

**Circusing Societal Condition:  
An Inquiry into How Contemporary Circus  
Enters Unconventional Spaces in Taiwan**

Tai-Jung Yu

Student Number: 0622168

MA: Contemporary Theater, Dance and Dramaturgy

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink

Second Reader: Dr. Theron Schmidt

University of Utrecht

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates contemporary circus practices that enter unconventional spaces in Taiwan and how they reflect different societal conditions. As this research entails peculiar types of space in the real world and how the circus performances residing in these places reveal the abstract property of living conditions, the key theories deployed include locality proposed by Arjun Appadurai, structure of feeling proposed by Raymond Williams, double consciousness discussed both by Paul Gilroy and W.E.B. Du Bois, and the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity raised by Hassan Hanafi. The conceptual tools developed for the subsequent performance analysis include the spatial, temporal and communal characters within structures of feeling, a focus on materiality for spatial investigations, and the modes of in-solution and of precipitate regarding sensing structures of feelings. In the case studies, I first analyze the promenade circus performance *Disappearing Island* by Formosa Circus Art in 2020. The performance concretizes the structure of feeling of the island with the wearable installations and participative scenarios, allowing the structure of feeling to be observed by the audience. This work further proposes questions about a co-sharing urban life to the audience and states the fragile and uncertain living conditions in contemporary society nowadays. The second case study focuses on *Main Agile* by Thunar Circus in 2022. The performance structure and the material composition of *Main Agile* show a juxtaposed mentality and brought about two modes of spectatorship, which leads to double consciousness. The double consciousness hidden in the work indicates the contemporary dilemma of living with a dual mentality caused by the irreconciled integration of tradition and modernity in a society like Taiwan. I argue that what lingers in these cases is the ghost of modernity. If the issues of contemporary uncertainty and the dilemma of duality can be solved, we must start with identifying the ghost of modernity and its influence, then proceed with motivating “the past” into something dynamic and alive, rather than static or unchangeable.

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, innovative circus performances and creations have created a new category: Contemporary Circus. Seen as part of the field of circus and a research object of Circus Studies, Contemporary Circus is indeed one of the most popular forms of live performance, yet the research and writing about it are rather scarce and still at the beginning of accumulation (Lavers et al. 2019).

Having worked as the resident dramaturge and the international affairs manager for a Taiwanese circus company- Formosa Circus Art (FOCA) from 2017 to 2021, I observed a growing interest in circus practices to perform outside of conventional spaces in the field, i.e., big tops or theatres, both in Taiwan and in other countries. Some of them were on the trajectory of responding to the cultural governance by urban or national authorities urging artists to bring the “arts” into quotidian sites. Some of them chose the space for performances in a more deliberate manner, kneading the act of circus with the traces of urban activities, memories and context, some even attempted to expose the underlying sociopolitical structures.

Compared to other genres of performing arts, research in the circus field is still in its early stage, and even a definition for circus seems to be difficult (Tait and Lavers 2020, 2-3). The cause is not only its rapidly, still growing and developing aesthetics in various forms of practice, but also its paradoxical nature that “when a definition of circus is set up, it invites contestation” (3). Though many recent endeavours were made by researchers looking into the foundations and evolution of (contemporary) circus practices, very few of them dealt with the issues of where the performances took place and the outcome in relation to the chosen spaces (Lavers et al. 2019; Tait and Lavers 2020; Arrighi and Davis 2021). Moreover, the examples integrated into the above volumes are basically “Western cases”, i.e., the practices from Europe, North America, or Australia (Ibid.).

Nowadays, circus practices often encounter the cliché representation of freedom and magical impressions that normally imply the separation of themselves from society at large. In this sense, circus tends to position itself at the margin of society (Lievens 2016). Circus performances entering unconventional spaces may obtain the possibility to reconnect this genre which is usually *out of this world* back to the *real world*. Attempting to provide research in the circus field that tackles the spatial issues and casts light on non-Western examples, this thesis investigates Contemporary Circus practices entering unconventional spaces in Taiwan, where

diverse societal conditions are exposed, performed and *circused*. These unconventional spaces include a marginal region in an urban area and a temporary stage placed within a temple. They both meet the criteria of, first, non-theatrical or non-big-top spaces and, second, having the potential to reflect on social or cultural contexts.

As this research is built much upon the chosen cases and their relationship with unconventional spaces in a particular country, how they operate as a local object is crucial to the investigation. This thesis explores the dramaturgical application of contemporary circus practices that deliberately involve the place and the space. Thus, the concept of locality is a crucial element as a starting point for this research. Bringing locality to the surface entails recognizing the local outlines and construction, which usually emphasize the material aspect. However, another aspect of locality proposed by the Indian American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai is at once important, where he asserts locality as a structure of feeling. In short, the thesis attempt to shed light on, firstly, particular circus practices in a non-Western region, secondly, the usual neglected analytical elements of spatial characters within circus performance, and, lastly, the sense and feeling in relation to place, space and the surrounding societal environment within circus performance situated in unconventional spaces. Hence, the main research question I will try to answer is: how do works of contemporary circus in Taiwan engage unconventional spaces and reveal structures of feeling and living conditions in contemporary society?

As this research regarding circus entering unconventional spaces also aims at the societal condition, the spiritual aspect is as important as the physical aspect of space. This is why the chosen concepts involve the ones dealing with abstract sense of ways of living, i.e., structure of feeling and double consciousness. I also include the theory that tackles the exterior side of ways of living, i.e., the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity. As for locality, it is a theory that at once tackles the abstract sense and the tangible ways of living.

The notion of structure of feeling was proposed by British/Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams as one of the most important terms in his research towards what culture and its properties are. In order to investigate culture as a complex organization of "whole way of life", Williams defined structure of feeling as "a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression" (Williams 1961, 63-64). The concept of locality is drawn from the Indian American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who defined locality as the "materiality

of a neighbourhood “and “a structure of feeling, a property of social life, and an ideology of situated community” (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 189), among which he emphasized “structure of feeling” the most. Appadurai’s concern was about how local objects are influenced by the flow of globalization, both culturally and politically, which calls for further inquiries into the alternation of the concept of locality.

The notion of double consciousness was researched by British sociologist and culture studies scholar Paul Gilroy, who drew this concept from the African American sociologist William Du Bois (Gilroy 1993, 1). Double consciousness was developed to capture the unique and complex sensation, originally observed on black people scattered in foreign lands. Thus, double consciousness is used to describe a sense of life for people who live in a particular condition that caused this mental duality, for which its functionality in this thesis will be further substantiated. The juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity was proposed by the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi to indicate the way people deal with tradition and modernity in (Eastern) Asian countries (Hanafi 2005, 390). Concerning how traditional ways of life co-exist with the modernized world, Hanafi investigated different kinds of models regarding the currently existing examples. In the juxtaposition model, Hanafi points out how “the old” and “the new” stand with each other in a single society (Ibid.). This concept is chosen to analyze the structural composition of one of the case studies and to complement the concept of double consciousness.

The methodology of this research consists of two parts: first, the mentioned concepts will be further discussed and scrutinized in Chapter 1 to provide the framework and tools for the following analysis. Second, incorporating the results of the discussion in Chapter 1, I will then conduct the dramaturgical analysis of two case studies. The analysis will depart from the aspect of composition, which is among the apparently visible, perceivable content and the structure of the performances. With the help of the above theories and conceptual tools, the analysis will be further developed to discuss the abstract phenomena of the cases, which involve different kinds of structures of feeling. In this way, the analysis will allow me to dive into the more complex and implicit relationship between the works and society, thus exploring the societal condition that I wish to unearth.

In Chapter 2, I will investigate the work *Disappearing Island* by Formosa Circus Art in 2020, which responded to an urgent urban development project. This work is a



collaboration between the Taiwanese circus company and Filipino visual artist Leeroy New. Being restricted to any new buildings and lack of infrastructure for half a century, the area where the promenade performance took place, Shezi Island, was also where the studio of the company was located. The performance invited the audience into a long-neglected community where circus performers and bodies became the guides and forces. In this Chapter, I investigate how locality as a structure of feeling is informed and revealed by this work and address a peculiar but co-shared, uncertain living condition in contemporary society. In Chapter 3, I will take the work *Main Agile* to the centre stage. *Main Agile* is the third piece created by director Lin, Zheng-Tsung that looks into the link between circus and folk arts in the traditional culture of Taiwan. In this work, he chose Stilt-Zhen, a specific type of folk art carrying religious function as the main element for the performance. After field surveys for years, *Main Agile* took place in front of a local temple in Taipei City. In this Chapter, I investigate how double consciousness is hidden in the structure of the work and revealed by the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity, thus exposing a contemporary dilemma of duality.

## Chapter I

### Structure of Feeling: Locality and Double Consciousness

#### Structure of Feeling

In his 1961 published volume, *The Long Revolution*, British/Welsh cultural theorist and literary critic Raymond Williams continued his inquiry into *structure of feeling*, a term he coined in *Preface to Film* in 1954 for the first time. His proposition of this term is strongly connected with his studies of culture. Not only did Williams critically reflect on the changing definition of culture, but he also proposed different “categories in the definition of culture” (Williams 1958 & 1961 & 1977). In the chapter “The Analysis of Culture” in *The Long Revolution*, he distinguished three categories of culture: the ideal, the documentary, and the social. Due to limited space, detailed descriptions of these individual categories are not provided here. However, it is crucial to point out Williams’ assertion that “it is the relations between them that should claim our attention” (1961, 59). This claim is aligned with his belief that “[c]ultural history must be more than the sum of the particular histories, for it is with the relations between them, the particular forms of the *whole organization*, that it is especially concerned” (63; italics added). Thus, he defines the theory of culture as “the study of relationships between elements in a *whole way of life*” (Ibid.).

As how Williams was concerned with the complex relationship between different representational behaviours of culture, he was also interested in investigating “the nature of the organization” within culture. He believed that instead of using terms like “social character” or “pattern of culture” proposed by other scholars before him for analysis, “we can gain the sense of a further common element (...) as it were the actual experience through which these were lived” (63-64).<sup>1</sup> For Williams, this concept of the “further common element” is structure of feeling. He used structure of feeling to describe “a particular *sense of life*, a particular *community of experience* hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some way passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour” (Williams 1961, 64; italics added).

