

香港喜劇電影的邊緣人

Reimagining Marginality in Hong Kong Comedy Films

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喜劇從來是無權無勢者抒解與宣洩焦慮及不滿的一種語言，而現代社會的新教倫理、資本主義時刻協助人製造大量對自己身體、未來、階級的焦慮。Alan Dale 曾分析美國喜劇電影的核心課題為「周身蟻的人」（‘Comedy is a Man in Trouble’）。「周身蟻」，源於在基督新教倫理主導的社會文化中，持續的向上認同，不斷攀爬社會階梯，被賦予理所當然的道德意涵，使現代人對於身體的突然「失控」，有前所未有的焦慮；動作喜劇的普及化正是來自紓緩這些壓力的社會需求。「……動作喜劇視失足／墮落為一種我們生命中必須與之共存、好笑，但又無可避免的處境。但在基督教神學中，失足／墮落有最壞的含義。基督教對墮落的恐懼，想像地獄的深淵永遠在下面，呈現出對肉身存在的一種不斷反抗，包括人類被指派要跟其他動物一樣抗衡地心吸力的枷鎖。」¹ Christie Davies指出，在基督新教倫理紮根最深的社會中，也是工業資本主義最興旺的地方，平民的幽默感——或日常搞笑的習慣——不但沒有消逝，反而隨之興盛起來。² Steve Seidman 把笑匠喜劇在荷里活的興盛追溯為美國夢的「副作用」。³《整蠱專家》（1991）中周星馳與劉德華手牽著手，一身黑西裝趾高氣揚地爬上樓梯，唱著「我要努力向上，不枉諸君寄望；我要努力向上，要令朋友滿心歡暢。青年人要努力，休悲愴休淒涼；總之但憑我力量，先要堅定我志向」，⁴只為鋪排他們滾下來的慘烈。香港曾經長期風靡的笑匠喜劇，是否也可以被解讀為香港夢的「副作用」？

承載矛盾的類型

美國笑匠喜劇如卓別靈（Charlie Chaplin）、基頓（Buster Keaton）等的作品，把人與社會制度的搏鬥、個體無助的掙扎化成舉重若輕的笑料，讓觀眾可以在戲院安穩的環境中，暫時認同自我作為異類／怪胎或各種邊緣人的可能身份，從而釋放在美國夢大論述氛圍下，久被壓抑的情感。香港150年獨特的殖民地歷史，配合非常急速壓縮並被認為異常「成功」的資本主義體制，也幫忙造就了喜劇作為幾十年香港電影史上最重要的電影類型之一，產生了不少喜劇泰斗。然而，跟歐美電影比較不同的是，香港喜劇電影中的笑匠，在針對建制提出反叛的同時，又不無弔詭地經常擔當作為教化觀眾的角色。像《半斤八兩》（1976）中一方面讓許冠傑演

活了七十年代青年人愛上位的特性，另方面也以許冠文這名孤寒老闆，呈現香港社會草根階層人壓人的現實，並借二人間的角力，凸顯代際價值觀的矛盾，批評香港（在這看似黃金時代）製造出來的新人類如何練精學懶與忘本。當二人躺在舒服的酒店水床上，許冠傑慨嘆著說：「我總是覺得這個世界好像欠了我很多似的」，許冠文立刻反駁：「你自出娘胎的時候連尿布都沒有一條，這個世界欠了你甚麼」。《雞同鴨講》（1988）更進一步批判美式跨國文化對本土的吞噬，重新肯定尊卑有序的儒家人倫關係。

