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2021-04-13 · On Screen

Islands in the Stream: Navigating East Asia's Content Platforms



In 2020, we were informed that an abstract we had submitted for a book on streaming in Asia had been accepted. Later in the year, we learned that the essay we sent *was not*. The issue was not the content but the form, which seemingly did not fall in line with the style of the other texts. Those, we were told, needed to abide by more academic standards, though some of the titles in this particular publisher's catalogue did not hesitate to *go their own way*. Numerous colleagues have told the story of how one rejection turned into a tale of their texts appearing in other publications; this has also happened to us and has served to further consider Jean-Luc Nancy's inoperative and disavowed communities. Soon after the notice came shifts in calendars that had us prepping for curatorial projects. And so we thought S_Z would be as good a place as any to make this essay available.

S.

The neighboring East Asian nations, Japan, China, South Korea, and Taiwan share a long history of media content production. Since the turn of the 21st century, this dynamic relationship has been further complicated with the emergence of global streaming services like Netflix. Changes are catalyzed, giving birth to experiments with old models and new possibilities of narrative and methodology. From Japan's burden of a format history to China's loss of history, distinct features and strategies emerge at the interface of clashes and affections. How did the streaming cultures in these countries evolve prior to and during the pandemic? Did the latter accelerate or hinder changes? Here is a look at the thread that connects those *islands* where preoccupation for streaming turns into instrumental power.

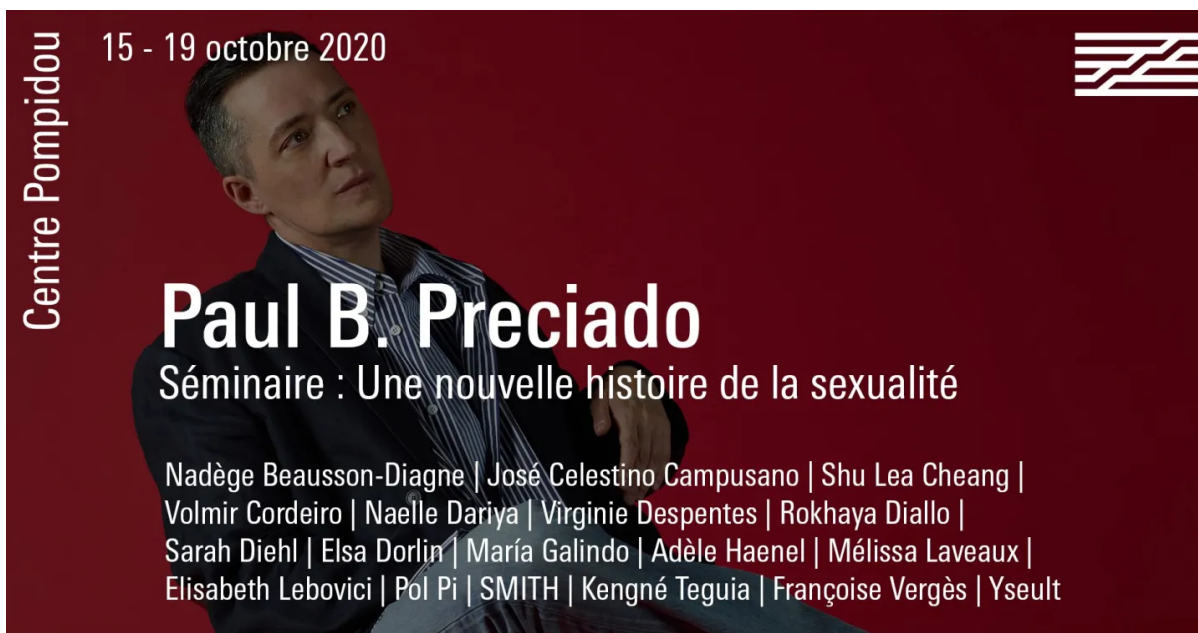
To the question 'what are we going to watch tonight?', the pandemic induced confinement answered 'everything'. All the time, because tonight starts when we say it does and doesn't stop until we say the sun is up. Binge watching suddenly became the stuff of schedules, something that had to be done before the workday came around, before the workweek began. The 2020 pandemic has changed the narrative for the relationship that binds streaming to pop culture—keeping up with *has to be watched* and finding that other content that speaks to us directly—and how the latter became redefined through the process of being required to or invited to *stay in* rather than having that 'work lifestyle' that allowed being at home. From shutting yourself in to closing oneself off from the world, from a goth sensibility that had a movement 'preparing for this all their lives' to those who embraced

Japan's 'hikikomori' contract with society and had closed the door long ago—and who may not be entirely aware of the covid-19's existence: is not going out still pop when you're told you can't?

