

“A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image.” Joan Didion, *The White Album*, 1979

Something Borrowed, Something Blue

Yau Ching conceptualizes and negotiates landscapes of exile and displacement, interrogating histories, subjects and post-colonial frameworks. In her work Yau Ching problematizes conventions of narrative and text, at the same time conveying poignant emotional affect, humor, and the wicked intelligence and wit of the post-colonial queer subject. She has been fearless in forging her geographic migrations, complicated identities, and extraordinary multivalent work. If you step back and consider Yau Ching's oeuvre, there are shifts in the process of telling, but there are elements, to degrees, of narrative, documentary (or documented) and non-traditional form, with materials that range from tourist style filming, dramatization, interviews and varying narrative forms that complicate and synthesize the personal, political, issues of displacement, identities, women and queer love. The video and films that I will discuss suggest the extent of Yau Ching's visual repertoire and experimentation. In addition, I am particularly interested in how the process of making adds to a work's richness, and how aspects of a work are not necessarily dormant, that over time, a shift in the world or political policy can provide an additional reading to the material. The work is also a time lapse of technical changes and choices of the independent filmmaker.

I remember my first used Sony VHS camera and portapak from the 1980s and after turning it on, standing in front of the camera, and catching a glimpse in the black and white viewfinder of an illuminated, bluish electronic figure, a figure I had not seen on TV before. Fast forward.

In 1993, during an artist residency at the Banff Center in Canada, Yau Ching made three video letters. These short early works were inspired by poet and film director Shūji Terayama's *Video Letters 1982-1983*, “homemade” VHS video exchanges made with poet Tanikawa Shuntaro, while Terayama was nearly immobile and dying (at home). A poet, filmmaker, and activist, Yau Ching's early video letters echo a low-tech texture from Fisher-Price Pixelvision, Hi-8 video and Super-8 film. These black and white works are gritty and playful with a bright-eyed irreverence that teases out thoughts around identity, sexuality, visual language, displaced bodies and the ubiquitousness of post colonial infiltration (consider the Twinings tea bags Yau Ching roots through in *Video Letter # 2*). Yau Ching's video letters, unlike Terayama's, are constructed outside of or away from home. “Elsewhere” becomes a haunting ground for Yau Ching's work, and notions of “home” a kind of mental backyard Slip 'n Slide¹. Yau Ching provides a swinging door for a viewer and here I invoke childhood, as there is a smart, provocative cheekiness in the work. Focusing on *Video Letter #1* and *Video Letter #2*, both outside of and within the works, the video letters leave traces of a past, and a developing “real life” friendship between

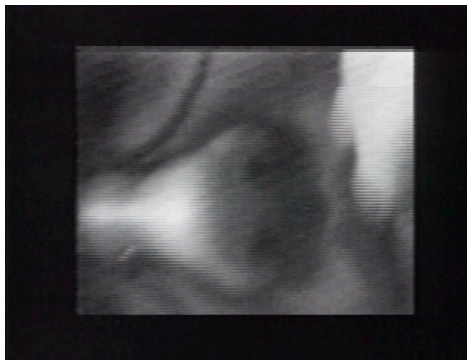
the artists Yau Ching and Gregg Bordowitz. The low-tech format glistens and I feel nostalgia for the collective, playful, activist overlay in the work, when many families were formed away from and outside of home.



In *Video Letter #1*, Yau Ching creates a pendulum of self, a kind of ticking clock (face) that involves the viewer in an exploration of inside or out, back or forth. We see a video messenger, Yau Ching, in extreme facial close up, a kind of “self recording” that is far more familiar today with YouTube and other forms of social media, although in *Video Letter #1* the camera framing is on its side (think of Bruce Nauman’s 1968 *Slow Angle Walk*) with a tight composition, making the areas we observe, the eyeglass bridge, the bridge of the nose, humorous, intimate but also a challenge to access. There are everyday gestures like those one might see reflected back from a mirror or from intimate proximity to another. A “self” becomes part of the electronic fabric and hum (think of Joan Jonas’ 1972 *Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll*). A thin hand moves across nose, lips and face. Eyes scan across frame, a head tilts down and in the constricted view the viewer sees a forehead, a fragment of shortly cropped hair, glasses, eye, a finger touching face; queerly coy.

