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Minor China: Affect, Performance, & Contemporary China in the Global

by

Hentyle Taiwan Yapp

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair
Professor Mel Chen
Professor Andrew Jones
Professor Susan Kwan

Spring 2014

Abstract

Minor China: Affect, Performance, & Contemporary China in the Global

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Hentyle Taiwan Yapp

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

In our globalized moment, cultural production emerging from China and other non-Western locations has become of central concern for critical theory, art history, and cultural studies. In order to counteract previous decontextualized and over-universalizing discussions of contemporary Chinese art, most art history, theatre, and performance studies scholars have emphasized how art and culture emerged within specific historical and political contexts. However, by repeatedly relying on contextualization, the Chinese are reproduced as lacking imagination, contradictions, and complexity. By examining the historical emergence of this discourse, I demonstrate the limits of past approaches in order to explore other methodological possibilities.

In contrast to other scholars who have situated contemporary Chinese performance and art within over-determined modes of contextualization, this dissertation locates alternative methodological possibilities in affect and feelings. This project argues that historical contextualization reproduces presumptions around the Chinese state as authoritarian and its subjects as conscious actors. Thus, I develop a method called *minor China* that privileges the realms of affect, fantasy, and the immaterial over such presumptions. The minor, akin to the musical structure that feels melancholic and less prevalent than the major, focuses on such contours to direct attention to the assumptions that frame how we write about Chinese culture and the state. I develop the minor from the recent theoretical turns towards minor feelings and affects, from scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai, Steven Shaviro, and Eve Sedgwick. As I engage these analytics for their methodological capabilities, I situate minor contours to understand what they offer for cultural and political economic analyses of China.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

As a dancer, I have always identified with choreographic practice and performance because one generally has the option to reenact a choreographic structure each time one performs. Choreography involves a series of redos, restarts, and reperformances. Thus, it is with trepidation that I engage the form of the dissertation, with its sense of finality through the act of filing. The choreographic form with its restarts seems more appropriate for a project that has involved long-term and collective labor, interaction, and experimentation. A part of this collective was the artists that I interviewed; I am thankful for their generosity, time, and openness to my inquiries as a fan and scholar.

My committee has pushed me more than any other dance partners I've encountered, including gravity. Shannon Jackson graciously guided this project with gravity's invisible ease and constant presence throughout the research and writing process. Andrew Jones catalyzed many of the initial sparks of my, at times, unruly imagination. Mel Chen has become a feral companion. SanSan Kwan has lent a rigorous yet gracious model of academic performance within which I improvise.

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MINOR CHINA

In *Kill (the) TV Set* (2013), two black and white videos simultaneously play for about three minutes in a large dark space. One is a reperformance of "Charlotte Moorman with Human Cello," where Moorman simulates playing John Cage's "26' 1.1499" (1955) across Nam June Paik's back. In the original piece, their semi-naked bodies face each other, while Paik holds a string across his back.   In the reperformance, the artist Yan Xing, dressed in a white collared button down and black trousers, stands in a similar position to Charlotte, while an African actor sits facing Yan Xing in the same semi-formal attire. Yan Xing's face peers deeply into the space directly in front of him, while he lightly caresses his bow across the string held by the actor. The other video features a direct shot of a bonsai tree that Yan Xing groomed for a year before the shoot. In between shots of the bonsai, the screen flashes, in bold white letters, the following sequence: "Kill," "(the)," and "TV-Set."   Both of Yan Xing's videos run in silence.

Although this dissertation analyzes contemporary Chinese performance-based practices spanning from the 1980's to the early 2010's, I begin with this more recent piece as it brings many of my methodological, artistic, and critical concerns to the fore. Such concerns circulate around global art, specifically how non-Western art is discussed in relation to the contemporary, modern, and aesthetic. By focusing on examples from contemporary Chinese art practices, this dissertation expands the ways in which the non-Western other is approached and understood within increased global circulation. In particular, I work through questions surrounding 1) method, 2) context, and 3) media to augment our current approaches to non-Western contemporary art. My first concern is about method.   What methodological approaches are most appropriate in understanding the dynamics of this work? Is symbolic analysis enough to capture the relationship amongst bodies, objects, and audiences?   For example, one could write about the bodies as symbolic representations of global relationships between Yan Xing from China and his African counterpart. These types of analyses rely upon a representational method that captures bodies as knowable objects. However, the slow video produces a sense of instability that cannot be captured solely by representational analysis. References to Nam June Paik's iconic work, along with a queer sense of relationality between bodies, punctuate the slow pace of the work. What other interpretive methods might capture this instability and unique dimension in Yan Xing's art?