Across East Asia, monitoring the spread of the virus has yielded sharply distinct results. China closed off Wuhan and set up an invisible wall with the health code system against the entire Hubei Province; several months after the country returned to 'normal', Xinjiang suddenly became the second Hubei with a handful of new cases being spotted. Japan relied on a population for which peer pressure is complicit in the government's agenda, which declared a state of emergency without imposing restrictions. South Korea reacted aggressively with testing and suffered little discussion on what was to be done. Taiwan was cautious from the beginning with a strong plan, while in fact benefiting from the earlier China-Taiwan split on cross-border tourism which had prevented the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Chinese tourists. Each approach would contribute to regional diversities as to how content was either regulated or consumed: would foreign content dominate selections or would local production companies seize the opportunity to do massive releases of their own films and series. A design on how to placate. Figures for Netflix are impressive, but more significantly was the emergence of its strategic commitment to Asian stories, some of which resonated in an unexpected way with the moment. Subscriptions to Disney 'Deluxe', as it was termed in Japan, exploded in a country that worries about what is currently happening to the characters in the Mouse's theme park. China relied more heavily on all-are-welcome live streaming platforms led by Douyin (domestic version of the controversial Tik Tok) and the similar Kuaishou (whose International version Kwai is less known), used not only for entertainment but also for emotional and informative sustenance.

Streaming has also revealed itself as a marker for staying safe and a

cypher for Foucault's bio political order, a knowingly insidious technique used to measure accountability and control behavior. It had disciplined a willingly domesticated body, creating anticipation and a fixed choreography of gestures as it examined the capacity for consumption. It provided a tally for surveillance –subscriptions– and is not unwilling to cooperate with an apparatus of incarceration, sanctions and punishment, from fines to arrests: where are you when you're not watching? Philosopher Paul B. Preciado had begun a seminar held at the Pompidou Center days prior to confinement in France in which he was to revisit Foucault's History of Sexuality^[1]. He would in turn become infected and recover and remarked on how consuming online content improved our health as it improved the ways in which we were being controlled through a regulated and quantifiable pleasure constantly produced and disseminated^[2]. This is the result of the internet's planetary expansion, as we are able to stream films and series from around the globe, and return to what everyone else is watching. This subtle task of eliminating possibilities for difference did not go unnoticed as it launched thousands of online exhibitions and curated programs of video art & alternative cinema. Was this also the case for Asia? Examples of what was in the making in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China, taken from Netflix, Amazon Prime, Youtube, Douyin, and other platforms, and what was accelerated by the pandemic, are examined as promises fulfilled and concepts gone wrong.



Centre Pompidou 15 - 19 octobre 2020

Paul B. Preciado
Séminaire : Une nouvelle histoire de la sexualité

Nadège Beausson-Diagne | José Celestino Campusano | Shu Lea Cheang |
Volmir Cordeiro | Naele Dariya | Virginie Desportes | Rokhaya Diallo |
Sarah Diehl | Elsa Dorlin | María Galindo | Adèle Haenel | Mélissa Laveaux |
Elisabeth Lebovici | Pol Pi | SMITH | Kengné Teguia | Françoise Vergès | Yseult

The Aging Legacies

SHIFT_The Future/ Switch!/ Touch! These catchphrases are for an unfolding drama: Nissan inviting us to Shift (a prescient moment to the Carlos Ghosn debacle), TEPCO (Japan's power company at the center of the 2011 radiation disaster) suggesting to Switch, and Nintendo's Touch inviting consumers to bond with their DS and... Switch console (as a result of the confinement and Chinese manufacturing issues, Switch ended up running out of stock within days). As a manufacturing nation, Japan remains connected to the presence of hardware and physical media. It continues to operate one of the largest rental dvd chains in the world, Tsutaya, and to cherish the role it played in creating a relationship with devices that were not based solely on a user-friendly strategy but rather as instruments of contact and solace. And, as equally documented, the country has the largest aging population, one which did not see the digital revolution coming and that is still unable to consume media as something other than a set time process.