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<sup>1</sup> Though not detailed, Williams pointed out that “social character” is proposed by the American philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, and “pattern of culture” is addressed by the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict. (Williams 1961, 63)

The choice of the words composing structure of feeling as a term shows what kind of "sense" Williams was referring to. First, though as vague as "feeling" may sound, it is somehow "firm and definite as 'structure' suggests" (Williams 1961, 64). Second, Williams was attempting to find a word which could reflect his assertion of culture as a whole way of life encompassing complex relational representation. This kind of culture as "a whole way of life" should be in the present tense, with an active and subjective sense, like *feeling*, , which "operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity", instead of the static, objectified past tense, like *thought* (1961, 64 & 1971, 129).

Williams considered structure of feeling to be "the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization" (1961, 64). For example, in his analysis of the British novels in the 1840s, he pointed out how the works by Mrs. Gaskell, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, Charles Dickens, George Elliot and others showed the structure of feeling of the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, as he argued: "some art expressing feelings which the society, in its general character, could not express" (86-87). According to his analysis, one can understand that structure of feeling obtains the trait of exclusiveness to a certain degree, as this *sense of life* or the *community of experience* is usually possessed by a specific group of people ("our" way of life vs. external analyst), in his most cases, a group of people in the same generation. For the people who hold it, the structure of feeling as an abstract production of their lives and activities may feel implicit, but the result of its impacts on them is intrinsically profound. Williams uses the status of *in solution* to explain the living experience as structure of feeling sensed by the people who produce and immerse in it. However, the people in the next generation would observe the living experience of the past as a *precipitate*, which is rather more visible and more detectable (63). Thus, despite different manners, this is why a structure of feeling produced by a specific group of people is not completely "internal" and exclusive to themselves and can be witnessed by other "external" analysts.

If the idea proposed by William sounds vague in any sense, it is because scrutinizing the structure of feeling, something one can learn and understand from a specific group that exists in a specific *place* and *time*, is no easy task. It entails not only inquiries into "particular activities" that hold the structure of feeling, but also how these activities are combined into "*a way of thinking and living*" (Ibid.). It is this complex essence of structure of feeling that invites us to reflect on the tangible and intangible quality of life in different cases.

Although vaguely, in Williams' discourse, he implies that the "internal" and "external" perspectives of structure of feeling rooted in ways of life are delineated by *temporal*, *spatial* and *communal* characters which compartmentalize different groups, generations and communities holding certain structure of feeling. For example, he points out that people are usually aware of the particular sense of life when they "notice the contrasts between generations, who never talk quite 'the same language', or when we read an account of our lives by someone from outside the community, or watch the small differences in style, of speech or behaviour, in someone who has learned our ways yet was not bred in them" (Williams 1961, 64). Once the contrasts between any groups are noticed, the internal and external positions form at the same time. This is also the moment where the positions for observing structure of feeling merge. In this sense, one may say that most structure of feeling observed by researchers and scholars are *precipitate* instead of *in solution*.

Williams exemplifies how the temporal character informs the formation of in-/external positions in different generations and the structure of feeling they bear. He indicates that though one generation could try to pass on the structure of feeling it produces and possesses, the next generation may not fully accept it, and often produce a new structure of feeling that its origin can hardly be identified (65):

[T]he new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many *continuities*, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its *creative response* into a new structure of feeling (Ibid.; italics added).

Although the analysis above focused on how generations deal with and invent structure of feeling, it points out exactly how opposite parties evolve and involve themselves in the (re)production of their unique structure of feeling, while there is a sense of continuity and creativity involved in the process. As the temporal character facilitates the divergence of generations and their own structure of feeling, the spatial and communal characters would also help to form other types of contrasting "internal" and "external" positions for observing the newly generated, precipitated structure of feeling.

What's worth noting here is that the temporal, spatial and communal characters that delineated and support the formation of a structure of feeling. Meanwhile, these

characters do not function independently from each other. For example, a specific structure of feeling in a generation may be influenced most distinctly by the temporal factor, but it is also informed strongly by the communal factor, as a generation usually forms its own language within its community. And even the most influential types of structure of feeling, for example, the structure of feelings in the 1840s British novels analysed by Williams, would always meet a limitation within a region that reflects on the geographic hence spatial character. The structure of feelings in times of the British Industrial Revolution is never quite the same as the structure of feeling during modernization progress in other countries. Thus, structure of feeling is not universal but deeply situated.

When using structure of feeling as a lens to look into cultural practices like art and circus, structure of feeling also features the two following characters. First is that structure of feeling “can fail to be fully understood even by living people in close contact with it, (...) we shall not suppose that we can ever do more than make an approach, an approximation, using any channels” (66). Once we realize structure of feeling is something inherently beyond any fully concrete grasp, we may operate it effectively with caution and boldness. After all, there is no “correct” structure of feeling, only the ones either in solution or precipitated, either observed from internal or external position. Secondly, structure of feeling does not represent a well-distributed or evenly-demonstrated status of way of life. Again, appropriating Whilliam’s words, it is “not uniform throughout the society; it is primarily evident in the dominant productive group” (80). Thus, any phenomenon that could be accounted as proof of a structure of feeling may also address a specific, no matter the hegemonic or omitted, side of one society.

## Locality as a Structure of Feeling

Researching circus as a vehicle of structure of feeling may seem like an “innovative move” in academia, but not merely that. This approach allows me to deliberately connect the spatial characters within circus and structure of feeling. The spatial character is certainly crucial in the field of circus studies but it is yet to be contemplated with circus as cultural and societal practices bearing structure of feeling. In order to do that, an investigation into the concept of *locality* is helpful here.

The study of certain places and their local traits has been thoroughly scrutinized by geographers and anthropologists along with the “great discovery” of “other” parts of

the world since the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Western world. But the investigation into the overall abstract, contextual meaning and property of local practices arrived rather late. This direction can be found in the research of Indian American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who observed that the forces of globalization play an important role in affecting the formation and perpetuation of locality. Appadurai argued that some of the most iconic ethnographic writings in the 1990s took locality wrongly either with a transitory quality or as a neutral foundation which overlooked that any understanding of locality was also a work of invention and imagination (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 180). He attempted to find out what locality would probably mean by critically addressing the myth of a globalized world must be thus flattened and unified. In "The Production of Locality," Appadurai began the article by addressing three questions:

What is the place of locality in schemes about global cultural flow? Does anthropology retain any special rhetorical privilege in a world where locality seems to have lost its ontological moorings? Can the mutually constitutive relationship between anthropology and locality survive in a dramatically delocalized world?" (Ibid.)

In order to answer these questions, Appadurai dug into the meaning of locality. He pointed out two different sides of locality: first is the "materiality of a neighbourhood", e.g., the building of houses, bridges and infrastructure, that produces and ensures the tangible existence of locality. The investigation on materiality in scenographic analysis by Dutch theatre scholar Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink is helpful here. In "How Does Scenography Think?", she introduced the scenographic analysis for performing space with four angles: relationality, affectivity, materiality and temporality (2019, 106). When discussing materiality, she quoted Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer who described the materiality of staging causes an "impact on our experience and understanding of performance and of the world more generally" (108). Thus, though the materiality of a neighbourhood is not the main focus for Appadurai, it is useful for analyzing the concrete components of performance and of space and allows us to scrutinize "the world" around it more easily.

The second definition of locality, which is foregrounded by Appadurai, is the more easily overlooked, abstract effects of the tangible constructs where the production of locality involves structure of feeling (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 180-1). As Appadurai elaborated, locality in small-scale societies used to be seen by anthropologists as

something “ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality” (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 180-1), which was not wrong. But with this approach, and usually being the only approach that was emphasized, Appadurai critically addressed that many of the anthropologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century omitted that locality also entails another layer of perception, the abstract effects of the tangible constructs, where structure of feeling played its part.

These two aspects of locality - the tangible and the intangible trait - inform each other to establish “locality as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity” (182). Thus, locality is established from spatial elements of certain groups and communities and at once resides in the intangible levels of social behaviours and cultural activities that produce structure of feeling. As structure of feeling entails “intentional activity”, it is also “performed” through various human behaviours, which, of course, involves performances entering unconventional spaces.

Furthermore, locality as structure of feeling obtains a *productive ability*, as it can “yield[s] particular sorts of material effects” (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 182). What Appadurai implied here was that the abstract effect of locality is not merely something metaphysical or floating in the atmosphere that one can only imagine. Locality as structure of feeling can actually bring about visible and physical changes. In other words, the intangible trait of locality as structure of feeling allows itself to reinforce, complement or alternate the material foundation on which locality was established. This idea is aligned with the example in Williams’ text that a new generation which was raised by the previous one holding a certain structure of feeling is capable of “shaping its *creative response* into a new structure of feeling” (Williams 1961, 65. Italics added).

Deviating from many of his predecessors, Appadurai’s concern was more with how locality functions (or not) in urban life and the contemporary world. Thus, the examples he provided to explain this intangible side of locality is pretty much influenced by other exterior forces:

The long-term reproduction of a neighborhood (...) depends on the seamless interaction of localized spaces and times with local subjects possessed of the knowledge to reproduce locality. Problems that are properly historical arise whenever this seamlessness is threatened. Such problems do not arrive only with modernity, colonialism, or ethnography. (...) I will discuss below the

special properties of the production of locality under the conditions of contemporary urban life, which involve national regimes, mass mediation, and intense and irregular commoditization (Appadurai, 181).

According to this quote, one may realize though locality as structure of feeling can bring about changes to (re)form the material foundation that it is based on, it is not as stable as one thinks. On the contrary, like what Appadurai indicated, locality is inherently fragile as a structure of feeling, for it highly depends on the practices of local subjects in specific neighborhoods (198), and in contemporary urban life, it is without question that the local subjects, their practices and communities are immensely affected by exterior forces like national regimes and mass mediation.