今天回溯五十年代的香港電影，可見喜劇作為類型片從沒脫離中國文藝重視文以載道、教化觀眾的傳統。《兩傻遊天堂》（1958）中作為學

生的新馬仔（新馬師曾）與鄧寄塵，雖然他們自己的髮型及服裝其實跟同學「貓王」（鄭君綿）十分相似，但他們卻在片首多次辱罵貓王的「阿飛裝」為「最賤格」。這種自以為是、高高在上又單一的泛道德觀，即使是最接近邊緣主體的類型片中，仍然相當主導，跟怪胎主角遇到的各種複雜處境及難題形成奇妙的張力。六十年代的南北和系列以家庭倫理及愛情故事為骨幹，企圖處理香港大量難民湧入後的多族群社會衝突，呈現廣東人對非廣東文化及「外省」對廣東文化的各種刻板印象，像「孟子說南蠻南蠻」、「廣東人都沒出息」、「外省人沒句真話」等等，但不忘安排新一代批判及跨越偏見，成為政治正確、宣揚族群和諧的新香港人，讓「外省」妹丁皓說出「我最喜歡吃梅香鹹



《半斤八兩》（1976）中喜劇人物的衝突反映了代際之間的矛盾：（左起）許冠傑、許冠文、許冠英

The Private Eyes (1976) reflects the inter-generational conflicts between the characters: (from left) Sam Hui, Michael Hui and Ricky Hui

魚」；廣東女白露明說「我情願吃臭豆腐」這樣的話。

本土喜劇孖寶

「喜劇孖寶」在歐美電影中為常見的表演形式，通常由兩個同性別、同年紀、同種族但有相反技能或能力的演員組成搭檔，利用兩人之間的對話與肢體動作進行演出，在個性或行為上製造對立，利用落差來形成戲劇效果。五十年代兩傻系列的新馬與鄧寄塵表演的精靈行動與低弱的反差正是喜劇孖寶本土化的表表者。但至六十年代南北和系列中梁醒波與劉恩甲的組合卻出現相當大的質變；首先這對孖寶身形及智商與技能相當類近，他們的戲劇性對立及情節上的互鬥與磨合，主要並非來自體形上的不協調，更多是為了凸顯當時多族群文化的社會矛盾；「喜劇孖寶」的表演形式於此成為獨特社會問題的一種上身。香港喜劇電影的這種「貼地」特質，也可能是對中國相聲傳統的一種繼承與轉化。

七十年代開始香港電影中許氏兄弟的互學互鬥，戲劇張力也不來自高低智商與技能的反差，而是社會急速轉變過程中價值觀念矛盾撞擊暴力的具體呈現。這些社會暴力的呈現，在九十年代進一步成為周星馳作品的題旨，也見於他與吳孟達的搭檔表演中。他們二人隨時互換的霸凌互扁互

窒又互靠取暖，成為獅子山下香港人熟悉的最親密關係異常真實的寫照。我們在這樣的人際關係，這樣的愛恨交雜中拉扯長大，做了也許相近的香港夢，又經歷過何其悲喜難分與笑到氣絕的荒謬及無奈。

性別流動及連線

《百變星君》（1995）李澤星（周星馳）一夜之間從富家子淪落為管家（吳孟達）的私生子，溝女不遂被炸至粉身碎骨，只剩下腦及口，把港人面對大限的身份危機，對一無所有的恐懼，抑壓著絕望無奈只能「食腦」及死剩把口等處境情懷，作出最直白的詮釋，卻竟是一部科幻喜劇的格局。阿星被植入無敵晶片，據說可以千變萬化，但化身的並非高科技武器而是家常用品如廁所牙膏之流，最後殺敵絕招竟是變成微波爐，充滿港式文化的市井玩味。男人走到這裡早已不是男人，因為香港人是否還是人已經成為疑問。易服與喬裝，在此被賦予新的意義。是他演的（廢）人，在喬裝（廢）物，還是，他作為廢物，要易服成人？而觀眾經歷的悲喜難分與笑到氣絕，正正來自人與物之間的類近與距離？

周星馳主演及導演的電影一向被認為欠缺女性角度，並帶有強烈的歧視或仇恨女性成分。在周星馳常常被造就成英雄的過程中，女主角卻被

塑造成奇醜無比、有生理障礙或特別魯笨等。最叫人印象深刻的例子莫如《食神》（1996）中刀疤臉加齙牙的莫文蔚，及《少林足球》（2001）中起初齙牙繼而光頭，而且守龍門時站在對方龍門前的趙薇。《長江7號》（2008）中的張雨綺全片被安排穿著貼身的旗袍，展現她據說是35D、24、35的身材。她演的袁老師，是周鐵（周星馳）的夢中情人與小狄（徐嬌）的救星，溫柔善良充滿愛心如天仙下凡。這些都容易被讀成是鞏固性別定型，強化父權社會對女性作為賢妻良母，同時又能作為花瓶或「性徵」的想像。

