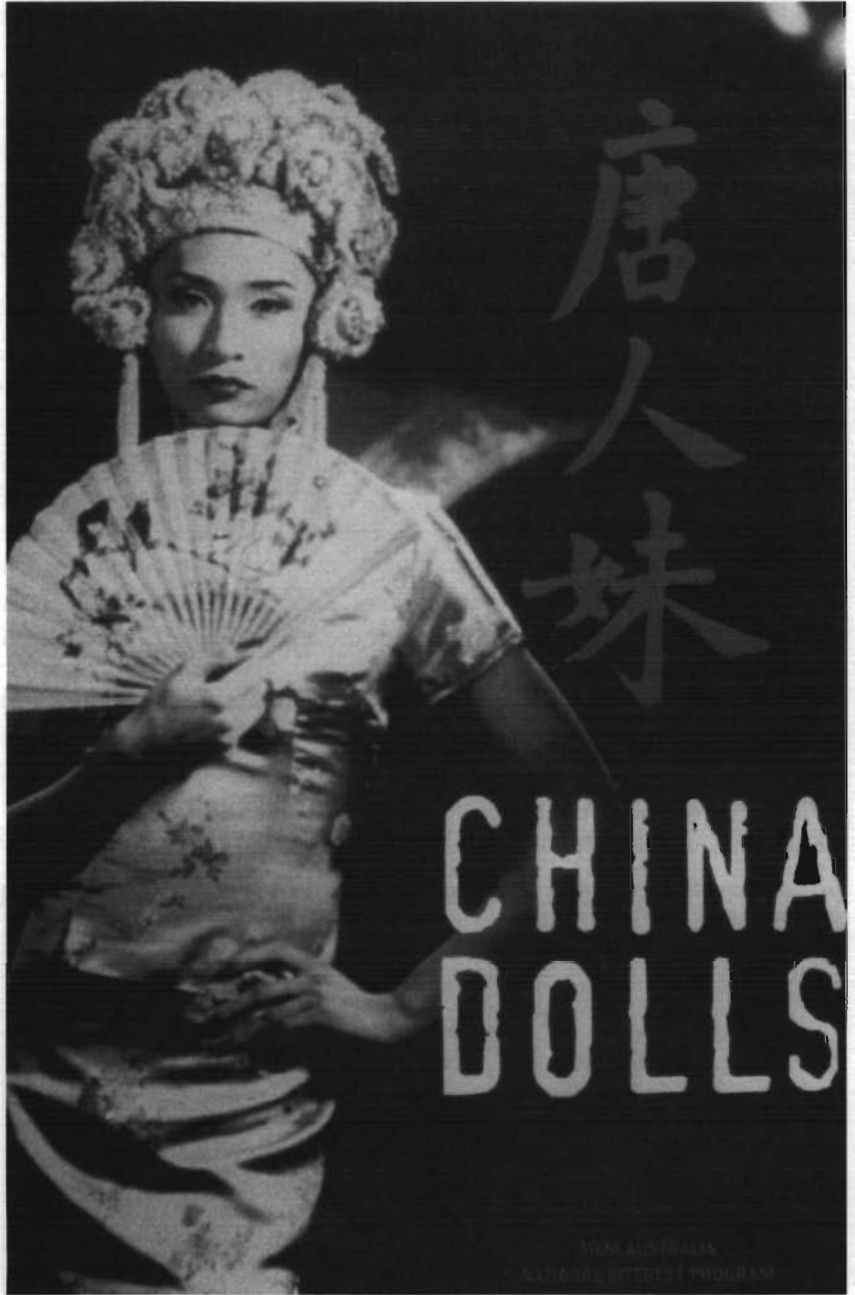
7. *China Dolls* was made for the ABC and Film Australia. It won the Director's Award for best short documentary at the Washington International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and an AWGIE for Best Public Broadcast Documentary.

