CHAPTER 15

Intermediating Immanence: On Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers*

Mi You

The Piece and Its Reception

An opening teaser: when confronted with Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen's theatre production *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014), audiences not familiar with the Chinese language may wonder, why ten thousand? Those recalling Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* may work out the math and see an image of ten tigers resting on each plateau. And those who know about Ho's more recent video installation, titled *Two or Three Tigers* (2015), may be even more perplexed with the numbering. The numbering is not arbitrary, of course. In Chinese, 'ten thousand' and 'two or three' are fictive numbers that allude to 'magnitude/multitude' and 'casual instance,' respectively. Interestingly, the magnitude of ten thousand does encompass an indirect answer to Deleuze and Guattari's plateaus of variation, as we will see later.

This chapter focuses on Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers* and delves into its multitude of layers in which animistic belief, history, man, and non-human and non-organic actors intermingle into a grandiose narrative.

M. You (✉)
Academy of Media Arts Cologne, Cologne, Germany
e-mail: m.you@mail.khm.de

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Ten Thousand Tigers interweaves the history of Southeast Asia through the figuration of the tiger. In folk belief, the animal is said to possess humans under certain circumstances and make 'weretigers'; yet this ambiguous, more equal relation between man and tiger has changed in modern times. Further, the ruthless Japanese generals in World War II known as Malay Tigers and the many-faced Lai Teck, the Malayan Communist Party secretary who was likened to a tiger, add historical weight to the man-tiger relation.

When the piece was shown at the Vienna Festival in 2014, it garnered enthusiastic, if somewhat over-exoticising, reviews. The *Tiroler Tageszeitung* review, for example, celebrated that the piece successfully conveys the making of the Malayan world by the colonial powers; at the same time, it remarks that 'the past and the future belong to the tiger' and that the artist develops 'the old myths around the secret cult animal of shamans and the miraculous' ('Asiatische Historie' 2014). Perhaps a regional popular newspaper could be excused for exaggerating the 'mythical' aspect of the theatre piece, yet it evinces a general tendency for things beyond the rational frame of understanding to be categorised as 'cult' and the 'miraculous.' More alarmingly, it should be pointed out that the notion of the 'timeless' character of Asia slips in unquestioned, so that with a leap of faith the tiger as a figuration has to possess potential for the future.

The work was celebrated in Singapore, and the local newspaper *The Straits Times* offered a more in-depth reading of the piece. Aware of the cultural and historical backgrounds, the critic remarked that the work 'examines the authority of folklore and its subconscious impact on the local psyche' (Tan 2014). Here I refrain from labelling either review as a right or wrong interpretation; yet it is telling to observe how the reviewers choose to highlight or not highlight the dynamic transformation process between man and tiger, and its spiritual, material, historical, and political implications.

In the following, I will pursue the unfolding of the narrative and revisit each historical station to bring to the fore the trans-historical and meta-historical scheme of *Ten Thousand Tigers*. The analysis is situated in an expanded field of intermediality and media theory, encompassing the technicality and affectivity of (inter)mediated encounters, as well as proposing a view of matter, time/space, and events as non-fixed and dynamic. In this way I hope to flesh out the affective and philosophical dimension of *Ten Thousand Tigers*, which renders the performance both as an experience and as a 'kind of philosophy … its own kind of thinking' (Cull 2013, 3).

The Set as Intermedial Edifice

The piece opens in darkness. With the sound of the play button being pressed, light is shed on a magnetic tape deck on the upper left side of the stage. A voice comes from an old tape recorder, in Mandarin Chinese: 'Most of what is known about us comes largely from spies, traitors, double agents, informers ...' (Ho). The adjacent compartmental space is lit up and reveals piles of documents in it, resembling an unattended archive. Against the vast space of darkness yet to be revealed on the theatre stage that tiny window of light seems to forecast a looming presence of memory (Fig. 15.1).

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the performance happens in an intricately designed 'stage edifice' with vitrines and display boxes of varying sizes stacked up to fill almost the full width and height of the stage. The audience only comes to see the entirety of the stage almost at the end of the performance; before that, only parts of the stage are revealed to the audience through meticulously control lighting. Invoking the aesthetics of a cabinet of curiosity, to the political dimension of which we will return, the vitrines and boxes contain real and virtual, mechanised and immobile objects, as well as four actors—themselves remaining immobile throughout the performance. The edifice on stage thus inaugurates a dense interplay of objects, bodies, and variations of media technology. This amounts

Fig. 15.1 *Ten Thousand Tigers*. Ho Tzu Nyen. Photo: Ken Cheong

to what Chiel Kattenbelt calls 'intermediality' of theatre, demonstrated in its efficacy of inducing mutual affect, which entails 'co-relations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception' (Kattenbelt 2010, 25).