An audience that is shrinking, caught between competing media ecosystems.

The traditional model, with its roster of formats including morning (wide) shows, game shows, variety shows and episodic dramas, has lost a considerable share of the youth market, reducing the number of sponsors looking to launch new product lines, diminishing the advertising budget for such goods, and cutting deeply into network revenues. It has become a life form burdened with nostalgia, which is not memory. Salvation failed to be provided by talent agencies, as it had in the first decade of the new century. Fresh new faces with a limited lifespan appeared on television, in commercials, and movies, initially attracting a young demographic that would wane after witnessing the same storytelling tropes. Which is not to say that this community embraced streaming as an alternative. It transformed the smartphone into a lifeline sustained by an emerging crop of new subcultures that basks in celebrity at a macro level, basking in its hyperreality, in which Disneyland Tokyo remains a defining symbol of fictiveness.

There is less and less of a 'cinéphilie' in Japan, and a confirmed visceral reluctance to watch films in black and white. In light of indecisive attempts by Japan's film studios, notably Toei and Toho, to provide streaming platforms that would have allowed a materialization of their contribution to film history, foreign inroads were made into the Japanese production system. It is in such a media context—not quite a response but rather the perception of an opportunity made possible through the ghosting of Japanese film history—that Netflix and Amazon Prime opened a production division in Japan, as they did in other territories in Asia. The intent focused on rekindling ambitious storytelling told by directors whose names resonated beyond Japan, which already limits the field to the film festival circuit. Directors celebrated as figures belonging to a chronology admired overseas for a

set of criteria that have ceased to weigh in on the domestic market. Still, international teams were hired and dispatched to Japan where they relied on genres that encapsulate the country's moving image pop culture sensibility abroad. NHK's *taiga dramas*^[3] could have served as a blueprint; the 1980 American mini series *Shogun*, adapted from a novel by James Clavell and starring Mifune Toshiro and Richard Chamberlain did borrow from its conventions, yet the NHK titles remain largely unknown or ignored to this day, including by teams selecting Japanese content for festivals. It has also experienced a downward turn in Japan, even as it relied on the use of young pop culture stars in leading roles. In many ways, Sucker Punch's PS4 title *Ghost of Tsushima* and its collaboration with the Kurosawa Akira heirs has proven to be a precise example of a culture filtered back to an audience that forgot the references but is attuned to the tremor of something that once belonged to them.



Jacques Derrida's hauntology tells us life is already always cinema; to be haunted by a ghost is to have a memory of something that we never actually lived through^[4]. For Mark Fisher, who discussed it in its second *disincarnation*, as spectrality, it is a confrontation with a cultural impasse: the failure of the future^[5] while Bernard Stiegler terms it an enterprise desingularizing impulse and memory^[6]. Unexpectedly, within a time frame of three years, Japan produced examples of each.

The notable venture *Hibana* (2016) was produced by Netflix with Hiroki Ryuchi as supervising director, a favorite of international Japanese film festivals including Nippon Connection in Frankfurt, Kinotayo in Paris and Japan Cuts in NYC; his films include *Vibrator* (2003), *M* (2006), and *Kabukicho Love Hotel* (2014). Adapted from an Akutagawa prize winning novel by comedian Mayatoshi Naoki, a protégé of the titan Osaka agency Yoshimoto Kogyo (an inevitable production partner), it follows the rise of a *manzai* duo^[7] over the course of a decade. While Netflix is present in 190 countries, *Hibana's* intent was to bring Japanese serialized content in the company of international players. Japan's contemporary tv dramas are notorious for their rapid shooting schedule, limited production values and reliance on a rotating ensemble of leads and supporting cast. Celebrated filmmakers from around the world have helmed a number of major platform projects and *Hibana* would show a national audience what television could look like when a director is given a larger measure of control and vision. As to whether it served the cause of this comic form outside Japan, here was further proof that comedy remains the most challenging of cultural exports, and over the course of ten episodes, that joke was wearing thin. Unsurprisingly, the domestic tv drama since the eighties has become a coded form with a grammar not only understood by Japanese audiences but also by those in South Korea who would initially borrow from key titles before reinventing the genre into something that would lead to a far more current and global sensibility, something the platforms have yet to significantly achieve with Japan's main cultural content export, anime^[8].