Second, in what contexts does this work arise? How can and should we situate an artist operating within a global art market, while simultaneously working in Beijing? Previous accounts of contemporary Chinese art have emphasized the role of globalization in the aesthetic production of these artists. One could posit that Yan Xing, who was born in 1986, grew up in an increasingly global world unhindered by the "legacy" of the Cultural Revolution. However, the notion of globalization primarily focuses on issues of exchange and modernity, which gloss over more minor concerns like Yan Xing's complex negotiations with personal exploration, local artists and trends, and the art market. When critics emphasize an increasingly homogenous and global aesthetic style that contemporary Chinese artists are (re)producing or the redefinition of modernity through such global artistic practices, they ignore some of these complex negotiations. What other contexts, or ways of understanding context, might best capture the complicated ways Yan Xing and others create, imagine, and produce?

Lastly, how do we understand this work as it relates to a larger history of performance art in China and also in relation to the art form's genealogy in US and Europe? As a reperformance of Nam June

Paik's iconic work, how do we understand Yan Xing's use of slow (almost photographic) video and live bodies? How do we situate the role of different media in relation to the genealogy of performance art in China, particularly in relation to not only new media but also theatre and dance? The discourses on contemporary Chinese art primarily reference a genealogy of visual art, along with a performance art practice deeply imbricated within this economy of visual culture. Yan Xing could be framed as being derivative of (in the least gracious light) or innovative within (in a more generous sense) this Western[1] genealogy of performance art and visual culture. However, in debating over the derivative or innovative nature of these artists, scholars ignore the medium-specific factors that might make a work derivative or innovative. In other words, innovation and derivation are contingent upon the standards and histories of the medium on which one focuses. Furthermore, as artists operate deeper within "expanded art forms," it becomes even more crucial to contend with the medium or mediums that we emphasize and use to frame a work. A focus on performance art might view Yan Xing as particularly derivative of Nam June Paik, while his use of breath and subtle movement are quite innovative in thinking about the relationship of dance/movement to photography and film. I consider the relationship among mediums, especially as performance and body-based forms comingle with new media and film.

The three above questions have shaped this analysis of contemporary Chinese performance and art, as they have developed within the context of the global art market following the Cultural Revolution and the marketization of mainland China. These questions, when understood together, direct us towards reinvigorating our approaches to the larger category of non-Western art, as such works are simultaneously arising from complex local contexts along with globalized dynamics. In surveying the dominant methods and debates available for discussing contemporary Chinese art and more generally non-Western art, I have discovered limited options beyond historicization and contextualization. The primary method of contextualization responded to previous maneuvers that overly universalized non-Western art. Rey Chow captures the predicament of repeatedly relying on contextualization: "Often, in an attempt to show 'the way things really are' in the non-West, our discourses produce a non-West that is deprived of fantasy, desires, and contradictory emotions."[2] Chow directs us towards the paradox by which our attempts to refute limited understandings of non-Western otherness preclude more complex analyses. Most discourses around Chinese art focus on state and global contexts or ignore context in order to universalize a work to understand how it relates to humanity. Both discourses produce the same issue for China and the non-West: otherness is flattened, erasing its complexity or specificity.   This project delves into this complex methodological problem surrounding how non-Western art is understood. On one hand, situating non-Western art within universal discourses glosses over the material problems that construct how non-Western others are conceptualized as lacking and limited with regards to the West. On the other hand, discussing non-Western art solely in terms of context and historicization becomes the dominant default methodological approach, which negates more dynamic explorations of non-Western artists. Rather than finding a "balance" between the two approaches, I develop a method that locates this predicament in relation to the limited conceptual terms and frames within which non-Western others are embedded.

Rather than solely offering historicization and contextualization, I engage these works at the level of methodology. Questions about method are intimately tied to how we shape the context in which a

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[1] As a Korean-born artist who primarily worked in the US and Europe, Nam June Paik holds a curious place in both American and Asian American art historical accounts of performance art.

[2] Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xiii.

work emerges; in addition, method grapples with the medium-specific lenses that we use to analyze multi-disciplinary work that dominates the current art market. Although I focus on China, I deploy the Chinese example to think more about the category of non-Western art, as similar dynamics structure the discursive and analytic issues surrounding this broad catchall label. Although the category non-Western may ignore the material differences amongst the varied temporal and spatial arenas embedded within the idea, the construction of the category itself directs us towards the relationality amongst those tossed into the category via racialized logics.[3] In other words, the category of non-Western is indicative of how Western logic imagines the Other: as flattened, similar objects. This relationality amongst non-Western others has been theorized through the notion of racialization, a category I further develop throughout this project and situate in relation to gender, class, sexuality, and disability. Denise Ferreira da Silva reveals how "the racial configures the globe as a modern signifying context."[4] Following the colonization of the non-West, "the scientists of man rewrote two principles of classification inherited from natural history, 'heredity' and 'fecundity,' as 'laws of nature.' […] From then on, racial categories, as scientific signifiers of human difference, would …produce a fundamental connection between the human body, the global region (continent), and the mind."[5] da Silva directs us to the possibilities of the category of race for thinking about the relationship between diverse sets of people labeled as non-Western. Without glossing over the struggles against and negotiations between such non-Western communities, da Silva invigorates the import of race for thinking through the global. Race is not meant to unite all non-Western others in their subordination; instead, the category of race for this project engages the use of non-Western to reveal its construction, as opposed to accepting the difference it presupposes.[6] I delve into this dynamic through the figures of *Major China* and *minor china*. Although this project has a specific archive situated within a historical moment, that of performance and art in contemporary China post-Cultural Revolution, my contribution is less historical (in terms of providing a full account of all art and performance in China after 1979) and more invested in the theoretical frameworks it activates.