這些理所當然的解讀最大的問題是把「性別位置」擺放在一個跟它的文化脈絡抽離的真空處境中，彷彿「性別」可以是被放置在階級、教育、國族認同等議題外的一塊獨立方塊，而漠視了周星馳電影中經常把各種政治社會問題呈現成互為因果，所以即使橋段誇張但仍能達到叫人感到可信，而且發出會心微笑（或大笑）的效果。

跌倒與反串，都是身體對管治、被邊界化與工具化提出反抗的表達方式。香港喜劇電影中的失常男人，是否可讀成是在我們特定的政治經濟現實下，男性已經無法再想像自己作為（正典）男性主體，甚至無法再想像自己作為一個能夠持續抗衡地心吸力



《百變星君》（1995）描寫香港人面對身份危機時的恐懼，充滿政治隱喻。

Filled with political metaphors, *Sixty Million Dollar Man* (1995) depicts Hong Kong people's fear in face of identity crisis.



有別於歐美的傳統，香港喜劇電影大多以教化作結，重新肯定儒家家人倫關係的《雞同鴨講》（1988）便是一例。

Differ from Euro-American traditions, most Hong Kong comedy films assume a didactic role as educator: *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988), which reinstates Confucian hierarchical values, is one of the examples.

的「正常人」，能讓自己不被看成是「被唾棄物」的暗示？從這角度回看香港喜劇電影中經常出現的笑匠反串醜女，如《兩傻擒兇記》（1959）中的鄧寄塵、《南北喜相逢》（1964）中的波叔等，可能要表達的不是對女性的嘲弄，剛相反，正是透過顯現她們的醜與性別失常，來暗示這些角色與笑匠自身的醜、弱勢與各種身體失常（如跌倒、變成生化人等）的相類近性，於是可以有連線及互相代入的可能。這樣重看香港電影，也許可以啟發我們重新思考，電影詮釋與挪用社會脈絡及文化資源的多種可能。■

註釋

- 1 本文作者譯自：'...slapstick sees falling as an amusing inevitability we have to live with as we can. By contrast, in Christian theology, falling has the worst possible connotations, of course. The Christian fear of falling, with the pits of hell always imagined down below, indicates a ceaseless resistance to physical existence, with our enslavement to gravity a symbol for all the animal lapses to which we're given.' (Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick and American Movies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p 13.)
- 2 Christie Davies, 'The Protestant ethic and the comic spirit of capitalism' in *Jokes and their Relation to Society*, Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998, pp 43-62.
- 3 Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981.
- 4 原為粵語片《彩色青春》（1966）插曲〈青年人抹去你的憂傷〉的歌詞。

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Comedies have been classically studied as a 'side effect' of power struggle and the human need to process disempowerment, for example, as seen in 'the superiority theory'¹: laughter considered as an expression of feelings of superiority over another being, vis-à-vis aspects of the shameful, ugly or the base; in 'the incongruity theory'² which describes laughter as a reaction to a sense of things being out of place, a perception of temporal, geographical or other forms of 'abnormal' displacement, and 'the relief theory',³ where laughter is the venting of superfluous nervous energy. In what ways could Hong Kong comedies be seen—or experienced in this deeply colonised society amidst troubled times—as provocative and politically non-conforming, while simultaneously offering its audience tension-releasing effects? Comedy is read as a text which negotiates both psychic and cultural restraints, with the effects of producing a sensation of personal empowerment, often from the positions of the 'middling people'. Do Hong Kong comedians serve the role of these 'middling people'? Discussions on distance, detachment, alienation, and reassurance⁴ are also influential for studies on the subversive effects of comedy in relation to survival.⁵ Geoff King's⁶ historicising of David Worcester's⁷ studies of the satire as a subgenre which has been prevalent in periods of 'public excess, hardship, impropriety and aberration', and his development of Steve Seidman's work on the central comedian figure who has the licence to disrupt the narrative, using tropes like pre-Oedipal regression (pre-occupation with bodily fluids and focus upon the lower body stratum), are particularly useful for examining popular Hong Kong comedies in which representation of 'excess, hardship, impropriety and aberration' as well as regression are prevalent.

Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* sees slapstick comedy in the context of American films as a relief device to cope with the Christian fear of falling, a gentle reminder of our humanness: '...slapstick sees falling as an amusing inevitability we have to live with as we can. By contrast, in Christian theology, falling has the worst possible connotations, of course. The Christian fear of falling,

with the pits of hell always imagined down below, indicates a ceaseless resistance to physical existence, with our enslavement to gravity a symbol for all the animal lapses to which we're given.'⁸ Christie Davies has observed that in modern history, with the triumph of industrial capitalism, comedy 'flourished enormously' among those 'most strongly endowed with the Protestant ethic' because



笑匠透過反串凸顯女性的醜與性別失常，暗示這些角色失去男性主體，並成為「被唾棄物」的狀態。圖為鄧奇廉（右一）在《兩傻擒兇記》（1959）的反串扮相。

Comedians unveil the degenderisation of women through their cross-dressed performances, and suggest that their characters have lost their subjectivity as men and further become a state of 'non-being'. Here shown is the cross-dressed Tang Kei-chen (1st right) in *Two Fools Catch the Murderer* (1959).

the Protestant ethic and capitalism work collaboratively to produce a lot of anxieties in a society towards one's own body, future and class formation.⁹ While the protestant work ethic helps to sustain the supply of workers to conform to the capitalist mode of production and expansion, comedy helps to keep these workers alive and sane. Comedies provide alternative resolutions to problems produced by a Christian-dominated culture, problems which fail to be resolved within a Christian value system itself. Steve Seidman¹⁰ sees the popular tradition of comedian comedy in Hollywood as a 'side effect' of the American Dream. American comedians such as Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin transform the struggles between the individual and social systems into laughable material so that the audience could embrace and identify with abjects and freaks in a safe environment called the cinema, thus enjoying an emotional release repressed by the grand narrative of the American Dream. Hong Kong, although not as Christian-dominated as the US, has also been infused with the Protestant work ethic and capitalist values. To what extent could Hong Kong comedian films be seen as a side effect of the Hong Kong Dream?

Ng Ho's¹¹ pioneering study of Cantonese comedy subgenres including kung fu comedy, satire and comedian comedy, drawing widely from examples of 1950s to 70s,

alongside his study of Michael Hui as an auteur in 1970s to 80s, helps to establish the historical framework for the study of Hong Kong comedies. Jenny Lau¹² offers significant insight into Michael Hui's work of the 1970s in relation to Chinese social and moral conventions as well as the specific processes of modernisation and metropolitanisation in Hong Kong; how Hui's characterisation is either 'unaware of the change and thus caught in impossible situations', or presented as struggles 'against the encroaching reality of progress'.¹³ Her close textual study of Hui's work leads to her concluding remarks on the Hong Kong colonial subject as a 'schizophrenic triple split subject',¹⁴ dispossessed of a collective memory and self-determination, unable to identify politically, culturally and economically.

Hong Kong comedies, with its most popular auteur Stephen Chow's work as one notable example, can be read as mapping multi-layered stigmatisation of a dominated subject (by capitalism, colonialism, Chinese feudal values and more) onto characters with physically and emotionally challenged/disabled bodies, non-normative genders, dysfunctional losers etc., and through these processes of displacement, a relatively safe space is carved out for the audience to identify with, sympathise with and laugh at what seems to be the 'lack' in all these characters. Chow, through his

highly skilful use of folk humour and Cantonese slang (his effective but widely criticised 'no-sense talk'), often parodies established power, overthrowing the boundaries between the cultured and the banal, and facilitates the formation of a localised community through a shared history of popular culture.