In brief, what Appadurai tried to remind us is that due to the extensive entanglement of contemporary urban life in a global era, it is crucial to reexamine the methodological and ontological thinking towards locality. Meanwhile, when looking at locality, one ought to be aware of the multiple forces surrounding it, like nation-state, modernity, colonialism, and ethnography, that play significant roles in the formation and perpetuation of locality and its aspect of being structure of feeling. Thus, unsurprisingly, Appadurai ended the chapter "The Production of Locality" with the affirmation that "it is unlikely that there will be anything mere about the local" (199), which once again marked the fragility of locality and the necessary attentiveness for studying locality with unavoidable contextual concern that leads to a wider network of operation in any field.

After looking into the concepts of structure of feeling and locality and how they inform each other, I now dive into *double consciousness*, the third and final primary concept for this research, which is postulated as another form of structure of feeling by me

## Double Consciousness as a Structure of Feeling

First of all, it is necessary to point out that double consciousness is a sort of "black" concept originally, but there is also a sense of "shared" bestowal envisioned by its initiator. In order to explain the double identities – a black person, and an American – and their spiritual influences on an individual, the American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois explained what double consciousness is in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Du Bois' intention in this cross-style volume



encompassing prose, poem, autobiography, and memoir was to clearly identify the living condition and struggles of black people in the US.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois 2018(1903), 3).

From Du Bois' description, one can identify that double consciousness is indeed a kind of structure of feeling, in how Williams understood the term. It is a particular *sense of life* and, since it entails a series of complex feelings, it is also grounded in a *community of experience*. Double consciousness may be (assumed to be) difficult to observe by an external analyst as a kind of structure of feeling, but due to the self-reflexive lens the subject operates constantly, the internal subject of this structure of feeling - double consciousness - at once inhabits an external position. And it is this paradoxical two-ness as the premise that allows the formation of double consciousness. As a result, double consciousness is a structure of feeling both in solution and precipitate.

As the British sociologist and cultural theorist Paul Gilroy pointed out later on, the idea of double consciousness was initially proposed to reveal the struggle and frustration of a black American to internalize his identity into the lived country (Gilroy 1993, 126). Thus, the unreconciled double consciousness is embedded in and interwoven between the history of slavery, the establishment of nation-state and the psychological process of identifying oneself, which are, to quite a high degree, located in the offspring of the African endured "black" history.

But in the research of Gilroy, he also argued that Du Bois' intention was not to outline a sense of exclusiveness or a "distinct standpoint" with double consciousness (Ibid.). Instead, he observed that Du Bois attempted to "illuminate the experience of post-slave populations in general" and dug into the "real essence of this kinship [which] is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas" (Ibid.). Gilroy further developed Du Bois' concept by indicating the "unhappy symbiosis between three modes of thinking, being, and seeing" from which "[d]ouble consciousness emerges" (Gilroy 1993, 127):

The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalist in that it derives from the nation-state in which the ex-slaves but not yet citizens find themselves rather than from their aspiration towards a nation-state of their own. The third is diasporic or hemispheric, sometimes global and occasionally universalist" (Gilroy 1993, 127).

Gilroy's implication is that double consciousness is not necessarily confined to the black community, it also applies if the case meets these three conditions. However, as I seek to deploy this idea of double consciousness to circus research in a specific country with its own cultural and political background, it is essential to examine if the cases meet the above principle. One can see that the scope of circus practice in Taiwan involving the traditional form of folk techniques resonates with the first and third modes, especially in the second case study with which I will deploy this concept. It is both a racially particular diasporic condition which focuses on the Taiwanese, as the offspring of Chinese Han immigration, and their settled cultural activities. However, the current scope does not fully correspond with the second mode of perception in double consciousness, which is the discrepancy between the identity of the subject and the nation-state they inhabit, where the historical effect of slavery plays a key role. In order to carry on this theoretical pursuit, I need a little help from another theory to complement this gap: *the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity*.

The juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity was proposed by the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi to indicate the way people deal with contemporary life in (Eastern) Asian countries (Hanafi 2005, 390).<sup>2</sup> In this text, Hanafi's goal was to propose a rather "ideal" relationship about how to handle tradition and modernity, which is the model of continuity represented by the Islamic world. In my research, in order to apply the concept of double consciousness in the case studies, I only draw on his observation of the juxtaposition model as a complementary tool. In this model, Hanafi explained how "the old" and "the new" stand with each other in a single society in East Asian countries:

The old is for the private sphere, the new for the public sphere. Tradition appears in personal and family life, that is, in lifestyle, eating, dressing,

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<sup>2</sup> There are two other kinds of model dealing with tradition and modernity proposed by Hanafi: the model of discontinuity, and the model of continuity through change, describing respectively the social status in the Western world and the Islamic world (Hanafi, 386).

birthdays, weddings, festivals, religious ceremonies and such. Modernity appears in work, automation, production, competition, surplus, investments and corporations" (Hanafi 2005, 390).

Hanafi's concern with this juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity was "how can man live with double truth, double ways, and double behaviour?" (Ibid.), and it is exactly this inconsistency that can complement the gap of "discrepancy between the identity of the subject and the nation-state they inhabit" one sees in the analysis of deploying double consciousness in the topic of this thesis above.

Despite the juxtaposition of modernity and tradition in a country like Taiwan is not identical to the displacement of the black community scattered in Europe and America (like the title of Gilroy's choice for the volume *The Black Atlantic*), the fraction and the two-ness in "thinking, being, and seeing" of oneself are rather much similar. After all, the postcolonial condition that causes double consciousness for diasporic black people in white-dominant societies and cultures does take place in Eastern Asia, including countries like Taiwan, where the juxtaposition model in contemporary society is exactly the phenomenon of a postcolonial condition. With further explanation, it means that even without racially otherwise environments like the ones black communities face, double consciousness can still occur as long as the subjects in that particular place encounter "unreconciled striving", as how Du Bois described, from countless historical incidents that introduced modernized mindsets, systems, institutions, etc., to fulfil the discrepancy. These Western interventions confronting the local, traditional organizations in Asia-Pacific regions are interwoven with the establishment of a modern republic nation-state and the psychological process of self-identification. As a historical condition, the juxtaposition model forms the stage where double consciousness also performs in the mental state of contemporary Asian people.

As structure of feeling is something one can learn and understand from a specific group that exists in a specific place and time, it entails the characters of communality, temporality and spatiality. Within the character of spatiality, I will foreground the location of a place, and the materiality of space and of deployed objects as a critical entry point for the investigation concerning circus performances in unconventional spaces. On the other hand, structure of feeling always pertains to a unique sense of life, and one or multiple positions for observing that structure of feeling, which demonstrate respectively an internal position with experiences in solution or the external position(s) for observation with precipitate sense. Thus, in relation to the

modes of in solution and precipitate, how to identify the decisive elements for communal function, especially when the situation implies a specific position of the audience members, is also important for the following analysis.

## Chapter II

### Contemporary Uncertainty in Promenade Circus: the Case of *Disappearing Island*

In the 2010 animated movie: *The Secret World of Arrietty* directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi, Arrietty, the “little people” girl, lived with her parents in the walls of a human house. During the “borrow mission” with her father, a journey to collect daily necessities in the human house, Arrietty was seen by the newly moved-in human boy, Sho. As a result, Arrietty and her family had no choice but to move away for the taboo of “forbidden to be seen” was violated. The ill, lonely Sho wanted to help Arrietty and her family and to make friends with them, so he placed tiny, customized pieces of furniture into their home in the wall but ended up accelerating their unavoidable departure.

Even though Arrietty and Sho still said goodbye as friends, their farewell somehow marked the impossible coexistence between the two species. It seemed like the “little people” and their unique ways of living can only be understood by their relatives of the same ethnicity, which was addressed when another “little people” boy from a distant “tribe” came to help Arrietty’s family, even if he was poles apart from them. The tangible aspects and the delicate structure of feeling of the “little people” came from their way of living, e.g., the borrow mission, the taboo of revealing their existence. These traits are as unique as any specific inhabitants or communities may have.

In this chapter, I discuss the production of locality in a promenade circus performance: *Disappearing Island*, focusing on the structure of feeling of the place the work took place, and also how the work revealed them. This work deployed a promenade form in a marginal urban area in Taipei, Shezi Island, which faced a new development project. I will first look into two elements of spatiality: location and materiality, and then further explore the concept of locality as structure of feeling, focusing on the communal factor and how it was produced and conveyed. I will end the discussion with what statement this work established with its promenade form.

*Disappearing Island* was developed from 2018 to 2020, during which I served as the dramaturge in the beginning and then stepped into the shoes of the producer for its final production and premiere. What is tended to achieve here is to explore and analyze its dramaturgical traits and especially reflect on its promenade form as a

choice for circus work that invites the audience into an unusual scenario. This chapter argues that both contexts of society and of the circus inform the performance. These contexts are joined by the spatial composition of the work and led to a statement regarding the uncertain living condition in the contemporary society of Taiwan.

## Location: The Island

When investigating a performance that occurred in an unconventional space, the first thing to unpack would be where it took place, and why it took place there. Thus, I will look at the unique location of Shezi Island and its relationship with the performing company.

Shezi Island is a piece of sandland at the confluence of Tamsui River and Keelung River in Taipei City. In 1963, typhoon Gloria caused Taipei area to sink in water for three days. This event became the starting point of all current discussions regarding Shezi Island. The succession of natural disasters including this flood and previous ones resulted in the implementation of the Taipei Flood Control Project in 1970. This project was the initiation for Shezi Island to be used as a flood field which restricts any new buildings or renovation of houses in the nearly 300-hectare area. Before that, there were abundant farming activities and already thousands of people living on the island, even once became the most important farmland in north Taiwan. With the restriction and the completion of the National Highway, Shezi Island slowly lost its advantage in the regional agricultural economy and started to leave the impression of underdevelopment, chaos, and disorderliness.

Though called an "island", Shezi Island is not actually a real island since it is only surrounded by water on three sides of it and connects with Taipei City with one road without crossing any bridges. However, it is the restriction regulation that makes the area more like an isolated island from the city. Though isolated, many businesses seeking an adequate, spacious, and affordable place came to Shezi Island over the decades during the restriction, just like the circus company. The island is filled with sites of recycled materials, scrap yards, large printing houses, factories dealing with heaving machines, logistic warehouses, etc. Thus, Shezi Island does play a role in the operation of the urban area nowadays. But it is also true that rarely anyone perceives it this way, rather as a rural, alienated even mythical place. Critic Yang, Chih Xiang opened his review on *Disappearing Island* as:

I don't know how many people are like me, never set foot on Shezi Island before this performance. (...) *Disappearing Island* has become a key for the audience to open the opportunity to visit this land in person (Yang 2020; my translation).