Major-minor Relationality

Gertrude Stein once wrote of China: "In China there is no need of China, because in China china is china."[7] Although Stein's reference to china could reference bowls and other collectible objects, I read Stein's invocation of "china", as opposed to China, akin to the Major and minor. "China" represents an imagined Orient, where its grandeur must be captured and made legible through an understanding of its history and context. One could account for Stein's account of "China" and "china" in terms of geographic locale, where the latter becomes such within the nation-state since it

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[3] China has a complicated relationship to the notion of the avant-garde, similar yet distinct from Japan. Due to China's dominant relationship to global economic markets, along with Chinese artists' increasing popularity within global art markets, China possesses a different relationship to the West and aesthetic production. As such, China's position within the notion of "non-West" is one that has its own privileges in relation to other sites. For example, most Southeast Asian artists do not possess the same influence nor circulate in similar ways as Chinese artists. My use of non-Western is not meant to gloss over these material conditions.

[4] Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 182.

[5] Ibid., 127.

[6] Although *Third Text* has shifted in its focus and primarily emerged from a postcolonial analysis, the art historical journal offers a vibrant example of a long-term project that understands the category of non-Western in their relational possibilities as opposed to their limiting and exclusionary formations.

[7] Gertrude Stein, *The Geographical History of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 63.

loses its Orientalist appeal. However, Stein's poetics and use of capitalization direct us to the making of Major China and *minor china* through its shifting meanings. Depending on space, time, and history, the *relationship* between minor and Major changes.

The predicament of Major China emerges from the repeated framing of China in relation to historicization and contextualization. The Major refers to the production of "China" as the monolithic, authoritarian state system. The Major functions in the Derridean mode that operates within an "urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge."[8] Derrida describes an urgency that arises from the "force of law," inspiring fear which privileges the immediate and what the majority deems "important," in lieu of epistemological exploration. The "force of law" conditions what and how we produce knowledge. The Major arises in relation to this "force," as most non-Western others are described within this mode. The forms of knowledge produced about the non-West circulate around history, context, and "way things really are," since scholars are responding to the force of discourse - a discourse that had previously overly universalized China. Thus, the Major emerges from this push towards contextualization, where other modes of epistemological engagement were and still are eschewed. However, during my research, I sensed a more minor form in "china." Such contours were often eschewed in relation to the force of law/discourse. By tracking this sense of *minor china* in contemporary Chinese art practices through the contours of affect, breath, and failure, I developed analytics to engage and disturb the predicament of the Major. As such, the minor becomes a way to not simply replace the Major, but to renegotiate the assumptions that undergird the Major.

Major and minor are relational in form, rather than a binary. Such a relationship directs us to the minor contours of the Major, in which a shift in focus on the minor enables us to see how it upholds the assumptions of the Major. Major China is a methodological problem in which the main analytic and conceptual tools available to discussing Chinese and non-Western art are primarily historical contextualization, wedding a work to the state and history. The Major precludes other modes of inquiry, as demands for context predominate. The Major is not a problem per se, as demands for contextualization emerged from a previously limited discourse that overly universalized contemporary art from China. However, the problem emerges from the repeated invocation of the Major; thus, I take stock of what results from decades of such Major argumentation for Chinese and non-Western art. I focus less on dismissing the Major and more upon historicizing it to see what results when the bulk of critical discourse operates in such a mode.

To structure the dissertation, I track four dominant categories as they have been used to develop Major argumentation and to frame the non-West: history, the state/institutions, the subject, and agency. Rather than abandoning these terms, I invest in revealing their epistemological assumptions in order to rework, reconfigure, and find new avenues in their meanings. When these categories are left unquestioned, non-Western art remains within the Major since the art must solely contend with the terms and assumptions of such categories. These terms were originally formulated against non-Western others. For example, Yan Xing can be discussed in relation to history, the state, subject, and agency by first emphasizing Yan Xing's allusions to China's "ancient" history through his occasional references to pre-modern objects, such as vases and paintings, in the background of his films. Critics often discuss his relationship to the state and his critique of its pre-modern ways,

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[8] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice,* ed. Drucilla Cornell, et.al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 26

emphasizing a mode of resistance and critical agency for a queer subject. These four categories often dictate how artists and their works are discussed.

