

# 行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫成果報告

自戀與問答：當代音樂文化中的閃爍物體  
Narcissism & a Catechism:  
Flashing Objects in Contemporary Music Cultures

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## Preparation of NSC Project Reports

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### 一、中文摘要

本研究將由台灣女性的詩與流行音樂為切入點，探討女「性」的流通與交易；預計為期兩年。研究初期將閱讀西方女性主義與酷兒理論學者的作品，這些作者有關於女性經濟流通價值的著作，但作品尚未被翻譯成中文，或是在台灣並不出名；而後將檢視台灣的女性詩及女性主義評論如何處理女性的交易流通價值。最主要的是經由閱讀不同形式的作品將能發現簡短、無敘事情節而能夠表達抽象概念的詩，事實上有其理論架構，這些理論參與了(而非僅僅反映出)台灣多層後殖民性中性與性別認同的型構。此酷兒理論的支派雖不如相關心理分析理論般為台灣學術界所熟知，但由於是針對漸趨「全球化」的經濟架構所分析得出的，故應也能適用於本地。理論是對應於性與性別的歷史型塑發展所出來的，因此台灣的詩與學術成果會將歐美的理論予以「地域化」，而理論在應用上也會產生很大的轉變。

計畫第二部份的重點是自流行文化取材，用以探討女性寫、唱的流行歌詞是如何處理性規範的契約邏輯。此部分將以夏宇所創作的歌詞(其中大多以筆名發表)為討論題材，同時也將探討音樂錄影帶的影像呈現對當代性與性別的塑造，以及歌詞與音樂錄影帶的形式結構是如何影響建構心的、高度性視覺的認識論。由於其它東亞國家及西方音樂及錄影帶的

進口，加上近來台灣流行音樂成功地對其它東亞市場出口，在此針對流行音樂的討論中要論證塑造超國界性與性別塑造典範的必要性，因其可用以解釋多層且多樣區域實踐與論述的歷史決定。同樣地，本研究也將在非規範性的性別認同與性實踐之論述中尋溯其可能的內在矛盾；除了將酷兒論述置於文學與理論脈絡裡，此計畫更要在「主流」流行文化及較「另類」的音樂及錄影帶建構的影像中，檢視那超越卻也頑強的酷異可能。

關鍵詞：女性的詩、文化研究、女性主義理論、酷兒理論、馬克斯主義與後殖民理論

### 二、英文摘要

This project will consist of a two-year study on the ways in which women's poetry and popular culture in Taiwan refers to the sexual circulation and exchange of women. The study will begin with a reading of pivotal texts by Western scholars of queer theory who have written on the economic circulation of women but whose work has not been translated into Chinese and may not be well known in Taiwan. I also will consider how women's poetry and feminist scholarship in Taiwan addresses the same logic. Most important, reading these different types of writing together will reveal the ways in which poetry, in its brevity, lack of a narrative "plot," and capacity for radical abstraction, can be read as a repository of dense theoretical constructs that actively engage with

(rather than simply reflecting) the complex formation of gender and sexual identities in Taiwan's layered postcoloniality. This branch of queer theory, which has not been as readily available to scholars in Taiwan as have its more psychoanalytic counterparts, may be more productively taken up locally because it is based on the analysis of an economic structure which has become increasingly "globalized." This study, then, will read cultural production in Taiwan from a combined Marxist and queer feminist paradigm. At the same time, however, the poetry as well as the scholarship from Taiwan will "provincialize" our understanding of the U.S. and European-based theory, as well as demanding, at times, modifications and greater transformations of its methodology, since that theory has developed in response to different historical formations of gender and sexuality.

The second part of this project will focus on texts from popular culture rather poetry. It will extend the argument begun in part one by examining the ways in which popular song lyrics written or performed by women artists refer to the contractual logic of normative sexuality and romance. In this connection between the two parts of the study, I will discuss some of Xia Yu's many song lyrics (most of which were written under pseudonyms). I will build on the paradigm established in part one, moreover, by addressing how the semiotics of music videos contributes to contemporary formations of sexuality and gender, and how the formal structure and content of song lyrics help to establish the visuality of popular music videos. This discussion of popular music, because of the "importation" of other East Asian and Western popular music and videos, and because of the recent success of Taiwan's music industry in "exporting" some of its products to wider East Asian markets, will demonstrate how it is necessary to develop and transnational paradigm of gender and sexual formations in order to adequately account for the layered and heterogeneous historical determination of local practices and discourses. Equally, this discussion will concentrate on the points of contradiction that also constitute these formations, tracing the possibilities opened up by these contradictions for non-normative gender identifications and sexual practices. Rather than locating a queer discourse only in literature and theory, then, this project will conclude by attempting to trace the often sublimated yet recalcitrant queer possibilities in the images constitutive of "mainstream" constructions of

sexuality as well as in more "alternative" music and video.