When coming to watch *Disappearing Island*, the audience would find themselves stepping into an unusual journey long before the show started, passing through a city from places they know well to an unfamiliar corner. Because of its marginal location on the northwest side of the capital, the audience needs to travel a rather long way, far from any metro station or cultural facilities to a place where buses with limited schedules are the only possible public transportation. The promenade started outside of the island. As this neighbourhood is also where the studio of the circus company was situated, this was not just any randomly chosen rural location for the sake of performance, but a place where the performers worked and rehearsed on a daily basis. As a result, instead of "going" or being "brought" to Shezi Island, the audience members were more in the sense of "coming", "arriving" and being "invited" here for the performance.

The chosen location for the performance to raise its curtain reflected the cultural context of the community: a parking lot across a small temple at the heart of the Xi-Cho-Di community. This is the gathering place for the local ceremonial parade of Land Gods hosted on the evening of the annual Lantern Festival. There is also a weathered construction occupying one side of the parking lot. From the remaining structure, one could slightly see that it used to be a stage for traditional opera. Two musicians played Pipa (Chinese Lute) and Erhu (Chinese 2-string fiddle) on the stage, the female musician sang a song from Nanguan, an ancient musical genre originating in Fujian, China. Accompanied by the sounds almost like a ghost from the past, two performers appeared on the ground, from the back of the elevated stage, entering the square between the audience and the musicians. Each of the performers held a pole, and after showing circus movements in a minimal way, e.g., vaulting with the support of the pole, they carried two poles together, back-to-back, and started to run.

As what critic Yang described as an "afterimage", the performers simulated while deconstructing the movement of carrying a God's Palanquin in parades of the Lantern Festivals. However, the palanquin vanished, and only the poles supporting it remained. The performers representing the palanquin carriers ran and separated from each other at times. They jumped and stepped onto walls and led the audience

into the promenade. Yang considered this choreography as bringing the performance from the memories of the community – the local religious activity – into the realm of a community revealed by contemporary circus (Yang 2020).

### Locality: Materiality of the Neighbourhood

Not only did the performance take place on the outskirts of the urban area but also the landscape was extremely unusual for any existing metropolitan. Due to the restriction regulation, Shezi Island looks frozen in time, preserving old brick houses and narrow alleys within the confinement of the six-meter-high embankment, which was built 17 years after when the restriction was announced. The materiality of the neighbourhood formed the “stage” of *Disappearing Island*. It was also the first layer of the locality of Shezi Island. This idea was proposed by Appadurai as he raised two kinds of locality: the materiality of a neighbourhood and structure of feeling (Appadurai 2010 (1996), 180).

As a promenade performance, this “stage” is composed of many little “stages”. During the performance, the audience passed through the community of Xi-Chou-Di to the embankment by the Keelung River. They stopped at places including a pigeon loft, an abandoned house, a narrow alley between red-brick houses, the back pathway of local families, some small factories, an art studio, green lands beyond the embankment, and sports equipment installed under a huge bridge across Keelung River, where the audience could see an example of another different but similar community across the river already being developed and re-constructed in a full scale. Most of these places are rarely seen in the city, or rarely able to witness together within a sequence. As the performance gradually reached its end, where the river, embankment and bridge “entered” this “big stage”, the audience would also notice they approached the vague boundary between Shezi Island and the usual urban area. Even though the audience would inevitably encounter local people and be introduced to a series of places, the journey was not delivered as a field trip for local research, but rather, by coming through these spaces, revealing its unique locality.

One of the examples is the appearance of the building. We already knew that due to the restriction regulation, many houses remained unrenovated for decades. However, the subtropical weather didn't know about the restriction thus causing a certain degree of damage to buildings, most evidently on those traditional red-brick houses.



One of the strategies developed by the residents was to cover the weathered rooftops or walls with metal corrugated boards, usually in dirt green, or in grey if made from plastics. The different materials of the brick and of the metal corrugated board formed distinct contrasts in colour, projective sense of temperature, and traces of time. It substantively addressed the tangible influence and consequence of the restriction, which was an act-of-man, induced by natural forces, that ended up in a hybrid form of building response. The metal corrugated board is a very common construction material in Taiwan. Many houses are topped with metal corrugated boards for further renovation. But this kind of strategy is massively applied in Shezi Island, becoming a material landscape that is hard to be omitted.

This material landscape is transformed into the performance by the artist Leeroy New. New was trained as a sculptor in the Philippines and created wearable installations as one of his most important forms of practice. In *Disappearing Island*, he used white wire made from fabric glass, which was a kind of material that is hard to break but retained certain flexibility for bending at the same time. New described these installations as “ghostly drawings” that “resemble parts from a construction site” (Formosa Circus Art 2020). These wires were composed to form the installation object scattered along the way in the promenade. Their unstable, tilting structure formed a dialogue with the already existing hybrid building materials on the island, which exposed as an alternative option, an unstable plan B as the result of the restriction. Furthermore, these whit-wire-made installations were placed on the performing bodies. One of the performers wore one of these complex structures with only skin-coloured underpants, transforming into a monster interacting with a man in an isolation gown. At the end of the section, the attached installation was taken away by the man in the isolation gown after he spread sanitiser water on the installation, leaving the almost naked, corporeal being left alone on the street in a confusing and helpless position shown by its shaking body, constantly changing movement like a spasm.

Another recurrent material in this work was water. As the audience came to the “island” and later on actually walked on the embankment by the river, showing the close relationship this place had with the water, geographically. However, the water was not merely a backdrop. It was re-emphasized in the performance. Critic Chang, Dun-Chih observed in his review:

More and more performers appeared, throwing plastic bottles filled with water and each pouring water on the ground, drawing a circle around

themselves. (...) Since then, the image of water has appeared in the work for quite a long time, including the performer who walked down from the pigeon loft in the next paragraph, wearing a full white isolation gown, and continuously sprinkled water on all the houses, plants, garbage, and even the audience along the way. The image of the isolation gown itself represents the intruder who does not belong here: the typhoon, the flood, and it falls on everything indiscriminately. Therefore, no matter whether it was garbage or the audience walking on Shezi Island, no one was spared (Chang 2020; my translation).



Figure 2.1 Performer with the wearable installation interacted with a man in an isolation gown, who spread water from sanitiser equipment all over the place during the performance. Shezi Island, Taipei, 2020. (Photo by Ken Wang)

Throughout the work, there was no conventional circus apparatus, only objects of which material responded to or reflect the environment of the island. As Chang pointed out, by juggling the plastic water bottle, the water transformed from a simple substance and a geographical element into a symbol of exterior forces. It was the flood caused by the typhoon that led to the restriction of the area. However, the threat nowadays no longer comes from the natural environment, but rather from the local authority which tempted to implement an overall development project. This was reflected in the interaction scene when the man in the isolation gown started to

spread sanitiser water on the performer wearing the white linear installation. The body and its tilting, alternative outer protection were intruded on by the power of control and regulatedness.

By bringing the audience to Shezi Island, the performance revealed a place with its tangible, material reality, which allowed the first layer of the definition of locality characterized by Appadurai to arrive: the materiality of the neighbourhood. The material composition, application and choreography also reflected the past and present context of the formation, the endeavour of maintenance, and the ongoing yet shifting governance of Shezi Island.

### Locality as a Structure of Feeling

In Chapter 1, I examined the three factors that inform the production of structure of feeling: the spatial, temporal and communal characters. I found out that these three factors in principle function with one another and rarely play a sole role on their own. However, they do operate on different levels in one scenario.

There are two conditions that help to bring about the spatial character of locality to meet the communal character of locality in *Disappearing Island*. The first is the unusual existence of the community and the people who live and work there that face the new development project proposed by the city government. After all, spaces are not just neutral places or merely belong to an individual. Spatiality informing the communality of structure of feeling indicates that spaces pertaining to structure of feeling, like locality, have to deal with the local community inevitably. The second condition is the fact the circus company was based in this area and conducting activities in this neighbourhood and became a connector for the audience with the community. Thus, while travelling through the spaces where the performance took place, the journey was coloured and implied by the position of the company and its relation to the area. Both factors above allow *Disappearing Island* to tune into the second layer of this particular locality of Shezi Island, i.e., its structure of feeling.

As I analyzed in Chapter 1, the ones who hold and possess their own structure of feeling and the ones who observe that particular structure of feeling of the others perceive the structure of feeling in different forms as *in solution* and *precipitate*, respectively. In the case of *Disappearing Island*, the residents of Shezi Island obtained their structure of feeling *in solution* as a group of citizens facing a systematic and

systemic violence from the local authorities, which is the new proposed development project that attempts to “rebuild” the region, by which the cultural and historical traces would be fully wiped away. Living with the uncertainty of the change which is about to come produced a structure of feeling shared by the circus company *in solution* as well, as the company was a kind of temporary resident of the area. Though in detail, it may not be the same kind of structure of feeling for the residents and the members of the circus company, as the temporal, spatial and communal factors are varied: the time the Shezi community resides in this area (over generations or only past few years) radically differs from the circus company as do the type of space they use (a family house passed through generations or a rented warehouse) and the network of their interpersonal relationship in the community (deep connections built within the community or a relationship between outsiders and local people).

A structure of feeling was also perceived by the audience, which was no doubt in the form of *precipitate*, a form for the external observer. But how was the audience actually invited to sense Shezi Island in *precipitate* in the performance, compared to those passersby? This is where the dramaturgy of the performance takes place. There were two different strategies deployed and add to each other here. Firstly, the form of a promenade performance transformed the audience into a group of people who watched and move (in) the same performance together. The audience became a symbol of a small society that walked together and followed the same route, a metaphor for social development. Secondly, by arranging acts of participation where the audience experienced and faced the same scenarios, the performance made space for the audience to “feel” in the designated, metaphoric structure of Shezi Island.

