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And Now China? A Survey

A year ago, the editors of this issue attended a roundtable discussion entitled *Europe: Land of the Setting Sun?* held at the then newly opened Louis T. Blouin Institute in London. Scholars and curators of contemporary Chinese art at TATE Liverpool and Battersea Power Station “discussed the extent of artistic interaction between Chinese and European artists, the role of the Chinese diaspora, the new geography of art and the question of a shift in cultural power eastwards in the wake of this art’s much publicised market boom coinciding with an increase in institutional attention.” A comment/question arose from the floor locating the global currency of contemporary Chinese art within a New World Order premised upon an era of global capitalism.

With China looming as a world leader with tremendous influence over international financial markets, contemporary Chinese art, now a commodity fetish, is being made instrumental to a new hegemonic order being built by global network capital based on power that is structured by cultural capital and access to information produced by the new information technologies.

In light of China-as-hegemonic force, it has become crucial to uphold the idea of the production of culture as site of struggle over power and meaning: as site of discursive formations and closures by dominant forces and by cultural producers marginalized and excluded precisely because of their project to resist, contest, evade capture and assimilation by such dominant forces. Oppositional-meaning making is now the lot and responsibility and perhaps a fatal space of those who continue to be consigned to the margins.

But while no new epistemic change has occurred, independent voices are much more difficult to sustain with China on everyone’s horizon. With Chinese artists arrogating the language of resistance coined during the advent of post-colonialism, exclusion is now effected by a double-silencing. Rejecting assimilation or eluding capture means devising a whole new language of resistance. How is this language to be shaped? Who will now speak from the margins when margins and centres are already a too-appropriated site?

The editors approached artists, curators, writers, scholars, critics and cultural administrators to respond to these questions which resulted in a survey of current cultural politics with regard to art being made instrumental to a new hegemonic order. Their critical responses are published here in *Ctrl+P*’s March 2008 issue. In addition, Sonya Dyer and Marian Pastor Roces were commissioned to write essays. Ken Lum’s *Homage to Chen Zhen*, a work originally published in the hybrid journal *point d’ironie*, is reproduced here albeit laid out differently for the purpose of *Ctrl+P*. Lee Wen’s performance *More China than You* is featured. And Erika Tan, guest editor, writes an overview of the contributions.

All these have been made possible by a partnership with the Chelsea Programme, Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London which is undertaking a series of programs in response to the UK based *China Now* initiative. One of these projects is the mounting of the exhibition *Three Degrees of Separation* at Chelsea Future Space. A printed version of *Ctrl+P* No.11 is being distributed together with the exhibition catalogue.

This year, China hosts the Olympics. The event, as with any other major international event will be watched, scrutinized, celebrated and monitored for a multiplicity of factors, codes and significances. Less than a few months away, already we wait with baited breath for the spectacle of the decade. The pivotal/defining moment when China gets to parade its ‘arrival’ onto the world stage, this Olympics will signal to the world that it is no longer just a spectator or a nominal participant/contestant, but a true contender in shaping the future for all of us.

Dialogical Skirmishes Erika Tan

More immediately, the American financial market has just taken its largest crash in recent years, whilst 'at home' here in the UK, *China Now* 'the largest festival of Chinese culture in Britain' is about to commence, programmed to coincide with Chinese New Year and end with the opening of the Beijing Olympics. Events of such epic proportions inevitably dominate the headlines, eclipsing previous pivotal moments or less visible performances of power, domination, and economic prowess. Money and Culture however, have always gone hand in hand; so perhaps in some respect this issue of *Ctrl+P* is not breaking new ground or trespassing on the specifics of some Chinese phenomena not previously witnessed in other areas of the world. For me, this edition is a foray not into enemy lines, but into that of allied territories: territories of language, subjectivity, creative production and the ongoing negotiations of place, autonomy, power and recognition.

Two anecdotal events foreground my interest and involvement within this issue. Firstly, it was the opportunity to have spent an intensive week with Judy Freya Sibayan in London last year, made possible by a *Visiting Arts* grant. Aside from her solid body of work, I would argue that it was equally her status as a Philippine subject that clinched the deal. *Visiting Arts* was set up to promote the programming of artistic practice from around the world in Britain. And in the case of this fund to sponsor an artist to visit and network from regions less typically on Britain's cultural radar, Southeast Asia has always been one of these lesser represented regions. At one time, *Visiting Arts* played a major role in shaping the inclusion of 'world arts' in the UK art scene. This role of public money still maintains an important place, however with the rise in corporate sponsorship of the arts, it is now business partnerships and collaborations that dominate art programming. The economic paradigm generates a repeated desire for epic blockbusters that supersede and demolish all other forms of cultural engagement. Practicing within the shadows of such monolithic desires for grand gestures, how does one remain 'unincorporated,' avoid complete annihilation, or attempt to 'play with the big boys?'

This is at the heart of Sonya Dyer's essay which traces the connections in Britain between big business, government, educational institutions and the arts. With a growing business imperative behind cultural initiatives such as *China Now*, she asks what are the attendant possibilities of those who participate to attempt to work autonomously or those who critique such structures. What are these cultural programmes about? What are their agendas? Who do they serve and how do we negotiate them? Will they have long term impact? Will they provide opportunities for artists—or simply render them instrumental to larger social-political agendas or produce mere cultural tropes rehearsed one too many times before? In this position of dependency, can one 'bite the hand that feeds you?'

The second experience is about collective visibility and the power of artists. In a recent exhibition in Germany of contemporary Asian art, the catalogue inclusion of an artist originally ascribed a Tibetan origin, was changed assignment on the night of the private view. A sticker printed with the word 'China' was hurriedly placed on top of the original text. Hearsay has it that the curators of the show had succumbed to the collective demand of the Chinese artists present and one Chinese journalist, whose threat was not that they would withdraw from the show, but that they would not have any future dealings with the curators of future shows. For the curators whose careers depended on their ability to curate 'Asian' art, this potential casting out proved too much to risk. No dialogue between the curators and the 'Tibetan' artist was undertaken; they did not even inform him of the issues or events leading up to this debacle. Whilst in any other circumstance I would have been thrilled to witness the collective power of artists, in this instance I felt no such elation, only consternation for the nationalistic alignments being orchestrated.

Whilst the intentions of our question for this issue originate in events in Britain, contributors were invited in an attempt to tap into intra-Asian concerns. The focus

was not just about an axis between Europe or America and China or as Lee Weng Choy puts it, about a “tired West and an emergent Asia,” but how new cartographies of power and influence are impacting globally. The effect of a growing/rising Chinese art market can be seen not only in places like New York and London but also in Asia as for example in Bangkok and Singapore where Chinese art is increasingly sold by galleries and collected by public institutions. And what about the effects on over-seas Chinese artists—the Diaspora? What place do they have? Are there possibilities for maintaining distance and difference or is it about a re-aligning of associations and engagements? Lee Wen’s recent performance in *Vital 07*, a Chinese live-art festival in Manchester engages with these issues head on. *More China Than You* hits at the very heart of the challenges and compromises taken by those outside China, especially the Chinese Diaspora where an awkward positioning, marginalization, and new anxiety for allegiance are heightened in the face of the world’s mass consumption of China. In Ken Lum’s *Homage to Chen Zhen* the diasporic subject, untethered from ‘home’ enters a reflexive space where he or she necessarily considers the possibility of having agency amidst hegemonic structures that produce discourses that co-opt, limit and define precisely one’s subjectivity. In Thomas J. Berghuis’ response, a description of the sycophantic nature of the world’s desire to embrace China is made which belies an underbelly of profound dis-ease with China’s new found wealth and power. Although as he points out, from history we may have something to learn and yet the precedents of Sino-British/European relations seem forgotten in our own hurry to establish our terms of and access to trade with China.

From another perspective Ken Lum alerts us to the riskiness of language and of asking such questions: this anxious mis-reading feeds into the possible resurrection of latent xenophobias and the further development of binary and exclusive positionings. The problematics of inequality is raised in the conversation between Neferti X. Tadiar and Jonathan Beller. They argue that even if cultural practices are rapidly being subsumed by capital, this does not produce a unified, homogenised and equal playing field of culture, but produces and reproduces disparities. Further, Andrew Maerkele observes that behind the hype and grand gestures, the unequal and still limited distribution of Chinese art is accompanied by limited expenditure on Chinese art, which remains a fraction of the European and American art business as a whole.

Whilst the status of China’s current art production in the global art world/market certainly does carry weight, how exactly is this weight measured—in quantity and sales prices or in its spheres of influence?; and what place within China’s own developing and localized art arenas? Ken Lum traces the fledgling developments within China back to 1989 and an emergence of a ‘first generation’ of artists. The Chinese government’s perception of contemporary art has changed from initial wariness, to one of tolerance and growing recognition of its economic potential. Berghuis further suggests that the capitalization on such cultural events are now equally about projecting an image to the outside world as they are about fuelling the patriotism and national pride amongst the Chinese populace and the overseas Chinese. However, these audiences or markets do not necessarily follow the same tastes. This dualism is seen historically in the creation of Chinese goods for different markets. Export art made for consumption by 17th century Europeans excited by *chinoiserie* for example, is now echoed in the consumption (both locally in China and globally) of internationally recognized contemporary Chinese cultural endeavors. The rise of a particular type of Chinese art might just be, suggests Oscar Ho Hing-kay, China’s response to meeting the needs of a new form of Orientalism in the West.

This points to another aspect of Chinese contemporary art, that is, its history as a product of Western discourse. Katy Deepwell reminds us of the hegemony of the art world where discrepant, fragmented, contradictory and often personal subjective bias in the telling and re-telling of contemporary Chinese art history create “trading impressions” depending on who the narrator is of these events and their already located

positions. Are we seeing Chinese contemporary art as a trajectory within China's own history or as China's entry into and engagement with an international context of grand shows and biennale presences? Certainly from Caroline Turner's response, it is clear that new ground has been claimed through the expansion of geographical inclusion in the international art arena. This new geography of art challenges western hegemonic structures and their initial resistance to and claims of what were deemed unworthy standards in China and in much of the Asia Pacific region. These "geopolitical tectonic shifts" have removed barriers, allowing for the development of new frameworks and paradigms. Turner welcomes this more open and inclusive international art world with multiple centres where the resilience of independent voices still find ways of existing and connecting. This limit or field of interest of the art world is explored by Marian Pastor Roces through *The Long March* project which curator Lu Jie has been engaged in for several years. Here, distances between obscure rural localities and international urban centres are temporarily collapsed, but arguably not diminished. Pastor Roces asks if it is perhaps the scale, duration and quotidian nature of the project that locate this work in concrete socio-political engagements, despite and perhaps because of it simultaneously entering and being appropriated by and within art world arenas. Lu's *Long March* operates as a profound but humble understanding of how indeed art can only exist within the system that produces art. However, as mimesis of the epic sustained only by an "authentic jouissance for and from the Real" Lu's *Long March* is a process of redemption in search of an 'outside,'—a utopia.

The question of hegemony—what and whose, and the role, place, possibility of resistance and usefulness of a centre/periphery approach is central to this survey. Deepwell and others problematise the concept of hegemony and remind us of the existence of its multiple forms: art world hegemonies, China's own cultural hegemony and the hegemony of current world super-powers, which China may or may not supersede. The location of margins and marginality is relative to this.

In approaching the issue of how we deal with resistance, Tadiar and Beller suggest we may need new ways of looking. The legibility of the signs of resistance may be excessively dependent and conditioned by the already too familiar and expected images of resistance. Behind the post-communist imagery now consumed and celebrated, emergent subjectivities may be obscured. For Andrew Maerke, it comes down to the individual and their choice of positioning and non-participation in the bi-polar relations of subjugator and subjugated needed for hegemony to exist. In addition, he cites a problem with the interpretive tools we use which restrict our ability to render visible and accountable the world-as-experienced. It is in the very nature of invisibility where Eliza Tan's focus lies. "Spheres of invisibility"—sites of cultural production which have escaped the general gaze of larger cultural lenses or fallen through the infrastructural gaps—allow for a practice which is less dependent on such forces for its legitimacy and engagement in agendas other than that of the art market. Tan explores curatorial models for financially self-sustaining projects where cultural producers determine and shape projects for and by themselves. This level of independence allows new forms of visibility, structural relations and cultural models to develop. For Hans Ulrich Obrist, resistance is about the avoidance of too-easily packaged entities, the need for long term engagements and the production, upholding and maintenance of difference within the framework of curatorial projects. He looks to Édouard Glissant's ideas where the model of the archipelago, as opposed to the continent, provides new spaces and approaches to curating. Rather than endorsing or stabilizing existing boundaries, his projects allow for the sheltering and production of difference and the existence of "autonomous zones."

The tools or 'language' evoked by Saskia Sassen are those of the networked and the digital. Here, subversive interventions can create what she terms "counter-geographies of globalization" which cut new paths of connectivity. This activity of cross-border work bypasses older routes and hierarchies of communication, and it is

here where the agency of art, artists and activists can reside. For Sassen, technology becomes a tool for developing new languages of resistance, and critical practices based on a politics which is at once global but engaged in a “multiple of localities,” and is party to the dynamics of globalization, yet not inscribed by its aims. This focus on the site of technology is reiterated in Kelly Baum’s response where the site or ‘proper place’ of oppositional artistic practice needs to be seen in relation to its goal and its audience. Distribution as opposed to form and content alone is seen as key to political efficacy and the ability to create agents or “engaged, empowered and enfranchised public(s).” It is in the technology of communication, engagement in the public realm, and in the economy of the viral that Baum sees a future for resistance and the articulation of critical engagement.

For Patrick D. Flores there is a need to rethink ‘resistance’ not as a particular action which seeks to deliver an alternative ‘universal,’ but by shifting tense from resistant and resisting to resistive. Here, he inserts the vernacular of *palabas*, which addresses the desire to evade the ‘inevitable’ and fatigue/stasis-inducing paradox of art and resistance as both antagonistic or free from, as well as subsumed within and by political regimes and social necessities. *Palabas* meaning ‘performance’ and an ‘inclination outward’ is for Flores “the performance of the impossible, the unfolding of the not-yet.”

And what of the ‘not yet’—the future? *The End of History* is an image and text work contributed by Cornford and Cross and is seemingly narrated around the structure of a journey into the unknown. However steeped in historical and literary references, the gap between image and text leaves us unbound; the inconclusiveness and opaqueness in the text is only punctured by the bleak homogeneity of the image of thick fog at sea. History, empire, madness and humanity—the text conjures apocalyptic imaginings of the decline of Empire, where immanent catastrophes of a personal and political nature fester. It seems the future has reached an impasse—are we at a beginning or at an end?

This inconclusiveness and state of veiling is reiterated in Ho Hing-kay’s advice to wait it out until the current Chinese art frenzy slows down, the dust settles and the inflated market cools. Only then he suggests, will more clarity be gained and we will start seeing what else has been going on. The fragility of foretelling is also raised by Neil Stewart’s text which forms a psycho-spatial-temporal exploration of his relationship with China and the spaces between east and west, knowing and unknowing, the here and the now, the past and the future. The issue of pre-emption raised by the text points to the instability of knowledge where very little is fixed and where there are always new findings. China’s rapid socio-cultural developments and political events overpower our ability to summarise, predict and at times comprehend what is surging on the horizon. Although precedents might cautiously be evoked, the scale and speed is what is most remarked upon. Whilst this survey is somewhat Trojan in its intent to make a pre-emptive strike against what some might assume to be a fore-closed event[s] (*China Now*), it is the survey format itself and the heterogeneous responses to our query that has produced an issue of dialogical skirmishes.

What is clear however is that there is no unified target; reconnaissance is still coming in; tactics remain on alert but acknowledge their conditional existence. *Ctrl+P* may continue to contribute to this particular debate and dialogue in the Philippines, in the UK and in anywhere else with PDF download ability; but as a practice which seeks to exist globally yet without the ongoing infrastructural support of corporate or public capital, its ability to maintain a space for continued debate, critical response and resistive practices is dependent on, not global finance, but on global contributors and readers. It is with this in mind, that we thank all the contributors for their vital engagement in keeping this issue in sight.

1

Palabras
Patrick D. Flores

The question of resistance speaks to a particularity of action, an ethical and strategic response, a choice or decisiveness that makes the political possible. This particularity, this irreducible locality of agency, however, importunes an equivalence of the universal, not its equality, but its commensuration. To resist is to propose another universality that may extend beyond the current dominant: globalization and capitalism. The political feeling that resistance has failed and has become impossible raises another question: that of its teleology. Is resistance a teleological discourse, something that ordains an end?

A colleague interjects: “Yes, the end of resistance, especially if it is triumphant, is the threshold of a failure; however, if one transcends, or should I say transgresses [confronts] the deferral of action inherent in poststructuralism, this teleology is imperative, because categories like class, gender, or race have their bodies and these bodies will desire an end to capitulation and the inaugural act of emancipation, which as an originary dream is no failure at all.”¹

These two concerns of the particular and the teleological are salient in our exploration of resistance. What complicates this, of course, is the notion of art, and the aesthetic that underwrites it. What renders art political? What makes the aesthetic political and ideologic? And how does the term ‘contemporary’ repoliticizes art and reflects on art postcolonially?