In *Video Letter #2(or call me an essentialist)* the clockwork continues beginning with a tilted image of a smiling man, filmmaker Gregg Bordowitz, whose oscillating body provides a warm metaphoric “ticking,” a suggestive shifting from time device to a man, from being something to something other than. Blocks of text are stamped onto Bordowitz’s image, first “I AM NOT YOU” then “YOU ARE NOT A CLOCK.” The image of the man becomes further associated with that which he is not, when his image, through video editing or “media play” is sutured to a close up image of a kitchen clock, as the audio shifts from the sweet tic tock sound to a jolting alarm. Read in conversation, Yau Ching’s *Video Letters #1* and *#2* bump into each other, like two buddies might. Space, context, objects, histories, genders and gestures provide clues, tensions and bend perceptions. In both black and white videos, the person and objects are isolated in a tight close up, against a blank or negative interior. The people do not speak though there is occasional keyed in text and music with lyrics. Yau Ching feeds the viewer connections while denying, disarming or alarming them.²

I want to draw attention here to the process of making. It is a significant part of a work's journey and that interior knowledge can provide curious anecdotes. Yau Ching and Gregg Bordowitz were working on their own video projects during their residencies at Banff and each artist stepped into the other's work in some manner. The physical image of Bordowitz resides in Yau Ching's *Video Letter # 2* as mentioned, and Yau Ching was working on Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, as an assistant editor. An interesting osmosis occurred during their Banff stay, and lingers in both works through the suggestions and actual images of clocks, edited rhythmic stutterings, and a predominantly blue video clip that appears in both artists' work. The shared image is a TV Studio (Public Access style) head and shoulder shot of a character in a suit and tie (produced for Bordowitz's video), keyed over a bright blue background. This "televangelist like clip" appears at the beginning of Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop* and in a bookend fashion, at the end of Yau Ching's *Video Letter #2*. The appropriation of the trope of a televangelist character in a queer work during this time period might be expected, considering the many battles waged between queer activists and organized religion. However, though both artists have used found imagery in their work, sharing a very specific clip in two different art works, made at the same time, is not so much "appropriation" on Yau Ching's part, but an evocative exchange between the artists, comrade in arms queer, an interesting kind of "non-precious" treatment of material and image recycling, and over time, a lasting echo. Though Yau Ching's "Video Letter #2" is black and white, the "shared" clip at the end is in color and the only image in the video that was not generated by Yau Ching.



Yau Ching in *Video Letter #1*



Gregg Bordowich in *Video Letter # 2*

Rewinding, I want to head back to an earlier kind of "video letter" of Yau Ching's, the 1991, 16 mm film short, *Is There Anything Specific You Want Me to Tell You About*. *Is There Anything Specific You Want Me to Tell You About*, which may be the longest title for a work that I know of, is stylistically different, with luscious colors, processed images and "found" archival footage integrated throughout. The video is a long distance love letter between two Hong Kong women, one "writing" from Hong Kong and the other, a filmmaker writing and gathering images in New York City for a film project. The film begins with two Polaroid SX-70 photos, (remember the now defunct instant prints with the white borders) placed on a black background, askew,

one photo edge overlapping the other. In the left photo, a woman with short black hair sits pressed against the right frame edge, her gaze cast downward. The image may convey exhaustion or an image of deep reflection. The photo on the right is far more abstract, of yellow material covered with red roses. A viewer is uncertain of the meaning or translation, but might expect the visible woman in the photo to reappear in the body of the work. She will only be heard. One might expect the two photos to be portraits, and they might be, though one displays a woman and the other is an abstraction. In retrospect, the disjointed but overlapping photos foreshadow the film and the characters, a voice and a collector of images. Although we never see the two characters, even in partial absence, they come to inhabit the work in a mesmerizing way. We come to understand the distance between the two women, and the gap between tourist and landscape, home and place, symbolic symbol and trinket. The voice-over becomes a cadence, and the words, even in their confusion, provide a kind of adhesive for the images, tourist like visuals, found footage, and semi-abstracted human shapes. "Tell me more about life over there, would you?" Some statements lead the viewer to wonder which character is speaking and to where "where" might be? There is a prevailing sense of searching and investigation, and through contemporary and found imagery, a washing back and forth between histories, people and places. The resulting hybrid form creates a seductive illustrative language.

