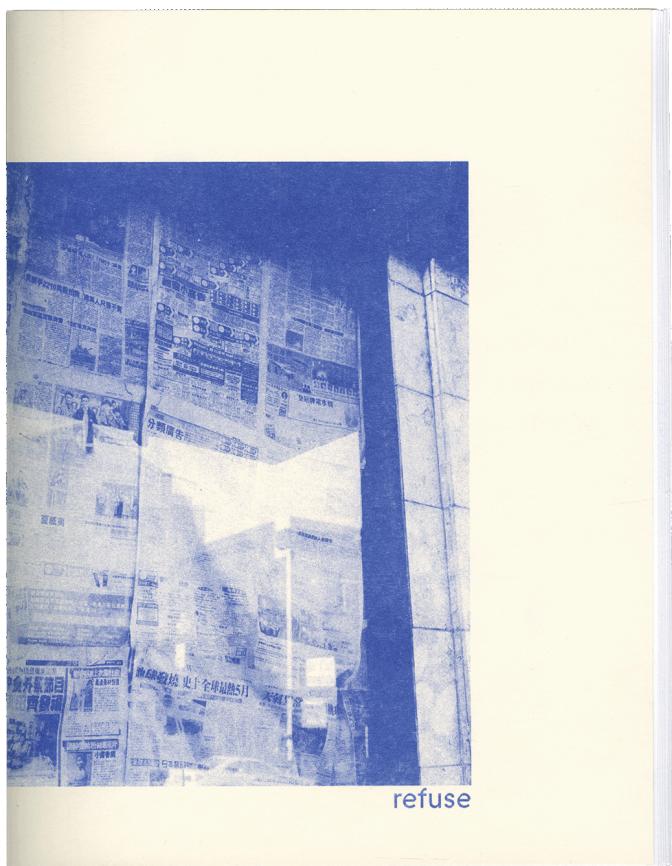


## Refuse

### Prompt 3: Discourse



↑ Refuse, cover

The eagerness, and excitement of going back to school seemed to fade away; the good old friend of anxiety has returned when I'm facing unfinished projects and seeking the perfect way to frame my work. Here comes to prompt 3: Dialogue—do a project based on a piece of academic writing.

#### What's the Use?

I chose the very first reading we did for the Dialogue class, the first chapter of *What's the Use*, by Sara Ahmed. Picked it up on the philosophy bookshelf, I was drawn to Ahmed's queer feminist critique of the concept of use ("the uses of use" as Ahmed states in the book). After finishing the whole book, I realized I couldn't simply apply Ahmed's wording (especially Ahmed's "queer use" theory) to my work, knowing my privileges and biases. However, learning from Ahmed's precise analysis of "use" and phenomenological approach to discuss "refuse" as a form of use, I

tried to connect her writing to my own experience as a Chinese diaspora artist.

I started my journey to realize my identity when I first entered the adventure thousands of miles away from where I was born. It was an awakening moment to first learn the term "identity". Since then, questioning my own identity has become a daily practice and a recurring theme in my works. From introducing myself as a Chinese student who studies abroad, to studying the traumatic history of the Cantonese diaspora in California, I refuse to address myself that I'm from China, but to give context about my cultural background. Echoing back to Ahmed's idea about the use and refuse: my identity is present because I'm using it; and I refuse to use the identity given by the Chinese government, the same government that suppresses many Chinese indigenous cultures including Cantonese culture. Simultaneously, I'm rejecting the idea of post-colonialism that is happening in today's Chinese society.

"When we recover a potential from materials when we refuse to use things properly, we are often understood not only as causing damage but as intending what we cause."

With this idea in mind, I started to look for images that convey the iconography of refuse. I captured a chair used as a display shelf for a deli; an excavator on a normal road where it shouldn't be running; and a utility pole with a provocative art piece that is furiously shouting out the country that has been violently built on the land of the indigenous people. These images are sequenced and accompanied by my writing to provide a constructed landscape of refuse.

→ A chair in San Francisco Chinatown  
→ An art piece on a utility pole in Toronto