However, how might we attend to the nuances of Yan Xing's and others' works beyond context? And when attending to such nuances beyond over-determined contextualization, what emerges? I argue that minor contours do not replace Major categories but rather renegotiate their terms and assumptions. For example, the Enlightenment category of the subject was produced during an era of colonialism, in which the non-West was understood as non-subject and other.[9] However, the notion of the subject cannot be displaced by another term or concept. Rather the assumptions around who a subject is and how he operates must be made transparent. Replacing key terms does not reexamine their epistemological bases. Such bases reproduce the presumptions that privilege Western discourse and limit understandings of the Other. In trying to show the "real" history and context for non-Western works without renegotiating and revisiting the key terms that we utilize to construct such history and context, we reinforce the epistemological assumptions within Major categories like the subject and agency.

The predicament of the Major leaves the epistemological foundations of history, the state, and the subject unquestioned. Through the Major, 'the Chinese' remain non-Western others that are mere exceptions and multicultural subjects to learn about, as opposed to resources for rethinking key philosophical debates within academic theory. To shift away from the Major predicament, I do not simply dismiss and replace it with different concepts. As Dipesh Chakrabarty astutely observes in relation to Frantz Fanon's simultaneous critique and belief in the Enlightenment notion of the human, "there is no easy way of dispensing with these universals in the condition of political modernity."[10] Similarly, as Chinese scholar Wang Hui argues in *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, "as we correct the errors in the idea of Asia, we must also reexamine the idea of Europe."[11] In other words, although writing from different contexts, these scholars emphasize the need to both critique yet work within the limits of these dominant concepts and ideas.

In order to mediate such a task, I develop the method of the minor to think through the presumptions of the Major. *minor china* offers a relational view to the Major, whereby such a relationship points to the dominant epistemological frameworks that uphold Major concepts. As the urgent response to the *force of discourse*, the Major is embedded within what we privilege as mattering and important. To bring to light such privileging, we question what "matters." The minor is an approach that does not "solve" the Major predicament; rather, the minor brings to the fore the presumptions around what we privilege as important and directs us to different methods and analytics to understand a work. In other words, the minor contends with the unexpected and does not discard details that do not fit into the over-determined narratives surrounding the figure of Major China. The minor operates, according to Andrew Pickering, within a "stance of revealing" which "is open to the world and expects novelty, for better or for worse, and is ready to seize on the former."[12] Major and minor are mutually constitutive, as opposed to a strict binary. In this regard, the minor questions and shifts the category of the performative. Rather than asking what an object

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[9] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ferrerira de Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*; and Lisa Lowe, "Metaphors of Globalization," in *Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice*. Edited by Ranu Samantrai, Joe Parker, and Mary Romero (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 37-62.

[10] Chakrabarty, 5.

[11] Wang Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 57-58.

[12] Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 383.

performatively does or enacts upon the world, the minor directs us to an indeterminate, exploratory stance that asks how an object emerges. The minor emphasizes open processes over performative action.

The Major and minor relation has previously been theorized in terms of minor positionality or subjects. The Major-minor relation I develop is less about the notion of a dominant group over a minor one, although admittedly this informs part of my model. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor literature" operates in the dominant-sub relation in which they demarcate a vertical dynamic of a minor resisting subsumption by the majority. Their investment in minor literature is to reveal Franz Kafka's abilities to subvert and utilize the majority language in different and radical forms. For Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature enables the minoritized subject to utilize and subvert majority language. [13] Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet develop the notion of minor transnationalisms, which connect minor spaces outside of the center-periphery relation of World Systems Theory. The authors shift the focus onto the interactions between peripheries rather than periphery to center (for example how two post colonial sites may interact). Although they are critical of Deleuze and Guattari's "minor literature," they nonetheless theorize the minor in terms of being peripheral and outside of dominant space. Both projects inform my understanding of the minor; however, I contribute to these discourses by directing the minor more towards its *analytic* possibilities as opposed to the minor as subject or spatial position.

Analytic modes direct us towards methodological possibilities. Drawing from the turn towards minor moods, affects, and feelings,[14] I utilize the minor in less its subject position status and more as an analytic, although admittedly the distinction between the two may not be so tidy. Although this growing body of work primarily focuses on works within the US and Europe, I am drawn to its possibilities, particularly its methodological import for understanding cultural production emerging out of China. Below, I will more explicitly explain how and why I utilize this "turn" towards affect and the minor as it relates to contemporary China. My turn away from subject position is not meant as an anti-identitarian move. Similar to developments within queer theory, the minor developed throughout this project differentiates between acts and relations. Both are informed by an identitarian sensibility; however, queer as relational emphasizes affiliations in terms of power rather than identitarian acts/behavior. As such, queer theory informs *minor china* through its methodological possibilities, rather than as a discrete identity. I rearticulate the minor as methodological possibilities for reinvigorating how we think about the Major, rather than showing how the minor might reappropriate, disidentify, or problematize a Major, dominant group.