One of the most memorable links was that everyone must pass through the long and narrow alleys one by one. In an alley, there was a device made of white wire by the creative team. Everyone must fiddle with their hands and raise their feet to pass through (Chang 2020).

[The] performer in a suit and on stilts who appeared later distributed grey plastic water pipes to the audience, and encouraged everyone to rub and beat it together, and even used it as a plastic ring for the night market hoop game (...) This was different from passing through obstacles in narrow alleys. In the latter situation, the audience had no choice, just like the residents of Shezi Island facing various challenges in life (for example floods or there are no clinics and hospitals in the local area). But during the scene where the man in

the suit encouraged everyone to rub together, knock on the plastic water pipes, or play games with them, whether to follow his instructions, the choice was in the hands of the audience. Just like being a resident of Shezi Island, there is still some room to choose, what kind of Shezi Island you want to live on (Chang 2020).



Figure 2.2 Artist Leeroy New used wires made from fabric glass to construct “ghostly drawings” throughout the promenade. Here the audience needed to find their way to pass through the installation. Shezi Island, Taipei, 2020. (Video capture from the performance recording. Filmed by Viewfinder Studio. Captured image was chosen by me.)

These parts of the performance brought invitations to the audience, one might feel more obliged, another more playful and controllable. As critic Chang pointed out, these two examples “translate and enable everyone to experience this situation” in a subtle and distinctive way (Ibid.). They functioned as experiential metaphors enabling the audience to perceive the structure of feeling of the residents of Shezi Island, transforming the undetectable, *in solution* state of structure of feeling into a *precipitate* state. As a result, the audience members formed a temporary community that held its own structure of feeling by experiencing the specific scenarios of power relations proposed by the work. This structure of feeling was, also, informed by its particular temporal character, i.e., the duration of the performance, spatial character, i.e., that they went through corners of the community Xi-Cho-Di, and communal

character, i.e., that they did this together. In this way, the locality of Shezi Island “felt” firstly by the creative team, is then (re)produced and observed by the audience, as feeling, with structure.

## Promenade Circus in Society and Contemporary Uncertainty

Deploying a promenade form in circus is not a common choice, in Taiwan nor in the Western world. In the development of circus arts from traditional style to contemporary forms, circus practices stepped outside of the big tops and went into modern theatres. No matter circus inhabits which mentioned type of performing space, it often retains itself in its own “world”. In the big tops or amphitheatres of traditional circus, the acts are out of the real world, dazzling the audience with fantasy and grotesque, e.g., exotic animals, trapeze performers, contortionists, dwarfs, and clowns. Circus performances staged in black boxes or proscenium theatres more often borrow methods and languages from drama and dance scenes, contesting various conventions of circus performance, from the construct of storylines to experiments on corporeal and object expression. There were very few of them deployed circus as a form to really tackle the society we live in.

As discussed earlier, the promenade form allows the audience to experience the space, community, environment and materiality together as a group, thus enabling the structure of feeling to be perceived in a precipitate state. The promenade form also corresponds to the nomadic character embedded in circus culture, which is also implied in the marginal position of the circus company on Shezi Island, literally and figuratively. Meanwhile, unfolding a promenade in a specific place enables works like *Disappearing Island* to deal with the actual pulse of society, thus being able to further investigate the living condition of human beings.

The promenade form introduced the place in a series of experiences with other contexts. First, the performance opened with a location reflecting on local religious activities (the performers simulating and deconstructing the movement of carrying a God's Palanquin with the remaining poles and the absent palanquin), then entered more deeply into the Xi-Cho-Di community, gradually summoned its materiality and structure of feeling (the white-gown man spreading water everywhere and the white-wire sculptures installed on body and places in the community). When approaching the end, the audience found themselves on the embankment, walking on a heightened level between the river and the island, a place representing the cause



of the current condition, i.e., the flood, but also a place being governed, i.e., the implementation of the embankment. At this boundary between the island, the water and the city, following the movement of one of the performers, the Cho-Mei community across the Keelung River was pointed out, where the possible development project for Shezi Island was already imposed there. Thus, the past, the present, and the (possible) future is presented at once here. This was the temporality of the structure of feeling recreated by the performance, deeply rooted in facing the development of this neighbourhood.

At the very end, the audience arrived at a discarded, canvas-like place in the city: the space under the huge Cho-Mei bridge across the Keelung River. Here, the accumulated materiality and subsequent structure of feeling were reprised as an aggregation. The U-turn lane surrounding the space was like the river to the island, isolating it from other parts of the city. Watching from across the U-turn lane, the audience was filled with a complex layer of sounds: the noise of traffic constantly involving high-ton trucks driving by or entering the island, and also a collage of traditional music mixed and gradually overwhelmed by the synthesized urban electronic sounds like noises created by the musicians. All the sounds are amplified but blurred and mixed at once due to the reflection by the bridge above. The performers, who just finished a series of acrobatic movements at the embankment and were covered in sweat, held the white-wire sculptures in shapes either fixed structures like a cube and a cone, or irregular forms like a water drop and a twisted column. They manipulated the sculptures while moving and dancing with the man on stilts in a suit, as he walked past in front of them one by one, looking at them from above.

Chang described the ending as “both the choice of space and of music seemed to throw the audience into a larger problematic. In the flat and empty space under the bridge, the echoes were lingering and constantly refracting. The body and sound in the work, while expressing Shezi Island, seemed to be asking “how to define where this is” (Chang 2020; my translation). If the white-wire installations reflected and represented the unstable, tilting material condition and the temporal coping strategy for the restriction, the performance of holding, manipulating and dancing with the installations may be seen as the struggle and endeavours of finding a way out of this, or any other living stalemate. As the audience saw the bodies exhaust themselves with rapid choreography, huge portable installations on an “island” surrounded by traffic resonating sounds of the urban scenario, which compressed the figures of performers becoming even smaller and made them seem much more exhausted, the

performance also became a throwback question for the audience members to imagine themselves in the actually co-shared urban life.



Figure 2.3 The end of *Disappearing Island* took place under the Cho-Mei bridge. The performers manipulated white-wire installations reflecting the unstable, tilting material condition of Shezi Island. Shezi Island, Taipei, 2020. (Photo by Ken Wang)

The specific condition being faced by the local residents radiated into a bigger scope. An urban development project like the one that may soon be implemented on Shezi Island is apparently a product of modernization and the legacy of modernity which seeks further clear-cut planning that obliterates any friction. However, it is exactly this kind of persuasion for clarity in development and governance that caused the fragility and uncertainty in the contemporary society of Taiwan. In recent years, the Taiwanese government has established numerous “Historical Sites of Injustice” to unearth and memorize the history of “White Terror” under the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) from 1949 to 1987 (Historical Sites of Injustice Archive, n.d.). The urban development and land planning scholar Hsu, Shih-Jung initiated the project “Historical Forced Eviction Sites of Injustice” in 2022, gathering photography and accounts of 53 cases in the past 40 years in Taiwan that encountered similar scenarios like Shezi Island with high-handed governance and replacement from the local or national authorities (Hsu, 2022). Thus,



*Disappearing Island* is like a moving and temporal "Site of Injustice" indicating not only the unlikely avoidable future of the area but also other similar cases that witnessed the fragile and uncertain living conditions.

Let me, again, appropriate the words from Chang to close this part:

Following the context of the whole work, the audience has already participated in, experienced, became, or understood Shezi Island from different distances. This kind of experience itself, under the daily atmosphere, will also become the flesh and blood of Shezi Island. Therefore, when the work asked who are we? Where are we? (...) Such questions were rare, both private and public because the audience members were not only themselves but also briefly participated in the life of Shezi Island. In that gigantic (ending) scene like a question, no matter from the point of view of intention or aesthetic level, it drew a very complete comma for Shezi Island and also gave the work a touching ending (Chang 2020; my translation).

## Conclusion

By deploying a promenade form of performance, *Disappearing Island* invited the audience to a marginalized area in an already highly developed urban area. In this work, not only were different locations in a specific community being explored to expose the locality as the materiality of neighbourhood, but also various types of participative scenarios were designed to produce the locality as structure of feeling, thus enabling the intangible sense of a tangible world to be perceived and observed.

Furthermore, this structure of feeling revealed by *Disappearing Island* was the foundation for stating how living conditions in contemporary society are both fragile and uncertain. On one hand, the work introduced Shezi Island as an actual place and as a particular situation. On the other hand, it proposed questions on the more general situation for us, as citizens and human beings. Like the "little people" Arrietty who could not avoid contact and encounter human beings, as long as we continue to live in a global era, our existence as local subjects would be difficult to be disentangled with contemporary urban life and other subjects within. Thus, the local settings and experiences, i.e., locality, are once fragile and unstable under the effects of various exterior forces, just like what Appadurai reminded us: it is unlikely that there will be anything mere about the local" (199).

## Chapter III

### Contemporary Dilemma of Duality in Site-Specific Circus: the Case of *Main Agile*

In the 1989 animated movie: *Kiki's Delivery Service* directed by Hayao Miyazaki, the young protagonist coming from the countryside left her family and flew on the journey of becoming a real witch. Her final assignment was to survive on her own, and she chose a big city for this task. She soon found out that not only urban life is running hectically without any traces of magic left, but also her identity and expertise were not always welcome in a regulated environment, where her first encounter was questioned by police. As she transformed her ability to fly with broomsticks to provide delivery service, in the end, she successfully rescued a friend who was involved in an accident of a modern airship that lost control.

Kiki's story perfectly demonstrates the maladjustment of subjects when tradition reenters a modernized society. It seems like, from the perspective of Miyazaki, these two worlds eventually can reach a point where balance and coexistence are possible by complementing each other. However, especially in the non-Western world, the relationship between the two is much more complex than a set of oppositional concepts, through which their reconciliation could be imagined easily.

In this chapter, I discuss a particular kind of structure of feeling: double consciousness in a site-specific circus production: *Main Agile* by Thunar Circus. The director of this work, Lin, Cheng-Tsung, has been focusing on creating "Circus with Taiwanese Flavour" since his early practice.<sup>1</sup> In his recent works, like *Melancholic Mambo* (2019) and *Main Agile* (2022), he conducted years-long research and practical learning towards Taiwanese folk arts like Stilt Zhen, Lang-Lau (Cymbals Manipulation) and Fire Juggling. He also drew inspiration from the painting of artists like Hung, Tung in *Hung Tung's Fantasy*. Incorporating and weaving objects and materials that emanate the local atmosphere has become a signature of Lin's works.