In the close reading of key moments in *Ten Thousand Tigers* that follows, we have to perhaps come up with a more adequate terminology than 'scenes' to describe what we register from our experience. Duly mirroring 'intermediality,' Ho aptly calls the distribution of experience in theatrical time-space 'fragments.' In these fragments, the audience is constantly confronted with the alliance created between bodies and technologies onstage which thwarts the dominant gaze. This means seeing the technological apparatuses of media 'performatively on stage as agents for form and content, not merely as the systems through which ideas are imparted, but as ideas, subjects, themselves' (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 40).

Back on stage, the narrator continues in a solemn and emphatic voice: 'He who controls the flow of stories, controls history. The art of the narrative belongs to the police' (Ho). Ho's script is a masterfully crafted flow of texts of narration and commentary, some of which are in deep resonance with philosophical texts. The audience may be reminded of George Orwell's remark on politics of historiography or Michel Foucault's politics of knowledge production and may wonder to which extent this political framing of history will condition the piece. At this point the magnetic tape deck abruptly starts fast-forwarding. Is it a sign of a living machine? We will see later. As it comes to an equally abrupt halt, music starts. Another compartmental space is illuminated on stage, resembling a cabinet of curiosities from afar. We can discern busts of Lenin and Ho Chih Minh, mannequins of other figures, skulls, and on the small flat screens tucked neatly in between physical figures, photos and three-dimensional models of heads are to be seen.

In voice-over, a story is told in Japanese about Lai Teck, Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 until after World War II, who goes by many different names: Nguyen Van Long, Hoang A Nhac, Pham Van Dac, Mr Light, C. H. Chang, Wong Kim Geok, D. Ling, Malaya's Lenin, the right hand of Ho Chih Minh, and so on. While these names are enunciated, the spotlight switches on and off on different busts and objects and the heads on screens fade in and out. This multi-media segment about the mysterious Lai Teck concludes with: 'He is every name in history' (Ho).

Now spotlights are on a series of deformed heads as if undergoing transformation (in this segment, Ho was inspired by the painter Francis Bacon). The narrator speaks in a low-pitched voice, 'when one does not know a man, he is a tiger to man' (Ho), heralding the theme of the piece, and its variations that trigger inexhaustible permutations—man and tiger, tiger to man, man as tiger, and so forth.

The opening scene sets the basic parameters of the performance: the stage machinery carries out calculated manipulations of the objects, the actors do not adhere to narrative personalities but are rather implicated in the timing of the machinery. Here, we are confronted with mediality both in its technological constitution as media device and, in the expanded sense, mediality as process of transformation—transforming from one format into another in the case of the tape recording, and from one form of being into another in the case of the Bacon-inspired deformed figures. This further adds dynamics to our understanding of intermediality, in which the matrix of transformative and transforming participants may be said to enter into 'a becoming that changes both the work and the world as representation or differential repetition' (Cull 2013, 5). The variety of objects—digital or analogue machines, screens and showcases—that are to sustain the curiosity of the audience in the entire performance posit a challenge at the same time: 'What can we learn about bodies and technologies through their exchanges?' (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 51) The question of 'liveness' and 'life' itself also comes into play; the two at times follow separate paths to reinforce the separation of the theatre and its audience, and at times intermingle and prompt philosophical questions.

Transformation of Man and Tiger

Subsequently, other parts of the stage machinery are lit. We see a silhouette of two squatting figures against a light box and hear a quiet voice in Malay: 'No one here calls the tiger by its proper name, unless in a whisper. For speech is spell, and words warp the weave of the worlds' (Ho). The squatting figures are in the dark and their faces illegible; their postures are steady and unmoving. In the enticing whispering, it is conveyed that 'Man is not a being but a place. Of ceaseless divisions.' The transformation, or transmogrification, between man and tiger is deeply imbued in the narrative of *Ten Thousand Tigers*. More than a folk belief that confers magical power to man while allowing man to elude responsibility from potentially inhumane actions, it rather paints an entirely different worldview in which

the tiger and man are both immanent to a grand process of transformation and, to a certain extent, on an equal footing. What this means, and more importantly, what this feels like, will be explored throughout the piece.