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[13] José Muñoz's notion of *disidentification* relates to this minor subject position formation. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[14] From within queer and feminist theory, the minor has articulated itself in the following works: Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Eve Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2023); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)*;* Heather Love, *Feeling Backward* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Jennifer Devere Brody, *Punctuation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jack Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
Another body of work that I draw from is from speculative realism and new materialisms, in which authors question the dominant accounts of what materialism, consciousness, and human life might be. Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost*, New Materialisms : Ontology, Agency, and Politics.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Graham Harman, et. al., *The Speculative Turn* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

The *relation* between the Major and minor exists within affective and bodily registers. Major and minor muscle groups support one another, while the former tends to be the most physically dominant or noticeable in form. When one removes the minor, however, one notices the relation between the two once the Major fails and cannot function per usual. Another corporeal dimension of the minor corresponds to sound. The minor's relation is akin to the musical structure of Major and minor scales, where the latter has a different affective tone in comparison to the former yet both interrelate in terms of content or structure. Every major scale has a relative minor in which they share the same key signature; the minor key however has a more "serious or melancholic" affect.[15] Tone constructs these major and minor sonic qualities. Within a tonal music system, the relationship between major and minor tone produces either consonance or dissonance. The relation and shifts between major and minor generally produce a dissonant sound, which then seeks resolution. Although music systems are culturally defined as to what is perceived as consonant and dissonant, the meta structure of how major and minor tones interrelate offers the analytic model for producing my sense of the minor for this project. Although muscles and sound are certainly subjects, I utilize how these subjects operate and relate within their minor dimensions to better understand their analytic capabilities. In their relationality, the minor functions to make the presumptions of the Major more evident.

The subject typically presumes a knowable entity, while an analytic mode engages the process of understanding and synthesizing. It is within this distinction that I locate a shift away from the minor as subject. I extrapolate an analytic and means from this minor subject or spatial response to Major discourses in order to produce my method. To further illustrate the distinction I make between minor subjects and analytic, I offer the following figure to show the differentiation between subjects and analytics in their Major or minor dimensions.

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[15] Roger Kamien, *Music: An Appreciation* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007), 46.

As a Subject

As an Analytic Mode	Major Subject	minor subject
Major Mode	**1. MAJOR:** Upholds and maintains the assumptions of Major frameworks and discourses. Ex) The reproduction of discourse surrounding the Chinese state as authoritarian, censuring artists and limiting human rights. This imagines the major subject, China, in over-determined understandings of context and history.	**2. major :** Posits the minor subject within a Major framework, which maintains the logic of the Major, as it emphasizes narratives of resistance and autonomy Ex) This situates the minor subject, like aesthetics or media, to have a Major function, like resistance or challenging the state. Such discourses have relied on movement and the body to resist power. In addition, discourses around the use of Twitter in the "Arab Spring" and other protests are imagined to have a Major function in social change.
minor mode	**4. minor:** This analytic resituates major subjects within the minor in order to 1) render visible the minor in the major and 2) critique the dominance and limits of Major logic (and its assumptions). Allows us to imagine an otherwise, outside of Major discourse Ex) Rather than assigning a "political" meaning to Major subjects, this analytic mode focuses on the Major Subject's shadows to understand the assumptions that undergird its logics.	**3. minor:** Although a focus on minor aspects of minor subjects (form in poetry, etc) can have crucial insights, this form of analysis typically limits the minor within minor formulations – "the minor for minor's sake." Ex) This often takes minor forms, like movement or poetry, and primarily focuses on its universalist or aesthetic functions.

Figure 1: Subject or Analytic of the Minor

The first quadrant describes the **Major**, by which Major subjects are understood within a Major analytic. Major China emerges when dominant discourses are perpetuated around Major topics. For example, a global analysis of China reifies presumptions about what is already believed about China and globalization. In addition, cultural production can be situated within the Major, as what may be understood as "Chinese," "contemporary," and "art" are assumed to be stable categories. The second quadrant describes the **major,** in which minor topics are understood within Major frameworks. This type of discourse emphasizes how minor *subjects* like performance are operationalized and proclaimed as the possibilities for changing society. In addition, minor subjects can also become embedded in Major analytic ways within the art market itself. With recent turns towards the minor topics of imagination and play as curatorial frameworks, some of these shifts to the minor take on Major possibilities in their entwinement with capitalism and marketization. I

locate problems around focusing on minor subjects, in that we privilege them to replace the Major. The distinction between *analytic* and *subject* is important in that merely focusing on subjects often ignores how they can be deployed in Major ways. Furthermore, my turn to the minor is meant to take stock of the fields of performance and cultural studies. In their bids for legitimacy at the end of the 20th century, such fields have often relied upon discourses that have centralized performance or culture's import in terms of social resistance, social protest, and political validity. However, by doing so, I argue that we must take stock of the minor within performance or culture itself – its sense of humor, play, affective feel, or minor details that are often discarded in relation to the *force of law/discourse.* Rather than arguing that such minor things are important, I utilize such seemingly minor subjects to help us think dominant categories anew – the function of the minor as an analytic.