In this chapter, I explore and analyze the dramaturgical traits of *Main Agile*, focusing

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Circus with Taiwanese Flavour" was originally used by the Thunar Circus, and subsequently elaborated or criticized by other critics. See Chen, Cheng-Xi. "The flavour of Taiwan that diffuses into the final rhyme? A review on *Main Agile*." Lin, Li-Hsiung. "Pessimism under the ecstasy of joy Taiwan-style circus aesthetics: from *Melancholic Mambo* to *Main Agile*." Wu, Yue-Lin. "Between 'Reproducing Folklore' and 'Creating Circus': Lin Cheng-Tsung's circus main agile in progress."

on its choice of spatial and material composition involving the explicit juxtaposition of traditional elements and modern products, and also how these choices revealed the double consciousness. In this work, the representation and transformation of the performing technique of “Stilt Zhen” from Taiwanese folk arts, which shows a kinship in physical skills with (the Western) circus, were key components. These tangible components including the spatial, material and technical ones are structured and interacted with each other to expose two modes of spectatorship coloured by double consciousness. This chapter argues that both the context of modern and traditional culture informs the visible components. Based on the tangible components, the structure and narrative strategy of *Main Agile* revealed the intangible property of double consciousness and the condition of living with a dual mentality brought about by the irreconciled integration of tradition and modernity in the contemporary society of Taiwan.

### Location: Stage within a Temple

As I investigate a site-specific circus work hosted in an unconventional space, the spatial component of the place itself and the implemented performing site are appropriate starting points to unpack the analysis. I will discuss three different layers of this spatiality: the temple chosen as the performing location, its relation with the surrounding neighbourhood, and the actual stage built on the court of the temple.

There is a strong connection between hosting the performance at a temple and applying the technique of Stilt Zhen as the most prominent act in *Main Agile*. “Zhen” in Mandarin means the disposition or formation of armies on battlefields. In Taiwan, each village establishes its own “Zhen Tou”, a performing troupe formed by local residents, usually affiliated to the local temple which worships a mix of gods and deities from Taoism and Buddhism. Zhen Tou plays an important role during the parade, or the “tour of inspection”, hosted by the temple of the tutelary god in the local community.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that there is always an intimate relationship between a Zhen Tou and the corresponding temple, also between the

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<sup>2</sup> There are many different types of Zhen Tou in Taiwan. Some are just small traditional music troupes, some obtain role-playing elements as deities or characters with comedian traits, and some focus more on physical presentation like martial arts, tiger dance or traditional acrobatics, like Stilt Zhen. In the past, certain types of Zhen Tou would even function as a mini-armed troupe in order to protect the village and their property. Nowadays, the purposes of Zhen Tou are for physical training, entertainment, strengthening religious functions, etc. See Wu, Teng-Da. 1996. *The Art of Taiwanese Folklore Zhen Tou* Taipei: Taiwan Tung Hua Book Co., Ltd.

members of the troupe and staff, volunteers of the temple, and between their families as well. Director Lin and the performers who learned the technique of Stilt Zhen among others, e.g. Sihkuai<sup>3</sup>, for years in Tainan, also spent a lot of time in different temples observing and practising Zhen Tou.<sup>4</sup> Nowadays, the Zhen Tou culture is rarely seen in big cities. Especially for the still-existing temples in many places, there may not be a close-by and intimate community that supports the operation of Zhen Tou. Choosing a temple as the performing location became a reasonable choice to “represent” the technique of folk arts which almost disappeared in the capital Taipei City, as the temple was usually where this kind of activity roots and takes place. Stilt Zhen as a product and technique of religious activity was thus addressed with the choice of space.

*Main Agile* took place at the temple court of Chung-Shun Temple in Muzha District of Taipei City. This still-operating temple is not situated in a rural area. However, there is indeed a distance between the temple and the metro system or the hectic commercial district. The temple is cramped in the middle of a few much taller concrete residency buildings in a small community, which makes the temple seem even shorter and smaller. Following the red lanterns from the bus stop, which contrast themselves with the rather cold and grey landscape in the neighbourhood, audience members attending the show found themselves coming to the spot where the traditional religion and the warm, bright colours of red, orange and brown are functioning at once. The visual contrast and the spatial composition between the surrounding environment and the temple itself became the first experience for the audience. This spatial composition also formed the first layer of the juxtaposed relation between tradition and modernity.

Like many other temples, Chung-Shun Temple is also equipped with an elevated, permanent, concrete stage across the court in front of the temple itself, which is usually where traditional Taiwanese opera or glove puppetry performances take place during festive and ceremonial occasions. However, the performance of *Main*

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<sup>3</sup> Sihkuai is a kind of traditional percussion instrument. It is made of four bamboo boards that have been fried. Its tapping sound is rather loud and usually accompanied by singing or storytelling. Sihkuai is also used in the performance of *Main Agile*. See Taiwan Cultural Memory Bank. n.d. “The Origin of Sihkuai and Car-Drum Zhen.” Accessed June 21, 2023. [https://memory.culture.tw/Home/Detail?Id=568519&IndexCode=Culture\\_Object](https://memory.culture.tw/Home/Detail?Id=568519&IndexCode=Culture_Object)

<sup>4</sup> This observation comes from a series of posts and photos on the Facebook Page of Thunar Circus during 2020-2022. Also, the musician Tseng, Po-Hao who partially participated in the field survey and Zhen Tou learning trip with Thunar Circus also contribute an article. See Wu, Sih-Fong, eds. 2021. *Kh í-lóh-thiáp • J í : Yizhen and its Adaptations and Appropriations in Contemporary Theatre*. Tainan: Cultural Affairs Bureau of Tainan City Government.



Figure 3.1 *Main Agile* took place at the temple court of Chung-Shun Temple in Taipei, deploying the form and techniques of Stilt Zhen within a well-equipped stage with theatrical lighting and Marley floor. Chung-Shun Temple, Taipei, 2022. (Photo by Chen, Chang Chih)

*Agile* took place mainly on the square stage built under a canopy in the temple court. The stage was slightly elevated, set with Marley floors and also surrounded by theatrical lighting equipment. The scale was larger compared to what people often encounter at a temple. The seats were set on the three sides of the stage, like a thrust stage, but left an entrance at the side facing the permanent concrete stage allowing the performers to enter or leave. Between the Marley-floored stage and the permanent concrete stage of the temple were the two-man music band placed on a small truck. There was also a set of stairs where the performers could sit during the performance, but also connects the Marley-floored stage and the permanent concrete stage of the temple. The chosen direction for the stage was coherent with the usual setting in a traditional performance in temples in Taiwan. From the religious perspective, the performances are for the gods and deities of the temple, thus the audience is set to face the stage and away from the temple. The stage of *Main Agile* could be seen as an expanded version of the original stage of the temple. However, the arrangement akin to a thrust stage is not common in the conventional setting of such an environment, at least not in this clear-cut way of positioning the audience firmly on the sides. Thus, though the stage of the performance was implemented with a sense to merge into the spatial and cultural context of the temple,

it also showed characteristics that this was not a usual setting, but a more modern one according to the use of Marley floors, theatre lights and the structure of thrust stage.

This kind of juxtaposition not only occurred on the level of spatial composition but also on the level of material composition. In the next section, I look at the types of chosen apparatus/props and objects, how they were presented on the stage of *Main Agile*, and what kind of contexts were revealed by them.

### Tradition and Modernization: Materiality of the Objects

The most curious type of circus apparatus in *Main Agile* is no doubt the stilts. These particular stilts are made of wood with red and yellow painted alternately on the surface, or just purely in red. In the existing forms of Stilt Zhen in Taiwan, the performers focus more on displaying the techniques of manipulating and moving with ease on stilts. Sometimes they play roles of historical figures, e.g. Kuan Kung.<sup>5</sup> In *Main Agile*, the stilts were introduced mainly by four male performers. They opened the performance by showcasing a few techniques of stiling, and combining them with other tricks, e.g. doing a balancing act or fist martial arts at the same time, or multiplying the form by extended elements, e.g. lighting fire on the fabric attached by little hooks on the stilts.

Apart from the stilts, the constantly recurrent objects in *Main Agile* included the Sihkuai made of bamboo, a pile of wheat straws, plastic bags and plastic chairs. Most of the time, these objects appeared with each other at the same time, thus constantly interrelated with one another. For example, the first appearance of the stilts was not when they were stepped on during the opening described above, but rather before the performance actually started, being used as sticks to hold multiple plastic chairs to make small tricks like balancing act as “warm-up” shows in front of the gate of the main temple building. The held chairs were the same type of plastic chairs in neon green and red on which the audience also sat. Thus, from the very beginning before the actual performance, chairs were not used as chairs, stilts were not used as stilts either. It was this type of world tolerating reversed and alternative choices that *Main Agile* sought to summon.

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<sup>5</sup> Kuan Kung is a general in the Three Kingdoms periods of China during AD 220-280, who became a religious figure in the religion Taoism. He is a symbol of justice and the tutelary for police, gangsters, actors and acrobats.

The "unusual encounter" happened with the plastic bags and the wheat straws as well. These two materials both appeared on stage for the first time together as the plastic bags, coloured in red-white (actually red-transparent) alternately, were placed and scattered with the pile of wheat straws. On a stage where a traditional cultural activity like Stilt Zhen and Sihkuai were represented, the wheat straws were easily correlated as similar elements from villages of farming areas instead of places like Taipei, where the performance took place. As the community preserving culture like Zhen Tou would also obtain more intimate relationships within the neighbourhood, it is a similar interpersonal trait to the agricultural region to which the wheat straws refer. On the other hand, the plastic bag and plastic chairs symbolised the development of modernization in the 1960s of Taiwan where expanding the petrochemical industry was involved in national policy and led Taiwan to become the petrochemical kingdom of the globe, exporting tons of plastic products out of the country (Yen 2015).<sup>6</sup> But also, these plastic objects already became a necessary and natural part of daily lives. This pile of straws and plastic bags, which represented two different types of cultural and social contexts of Taiwan, started to move like it was breathing. Suddenly, a stilt came out of the pile, after which the character "A-Kuan" appeared from the inside. A-Kuan was introduced in the "Memory of Mr. Main Agile" in the program as "a boy who favours the culture of Zhen Tou thus practising, experimenting with this technique" (Thunar Circus 2022). He hid in the pile of wheat straws and plastic bags and was only equipped with one stilt on his left foot.