In 2017, film auteur Sono Sion directed the nine-part series *Tokyo Vampire Hotel* produced by Amazon Prime Video from a script written by the director. Shot in Tokyo with a quick fly-over to Romania for scenes featuring the Bran/Dracula Castle and other Transylvanian sites, the series makes its way into more immediately recognizable otaku fare, notably in its use of *visual Kei* rock and goth loli aesthetics. James Farrell, head of Amazon's Asia Pacific Content, framed the production based on what was argued above for *Hibana*, 'the customers will see something they haven't seen before that's awesome and different', while Sion added that he 'had approached the series as if making a movie... producing something that has never been done before either as TV drama or feature film. Without Romania, the series wouldn't have any power'^[9]. In 2020, Sion continued to explore the horror genre with the series version of his film *The Forest of Love* this time produced by Netflix. In 2014 the filmmaker had revealed a gift for manga adaption to film with the Nikkatsu produced *Tokyo Tribe*, a Japanese rap musical that did not lead to a series. The case of Sion attests to an ongoing belief that a filmmaker will always make television *better* rather than make it his/her own. In TVH, a 22 year old woman, Manami, is targeted

by two rival vampire clans, the... Draculas and the Corvins, one believing she is their salvation, the other to insure the Draculas' doom. If *Tokyo Tribe* subverted the musical genre, *Tokyo Vampire Hotel* sabotaged its intent, something Sono Sion has not shied away from in the past. Neither great television like *Buffy*, nor zeitgeist embalmed *Twilight*, it gave streaming a bad name.



Rekindling through transgression

By the Fall of 2019, Netflix Japan had found the right formula with the series *The Naked Director*. Rather than rely once more on a filmmaker-led project, it focused on one specifically notorious film genre in Japan, erotic cinema, though not the more recently legitimized history that

ranges from the pink films of Wakamatsu Koji to those of Nikkatsu's Roman Porno. Rather, it looks at a pivotal moment when AV (adult video) obliterated the premise of fiction. The series covers the career of 1980s porn director and entrepreneur Muranishi Toru and his star actress, Kuroki Kaoru. Muranishi, played by Yamada Takayuki, one of Japan's finest contemporary actors, known overseas for a number of collaborations with director Miike Takashi, was infamous for the introduction of unsimulated sex acts being recorded and the consequences of this revolution continue to resonate in the porn streaming market in Japan. His actress anticipated much of the feminism & porn discussion that would appear in the nineties and defended the right of women to appear in such productions in all forms of national media, until she retired in 1994 though few performers or contemporary scholars voiced similar positions afterwards. Nonetheless, her efforts championed those of others from her generation, including the celebrated actress Hayashi Yumika (who passed away in 2005). It resulted in the near dismissal of a taboo that would have hindered such performers from crossing over to more traditional media. The series itself does not delve into such a discussion, rather it attempts to recreate a 'homemade' sensibility at a moment in Japan's history when Tokyo was being transformed by an influx of capital. Mainstream television would not have dared invest in such a project, and current film production companies don't have the means to take on something on this scale. Yet for the episode directors, including Uchida Eiji, 'The Naked Director' continues to muddle the medium, "I believe that Japanese *films* have to change, they have to look outward and overseas. This *series* was made with just that thought in mind. If you haven't seen it yet, take a look!"^[10]. Netflix Japan had a hit and signed on for a second season.



Either producing their own titles or collaborating with local production companies, transnational streaming services bring financial means and methodologies that could challenge not only the existing industrial structures, but also their somewhat ossified mindsets. To many East Asian countries where tradition weighs in, sometimes too much, the very 'foreign' nature of such transnational power is often free of constraints and able to breathe new life into the conservative status quo. While the local production companies hesitate to radically

challenge the social conventions, afraid of losing the existing audience, transnational services can afford to be daring because of their economic heft and culturally different standpoints. In 2019, HBO Asia co-produced the best known Taiwanese TV series of that year, *The World Between Us*, with Taiwan Public Television Service and another local multimedia company Catchplay. Taking the story from a series of incidents that happened in the 2010s in Taiwan, the socially realistic series focuses on the aftermath of an indiscriminate act of mass murder. Within the 10 episodes, it manages to achieve balance to depict all parties involved in depth, from the perpetrators with mental illness, their families, those of the victims, to the legal system, health care, and mass media. The show was warmly received in Taiwan and was soon introduced to other streaming platforms, notably Amazon, Netflix, and Tencent in China, leading to a wave of widespread discussion. As Taiwan devotes itself to solidifying its identity as a democratic and diversified society, its television industry which used to exclusively export melodramas to its neighboring countries now transformed into one closely concerned with the here and now reality, from gender issues to the living conditions of immigrant workers. As *The World Between Us* screenwriter Lu Shih-yuan suggested, there used to be very few platforms that were willing to invest in such topics, but now that's changing^[11]—coinciding with the entering of transnational services.



In 2019, Netflix produced its first original Korean series, *Kingdom*; a second season, which was also favorably received, came out in March 2020. This historical-horror drama is all about being in between and living the valley life, about finding a narrative breach that allows for time and for the organic to dig trenches through both a conventional use of the court drama and the walking dead tropes that have haunted 21st century media. Its storyline rapidly clears a path to explanation and resolution in its desire to lead us to an origin story, while bringing in the visually engaging horror theme from popular culture as a metaphor for the hunger of the common people and the oppression from the powerful. The idea of zombies in an imperial setting could also find its origin in Hong Kong horror movies. In 1979, a movie called *The Shadow Boxing* first put a Qing Dynasty costume (1616–1912) worn by officials (Gwanbok) on a zombie. Ever since, zombies are often dressed in that fashion in Hong Kong horror cinema. The inspiration is said to have come from the tradition in the early 1900s in China, when wealthy people would be buried wearing a costume similar to a Gwanbok regardless of whether they were officials or not. So when the image enters the screen, the idea was that the zombies are individuals who

are buried at the wrong place possessed by the evil or were treated unjustly before death, unable to remain peacefully underground. Instead of biting, their long and contorted fingers are the common weapon that could hurt people and in some cases transform the victims into zombies. Deeply influenced by the local religions including Daoism, Buddhism, and Shamanism, in order to kill the zombie or save the possessed usually requires some sort of ritual objects or performances, since it is the spirit that is at stake instead of the brain of any other anatomical body parts. By preserving the imperial connection while adding the infected running zombie, more familiar to international audiences, *Kingdom* stands as a good example of Netflix's global expansion and opens a new door to both the historical drama genre and horror in East Asia.

Furthermore, it points at something very contemporary, notably the banality of evil within the power structure identified by Hannah Arendt, and what the Chinese modernist thinker Lu Xun calls the cannibalistic world where the ordinary people prey on a daily basis on each other's misfortune. As the world experiences the COVID-19 pandemic, much of it immediately resonates, from the 'parasite' that lives on the resurrection flower to the outbreak that occurs after having ingested contaminated... flesh, addressing what it is to live within the proximity of a plague in an era of convenience and gig economies. Speed and economy of means (the repetitive abundance of drone shots, the relative display of the court's opulence or that of provincial incompetence) create an 'empowering' contrast between the slow moving, beaten and tired villagers who transform into lean and tight contemporary jumpers and sprinters once bitten. Not having experienced being in the soil, as zombies of old had (those which Morton may have in mind^[12], who hands emerge from cemetery grounds and stand as icons of the uncanny allotted by their strange and

disturbing resemblance), they have never been 'so alive' as they distinguish themselves from Romero's astute political model^[13] or *The Walking Dead's* anticipation of Trump's advent and what true horrors would be unleashed afterwards. An army initially created to defeat the Japanese invader that is now ready to eat its own. It's all there. The main characters become arrows, the prince, the nurse-slash-doctor, and even the elite tiger hunter responsible for the spread, all turn their backs on the court in order to speed learn the language of flowers, making it a series far smarter than it looks.



Redefining the professional

Which brings us back to an idea of television that had been responsible for the creation of key formats that shaped, for better or worse, audience interaction with the medium over some seventy years. While

prominent institutions and figures from other cultural spheres were slow in setting up platforms for alternative content, performers, notably comedians, whose careers were unable to get traction on Japan's private tv networks or appeared to have reached a downward slope began turning to YouTube. At first, much of it was all homemade and self-produced, with the performers using and introducing family members, shooting outside in their neighborhoods and other favorite areas of the city, mimicking similar daily segments on morning shows. But as their following grew, former professional tech colleagues, including camera operators, editors and sound engineers, began helping out while entertainers still active on mainstream programs started to show up as 'guest stars' in their host's living room. Some began to introduce skills they had picked up during their 'hiatus', notably cooking, and transformed this into yet another segment. Sponsors soon followed and the pandemic provided a 'fertile' ground to try out ideas and concepts. Among the most popular of these is Japanese Ninja Kasijac TV^[14]. It began looking increasingly professional and more commodified. And just as this form found a way to come back to life, within a limited perimeter, there would also be a movement that removed itself from an urban configuration and attempt to forge a form of media that relied on streaming and nature, on embracing distancing while sending lessons on how to follow suit. The 'media amateur' nature was fully on display, as YouTubers demonstrated a limited use of media grammar: poor framing and lighting, compromised POV shots to show their 'arrival' in a remote setting, and sound & music as an afterthought. Channels navigated between those that could not let go of a dandified use of 'outdoor gear', such as the Hiroshi Channel^[15], while others were going in alone and deeper, to possibly encounter what Baptiste Morizot termed 'manners of being alive', pointing to 'a crisis of sensibility, a concept used to describe an impoverishment of what we can feel, perceive, understand, and weave

in terms of relation towards the living (that which is not man). Our vocabulary for addressing such relations is so limited by comparison to the language we use to speak of institutions, collectives, of technical objects or works of art.^[16] The form is either cleaned up or poorly mimicked. Never challenged.

While tv talents turn to the 'amateur' platforms to re-assert their presence, it is no longer a subcultural secret that a generation of self-made superstars have been emerging and maturing on the same platforms. One doesn't have to be an industry talent to be publicly noticed, as long as they are talented. A vlogger could either work on their own or lead a small team to produce short videos. They are not binded by contracts with production companies, although sponsors are very common. Which makes it possible for them to enjoy a considerable extent of production freedom, as well as the flexibility to be present on multiple platforms. First earning attention in 2015 on one of the short video platforms in China, Meipai, blogger Li Ziqi now has tens of millions of followers in and outside China. By comparison, Netflix had 192.95 million paying streaming subscribers worldwide in the second quarter of 2020^[17]. After several years' experience as DJ/singer, Li returned to her hometown in the remote Sichuan Province to live with her grandmother, and started to produce videos about handmade food, clothes and housewares from scratch while underlining the aesthetic of the countryside life and traditional handcraft. Her early work both displayed originality and a rather amateur execution, yet was noticed and carefully invested in by a production team from Weinian, a company specialized in the incubation and integration of KOL network. Her focus on traditional culture and lifestyle, although not without criticism of the intentional romanticization, gathered numerous viewers who lead fast-paced (middle-class, in many cases) lives in the

cities yet cherish the memories they have for their hometowns. Knowing that the real countryside life of deficiency and suffering is by no means close to Li's, people are still obsessed with the artificial idyllic dream Li offers, in which there is the combination of charming nature sceneries, quality food and homemade ware, the release of the getaway fantasy breaking away from the urban stress, as well as the desired imagination of the ideal Chinese identity. This also coincides with the central government's agenda of establishing the contemporarily nationalist narrative against the backdrop of peace and prosperity, which led to warm applauds from the state media, followed by a series of prizes and designations as cultural promotion ambassador. Of course, the question 'how could Li and her team get access to Youtube' never comes up.