In one of Chow's representative films *Tricky Brains* (1991), for example, an anti-climax of falling is built up by the homogeneous white-collar working man costume and prop (white shirt, black suit, black tie and glasses and the document suitcase) of Chow and Andy Lau no less, the robot-like peer group dancing, the overly excited out-of-tune singing '*I have to try hard, and make everybody happy. Young man has to work hard, I have to be decisive*',¹⁵ creating as a totally over-the-top and slapstick expression of the struggle and the desire to climb up the social ladder, which is symbolised, in this case, literally by climbing up a long and steep staircase in open air, framed by commercial buildings all around it.

Genre of Contradictions

Hong Kong's specific colonial cum highly compressed aka 'miraculously successful' capitalist history of 150 years, has contributed to the formation of comedy as one of the most significant genres throughout the decades and has produced a handful of comedian masters. Benjamin Leung¹⁶ has shed light on understanding 'the unmatched popularity in (the 1990s) Hong Kong's popular culture market of comedies and mix-genre movies with a clear comical bent' as delivering a 'relief' of a strain generated by 'the discrepancy between belief (ideology) and personal experiences', a tension acutely and commonly felt in British capitalist Hong Kong. It should however be noted that Hong Kong comedians differ from their Euro-American counterparts as they rebel from the system, they also

paradoxically assume a didactic role as educator. A close look at 1950s Hong Kong comedies would reveal that this genre, in spite of its critical and grassroots oriented conventions, has never departed from the Chinese arts tradition of being the elites' ideological vehicle for educating the masses. Through negotiating between residual and emergent value systems in a rapidly changing society, Hong Kong comedians serve as 'middling people'. Sam Hui in *The Private Eyes* (1976), playing a typical go-getter of the 1970s, contrasting with Michael Hui playing his stingy boss, foregrounds the inter-generational conflict and dog-eat-dog reality of Hong Kong working classes on the one hand, and critiques the younger generation's lack of work ethic and loyalty on the other hand. Lying on a water bed in a love hotel while spying on their neighbour's adulterous affair, Sam sighs, 'I feel that the world owes me much', only to be slapped by Michael's 'You came to this world without a diaper on. How could anyone owe you anything?' Hui brothers' *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988) further reinstated Confucian hierarchical values through critiquing the impact of transnational American capitalism on local culture.

Two Fools in Paradise (1958) opens with Sun Ma Si-tsang and his buddy Tang Kei-chen bullying their classmate (played by Cheng Kwan-min) by mocking at his 'Teddy Boy' outfit, although the three of them in fact look quite alike from hair to wear. This kind of self-righteous mono/hyper-moralism remains dominant—however contradictory this may sound—in a genre known for its proximity to or sympathy for freakish subjects. 'The Greatest' series of the 1960s, including films such as *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* (1961), *The Greatest Wedding on Earth* (1962), built on conventions from family melodrama and romance comedies, tackles the sensitive topic of intercultural tensions in a refugee-

packed society. Foregrounding the making up of non-Cantonese stereotypes by Cantonese and vice versa, the series aims to advocate the politically correct and orthodox ideal of social assimilation and harmony, another way perhaps aimed to ease fear, anxieties, and irresolvable contradictions felt all too starkly in Hong Kong.

Double Acts

The Double Act, as a common form of performance in Euro-American comedies, is usually built on the uneven relationship between two partners, often of the same gender, age, ethnic origin and profession but drastically different in terms of personality or behaviour. The contrast between the two characters' physique, body language, speed or level of intelligence makes up the intensity of drama or the comic effect. The *Two Fools* films of Sun Ma and Tang epitomise one high point of localised double act comedies in the history of Hong Kong cinema, like that of Laurel and Hardy. But 'The Greatest' series of the 1960s produces another duo of quite a distinct species. In contrast to the Sun Ma and Tang duo, comedy lies not in the differences between the stooge and the banana man—one cannot tell major bodily or IQ distinctions between Leung Sing-por and Liu Enjia. Instead comedy is produced by the diegetic problem and the message of the films. For example, how could the social conflicts between various ethnic populations in Hong Kong be resolved? The interactions between Southerner Leung Sing-por and Northerner (non-Cantonese) Liu Enjia and by extension their families demonstrate these social conflicts to such an extent that the duo itself is in fact designed as embodiment of this particular problem. They are the visual representation of the socio-cultural problems they embody, inducing laughter through their identities. This

kind of comic embodiment with intense social specificity could also be an offshoot from xiangsheng, a Chinese traditional stand-up comedy form often played as a duo dialogue between two performers.