The over-narration is poetic and philosophical and flows from a variety of sources from personal address, "Dear Shu," to a recitation from a writer's critical essay. Twice within the work, over the voice of the main narrator, we hear the punctuation of the filmmaker's voice, which is also the voice of the actual filmmaker, strongly stating, "You are delusional."

I move through the film and find myself in a kind of visual and aural multi-tasking, shifting attention and thoughts. Perhaps it is because I am a filmmaker, perhaps it is because I was in love with analog before I relinquished myself to digital, because I have spent a great deal of my life as a tourist, as an observer, writing home to a woman. The electrical signal of images, manipulation, sits out on the surface of many moving frames in an illuminating decay. The voice trails. Distance gaps. There are people who know loneliness not because of a chemical imbalance but because of cultural, social and political injustice.

There are two exquisite sequences that I want to briefly mention. The first directly follows the photo title page. From the perspective of a tourist on board the deck of a boat, a camera records the New York shoreline as the boat heads forward. Known iconic images, such as an American flag waving in the breeze and the New York City Twin Towers come into view. (When making a work we are often absorbed in the process, and don't anticipate how it might be read once it falls out of the historical moment, until we look back. It is striking to see the image of the Towers standing. The viewing of those few frames are of course, significantly different from when the film was made. I think about Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida*, and his discussion of an 1865 portrait of Lewis Payne, handcuffed, handsome, and

condemned to die. "He is dead and he is going to die." A reaction to loss may not quickly be associated with buildings or structures. Having lived in Brooklyn at the time, having heard the impact of the second tower, then seeing the Twin Towers again in Yau Ching's video, I felt my jaw drop open. How many times have I seen footage of the buildings being hit and then falling? I had a strange feeling like I wanted to roll the video back just to see the buildings standing, I guess in the way one might have rolled back the Zapruder film to see Jack Kennedy smiling again. For a moment, that segment of footage becomes its own work, as I excerpt it mentally, looping it over, then again. During those seconds of recognition my visual recall flows over the film's visual. People perished in the Towers and because of that many people perish to this day. They are dead and they are going to die.)

Much older found footage follows after the image of the New York shoreline. With their backs to the camera, Asian men and women clad in 50s bathing attire, dive into the water, joining a larger group of swimmers. The two clips coupled together are absurd, decades apart, but they are also eerily in sync and seem to make some sort of sense. Strung together, the travelogue footage of the New York City harbor and the unrelated clip pulled from the past, of people jumping into a body of water, creates an odd afterimage. There is the humor of course, but it also evokes dreams as well as unfortunate delusions of trying for a "promised land." The archival clip may initially express the luxury of swimming for recreation though that is quickly worn away. There is a long and present history of boats breaking waves and both the joy and desperation of trying to reach shore. I imagine here the power of a shoreline and how it might come to imbue such power. Viewing this on analog video, I rolled the image back a few times, to watch the slow motion frames and imagining the thrill and desperation of getting somewhere. But somewhere can quickly become nowhere. How thrilled one might be to throw oneself into the sea in the hope of touching a shore. How desperate one might be to throw oneself into the sea in the hope of reaching a shore. We are reminded of the many eyes that have looked upon a shoreline and the masses of immigrants. It may not be as welcoming a shore as a traveler might expect. "Dear Shu, If not for shooting this film, I guess I would not have gone. I ended up throwing away all the footages (sic) I shot." The next view from the boat is an image of the Statue of Liberty. The film abruptly cuts to Washington Square Park and once again we see the Statue of Liberty but in miniature and being sold, held up in the air by an Asian man. "Is this guy Chinese you ask me? I don't know. As a matter of fact, I couldn't tell who is Chinese and who isn't. Don't you see?" The viewer sees nothing, a black image. This kind of word/image play appears in many Yau Ching works. (Think back to Video Letter #2's, "YOU ARE NOT A CLOCK.") When we hear, "Don't you see" and what we see is nothing, the very literalness feels awkward as well as humorous. I imagine Yau Ching nudging Magritte. Through word and visual play, messages remind us that seeing is a system not to be taken at face value, that representation can be both a structure of privilege and of status.