These are contentious themes that brief remarks cannot hope to flesh out. As a provisional foray, I defer to the insight of Misko Suvakovic who claims that the concepts of the aesthetic and the artistic constitute a “critical and material conflict between dominations of theoretical platforms that offer (1) the view on the aesthetic and the artistic as a ‘free territory’ intrinsic to the social necessities, and (2) the view on the aesthetic and the artistic as specific ‘political regimes’ of very social necessities.”² Suvakovic further ventures that a “cynical aesthetician would resolve these positions by an attempt at proving that there is no art without autonomy within the society, for every autonomy of art is a political regime.”³ It would be instructive to find out how a more sanguine aesthetician would approach this dilemma. How could this contrived inevitability that bedevils any labor of resistance be transcended?

Much of the paradox underlying this formulation stems from a certain concept of modernity that denies the authority that enables art to pretend to reflexivity and critique, to be able to choose and decide, in other words, to be political.

We discern in this a strain of Jacques Rancière’s reconsideration of modernity: that modernity as a concept is incoherent and that its ‘true name’ ought to be the “aesthetic regime of the arts.” What modernity does is to veil the “specificity of the regime of the arts and the very meaning of the specificity of regimes of art. It traces, in order either to exalt or deplore it, a simple line of transition or rupture between the old and the new, the representative and the non-representative or the anti-representative.”⁴ Rather than pursuing this trajectory of antinomies, Rancière posits that “the aesthetic regime of the arts invents its revolutions on the basis of the same idea that caused it to invent the museum and art history, the not new forms of reproduction...And it devotes itself to the invention of new forms of life on the basis of an idea of what art *was*, an idea of what art *would have been*.”⁵

This is particularly illuminating if viewed in relation to art that is resistive as it locks horns with the “tradition of the new” and the “newness of the tradition,” with the modes of consecrating objects and the technologies of making new ones, of its residual potency and its emergent selflessness or dispossession. What modernity insists is the retention of the “forms of rupture, the iconoclastic gestures...by separating them from the context that allows for their existence: history, interpretation, patrimony, the museum, the pervasiveness of reproduction...The idea of modernity would like there to be only one meaning and direction in history, whereas the temporality specific to the aesthetic regime of the arts is a co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities.”⁶

This co-presence is key in our understanding of the ‘resistive’ and not merely the ‘resistant’ or the ‘resisting;’ which, in fact, may or should be prior to domination

The political feeling that resistance has failed and has become impossible raises another question: that of its teleology. Is resistance a teleological discourse, something that ordains an end?

itself and not merely a reaction to it. It is a cohabitation that is without its perils. It could lead to an illicit intimacy with power that spawns powerlessness and violence among the protagonists of the postcolonial polity; Achille Mbembe conjures a scenario in which “people” are consumed by “madness” and clothe themselves in “cheap imitations of power so as to reproduce its epistemology; and when, too, power in its own violent quest for grandeur makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence.”⁷ The Philippine experience with the tyrant Marcos and the succeeding faux revolutions that were its lamentable afterlife testify to this unnerving prospect.

But if viewed within a strategic play of interventions, on specific “logics of practice,” such co-presence may well be able to carve out a translocality that is universally equivalent to the global. In light of these problematics, I tentatively spin the vernacular term *palabas*, which in the Filipino language means performance as well as an ‘inclination outward.’ This movement from interiority to a community beyond the modern self and within the condition of performativity is central to how we could prefigure the imaginary of a future of resistivity, a valiant hope against reification and the temptation of mimicry, yet within the vicinity of these irresistibilities, too, as *palabas* enunciates at once the melodrama of sentiment and the radicality of disclosure, illusions and inventions, the passage into the moment of revelation, of shedding inhibition when the agent of performance finally transforms, reasonable and sensible enough to act. Somehow rationality and sensibility must cease to be the privilege of the enlightenment.

*Palabas*⁸ is spectacle and appearance. It speaks of an outward thrust from an interior, and so is both inclination and intimation (*saloobin*). There is a deliberate agency at work in a gesture of performance or the process of making something appear and making it appear in a particular way (*papalabasin* or *pinapalabas*). It may be construed as modern to the degree that it is reflexive, a mediated exposition (a cognate of *pakitang tao*) in relation to a premeditated exposure: it is theater and it involves acting, diversion, pedagogy. It is (dis)guise and it is manifestation. It is a matter of conjuring, tricking the eye, catching the feeling, concealing the device of drama. And because it is tactical, it is also corruptive: semblance is always elusive.

And so, with *palabas* we finally come to the locus that is the margin. Does the margin aspire to an alternative universality that is actually a dis-place or a dis-locale, an encompassing emancipatory ideal that knows no expiration, only inspiration and sufferance? Is it irreducibly the limit? Or is the metaphor, the space that it evokes, altogether a failure, one that is prone to be condensed in identity within multiculturalism; or effete, easily metabolized, in the face of ceaseless, ravenous productivity. The aporetic instances of our time do not call for a margin of self-reflexive, oftentimes recursive critique that gives rise to the sad verb marginalize, and that in itself is alluring and exotic and cosmopolitan, complicit with the hegemonic and its neoliberal enchantments. It demands a latitude, a way out, an access to the play of the body of struggle without “fatigue and surfeit,” the performance of the impossible, the unfolding of the not-yet—verily, a *palabas*, a ruse by any another name.

1. This essay was significantly enriched by conversations with Jason Jacobo, a colleague who is completing his graduate studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.
2. Misko Suvakovic, “Politics and Art After the Fall of the Berlin Wall.” Abstract of a paper presented to the XVII International Congress of Aesthetics, Ankara, Turkey, 2007.
3. Suvakovic 2007.
4. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).
5. Rancière 2004, p. 25.
6. Rancière 2004, pp. 25-26.
7. Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony” in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 62, no. 1 (1992), p. 29.
8. A series of five exhibitions was organized from 2004-2007 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines to reflect on five tropes of Philippine affect, one of which is *palabas*, involving contemporary and folk/popular art.

2

Narrating Unsettlement Saskia Sassen

One way of thinking about globalization today is as unsettling—of economies, politics, cultures, imaginaries. It destabilizes existing formal arrangements and interpretations (e.g. we used to think that a vacuum cleaner was just a tool to clean, now we are asked to see it also as a designed object that reveals your taste code). In some ways the world of design is continuously engaged with destabilizing existing meanings, shapes, iconographies. We often call this fashion or new styles.

But what concerns me here is a set of deeper, structural changes that can be quite ambiguous or diffuse, and difficult to grasp—a domain that feeds what we experience as unsettling. This is a domain that cannot be mediated via ‘design.’ Contestatory and transgressive practices, whether by artists or activists, are one bridge into this domain—an in-between space that is in principle underspecified, ambiguous, under-narrated. Artists and activists can and are doing some interesting work here. This is a type of work that might be political, but not necessarily in the narrow sense of the word. Rather, I am thinking of a kind of politics that has to do with “making present” of giving voice to actors and conditions usually rendered invisible.¹ Often art can make present that which is not clear to the naked eye in ways that rational discourse cannot.

Art as having the capacity to make present is a notion that stands in sharp contrast to ‘design’ as a capacity to add profitability: making present vs making money. Both logics can of course coincide in a given object or process.

Let me illustrate some of these issues with two concrete cases that capture massive transitions (unsettlements) and the work of narrating these in ways that are not functioning as design that bridges with the world of commerce but rather where the work of the artist comes into play in a larger political space. One is work that engages the built environment in today’s large complex cities, and the second that of new media artists and cyber-based or -aided political activism.

INTERVENTIONS: RESISTING PERMANENCE AND PROFIT LOGICS

The meanings and roles of architecture and urban design centered in older traditions of permanence are irrevocably destabilized in today’s complex cities—that is, cities marked by digital networks, acceleration, massive infrastructures for connectivity, and growing estrangement. Those older meanings do not disappear, they remain important. But they cannot address comfortably these newer meanings—the growing importance of networks, interconnections, energy flows, subjective cartographies. To this we should add the enormity of the urban experience and the overwhelming profit-maximizing logics that today organize much of the investments in cities.

And yet, these cities contain multiple underused spaces, often characterized more by past than current meanings.² These underused spaces lie outside the utility-driven logics that today organize urban space. But they are part of³ the interiority of a city. This opens up a critical problematic about the current urban condition in ways that take it beyond the notions of high-tech architecture, virtual spaces, simulacra, and theme parks. All of the latter are too easy. And while they matter, they are fragments of an incomplete puzzle. Architecture and urban design can also function as critical artistic practices that allow us to capture something more elusive than what is represented by notions such as the theme-parking of the urban. There is a type of urban condition that dwells between the fact of massive structures and the reality of semi-abandoned places. I think it is central to the experience of the urban, and it makes legible transitions and unsettlements of specific spatio-temporal configurations.

The work of capturing this elusive quality that cities produce and make legible is not easily executed. Utility logics won’t do. It calls for artists (e.g. public sculpture) and architects able to navigate multiple forms of knowledge and introduce the possibility of an architectural practice located in spaces—such as intersections of multiple transport and communication networks—where the naked eye or the engineer’s imagination sees no shape, no possibility of a form, only pure infrastructure and utility. On the other hand, there is the work of detecting the possible architectures and forms of

spaces that are construed as empty silences, non-existences, for architectural practices centered in permanence.

INTERVENTION: DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE MAKING OF PRESENCE

A very different type of instance is that of new media artists using computer centered network technologies to represent and/or enact politico-artistic projects. What I want to capture here is a very specific feature: the possibility of constructing forms of globality that are neither part of global corporate media or consumer firms, nor part of elite universalisms or ‘high culture.’ It is the possibility of giving presence to multiple local actor/projects/imaginaries in ways that can constitute counter-globalities.

One of the outcomes of these contributions is uses—ranging from political to ludic—of technology that subvert corporate globalization. We are seeing the formation of alternative networks, projects, and spaces. Emblematic is, perhaps, that the metaphor of ‘hacking’ has been dislodged from its specialised technical discourse and become part of everyday life. In the face of a predatory regime of intellectual property rights we see the ongoing influence of the free software and open source movement.⁴ Indymedia gain terrain even as global media conglomerates dominate just about all mainstream mediums.⁵ The formation of new geographies of power that bring together elites from the global south and north find their obverse in the work of such collectives as Raqs/Sarai that destabilize the centre/periphery divide.

Such an outcome/creation is to be distinguished from the common assumption that if ‘it’ is global it is cosmopolitan. The types of global forms that concern me here are what I like to refer to, partly as a provocation, as non-cosmopolitan forms of globality. Through the Internet (or, more generally, internetworking) local initiatives and projects can become part of a global network without losing the focus on the specific of the local actor/project/imaginary. It enables a new type of cross-border work, one centered in multiple localities yet intensely connected digitally. For instance, groups or individuals concerned with a variety of environmental questions—from solar energy design to appropriate-materials-architecture—can develop networks for circulating not only information but also political work and strategies.

In an effort to synthesize this diversity of subversive interventions into the space of global capitalism, I use the notion of counter-geographies of globalization: these interventions are deeply imbricated with some of the major dynamics constitutive of globalization yet are not part of the formal apparatus of global firms and global markets nor of their aims.⁶

These counter-geographies thrive on the intensifying of transnational and trans-local networks, the development of communication technologies which easily escape conventional surveillance practices, and so on. These counter-geographies are dynamic and changing in their locational features.

The narrating, giving shape, and making present involved in digitized environments assume very particular meanings when they get mobilized to represent/enact local specificities in a global context. Beyond the kinds of on-the-ground work involved in these struggles, new media artists and activists—the latter often artists—have been key actors in these developments, whether it is through tactical media, indymedia, such entities as the original incarnation of Digital City Amsterdam⁷ and Berlin based Transmediale⁸ or the massive effort represented by the World Information Order project.⁹ But new media artists have also focused on issues other than the world of technology. Not surprisingly perhaps, a key focus has been the increasingly restrictive regime for migrants and refugees in a global world where capital gets to flow wherever it more or less wants: organizations such as Noboy is Illegal,¹⁰ Mongrel,¹¹ Mute,¹² the Manchester based Futuresonic,¹³ and the Bonn/Cologne based Theater der Welt¹⁴ and many others have all done projects focused on immigration.

Often art can make present that which is not clear to the naked eye in ways that rational discourse cannot.

This is one of the key forms of critical practice and politics that the new media can make possible: A politics of the local with a big difference—these are localities that are connected with each other across a region, a country or the world. Because the network is global does not mean that it all has to happen at the global level. The expanding cross-border network of global cities is a space where we are seeing the formation of these new types of ‘global’ politics focused on place.

CONCLUSION

Designers and artists both narrate the unspecified at a time of growing velocities, the ascendance of process and flow over objects and permanence, massive structures that are not at a human scale, branding as the basic mediation between individuals and markets. But where the designer produces narratives that add to the utility which today increasingly becomes the profit of global capital, the artist produces disruptive narratives. The artist narrates unsettlement and inserts the local and the silenced through forms of globality that are horizontal rather than hierarchical.

1. See Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Princeton University Press, 2006), chapters 6 and 8 for an elaboration of this notion.
2. For one of the best treatments of such *terrains vagues*, see Ignasi Solá Morales, *Obra*, (Barcelona: Editorial Gigli, 2004), vol. 3. For a good example of an intervention in one of these *terrains vagues*, in this case in the city of Buenos Aires, see Kermes Urbana, an organization which seeks to produce public space by reactivating such *terrains vagues* and by emphasizing the making of public space in modest settings (see at www.m7red.com.ar/m7-KUintro1.htm).
3. See <http://www.gnu.org> for more information.
4. See <http://www.indymedia.org>
5. See the book *Manifesta: Ten Years*, prepared by Manifesta International (Amsterdam).
6. Elsewhere I have discussed this in detail (Sassen 2006: ch 7).
7. The Digital City Amsterdam (DDS) was an experiment facilitated by De Balie, Amsterdam’s cultural centre. Subsidised by the Amsterdam Municipality and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, it allowed people to access the digital city host computer and retrieve council minutes, official policy papers or visit digital cafés and train stations. See <http://reinder.rustema.nl/dds/> for documentation. See also Riemens and Lovink’s account in *Global Networks/Linked Cities* (Routledge, 2002).
8. <http://www.transmediale.de>
9. For one of the most comprehensive discussions about the new technologies, see “World-Information Files. The Politics of the Info Sphere” in *World Information Order. 2002*. (Vienna: Institute for New Culture Technologies, and Berlin: Center for Civic Education. See Lovink’s book *Dark Fiber* (MIT, 2005) for one of the best critical examinations of the new technologies.
10. A campaign carried by autonomous groups, religious initiatives, trade unions and individuals to support refugees. See <http://www.contrast.org/borders/> for more information.
11. London based media activists and artists. See <http://www.mongrelx.org>
12. See <http://www.metamute.com>
13. A festival exploring wireless and mobile media. See <http://www.futuresonic.com>
14. A theatre festival. See <http://www.theaterderwelt.de>

3

Engaged Art: A Condition of the Viral Kelly Baum

We’ve been asked to respond to a question that concerns the relationship between contemporary art in China and “a new hegemonic order,” but since this is a subject I cannot, to be quite honest, discuss with much authority (my own area of expertise being American and European art), I’ve decided to leave it to others to parse. What I do feel comfortable speaking to, however, is that question’s meta-subject, which concerns, essentially, the parameters of oppositional artistic practice today. Admittedly, my suggestions will have a strong cultural and geographical bias, so their viability in a Chinese context will have to be determined by others, through experimentation.

The debate around art and politics (at least in the West) has typically revolved around the following issues: form, on the one hand, and content, on the other. For the most part, we find artists and critics asking two types of questions: first, what shape should an art that strives to defy, disrupt, and transform the dominant social order assume, and second, what is art’s proper discursive terrain? Tackling the heady subjects of form and content are, without doubt, crucial steps in developing a language

In my mind, the best kind of politicized art doesn't just critique the status quo, it likewise assists in the creation of agents (or more precisely, it gives subjects some of the tools they need to make themselves into agents).

of resistance. But I'd like to approach the problem from a slightly different perspective. I propose adding a third term into the mix: distribution. This means asking of art—specifically art that positions itself in some relationship to activism—three questions. How should it speak, what it should speak of, and, finally, where should it speak from? In other words, what is the proper place for an oppositional artistic practice? It's of the utmost importance to pose this question because the site (or sites) at which art is presented, displayed, and dispersed goes a long way towards establishing its political efficacy.

Not that showing a work of art in a gallery or museum necessarily negates whatever currency it might possess in the political realm—it doesn't, although some would certainly disagree. (The opposite is true as well: producing art for 'the street,' broadly speaking, guarantees neither its quality nor its rigor nor its use-value.)

But certainly, imagining a different and more expansive field for art, one that includes institutional as well as extra-institutional sites of distribution, has the potential to secure what is (or should be) the ultimate goal of any oppositional artistic practice: the production of an engaged, empowered, and enfranchised public. In my mind, the best kind of politicized art doesn't just critique the status quo, it likewise assists in the creation of agents (or more precisely, it gives subjects some of the tools they need to make themselves into agents). Artists cannot, I believe, accomplish such a task by speaking only to the people who patronize museums and galleries. While these individuals comprise a crucial part of art's public, they should not (always) be its exclusive focus. Indeed, a large number of artists in the US, Europe, and Latin America are making it a priority to address audiences both inside and outside of art institutions. Either with or without the permission of authorities, they are presenting art over the radio; they are publishing it in magazines and newspapers; they are placing it on billboards; they are staging it on street corners and in city squares; they are distributing it over the Internet; and they are dropping it in stores. These practices expand the audience not just for art, but for political debate as well.

