

Stills from
花花世界 / Huahua's Dazzling World and
its Myriad Temptations / HUAHUA SHIJIE



D I F F U S I O N

S U M M E R F E S T I V A L S E R I E S

DIFFUSION is a new summer festival series that will take place across 10 events (on site and online) including screenings, talks, workshops and critical writing intersecting with recent non-fiction moving image works.

re:assemblage collective since 2016 this collective has been committed to championing underrepresented voices and perspectives through public film/video screenings. We are itinerant and intentional. We are "reassembling" assumptions about artist film/video practices: who is shown and the forms of works championed. The re:assemblage collective was co-instigated by Christina Battle and Scott Miller Berry and is currently comprised of Faraz Anoushpour with Miller Berry and calls Tkaronto/Toronto home.

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Its Myriad Temptations / Dazzling World

E S S A Y

by Fan Wu

Its Myriad Temptations

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant –
Success in circuit lies*

And “hearts... will always bring people
pain” till they slacken the vines
of desire and learn to play fetch with desire’s
many-headed human hydra.
The lure turns up empty.
Mania makes
inflatable arm-flailing tube men
of us all – but not before in a market
stall a suitable husband is found
by facts alone. Let temptation be
the last domain of the lonely.

—

How do I write about Daphne Xu’s *Huahua’s Dazzling World* and *its Myriad Temptations*?

The title is a pun on 花花世界 (huahua shijie), which translates to “this teeming world” or “the world of sensual pleasures.” Huahua makes her living on Kuaishou, a social media app where you livestream your life. The film alternates between her home life and her online life. Daphne tells me that Xiongan New Area is the site of a plan to create a new and hyper-technologized smart city, meant to rival the political and economic significance of the development of Shenzhen, which was China’s first experiment with special economic zones and market capitalism. In *Huahua*, Daphne suspends this macro-political context in the weave of ordinary life, viewed from the (virtual) ground level.

As far as interpretation goes, I could render the film a case study in the collision of tradition and technology in China; or seek the stark contrast in the interface between virtuality as fantasy – with its infinite choices for face-filter transformation – and the banality of reality – with its endless menial labours; or turn Huahua herself into a complex psychological figure, using flourishes of affect theory and/or psychoanalysis. All of these would be more than valid and valuable should one choose to commit to a critical direction.

But I feel that any didacticism would deflate the image of both *Huahua* and Huahua, whose vitality emerges from the openness of approach that speaks only the presence of life itself, the *there it is and say no more* of one particular life that happens to flicker from private to public. I’m pulled toward a quietude that mirrors Daphne’s own camerawork, which leaves space for your affects to gather; and her editing, which offers as much energetic meaning as narrative meaning. What do you hear in Huahua’s banter, her grainy cough, her swiveling hips?

Dazzling World

I can tell you what I love about this film. *Huahua* allows actions to unfold in the fullness of their duration, past the point of an expected cut and into the awkward zone of voyeurism: *how long will (we get to see) Huahua dance outside the store as deliverymen grin past her?* This commitment to the time-image lets the viewer into Huahua’s ragged rhythms of life in all their myriad variations.

Of course I love Huahua herself, who has masterfully woven performance into sincerity and thus declines the traditional distinction that defines “authenticity.” She’s brash and gives not a rat’s ass what you think of her as she declares her hottest takes on everything from mortality to spousal ethics. “We like you, that’s why we watch you,” fawns one of her many Kuaishou admirers. Her charisma is equal parts bulldozer and thunderbolt.

The film evokes the grainy kitsch of China, its dust and colour, its excruciating pragmatisms. I don’t know how to put it – once again I come to a nugget of silence – how *Huahua* immerses me in a cellular melancholy: in the stacks of flower-patterned blankets; in the walls stained by wok oil; in the brusque tones of conversations that dance around depth. When I went back to visit my great aunt in a Shijiazhuang village in 2016, she couldn’t get a word out she was weeping so much about her hard life; the government will evict her next year from her family farm to build a series of high-rises. Haunted by hyperdevelopment, Huahua’s dazzling world bears the shadow of another world razed to the ground; and the spirit of this other world squeaks through the youthful filters, the shiniest surfaces.

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“Men, don’t let your women cry.”

Oranges rolled to my door, sequins
fall from my skirt, a family affair by the wayside.

Four-season karaoke classic:

为了你 (cuz of you)

我愿意 (I want to)

你是我的好兄弟 (u my bro)

(my best best bro)

“I keep myself from hoping for anything

from the flow of time, or the color of the sky,”

or a love worth going Live.

The truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind.

Fan Wu is a shivering rink of huddled flesh. You can write or reroute him love letters at fanwu4u@gmail.com. All my gratitude to Faraz Anoushahpour, Scott Miller Berry, Emily Dickinson, Daphne Xu.