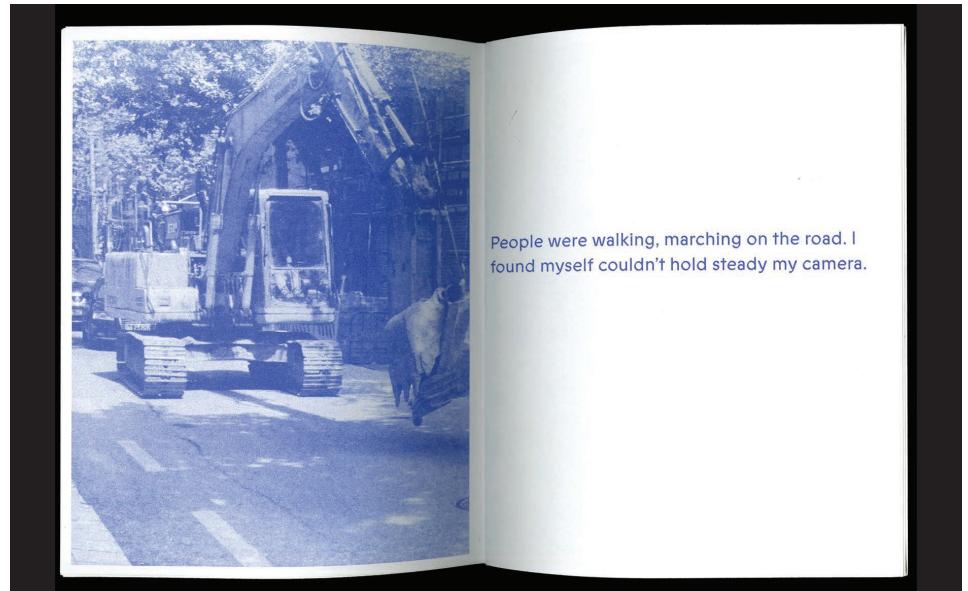
### The Book

Of course, once again I chose a book as my primary medium to convey the subject matter. Given the time limitation (we needed to showcase the outcome within a month), I decided to print the pages using the risograph machine which is able to effectively print pages at a low cost. For binding, I looked for a method that is fast and easy. Hence rubber bands are used to hold all the pages together. Combining the two approaches, I was able to finish 20 copies within one night.

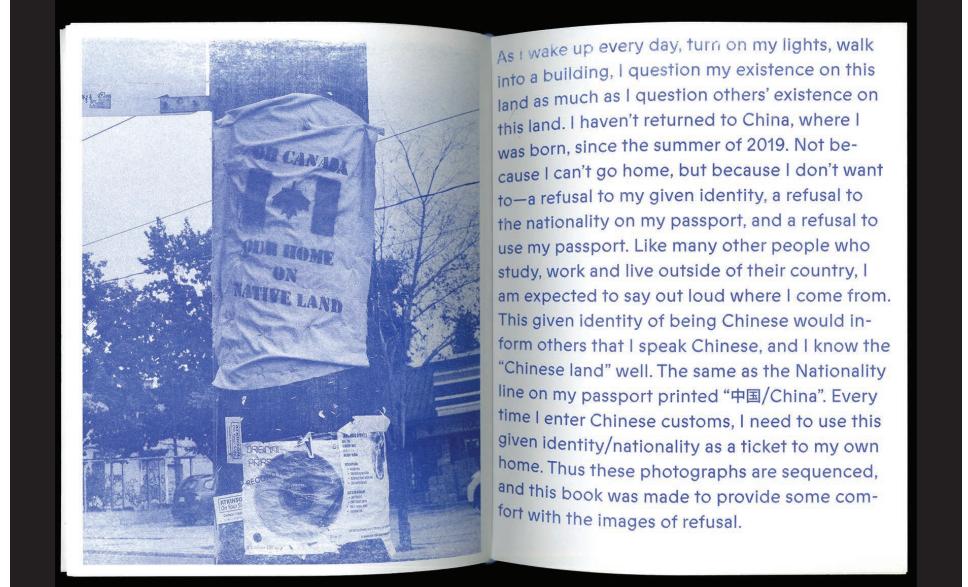
The quick and accessible production process is also a significant aspect of my self-publishing practice. Today, we receive, access, read and interpret images in a high-fidelity setting. We view images on “retina display” on iPhone; we can enjoy a 4K movie on a Blu-ray DVD; we appreciate the print quality of a photo book published by Steidl. However, the pursuit of these high-resolution viewing experiences has become more and more difficult to access because they require an expensive device to play the media. On the contrary, a trend of low-fidelity media is still roaring—it is self-publishing. Self-publishing can be a letter-size paper with laser-printed images folded into an 8-page size; it can also be a doodle drawn on a piece of paper which is later photocopied into multiple prints. What I am doing here is also low fidelity: I converted all the sophisticated color images into

monochrome with risograph. The finished book is full of grainy and unclear images. They are confronting the high-fidelity world and confronting the viewing angle of any high-quality images. The poor image is free from high-end players, free from centralized social media platforms, and free from its original, as Hito Steyerl reminded us more than a decade ago “The poor image .. . it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities.”

→ Refuse, interior



People were walking, marching on the road. I found myself couldn't hold steady my camera.



As I wake up every day, turn on my lights, walk into a building, I question my existence on this land as much as I question others' existence on this land. I haven't returned to China, where I was born, since the summer of 2019. Not because I can't go home, but because I don't want to—a refusal to my given identity, a refusal to the nationality on my passport, and a refusal to use my passport. Like many other people who study, work and live outside of their country, I am expected to say out loud where I come from. This given identity of being Chinese would inform others that I speak Chinese, and I know the "Chinese land" well. The same as the Nationality line on my passport printed "中国/China". Every time I enter Chinese customs, I need to use this given identity/nationality as a ticket to my own home. Thus these photographs are sequenced, and this book was made to provide some comfort with the images of refusal.