8. The issue of feminisation arose from three papers at the '1999 Asian Australian Identities Conference' (ANU, Canberra 27-30 September): Peter Jackson, "'That's What Rice Queens Study!'" White Gay Desire and Research on Asian Homosexualities', Tony Ayres' presentation of *Sadness* and Audrey Yue's talk on *Fruit Salad: Asian-Australian Cinema, Asian-Australian Modernity*.



'*China Dolls*',
courtesy Tony
Ayres and Film
Australia

'China Dolls',
courtesy Tony
Ayles and Film
Australia



drag queen becomes another kind of ridicule, not of the feminine nor of the self, but of those who assume that the structure of their desire controls the gender of another person. Tony Ayres puts on his make-up for the film (see picture above): his film, his make-up, his *design* of the *found* sexuality of his self. Ayres was brought up in Western Australia (he now lives in Melbourne), Yang's family came from the north, Leong works in Tasmania.

These are old-fashioned places, in so far as the young leave to find urban freedoms elsewhere. Yet these are the landscapes that *la chine* pulls into focus, in erotic play between the found and the designed versions of the objects of life in 'this' place at 'this' time.

THIS PLACE AT THIS TIME

Jo Law is a film-maker and photographer working in Western Australia.⁹ Her 1997 photograph of a bus stop outside the Immigration building in Hennessy Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong captures and exceeds the bricolage of Floch's original *chine*. Advertisers dress Hong Kong models in Spanish clothes, and say 'Cheers' with a can of San Miguel. San Miguel is the beer that the British drank from bottles in London bars in the selfish eighties. Every bottle was served with a slice of lime squashed into its neck. They probably said 'Cheers' too. But here we are in Hong Kong in 1997, in the midst of the handover to Tung Chee-hwa's leadership of the second system of Chinese Government. He is smiling from another ad, adjacent to the San Miguel text 'Another Hong Kong miracle!!' (*Xianggang qi ji, yi guan chu se*). The magazine that his head graces is called *Zhong* translated here as *Chinese* but it can also mean simply *China*, another useful ambiguity in the circumstances. The catchphrase of the magazine is printed in English: 'the talk of global Chinese'. Law's photograph embraces the incisive certainty of an advertiser's cultural politics, and the realpolitik of the event. *Zhong* is the talk of global Chinese, but the Hong Kong of this photograph is sitting on the cusp of the periphery and the centre. Another 'Hong Kong miracle' is the hope and the text of these ads and of the handover itself. The 'very specific ... collection of signs taken from contemporary material culture' at this particular bus stop are the threads of a weave from which no clear

9. Film works available for view: <http://www.imago.com.au/phonetics/Movies/Movies.html>



'Bus stop',
courtesy Jo Law

design has yet emerged.

Jo Law took this photograph as a visitor to Hong Kong. In her film *The Green Green Grass of Home* (1995) she performs her status as a citizen of Australia. The film consists of several takes of Jo standing in streets, and on sidewalks, in two areas of Perth: Nedlands (an up-market area around the University of Western Australia) and Northbridge (the Soho of metropolitan Perth). She stands and shouts at passing cars 'Go Home! Go Home! Go Home!' Eventually, tired, she goes to her own home and shuts the door on the camera behind her. Jo mimics the neurotics of the racist who doesn't allow that citizenship is the institutional token of being at home, but then she returns to herself and slams the door on the passing stupidity of strangers.

The claims on existence that all these works represent are strongly attached to the logic of accumulation and to the density of the material object. The pleasures of unexpected proximities and contingencies invoke in the artist and the spectator – the makers of culture – a diasporic consciousness that exists alongside the knowledge of settlement. At its most poignant the art of culture/China is also its most political. It drives in a stake for the logical and accumulative hybridity of citizenship and belonging within this settler society, this place at this time.

Thanks to Tony Ayres, Jo Law, Greg Leong, and Alec McHoul for access to their work.