To shed more light on the transfiguration of man and tiger into each other, it is said that 'in the river, the tiger bleeds, into the shadow of man' (Ho). A key element in the *Ten Thousand Tigers* cosmology is thus introduced: water. The squatting figures—now we could take them for weretigers—further recount, 'The being of animal in the world is like that of *water in water*. This is why in the midst of crossing a river one is able to dissolve into a tiger' (Ho, emphasis added). They further relate, in almost a chanting way, 'I touch, but I never touch my hand touching,' 'Am I a tiger among men? Or a man among tigers?' (Ho).

These poetic lines give an indication of the univocity of being: multiplicity within univocity. In which way is the being in the world univocal? It is, to be sure, not an erasure of difference. As Alexander Galloway puts it, 'In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities' (Galloway 2014, 4, emphasis in the original). It is best grasped in the image of water in water—as Deleuze has it, 'A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings' (Deleuze 1994, 304). More than a theoretical concept, the 'indigenous' belief offers a practical instance of univocity in the moment that tiger bleeds into the shadow of man in the image of the squatting figures.

At this moment another part of the stage awakens. We see a transparent water tank mounted on the upper part of theatre machinery; in it, vibration-induced black torrents continuously shoot upward and mingle with clean water. This creates an image of two bodies of water entwined—or is it the tiger bleeding into the shadow of man—being one of the same, of water, yet differentiable? Water here becomes a medium that allows a sensual experience of univocity, whereby the affective image of water in water triggers our projection of our own manner of being in the world—there is a parallel, not of essence, but of manner.

The Camera and the Uncanny

The water segment is neatly followed by the introduction of the camera in the context of Malaya: in 1906, the first photograph of a Malay weretiger was taken by the English anthropologist Walter William Skeat. (In the conception of the staging, the photograph serves as a reference for the posture of the squatting weretiger figures against the light box.) Another segment on the left side of the stage edifice with an old-fashioned camera is revealed; its flash bulb is suddenly activated, creating a burst of light. At the same time, the squatting weretigers on the right side of the stage are lit up by a flash, making the figures momentarily visible and appearing paper-flat, as if they were captured in a photograph. The flash recedes quickly, and the weretigers voice a meditation on photography: 'Men love tigers for the same reason they love the photograph: the love of the dead. Every photograph preserves the future death of a captured object. Every photograph promises the return of the dead' (Ho).

Photography, a technology that was at the time implicated in the hierarchy of the gaze, which renders the subject—weretigers, or the indigenous people in general—in the anthropologist's eye as nothing more than the prey in the eyes of a hunter, assumes the status of an 'actor' on stage. Through its mechanical appropriation of the colonial gaze, the theatre performs and enacts the conditioning of the objectified human bodies, to subsume the bodies 'as a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and nondiscursive) power' (Grosz 1994, 116). Yet the weretigers do not shy away from the camera; their comment on the camera and its user—the (implicated) Western men—rather thwarts the domination of the dominating gaze. Donna Haraway's cyborg project as a weird marriage between the subjugated 'other' and technology resonates here: just like the feminists, the indigenous subject of colonialism has no eyes for a state of purity and does not want to return to a fictive origin, a supposed state of nature. For, as we will see throughout the piece, the delineation of nature and culture, organic and inorganic has always been there, and has always been messy in the course of human history. This makes possible the emergence of cyborg subjectivities on stage, conceived as 'othered' bodies that form close kinship to photographic, computer or medical technologies, which 'begin to shift and crack, exposing the materiality beneath such conceptions' (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 98).

In light of this, the comment of the weretigers on technology contaminated by colonialism seems to thwart the sheer dominance of Western technology; here the camera harbours something uncannier. The love for the dead is a perversion that does not allow much rationalisation; one may recall how it was believed, in the early days of its invention, that photography may capture the images of ghosts, just like it was believed that telegraphy may channel messages of the dead. Is this not one of the moments when the rationally-minded inventors, users, and worshippers of technology are suspended from the rationalising frame of technology? Here we are confronted with a media critique of photography that rather derationalises the technology and with that, attempts to decolonise technology.

Tiger and Transformation in War

On the upper part of the stage edifice, we see a vitrine containing a miniature landscape, which soon turns out to reference a model of a battlefield, with stroboscopic lighting effects suggesting bombing. A deep-voiced Chinese-speaking person chronicles the fall of Malaya under the Japanese in World War II, and pronounces the name under which the Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita is known—'The Tiger of Malaya.' (The second ranking officer, Takuma Nishimura, was known as 'the other Tiger of Malaya.') The weretigers relate this to the fact that, 'the Japanese shed the prison of their human form, becoming tigers' (Ho).