There is a certain melancholy in the over-narration. I associate the visual images with the filmmaker character. They are beautiful with a delusional or experimental

force, tourist-like images of New York holding hands with “found” propaganda style film clips from Hong Kong or China, then sent back to “her.” The images and over-narration are a mash-up, a correspondence collision between the two women. “Dear Shu, I’m trying to make this as exotic as it can be and they would say, ‘I know this is about Zen Buddhism.’” The viewer sees a close up of a woman. I believe she is sewing, but the tight shot and semi-blurred quality, makes the image ambiguous and difficult to categorize. This “need” to identify and to situate the body, returns the viewer to the earliest moments of photography when the medium was used to both render portraits and as a scientific tool in an attempt to regulate a social body. The absurdism the filmmaker character refers to, humorously confronts the rhetoric that surrounds race. “You cheated, there is no such thing. I imagine you saying just like fortune cookies.” What do the references to fortune cookies mean in Yau Ching’s work? In an odd way, a fortune cookie hides a broken verse. Yau Ching takes the absurdity and faux cultural symbolism in the fortune cookie and cracks it open. Yau Ching throws into the mix these absurdist elements allowing a viewer to both contemplate the history as well as the absurdity. The humor disempowers the venom.

I return to the film and a striking sequence of short, “found” clips. The first clip is a medium shot of a woman wearing sunglasses, a swimsuit and holding a beach ball, followed by a woman officer and women soldiers. All the archival images are of Chinese women and because of the age of the material, recorded by a male cinematographer. Most of the images appear to be pulled from a Chinese government film archive, however the tightly cropped-in selections from each film, read together are seductive and orchestrate a kind of humorous and sexy ode to women in uniform. This condensed archive of women clips ends with a full-length backside shot of a woman in hat and robe walking away from a camera. “Shu, It seems inevitable now that you are being projected rather than you projecting.” Soon after, there is the image of a man passing in front of a camera, obstructing our view for a moment. The movement is jarring as a non-Asian, white man in the attire of a Buddhist pilgrim, straw hat and flowing robe, cuts a striking figure in a wave of people in New York’s Chinatown. From the narration, I am led to believe that this man is not a character in the film but a documentation of a man who was regularly seen walking in Chinatown. With the video’s meditation on “being Chinese” and images of “Chinese women,” the non-Asian man in Asian attire, on a street not in China but in Chinatown, New York, poses questions about identity, representation and space. How is this man imagining himself, the landscape and what does he represent?

The narrator continues, “... how can you still claim to be struggling all the time with reality if you don’t know another point of desire but the male gaze.” As a kind of marker for the women characters, we see a condensed clip of two people in a boat, edited in such a way that they move slightly forward and back and forward again, remaining in an interpretive slumbering love. Excised from linear time, they escape here. Here in this moment, in these frames of this video, they will always remain together, forever at sea. However, I’m left with the sense that the filmmaker

character is ambivalent in returning “home.” Words gleaned from the over-narration like “the Bill of Rights,” places a reminder on limitations both personal and political. I find myself leaving the film wondering if there is any “truth” in the characters; who the woman in the photo represents, if the footage of New York City was taken by a young filmmaker and when I see women working in a Chinatown sweatshop were they playing characters or themselves? Tourist films seem to always say I do not belong here. Why do we wave? Much of traditional documentary footage is highly choreographed, moralized and staged. The genre itself seems riddled with holes. On the flip side of this, how is this particular work fiction?