In the traditional form of Stilt Zhen, stepping on a single stilt is, of course, showing another level of skill. Meanwhile, the performer equipped with a single stilt usually represents her/his character being injured or about to be defeated. In the performance, A-Kuan seemed to inherit this figure, battling with himself with the absent presence of a concrete enemy. He showed the instability of the body with a single stilt by constantly losing balance while walking, swirling and crawling. As he travels through the plastic bags and wheat straws scattered around by his

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<sup>6</sup> The modernization of Taiwanese society occurred with political and authorial alteration. The initiative of modernization was implemented during the Japanese colony era from 1895-1945. The modernization was conducted as governance instruments, including the improvement of environmental hygiene, development of infrastructures, execution of demographic census and geographical investigation, and the establishment of educational and economical institutions. Another wave of modernization came around 1960s to 1980s, while Taiwan was under the reign of Chiang, Kai-Shek and his son Chiang, Ching-Kuo. The most prominent event was Ten Major Construction Projects, which involved six transport infrastructure, e.g., airport, harbour, high-way, trail way electrification; three heavy industrial construction, i.e., steelmaking, naval architecture, and petrochemical industry; and one energy construction: the nuclear power plants.



movements, he found another two stilts. He used his hands to control the stilts, forming a figure like an animal lost one foot. At one point, he lay on the ground with twisted limbs and stilts, holding his right foot without stilt but a white, vivid basketball shoe, contrasting with the other three red, wooden, prosthesis-like limbs. His performance struggled between the figure of a defeated human being and a disoriented, incomplete animal, in a space full of plastic bags and wheat straws reflecting on the complex cultural and social perspectives of both the tradition and modernization of Taiwan.



Figure 3.2 The juxtaposing materials in the performance of the character A-Kuan in *Main Agile*: the plastic bags and the wheat straws, the red wooden stilt and the white basketball shoe. Chung-Shun Temple, Taipei, 2022. (Photo by Chen, Chang Chih)

The image of plastic kept further expanding. After A-Kuan's performance. The four male performers who opened the show entered the stage on stilts with long bamboo sticks and used the end of the sticks to hook up plastic bags on the ground and juggle them in the air. Later, they brought up other bamboo sticks full of plastic bags attached, using the sticks to swipe the wheat straws on the stage. In another section closer to the end, A Kuan came out with Sihkuai, the traditional percussion instrument, in his hands and started to play steady beats with them and run in a circle on stage. Soon he found out that there was a plastic bag following wherever he went. Trying to get rid of it but in vain, A-Kuan decided to play with it. He used the Sihkuai



to hold the plastic bag, throw it in the air then carry it with his shoulder or back. At some point, his head was covered by the bag, which led him to walk like Jia Jiang, another type of Zhen Tou with specific and identifiable physical movements, but with spasm. After this, the other four performers rolled out some tires, another kind of product from the petrochemical industry and started to wave flags made of transparent plastic while standing on the tires.

At the end of the performance, the performers ran in a circle with plastic flags while a few audience members voluntarily sat at the stage centre. Soon, a much bigger plastic fabric was brought on stage, covering the whole space in the air while floating and flying back and forth with the audience underneath it. A-Kuan appeared again by the entrance with a pile of stilts he could barely hold, putting them on the ground. As I mentioned, the silt and Sihkuai represented distinct and different types of cultural and social contexts from the plastic products on stage. Thus, the aspect of tradition and modernization are embodied by juxtaposing the materiality of the chosen objects of this work on stage with performance. The methods of material juxtaposition in *Main Agile* include playfulness (the warm-up show combining the chairs and the stilts), experiment (A-Kuan's one-stilt act to three-silt act), replacement (using tires and plastic flags instead of conventional wheel or flags in traditional acrobatics) and enhancement (the size of the plastic flag and the number of stilts at the end).

## Double Consciousness as a Structure of Feeling

In Chapter 1, I discussed the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity as a complementary concept in the theoretical framework. I have found out how the spatial composition of the performing site and the chosen objects with their materiality in *Main Agile* reflected what this model described. But how does the performance arrange these tangible aspects to reveal the intangible quality of structure of feeling about society? What is the role of the audience in this process? In this section, I will examine the condition of living with a dual mentality brought about by the irreconciled integration of tradition and modernity in the contemporary society of Taiwan.

Critic Lee, Chiao-He described *Main Agile* as composed of “two parallel lines that alternate back and forth” (Lee 2022; my translation):

One was a circus-style Stilt Zhen, which used the skills of stilts arranging circus performance to express the spirit of the temple fair, lively and jubilant; the other one mixed and extracted elements of Zhen Tou and circus and tried to transform the form of the body with Zhen Tou objects. (...) Here, the temple court was no longer just for a lively temple fair, but the spacetime for the accumulation of learning the techniques of Stilt Zhen expanding to practising and experimenting traditions with creation. Thus, the line of people enjoying the art of Stilt Zhen and the line of bodily experimental creation continuously alternated with and covered each other during the performance (Lee 2022; my translation).

Exact like what Lee indicated, the performance consisted of two distinct types of atmospheres corresponding to these two lines. In the parts expressing lively temple fair, the colour of the lights was bright and warm, and the music was clearly more up beating and optimistic. In the parts where “bodily experimental creation” was conducted, the cold blue lights covered the whole stage, and the music is mostly in a calmer, mysterious or at least implicating sense. Building distinct ambience respectively, these two lines also created two different ways and positions for the audience to approach.

According to Groot Nibbelink and Merx, “how the performance constructs a position for the spectator” is exactly how spectatorship demonstrates modes of audience address. Referring to the distinguishment from the volume *Visuality in the Theatre* of Maaïke Bleeker, Groot Nibbelink and Merx introduced two modes of spectatorship: *absorption* and *theatricality* (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 2021, 9).

*Theatricality*, on the one hand, is about rendering visible how theatre addresses and positions a spectator, illuminating how the means of theatre are deployed to present a specific argument and to expose how the spectator is actively involved in processes of meaning-making. *Absorption*, on the other hand, is the mode of address in which the spectator is drawn into the world on stage, precisely because the traces of mediation are erased (Ibid.).

In *Main Agile*, two modes of spectatorship alternated with each other, one rose as the other fell. When the lively, jubilant temple fair rose with the Stilt Zhen, the mode of absorption took place. The audience was “drawn into the world on stage” by the design of audible and visible components, but also their role indicated by the cultural context – a disciple, or at least a participant in the site of folklore religious event. As

I pointed out earlier, there is a strong connection within the relationship between Zhen Tou, the temple and the religious activity. As how Lee phrased the first line as “people enjoying the art of Stilt Zhen”, people who took part in a temple fair, including roles like performers, staff of the temple and residents of the community, are crucial for the religious structure to exist and function. Thus, when the mode of absorption took place in the first line of *Main Agile*, it also transformed the audience into disciples of this religious realm, but secretly and without a trace.

When the bodily experiments surfaced, the mode of theatricality took place. For example, the strategies discussed earlier like playfulness, replacement, and enhancement of materiality addressed the audience to actively thinking the purpose of these deployments. The mode of theatricality was also related to the spatial composition of the performance discussed earlier. Due to the choice of the Marley floor and the abundant number of theatrical lights, it shows an unconventional setting, based on the criteria of temple fairs. It is the juxtaposition of elements of traditional culture and of (Western) modern theatre that forms what Lee described as “the spacetime for the accumulation of learning the techniques of Stilt Zhen expanding to practising and experimenting traditions with creation”. The most evident features in this spacetime were shown in the sections where A-Kuan deployed the single stilt technique and also the haunting plastic bag that followed him. In the first example, A-Kuan resided in a hetero-material world reflecting the juxtaposition of tradition and modernization, holding on to the stilts of the past and trying to proceed with a novel attempt, only becoming a non-human, non-animal being crawling in solitude. In the second example, while his head was covered by a plastic bag, he held the Sihkuai and moved in the form of Jia Jiang with spasms. Both these sections invited the audience to actively re-think the relationship between traditional and modern objects, and how this relationship affects us.

These two modes of spectatorship also brought about two kinds of structure of feeling. The reason why the mode of absorption can immediately capture a Taiwanese audience member is that positioning oneself as an audience member in a temple fair pertains to a specific living experience in a particular culture. This shows its strong communal character as it summons the structure of feeling in Zhen Tou, which is a particular activity that represents a way of thinking and living. When the mode of absorption took place, it also reflected how the structure of feeling operated in solution. In the mode of theatricality, the audience witnessed the artists deploying experiments as a method of transforming traditional techniques into another layer of practising. It reminded the audience to reconsider their distance from the tradition

of Zhen Tou, and what would it mean for them to look at a performance like this, especially in Taipei where Stilt Zhen as a traditional activity is much scarce. This shows another communal character in the structure of feeling of people who “know” the tradition but less and less “participate” in its actual activities. Thus, the deliberate demand of watching at a distance in the mode of theatricality rendered the structure of feeling precipitate.

These two kinds of structure of feeling were both raised by the spatial composition and materiality discussed before and entail the communal character corresponding to the two modes of spectatorship. Inevitably, as these two kinds of structure of feeling existed in the same work, they met each other constantly in the alternation of the two lines of the performance. As a result, they formed another kind of structure of feeling that entailed the sense of in solution and precipitate at once: double consciousness.