The cruel competitiveness and mutual bullying between the Hui brothers in films from the 1970s onwards seemed to once again formulate a form of comedy duo of a different nature. The dramatic tension no longer resided in the contrast between mental or physical skills but rather in the explicit visualisation of violence produced by contradictory value systems evolving in nauseating speed. The impact of social violence on the everyman became the key—if not only—theme in Stephen Chow's wildly popular work from the 1990s onwards; its representation was especially effective in the duo performance between Chow and Ng Man-tat. While these two routinely mock, belittle and bounce off each other, one obviously requires the other for companionship and support. The representation of their closer-than-family love-hate relationship serves not only as a narrative trope but speaks intimately to Hongkongers' mundane experience of cuddling with each other in this tightly knit dog-eat-dog community. Northrop Frye's¹⁷ definition of comedy as a cathartic, taboo-breaking experience of the 'normal individual' proves to be useful for theorists such as Susanne Langer¹⁸ who further identifies comedy as a text in which the protagonist's survival is taken to signal a general survival against events which would have destroyed him/her in tragedy. Mikhail Bakhtin's¹⁹ notion of the 'carnival', influential among theorisation of comedy, where people generally segregated are given an opportunity to temporarily escape the confines of one's selfhood and be part of an egalitarian collectivity, is linked to his idea of the 'grotesque', an excess produced by bodily changes through

eating, evacuation and sex. While the Hong Kong comedians' potentially tragic personas strategically take their comedian turns, as variable responses to Hong Kong's different and changing forms of coloniality and nationality, Hongkongers may find themselves programmed and/or spoken for by a similar dream called the Hong Kong Dream, then drowning ourselves in carnivalesque laughter out of cathartic sadness and despair, consuming Hong Kong comedies representing various taboo-breaking experiences and forms of excess.

Body/Gender Fluidity and Reimaging Coalition

Henri Bergson²⁰ analyses laughter as resulting from the diminution of a living creature to the condition of an object or a machine, pointing to a direction towards a foundational relationship between theories of comedy and theories of abjection and mechanisation. Stephen Chow in the 1990s has taken on the challenge of foregrounding processes of abjection and mechanisation in his construction and reinvention of the Hong Kong comedy genre to another height. Facing sudden and rapid plot changes, Chow's personas often tactically and speedily assimilate technology and/or kung fu (through intertextual references to older Chinese films and/or use of digital effects) into his personal transformation and induce paroxysm of laughter to disguise nausea and danger produced by such changes. In *Sixty Million Dollar Man* (1995), the 'destiny' of Sing (played by Stephen Chow) could not be more (melo)dramatic (or tragic). He 'falls' from a billionaire's spoiled filthy rich kid to become the bastard son of a house servant (played by Ng Man-tat) overnight, only to find himself almost killed in an explosion, destroying his entire body as his brain and mouth remain. A scientist promises to restore his life by turning

him into a cyborg. Along the way Sing is implanted a chip which apparently grants him extraordinary body-transforming skills to fight his enemies but all he could access seems to be useless household appliances such as a toilet or a toothpaste tube. Although incapable of turning into 'real' hi-end hi-tech weapons, Sing in a life-saving call, becomes a microwave oven which 'melts' his enemy.

