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PROFILE

Project title

Queer By Night: Discovering queer embodiment in queer performance spaces in Shanghai

Supervisor/s

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Abstract

Queer performance spaces in contemporary China have been largely under-researched, despite the active role they have played in the development of the queer community in China over the past two decades. Previous research in gender studies in China has primarily focused on tracing how non-heterosexual desires are represented in Chinese literature and history. The present research shifts attention to the current scene of the queer living experience in Shanghai and now. Based on a six-month field trip in 2019-2020 in Shanghai, this primary research intends to answer: where are the spaces for queer people to gather; where can one find queer-themed performances; what are people doing in those queer performance spaces?

Selecting influential queer gathering spaces: Lilai Dance Hall (targeting middle-aged local gay men), Lucca 390 (a café and nightclub catering to young gay men living in Shanghai), Roxie (a bar catering to mainly young lesbians) and Elevator (an emerging underground music club) as samples, the research reveals how strategically existing queer performance spaces affect the way public spaces in the city are arranged and used. It also looks at how queer performance spaces have expanded outside of the venue into the neighbourhoods and illustrate the queer cultural landscape of today's Shanghai. To gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which queer subjects interact with these spaces, the research further investigates what people do inside the venues, to understand how queerness has been and is being practised by both the audience member/customer and the performer in the making of queer space and the creation of drag characters and performances.

This research presents the findings of interviews conducted with participants covering both performers and audience members during field trips. Interviews on these topics, involving twelve participants, were subjected to a grounded theory analysis. Together with other materials such as images, posters and videos, they are discussed in an effort to understand how masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity are presented both on and off the stage.

The research contributes to archive the yet undocumented queer performance landscape in Shanghai, as well as expand upon both local and global knowledge of how marginalised individuals navigate and negotiate space through performance-making under the shadow of transnational influence.

Profile

I am a researcher and theatre practitioner interested in anything queer and performative. I enjoy shifting between the roles of educator, artist and 90s disco dancer.

I am a PhD Candidate at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. My degrees include: MA Advanced Theatre Practice at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London; BA English Literature and Language at Tongji University, Shanghai.

My doctoral research focuses on queer people, queer performances, queer spaces and what queerness is in the context of today's China. Throughout my MA, I create performances and write about topics such as: marriage, the mother-daughter relationship, transnationalism, the sexualisation of children's bodies in society, drag, queerness in ancient China and languages. I achieved a distinction grade with my BA dissertation on "Queerness in M. Butterfly".

I believe there are more similarities in humanity than differences.

I believe the future of theatre in China lies outside of Chinese theatre, outside of Chinese arts school. I believe in education.

I believe theatre is made for people, by people.

Practice

Theatre Making

2016, Devising and performing, Subject to Change, Work in Progress Theatre Company, London

2017, Devising and performing, 90 Breaths, London (World Stage Design, Emerging Designers Finalist)

2020, Devising and performing, The Vagina Project, Shanghai

Theatre Producing & Others

2016, China Touring Coordinator, Harlequino: On to Freedom, Tim Robbins (USA)

2018, Festival Judge, SETKÁNÍ/ENCOUNTER (Czech Republic)

2018, Column Writer, The British Council biennial Edinburgh Showcase (Chinese), British Council

2018, Copywriter, The Shakespeare Classics Translation project, Royal Shakespeare Company (UK)

2019, China Touring Coordinator, Kite, The Wrong Crowd (UK)

2019, China Touring Coordinator, Coco Chanel, Ulrike Quade (Netherlands), Jo Strømngren (Norway)

2019, China Touring Coordinator, Othello, English Touring Theatre (UK)

2019, China Touring Coordinator, Dead Dog In A Suitcase, Kneehigh (UK)

2019, UK Touring Stage Manager, Farewell My Concubine, Edinburgh Fringe

2019, Research Report, Arts and Disability in China, British Council (UK)

2019, Project Coordinator, FeastFest, Performance Infinity (UK), Edinburgh Fringe

2019, China Touring Coordinator, Lippy, Dead Centre (Ireland), Wuzhen International Theatre Festival
2019, China Touring Coordinator, Paperwork, BetweenTwoHands (Netherlands), Wuzhen International Theatre Festival

2019, Project Coordinator, Dutch Focus Showcase (Netherlands), Shanghai International Arts Festival
2020, Project Coordinator, Queer East Film Festival (UK)

Teaching and Workshops

2018 Visiting Lecturer at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, UK
BA Drama, Applied Theatre, and Education
Sexuality and Theatre in China

2019, 中国戏剧节 (LIES) (by Ontroerend Goed), Shanghai, China
Devising Theatre Workshop

2019, Baihui International Education & Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai, China
Devising Theatre Course with Children, co-facilitator with Dave Carey, Senior Creative Producer for Music, Chicken Shed Theatre

2020 Spectrum Academy (Queer Academy), Suzhou, China
Queer Methodologies
Devising Theatre Workshop

2020 NanNan Girls Go Out Academy (co-hosted by 爱爱MyLove, NGO focusing on sex education of Chinese teenagers and 爱爱ExcoloVoice, Liberal Arts Education Academy), Hangzhou, China
Devising Theatre Workshops: Drag, Solo Performance

Conference Presentations

2017 'Feminist Theatre in Contemporary China', Intersections, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
2018 'Queer Monologue', Collisions, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama