

72-13

Image from Search-Hamlet, World Premiere 16 August 2002,
Kronborg Castle, Denmark

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TheatreWorks / 72-13 is the Associate Producer of **HERE**, Ho Tzu Nyen's new film that recently premiered at the 41st Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival 2009 in competition for the Camera d'Or. We supported **HERE** through our Creatives-in-Residence (CIR) programme that was established in 2006.

HERE reflects the CIR's objective to be an incubator, a platform for nurturing trans-disciplinary processes, an organic interface between arts and the creative industries; generating ideas, creative strategies as well as providing the necessary stimuli.

72-13 will present a talk by Tzu Nyen on **HERE** in relation to his engagement in the performing arts. The talk is on 20 June 2009 at 72-13.

*"...the experience of sitting through **HERE** in the cinema is quite unique - it feels like a live experience because of our rather peculiar use of sound. But also I believe the way in which I work with actors has a lot of connections to semi-improvisations, games, rules, etc..."*
- Ho Tzu Nyen.

HERE

with Ho Tzu Nyen

by Ng Yi-Sheng

One of the most buzzed-about names in contemporary art in Singapore, Ho Tzu Nyen has piqued, entertained and infuriated his viewers since '03 with his installations, videos, performance lectures and grand opuses of anti-theatre (e.g. *Utama: Every Name in History is I* (various incarnations); *The King Lear Project* (various incarnations); *The Bohemian Rhapsody Project*; *The House of Memory*; *4 X 4: Episodes in Singapore Art*.)

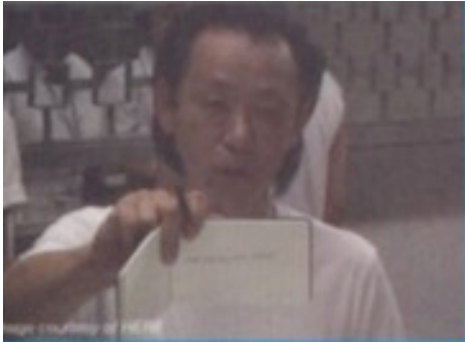
Born of four production companies (Ho's Tzuological Films, Borgia's Akanga Film Asia, Oak 3 and M'GO Films), the film also involves sound artist George Chua and sound engineer Charles Lee. It is largely financed by the Singapore-based Canadian company *gsmprjct'média* and stars Singapore's most visibly invisible actor (and visual artist), John Low.

1. Tell us about **HERE**. What's it about?

HERE, as its title suggests, is really about what it means to be 'here'. The characters being 'here' on screen, captured by a camera and forever alienated from the 'live' spectators. But the film is also about the spectators being 'here' in the cinema – their eyes open to the constant flux of images unfolding on the screen, and the whole of their bodies, a giant ear for sound vibrations. **HERE** is also a love story, and a story about the idea of 'Amor Fat'. It is also a film about self-consciousness in its endemic form as self-awareness, but also self-consciousness in an atrophied state – paranoia.

There's a saying in the film business that if you can't sum up your film in a key punch line – you've got a problem. I'm happy to say that we seem to have this problem.







2. Why did you, a visual artist, suddenly decide to create your first feature film?

Next to music, the cinema has always been my greatest love. I think I have wanted to make a film for a long time – but with **HERE**, all the correct conditions were in place – people, money, ideas...

3. What are the ideas, inspirations and influences behind **HERE? Does it embody any specific theory or philosophy?**

HERE is a coagulation of my interests over the last ten years – so it does not embody a specific theory. I am not sure that listing out my references here is interesting for anyone – but anyway here goes.

One of my main interests over the last few years has been the phenomenon of self-consciousness as a 'movie-in-the brain'. As the neurologist Antonio Damasio said, the fascinating thing about self-consciousness is how the brain also generates the sense that there is an owner and an observer for that movie.

Another key idea in the film is that of repetition (and differentiation). In **HERE**, this is tied to Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of 'Amor Fati' or love of fate – in which the test of an affirmative life is that of someone who is willing to live his life over and over again, without making a single change.

I should add that for me, the process of embodying a philosophical idea or theory into a work of art is justifiable only if it is open to mutation and distortion. To embody an idea is to give it mass, weight, clumsiness, awkwardness – to transform a concept into a sensation or an effect. Such a notion of embodiment is also what I am really interested in.

Other than that, **HERE** can also be understood as a recollection of fragments of my favourite films, paintings and music that have haunted me for a long time. I believe this practice introduces a different kind of duration into the film – the virtual time of remembering, which I think has to be related to my interests in a certain line of French philosophy stretching from Henri Bergson to Gilles Deleuze.

Last but not least, **HERE** is also a love story.