Yet this is by no means the only kind of political work that such practices perform. Insofar as they operate from within the belly of the beast, infiltrating those sites most beloved to power, capitalism, and globalization, the projects outlined above also constitute what David Joselit, in his 2007 book, *Feedback: Television against Democracy*, has called viral aesthetics. "Viral aesthetics," Joselit writes, "involves a parasitic and catastrophic mode of image circulation that can invade and transform systems."¹

Take the case of Conrad Bakker. Based outside of Chicago, Bakker is an artist whose entire practice revolves around the subversive appropriation of existing systems of distribution—from eBay and mail order catalogues to sidewalk sales and outdoor markets—systems that generally operate in concert with capitalism. Bakker's 2007 intervention, *Untitled Project: rEpLICA [SPAM]*, for example, consisted of hand-carved, hand-painted sculptures of fake designer watches that the artist distributed through an e-commerce website. This functional (yet temporary) website was accompanied by an ingenious marketing campaign—spam, specifically, ten in all, which the artist sent to a select group of individuals. Bakker's spam mimicked the structural characteristics of actual spam, whereby a decoy is used to smuggle content into restricted areas, in the manner of a Trojan horse. While the artist's spam each contained the obligatory advertisement, tempting readers to his website with the promise of a 10% discount on the purchase of two or more 'watches,' they also included fragments from Karl Marx's 1867 text, *Das Capital*. As the spam accrued in recipients' mailboxes, sentences and paragraphs also accumulated, eventually cohering into what Bakker described as "a specific political position on the relation of capital to commodity to fetish." It thus became impossible to consume without simultaneously reflecting on the process of consumption itself. The act of buying became troubled, unfamiliar, and decidedly uncomfortable. In the case of the project as a whole, Bakker infiltrated a system designed specifically for the

circulation and marketing of goods. He also repurposed some of this system's tools, turning them against themselves in the interest of political critique. Bakker's position vis-à-vis capitalism, therefore, might be best described as one of interrogative complicity.²

Taking Joselit's and Bakker's lead, I believe that an exemplary form of engaged art should aspire to the condition of the viral. Trespass, occupy, squat, reclaim. Synchronize place with purpose. These, it seems to me, are some of the keys towards developing a language of resistance. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert in their 2000 book, *Empire*, "If there is no longer a place that can be recognized as outside of [Empire], we must be against in every place. [The will be be-against] becomes the essential key to every active political position in the world, every desire that is effective—perhaps of democracy itself."³

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1. David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), xiii. The 'manifesto' that Joselit composed for the back of the book should be required reading for anyone engaged in the issues around art, resistance, and oppositionality.
 2. This project by Conrad Bakker was created for the exhibition *Transactions*, which I curated at the Blanton Museum of Art in fall 2007. The show featured works by eight other artists: Daniel Bozhkov, Eugenio Dittborn, Christine Hill, Emily Jacir, Ben Kinmont, Cildo Meireles, Seth Price, and Zoë Sheehan Saldaña. An eponymously titled catalogue accompanied the exhibition. In almost every case, what was presented at the museum was documentation of interventions that had already occurred or were then occurring in public spaces.
 3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 211.
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4

Speaking and Naming Eliza Tan

I. ON THE ACT OF NAMING AND ABOUT SPHERES OF VISIBILITY

If the act of naming places contingent and arbitrary closures around an 'other' as an affirmation of a speaking subject's alterity, from what consciousness or under what conditions is such a language produced? Who is the speaking subject and from what vantage point does he or she speak?

The naming of China in the statement accompanying this survey draws attention to questions concerning the infrastructures that support the global visibility of Chinese contemporary art and the dialogue forming around it. Apart from interactions taking place within market-places, auction-houses and art fairs, these spheres diverge and coalesce across exhibition platforms, and international and regional stages. A look now at the increased interest in Asia as a geo-political region and by extension 'Asian' contemporary art, adjacent to the spotlight on China, may perhaps preface a consideration of 'other' critical subjectivities and their points of intersection within a plural spectrum.

Cultural 'margins' and 'centres' are susceptible to shifting distributions of power, capital and constantly morphing spaces of discourse, and point to inter-contextual spheres of production and consumption whose spatio-temporal correlations are necessary to detect but difficult to place. In the last two years in London, for example, large scaled exhibitions which gave special focus to contemporary art from China include the Serpentine Gallery's *China Power Station* at Battersea Power Station in London (2006) and *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China* at the Tate Liverpool the following year. Looking further back, however, a platform such as *Cities on the Move: Urban Chaos and Global Change* at the Hayward Gallery (1999) included in its city-specific rather than country-specific frame, works from countries such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore. More recently, the exhibition *Thermocline of Art, New Asian Waves* held at the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany (2006), gave premise to Asia and Diasporic art from the "Middle East to Far East, from Southeast Asia, to near East and Central Asia," their globalities and dislocations.¹

Within Asia, The Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2005) held just the year before paid heed to the production and positioning of Asia's "parallel realities" and postcolonial contexts.² Glancing now at biennale or triennale arenas, the 49th Venice Biennale

The methodological naming, un-naming and re-naming of alignments within existing discourses perhaps then activate a site of resistance, of becoming and of a speaking-subject's jurisdiction.

(2001) for instance, saw the inclusion of more art from Asia or the Asia-Pacific region after Japan's participation in 1952 at the 26th Venice Biennale and Korea in the 80s. Art historian John Clark has in this instance traced the participation from the Asia-Pacific region in international biennales as well as the development of the regional-international exhibition form with participating Asian artists following the Biennale of Sydney in 1973.³ The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art which began in 1993 at the Queensland Art Gallery, for example, located art within the categories: 1. Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam); 2. East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea); 3. South Pacific (New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Australia).

While it seems that various 'intra-regional' rather than 'extra-regional' exhibition models have put forward discourses forming outside of China, such spaces which facilitate narratives of alterity from 'Asia' by and large do not, by the geographical marker of 'East Asia,' exclude the consideration of contemporary art from China.⁴ The question that follows, however, extends beyond a statistical comparison of the ratio of artists from a specific nationality, China or otherwise, to other represented countries. To what extent, does a speaking subject define, and is defined by or within neighbouring narratives in or outside of the artificially constructed perimeters of exhibition? To what degree or effect can this subject be heard within these shifting premises?

'Nation' oriented platforms in which commonalities such as post-colonial experience or other local hauntings which become markers, move on the other hand, still towards continued anxieties and desires concerning identification and recognition. How then, if a subject were to adopt a conflictual 'nation'-focused approach, should the post-colonial artist or subject '[navigate] the void between...seductively posed polarities, sustaining a romance by turning exoticised otherness into social realignments'⁵ as critic Geeta Kapur suggests? Alternatively, if 'Asian' oriented platforms are to be seen as more open, tangible spaces for disparate rather than unanimous vocalisations of particular constituents from various constituencies, do these stages project a groping about for ideological markers or for a certain vision of 'Asia' (as compared to the West, or forms of new internationalism)?

With respect to cultural and economic specificities, breaks and ruptures of local and regional modernities or historicities, the very definition of Asia comes repeatedly into question for a subject speaking from or within the region and who is, as a witness, necessarily concerned with specificities of place. The ambivalences of such markers complicate, though certainly not uninterestingly, the translative project of an 'Asian' speaking subject who negotiates these reflexivities alongside dilemmas with (internalised or exteriorized) post-colonial categories of 'otherness.' Problematized by internal and external conjectures of 'otherness,' is 'Asia,' as curator Apinan Poshyananda for instance asks, "projected as the alterity of Western centers?"⁶ Or as critic Joan Kee asks, "a fiction, a construct serving as a repository of external desires and speculations?"⁷ The question of identity and identification for an Asian speaking subject remains consistently troubled by notions of 'nation,' 'state' and 'nationality' in addition to locality, where a 'transnational' or 'immigrant' subject tends to fall between. Confronted with the slipperiness of such trajectories, and the plural inflections of given names, how and when does a resistant subject introduce a "temporary break in the never-ending semiosis of language?"⁸ The methodological naming, un-naming and re-naming of alignments within existing discourses perhaps then activate a site of resistance, of becoming and of a speaking-subject's jurisdiction.

II. ON THE ACT OF SPEAKING AND ABOUT SPHERES OF INVISIBILITY

Parallel to more internationally visible spheres of representation, and perhaps most importantly, are autonomous spheres of art activity and critical discourse, and forms of

Parallel to more internationally visible spheres of representation, and perhaps most importantly, are autonomous spheres of art activity and critical discourse, and forms of exchanges or micro-practices which have, in their respective locales, eluded the sweeping gaze of larger cultural lenses.

exchanges or micro-practices which have, in their respective locales, eluded the sweeping gaze of larger cultural lenses. Where the creation and evolution of their forms may be burdened by, and even in complicit with the circuitry of expectations facilitated by these organized platforms, the impetus driving such expression is not dependent on legitimization by such denominators. These spheres of production consequently persist as charged sites which enact social-political will. Within these spaces of conversation, the ethnographic re-reading of narratives, re-interrogation of their site-specific features and re-surfacing of memories inhabiting the elliptical spaces of dominant consciousness may take place. Critical subjectivities and issues of identity, through practices of methodology-oriented processes of production, then float to the fore much more organically.

To speak of analogies, the organisation of the *Future of Imagination* festival started out in 2003 as an artist-initiated discursive space for performance art. It was held at the Substation in Singapore, with the artists Lee Wen, Khairuddin Hori and Kai Lam forming its principal committee.

Invited for participation, were not just artists expressly from Southeast Asia, East Asia or the Asia-Pacific, but “foreign artists whose work has questioned or attempted to share a continuing interest in the cultural constructs of identity in the global situation” as well as the practice and methodologies of performance art.⁹ Similarly, the *Asiatopia* performance art event first initiated in 1998 and directed by the artist Chumpon Apisuk served to privilege both the facilitation of regional-international connections between artists. Forums for critical exchange and mutual exposure, the continued development of writing, documentation and archival on performance from the region again come into focus here, where such infrastructures or spheres of interaction were perceived from the outset as lacking.

In terms of methodology-focused cultural production, the organisation of *Open SEA* in 2006 by Khairuddin Hori, an ongoing series of presentations by young artists and curators in Southeast Asia, emphasized processes of communication between cultural producers by re-calibrating the terms and reception of exhibition. Defining another scope by which to probe into conditions affecting a speaking subject’s creative agencies and constituencies, the first edition of *Open SEA* set out to introduce “emerging personalities of Southeast Asian contemporary art.”¹⁰ It featured four artists, Lynn Lu, Sharon Chin, Patiroop Chychookiat and Hori, who played the role of curator, and drew attention to the biodata and documentation of the participants’ creative processes and encounters. What raises interest here is also that the anomalous term ‘personalities’ was used in this instance to (perhaps wilfully) describe the speaking subject. The term itself connotes the impossible task of identification for the ‘Asian’ subject, where symbolic meanings attachable to the speaking-producing subject and consumable object (‘Southeast Asian contemporary art’) are destabilised.

Wunderspaze, another project sphere which Hori initiated in 2006 was aimed as a laboratory for experimental art and curatorial approaches, giving weight to the research, documentation and presentation of Southeast-Asian practices. The *AIR* artist-in-residency scheme, amongst other programmes orchestrated by *Wunderspaze*, expressed a commitment to supporting the development of like-minded cultural producers working in the region, where again, relational exchange was the objective of the scheme. Hori negotiated issues of *Wunderspaze*’s financial sustainability by attempting to construct self-sustainable project models or by introducing modes of independent fundraising. *Wunderspaze*, as an example, takes the form of an interventional sphere of reflexivity that attempts to bridge infrastructural gaps (and hence, the possibility to re-name structural conditions) for the engagement of local-regional alterities. An initiative like this also approaches the need for the critical reassessment of transactional terms of contemporary cultural production and its translation into capital. Project spheres, as public spaces determined by cultural producers for cultural producers, potentially serve as evolving

social forums for speaking subject/s in a community who otherwise escape the radius of more visible international spheres of art activity.

III. CLOSURES AND DISCLOSURES

With 'margins' and 'centres' increasingly confounded by macro-spheres of representation influenced by markets, institutions, corporations, groups or individuals, the destabilisation of conglomerate cultural narratives forming around such activity perhaps requires the persistence of micro spheres of reflexivity. These spheres mediate articulations of displacements and colloquialisms of place, space and identity. In these spheres, lines of affiliation as well as disaffiliation with dominant narratives are traced not singularly in relation to the West or even to China per se, but also in relation to a spectrum of existing cultural narratives, or neighbouring narratives, so to speak. Taking into account that the infrastructural delimitations conditioned by global capital remain in flux, as does the naming of cultural territories, a speaking subject is compelled to expose his/her own complicit state of abjection and perplexity in the act of resistance. Yet on another level, a speaking subject may also unmoor closures of dominant forces by disclosing the otherwise opaque processes of production and consumption within interconnected spheres of influence. The establishment of independent project spheres which appropriate existing systemic structures if only to re-name its own terms of visibility, provides another space of possibility.

At the cusp of such impossible longing is the aporia that cultural theorist Takeuchi Yoshimi has offered in the context of collapsing 'margins' and 'centres.' Desiring, the 'Asian' speaking subject iterates that "...we must have our own cultural values. And yet perhaps these values do not already exist, in substantive form. Rather I suspect that they are possible as method, that is to say, as the process of the subject's self-formation (*shutai keisei no katei*). This I have called 'Asia as method,' and yet it is impossible to definitively state what this might mean."¹¹

In the flickering shadow of constantly deferred terms and means of identification lies an anxious sense of unanswerability that does not reach closure: Who speaks? Who acts? How?

1. As quoted in the press release, [http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/stories/storyReader\\$5584](http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/stories/storyReader$5584)
See also the brief exhibition report at <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/specials/2007/thermocline/english.htm>. In this case, the ratio of the 25 Korean artists present outweighed representation of works from the other 18 locations.
2. "Diving into Parallel Realities: Notes on the Theme for FT3" in *The 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2005: Parallel Realities Asian Art Now* (Fukuoka-shi: Fukuoka Ajia Bijutsukan, 2005), pp. 10-21.
3. John Clark, "Contemporary Asian Art at Biennales and Triennales, the Sigg Collection and the Yokohama and Gaungzhou Triennales" in *College Art Association*, 2006.
4. The introduction to the exhibition catalogue provided a proposition of moving from an approach of 'extraregionalism' to 'intraregionalism.' *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, 1993.
5. Geeta Kapur, "Globalisation: Navigating the Void" in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), pp. 339-64.
6. Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition" in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions, Tensions*, (New York: Asia Society Galleries; Harry N. Abrams, 1996), pp. 23-53.
7. Joan Kee, "Guest Editor's Introduction: 20 Questions" in *Positions 12:3*, (Duke University Press, Winter 2004).
8. Hall has discussed the relationship of identity and difference in a Derridean sense, where difference destabilises the translation of meaning, which is constantly deferred by a series of significations, where "Without relations of difference, no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised." Stuart Hall, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 397-8.
9. Foreword Future of Imagination #2 & #3, 8-12 December 2004 (Sculpture Square, Singapore) & 10-13 April, 2006 (The Substation, Singapore).
10. Italicised word is part of the quoted passage. Taken from the exhibition statement on Open SEA, at the Substation gallery, Singapore (2006) and posted on the artist's blog.
11. Takeuchi Yoshimi, *What is Modernity?* Ed & Trans. Richard F. Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 33.

5

Katy Deepwell

In attempting to answer a question like this, a thousand questions more come to my mind. Has there been a significant shift in attention towards Chinese contemporary art? And by whom? What are the exhibitions, as markers of change, which are used to explain this shift? The stories are very fragmented and partial depending on what ‘signs’ are taken account of and how the picture itself is constructed.

A key turning point in the transformation of the hegemonic art world’s view of Chinese art is repeatedly named as Harold Szeeman’s inclusion of 20 Chinese artists in the Venice Biennale in 1999 (and subsequent pavilions or shows at Venice, including Hou Hanru’s all-female pavilion in 2007) or the work of Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, particularly their international touring shows *Cities on the Move* or *The China Power Station*. The curators of *Between Past and Future* (New York, International Centre for Photography, 2004), by contrast, give a timeline beginning a decade earlier in 1988 highlighting China’s opening up through the creation of its economic zones as the principle starting point coupled with representation at the Arles Photofestival.

The ‘by whom?’ is therefore: how does the European mainstream now regard art from China? And here the answer is mixed again: with moderate recognition of some artists and some shows as transformative or ‘making an impact’ in terms of contemporary art, leading to the widespread inclusion of some Chinese artists in international shows. Major international touring exhibitions of Chinese art since the late 1990s in Chicago, New York, London, Liverpool, Berlin, Copenhagen or Melbourne signal other signs of changing times: most of the works on show are made post-2000 and most of the artists (repeatedly the same names recur) produce work in video, performance, installation, photography or digital media.

Is this the promotion of a trend from China or really a new engagement with a country which guarded its economic and cultural isolation for so long? The setting up of biennales/triennales within China itself since 2000 in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou could be seen as another signal of change—China engaging in the contemporary art world—or are they simply more evidence of the rapidly expanding international biennale culture in one country? Has there been an explosion of Chinese avant-garde activity or are we (Westerners) simply witnessing the effective promotion abroad of small groups or individuals representing certain tendencies, artists and trends in new media? As I have not yet been to China in my life but have seen several of these touring shows and tried to find out more from available literature, I can only deal in these kind of trading impressions. I know from my research in other fields, there is always more which is shown and seen and not widely reported. My sense that we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg is not diminished.

