



Towards *Obliterature*: Writing a Female Text of Hong Kong

PREMIS Seminar

26 April 2023, 16:00-18:00

Arken, Helikon (A202)

Karen Cheung is a writer from Hong Kong. She is the author of [*The Impossible City: A Hong Kong Memoir*](#) (Random House), which was longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, and named one of the best books of the year by the *Washington Post* and *The Economist*.

The writer and critic Kate Zambreno proposes a term for informal writing that has fallen through the cracks of not only the ‘canon’ in literature but also the archive of published works—writing by women and circulated amongst women. She calls it *obliterature*: texts that are “experiments in the epistolary, the fragmented, this casual, cultural criticism, some of it in the comments. It is all ephemeral, not wanting to be formalized. I am beginning to think of this note-taking as the project itself.” During the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, the best writing I read about the movement were not the pieces published in *The New York Times* or the commentaries in local newspapers or the rousing calls to action by activists. They were the ephemeral Instagram stories and Facebook statuses by my friends, posted day after day as we accumulated bruises from falling over on the streets and the tear gas clogged our lungs. These were not structured pieces of writing with a beginning, middle, and end; our emotions are unprocessed, immediate, too *raw*, an editor would say, to be considered for official publication. I propose that these fragments of personal writing, rarely archived or published, contribute towards a body of *obliterature* that stands alongside the formal archive in the form of factual news articles, academic papers, summaries of historical events, and other books on Hong Kong.

My own book, *The Impossible City*, arose out of not just the writing I was doing for media outlets at the time of the protests, but also a series of tynyletters and personal writing, sent at the time only to a small circle of subscribers and take on the tone of 少女心事, roughly translated as ‘the yearnings and struggles of teenage girls’—writing that would be classified under *obliterature* had they not been lifted and reinserted for the book. Drawing on my own experience as a news reporter navigating the confines of the clinical, ‘objective’ medium of journalistic writing, I contend that 少女心事 writing are its own category of ‘female texts’ that exist in the margins of literature and history.

What is PREMIS? It stands for Post-graduate Research in English: Multimodal and Interdisciplinary Studies, and refers to a literary and cultural seminar which promotes post-graduate research. While the emphasis is on new developments in literature, the seminar also keenly appreciates multi-modal, interdisciplinary or multi-cultural input.

WELCOME - the seminar is open to all!