Some of the images that Yau Ching floats through the film are processed, posterized or composited. A composite occurs when two or more generally different images are overlaid, and through opacity or keying, result in a single (combined) image. In this work there is a bluish clip, filmed from a television screen and enhanced electronically, of a group of Mao supporters, cheering and seemingly drummed up for the political event. During the edit, a duplicate image was placed on top, and then moved slightly out of sync. The resulting graphic and blur illuminates but disallows a viewer to clearly read any individual. There is more a sense of a group than a person. In this instance, the compositing process collapses people into a system, and reflects back to the viewer, the dynamic in which the people are held. In the 19th century, Francis Galton developed the composite portrait, making multiple exposures of faces from people who shared race, economic status etc., with the intention to produce a “type” to aid in identifying criminals, deviants and “low life.” Where Galton sought a scientific means to produce a system of identification or archiving, Yau Ching utilizes a film archive to dismantle or reinvent.

Is There Anything Specific You Want Me to Tell You About, combines experimental form with narrative, and the glue is the filmmaker’s astute selection of material, reshaping and recontextualizing of image, writing and a dash of probing play. The filmmaker gathers together selections of women, mostly from older films mostly concerned with love of country rather than a discourse of love between women. The story of the two women almost appears buried beneath landscapes, readings and categories. In the work, Yau Ching excises women figures from the great vault of archives, and populates them within a sequence, creating oddly beautiful communities, establishing a shifting visibility or space. Worlds, spaces and occupancy remain critical throughout Yau Ching’s work.

We never see the physical bodies of the two women characters, though the viewer receives a sense of an interior and surrounding world, and a progressing story. However, the string of sequences, the reframing, the temporal back and forth between spaces and time, provides an engagement that dissuades a viewer from a singular story.

I’m Starving, released in 1999, has the most direct narrative progression, with its charm coming from a stylistic nod to early German Expressionist cinema, however it does not bear an explicit element of horror, though there is a ghost. The film has a

stylized albeit contemporary color palette, and utilizes artificial lighting, shadows and dramatic camera angles. Character movement, camera framing, music, sound effects and dialogue play key roles in propelling the work forward. Some of the earliest of special effects, slow motion, reverse motion and a dolly shot add to the film's simple yet sleek sophistication and magical impact. It is a fantastical work and a love story that returns a Yau Ching film connoisseur, back to New York City. The narrative takes place in a late 90s, domestic space, in a Hell's Kitchen apartment in New York City. The apartment houses a hardworking, African American woman and a "sometimes" invisible Chinese (Hong Kong) woman "ghost." Queer readings of invisibility and the monstrous in relation to classic horror films, have been significantly noted and written about. The apartment is a space that somewhat shelters their combined worlds and commingling. Part of the dynamic of the relationship is that it is somewhat cloistered, existing outside of but also within the belly of the neighborhood. It is almost an impossible match, life and death, but it survives against the odds as many queer past and present relationships have proven.

The opening shot is a close up of an advertisement in Times Square, a giant 3D "Cup Noodles" with steam rising up that one might expect, because of its size, to run across in a film like the sci-fi classic, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, 1957. The instant noodles symbolize a kind of homogenized Asianness, and because it is a cup not a bowl, a metaphoric cultural absorption from Asian to American. Following this shot, Yau Ching brings the viewer back to New York City's Chinatown. We hear a beautiful disembodied voice speaking in English with a Cantonese accent. The language is quite visual creating an additional image overlay. "I had a headache in a burning house for years, hardly knowing it's burning, until you moved in." Two filled reddish orange bags sit on a stand covered in fruit. A man cropped from shoulders down, is selling produce. The bags are the color of a flame. The arm of a woman comes into frame and picks up a red, fruit-filled bag, then exits the frame. Another woman, cropped from the shoulders down, crosses the street with a red bag, then another, and another. The shots all focus on the hands, bag, legs and feet. The carriers are all women. Are they carrying something for themselves, another, to share? The reciting continues, "Your takeout menus remind me of the best part of my past life before I was considered dead by people who could not afford to see." The words suggest a connection between the off screen voice to possibly one of the women in this Chinatown crowd. The voice is a luscious whisper and through her words and delivery, sets up the film's relationship. "Your delicious existence renders me a permanent fixture of your apartment." The viewer sees an oblique wide-angle view, a long flight of stairs to an apartment door. The image has a limited color palette with the stairs, railing and sidewalls bathed in two shades of blue and the top of the stairs tinted in a light yellow warmth. "You move me back and far." The viewer hears footsteps, sees a shadow on the stairs, then in tight shot, a woman in a blue suit slowly ascends with a few bags of groceries at her side. "Here I imagine a world which abuses much less by imagining my attachment to you as my real life. I'm glad through you I continue the ancient tradition of eating." The viewer sees the white interior of an apartment with an overhead fan spinning. Long, transparent