At this point, a vertical compartment dimly lights up. A solider can be discerned amidst a thick forest. He speaks Japanese in distress, and recounts horrendous events of killing and how vulnerable he has felt. A ghastly presence of a shrouded human body emerges into the light in a compartment on the lower part of the stage. As if alluding to the events of World War II too terrible to relate, one of the weretigers announces, 'In man live two animals that never coincide. The first is an internal machine of respiration, assimilation, excretion. The other is a being of relation to the external world. In man, these two animals live together, but they do not coincide. Unless you are a weretiger, and your skin is made of cloth' (Ho). This is followed by a detailed account in Chinese and Japanese of how one transforms into a tiger and returns as human. The appalling feeling induced by the unidentifiable, shrouded body gives way to the suggestion that the body in the cloth has yet to transform. This triggers in the spectators a strange, tantalising feeling, related to their own bodies (Fig. 15.2).

Fig. 15.2 Japanese soldier depicted in *Ten Thousand Tigers*. Ho Tzu Nyen. Photo: Ken Cheong

Moments later, the centrepiece of the stage edifice comes partially to light, and indeed through light—it is a massive shadow puppet theatre screen presenting a composition of intricate, monochrome cut-out figures. A selective light source creates shadow plays out of the chosen elements, so that the audience can discern the contours of trees, a human figure, and a tiger individually. Now something rather curious happens. The weretigers have burst into crying at the end of the shadow play as if undergoing transformation. At one point, however, they stop wailing but the wail continues as a recording—the voice is separated from the body. After the weretigers resume the mode of chanting speech, they offer a meta-commentary, 'The death cry of a tiger detaches itself from flesh, and falls outside the world of man, like a vow unredeemed. Perambulating the surfaces of the ocean and the earth. Lingering, awaiting, the taste of fresh blood' (Ho).

This is an astute enactment of what could be dubbed 'a technological capture of infinities.' One has to unfix technology from the rational framework of thinking, as I have already hinted at; in this case, the recorder captures the weretiger's cry, but not just the weretiger's cry. Similarly, the camera captures the face of the weretiger, but not just the image. The reading of this enactment as a capture of the infinities is based on the view that the object of the technological capture and the technology are part of the univocity, part of the order of immanence. Hence, the divide between the object of technology and technology itself is blurred.

Here, the enactment of 'technological capture of infinities' does not refer to the wailing of the weretiger as sound transmitted by radio, which would invoke an image like the RCA trademark in which the dog Nipper answers faithfully to a gramophone replaying his master's voice. This would be a mechanical capture, or one-to-one transference of the sound of the cry. What the scene hints at is a second-order nature: it is what informs the cry of the weretiger that is made visible through a technological intervention and that underlies technology itself, however poetic and speculative this intervention is. In other words, it enacts the affectivity that is in excess of the weretiger (hence articulated as the cry), and that, 'registered by' the radio and presented to an audience, is equally in excess of a person's consciousness and sense perception, and rather signals a pre-personal, pre-conscious space. This space is similarly indefinable and untraceable as that which informs the cry: hence the loop is completed.

The Japanese, Communists, Violence, and History

The transformation between man and tiger is nontrivial in that it does not stay in the realm of mythology or folk belief; rather, it has to account for concrete consequences in the realm of history and politics. As the transformation between man and tiger dismantles the border of nature and culture, is there a way to read the history of man and nature together?

On stage, the narration goes into 'The Red plague,' the communist guerrilla resistance against the Japanese during World War II, and the Japanese soldier repeatedly shouts, 'Kill all. Burn all. Destroy all.' Following that, he frantically recites variations of the verse, 'When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha!,' and finally, 'Only thus will ye attain deliverance. Only thus will ye escape the trammels of material things and become free' (Ho), as the shrouded bodies can be spotted moving.

The variations of the 'Kill the Buddha' reference the famous Zen Buddhism koan which is said to help a person rid themselves of rational thinking to directly attain enlightenment. In this context, the killing of the Buddha may be interpreted as a vehicle to transcend the mind's fixation on the material world. The rhetoric of 'killing' anything that hinders the way to enlightenment and the context of World War II in Southeast Asia make an uneasy juxtaposition. It is all the more uneasy if one recalls that Colonel Ishiwara Kanji's rationale for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria to use it as social laboratory before World War II was also based on Buddhist principles. However, the piece makes no overt judgement.