This is why any sense of ‘marginalisation’ or ‘resistance’ has to be considered carefully. Centre vs margin no longer seem to work; as another classic dispute between concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity.’ Postmodern works can demonstrate the clash of cultural expectations and visions (for example, Cao Fei’s *Cosplayers*) but they can just as equally reinvest old forms within new media as in Xu Bing’s calligraphic works. Will the conventional assessment of ‘radicalism’ by the artist’s political/aesthetic position work here: as gender, skin colour or nationality are inadequate measures of radicality in or of themselves? Gender for me remains a key problem, as with the exception of a few notable interventions, most of the effort has been geared to promotion of the work of men and the effective marginalisation of women.¹ Is it only against a dominant hegemonic culture in China that any sense of the “margins”—sometimes liberally juxtaposed with avant-garde—should be measured? Is the West again anxious to see only evidence of a post-Communist culture in the work of these artists, which will parallel the post-Socialism of Eastern Europeans? Certainly many of the works shown abroad contain all the ‘signs’ of melancholy, critique and a certain nostalgia for the political certainties of Communism as well as some irony and humour. It would be pressing the point too far to suggest that given the cultural conservatism of the ruling Communist party in China, radicalism is represented just by having a voice as an artist, as there remain plenty of ‘normal’ state-

sanctioned activities for artists and many politically acceptable forms. How do works 'from' China today sit against works produced by Chinese who emigrated or became refugees or political exiles? How do works 'from' China sit against those from Hong Kong, Taiwan or even Singapore? In the marginal art world (when compared to politics, economics or sport for example), who is it who really operates "at the margins"—socially and economically? Is "resistance" to do with the construction of subjects and subjectivities in the work: i.e works which are the most direct responses to the dramatic economic and social changes in China's economic zones and major cities and those which most effectively juxtapose this with rural poverty? Are we in danger of confusing cultural openness and opportunism i.e the ability to mount or take part in large-scale exhibitions of 'Chinese art' abroad as a sign of new cultural forces at work or are we substituting relative economic good fortune for a few with political radicalism? These are questions with no easy answers.

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1. Hou Hanru's Chinese Pavilion in Venice, 2007 showed Cao Fei, Yin XuiZhen, Kan Xuan, Shen Yuan; another example would be Binghui Huangfu's pan-Asian women artist's exhibition *Text and Sub-Text* (Lasalle-SIA, 2000). *N.paradoxa*, my own journal, for example, has published articles on Yin XuiZhen (vol. 7, 2001); Cheng Ling-Yang (vol. 15, 2005) and May Chan who lives in Canada (vol. 13, 2004); on women performance artists in Beijing (vol. 11, 2003); and on women artists' situation in Taiwan (vol. 10, 2004).
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A few years ago, writing about *Documenta 11* and the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, I had hoped to learn from the two exhibitions what to ask of them, in particular, and what to ask of large scale shows in general. In that essay, I suppose I didn't get very far in figuring out how to write about such events, which have become the major platforms for the presentation of 'global' contemporary art. But one thing did strike me as evident: that the enterprise of the grand exhibition was haunted, not only by those spectres of the nineteenth century—culture, nation, modernism—but by the defeated self-reflexivity of the twentieth century (for all our sophisticated theorising, we—this largest of we's—still couldn't figure out how to adequately represent the struggles of our times). I ended the essay by describing an artwork, as I could not find any other way to best respond to the questions raised. The work was by Alfredo Jaar.

To see his installation at *Documenta 11*, you entered a darkened room: on the grey walls were three texts, their white letters emitting their own light. The first text talked about images of Nelson Mandela's release from prison but, apparently, there were no photographs of him crying. During his long detention, he had worked in the lime mines, which were so blinding white, it's said that his tear ducts no longer work because of that. The second text referred to a Bill Gates venture to protect his vast archives of images, including some of Mandela, by burying them underground in a nuclear bomb-proof shelter, meanwhile circulating and selling their digitised versions. The third text spoke of how the US military took control of satellite and air surveillance images of Afghanistan. To exit the installation, you walked through a dark corridor into a room, where you confronted a wall-sized screen of intensely bright white light. The piece is called *The Lament of Images*.

The question that *Ctrl+P* asks seems to me to be symptomatic of a discourse of defeated self-reflexivity ("oppositional-meaning making is now the lot and responsibility and perhaps a fatal space of those who continue to be consigned to the margins.") The terms have been with us for generations—"margins," "opposition"—and while their age should not be taken to mean they are any less relevant or urgent, it is not enough to rehearse them.

I think where the question misspeaks is in this assertion: ..."while no new epistemic change has occurred, independent voices are much more difficult to sustain ..."

Gender for me remains a key problem, as with the exception of a few notable interventions, most of the effort has been geared to promotion of the work of men and the effective marginalisation of women.

6

The Lament of Lacks
Lee Weng Choy

**Yes, what we may have
is but a lament of lacks.
For starters, what we
lack is critical density
in our discourses.**

“No new epistemic change has occurred”—its appearance as a description of the present state of affairs belies its rhetoric of foreclosure: no new epistemic change is foreseeable on the horizon. This is where I would beg to differ. Yes, what we may have is but a lament of lacks. For starters, what we lack is critical density in our discourses.

Who is this ‘we’ that I speak of? I am an art critic based in Singapore.

So much of my thinking is indebted to my reading and study of European and American writers. And of course I have friends from Europe and America. But I am far less interested in the discourse that has, as its agonists, a tired West and an emergent Asia (read China), than I am in the conversations we in Asia, or we in Southeast Asia, are still not having amongst ourselves. It is density in these intra-Asia and intra-regional discourses that we need. It is not hard to imagine an improvement in the situation, even though it will not be an easy thing to achieve. We lack the publications, the schools, the museums, the institutions, et cetera, to support the densification of our discourses. But the horizon is visible. An epistemic shift is possible.

7

On the Question of Hegemony in China Ken Lum

Firstly, there is something objectionable to the way that the question is composed. There is a “yellow peril” quality to the question. What is being asked? Is the China of today a hegemonic force equal to the United States and the European nations? Or is the question meant more preemptively to be applied in the prospect that China’s sustained growth will continue and China will become a hegemonic force? Or is it being suggested that avant-gardism and resistance through art remains a vital presence in Western art whereas such terms are presently foreclosed in China? The question seems to presume a binary opposition between the institutional and an autonomous avant-garde. Even the manner in which the term hegemony is used is problematic, without nuance to the dynamic ways in which Chinese contemporary artists are negotiating hegemonic forces not only within China but globally as well. It is not as though hegemonic force ends at the Chinese border.

Today, China is more a state version of a capitalist corporation than one committed to a socialist ethos. Government agencies and officials work in concert with developers with little regard for the rights of communities and neighbourhoods, never mind individuals. But most Chinese can see through all this: it is not as though they have become inured to the corruption and hypocrisy they see and experience around them on a daily basis. In fact, there are increasing signs of resistance among the populace against government and private company injustice. That President Hu Jintao recently emphasized the absoluteness of Communist Party rule over China is a sign more of vulnerability than of strength among the rulers.

Contemporary Chinese artists, more so than the general population, are acutely aware of the contradictions inherent in their society. For one thing, they travel a lot more than the general population. This provides them with access to discourses about China from external sources. This is not to say that being an artist in China is without its difficulties. It is significant that Chinese contemporary art did not effectively exist three decades ago. A key event was the 1989 *Grand Modern Art Exhibition of China* with its celebration of so-called ‘first generation’ artists. Another key marker was the inauguration of the Shanghai Biennale in 1994 (although it was not until Hou Hanru’s version in 2000 that the biennale achieved its present day significance). Up until that time, a wariness of contemporary art informed government policy in Beijing. Exhibitions were regularly shut down or heavily censored and the most interesting artists played a creative cat-and-mouse game with the government. It was only a few years ago that the Communist Party officially recognized the instrumental value of contemporary art, adopting an attitude of tolerance (but still within the limits of government vigilance). All the while, the marketplace for Chinese contemporary

art continued to expand both internally and internationally. Many Chinese artists are cynically and unabashedly reaping the material rewards of a hyperactive marketplace for contemporary Chinese art.

The rapid development of contemporary art interest in China is collated to the paucity of serious art criticism and art historical analysis and theory being produced in China. Indeed, an important missing element in Chinese contemporary art remains criticism, be it in the form of critical social history or art theory. The most interesting papers being published on Chinese contemporary art have been generated in conferences and publications outside of China, although these papers do readily enter into China, signaling yet another contradiction. These external texts can circulate within China and yet critical discourse around art is not generally fostered within the country. Contemporary art in China is only acceptable to the governing Communists if it is de-linked from critical art scholarship. This is why the seeming triumph of the marketplace for art in China could collapse at any moment, as it is unsupported by discursive weight. This is also the reason why the government continues to cast a watchful eye over contemporary art developments, with censorship here and there rather than in wholesale fashion as it once practiced.

...the seeming triumph of the marketplace for art in China could collapse at any moment, as it is unsupported by discursive weight.

The rise of China as manifested by an overwhelming excitement over its contemporary art scene might be just a romantic fabrication of the West, reinforced by dealers and artists who are happy to promote and create works of silly looking faces to meet a new form of Orientalism. The idea of suppressed artists making art against a totalitarian regime and at the same time the critique of a new colonialism disguised under the harrowing glamour of consumerism is just too sexy for both the Left and the Right. Resistant art, which contains human suffering and heroism, is one of the hottest cultural commodities today, and satirical and cynical humour has a good market. In a Communist country with a new capitalist orientation, one witnesses an outstanding combination of propaganda and marketing strategies. Perhaps this is what makes Chinese art outstanding.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “when you are starving on the street, nobody cares; when you are rich and live far way in the mountain, you will still find relatives visiting you.” Chinese contemporary art would only be getting stronger as long as the economy goes well. Chinese contemporary art is a tightly integrated part of the mythologies of Chinese economy created by the West both in the monetary and intellectual sense.

Chinese contemporary art is full of irony. The Government, which is the favorite topic of artists’ critique (Sex is okay, Mao the old man is fine as long as it doesn’t touch the real forbidden topics, and all the artists know the codes well) quietly endorses it because art represents freedom of expression and is good for the economy. Naturally, artists appreciate the recognition and the economic return; the dealers love it for it makes for good money. The museums love it for they have found new topics at a time when the global contemporary art scene is running dry.

I am convinced that behind this dazzling propaganda and marketing scheme, there are Chinese artists sincerely working hard quietly. But you have to wait until the frenzy cools down. You may then see some real stuff. Meanwhile, the celebration of the marriage between East and West, and between the decoration of Communism and the real money of Capitalism will go on. Let’s have fun.

Chinese contemporary art is a tightly integrated part of the mythologies of Chinese economy created by the West both in the monetary and intellectual sense.



Oscar Ho Hing-kay

9

Andrew Maerkle

I am a firm believer in free will and the diversity of individual experiences and perspectives and find the concept of hegemony rather flimsy to begin with. Resistance to hegemony presupposes subjugation to hegemony. However, hegemony itself begins to disintegrate as soon as even one individual refuses to acknowledge it. One has the option of not participating in the art market, or rather the specific, high-stakes market that has embraced Chinese art. One has the option of working outside the institutions that attempt to streamline contemporary art discourse into a cohesive narrative or pre-packaged history. Likewise one has the option of not participating in a canon that views any particular culture or tradition as the starting point for all culture and tradition. The idea of center-margin relations is only one convenient tool for understanding the world, but not a truly adequate accounting of the world-as-experienced.

My personal position is that “China Fever” is overplayed. Chinese contemporary art still represents only a fraction of the activity occurring in major markets such as New York or London, and is barely registered in alternative (or should we say, provincial?) art scenes such as Portland, Milwaukee or Providence in the US, for example. The category of “Chinese Contemporary Art” obscures the diversity of artists and local art scenes in China itself. And of course there are rich and textured art scenes across the world that are not oriented toward China at all.

The flourishing in recent decades of satellite television, the Internet, cellphones and a competitive travel economy that allows an unprecedented number of people to be anywhere at once creates the illusion of one worldwide knowledge platform. But we often underestimate the capacity that all individuals have to make their own decisions and pursue their own interests. Art, in particular, will always provide us opportunities to appreciate new perspectives, including those within ourselves of which we aren’t even aware until confronted by something we could never have imagined.

Likewise one has the option of not participating in a canon that views any particular culture or tradition as the starting point of any culture and tradition.

10

Time Difference
Neil Stewart

Waiting. Tonight, I hope to download the new issue of *Ctl+P*. Various texts on China’s hegemony, including one I contributed a few months back. Interesting. But will mine still be relevant? Putting off time, I take a walk down The Bund. There’s a Japanese tourist in an Eels T-shirt taking a photo across the river. A photo we’ve all seen. A photo of the future used in every Western magazine. Never has the future felt so familiar.

But that’s over there. This side of the river is from a different era; somewhere closer to *Empire of the Sun*. Behind me is The Customs House with its clock tower. If it wasn’t for its gothic face and roman numerals it would say 14:21. Curious. I look back. I don’t see any public clocks over there...in the future.

Time to kill, so I wander. The mind wanders too. Questions arise. Wasn’t *Empire of the Sun* developed from his short story *The Dead Time*? Wasn’t it published in his anthology *Myths of the Near Future*? What would JG Ballard make of his birthplace today? Hold on...the tagline from the film is coming back to me now...something like “To survive in a world at war, he must find a strength greater than all the events that surround him.” Somehow, the more time passes the more prescient it all becomes.

But wait, another anachronistic clock tower appears; the Shanghai Art Museum. Hours have passed and these gothic public clocks start to strike a chord: How the West used time (chronological, standardised, segmented time) to control people’s behaviour. How time became commodified in the capitalist system. Time as money. But Western time had to wait for technology—the telegraph—before it could be distributed and standardised. Sometimes you need to visit another world to see your own world more clearly.

Yes, China’s time may have come, but what exactly is China’s time? And could that idea of time be exported?

Time for tea and tofu and waiting becomes an activity—everything accelerates. People say the Chinese have a very different concept of time; a concept of time that seems to defy definition. Certainly, it is not a difference in degree, but a difference in kind. We cannot compare China to the West in the same terms—*our terms*. It's not about the same thing at different times (China will replace...), but different things at the same time. Parallel worlds. Yes, China's time may have come, but what exactly is China's time? And could that idea of time be exported? The bill arrives long before any answers...

It won't be long now, but on my way back I pop into a couple of antique shops. Disappointment. Although the Chinese invented clocks, there doesn't seem to be such a thing as a Chinese clock, only Western ones! No clues here; here in the kingdom of the moon. Yes, it's getting dark. And out on the street again, I start to sense this Chinese idea of time; it's in the air, not in the mechanism.

I start to see how technology has shifted the West from a spatial to time-based culture, so I shouldn't be surprised that a time-based culture comes into its own. Not least is the almost intuitive embrace of time-based media by many Chinese artists: Performance, video, photography. But of course, brush and ink painting was always considered a time-based medium too—the instant of the mark representing a whole life time's experience. And maybe it's in Chinese art that we might find this very different kind of time...and how the Chinese find the time to do the things we don't have time to do.

Ah, here we are, at last; it's time to connect...

Neil Stewart
Shanghai, 2004

More China Than You

LEE WEN

This is based on a new performance series that I began in May at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art *Made in China* exhibition, and I presented a continuation of the work in *Vital 07*. As an ethnic Chinese born outside of China, in post-colonial Singapore, one faces various stereo-typing of identity and is often mistaken for being from China. This stereotyping is also apparent when meeting Chinese from mainland China who have various expectations of us such as, the ability to speak fluently perfect Chinese or Mandarin instead of other languages, or the familiarity with Chinese traditions. My past works such as *Journey of a yellow man* and the *Neo-Baba* series had confronted such issues and made more complex the question of identity-politics in the age of post-colonialism, globalization and multi-culturalism. Since the founding of the present state of modern China, there have been rapid and volatile changes. As Singapore has over the years of consistent progress and development gained confidence in its own national identity, it is being dazed and astounded by the rise of China as a world economic and political power; and today seems likely to veer itself towards its historical roots since a majority of its population and leadership is of Chinese descent. The world at large too is mesmerized, as the global capitalistic world economy is just as anxious to embrace China into their ever-expanding markets as much as this largest nation-state of Communist ideals is willing to compromise itself in order to enrich its less developed economy. What position should one take in the face of such geopolitical contradictions? How can one reconcile one's true identity and maintain the sovereignty of art at the risk of losing the purity of live-performance art without compromising it into being a tool of the State or as a product for the market?

Lee Wen
More China Than You, 20 November 2007
Vital 07, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester.
Photo credits: James Champion

11

Art and Social Change in the Asia-Pacific Region Caroline Turner

There have been extraordinary changes in the Asia-Pacific region since the early 1990s but I believe these are in great part positive changes for art and artists. There is today a new and more inclusive intellectual context for international art. The question posed in this survey is related to the growth of China, but my position is that the challenge to Western hegemonic influence implied in the “new geography of art,” heralds a much more open international art world. I do not accept the contention that “independent voices are much more difficult to sustain with China on everyone’s horizon.” Independent voices will continue to be raised because artists in the Asia-Pacific region have a tremendous and resilient history of commitment to their communities. It is also important not to conflate the art market and the huge prices for some Chinese art with the intellectual and artistic directions of art practice today.

