

DIY Haunt Yen-Chao Lin

curator **Alice Ming Wai Jim**

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In an era where fake news and alternative facts ominously sediment into false history, no wonder the early twenty-first century has been preoccupied with ways in which ghosts of the past and our lost futures with knowledge of events yet to come, inhabit and haunt our troubled present. In *DIY Haunt*, Yen-Chao Lin provides an opportunity to experience spectral modes of being through an intensely personal hauntology that invokes an unsettling diasporic view of the present. Haunted by the past and the future, the immersive installation performance simultaneously combines past memories, present-day social practices of endurance and self-care, and the anachronism of an electro-acoustic soundscape. *DIY Haunt* freely evokes the idea of hauntology coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 work, *Specters of Marx*, to describe how the figure of the ghost, with its ability to cross through time and space, disrupts linear understandings of time.

DIY Haunt's main mise-en-scène is a life-size diorama, the size of a tiny shoebox apartment, whose interior is only visible through seven door viewers, two of which rotate. Opening breaches in a time that is “out of joint,” as Derrida, after Shakespeare’s Hamlet, phrases it, these “poetic and thinking peepholes [*meurtrières*]” allow visitors distorted, partial glimpses into a sparsely-decorated interior and, most strikingly, the presence of a trapeze sling and a live performer.¹ According to Derrida, media amplifies haunting because like the ghost, it is “neither living nor dead, present nor absent.”² The performance begins with the artist building an electro-acoustic soundscape by playing, backwards, old vinyl records of traditional Chinese instrumental celebration music and Beijing radio programs from the sixties and seventies. Collaborator, experimental musician Oliver Lewis, samples the looped instrumentation with minimal processing. Lin performs while the video also records the ambient noise of visitors perambulating between the peephole installation and the rest of the space, which has been transformed into a screening room projecting the real-time playback of the performance that just happened in the black box.

The uncanny scenes of compact domesticity, the not quite circus performance, not quite yogi suspended inversion therapy, and the strain to recognize remixed retro Chinese golden oldies brings to mind how, as cultural theorist Mark Fisher, aka k-punk, writes: “Haunt is a perfectly uncanny word, since like ‘*unheimlich*’ it connotes both the familiar-domestic and its unhomey double. Haunt originally meant ‘to provide with a home,’ and has also carried the sense of the ‘habitual.’”³ *DIY Haunt*, in fact, builds on an earlier series of small peephole sculptures, *Fictive Kin*, inspired by the artist’s childhood memories of her home in the Republic of China during the 1980s and 1990s, a period of turbulent political change and rapid economic growth. Under the Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), Taiwan’s martial law lasted 38 years from 1949 to 1987.⁴

The lifting of martial law was followed by the liberalization and democratization of Taiwan although the first direct election of President and Vice President were not held until 1996. The political reform mobilized numerous human rights movements, such as the Taiwanese Indigenous cause of self-determination and economic development. Despite the end of martial law in Taiwan, political tensions and instability remain. The post-Chinese civil war trauma, its social and economic austerity, the road to democracy, and the island’s icy relationship with mainland China—in which differences

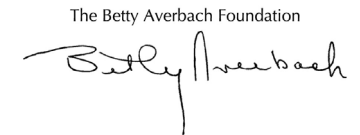
between intergenerational experiences invoke separation, boundaries, and divisions within families as well as between Han Chinese and Indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities in the region and diaspora alike—, increase skepticism towards the effectiveness of cultural sensitization programs and multicultural education introduced by the Taiwanese government.

This distrust is not unfamiliar in the Canadian context where Lin has been living since the age of thirteen as a racialized settler. Following a formal government apology in 2008, the 2010–2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s documentation of the haunting legacy of Canada’s residential schools woefully speaks to the ugly spectre of colonial guilt that continues to haunt North America. In Taiwan, on August 1, 2016, the then newly inaugurated President Tsai Ing-wen, the fledgling democracy’s first female President, issued a formal apology to Taiwan’s Indigenous peoples, promising to take concrete steps to rectify a four-hundred-year history of injustice. On many levels, then, Lin’s static trapeze routine in *DIY Haunt* reflects the balancing act required to navigate her social justice activities and political activism across various cultural geographies and temporal disjunctions. The performance focuses on inversion and stillness, using ritualized endurance as a metaphor for different forms of resistance to cultural conditioning past and present, here in Canada, as elsewhere. Ultimately, *DIY Haunt* considers a paradoxical return to unfulfilled or failed past utopias and no longer even imaginable or reconcilable futures so that we can envision a moment that is yet to come but is already now.

Alice Ming Wai Jim

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1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 20.
 2. *Ibid.*, 63.
 3. Mark Fisher, “Hauntology Now,” January 17, 2006, blog post, <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/007230.html>, [accessed April 28, 2017].
 4. Until the Syrian martial law (1963–2011), this was the longest period of martial law by a regime in the world.

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