While the audience is left in this moral ambiguity, the narration goes on to relate the mysterious stories of Lai Teck, the man of 'every name in history,' who is said to have been a double agent for the French, close to the British, risen to become Malayan Communist Party leader, and turned into a triple agent by the Japanese during World War II, only to be denounced after the war for causing the arrest and execution of at least 105 of his colleagues. A few scenes later, we will see a man's head drifting in spotlight aloft in one of the compartments, and we will recognise this head as that of Lai Teck. He voices his deep hopelessness in a soliloquy: 'We have always marvelled at the existence of demons and spirits: but we no longer marvel at man. What causes a man to move and to speak? What makes me believe in the root of my beliefs?' (Ho). These earnest questions present the moral ambivalence between a location-based and situated history and a meta-historical narrative that penetrates the course of history and the constitution of humanity.

Lai Teck confesses: 'As for me, I have always attributed my lack of success in this life to the influence of my previous life. The six paths of transmigration are inscrutable indeed, and I have no right to complain' (Ho). Is his attempt to attribute his brutal decisions to the influence of a previous life a convenient yet insufficient interpretation of Buddhism or a similar school of thought? Again, the theatre piece makes no immediate judgement.

These two moments are poignant reminders of a history that in some ways continues to shape present-day Asian politics. Post-war Southeast Asian countries took Japan's model in hopes of a similar economic boom, and Japan still has its firm economic and political ties to Southeast Asia. The post-war Communist struggle in Southeast Asia was to be situated in a global Cold War context and has left haunting marks in many Southeast Asian countries. The Japanese generals and Lai Teck are singular figures and at the same time part of serial figures and events, which all share the tiger-man transformation arc. It would be superficial if one treated the tiger as an allegory for human moralism—or the absence of which, as seen so often in the tactic of introducing spectral figures in literature. This makes it all too easy to condemn the nightmare of humanities. Instead, Ho offers a meta-historical commentary that goes beyond immediate judgement of good and evil and makes possible the comparison between distinctive historical periods, figures, and events. The review in *The Straits Times* makes explicit the association with Singapore being dubbed as one of the four 'Asian Tigers' in economic growth (along with Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan), which may suggest yet another episode of the tiger figuration in the age of a global economy.

Divine Machine Against Modernity, and Intermediating Immanence

Referring to the expedition party led by the Irish civil architect George Dromgold Coleman in 1835 into the Malayan jungle, in hopes of charting a new road, one weretiger narrates, 'A tiger erupted into their midst. And attacked. Not the men but only the theodolite. The instrument of measurement. Of mapping. Of order' (Ho).

The shadow puppet tableau at the centre of the stage is revealed again, and what appeared earlier as colourless cut-out figures come to life through projection—piece by piece, the video projection maps onto the men, the tiger, and finally, the theodolite and gives colour to each cut-out piece. What is revealed is the complete composition of *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore*, a dramatic wood engraving after Heinrich Leutemann from 1885.

The weretiger further relates: 'Modernity is the disappearance of tigers and myths as a constant state. But the tigers never truly vanish. They linger on in the world as spectral reproductions' (Ho). As stated earlier with regard to cyborgs, this is no romantic sentiment advocating for returning to a pure state of nature. For if it compels us to think of that force in its variant articulations beyond our understanding, or a Deleuzian desire that subsumes history, then the only way for such force to exist is to transgress continuously and take on new material agents. Hence the tiger perambulates in the world and assumes other incarnations, from a primordial half-mystical unruly creature, to the violent Japanese war machine.

All ten mounted television screens are now switched on, resulting in a visual symphony that shows tiger imagery in its natural habitat, while an ode to tiger is delivered collectively, in Malay, Chinese, and Japanese:

> A tiger is inhabited solely by singular moments, each one sinking into the night, passing into another moment, another world, another history … Undying, the tiger simply expires, transpires, shifts its animus to other bodies. Each animal is an extension of another. Each animal an undying swarm, unfolding, enfolding in a limitless continuum, returning anew to the world in another figuration, a different conduit, a new medium, each time, a divine machine. (Ho)

On the note of 'divine machine,' all of the media machines come back to life—the magnetic tape deck, the radio sets, and the gramophone, each channelling sounds of the tiger. They awake with all the different

temporalities they embody, the politics of gaze they are embedded in, the coloniality and decoloniality they represent, and they also bear non-traceable remainders of the dynamism of matter they are part of. This is again a nontrivial moment, for it activates the 'dynamism of matter itself' without falling into the trap of literal enactments of technological objects. Mesmerising as the collective enunciation is, its implication is utterly complex: how is a tiger a divine machine?