The third quadrant is the **minor**, where a minor subject is understood in minor ways. This quadrant may be understood as the minor for minor's sake. In formalist analyses of the minor subject of poetry, the minor is understood in its particular contours. Although such a goal could lead to fruitful intellectual possibilities, the minor for minor's sake often does not reveal the foundational assumptions of the Major since the minor is not in the purview of the Major.

The last quadrant is the **minor,** where Major subjects are analyzed with the analytic of the minor. My method of *minor china* primarily operates within this framework, as it highlights the problematics of Major subjects through minor analytics. Theodor Adorno defines the minor in its incompleteness: "As a deviation from the major, the minor defines itself as the not-integrated, the unassimilated, the not yet established"[16] As such, the minor becomes an analytic that brings to light the over-established and pre-determined that surround the Major concepts central to understanding the non-West. Similar to the work of humanist scholars on globalization like Lisa Lowe, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Denise Ferreira da Silva, I invest in thinking through Major categories through its presumptions. Rather than simply dismissing the concepts as Eurocentric, I think through the complex possibilities of what some of these concepts hold for the non-West.

The ways Major and minor subjects and analyses relate are historically shifting. For example, whereas the subject of China would have seemed quite minor for Hegelian notions of history, China has now become quite Major as a subject and also in its analytic forms. Thus, by attending to the historical contours of how and when China moves from minor to Major subject, we begin to better situate this dynamic and method of minor china. In order to locate the specificity of Major and minor relations within this project on contemporary China, I identify three particular notions that locate China's becoming.

As mentioned earlier, I focus on questions around 1) method and affect, 2) situating context in relation to Deleuzian notions of becoming, and 3) locating the rise of mixed-media work. These three aspects are central to locating the historical specificity of Major and Minor china within the contemporary. For contemporary art, methodology must be historicized as the limits around symbolic and representational theory have been debated in relation to the affective turn. For contemporary China, discussions around context are critical, as most popular discourses on globalization assume stable understanding of nation-states as opposed to tracking the local articulations of life inherent in the distinct becomings of non-Western spaces. In order to engage in

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[16] Theodor Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26. Adorno possesses a difficult place in music criticism, considering his racist dismissal of jazz. I mention the way he theorizes the minor with regards to Mahler, however, because it assists in think about the minor as relation to the Major.

this question on context and minor becomings, we must attend to the role of religion in society. As popular religions in non-Western spaces primarily stake a claim of tradition for contemporary China and other places, I engage epistemological frameworks from Buddhist and Daoist traditions in order to delve more deeply into how China has become and emerged within the contemporary moment. Lastly, questions about the use of mixed media are growing within both contemporary art and contemporary Chinese art. Within a context of expanded art forms, the medium-specific analysis (dance, theatre, visual art, etc) that is emphasized will amplify the minor through its attention on affect and becoming. Throughout each section of this introduction, I return to Yan Xing's *Kill (the) TV-Set* to situate the work in relation to these three concerns in order to preview the method of *minor china*. In addition to the historical needs of accounting for these three factors within the contemporary, I also situate these turns as minor ways of understanding method, context, and media/visuality.   Affect is the minor for method; becoming is the minor to context; and dance/theater/performance is the minor to how we analyze media.

On Method - From Representation Towards Affect

Method defines how one engages an object. The range of methods available in analyzing contemporary Chinese art greatly vary; however, the predicament of Major China often dictates a method that is geared towards the historicization and contextualization of the object.   In this project, I explore methods beyond these two options. By turning towards methods and theories that destabilize what we understand to be China, history, institutions, the subject, and agency and that are considered unimportant in relation to the force of law/discourse, I produce the method of *minor china*. Affect theory, queer studies[17], non-representational theory[18], and posthumanism[19] assist in developing this method, by contending with the ontological and epistemological bases of central concepts central to Major China. Situating these theories towards China renegotiates many of their insights, particularly how non-Western others are understood within the oft-universalist orientations of these recent theoretical turns.

In considering Yan Xing's *Kill (the) TV Set*, most rely upon contextualization to show how particular symbols and moments in his work represent his outsider queer status within China.   The method I deploy privileges the affective contours and modes of relationality in Yan Xing's work.   In moments of breath and the interaction between him and the other body, one obtains a sense of precarity, indetermination, and unknowability.   Yan Xing embraces another body; however, is this body simply an object, standing in for a cello? Or is this other body a lover? A distant memory? The work's ambiguous dimension is produced from the indeterminate relationship between bodies, or what may be called its affective qualities. Affect produced between the two bodies enables the viewer to ask questions and imagine the possible relations between Yan Xing and the other. As one of the few openly queer artists coming from China, Yan Xing's embrace of another male body is often seen as a reference, representation, or commentary on gay life in China. However, queerness

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[17] I trace a genealogy of affect below, particularly as it relates to queer studies.

[18] Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Nigel Thrift has influenced other geographers and social scientists who have been utilizing non-representational theory.