李子柒 Liziqi



Watch on

Another moon

Within the Great Firewall, China has cultivated its unique online streaming ecology, led by subscription streaming services and live streaming accounts, as well as the combination of both, owned by internet tycoons (Tencent, ByteDance, etc.) whose other services range from news to online retailing. This system runs largely outside the global media network by its own rules, although it is not uncommon for the Chinese platforms and the transnational ones to acquire streaming rights of popular titles from each other. During the modern enlightenment in China, there was a popular saying that the moon above the foreign land was fuller to imply how the scholars who had the chance to see the outside world admired Western modernism. The saying was soon criticized after the establishment of PRC under the Communist nationalist narrative and widely-spread cultural confidence. Today, the notion of 'the foreign moon isn't fuller' has been well established in mass culture along with the recent wave of nationalist sentiment. When Chinese technology companies are accused of stealing/copying intellectual property from foreign companies and universities, the single explanation on social media would be that this is only an expression of the foreign countries' anxiety towards China's development. It doesn't matter whether the accusation is true, just as it doesn't matter whether the general climate of opinion within the wall is manipulated. There is already too much information for the users, too big a market for the capital where the streaming services keep exploring their own model of survival and prosperity. The three major subscription video-on-demand platforms, Tencent, iQiyi, and Youku amount to a monopoly sharing more than half of the market in China. Like Netflix, they produce their own movies, series and variety shows as well as acquiring titles from film production companies and televisions. While constantly discovering emerging talents, these platforms are also accused of signing exploitive contracts with young

talents and their agencies. Even for the titles that are not produced by themselves, they occasionally still have the power to replace actors and rewrite the scripts anytime they want simply because the streaming rights are exclusively in their hands. While television prefers melodramas depicting urban and family life, nearly half of the cyber streaming space is occupied by costume drama and historical fantasy. On one hand this is due to the huge reservoir of web fiction writing, on the other it's not really a choice as fantasy is firmly grounded within the cyber space by state regulations. Although online streaming titles might enjoy slightly more freedom compared with television programs in terms of censorship, such subjects in fact leave little space for genuine innovation or more importantly social concern.

While the subscription streaming services overflow with fantasies, the reality, in its most bizarre shapes, is healthy and well on the live streaming platforms. Allowing users to share daily videos under certain lengths, the video-sharing social networking platforms were initially for grassroot entertainment. Ordinary people like Li Ziqi found the most straightforward opportunity ever to be seen in the huge country, since 2012 when the first platform of its kind, Kuaishou, evolved out of its predecessor which provided gif making and sharing services. These platforms provided a rather flat universe parallel with the highly centralized structure on the vast territory. Some quickly find their position—with their appearance, skills, wealth, humor, claptrap, ill-being, insaneness, etc. From language lessons to luxurious night life, from street dancing to ravenousness, from prank stealing to teenage pregnancy...everything is there. Popular sharers are not only rewarded by the platforms, but also from the simple but efficient promotion for business of their own or their contracted companies. Later on, more and more professional teams moved to short video platforms as their main front, broadcasting news, web series highlights, open courses, and

so forth. The platforms also started to carry out their own programs, some have even grown so ambitious as to integrate professional titles into their streaming map. The Covid-19 pandemic rang the alert for all of China right before the Chinese New Year. On the eve of the Chinese New Year in 2020, the mobile app Kuaishou became the most crowded place in China, with more than 780 million person-time entering its broadcasting room of CCTV's annual New Year's Gala to leave messages and draw red packets given out by the platform. Like many other movies that were ready to release during the New Year break only ending up being withdrawn, *Lost in Russia* was also scheduled to open in movie theaters across the country on the first year of the new year. A decision was made for the entire movie to be streamed online for free in collaboration with ByteDance, on three of its platforms including Douyin, the info portal Toutiao, the live and video-on-demand streaming service Xigua, as well as one of the production companies' own streaming platform, Huanxi.



With few entry restrictions, these short video platforms penetrate deeply into the 'invisible' China of remote areas. During the pandemic, they found themselves not only providing means of entertainment, but also means of documentation and survival. On these platforms, official news and announcement were relayed; professionals explained how to reduce the risks in everyday life; recovering patients revealed what it was like within the quarantine; volunteers called for donation while showing the process of getting supplies to their destination; village heads spoke up to help sell local fruits and vegetables which should have been shipped away if the transportation hadn't been cut off... When state apparatus and social organizations malfunctioned,

the discrete atoms realized that the distance in between them was in fact not that far. Through such 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles'^[18], there emerged a Deleuzian *rhizomatic* model of society, however bitter, censored, and high-tech low-life.