curtains blow into the room. The apartment appears to be empty. In close up, shadows of large letters scroll the title across two adjoining walls. The letters bend and distort as they migrate from one plane to the next. From a low angle shot of the ceiling, the words Yau Ching Production appear on a fan blade, then disappear as the blade moves through a rotation. Seeing and then not seeing the text, shadow letters being partially there and not, suggests a shifting state, perhaps one of habitation. It is a smart and simple means of creating titles that is much more hands on than using an electronic character generator. A lot of hands went into the making of the film, which I will briefly return to later. Just as the woman begins to unlock the door the film cross cuts to the inside of the apartment, to a window where a pinwheel is turning and the sound of blowing can be heard.

Exhausted from the day, the woman enters the apartment with two large red bags of takeout. She immediately looks around with concern. A musical score in conjunction with visuals convey emotional buildup. The woman walks to a window. In the corner of the shot, a pinwheel is lodged in the window treatment, and is quite still. Bypassing the pinwheel, the woman looks out the window. Each shot of the woman looking into a room is followed by a bluish, skewed, perspective shot that suggests two parallel worlds, that of the woman and that of the perspective shot of the “missing” ghost. Continuing the search, the woman exits the apartment running up the stairs that leads to the roof. The musical score shifts tone becoming more entangled and frantic. From the perspective of the woman, or more likely, that of the ghost, the viewer gazes through a peephole to a bluish, black and white image of the roof. Air vents and a smoke stack look like an ominous Nosferatu landscape. In this way, mise-en-scene, via light, shadow, color, camera angle, composition and movement, provides an expressionistic treatment that is most fully realized in relation to the ghost. After the woman returns to the apartment, she continues to search, perplexed. Then, from behind, something comes upon her and the woman’s suit jacket begins to radiate a lustrous blue. It is the ghost and in her game of hiding, she has emerged, releasing a throaty whisper to the woman. “Where have you been,” the woman gently scolds back. In the responding shot we see the ghost. Her face and neck are a luminous cyan. Behind her, the apartment door is illuminated yellow. Although there is something unnerving about the color combination, the ghost radiates a cool warmth and a gentle seduction. “Something smells good. What do you have?” There is a significant difference in their height. The “woman” is tall and solid and the “ghost” luminous and light. The woman is bathed in warm tones and ghost in blue. The ghost moves forward and begins to sniff. That the ghost’s height brings her to the woman’s breast creates a humorous oscillation between seduction and innocence.

As the woman begins to make tea, the ghost tears off strips of paper menu and begins to eat. She is a “hungry ghost” with a boundless hunger. The ghost in this story devours the other woman’s diary, speaking elegant secrets from restless souls. The ghost recites a list of Chinese foods as a lover might express desire, or the soul might yearn for home. To the woman she exhibits a sweet and touching devotion. Together they have a curious overlay, their own ancient diasporic histories and

ancestors, that here become further complicated. The sound of the ghost consuming the menus is deliciously crisp, as is the overall sound quality of the film. In a beautiful weightless drop, the ghost, slow motion falls onto the shoulder of the woman affectionately wrapping her arms about her then cracking open a fortune cookie. She feeds the woman the cookie then brings the paper fortune to her own mouth. The woman smiles and pulls the paper from the ghost's mouth so it can be read before being eaten. "Great Misery Falls on the Heels of Great Misery." The woman raises her eyebrows. The fortune is a humorous misfortune, a hybrid text that pretends a wise confusion. An overhead fan whirls around. If you have lived in New York City in the summer, you can feel and almost smell the sweltering heat of the small apartment. This one in Hell's Kitchen, though a fan is circulating, might be losing air. An interior apartment image cuts to a stock market tickertape in Time Square as it rolls across the screen announcing the world's misfortunes and a world that seems more likely to feed off of greed than what the woman and ghost might exchange. Text rolls "...CABINET TO VOTE ON BANK RESCUE PACKAGE FRIDAY JAPANESE BANK SHRS DOWN..." Is this signaling some type of crash?