It is true, as I said in my book *Art and Social Change* published in 2005, that: “The geopolitical tectonic plates have shifted dramatically in the Asia-Pacific region in the decade... signifying perhaps, as many experts suggest, the impending close of five centuries of global domination by first Europe, then the United States.” The new millennium has led to a rethinking of global relationships. Some may believe that the European sun is setting, as Oswald Spengler foretold in 1918, though for reasons inappropriate from the viewpoint of the present. But many experts agree that the political ascendancy of China does not portend a unipolar Chinese hegemony comparable to that assumed by some, especially in the United States. The geopolitical prospect in the immediate term, it is suggested, is rather of a multipolar global system, comprising the US, China, India and Japan, with Russia and perhaps Brazil as major powers. Europe and other countries in Asia will continue to be important. While this century may indeed be an ‘Asian’ century, this does not mean only China or Chinese art will be significant.

In a November 2007 conference of Asian Art Museum Directors that I attended in Singapore, Okwui Enwezor referred to the significance of a Rockefeller forum in Bellagio, Italy, of art curators from all continents in 1997 that I also attended. At that conference it became clear to me that there had been a paradigm shift in international art. The inclusion of artists from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific as well as Indigenous artists in world exhibitions and forums is a hugely positive development. When I was developing with Australian and Asia-Pacific colleagues the curatorial rationale for the Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions in the early 1990s, I encountered the prediction that the project should not be done because ‘standards’ in an exhibition of contemporary Asian and Pacific art would not be sufficiently high. The first Triennial exhibition in 1993 blew that contention out of the water; and indeed Southeast Asian artists whose work reflected issues of social justice and Indigenous artists from the Pacific and Australia were in many ways the ‘stars’ of that exhibition.

Contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific can no longer be understood by looking only at the twentieth century engagement with Western modernism that set art in the region on a new trajectory. Art in the Asia-Pacific today cannot be judged, defined and

confined by a dominant ‘Euro-American paradigm.’ The region itself has developed its own forums for art and there has been an explosion of exhibitions and research in the Asia-Pacific region in the last ten years. Many exciting and important exhibitions have provided new frameworks for understanding world art which do not rely on old hegemonies of exclusion or outworn paradigms.

Geeta Kapur, one of the pre-eminent writers on art in the region, describes the context for Indian (and by extension) many Asian artists as “a civil society in huge ferment, a political society whose constituencies are redefining the meaning of democracy and a demographic scale that defies simple theories of hegemony.” All these factors are evident in Asia today and many countries including India and China are undergoing the most remarkable social and economic transformations in history.

Independent voices will continue to be raised because artists in the Asia-Pacific region have a tremendous and resilient history of commitment to their communities. It is also important not to conflate the art market and the huge prices for some Chinese art with the intellectual and artistic directions of art today.

Economic transformation in Asia has also led to social dislocations, including the attendant growth of consumerism and materialism. The late Chinese artist Chen Zhen confronted these economic imperatives in 1999, creating a “crucible of washing fire,” as, in his words, a “medical-alchemical treatment for the inner disease of Asia’s success and its crises.” The crucible was constructed of hundreds of abacus beads, old wooden chamber pots from Shanghai, where the artist was born, and broken computers and electronic parts. Chen Zhen questioned the speed of economic growth and urbanisation and asked if this would generate a better life for the people of these countries.

Artists can, through their work, reflect the aspirations of their communities and of humanity. Many artists in the Asia-Pacific region over the last decade have addressed their work to issues of deep concern to their communities including issues of injustice, environmental degradation, cultural loss, poverty, exploitation, war, violence and racism. In confronting such issues, artists have addressed their art to and involved whole communities. There is strong commitment to such ideals in contemporary Asian and Pacific art. Nothing is more striking than the passionate social engagement of art in the region.

Homage to Chen Zhen

Chen Zhen and I had planned a project together that was never realized. The quote on the back of Chen Zhen’s homage is from some of the notes I took while we were in discussion over our planned trip to China. Chen Zhen’s thinking was very organic and often involved the idea of community analysis. I saw the photographs placed along the margins of the mirror as akin to communities that extend from Chen Zhen’s studio, and back from the communities to his studio. Reading over some of Chen Zhen’s interviews, I was most struck by his descriptions of feeling alive when he first arrived in Paris. All alone and living in tiny quarters, he mentioned having no real contacts in Paris then. I imagined that during times of isolation such as he endured, the mirror must have occupied an important component of his life, if only symbolically.

Chen Zhen’s passing is a great loss to art, his friends and family. I wanted a work that represented our loss of Chen Zhen through that most traditional form of artistic commemoration, a memento mori. I wanted a work that would allow us to look from the perspective of Chen Zhen and permit us to discover something about ourselves through a few remembrances of his life.

**En tant qu’artiste, mon rêve est de devenir un médecin.
Faire de l’art, c’est avant tout porter un regard sur soi,
s’examiner et d’une certaine manière, voir le monde.**

Chen Zhen

**As an artist, my dream is to become a doctor.
Making art is all about looking at oneself,
examining oneself and somehow seeing the world.**

Chen Zhen

12

**China:
We Love You!**
Thomas J. Berghuis

I want the judges to know that I love my country very much for its 5,000-year-old civilization, history and its people. I also want them to know that I will take advantage of this opportunity to introduce China to more people from around the world. I know my English is limited, but I believe through communicating with people about China, my English will improve.

—MISS CHINA: ZHANG NINGNING, COMMENT MADE
AT THE 2007 MISS UNIVERSE COMPETITION IN MEXICO

Last year I watched in awe as Miss China PR, Zhang Zilin, was crowned Miss World at the 2007 Miss World Competition in the Sanya tourist resort on Hainan Island. Several months earlier, on the other side of the world, the 2007 Miss Universe pageant in Mexico City was won by Miss Japan, Riyo Mori. Miss China, Zhang Ningning, was awarded the Miss Congeniality prize for her amiable performance. In an unprecedented move China is celebrating its newly found connection with the world and the world is embracing China as if it were a lost child that has just found her way back home.

Europe seems especially touched by China's powerful popular imagery. This could be seen during the Venice Film Festival in September 2006, when the festival President, Marco Muller, conducted a *kowtow* on stage to welcome the Chinese movie-star Zhang Ziyi in front of an international audience. According to news reports in the *People's Daily* Muller's act produced a heated discussion amongst Chinese citizens at online chat rooms. Many ridiculed the overseas popularity of the actress, who, like her long-term movie partner and director Zhang Yimou, fails to receive the same approval rates in China as they do internationally. This shows the two faces of China: one that is part of the global popular imaginary, and the other that is reliant on local countenance.

Chinese cultural production has long been conditioned by the popular imaginary of the West, as could already be seen with the manifestation of Chinoiserie in Europe since the 17th Century. In recent times, contemporary Chinese artists have become accustomed to thrill the eyes of the Western beholder through projecting repetitive similes of revolutionary realism, cynical realism, consumerism, and speedy urbanism. Since the late 1990s these popular depictions of a nation in transition have started to hit the global art market, and they are further disseminated through major art events that are capable of drawing on the support of cultural ministries, state institutions, and large sums of private, public and corporate capital.

With 30 days to go before the *China Now* festival kicks off, I can't help but wonder whether the majority of people in the UK will be able to get an understanding of the political tenets that lie behind this event. Of course we love China, but will China ever love us back? In fact, one only has to read the diary of Lord McCarthy's adversary to China of 1792 to understand the underlying turmoil behind the historical liaison between China and the UK. It led to the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860). But who cares about history? The prevailing disposition of the contemporary is that it is able to surrender the past by its rigid fixation on the 'now.' Resistance is futile. Assimilation is the new Leitmotiv. Even if there is still a voice coming from the margin, who will pay to hear it? The power of cultural capital lies in its trouble-free expenditure, in its potential to be easily consumed. Chinese art now is comparable to Chinese takeaway: quick stir-fries, suitable to all tastes.

Meanwhile—in many other parts of Asia—artists, curators, collectors, and scholars, are wondering if they will ever be able to compete with the overwhelming attention that is given to Chinese contemporary art. In December 2007, I was able to pay a second visit to Indonesia, where over the past twelve months the art market has risen to certain

The prevailing disposition of the contemporary is that it is able to surrender the past by its rigid fixation on the 'now.' Resistance is futile. Assimilation is the new Leitmotiv. Even if there is still a voice coming from the margin, who will pay to hear it?

proportions—giving hope that one day Indonesian contemporary art will also become noticed by the international art world. It was then that I began to realize how extensive the playing field in the promotion of contemporary Chinese art actually is. I am tempted to argue that it all starts with an overwhelming sense of patriotism that is shared by the majority of Chinese, including many who are living overseas. It is essentially through a careful mixture of ethnic pride and global prestige that China has managed to become a global player, put together by the self-proclaimed claim of 5000 years of history by its entire people. Not only do we love China, but we love to be part of China as well.

On 15 October 2003, when the China Space Agency (backed by the Military) launched a rocket into space carrying the first Chinese astronaut for a 22-hour orbit around the earth, it did so for the world to see. However, the primary incentive of the launch rests in encouraging a deep sense of national grandeur in all Chinese citizens; who will evidently work harder for the economic prosperity of a nation that prides itself on being called a dragon economy. In the past, the Chinese Communist Party used propaganda posters to incite the masses, but these days it needs to produce more imaginative symbols to project its global ambitions onto its people. Hence, in a few months from now, the world will witness the spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which is, without a doubt, far greater than any cultural event this year.

The organizers of this survey have asked me to respond to the “question of contemporary Chinese art and its current surge on the global horizon.” I must admit that, at first, I was reluctant to participate; having become convinced that any form of critical response will prove futile within the perspective of such powerful forces as those which are driving the market and political forces behind the global surge of Chinese art now. How can I possibly compete with the grand themes set forth by the group of distinguished speakers who addressed the topic of Chinese Contemporary Art at the Louise T. Blouin Institute in London, in March 2007? And, what am I to comment on the upcoming *China Now* festival, except to praise the organizers for their elaborate list of sponsors and getting such tremendous political support.

As time progressed, I succumbed my initial reluctance of joining this survey, mainly thanks to the great perseverance and profound interest of Judy Freya Sibayan in getting my opinion. It is then that I started to realize that the actual shaping of the “new language of resistance” that is sought after in this survey has to be found in subsistence of the journal *Ctrl+P* itself, and the fact that the call for debating the future of Chinese art originates in the Philippines and becomes disseminated to the open structure of an online publication. As to the question of “how this new language of resistance is to be shaped,” I can only convey my personal interest in expanding my point of view on the ‘global horizon’ beyond the overpowering imagination of China.

The power of cultural capital lies in its trouble-free expenditure, in its potential to be easily consumed. Chinese art now is comparable to Chinese takeaway: quick stir-fries, suitable to all tastes.

We read two novels during a flight on our way from England to China. The novels were *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, 1821, by Thomas De Quincey, and *Youth and The End of the Tether*, 1902, by Joseph Conrad. Each book narrates a journey across a physical, social and psychic landscape. De Quincey wrote in the ascendant years of the British Empire, while Conrad wrote towards, and perhaps in anticipation of, its decline.

Reading these books on this journey brought different layers of time into contact: the historical periods of the stories, the duration of the journeys described, and the passage of years between the events and their narration. As we read, the plane carried us away from Greenwich Mean Time towards the sun rising over the Pearl River Delta. It was here that China's deep culture of ancestry was brought into contact with the materialist present and invented traditions of the British Empire. With trade already degenerating into corruption, the flashpoint of the 1839-1842 Opium War came when Lin Tse-hsu, Imperial commissioner of Canton, seized 20,000 chests of illicit British opium, dissolved it and flushed it away into the Pearl River Delta.

We read, instead of sleeping. Altered states of consciousness, and changed levels of self-awareness are central to both books: De Quincey combines autobiography with hallucination and drug-induced fantasy, while Conrad pursues scenarios and portrays his characters with a grim determination as their choices lead them to the edge of madness.

The pull towards dependence and destruction is presented in both books as an almost inevitable force. In one book this gravity produces a sense of awe at human strength, while in the other it impresses upon the reader the extent of human frailty.

The End of History is the title of a book by Francis Fukuyama, who asserts that the projects of Liberal Democracy and the 'Free Market' are interconnected, and that they became complete with the collapse of communism as a viable alternative to capitalism.

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The End of History Cornford and Cross

2004
Photograph and text
Produced with the
support of Artist Links,
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River Delta, China

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**Hans Ulrich
Obrist**
Interviewed by
Erika Tan

Hans Ulrich Obrist: I am delighted to participate in your investigation as it forms a continuation of a long dialogue, which started in the 1990s when Judy Freya Sibayan was one of the main protagonists of *Cities On The Move* which I co-curated with Hou Hanru. This was a sort of laboratory or exhibition, which was about Asian art and architecture and it took place in many cities. You also participated in the London version of the show through an inclusion in the *Nasubi Galleries* of Tsuyoshi Ozawa which InIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts) organised and Judy from the outset in Vienna with her gallery *Scapular Gallery Nomad*. So it's particularly exciting to answer the question you propose because you and Judy were both in *Cities On The Move* and your question also relates to this.

My discussions with China however, go back further. Obviously now it's become very fashionable to do Chinese shows but for me it's really something much more profound than just bandwagoning and jumping on a train. It's really biographical in my case because in 1989-90 I moved to Paris. This was a very interesting moment, because Paris was at the forefront in Europe about discussions of a shift in ideas and understanding from the West Kunst idea to a more complex idea of where art could be. All of a sudden Asia became a focus. Africa, the East and the South became a focus and it was no longer just a North-West affair.

To some extent obviously the key moment was around *Magiciens de la Terre* which was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989 at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette. Although I wasn't living in Paris yet, I did go to the opening and met Frédéric Bruly Bouabré and all these different artists from all over the planet. It was an extremely interesting experience. And even though it was still a curatorial perspective from a European point of view, it marked the beginning of seeing artists from all over the world. It was the first contact zone. It was the first contact with artists like Huang Yong Ping.

In 1990-91 I got a grant from the Cartier Foundation which brought me to France on a more permanent basis and I became a neighbour of Huang Yong Ping and Shen Yuan. Ping was a Cartier Artist-in-Residence in Jouy-en-Josas. They were my neighbours and I spoke to them every day. This really marked the beginning of my interest in China, a beginning which I can attribute to my friendship with and the neighbourliness of Huang Yong Ping and Shen Yuan and all their friends, because there was a strong Chinese Diaspora in Paris at that time. I also met Fe Dawei and Yan Pei-Ming very early. Yan Pei-Ming introduced me to Hou Hanru and so I was basically hanging out with these extraordinary protagonists of the Chinese avant-garde of the 80s who are now all world-famous. Somehow for me it became a daily practice of talking about China and understanding the history of this Chinese avant-garde of the 1980s. The Tiananmen disaster in '89 had led to some artists going to New York and others to Paris. And Paris had a particularly interesting grant system. And then there was an exhibition of Chinese artists at Pourrières and of Fe Dawei who went there very early on. Hou Hanru the curator arrived, who was an artist to begin with but who also became a curator. Suddenly there were these curatorial voices and I started to think, if you look at *Magiciens de la Terre* as revolving around the ideas that the Western curator brings art from the East to the West, then perhaps the next step would have to be that one should work with a Chinese curator. So in this sense we thought the project had to evolve. It had to be about pushing things further and so that's how the collaboration with Hou Hanru started. We spoke for many years and the undertaking grew. It's not the sort of thing where we thought 'wow let's do a China show' and then six months later it happens. It grew organically over a period of many years from '90 to '97.

For us it was not about the idea of it being a continental exhibition, which for us is very difficult, but we were thinking and working more like Édouard Glissant whose idea of the toolbox for me I think also answers your question. I think Édouard Glissant is the great toolbox thinker of the 21st century. I think he is for our time what Foucault, Deleuze or Lyotard were in the previous decades to the art world maybe. I like Édouard

I have always believed that exhibitions have to resist hegemonic forces. Exhibitions have to produce difference.

Glissant's whole idea of *mondialité* and the idea of the archipelago—the idea that actually an exhibition should not be imposing like a rock as a continent, that maybe it should be more sheltering and welcoming and with an archipelago condition where there would be these different archipelago islands which could be brought together. In this sense it is really the opposite of a hegemonic model of the exhibition and that's why from the very beginning we always believed in a model where there are temporary autonomous zones. I mean you were part of the *Nasubi Gallery* of Ozawa and Judy Freya Sibayan had her own gallery there and so these were two temporary autonomous zones or conditions in the exhibition. So, the exhibition very much functioned as an archipelago and to some extent the idea of how to deal with these issues is for me, the archipelago and not the continental approach.

The idea or question of resistance is obviously that all kinds or forms of resistance are necessary. It's a resistance against the sort of packaging that results from homogenising forces. You are talking here about China as hegemonic force, and I have always believed that exhibitions have to resist hegemonic forces. Exhibitions have to produce difference. And again, back to Edouard Glissant. I read Glissant everyday. When I wake up in the morning, I read a few pages so that everything I have done in the last 10 years is inspired by Glissant. The idea of resisting hegemony as a different sort of annihilating force is one thing. The other thing is also to resist the velocity of packaging. So to some extent, particularly now, it's extremely important that exhibitions can evolve over several years, and that's something which *Cities On The Move* did. That's something that all my other shows have done and something which our *China Power Station* exhibition also has done. We now just have volume two in Oslo. And in London it had a lot to do with urbanism. It had a lot to do with this strange site, which reminded us of a site you could probably have in China now, a huge abandoned factory that could have been in China. When I arrived last year at the Serpentine, Julia Peyton-Jones, and I began to work on the show here with Gunnar Kvaran from the Astrup Fearnley Museum and we felt that at this incredible Battersea Power Station, we thought it almost could be in Beijing. The project was very driven by the building. Now in Oslo it's a very different show. We thought it was interesting to really focus on a young generation of artists who emerged after 2000, who are not yet in all of those shows, and to bring them for the first time into a more international context; like Tozer Pak and more performance artists and artists from different fields. So it's a completely different show. There's no one piece really the same as in the show here.