Keywords: Research Project, Report Style, National Science Council

### 三、成果報告

Narcissism & a Catechism:

Flashing objects in contemporary music cultures

I'm not wrong but still waiting for the world to  
prove I'm right

The song "Accept" by Taipei-based lesbian band BBM (*Bangbangmang*) begins with a few seconds of simple but just slightly haunting notes that might remind a listener of a half-forgotten childhood melody. After this beguiling opening, the music accelerates into an alternative rock tune performed with humor and a strong dose of "attitude." The humor and attitude of the music add force to the social commentary of the lyrics, which in a few lines set forth a complex political agenda by pinpointing and critiquing examples of both explicit homophobia and what has been termed a "discourse of reticence" on matters of nonnormative sexuality.<sup>i</sup> I begin with a discussion of these lyrics because the complexity of the issues they raise makes them an eloquent contribution to local cultural politics.<sup>ii</sup> Although my starting point in this study is the lyrics of two of the songs from BBM's first CD, ultimately I attempt to account for the significance of these songs as cultural objects that do not present themselves exactly as "texts" to be read from beginning to end. Rather I would like to suggest that they appear as flashing objects/performances, visual and aural, that fade in and out of the sometimes overlapping arenas of popular culture and the "microscopic" (121) and potentially "transgressive" (122-124) scenes of musical countercultures.<sup>iii</sup> These flashes, in slipping through some cultural cracks, call brief but brilliant and possibly obscene attention to struggles and psychic traumas as well as to queer pleasures, non-normative sexual practices and transgendered identifications and their forms of self-expression.

The lyrics of "Accept" (接受) provide a good place to begin understanding some of the possible strategies of such cultural flashes. They outline several definitions put on queer and non-normatively gendered subjects by heterosexual society as well as its prescriptions for normative sexual practices while maintaining a defiance of both and ending with a call for acceptance. The lyrics read:

You point at me saying I'm wrong, shouting at me that I'm  
abnormal

Insisting that men and women should get married when they come of age as the norm has it  
 You said that if I'm not attracted to men, then I'd better be good and just be alone  
 Instead of doing what I wish against what the good conventions prescribe  
 Tell me do you know what love is?  
 On what ground do you think my love is as dangerous as a beast?  
 Is there nothing else for you to do  
 But pursue me painstakingly in order to attack me?  
 I know one day, one day, the world will change  
 So would you please open your eyes, open your ears, release your heart, and accept?

The lyrics are preceded by a comment, which I have cited as the epigraph for this section: "I'm not wrong but still waiting for the world to prove I'm right." If this comment refers to all the ways, referred to in the lyrics, that the world has not yet proved this, then we might begin by considering what exactly is indicated by the word "world." I will approach this question both in terms of how the world is described in the lyrics, and conversely, the by considering the lyrics themselves as a part of the world that they seem merely to describe.

As to the question of locating the world in the lyrics, it seems to be found partly in the family as the possible deliverer of imperatives and certainly as a locus of social normativity. The family is central in the imperative to marry and to be alone if not willing to marry a man, while the initial hailing, "You point at me saying I'm wrong, shouting at me that I'm abnormal" is one that could potentially come from any subject in an interpellation that constitutes its object as abnormal and, correspondingly, its subject as normal.<sup>iv</sup> Thus the "world" here may be designated as societal norms and as and familial imperatives that operate as a vehicle for larger social regulations deployed onto young people's sexuality.