As the film progresses the woman and the ghost become despondent. Are they unable to reconcile their worlds or is their life together disconnected or dislocated from the rest of the world? We view various stilled moments, *tableaux vivants* of each seated alone within an area of the interior space, lost in thought. Each progressive "living picture" seems more emptied of air until the viewer arrives at a kind of ceremonial moment that begins with the ghost framed sitting on the edge of the bed, eating money. By eating fake money, is the ghost appeasing their ancestors, making preparation for their afterlife? A smooth dolly shot travels the left length of the bed, revealing the sleeping woman. The image speaks to an intimate closeness that is still somehow distant. There is a dissolve from the woman sleeping to the ghost and the woman seen through the soft transparency of a white, billowing bed sheet. They are standing and facing each other. Through the mediated view, the ghost appears to be gently brushing her lips against the woman's chest. The evocation of veils and a kiss, are suggestive of a ceremony such as marriage. This intimate moment is taken back once we see behind the sheet, to the ghost not kissing, and the relationship remains in a state of acknowledgment as well as denial.

The ghost then appears at the head of the bed as the woman sleeps, with unlit candles outlining her body. The ghost moves from one candle to the next, breathing out and igniting them one by one. The shot suggests the temporal space of the ghost is not fully guided by the usual state of affairs. With all candles ablaze, the ghost lies down next to the woman, resting her head upon her, though it appears the ghost may not be fully absorbed or recognized within the woman's slumbering state. Later, as they are both seated across from each other, with edible but uneaten and broken fortune cookies covering the table, the ghost opens one and hands the fortune over. The woman reads, "There must be a reason for living hidden somewhere," and, as a ghost might, the woman consumes it. We understand the desire the woman has to translate herself into another space. The film ends with the sound of the landlord scurrying up the stairs to demand rent from a possible

“missing” tenant. After pounding on the door, he opens it. The room is filled with large slips of paper, as though a hundred fortunes have been set free. We do not see the woman or the ghost, but in a corner, just outside the window, a pinwheel is being blown.

Yau Ching interrogates word and image, challenges the “truth” that holds up representations, and suggests how language and labels can be limiting. In her work, Yau Ching pulls from various sources, personal narrative, documentary, critical writing and poetry, exercising the edge her videos and films are known for, and effectively skirting the boundaries of genre. It is this weave that enhances what each of us might take away. In *I’m Starving*, there are cultural references and metaphoric whispers that allow for an openly interpretive tale.

Not long after making *I’m Starving*, Yau Ching left her apartment in New York City, where the film was shot. The crew consisted of New York based women, mostly all lesbians. I was part of that moment. It was a high-energy experience to work with Yau Ching and such a dynamic crew. I think the film has become a love letter for us all.

Lucretia Knapp is a writer, filmmaker, and artist. A video *Swim Suit* is distributed by frameline, San Francisco; and article, “The Queer Voice in Marnie,” has been published in *Out In Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays On Popular Culture*, *Cinema Journal* and the second edition of *A Hitchcock Reader*. “Genteel” is a recent essay on an installation by Lynne Yamamoto. Lucretia Knapp teaches at Smith College in Northampton, MA.

¹ The Slip 'n Slide is a toy invented by Robert Carrier in 1961 and was produced by Wham-O in the U.S. A garden hose is attached to the long yellow sheet of plastic, that contains perforations, allowing water to be released, and the material slippery. A person then runs, jumps on the plastic and slides across to the other side.

² Gregg Bordowitz’s 1993, *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, is a semi-autobiographical video that foregrounds the complexity of identity and representation in the media, especially for a young, queer, activist filmmaker who is HIV positive. He parodied the mainstream media’s demonizing portrayal of AIDS in the 80s and 90s. One character in the film parodies a news anchor/televangelist who stirs up panic. “I’m reporting on behalf of the uninfected and we know who we are.”