This sci-fi comedy gives Hong Kong's pre-1997 fear of losing everything a more than literal interpretation while it speaks a lingo full of grassroot wit typical of Hong Kong Cantopop culture. A man is not a man here, as the humanity of Hongkonger becomes a serious question. Cosplay and drag has acquired a series of new meanings. Chow's constant laughable morphing in allowing for (mis)recognition and/or disavowal of a socio-political compulsion, where we (audience and Chow) share a not-quite-changeable reality. Is Chow performing trash performing abject performing man, or are we as audience all performing comedy while we laugh at the indistinguishability between man and thing, a state of our non-being? While the success of Hong Kong comedians has been discussed as partly due to their miraculous abilities to transform from clown to god²¹ and back to clown, could these self-transforming tactics be re-read as allegorical survival narratives, as proposals for game plans to mock at the impossibility of memorising humanness while the territory is constantly renewed and delivered as a consumable package to colonisers and tourists alike? In this 'economic miracle' aka Hong Kong preoccupied with upward mobility and mechanistic efficiency, what kinds of affects, memories and denials could be recalled, renewed and/or rescued through (tragic-)comic characters such as the 'afterlife' cyborg in *Sixty Million Dollar Man*? Last but not least, are the desires and anxieties mapped and

displaced onto cinema through images of shame, disability and impurity in any way (trans)gendered?

Agnes Ku²² emphasises the need for the discussion of gender politics, in relation to processes of 'self-invention' in Hong Kong comedies, criticising the problematic of naturalising comic personas as a gendered everyman. Many heroines in Chow's earlier 'no-sense' comedies are marked by a disability or ugliness in the processes of making Chow the hero, most memorably the scar-faced Karen Mok Man-wai in *The God of Cookery* (1996) and the bald-headed Vicki Zhao Wei in *Shaolin Soccer* (2001), among many. It has been noted that Zhang Yuqi throughout *CJ7* (2008), among Chow's more recent work, is clothed in an airtight cheongsam in order to emphasise her 35D/24/35 figure. The young angelic teacher she is cast in, impersonating an ideal female archetype, becomes the saviour for Chow the construction worker (played by Stephen Chow) and his son (played by Xu Jiao) in trouble. All of these could be easily read as reinforcing gender stereotypes, sucking up to chauvinistic projection or playing the double bind of good wife and sex bomb.

I would, however, argue that this kind of gender-specific reading seeks to alienate Hong Kong comedies from its intricate socio-cultural context, as if gender could be analysed as an issue separated from class or ethnic identifications. Like that of the best Hong Kong comedians, Chow's work, silly and nonsensical on the outset, manages to convey a sense of verisimilitude and intimacy particular to Hong Kong audiences due to its ability in addressing interlocking social and political issues, while his personas are often confronted with life-threatening crisis in plots and have to survive through various forms of shaming and flagellation in processes of dehumanisation and rehumanisation. 'Cyborg writing is

about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.'²³ Chow's always shamed and traumatised personas may speak to gender politics through their ready identification with the other, not with a taken-for-granted assumption of manhood but already deprived of a qualification as man, a position not unlike women of visible hurt. In this light, Chow's personas could perhaps be reconsidered as non-normative texts towards bodily deterritorialisation and degenderisation, as their survivor or outcast positions deem them incapable of imagining themselves as any (normative) genders, male or female. Could these representations then be read as paving the way for new possibilities of coalition between different disempowered subjects due to their gender, class or ethnic positions?

Bhaskar Sarkar²⁴ reads Hong Kong martial arts films as 'hysterical texts', which evince 'an accentuated, dizzying pace' that resonates with confusion, ambivalence, and tension. He proposes that Asians, striving to cope with an intensifying, 'mutating world' and lacking the space and time to adequately process the vast transformations of their lives, 'turn to generic narratives and mythic structures to make sense—allegorically—of their lived

experiences'.²⁵ By taking a closer look at Hong Kong comic genre's formations and strategies from different eras, I hope this would help to deepen our understanding of comedies as socio-historical constructs bound by imaginings and fantasies available at given times and places, and their possibilities of offering relief in shaping and maintaining struggling and surviving communities while coping with an intensified castrating world and lived experiences. ■

Notes

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 - 13 Ibid, p 167.
 - 14 Ibid, p 172.
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Thank you!