Conclusion

The covid-19 pandemic happens in an age when online streaming is both regulating and liberating, both damaging and protecting. With the global film and television industry suspended for months (news is still there, only to remind us everyday how dire the situation is), 2020 could well be the year zero of online streaming. Not in that we've only now gotten used to the streaming culture, but in the sense that this very form of informative confinement has literally become the indoor substitute of physical movements, something indispensable to the basic form of human social life. It cruelly announces that screening culture is aging, those who refuse to watch videos online and be part of the data are aging too. Then it opens its browser or application, brings the living dead back to life, and makes them look new.

[1] Paul B. Preciado, "A New History of Sexuality," accessed August 29, 2020, https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/agenda/event.action?param.id=FR_R-bc77f17051bae9eb758896173d3c68c¶m.idSource=FR_E-bc77f17051bae9eb758896173d3c68c. Attendance was such that another room provided live streaming of the first conference.

[2] Paul B. Preciado, accessed August 29, 2020. <https://www.liberation.fr/>

[auteur/13780-paul-b-preciado](#).

[3] Annual *big river* prestige dramas about historical and/or samurai figures that began in 1963.

[4] Jacques Derrida in *Ghost Dance*, dir. Ken McMullen, 1983.

[5] Mark Fisher, 'What Is Hauntology?' *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 16–24.

[6] Bernard Stiegler, "Le Temps du Cinéma et la Question du Mal Être," in *La technique et le temps* (Paris: Fayard, 2018).

[7] Manzai, a comic art form based on two figures, *boke* (the fool) and *tsukommi* (the heckler), dates back to the Heian Period (794–1185). Popularization of the form shifted in 1912 with Osaka talent agency Yoshimoto Kogyo. A new style of *manzai* emerged, often performed in Kansai dialect.

[8] However, number of anime companies and studios have agreed to create a YouTube channel, *Animelog*, that will freely provide classic series: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsnDtu-g18tDA4miToMOjXQ>.

[9] Mark Schilling, "Sion Sono serves up some blood-sucking fun in 'Tokyo Vampire Hotel'," in *the Japan Times*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2017/06/14/tv/sion-sono-serves-blood-sucking-fun-tokyo-vampire-hotel/>.

[10] See Uchida Eiji's post on Facebook on August 11, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3512743682133692&set=a.502791809795576&type=3&theater>.

[11] See the interview with Lu and one of the leading actors, Wu Kangren, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://punchline.asia/archives/52766>.

[12] Timothy Morton, "There is an experiential valley where beings such as zombies live in between peaks: we healthy humans live on one peak, and all the cuter robots on the other. Zombies live in the 'uncanny valley' because they ironically embody Cartesian dualism: they are animated corpses. They are reduced to 'object status'... and mixed with other beings—they have been in the soil." in *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 136–137.

[13] In April 2020, a photo taken of Ohio protestors shouting at the doors of the governor's state building, faces pressed against the glass doors, wearing MAGA caps and no social distancing, was an echo of George Romero's seminal *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), in which zombies attempt to get inside a shopping mall where survivors found refuge. Is there ever a moment which is not a Baudrillard moment?

[14] See <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC642pLj4GXSj-OYbdx3ytmA?fbclid=IwAR1wNpSEPEDFrHLjC-aOsnNaVBVs2qjrLOTUAKyIp4iGG7Ku15ATY8AJBXQ>.

[15] See https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_ak3ZurSDtT3Kv1RFdrgiA?fbclid=IwAROQKuuBlvEzo1h88XmTh7xl3JvDxskQxv1Zr5bid6kwQLQxJVOcuU78q

[16] Baptiste Morizot, *Manières d'être vivant* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020).

[17] Amy Watson, "Number of Netflix paying streaming subscribers worldwide from 3rd quarter 2011 to 2nd quarter 2020," accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly->

[number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/](#)

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.

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