[19] Media and posthuman studies have influenced my notion of *minor china*. See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Pramod Nayar, *Posthumanism* (London: Polity, 2013); and Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

also possesses a dimension that exists in the realm of relationality. Queerness is not simply an identity category that is represented through Yan Xing's self-identification or when two men hold each other. Queerness can also be traced in the relation between the two bodies, film and audience, and the bonsai tree and Yan Xing. Understanding queerness through the minor of affect offers multiple frames by which to question the stable representations of bodies and identity. Such a minor approach destabilizes what we think we might know about queerness in China and queerness as represented by two men.

Affect is a concept that captures what remains outside of an economy of symbols and representations of bodies and objects. Geographer Nigel Thrift defines affect in four ways: 1) as embodied responses to internal emotions; 2) as a set of emotional drives, akin to Eve Sedgwick's recuperation of Silvan Tomkin's system; 3) as a way of understanding relations and encounters between objects and bodies, akin to Deleuze's development of Spinoza's system; and 4) as a set of expressions located primarily on the face that are universal to all beings, developed by Darwinian theories of evolution.[20] All four of these theorizations of affect exist within *Kill (the) TV Set*: 1) the momentary emotions or lack thereof on Yan Xing's face reveal the embodied expression of feelings; 2) the intensity of different affects that may be driving Yan Xing's emotions; 3) the relationalities between Yan Xing, the other actor, and the audience; and 4) Yan Xing's facial expression. Although these four formulations of affect differ, they direct us towards a level of uncertainty in defining what exactly Yan Xing may be doing. In other words, affect directs us towards what cannot be represented nor shown in predefined ways; affect as a method is often less determined than symbolic representation. Although I draw from these various genealogies of affect, I primarily utilize the third as it moves away from a sense of internal expression and more towards the relationship between entities.

This emphasis on relationality has been emphasized in what some call the affective turn. As a general discourse, affect has existed within various theoretical discussions in both Eastern[21] and Western[22] contexts. Although I could reproduce the oft-discussed genealogy of affect as relationality in terms of Spinoza, Lucretius, Deleuze, and Massumi, I situate affect's genealogy to a field less discussed within affect theory: dance. Dance studies is an oft-ignored yet critical place that engages relationality. I situate dance within a genealogy of affect[23] in order to centralize an oft-ignored art form as it relates to this body of theory. Furthermore, in the last section of this introduction, I discuss medium-specific approaches that situate expanded art forms towards the minor. With its focus on the relational and corporeality, dance studies is one such medium-specific approach that I utilize throughout the dissertation; thus, I discuss dance's relationship to affect to offer a clearer sense as to how I engage affect, dance, and Chinese cultural production. Dance is often considered

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[20] Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*, 175-182.

[21] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Although affect has less of a theoretical focus within contemporary Chinese cultural studies and within Chinese philosophy, one can find relationships to certain long-standing concepts within Chinese. *Shi* as a discourse encompasses some ideas around affect, as a quality and essence. *Guanxi* and *guanqing* both encompasses notions of affect in terms of relationality to strangers and a community.

[22] A pre-modern discourse of affect has existed for centuries. Aristotle "*From* Rhetoric," in *What is an Emotion?*, ed. Robert Solomon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6-8; Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994); and Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 2005).

[23] Although Thrift briefly discusses dance in relation to affect to develop his non-representational theory, he does not situate dance as internal to the genealogy of affect.

more minor in relation to visual art and theater; I develop dance as some of the field's internal debates provide ample directives in developing minor china.

Dance has often been associated with movement; however, some have located affect within dance apart from movement. François Laruelle offers such a distinction. Laruelle is a contemporary French philosopher associated with what he terms "non-philosophy." This movement questions all forms of philosophy (continental, analytic, and deconstructionist) for its presumption and decision to split the world from the philosophical world. In such a move, Laruelle critiques philosophy for dialectically severing the world to form philosophical concepts and analyses. Such a split, according to Laruelle, limits our understandings of what happens around us and within the world because we are merely reproducing the split between world and philosophy. Thus, similar to dance studies' desire to collapse theory and action, non-philosophy theorizes and writes in an attempt that merges these two realms. In "First Choreography: Or the Essence-of-Dance," Laruelle develops non-philosophy by questioning what we understand to be movement. Laruelle reveals that we often conflate affect with movement. He critiques the automatic association of dance to movement, arguing for a distinction between the material of the body and its external expression.[24] In such an articulation, affect becomes distinct from movement: "What can we say about this affect? If it is first, accompanied perhaps by movement but without movement being primary, that is because it is right independent of movement."[25] Through dance, Laruelle locates affect as distinct from the body's movement; dance allows Laruelle to see affect as a quality of art that is located within the body or object. According to Laruelle, "affect is 'interiorized' and more than interiorized: it is wholly interior."[26] This distinction forces us to account for dance beyond solely the externalized expression of movement; this dimension exists at the interior. Although Laruelle acknowledges that it is difficult to parse affect from movement, the *process* of doing so locates affect as a quality from dance that directs us towards different modes of theorization. Process is emphasized over results.