4. Could you tell us more about your cinematic inspirations?

In cinematic terms, I see **HERE** to be the result of my longtime fascination in what I hold as the two valid extremes of filmmaking, the first represented by the late works of Andrei Tarkovsky and the second by the late works of Jean-Luc Godard. I believe Tarkovsky's later films to be the perfection of an organic line of filmic possibilities, in which the durational experience of cinema has been sculpted into a kind of continuous and seamless unfolding. Godard on the other hand, represents all the possibilities of cinematic modernism – in which rhythm has become disjunctive, and the image is opened up on all sides, allowing it to engage in an instantaneous and critical dialogue with the world at large. But I should also add that the early films of Alain Resnais and Jacques Rivette were important to me in making this film, as were some of Alexander Sokurov's films.

Finally, I believe that every film should be about 'film-at-large' – or the history and future possibilities of film. In this way, **HERE** is inspired by what is inherently fascinating about the filmic process – how a spectator makes sense of images as well as the combinational process of attaching sounds to images. I think that because of the inherent 'humanistic' bias of vision over sound, film sound has not really been stretched as much as techniques in film images have been advanced. I would say that **HERE** is an attempt to translate some of my experiences with how sound is mixed in the 'live' performances of progressive bands such as OM and My Bloody Valentine, into film.

5. How did your CIR with 72-13 help in the creation of this project?

I believe that it is a testament to the foresight of the folks at 72-13 that they contributed funding support to **HERE** while staying clear of its production process. I am saying this because a film, by its economical infrastructure is subject to a host of complexities foreign to either the practice of the visual arts or theatre. The less interference we have from funding bodies, the more freedom we have in executing the project. I think that 72-13 was able to see that it was in the best interest of **HERE** to render help to us from a distance, and I am highly appreciative of that.

6. Would you like to make a comment on the state of visual arts and / or film in Singapore at the moment?

I think we are barely beginning. And the thing that we all need to do – is to recognise this as a fact. In general, I feel that our level of visual and audio culture is still quite primitive. As such, films are composed without taking into account the revolutions in visual thinking achieved through painting in the last few hundred years. Likewise, sound is deployed in the cinema in a manner that is deaf to developments in progressive music over the last one hundred years.

7. What projects do you envision for the future?

The next major 'visual arts' project that I am involved in is an adaptation of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I am also working on a second feature film, called *Endless Day*.

HERE goes on commercial release at *The Picturehouse* from 25th June 2009.

For more information on the film, visit www.herethefilm.com

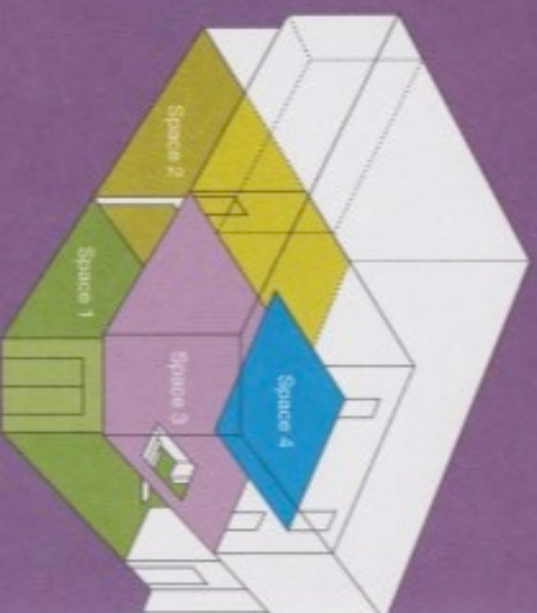
Ho's film, *EARTH*, was recently shown as part of *Invisible Room* in the Singapore Arts Festival 2009, a music performance by Singapore rock band the Observatory (TheatreWorks' / 72-13's CIR in 2006).

About 72-13

A converted rice warehouse, 72-13 is the home of TheatreWorks (www.theatreworks.org.sg). The space is flexible enough to be a gallery, a cinema and a theatre. Its primary purpose, through SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus) and the ICADA (International Centre of Asian Arts), is to foster collaborations, house residencies for creatives around the world and to encourage hybrid expressions from young Singaporeans. TheatreWorks, responding to the needs of contemporary Asia, has consciously created 72-13 to have a wider and a more inclusive agenda.

Open Call

72-13 invites creatives to apply to hold once-off non-profit events in the space. TheatreWorks will provide the space free of charge barring technical charges. Please write to Tay Tong at twork@singnet.com.sg - curation process will apply.



THEATREWORKS

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With support from National Arts Council, NAC Arts Housing Scheme, Lee Foundation and Hong Leong Foundation