So the exhibition always changes and it pops up in different places and different ways. Another way is to resist packaging by operating in a trans-disciplinary way, by involving philosophers, and people from all different disciplines, which is something we already did in *Cities On The Move*. We had urbanists and architects. We had this idea of going beyond the fear of pooling knowledge. In *China Power Station*, we have Ou Ning's sound project *Awakening Battersea*, which he developed as a show within the show. So the *Nasubi Gallery* of this show was Ou Ning's sound gallery. Or it's the Universal Studio Shop with multiples and all kinds of other items done by artists sold very cheaply—a sort of art for all. So we again had a sort of shows-within-the-show.

Erika Tan: I was just wondering, how you can actually resist the force of packaging, because whatever show you're doing and the Serpentine is not excluded here, you have to package. And *China Power Station* was a form of packaging. You can't escape packaging in relation to packaging the show in terms of China. I suppose one question is, how do you really resist packaging? In the *China Now* press material, it says that the Serpentine is part of it. I'm not sure if *China Power Station* was actually seen as part of *China Now*, but at the moment we don't know exactly how *China Now* is going to manifest itself. I'm sure those forces must equally be

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at play in terms of bringing you or the Serpentine opportunities, or perhaps funding. How do you engage with those scenarios, but still keep the integrity of something that seems to have been more biographical for you in contemporary art production?

HUO: For me the whole preoccupation with China, and working with China has always been an ongoing project. At a certain moment in Paris, after doing *Cities On The Move* and when I was at the Musée d'Art Moderne we did more monographic shows because I felt it was time to show Chinese artists in more depth.

So we had Yang Fudong and then Wan Jian Wei at the Musée d'Art Moderne. And then we did the Yang Fudong show at the Moore Space Miami. It created a very high visibility for a more monographic presence of an artist which I felt was also important. It can also mean that one can talk more about the singularity of an artist because I think one of the problems is also that many of these Chinese artists are in hundreds of group shows but they never have a solo show. That seems to me to be one answer. And then in France there have been lots of exhibitions. Context is everything and one looks at the context where one works. And *Cities On The Move* was an early introduction of this in '97. But then there have been many many institutions like the Pompidou that did other big China shows, and by 2000 to 2003, I felt it was a good moment to do these monographs. So we did the show called *Camera* that Chang Yung Hu developed. And I arrived in London and Julia Payton-Jones and I started to say it was really very amazing this energy in China and Asia, in India and the Middle East. It's a little bit like what Fernand Braudel describes as that which happened in the 15th/16th century in terms of seismic shifts. So to some extent I think it is also one of the necessities of western institutions to show it. Obviously one cannot have recipes of how to do this. One can only do it differently each time. One lives at a specific moment. One does it at a specific moment, so one has to look at one's time, and at the place one does it. So for example in London, when we started last year, it was a big surprise to us when Julia and I reflected that none of these artists had really ever exhibited in London after *Cities On The Move* and a whole new generation has emerged since then. So unlike in Paris or Oslo, where there had been lots of China shows, this was not the case in London. There was a show at the Victoria & Albert Museum. And obviously the work of InIVA has been important and the pioneering work of the Red Mansion Foundation.

But pioneering work had not been happening in the mainstream. It had been happening in the smaller spaces and so for that reason we felt a commitment was really important, and to do a bigger show of a larger scale; and for that reason a group show, and not a monographic show, because the younger generation of Chinese artists had never shown here. To create awareness, we felt that a critical mass of exhibitions develop. And so I think to some extent, to answer you, it's always contextual. You can only do it every day as a daily practice of basically looking at the situation and then hopefully making the right move. So it's a permanent negotiation. It's not an a priori situation where I say we do this or that, because tomorrow things might again be different, or you might be in another city where it is different. Context is everything and I think to some extent the idea of temporality is also important. It is important not to reduce it to a single model but have different ones, historical and contemporary ones. Glissant says that many shows tend to be like continents, rock solid and imposing, as opposed to the Archipelago, which is welcoming and sheltering. He then goes on to say that the idea of a non-linear time is implicit. The coexistence of several time zones allow for a greater variety of contact zones as well. And I think this is really the key idea of a non-linear time, so that basically you have a coexistence of several time zones which allows for a great variety of different contact zones.

We are not just going to stick to a programme that we set at the outset as a master plan. But we have to see how things have evolved, and what is necessary and

urgent; after having done the show here, we felt that it was very very important to create opportunities for this young new generation, because I saw in '97, with *Cities On The Move*, that for these young artists, it had a meaning; they all became visible one way or another. And it's a very useful thing. I think this idea of the usefulness of such shows is important; that they make sense; that they are not redundant. There is a utility and we thought it was also useful to bring the young generation to Oslo. Many of these younger artists had never met in China. And so it was useful to bring them to Oslo and create a kind of similar situation like *Cities On The Move* ten years ago in '97 and to bring that new generation together somehow. So we started on these two shows, and we felt furthermore it would be interesting to do something in China. However, with *Cities On The Move* in Asia, it went to Bangkok and in Bangkok there wasn't really a museum of contemporary art. So *Cities On the Move* there completely dissolved into the

Flyer of *Cities On The Move*, Bangkok 1999

city and with the focus turning to architecture and shopping malls, it became a form of urbanism. I had no idea what was going to happen with *Cities On The Move* or now with *China Power Station*. Once it goes to China, it might take a different form. Julia Peyton Jones, Gunnar Kvaran and I have still to decide with the artists as to what it will become. And then it might be interesting to bring some of that back to London, or to some other place. And who knows into what other form it will evolve. So to some extent, it's really very much a complex dynamic system with feedback loops. I think that to some extent this hopefully answers your question.

ET: Are you glad that you're not doing *China Power Station* next year while *China Now* is on? Are you glad you're not showing something that relates to China during that period of time? Are you aware of *China Now*?

HUO: With *China Power Station*, we did it at that time because it felt really urgent to us. I feel there was an urgency to doing it. Late 2005, Julia Peyton-Jones and I started to have discussions on Serpentine's programs. Our discussions started actually long before I moved in April. It's like the way an architect works. When you come to a city, you ask, what does the city need? It's not just about what you want to do with it. It's also about what the city needs. What excites me about London now is that it's so different now from when I lived here the first time in '96. It is now truly a global city

in terms of its polyphony of language, and in the sense that it really is a place where people from all over the planet meet and work and cross paths. There is no other city in Europe basically like it.

Very often in cities, there are these dynamics which is the beauty of urban complexity. It is just something that happens. Who could have predicted it? When I lived here ten years ago, I was one of the few foreigner curators living here. Nobody from abroad worked in an art institution. There were hardly any artists from abroad living here. It was really very much about British art, to some extent. And now, it is such a more open situation, much more open than in many other cities in Europe. And yet, paradoxically, many of these Chinese artists who we believe are so important had not yet exhibited in this country in a public institution. To some extent, it was good that it happened last year and it is wonderful that there is going to be more next year with this very dense festival. It felt urgent, and the other thing about why we did it so fast was also about the opportunity with the building. There was this opportunity with the building. Now the building has changed owners and it's a different situation. But back then, it belonged to a Hong Kong businessman, Victor Wang and his family. It was one of the great landmarks of England, owned by a Chinese Hong Kong family. It was an absolutely perfect constellation of events.

ET: But you can't escape economic imperatives.

HUO: The interesting thing about London now, is that you do have support for such projects. We had this support; the Wang family gave us the building for the show, and above all we had the Red Mansion Foundation as co-producers of the show. They had already done a lot for Chinese art in Britain in a pioneering way. I think this is a very positive thing, and I think again to some extent the question is always, what is the necessity? Certain countries do China exhibitions now to sell aeroplanes to China. But that's not the way we work and I don't think it's the way most institutions in this country work, because there's a real desire now in England for Chinese art. That's the thing that makes the situation in London so positive, that there is reciprocity. It's very receptive. There is a real appetite in London and desire now to see more. And in 2008 we will do a Serpentine online project with Cao Fei which will be part of *China Now* and which will be announced in January. Also, *China Power Station III* will open in Luxemburg at Múdam. And in February, I will curate a retrospective of Lu Chunsheng at the Red Mansion Foundation.

ET: And there hasn't been anything else really since?

HUO: There's been *China Power Station!* There's also been *The Real Thing* at Tate Liverpool, a very serious exhibition in Liverpool which I also felt was important.

ET: Yes, this show was discussed at the Louise T. Blouin. This is how the survey actually started because Judy came over for a week and there was a lot of discussion about China that week. One of the curators was saying it was great to go to China because we could make the money go further. And as an artist, sometimes you can appreciate that. But it didn't seem to be a good enough reason. For me it indicated perhaps a shift from the late 80s where people were interested in Chinese art, because they hadn't had any experience of China, and now being interested in Chinese art means it is the thing to be interested in.

HUO: It's a marathon! For me it is something that started in 1990/1991 and will always go on. I am going next week to the opening of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts in Beijing, and I'm launching my *Do It* book in Chinese with 30 Chinese artists, all China-based artists, who wrote instructions for the *Do It* book. So for me, it's also

about reciprocity. It's not only a transfer or bringing art from China to Europe, but it's also about curating in China, and that is also something that has become very very important as an experience. I co-curated the Guangzhou Triennial in 2005 and now we are doing the *Do It* book. The model is always that model which creates a bridge. This reminds me of Huang Yong Ping who says that the bridge created is that between the local and the global because on a bridge you have two points, two ends. He says that usually we think a person should only have one standpoint. But when you become a bridge, you have to have two standpoints. This is also an explanation for the concept of crossing the border of the self. As one person, you should have many standpoints between these two points. There is one that is more stable, your initial personality and another point which is less stable, which is floating. These bridges are always dangerous. But basically here, the notion of danger is not negative, but positive. It creates the possibility of opening up something else; by resolving to the notion of chance, one can have access to enlightenment. In terms of philosophy, traditional Chinese philosophers never said, 'I say,' but always said 'our ancestors said.' It is a way of accessing reality.

To some extent one of the things that is also interesting is, and this is also something that our conversation today prompted me to think about, one of the things that is also interesting is that obviously with *Cities On The Move*, we focused on many other contexts in Asia. We also focused on the Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia and I think to some extent, one can also ask why after *Cities On The Move* I had not spent more time for example in these places. Why have I not spent more time in South-East Asia? Why is my focus on Asia often on China, also Thailand, also Japan? I think it just has a lot to do with biographical matters. If I had not met Huang Yong Ping in '91, and not lived next door to him; had he not become almost like my family, and had I not become very close friends with Chen Zhen, nor saw a lot of these Chinese artists in Paris all the time—if all these hadn't happened, it might have happened with another geography. I think in your life you cannot really build too many bridges. Huang Yong Ping described it as "too many places." I think you can always do short trips, but you can always only do research in a certain limited number of places, because it takes a lot of your time, because you have to go there again and again and again. I have been so many times to a few places, and I've been to many other places but only on short journeys. But I believe in the idea that it is more interesting to do many trips to a few places than to do too many trips to too many places that then remain superficial. But I thought about this today in relation to your question. As Douglas Gordon would say: "It has only just begun. To dig deep takes a long time."

Cities on the Move at PS1
Contemporary Art Center.
Opening day, October 18, 1998
Photo credits:
Judy Freya Sibayan

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Cultural Revolution Internationale? Neferti X. Tadiar and Jonathan Beller In Conversation

Neferti X. Tadiar: I want to begin by rephrasing the question posed to us. From the perspective of my own work on contemporary Philippine literature and cultural production, it seems to me to be useful to rethink the idea of “culture as site of struggle,” which we have ourselves undoubtedly upheld. What is culture today? How are we to think about ‘it’? How does it operate? The astronomical market-value that certain forms of global art now command in the context of an ongoing global war (Chinese art being a prime example, but also the work of artists like Damien Hirst) prompts us to ask what is the role of art in relation to global capitalism and global governmentality? I am thinking here of art as a dominant practice of ‘culture’ and also of the permanent states of emergency that appear to have become the *modus operandi* of international politics. I think it’s important to put the question of art and culture in relation to these broad geopolitical conditions as well in relation to particularities of social life before we can address questions of resistance and struggle.

Jonathan Beller: I agree. While culture is no less a site of struggle than it was in prior moments (indeed one could argue that the meaning, as it were, of media technologies and media-capitalism is that culture as such has become a privileged site of struggle in more intensive ways than ever before), answers to the questions about the counter-hegemonic role of art seem to have radically shifted away from progressive potentials. Where once situationism, third cinema and protest art seemed to offer radical alternatives to the cultures and indeed states of capitalism, today even the most scandalous and/or incomprehensible art practices seem like market spectacles, not only because of the proliferation of art schools, auction houses, cultural pages, and what may be a new dispensation of a global elite towards the consumption and proprietorship of art as a means of at once signifying class and redeeming bad conscience, but because the market has penetrated the very structure of production to an unprecedented degree. Art students at Columbia University have their works bought en masse by wealthy art market speculators hoping to make good on one or more investments in this form of start up. A trip to Chelsea reveals that more than social comprehension, commentary, critique or experience, what is marketed in those sleek \$2000/square foot gallery spaces, are forms of social currency, memes looking for a community of investors. Here, Hardt and Negri’s concept of real subsumption is perhaps useful, as is Virno’s idea of virtuosic performance as the fulfillment of the score of capital vis-à-vis the general intellect.

What we are discussing here, then, is a change of state in the matrix of culture, specifically in its role in the production and reproduction of the relations of production. Capital has ‘developed’ to the point that culture, generally speaking, is itself part of capitalist production. Clearly China, with its tremendous role in propping up the dollar and having embarked on a massive upgrade in its productive capacities by increasing the organizational structures to massively exploit huge numbers of workers, many of whom have a status not much different from slaves, is a part of this Global shift. Indeed, it may be possible to see the current situation as an ironic fulfillment of the Cultural Revolution.

NT: Perhaps that is too strong or too cynical a way of putting it. While I understand you are pointing to the immense shift in general subjective capacities and the specific work of ‘culture’ called for by global capitalism, a shift undoubtedly gleaned in the spectacular changes taking place in China not only at the level of economic infrastructure but also at the level of personhood (Lisa Rofel writes of the new kind of human being emerging in China today, one who exhibits the proper characteristics of a “desiring subject”), I would want to hold the term “Cultural Revolution” in reserve for a couple of reasons. One, is that the Cultural Revolution has itself become such a prominent subject matter of visual representation in Chinese art as well as in Chinese cinema, and as such, has become central to

Beller: Capital has ‘developed’ to the point that culture, generally speaking, is itself part of capitalist production.

the very global currency that this art and this cinema have gained in the so-called “post-socialist” era. That is to say, if the Cultural Revolution has itself become part of the visual lexicon mobilized in the service of that very shift (and there is much more to say here about the prominence of reworked images of Cultural Revolution propaganda in quite a bit of the China art circulating in global art sites such as the New York Chelsea art scene), it seems to me to be quite difficult to employ it as a critical-analytical term.

Another reason for my hesitation in describing the current situation as an ironic fulfillment of the Cultural Revolution is that, despite the fact that I agree with you that it is quite impossible now to think of culture simply in terms of social comprehension or critique (or for that matter as a site of contradiction to capitalism), given its subsumption by capital (or its absorption into the logic of the market), I also think that cultural practice is much more variegated and unevenly ‘scored’ by capital than Hardt and Negri and Virno would lead us to believe. In other words, there is no unified field of ‘culture’ that one can point to as the object of capitalist subsumption. We can see this in the very unevenness of the global art market, which points to the widely disparate levels of recognition and valorization of visual representational practices in the world today and suggests that some ways of seeing and being are better codified and integrated within the formal global economy than others. We have only to think of the status of Philippine cultural production in the global public sphere to see this.

The very marketable art we see today may certainly seem to be a high end form of this valorized culture, commanding nothing more nor less than interest-bearing investment (financial and spectacular), which would only confirm the role of ‘culture’ in the reproduction of dominant social relations. But at the same time, the mechanisms of selection, curating and exhibition play just as great, if not even a greater role, as purveyors of this dominant ‘culture’ than the art works themselves. The exhibit of Chinese art we recently saw at Chelsea entitled *Revolution*, featuring precisely those works I mentioned that rework images of the Cultural Revolution to parodic or nostalgic effect (the life-size, chrome sculptures of Mao by Guanci; the painting of plasticized toy-like, literally-red State personnel by Shen Jingdong; the newsprint-like painting of photographs of Mao, Marilyn Monroe and the atomic mushroom cloud hanging over a classroom of children by Cao Xiaodong), almost as curious precursors of capitalist mass production, like proto-commodities or proto-spectacles of the Debordian variety, or as icons and artifacts of a global modernity, is a case in point. That exhibit might support your notion of “ironic fulfillment of the Cultural Revolution,” insofar as it presents subjective relations to this complex history that are quite compatible with fantasies of post-socialist affirmations of the triumph of capitalism.