At the same time this song and the message of its lyrics for queer communities becomes a part of a counterculture. In this case the countercultural contexts include the band's live performances and the consumption and circulation of the CD. BBM has played at T-bars in Taipei and at various gay and lesbian festivals and activities including the first city government sponsored Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Festival which took place at Warner Village in September of this year. In June of this year BBM recorded their first CD by playing their songs live and recording them with a minidisk recorder, editing each song on a computer, and then recording the finished product as a CD. They made 300 copies from this

the master copy, which are presently being sold at Fembooks, Jinjin Bookstore and on the band's website. As the entire recording process and even the cover art and designs and individual CD packaging were done by the band members, Dingo (bass player, songwriter and founder of BBM) can justly state that "We made the record totally by ourselves."<sup>v</sup> The larger lesbian and queer counterculture that BBM's performances and the circulation of their CD contributes to forming is a part of the "world" (lived environment). However, it is not in line with the familial social norms that this song challenges, and not directed by their interests except to counter them. In this sense, as this song is performed or consumed in CD form, the "waiting" has already become a kind of "doing" or to use BBM's term, a kind of "proving" that, albeit indirectly, speaks back to the larger social world by speaking affectively to listeners about the many sources of pressure they may be facing on a daily basis.

These lyrics concisely refer to a broad range of disciplinary tactics that are a part of that daily pressure. First, they pinpoint an explicitly homophobic discourse that identifies and categorizes queers as "abnormal" and "wrong." Second, they describe social regulations that don't construct abnormal categories but do explicitly define the normal by positing marriage as necessary to adulthood and by presenting individualized (but unspecified) desires as selfishly disobeying the benevolent will of society. Lastly, they show how nonnormative possibilities are reticently cancelled out in demands like this one: "if you can't love a man then be good and be alone." Equally, as a part of the world, the lyrics' catechism, directed toward heterosexual society, exerts an inquisitive pressure on its social-familial values by making it accountable—by asking for some answers and for substantial change. BBM's call for acceptance, however, like their CD, may not be heard so much by the mainstream as by the countercultures to which it belongs. In this case, to return to the introductory note, what is "proved" when this song is listened to or performed, when it becomes a part of lived experience in the world? To begin to address this question, I will turn to another song from the same CD, and I will argue that this song is as much about looking defiantly back as it is about looking at oneself.

*"a lucky yet tragic Narcissus flower"*

Narcissism (我自戀)

Looking at myself in the mirror can take me  
 quite a few hours  
 The left side of my face looks good; even when  
 the lighting dims it's very cool  
 I walk into the bathroom and wash my face; I stroke my hair,  
 turn around, and shake my head  
 Imagining she is standing right in front of me, saying to me

that I'm a sharp-looking butch  
I'm narcissistic I'm narcissistic  
I'm narcissistic, incurably narcissistic  
I'm narcissistic I'm narcissistic  
I'm narcissistic, fucking narcissistic

If punk style appropriates recognizable fashions and postures and then “recontextualizes” and defamiliarizes them to express identification with a non-mainstream group,<sup>vi</sup> I would like to suggest that a punk style can be taken up as a depth-defying surface. The most punk song from this CD in sentiment and musical style, “Narcissism” doesn’t seem to be about looking back in this defiant sense because it is about the irony of looking at the self only. The three projected objects in the lyrics, the mirror reflection, the projected other, and the imagined other’s projection (as a “*Shuai T*”) in the returned gaze, are triangular projections that point back at the self at every turn, leaving no exterior object of desire or blame. Without that object the narcissistic gaze might be assumed to be looking, only at an already prescribed interiority because it seems to be restricted to self-reflection. And because of the note, “a lucky yet tragic Narcissus flower,” there is the invocation of the infelicitous fate associated with Narcissus’s story. However, I’d like to suggest that if this gaze looks inward, it does so secondarily, after an affirmation, of sorts, of the surfaces of the self. For this reason I will argue that this three-fold structure of the surface-projections, however ironic, is not superficial or trivial. Rather it offers a distancing from and, combined with other cultural expressions and acts, begins to construct a supplement to a more readily prescribed mode of isolated interiority. In this supplementarity it resists the totalizing power of the kind of depth produced through some of the damaging interpellations and disciplinary tactics listed and defied in “Accept.”

Apart from the projected surfaces in the content of the lyrics, this song refuses depth in its punk minimalism, in its musical and verbal repetition, and in its attitude which encapsulates the spirit of what we might call a “stone wall of narcissistic irony,” playing on Freud’s image-term for narcissism as a stone wall that the analyst cannot penetrate by transference.<sup>vii</sup> Despite the allusions to the Narcissus myth in the introductory note and in the mention of face-washing in the third line, the lyrics are not exactly psychoanalytic. The note’s use of “tragic” to describe a Narcissus flower does hint at a depth that is not identical to any of the surfaces, but there is no normative analysis of what has gone wrong internally and produced a perverse self-love. Instead the lyrics, especially in their humor, ironically affirm the perverse surfaces: “Looking at myself in the mirror can take me quite a few hours.” Most important, the blame for the “tragedy” of the isolation implied in the note (and suggested by the irony) is not placed on the