According to W. E. B. Du Bois, double consciousness is the feeling rose from the “two-ness” of one subject, which leads to “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals” in one body (Du Bois 2018(1903), 3). It may be difficult to prove the double consciousness, as structure of feeling, of any group in any society, but it is possible to observe it once it is shown in a *precipitate* form, e.g., in a performance. As what Lee noticed:

On the whole, the bright and lively cheerful circus was in sharp contrast to the body narrative focused by cold light. However, although this creation arranged the two narrative axes neatly, it seemed that, in the end, the work developed two parallel lines that took turns but could not converge. One was the self who wanted to learn and promote exquisite folk skills, and the other was the self who extracted inspiration from the exterior appearance of the skills and further developed them. These two lines of self were not so much interspersed in the process as they competed with each other and interrupted each other. It was difficult to coordinate under the suddenly wrapped ending (Lee 2022; my translation).

In *Main Agile*, not only double consciousness is addressed by the juxtaposition model of spatial composition and materiality, but it is also built by two lines of narrative structure which brought about two modes of spectatorship. Even though, as Lee observes, the “two parallel lines that take turns but cannot converge”, I argue that it was this failure of convergence that allowed the two different structures of feeling to

surface and appear. Only showing the two “selves” in the work enabled the exposure of “unreconciled strivings” and “two warring ideals” of the subject obtaining double consciousness. The competition and interruption of these two lines proved the effective result of double consciousness. Like the title of Lee’s review, “Stepping between Tradition and Modernity”, the double consciousness of *Main Agile* arrived at a place in-between. Just like the performance of A-Kuan, the steps of the narrative lines constantly deviated from a non-existing centre in this “in-between” – between tradition and modernity - and strived to find an impossible balance between human and animal, between two modes of moving, acting, living, thinking and feeling. This was how double consciousness worked as structure of feeling in this work.

Paul Gilroy developed Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness into three principles that portrayed the conditions that allowed double consciousness to be produced. First, the *racial particularity*. Second, which I complement with the model of juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, is the *discrepancy* caused by modernized mindsets, systems, or institutions in which the subject lives. Third and lastly, the *diasporic*. *Main Agile* also reflects these three principles. The work revealed the surrounding social context with the spatial settings and materiality that constantly call for a racially particular and localized experience. It also presented the struggle and reconciliation of the subject carrying double consciousness in a juxtaposition model of society, where the (Han Chinese) traditional yet localized religious and folklore activities witnessing and participating by the contemporary spectators, who share the discrepancy between spirituality and ways of living, reflect the specific culture of settlers in diasporic consequences.

## Non-Western Folk: Contemporary Dilemma of Duality

In one of his interviews, Lin, the director of *Main Agile*, addressed that “[w]hen I started to learn circus, I chased the examples from the West all the time, like watching clips of foreigner artists. In the end, it felt empty. They are impressive but it’s impossible to finish the chase” (Tsai 2022, 79; my translation). It is then not difficult to understand why Lin tempts to deploy techniques like Stilt Zhen in his circus practice. However, in terms of the result, instead of creating a new form or a “Circus with a Taiwanese Flavour, *Main Agile* revealed even more clearly a contemporary dilemma of duality, which has a close relationship with double consciousness.

As I examined, the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernization was a

prominent phenomenon in this work. However, the difficulty in discussing cases, like *Main Agile*, dealing with tradition and modernization is that there is no clear cut between the two in contemporary society. For example, objects like stilts from folk art are, of course, seen with “folk” characteristics. However, the plastic products chosen in *Main Agile* which carry the context of modernization are also printed with folk properties. Neon green and red chairs, plastic bags, and tires...are all embedded in the contemporary lives of Taiwan, even perceived as objects holding a strong “Taiwanese” sense. Modernized commodities from the influence of the Western world are never separated from any non-Western society. Instead, the folk or local culture in a non-Western world usually strongly absorbs the forms and contents no matter of tradition or modernity, local or global, and keeps transforming into a new type of folklore and local culture that reflects on contemporary lives. Thus, contemporary lives in a place like Taiwan always have to face the juxtaposition model while dealing with its abstract and spiritual product: double consciousness, inevitably.

When proposing the idea of the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity, Hansa Hanafi questioned “how can man live with double truth, double ways, and double behaviour” (Hanafi 2005, 390). A man can, but not without consequence. In order to maintain consistency, functionality and perpetuation of life, the way of living with the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity is at once fractured and hybridized, like what one saw in *Main Agile*. And double consciousness is both the cost and the coping mechanism of this way of living. At the end of *Main Agile*, one of the characters Mr. Main Agile used a smartphone to live-stream the pile of stilt brought in by A-Kuan shortly before. The Facebook Page used for this end was also introduced to the audience earlier in the performance. This scene did not only juxtapose the apparatus of traditional culture and modern technology, but it also questioned our distance, position, relationship and perception towards this way of life, which the audience also witnessed. What were we/they watching? The stilts? (Which are much unfamiliar to most of us/them) The phone? (That we/they all have one) The action of filming? The video on Facebook? Where is my position in this? Actually, the audience was at once looking at and being in the situatedness of the irreconciled integration of tradition and modernity from the composition as a whole. The two selves proposed by Lee, the question by Hanafi, the juxtaposition model, the double consciousness and the situatedness of gazing and being, all describe the contemporary dilemma of duality revealed in *Main Agile*.



Figure 3.3 At the end of the performance, the character Mr. Main Agile live-streamed a pile of stilts on Facebook, while the audience watched. Chung-Shun Temple, Taipei, 2022. (Photo by Chen, Chang Chih)

## Conclusion

By hosting a circus performance at a temple, integrating traditional folk art, e.g., Stilt Zhen, Shikuai, and other modernized objects, e.g., plastic bags, plastic chairs and tires, *Main Agile* invited the audience to enter a hybrid field: a semi-modernized theatrical shelter within an inherently traditional and religious space. Not only did the layers of spatiality and materiality reflect the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity, but also the structure of the work alternating two different atmospheres and narratives revealed the same model and brought about two modes of spectatorship and two kinds of structure of feelings. In the failure of converging as one complete structure, this work exposed the double consciousness in the irreconciliation of tradition and modernity in one work and one body. Thus, unlike Miyazaki's character Kiki who successfully lived out of her value as a witch in a modern world, *Main Agile* implied a more difficult and complex scenario and sense of living.

Furthermore, the structure of feeling revealed by *Main Agile* indicated the condition of living with a dual mentality brought about by the irreconciled integration of

tradition and modernity in a contemporary society like Taiwan. In this contemporary dilemma of duality, tradition and modern products were absorbed by the local society constantly without clear identification of their origins. Thus, the local culture keeps transforming into a new type of hybrid culture that reflects a contemporary life where people could only live between tradition and modernity in unreconciled strivings.



## Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigate how works of contemporary circus engaging specific unconventional spaces in Taiwan revealed certain structures of feeling and exposed aspects of living conditions in contemporary society. To fulfil the inquiry, I first analyze the theory of structure of feeling, also the concepts of locality and double consciousness, both as a kind of particular structure of feeling.

As structure of feeling is something one can learn and understand from a specific group that exists in a specific place and time, it entails the characters of communality, temporality and spatiality. These characters are also applied in the case studies. However, structure of feeling as a sense of life and a community of experience is not easy to grasp, even for those who obtain it. Thus, there are also two modes of structure of feeling: in solution and precipitate. These modes also implied that for a single structure of feeling, there are two positions for sensing it, the internal and the external.

When looking into locality, I dealt with two different sides of it. One is associated with the materiality of a neighborhood which produces and ensures the tangible existence of locality, another is the structure of feeling, the abstract effects of the tangible constructs. What's worth noting is that locality as structure of feeling obtains a productive ability, which means the intangible trait of locality can reinforce, complement or alternate the material foundation on which locality was established. But locality itself is also fragile and unstable, especially under the exterior force like globalization or nation-state.

For double consciousness, I found out that the self-reflexive lens within the internal subjects of double consciousness, as structure of feeling, also inhabits an external position at the same time, allowing them to observe their own structure of feeling. I also found out that using the juxtaposition model of tradition and modernity to complement the forming factors of double consciousness, which was initiated by the diasporic black community surrounding Atlantic Ocean, allows double consciousness to be deployed in my case study which sits in the context of East Asia.

As in the case studies, I first analyzed the promenade circus performance *Disappearing Island*. With the bodily performance and the promenade form, this work further proposes questions about a co-sharing urban life to the audience and

states the fragile and uncertain living conditions in contemporary society nowadays. The second case study focused on *Main Agile*. The double consciousness hidden in this work indicates the contemporary dilemma of living with a dual mentality caused by the irreconciled integration of tradition and modernity in a society like Taiwan.

What lingers behind this research is the ghost of modernity. No matter the locality as structure of feeling at stake on Shezi Island, or the secretively functioned double consciousness in *Main Agile*, they can both be seen as the ever-present legacy of modernity. The former came from a modern governance method that foregrounds the importance of growth and development in any yet exploited space. The latter was produced in the perpetuated postcolonial condition that every modernized society which left any trace of the past way of living is demanded to adjust and reconstruct itself. The cause of these cases is the seemingly logical continuity chasing “the new” coined by modernity, despite they actually causing fracture, doubleness and putting the past into brackets. Take Stilt Zhen as an example: categorizing this kind of activity as “tradition” inevitably compartmentalizes it as something static and unchangeable from the past, as the opposite of modernity. And once something is put in that place, it is disconnected from the “modern” world and loses its agency at the same time. Same for the case of Shezi Island. As the area is forced to navigate towards the modern imagination in an urban outline, it is at once defined as something static and already stopped growing, thus needing a project for “change”. If these problems can be solved, we must start with identifying the ghost of modernity and its influence, then proceed with motivating “the past” into something dynamic and alive, rather than static or unchangeable.

What could be further investigated upon the result of this thesis may be the structure of feeling of circus. The cases I investigated are much regarding specific places or deeply situated spaces. However, the relationship between the abstract sense and the more general characteristics of circus, e.g., mastery, virtuosity, prowess and circus acts/numbers, can be further explored. For example: how does the development of circus skills inform the structure of feeling of certain generations? What is the role of technology in circus apparatus and the correspondingly revealed structure of feeling? The challenge here may also entail the issue of categorization. By categorization I mean the separation between Traditional Circus, New Circus and Contemporary Circus, especially the two latter. Does Contemporary Circus obtain or reveal structures of feeling different from New Circus? Is the exposure of structures of feeling more evident or deliberate in Contemporary Circus compared to other styles? These are the questions that require additional research.

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