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the figuration of tiger becomes a medium of transformation, a channelling of the 'dynamism of matter.' It posits a fundamental challenge to our generic perception of time and space. Henri Bergson sees time not as clock-time that pertains to order and eternity and that stands, as it were, outside of time and conditions of our being and perception. Bergson writes, 'The intellect is not made to think evolution, in the proper sense of the word—that is to say, the continuity of a change that is pure mobility' (Bergson 1998, 163). This pure mobility, or duration, refocuses our bodily being and bodily perception as that which informs our mental registration of time. This way of highlighting the body in relation to the mind also indicates that there are other images, pertaining to the infinite variations of beings that are not captured and henceforth perceived. They make up the 'virtual,' which allows for emergence and creation. As such, 'it does not prefigure or predetermine the actualities that emerge from it. Rather, it is the impelling force, or the principle, that allows each actual entity to appear (to manifest itself) as something new, something without precedence or resemblance, something that has never existed in the universe in quite that way before' (Shaviro 2009, 15–16). A practice of heightened attention is due, if only to 'dissociate the permanence of my body, "here," from a world in which things happen, "there"' (Stengers 2011, 65), or in other words, to probe the construct of the self vis-à-vis the happenings in general.

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the continuous being can be seen to assume variations of forms, depending on its passing into variations of images. There are no traceable threads that help us to draw the contours of what traverses the images, indeed we cannot assume that the Japanese general is one 'image' and the Communist leader follows from him. No one passing remains thoroughly one, so we can, at best, recognise the commonality between figures, events, and objects. In the affective realm, certain heritage characters are discernible, however speculative they are. These are exactly the liminal moments that the theatre piece aims to highlight and zoom in on: the affective lineage between the water, the roar, and

even the evils in history. It depicts a world in the image of a smooth, transforming, continuous surface; figures and events emerge out of this surface and become temporarily legible. *Ten Thousand Tigers* hence enacts mutual affect and gives an intermedial form to this practice of heightened attention; one that gives us affective as well as intellectual tools to reconcile history, morality and being in general that remains open to the outside.

The Epilogue

Every water tank on stage is revealed, bubbling, vibrating, spurting: a tide of sensations. The performers sing an ode to the Malayan Archipelagos. Water represents the univocity of being. The human desire to manage water, however, gives rise to cultivation, and in turn leads to urban settlement, to modernity, and to wars. The weretigers, the Chinese-speaking person, and the Japanese soldier join forces in chanting to a humming background music, 'Kings and murderers. Gods and monsters. The coming of one evil spirit after another. The return of same spirit in different form' (Ho).

All the backlights slowly go on to put the entirety of the intricate stage edifice on display. Each integral part, including the vitrines, water tanks, objects, media technology, humans and their mannequin counterparts, models, and scenography can be appreciated as part of one coordinated theatre machine. The piece ends with a grandiose history of the cosmos, uttered by the weretigers:

> 3.8 billion years ago, life began in the waters. The source. The origin.
>
> 2 million years ago, the first tigers dispersed across a single land mass, the Sunda Shelf.
>
> And the seas rose. And the land sundered.
>
> Malaya. Sumatra. Java. Bali. Borneo.
>
> 100,000 years ago, the first men arrived. (Ho)

A tour de force narrative of tiger and man in Southeast Asia thus comes to an end. The conceit of Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers* is the transformation between man and tiger. Yet it does not replace the qualitative differences between the human, tiger, and machine, nor does it argue for a connectivity or continuum between them that can be reduced to the image of some kind of flow of elements that binds and conjoins. The operative force is already at play in things and phenomena, manifested as it does as affectivity in human, in animal, and in technology alike. In

establishing a theatre edifice and conflating the unfolding of the narrative into the co-operation of the objects, machines, and narrators, *Ten Thousand Tigers* achieves a truly intermedial form. Not only does it highlight the interplay of technological objects and performance resulting in new sensibilities of theatre watching, but it also renders into experience a radically anti-binary philosophy of immanence or univocity, so that everything intermediates without bifurcating into actors and objects, human and animal, the organic and inorganic.

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