The very title of the exhibit, *Revolution*, would seem to gesture towards this sense of irony. However, I can only read these works in terms of their global legibility, and it is this legibility that simultaneously supports the social and economic currency that they can command or embody, *and* makes invisible or renders illegible other subjective relations and emerging subjectivities that might also be operating in the production of these very representations. Indeed, in some ways, these same art works thematize their own conditions of legibility through their sheer auto-referentiality. That is to say, in their recasting of the politically-instrumental imagery of a past era as media simulacra, they point to their own role as image-making technologies in a visually-organized and -produced mediaworld. In this way, their post-socialism is very much in conversation, if not in full congruence, with the postmodernism of what Jameson called the North American style.

Jing Kewen’s painting of an out-of-focus red-roofed and red-walled building viewed through a rain splattered car window (in the *Revolution* exhibit) both stages

Tadiar: ...there is no unified field of ‘culture’ that one can point to as the object of capitalist subsumption. We can see this in the very unevenness of the global art market, which points to the widely disparate levels of recognition and valorization of visual representational practices in the world today and suggests that some ways of seeing and being are better codified and integrated within the formal global economy than others.

Jing KeWen
Dream 2006 No.16
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 300 cm.
Courtesy of
ChinaSquare.

and epitomizes the global visibility of “China”. Here the real subject of the painting is the in-focus glass of the car window through which we see, highlighting the media apparatus (including the car) that is the condition of possibility of our view. Yet at the same time, it is the raindrops on the window that allow us to ‘see’ the lens, the same rain that might account for the strange quasi-facial form reflected on the expanse of wet street between us and the building, that introduces a permutation in our seeing, in the path of our vision. I read the rain here as a symbolic gesture to a leftover materiality that is excised from the image, but that

nevertheless is part of the latter’s condition of possibility as generalized visibility. You could say that it is this leftover materiality that remains illegible in the global currency of contemporary Chinese art, at least to us as examples of its cosmopolitan viewers. We are not only cosmopolitan viewers, however. In the Philippine context, the leftover materialities of life have introduced many permutations in my view that I have tried to use as other lenses for seeing not so much resistance as much as other subaltern subjective capacities and relations at work even in what appear to be the dominant currency of human experience proffered by global art.

So I guess I still maintain the idea of “culture as site of struggle” but as a realm of practice neither separate from nor fully and evenly subsumed within the order of capital. As I said, I don’t think this is a unified field. And while there are undoubtedly hegemonic forms of culture (such as global China art) that are exerting force in the world today, I don’t think those forms have either arrogated or exhausted the language of resistance. Resistance, struggle—these are not stable arenas of practice, like territories that can then get colonized. Perhaps the history of 20th century social movements has given us too fixed ideas and memories of what culture-as-struggle looks like, and it is this political imagination that is exhausted. But struggles go on, just not always in the forms that are already known. The world crisis or state of emergency that we now live in certainly testifies to this fact. How we understand the ways in which cultural struggles are currently taking place in relation to this crisis, to war as the present form of global governmentality, is important to ask if we are not to be tethered to a nostalgic notion of resistance.

If we look differently and perhaps also elsewhere, we would see that the relations of culture to war and to capital are quite conflicted and contradictory, and this is what opens up the question of politics. So I would want to retain a sense of ‘cultural revolution’ that is not locked into an ironic sense of how this turned out in the Chinese context, but rather that understands it as the *longue durée* of transformations in the social imaginative and creative capacities and practices that human beings engage in as part of the process of making their lifeworlds, as part of living. This sense, I think, might enable us to better think about what and where the margins are, and what resistance looks like.

JB: I’m glad to see that you agree with me, at least overall. To speak about the ironic fulfillment of the Cultural Revolution is to negate neither the history nor the existing practice of revolutionary struggle at every level of social endeavor. Indeed it is precisely these revolutionary energies that are today being capitalized. Just because the only thing revolutionary in the *Revolution* exhibit you mention above is the (at this point repetitive) capitalization of the Cultural Revolution is not to say that there is no struggle. It is also not to say that individual works there were not innovative or even revealing—however, it is to propose that the vector sum of the

Tadiar: ...the mechanisms of selection, curating and exhibition play just as great, if not even a greater role, as purveyors of this dominant ‘culture’ than the art works themselves.

cultural work being embarked upon here is market directed through and through. The artist brands him/herself and at the same time brands China looking for their niche, whether in the global market or in the “autoethnographic” market (as Rey Chow might put it) of Chinese art collectors.

What we have then, in my ‘too cynical’ view, is the history of a revolution, as well as current would-be revolutionary struggles (in which I would include the struggle for mere survival) being subsumed by the regime of representation known as the art market. “Red Capital,” in the phrase used by the Marxist Hong Kong legislator Leung Kwok Hung, incorporates the vast accumulation of human value that is a direct product of the cultural revolution. Rofel’s identification of a new modality of Chinese subjectivity, painter Yue Minjun’s post-Maoist caricatures of the new Chinese subject (himself), at once mass produced, game, and larger than life, Len Bracken’s account of middle class commodity fetishism that includes anecdotes of young women prostituting themselves in malls so they can continue shopping, all this, and so much more, testifies to the historical transformation of interiority for which culture is at once the means and product—in short, the technology. That this transformation was built upon revolutionary, resistant or otherwise survival-type energies is only emphasized by the other sides of this explosive unleashing of the productive forces: unprecedented environmental destruction, multiplication of slave-like working conditions, and a new culture of suicide. Indeed estimates put the suicide rate in China at 250,000 per year, but some say that it is much higher because many deaths are not investigated. And of course there are the efforts to censor the Internet and imprison radical journalists—another ironic reversal in many ways since these efforts at censorship are not designed to isolate a burgeoning Communist society from the corrupting influence of market capitalism during its nascent stage, but rather to allow market capitalism to let its thousand flowers bloom while a billion people struggle in disempowered isolation.

Jue Minjun
Lady Liberty

To really understand what is marketed as Chinese art, one must understand that what competing in the world market means is that you have to have the right bio-software: a battery of objects, ideologies, affects, media-pathways, desire, personifications, attitudes. The vast resources of the Chinese people and ‘their’ nationalism have been harnessed to create the Red-Capitalist nation as a global power. Of course this nation, and its capital no more belongs to the Chinese than does America and its capital belong to the Americans.

In reference to some of the art you discussed, you said that “the mechanisms of selection, curating and exhibition play just as great, if not even a greater role, as purveyors of this dominant ‘culture’ than the art works themselves,” and I could not agree more. Indeed it is this mode of capture, that is of cutting, extracting, marketing, circulating and selling that becomes not only the conduit for the production and dissemination of what counts as Chinese culture globally, but for the securing of profit as payment for new iterations of the commodity-form. This logic applies to the capture of labor power in a plasma TV factory as well as to art-making; all of these forms draw on the living resources of China in order to valorize a profit for capital. The artist however, must endeavor to dignify these acts with the imprimatur of high culture including a knowing irony, a sense of past and future, and at times the deployment of brilliant skills of craft, or, in the case of artists who have their own factories for the production of their works, of organization. High culture, while a battlefield that should not be abandoned (some things are better, that is more useful politically,

Beller: Indeed it is this mode of capture, that is of cutting, extracting, marketing, circulating and selling that becomes not only the conduit for the production and dissemination of what counts as Chinese culture globally, but for the securing of profit as payment for new iterations of the commodity-form.

aesthetically, ideologically, and ok, spiritually than others), these days is also the field of human endeavor most responsible for money laundering. The blood that might be stuck to your DVD player just washes right out of money when you buy art.

In this, contemporary Chinese art is no different from Western art today—indeed its skyrocketing trajectory reveals the truth of what Western art and the art market have become. Record prices for Pollock's, Rothko's and Warhol's—the emptiest art imaginable—testify to the liquidation of art as content, and the apotheosis of art as fetish. While there is much more to say about this contest in the West during the latter half of the twentieth century to empty the artwork, it is precisely this liquidation that Hirst's blatantly stupid and utterly useless death mask seeks to capture. The artist takes 25 million dollars of diamonds (themselves among the bloodiest and most useless of fetishes), composes a skull, and sells it back to a collector for 75 million—a macabre trophy that some hedge-fund manager can stick on his wall to legitimate his role in exacerbating all the human suffering, brutality and death that haunts 'his' money. For the right person, possession of such an object would be deliciously ironic, a testament at once to its possessor's epic crime against humanity and his impunity, since the object is in fact a vehicle for taking all of that human life summated in wealth and converting it not into hospitals or schools but into a form of irredeemable, individualistic, ego-gratifying death.

You will have noticed, of course, that my brief account here is closer to a structural analysis of the conditions of possibility for the appearing of art today than to a traditional analysis of the content or meaning of particular art works. However, I find myself suggesting that, whatever else contemporary art work might be about, this structure is part of its 'content'—indeed in many cases, *is* its principal content. Like advertisers, artists find hooks, with which to brand their product and lure fetishist/consumers. Of course the particularity and specificity of these desires is of extreme importance, and indeed, it is there, in the specifics of each piece, that a more 'content' driven radical inflection could be given to some art forms. But if you ask me flat out if I have seen any revolutionary art lately, my answer is no. Artists make grist for the mill, better look elsewhere for revolution.

To wit: Yue Minjun's painting *Execution*, based on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, sold at Sotheby's London for £2.9 million (\$6.6 million) in October 2007. Five years ago his paintings sold for U.S. \$10,000.

Jue Minjun
Execution

NT: I don't think that talking about particularity and specificity is a matter of 'content' as opposed to structure or form. I think you make a very strong case for the conditions of possibility of Chinese art's valorized global visibility (visibility as value), and certainly for the irony that is capitalist exploitation (it is always an irony that the creativity of people's struggle is expropriated and alienated from them, only to return as a power against them). But as I said, this is only what we can read in such works

as cosmopolitan viewers using the global terms of their legibility. If we remain within these terms, however, we risk giving up altogether the possibility of reading other things that don't meet that cosmopolitan eye/I. That is where I would insist on the unfinishedness of capital subsumption, as much as the unfinishedness of cultural transformation, and on the importance of developing not so much a new language of resistance but rather a different political vocabulary for understanding and talking about the forms of subjectivity, cultural practice and social feeling—indeed, the forms of living—that people engage in as part of processes of world transformation. It may be that hegemonic or market-valued Chinese art has yet things to say about these processes, that is, other than what can presently be heard, even by its anti-capitalist critics. It may have things to say, for example about post-socialist capitalism, about the production of neoliberal subjectivities (or the new “interiorities” of desiring subjects) that didn't only emerge out of conditions of advanced capitalist nations after the economic downturn of the 1970s (this is in part what Lisa Rofel argues), indeed, about the very ‘structure’ defining global visibility and, more broadly, what ‘culture’ is in the present moment, which we seem already to understand. So I am saying the seeming hegemony of Chinese art does not exhaust its political potential or its capacity to refigure thinking and practice in the vein of political struggle. Moreover, beyond their sampling in contemporary global art, the memories and images of revolutionary hope reified in the aesthetics of revolutionary transformation can also be seen to continue to live on, and to live on *differently*, in other contexts, such as the Philippines and in Latin America, but in other places as well. And that brings us back to war, insofar as the current global state of war is the post-Cold War legacy of counter-revolutionary capitalist militarism.

Beller: To speak about the ironic fulfillment of the cultural revolution is to negate neither the history nor the existing practice of revolutionary struggle at every level of social endeavor. Indeed it is precisely these revolutionary energies that are today being capitalized.

JB: Yes, I agree. The danger in saying that the content (and by this I also meant form, the ‘content of the form’) of contemporary art is a vehicle of capitalization, lies not merely in being correct, but also in that it might imply that with this the work is exhausted, that there is nothing to see other than money. However, as you stress, the qualities of these quantities, as well as the qualities which may still escape being registered by the relentless calculus of the art world, or, alternately, may be unable to broach the market at all, are there for the rest of us, or for the parts of us who are identified in some way with...The Revolution, for lack of a better word. But we are confronted with a problem: How do we talk about these qualities, how do we act on them, how do we intensify their relation with representation, with affect, with knowing, how do we bring these non-capitalized traces of people's struggle out into the open without handing them over to the fascists?

Why China Now?

Sonya Dyer

“CHINA NOW—the largest festival of Chinese culture ever in the UK—....will coordinate some 800 events, performances and activities, shining a spotlight on the very best of modern China to *forge international connections and unite and inspire communities*. CHINA NOW is a showcase of art, design, cuisine and culture, science, business and technology, education and sport—an inspirational celebration of vibrant, dynamic 21st-century China.

...CHINA NOW aims to build partnerships between artists, cultural leaders, schools, businesses and communities across the UK and China...offers insight into China’s rich heritage and brings the diversity of modern Chinese culture to life. *It is hoped that new connections and relationships developed over the course of the festival will cement partnerships between China and the UK that will last long into the future.*”¹ (italics mine)

“The rise of (India and China) has become the geopolitical cliché of our times. For all that, the shift matters more than anything else in shaping global prosperity and security. We are seeing the political and economic awakening of hundreds of millions of citizens hitherto locked out of the global arena....economic integration is driving the biggest upheaval in the balance of global power since the 19th century.”²

CONTEXT—CHANGING ROLES FOR CHINA & THE UK

The idea of China as the next global superpower is an increasingly powerful force in the Western capitalist imagination. In Britain, one could argue that China’s (and to a lesser extent, India’s) growing power and future dominance, feeds into the post-Empire hangover Britain has suffered from since WW2. Contemplating loss of power and prestige is proving difficult for a country still determined to be a ‘player’ on the world stage. Engaging with China is ultimately going to prove more necessary for the UK than China. It is part of the process of facing the fact that the nation’s importance has diminished, that it is essentially punching above its weight internationally and that it will not be able to continue doing so indefinitely.

China, the narrative suggests, is to be feared and respected, but also rather resented, certainly not trusted.

If the average Britain were to form their view on contemporary China based on what they read in the press, China is:

- Home of (often unsafe) mass produced cheap plastic toys and other disposable, non-bio-degradable goods;³
- Home of countless, hardworking, unidentified, disposable, casual illegal workers, who ‘take jobs’ from under-skilled ‘natives’ (see the tragic case of the Morecambe Bay cockle-pickers, as immortalised in Nick Broomfields’ film *Ghosts*, 2006);
- The home of the Britain’s most popular take away food;
- Home to millions of female orphans;
- A rapidly expanding land of heavily polluted mega metropolis and dirt-poor, rural backwaters;
- Most famous for producing Bruce Lee (although he was from Hong Kong) and Jackie Chan.

Accordingly, the survey conducted by *China Now* sponsors HSBC (‘the world’s local bank’) states “only 7% of UK respondents correctly identified, Hu Jintao as Chinese president, whilst 43% most closely associated China with the actor Jackie Chan.”⁴ So, perhaps there is a convincing argument to suggest that there is a lack of nuanced understanding of depth and diversity of Chinese culture and politics in the UK.

As China is the ‘world’s next superpower’ it makes sense for a small country like the UK to develop a greater understanding of the country, for all sorts of reasons economic, cultural and so on. However, if we consider the great interest in *The First Emperor* exhibition at the British Museum, and the Tutankhamen show at the O2. it would be remiss to suggest that British people are inherently insular and uninterested in other cultures.

What’s interesting about *China Now* is that it aims to use ‘cultural capital’ as a means of achieving its aims. But is the promotion of ‘cultural understanding’ between the UK and China the real impetus behind *China Now*?

“China is now the world’s biggest market for mobile phones and is set to overtake the United States as the second biggest consumer of luxury goods after Japan. At the same time, there is more construction in China than anywhere else. The tremendous pace of change has inspired a whole new generation of designers and architects who are shaping fashion, product and urban design in China’s big cities. We need to understand what is happening in China and the aim of this exhibition is to help people to get a snapshot of the development of design in today’s China.”⁵

“CHINA NOW’s tertiary education programme, supported by Norton Rose Group, (an international legal firm specialising in corporate finance) will enable universities to obtain grants to fund and organise China related student festivals within their university and local community...The university festivals will also feature lectures and business seminars about working in and conducting business with China.”⁶

“*China Now* comes hot on the heels of *India Now*, a 3-month, Mayor of London-led “celebration of India in London.”⁷ *India Now* combined related programming in London cultural institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the V & A Museum with business related activities spearheaded by Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London. This included a much publicised visit to India by Mayor Livingstone and selected business leaders. The Mayor also gave his support for India’s bid to host the 2020 Olympics⁸ further cementing the cultural, business and sporting links between London and Delhi.

There was some consternation in the press—and the blogosphere—about whether or not London’s Mayor should spend his time visiting India on official business. Seemingly, some Londoners failed to see the value of cementing links with one of the worlds fastest growing economies and potential future superpower. London is also being promoted as a desirable location for Bollywood movies, 40 of which were produced in the city in 2006. Like China, India is also a target area for overseas students in the UK.⁹

CULTURE AS A GATEWAY TO CAPITALISM

Art has always been used to achieve political ends, often as a propaganda tool to promote a particular image of a nation, empire or leader. One can almost trace a timeline from the political use of art in ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman times, medieval and renaissance Europe to the promotion of Soviet Realism and the CIA-sponsored promotion of Abstract Expressionism in the mid 20th century.

The use of cultural diplomacy as a way of flexing ‘soft power’ is on the agenda again, not that it ever really went away. (Again consider, *The First Emperor* exhibition). *China Now* intrigues because it is sponsored and driven by business. It is unashamedly using art and culture as a gateway to capitalist endeavour.