psychological make-up of the narcissist, but rather remains unplaced and in question. The open question concerning the object of blame is somewhat settled, however, when considered in light of the lyrics of some of the other songs, including “Accept,” which clearly pinpoint specific deployments of homophobic interpellation and other more reticent forms of sexual discipline. As some of the external sources of an otherwise individualized “tragedy” are identified in the other songs, it becomes possible for the totalizing and potentially tragic power of narcissism in the psychological sense to be transformed into a politicized understanding of psychic trauma. Further, if some of the interpellations are aimed at masculine women in particular (because they mention appearance, or the boss’s order to wear a skirt in the opening song. “What the hell am I doing?”), then this resituating of blame is also a kind of transgender cultural politics that turns the effect of those hailings into an irresistible, and self-love producing, “shuai T” mirror image.

The uncluttered space of the surface-projection, perhaps, generates a tentative distance from a “mixed” and potentially chaotic depth—one created in the inevitable mismatch of those interpellations, discipline and denial, yet also in affirmative hailings, and possibly in the subversion of the stigmatizing hailings into an affirmation of a queer identity.<sup>viii</sup> “Narcissism” in this sense, as a cultural object circulated in communities of queer women via the CD, and consumed at T-bars and queer events vis-a-vis live performances, invites its listeners to participate in addressing the necessary proximity of depth from a distance that is perhaps only supplied by such surface-projections. Its important task in a queer cultural politics is to provide an enunciative space from which to speak back to the mechanisms that attempt to prescribe depth as tragic for certain queer and transgendered subjects. This task could also be taken up as a starting point from which to imagine, through cultural practices, more ways to reconstruct alternative and pleasure-affirming structures of feeling out of precisely the recalcitrance of those depths. In this sense, the narcissistic process of surface projection described in the lyrics is one potential effect of the song as a cultural act that can tap the energy of its young audiences.

*music’s sexual shadows: obscene flashes in the dark  
night of culture*

Says a chorister friend, an endearingly  
femme bass:

The two coming-outs rhyme. “I’m musical”  
hurts—and heals—as much as “I’m queer.” With  
delight and horror I introduce myself as a  
musician. . . . I’ve never heard anyone explain  
how music is shadowed by the sexual, or why

“I’m a musician” seems as rude, queer and necessary as “Blow me.” Do I need proof that I’m a musician? Can musicianship be revoked? Was I born musical? Were you? Aren’t your instincts intertwined—folkways too knotted and abysmal to articulate—with music?

--Wayne  
Koestenbaum<sup>ix</sup>

The musical languages of pop—the wretched sentiments of soul, the exuberance of rock ’n’ roll, the verbal contortions of rap, the screeched angst of punk—all tend to propel the body through the sensorial ‘grain’ (Roland Barthes) of the music to the center of the stage. There, in dancing and the immediacy of performance, it is this physical sense of the musical ‘now’ that is pivotal, for it ‘is the body that ultimately makes, receives and responds to the music; and it is the body that connects sounds, dance, fashion and style to the subconscious anchorage of sexuality and eroticism.’ It being here, where romance and ‘reality’ are fused together, that common sense is often taunted, twisted and torn apart.

--Iain Chambers<sup>x</sup>

The second of these citations is from an article that is not about sexuality, not to mention queer sexuality; Chambers’ important analysis of pop music cultures has a progressive political agenda that is rather straight. However, when he writes about how the bodily dimension is central to music (the internal citation is from his own work), especially its live performance, the sexuality absent from the rest of the article slips into his phrasing like the shadow mentioned in the preceding quote from queer musicologist Wayne Koestenbaum. Together, the two quotes suggest that when music taps into the reserves of potential energy stored up in the enthusiastic listening (and dancing, participatory) experience of its audiences, this energy is embodied, physical and at least potentially sexual. Just how this shadowy yet embodied public sexuality might taunt, twist and tear apart common sense in an avant-garde manner might, moreover, have something to do with those brief but charged aforementioned events that “flash” an often unrecognized knowledge, desire, sentiment or experience into the cultural life of a contemporary city.

