

Sci-Fi New Queer Cinema

films by Shu Lea Cheang

1994 - 2023

Shu Lea Cheang is an artist and filmmaker. Her genre bending gender hacking practices challenge the existing operating mechanisms and the society's structural boundaries. Her work builds social interface with transgressive plots and open network that permits public participation; constructs networked installation and multi-player performance in participatory impromptu mode; drafts sci-fi narratives in film scenario and artwork imagination.

She made four feature-length films - FRESH KILL (1994), I.K.U. (2000) and FLUIDØ (2017) and UKI (2023), respectively termed Eco-Cybernoia, Scifi Cyberpunk, Scifi Cypherpunk and Scifi Viral Alt-Reality Cinema. In retrospect, these three decades of films seek to define a genre of Sci-Fi New Queer Cinema.

Celebrated as a net art pioneer with BRANDON (1998 - 99), the first web art commissioned and collected by Guggenheim Museum, New York, Cheang represented Taiwan with mixed media installation, 3x3x6, at Venice Biennale 2019. She is currently showing two art works - RED PILL (2023) at Hope, Techno-Humanities (Museion, Italy) and UTTER (2023) at Attention After Technology (Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway).

<http://mauvaiscontact.info>

FRESH KILL (1994, 80:00, color, 35mm)
2024 release - restored 35mm film print and 4K DCP
Initiated by the Fales Library & Special Collections of New
York University with a grant from National Film Preservation
Foundation.

Selected showings:

Berlinale, Berlin Film Festival, Berlin, 1994.

Whitney Biennale, New York, 1995.

International Film Festival Rotterdam, Rotterdam, 2024.

Synopsis:

Coined as an eco cybernoia film, an avant-anarcho ecosatire, FRESH KILL envisions a post-apocalyptic landscape strewn with electronic detritus and suffering the toxic repercussions of mass marketing in a high-tech commodity culture. "Kill" is Dutch for stream, Fresh Kill tells the story of two young lesbian parents caught up in a global exchange of industrial waste via contaminated sushi. The place is New York and the time is now. Raw fish lips are the rage on trendy menus across Manhattan. A ghost barge, bearing nuclear refuse, circles the planet in search of a willing port. Household pets start to glow ominously and then disappear altogether. The sky opens up and snows soap flakes. People start speaking in dangerous tongues. A riveting and densely packed film, Fresh Kill evokes the furious rhythms of channel surfing with its rapid-fire editing style.



I.K.U. (2000, 90:00, color, HD)

Selected showings:

Sundance Film Festival, Utah, 2000.

Theatrical release at MK2 Beaubourg, Paris, 2001-2002.

Synopsis:

Envisioned as a sequel to *Blade Runner*, I.K.U. tells the story of an internet porn enterprise that dispatches IKU (orgasm in Japanese) coders to collect orgasm data for producing massively profitable I.K.U. chips for mobile phone plug in and introduces orgasm on-the-go. "I.K.U. is a phenomenon.... it crosses all categories -- geographic, physical, conceptual - with a demented flourish. As much trans-genre as it is trans-gender, I.K.U. also wants to merge video and film into a fresh digital universe large-scale enough to overwhelm the viewer." - writes B.Ruby Rich in her article "The I.K.U. Experience, The Shu Lea Cheang Phenomenon", collected in her "New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut" Duke press, 2013.



FLUIDØ (2017, 80:00, color, HD)

<http://fluidthemovie.com>

Selected showings:

Berlinale, Berlin Film Festival, Berlin, 2017.

Documenta 14, Kassel, 2017.

Synopsis:

Set in 2060, after the Government declares the eradication of AIDS, mutated AIDS viruses result in the ZERO GEN - genetically evolved gender fluid humans whose ejaculate is an intoxicating hyper-narcotic for the 21st century. A new war on drugs begins, the ZERO GEN are declared illegal. The bio-drug carriers are caught between underground drug lords, glitched super agents, a scheming corporation, and a corrupt government in this conspiracy-filled hyper viral film plot.

"When Shu Lea Cheang's Fluidø first came out in 2017 it was meant to be a queer cypherpunk science-fiction film. Now, in the era of global confinement, digital sexuality, and sanitary surveillance, it has become the archeology of our present," writes Paul B. Preciado for Billy Wilder Cinema (LA) screening in 2021.



UKI (2023, 80:00, color, 4K)
<http://u-k-i.co>

Selected showings:

FILMFEST MÜNCHEN, Munich, 2023.
LAS ART FOUNDATION, Berlin, 2023.
Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2023.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2023.
ICA, London, 2023.

Coined as a SciFi Viral Alt-Reality Cinema, UKI's storyline unfolds as we follow a defunct replicant REIKO dumped on Etrashville - a vast dump for electronic trash - who tries to revive themselves with the help of Etrashville's transgenic inhabitants. Parallel to REIKO's trajectory is that of an infected city and a conspiring biotech corporation GENOM Co. As the plot thickens, REIKO's body is coded and decoded to re-emerge as UKI the Virus. Setting back GENOM's bio-engineering scheme, UKI the Virus swarm through the infected city to liberate the occupied bodies. Through virus becoming, viral love, we claim our viral bodies. "“This extraordinarily visually intense film moves from 3D graphics to game engine generated cinematic *mise en scène* to visual effects enhanced live action scenes in an extraordinary *tour de force* of contemporary digital collage.” – Matthew Fuller, Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London.