Perhaps the fact that *China Now* is business-led also explains the lack of comment about issues like human rights and democracy that can often arise in the UK when discussing China. We are also seeing the incredible growth of the Chinese art market, previously mainly for export, but increasingly fuelled by Chinese millionaires, with art by living artists reaching astronomical figures.¹⁰

According to artifacts.net: “Through fairs, galleries, auctions, exhibitions, and private sales, the Chinese art market offers an unlimited range of possibilities for artists, collectors, traders, and art critics today. The political world does not know how to regulate this recent phenomenon. It is not easy for artists, trying to cope with artistic inspiration especially with all the new market requirements, and all this whilst still trying to find a balance between art and profit. Finally, it is not easy for collectors and for investors, especially for the less experienced who find themselves in an unknown arena—the new art market—where they are not often successful.... There is a foreign market for art in China where artists can sell their works at a relatively high price: foreigners can pay more than people from their own country. On the whole, artistic production and its foreign trade are balanced and in some ways can even be seen as complementary: Chinese people have bought modern western art, and at the same time some Chinese artists have sold their works to foreigners.”¹¹

In an article in *Arts Business News*, Howard Farber, president of China Avante-Garde, NY, says, “I think the 20th century belonged to U.S. art and the 21st will belong to Chinese art.”¹² According to the Foreign Policy blog *FP Passport*, “If the global art market is hot right now—and it’s red-hot—then contemporary Chinese art are the coals stoking the fire.”¹³ Of course, there is more to art than the art market. However, as contemporary art is increasingly judged by its market value, the growing market for art by Chinese artists—both inside and outside China—plus the economic might of Chinese collectors is creating a fascinating situation.

How will the growing Chinese art scene affect the art being created in the rest of the world? Or—in the future—how art history is taught? There are no Chinese people in *Art Review’s* 2007 “Power 100 list” of influential art figures (dominated by Europeans and North Americans.) One feels this will not be the case for long if the Chinese market sustains itself.

INSTRUMENTALISM AND CREATIVE CAPITAL

With *China Now* involving educational institutions, what then of such institutions and similar agencies? What does it tell us about the perceived role of education, particularly arts education? Is it somehow ‘retrogressive’ to be concerned about business sponsorship of cultural programming in educational institutions?

There seems to me to be a space between ‘official’ and ‘experiential’ institutional impetus behind involvement with *China Now*. On one hand, arts programming in Britain is currently overwhelmingly driven by marketing agendas. *China Now* provides the potential for institutional programming that coincides with a well-supported national project, which is bound to attract a great deal more press attention to those institutions (such as the University of the Arts) than they would usually achieve. As mentioned above, UK Universities are also keen to attract overseas students, particularly those from Asia, as—amongst other reasons—they are potentially a great source of income.

Concurrently, the instrumentalist model currently pursued in England’s public funding system (that is, funding that comes from the public purse) dictates that art should have a socially useful purpose, specifically relating to key areas of government policy. So, as an example, we find a proliferation of projects designed to tackle ‘worklessness’ (unemployment to the uninitiated), the integration of immigrants or asylum seekers, school bullying etc.

Its mirror image can be found in the market driven, business-led approach exemplified—I would argue—by *China Now*. It is as much about building the next generation of consumers (of UK goods in an increasingly affluent China, and of Chinese goods in the UK) as a straightforward cultural exchange. After all, businesses are primarily interested in making money. This means that *China Now* allows space for institutions to programme multiculturally (by engaging with British-Chinese artists, as well as artists directly from China), which fulfills the ‘instrumentalist’ agenda, as well as feeding into the business-led *China Now* project.

So, what are artists (willingly or not falling within the framework of Richard Florida's 'creative class'¹⁴) to make of this? How do we create a space for artistic expression? How do arts programmers succeed in promoting a progressive agenda—which promotes the idea of Chinese-origin artists as individuals, as opposed to representatives of an 'inscrutable' culture we are told most Britain's know very little about? What would happen if an artist in a *China Now* affiliated project produced work that was overtly critical of China or of business involvement in the arts? Are artists obliged not to bite the hand that is feeding them?

I would argue that it is necessary for artists to engage in subverting these institutional, capitalist and diplomatic imperatives, to attempt to create something meaningful and worthwhile that can stand outside of 'external' concerns. This is not to suggest that artists should not be concerned with politics or of their work being an adjunct to the process of capitalist initiation that China is now involved in. Ultimately I believe that we largely wish to be judged on what we produce—not the circumstances of production.

There must be space for artists to express themselves however strident or indeed politically ambivalent their feelings may be. The danger is that UK institutions—having become accustomed to the government's 'instrumentalist' model, use *China Now* to make artists 'perform' the role of being Chinese artists—only to be seen in the context of their Chinese-ness, as opposed to as abstract painters or sculptors, etc.

The jury is out as to whether these concerns are justified. Artists seem to always find a way to do whatever they want, fortunately. For the purpose of this edition of *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*, we wanted to support artist-led intellectual inquiry into the difficult and contentious questions and initiatives like *China Now* pose for art practitioners. Hopefully, this will go some way towards supporting the primacy of art and artists above other concerns, often given greater emphasis in the market-driven present.

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The dimensions of “The Long March”

Marian Pastor Roces

BIGNESS AND JOUISSANCE

Curator Lu Jie’s *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* begs myriad questions, but perhaps none more pressing than its own relation to the political meanings of scale. The project takes up China itself. Its spatial stretch—its iteration of the tectonic shift from old to new in that über-journey that tramped out the contours of the People’s Republic with bloodied feet—surmounts time. Reinscribing the 1934-36 Grand March of the Red Army in the lines of contemporary artmaking turns up the dial on audacity, conceit, nerve. This was, after all, the walk that produced Mao Zedong’s ascendancy: that which no one is allowed to forget. And because Lu’s *Long March* produces a mirage of a historical long march has been discursively constructed vis à vis archaic empire-building narratives, the project also projects itself into the realm of myth. The stretch of Lu’s imaginative reach strains credulity.

Yet it is precisely that long reach—that is to say, the excess of possibility, the discursive hirsute-ness, as it were—that delivers this project to a prolonged climax of absolute jouissance, of the sort that Slavoj Žižek describes as a radical, “authentic,” subjective position that he supposes is best embodied by Michel Foucault. A turn to Žižek here gives one to detect what it might be about Lu’s project that produces remarkable pleasure, even simply as an object of meditation. To begin with, through Žižek, one immediately considers the porousness between this absolute jouissance and another, autistic jouissance. This latter is the familiar “false” jouissance, issuing from capitulation to market forces, that is roundly denounced in liberal circles but never quite transcended. He historicizes this autism thus:

The drive to pure autistic jouissance (through drugs or other trance-inducing means) arose at a precise political moment: when the emancipatory “sequence” of 1968 exhausted its potentials. At this critical point (mid-1970s), the only option left was a kind of direct, brutal, passage à l’acte, push-towards-the-Real, which assumed three main forms: the search for extreme forms of sexual jouissance; Leftist political terrorism (RAF in Germany, Red Brigades in Italy, etc.) whose wager was that, in an epoch in which the masses are totally immersed into the capitalist ideological sleep, the standard critique of ideology is no longer operative, so that only a resort to the raw Real of direct violence —l’action directe—can awaken the masses); and, finally, the turn towards the Real of an inner experience (Oriental mysticism). What all three share is the withdrawal from concrete socio-political engagement into a direct contact with the Real.¹

That brutal *passage à l’acte* resonates with the necessary and inevitable confrontation with the Real in Lu’s *Long March*. But reversals and ironies are rife, in this project hatched 30-some years after the events described above. The will to rawness in *Long March* is realized as a paradoxically good-humoured critical stance towards Mao’s legacy. The project decomposes Left/Right categories, rendering them absurd, exposing them as at the very least geographically unsound. Still, the project makes for yet another coalescing of North/South power dynamics, particularly in the spectacle of art’s power elite contacting, and on occasion co-mingling, with its artisanal other. Lu collapses the distance of the international from the most obscure of local contexts. But he inevitably produces multitudes of events that appear—at least to those reading of these events from a distance—to reproduce, attenuate, and harden social distance itself. As well, *Long March* conjures armies, but mock-heroically. It brings back the Red Army circa

the debacle at Tienanmen Square 10 years ago, when the soldiers proved themselves to as pliable and instrumentalized a mass as the followers who made Mao leader of their journey in the 1930's. In this connection, the current *Long March* encourages musings about art's armies that are instead sardonic and given to peculiar individualisms.

Reversals and ironies are themselves a twist on the un-ironic, unidirectional (however snaky) flow of the historical long march.

In "Long March," art's march into reality with a capital R appears to undo the relation Zizek describes—where concrete socio-political engagement is eluded in order to be in direct contact with that capital R. The bigness of the *Long March* precludes such escape. Judy Chicago, for instance, taken ill in a female shaman's acutely obscure village, distant from the possibility of immediate medical attention, is a case of big (big artist, big idea of spanning big theoretical and geographical distance, big problem for the *Long March*, at least for a while, in the early days of this project)² that embeds the project in concrete-ness. This is not the jouissance of extreme sex, extraordinary drug experiences, or terrorism. The scale of the project—its spatial and temporal lengthiness which is the particular character of its bigness—splays it upon the quotidian. Perhaps the pleasurable-ness, then, that this project produces is best described along a domestic register. This is enjoyment such as experienced by bureaucrats and homemakers conjuring an enchanting, nervy world; bourgeois delight, to be sure, but which, in China, has epic scale.

At this scale—and it is by no means an essentialist assertion that China, that is to say, Chinese political and art authorities, literally manufacture, or cause the production of, big talk—jouissance can only be considered vis à vis the biggest stuff imaginable "domestically:" religion, civilization, ideology.

MIMESIS

Lu describes his project mimetically: "I was thinking about the ways that contemporary art practice could connect with social development and social change. I developed the Long March Project as an organic structure that could parallel the grand narrative of the historical Long March initiated by Mao Zedong. I developed the idea that a number of sites could be created according to this historical Long March—this search for utopia, this sharing of resources, this going beyond the limits of body and ideology."

The Zizek article cited here notes a homology *en passant*, referring to Jacques Lacan pointing out in "Seminar XX, *Encore*" that "jouissance involves a logic strictly homologous to that of the ontological proof of the existence of God." Zizek goes on to suggest that such absolute jouissance "is myth, that it never really existed." This is good to keep in mind when thinking about art, which the rest of this essay proceeds to.

Things that are construed as "like" the other, come to surface between the two assertions (without proposing, of course, that Lu and Zizek compose a homological pair). Utopian desire operates along a homological construction between the fervor invested in radical metamorphosis of soul stuff, and the zeal invested in the dream of radical social transformation. The rabid political and religious utopianism currently playing out in large part owing to American exceptionalism in geopolitics, is only the most viscerally immediate, of tribal and Medieval dreams. To state the obvious, these dreams issue from and draw out extremely old universes of thought. To assert something perhaps more obscure: one ought suspect that these dreams suffuse contemporary artmaking, albeit, to various degrees specific to place, moment, and players.

Long March contrives a conversation with a modern utopia that was pitted, with brutal resolve, against a decayed Middle Kingdom representing several universes of bureaucratically-, domestically-realized longings for jouissance; longings articulated by emperors and embodied by millions, presumably even in their sleep. As in the historical long march, so too does *Long March* articulate a faith in social metamorphosis. Rupture is viewed as suffused and consummated by *joie de vivre* writ large; a joy that will be expressed through passage through pain if necessary. These narratives are as though

religion. Too, *Long March* re-uptakes the utopian and sometimes quasi-religious registers of the language of contemporary artmaking current elsewhere in the world. Except for the curious twist: *Long March* makes overt a will to a dream-like—and exquisitely prolonged—state of catharsis. In contrast, contemporary artists, curators, and writers for most part tend to vest the greater value on imaginings of guillotine amputations, and the hope of irreversible shift.

Encouraged by “Long March” to think along parallel—albeit quirky—lines, the two-track direction tends towards meditations on mirrorings and recurrences. Mimetic conditions are complexly shaped, and differently so, everywhere—and words like parallel, like, similitude, analog, homologue, synonym, are often fail to convey precise registers of contextual nuance. Nuance, that is, of the order necessary to discern or conjecture, for example, if a China exists in Lu’s *Long March* rather than just Art, or if this is merely one more exercise in re-articulating a universally-construed utopianism. Theorizing *Long March* will require hauling out the historically knotty relation of mimeticism and art. This essay can only gesture in this direction. It bears saying, however, that without such nuancing, the greater likelihood is that a generic sense of (ultimately meaningless) verisimilitude is communicated. Since politically useful analysis depends entirely on discriminating among various orders and species of the mimetic, the paralleling that Lu construes between two long endeavors cannot be unscrutinized.

It is in this wise that it must be asked of *Long March* whether its scale—its conceptual long-ness that draws from its citation of the historical long march—permits art to actually alter the scale of its relation to political process. Delight, glee, amusement, exquisite torment, sensuously-realized passion, and the exercise of intellectual suppleness, are all wholly germane to this question, and bring this meditation to China as particular.

CHINA, ART, AND UTOPIA

The idea of ‘China as particular’—or split into the particularities of its parts—seems oxymoronic. China outside unified noble narratives seems impossible; or unrecognizable as China. If particularized ethnolinguistically or in terms of local history, the villages near Tibet, for example, through which both long marches staggered, will likely drain out of the very notion of China. The historical contact points between these villages and the two long marches may be the singular, ecstatic, and quite rare moments charged with the enormous scale of the notion of China; outside these contact points, China could well be an ethereal experience in those parts. That ghostly, or possibly, religion-like presence would ironically be in stark contrast with the China in the minds of contemporary artists, curators and writers, for whom this word—in all its vastness—is a very solid presence indeed.

The difference between the perceptions of the scale, on one hand, of China as globally deployed by the world’s power brokers, and on the other hand, of China as mythically permeating its own hinterlands, describes the scale of the reach attempted by the two long marches. This does not mean that the two long marches are in fact parallel efforts; of a similar scale. The homology is stretched, strained; parallelism, only smooth at surface. There will always be a diminution in scale, from a geopolitical perspective, from the first long march to its parody, today’s *Long March*. The reason is not to be located in that the first is a political act and the second an artistic effort. Such spurious reasoning will presume a non-existent division between political and creative worlds. However, there is basis in suspecting that it is the particular nature of contemporary art that shrinks the second march conceptually, as well as materially.

The constellation of practices consisting the world of contemporary art works within the intersection, shaped, as described by Žižek, by both that myth of a perhaps non-existent absolute *jouissance* and the autistic *jouissance* that succumbs happily to capitalism. This is the upbeat view that allows some understanding of the perverse mirrorings within art as it continues to redeem utopia, through the infirmities and

strengths caused by capitalism. One can also take a pessimistic, skeptical view that sees the utopian longings embedded in contemporary art practice as a residual but powerful worm of theological imaginings that historically belong to the and tribal Medieval of many cultures. This worm erodes the robustness with which contemporary art is able to contest or annul or repeal the dynamics of recurrence. China today and the Middle Kingdom are easy to absorb into philosophies of eternal recurrence which have little to do with the the nature of Empire today; here using Empire in the sense that Antoni Negri and Michael Hardt suggest. So, too, is Lu's "Long March" absorbed easily in rather old orders of knowledge.

Art's ability to de-worm itself—to handle well the transcendent myth of the possibility of an absolute jouissance that reinstates religion at the core of utopian aspiration—comprises the suspenseful question carried along by the march forward of *Long March*. China's discursive bigness can be expected to compromise the chances that this project can avoid parlaying a strain of the modern imagination that keeps alive archaic notions of transcendence. This unfortunate outcome would simply be a matter of size. China's transcendental bigness at once diminishes art—however vastly constructed—and renders it effete, drains it of power, moderates both its heroic and mock-heroic claims. *Long March* is as big as it gets in contemporary art practice, and yet the following account by Lu Jie can be read, not as he intended, but as measure of size disparity: "I spent two years visiting the six thousand miles historical Long March route. In 2002, we established the 25,000 Cultural Transmission Center in Beijing before launching the project that summer. After a three-month journey, twelve of the twenty planned sites were completed. We already had the contribution of two-hundred-and-fifty local and international artists."

Two hundred and fifty artists seems a paltry number given the discursive breadth of both long marches. The small number (big in any other art context) can only avoid seeming absurd by even more absurd appeals to art's metaphysical largeness. Everything goes downhill from that point. "Long March" shows up art's smallness. It may also reflect the smallness of utopian imaginings in the face of the power of the thought of absolute jouissance—even given that absolute jouissance may have never existed.

DIMENSIONS

Granted that small is by no means synonymous with (small or other) scale of significance, *Long March* thus confirms its meta-dimensions in the sheer wobbly-ness of its possibilities. In forcing encounter with the varying dimensions of power relative to varying discursive domains (which are unstably) designated as art, politics, metaphysics, and so forth, "Long March" is an absolutely necessary project.

1. Slavoj Žižek, "Religion between Knowledge and Jouissance" in *Lacanian Ink* 30, on-line.
2. From a chat with Lu Jie, February 2007.
3. Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000).

About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art. Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Contributors write gratis for Ctrl+P. Circulated as a PDF file via the Net, it is a downloadable and printable publication that takes advantage of the digital medium's fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. Ctrl+P provides a testing ground for a whole new culture and praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art writing and criticism in the Philippines. It took part in *documenta 12* magazines project, a journal of 97 journals from all over the world (<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/>)

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