In the case of BBM, for example, that formidable transformative potential is contained within a kind of flash in culture: a brief appearance of something not commonly visible to its audience—something like a lesbian band, or an aggressive musical performance of narcissistic fantasy, or a clearly articulated defiance of homophobic interpellation. By taking into account BBM’s brief history, moreover, we find that this flash-like nature of cultural expression has at least two sources. One is the status of the band as, in Dingo’s words, “an alternative among the alternatives.” This status makes it difficult

to find appropriate venues for shows: performances held at gay and lesbian club activities and festivals have been remarkably successful, but these are special events that do not occur on a regular basis. T-bars are not necessarily set up for live bands and often cater to more mainstream KTV tastes, while underground clubs generally book bands whose music is “harder” than BBM’s and don’t attract an especially queer audience. Although BBM’s music (perhaps with the exception of “Narcissism”) is not generally very “hard,” and therefore the band could be integrated into the more alternative categories of popular music, it must stay “underground” because not all members can “come out” into the broad daylight of popular media coverage. Second, and more conclusively, the CD was made as a memorandum when the band realized it would be splitting up soon, or at least taking an indefinite rest, and “that is why there are only 300 copies.”<sup>xi</sup>

If it is brief, however, the flash is also bright, even brilliant, and as the English word connotes, possibly obscene, like the sexuality that shadows this physical arena of culture. If culture by and large provides either total indifference (which is its own kind of violence), hostile interpellations, or damaging representations—the dark night of culture—then it is important to note these flashes, to garner strength of their shadowy affectivity and build up their mobilizing potential. These *effects* accumulate and endure, subjects carry them in their memories and re-experience them when they play the CDs they have collected. Thus the accumulated effects can be mobilized toward the kind of positive social change some of the songs on this CD anticipate, giving another significance to my earlier interpretation of the catechism directed at sexual and gendered discipline in the lyrics of “Accept.”

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei, “Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics.” *Working Papers in Gender/Sexuality Studies* nos. 3 & 4. “Queer Theory and Politics” (September 1998) 109-155.

<sup>ii</sup> If the focus of what follows appears overly concentrated on the verbal rather than the musical, this is as much because I believe that the political stance in these lyrics bears detailed consideration as it is due to my own training in the fields of modern and contemporary poetry. In “US Space Shuttles Going to the Moon: Global Metaphors and Local Strategies in Building up Taiwan’s Lesbian Identities,” Antonia Chao has argued convincingly on the limitations of textual analyses of song lyrics in discussions of alternative cultural acts such as T-bar KTV singing. Chao shows that it is not the words of the song but how the song signifies in the specific context of its performance (which is precisely what is lost in strict textual analyses) that creates its cultural significance. I

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completely concur with Chao's argument on this point. Lyrics as important and eloquent as those written by BBM, however, I believe do warrant detailed discussion as long as that discussion does not lose track of the context, which in this case includes live performances as well as the production and distribution of the CD. Additionally, according to BBM founder Dingo, fans have commented most appreciatively on the lyrics (this information is from an interview with Dingo conducted in Taipei, October 2000).

<sup>iii</sup>Chang Yu-chang, "Search and Destroy": The Development of Taiwan Underground Music—A Historical Overview." Chungwai Literary Monthly Vol. 25 No. 2 July 290: 109-129.

<sup>iv</sup> This is a central thesis of Judith Butler's Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>v</sup> Quote taken from email correspondence.

<sup>vi</sup> Keith Negus provides an account of Hebdige's seminal book Subcultures: The Meaning of Style and a detailed outline of later adaptations, critiques and reformulations in the first chapter of Popular Music in Theory (Polity Press 1996).

<sup>vii</sup> "With these patients it always happens that after one has penetrated a little way one comes up against a stone wall which cannot be surmounted....In the narcissistic neuroses the resistance is insuperable; at the most we can satisfy our curiosity by craning our necks for a glimpse or two at what is going on over the wall. Our technique will therefore have to be replaced by other methods..." A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, "Tewnty-Sixth Lecture; The Theory of the Libido: Narcissism." Trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1962 (1960, Boni and Liveright 1924).

<sup>viii</sup> Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham: Duke, 1998).

<sup>ix</sup> "Queering the Pitch: A Posy of Definitions and Impersonations." Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>x</sup> "Contamination, Coincidence and Collusion: Pop Music, Urban Culture and the Avant-Garde." Modernism/Postmodernism, ed. Peter Brooker *Longman Critical Readers*. London: Longman, 1992.

<sup>xi</sup> The quotations in this paragraph and all information about the band's history are taken from the Taipei interview with BBM founder Dingo.