Dance scholars have repeatedly noted the difficulty of recording dance[27], not in relation to technological capabilities but in terms of capturing this sense of affect that is distinct from movement. With increasingly advanced technologies, one can record movements at multiple levels ranging from the micro to masses of bodies. However, the lingering inability to record this internal sense of affect forces us to engage not only the interior of the dancing body or object, but also our own relation to that interior. In other words, it is through the *process* of identifying this internal affect within dance (not simply marking movement or what the body "does") that we begin to explore our relation to the interior of an object/body. Following Laruelle, the notion of process highlights how it is only through such attempts that we can begin to locate affect; affect cannot simply be captured. The process directs us to constantly discover and form associations and relations.

This internal affect, distinct but often conflated with movement, draws us to the level of the kinesthetic, where a body or object possesses an internal sense of position, weight, and movement in relation to space and others. Kinesthesia can involve movement, but such movements are an external manifestation of an internal system, which involves sensory capabilities. The notion of kinesthesia assists in locating affect, as kinesthesia can but does not solely include movement.

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[24] Francois Laruelle, "First Choreography: Or the Essence-of-Dance," *Qui Parle* 21, no. 2 (2013), 143-155.
[25] Ibid., 144.
[26] Ibid., 147.
[27] Jane Desmond, "Introduction," in *Meaning in Motion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 25.

Kinesthesia directs us to both interiority and relationality. Susan Leigh Foster develops kinesthetic empathy, by revealing how kinesthetic awareness, sensibilities around choreography, and empathy are historically contingent and shifting.[28] Although Foster relies primarily on understanding these three notions in relation to movement, her project nonetheless locates a system that interweaves interior kinesthesia to external relationality. Within the field of Asian dance studies, SanSan Kwan's ethnographic work on kinesthesia within urban landscapes offers further understandings of kinesthesia as a relational force between body and objects (not solely between humans).[29] Kwan emphasizes the relational capacities beyond bodies into urban landscapes. In such an approach, she juxtaposes these relationships to the ways in which they translate via movement aesthetics. Such a relationship between phenomenological body, space, and cultural production contributes to understandings of affect, as it emphasizes the relationship of objects as opposed to solely between human bodies.

The field of dance studies directs us to attending to the internal vibrations of bodies and objects, along with the relational forces between such entities. These affective contours are methodologically difficult to locate; however, similar to Laruelle, dance studies emphasizes the import of the *process* of locating and defining affect (as not simply movement) within the interior and amongst entities. Although other fields, ranging from the literary to philosophical, have additionally engaged notions of affect, I emphasize dance studies because it has made affect a central methodological concern by attempting to locate and define affect within a body/object, moving beyond description and theorization. For example, within *Kill (the) TV Set*, Yan Xing focuses on the micro movements and subtle relations between subjects and objects in the film. Throughout the work, one sees two bodies breathing against one another. This subtle movement is punctuated by the other screen, which repeatedly changes with the alternating screenshots of "Kill," "(the)," "TV," and "Set". The rhythmic disjuncture between screens produces questions rather than answers. The different rhythms, from breathing bodies on one screen and repeated words on another, create a fractured relation between corporeal and linguistic movement. Through such indetermination, we embark on a process of inquiry. This process situates the viewer to the objects and subjects on the screens. In addition, through such a process, the viewer develops a sense of Yan Xing's kinesthetic sensibilities, as he is pressed against another body. Through an emphasis on such affective components involving subtle movement and breath, we turn away from prescribing symbols and meaning to Yan Xing's work. This focus on affect is not meant to simply open up a new dimension for analysis. Instead, through affect, we enter into a process of questioning the stability of bodies, subjects, and objects.

In addition to dance, affect can be understood in relation to developments in the social sciences. Affect responds to questions around methodology, particularly that of representational analysis. Affect has moved away from symbolic representation and contextualization, as affect questions the knowability of objects. Thrift's developing work on non-representational theory demonstrates this orientation. Thrift describes his theory as "an approach to understanding the world in terms of effectivity rather than representation; not the what but the how."[30] Within Thrift's delineation, symbolic representation is connected to identifying what we see and know, as opposed to questioning the processes and gradations of how we know. Representation presumes objects and effects as knowable, while non-representation engages objects and effects as processes. Thrift

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[28] Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[29] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[30] Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory,* 113.

develops non-representational theory from feminist destabilizations of the body,[31] distributive theories like actor-network theory,[32] and philosophies on vitality and biology.[33] In so doing, his larger project shifts away from representation, which he views as a dominant mode of academic inquiry that reveals knowable entities or symbols. Affect becomes a central part of his theoretical apparatus, as he develops it in relation to the non-representational.

The orientation towards questioning representation and conceptual categories has arisen in not only affect and non-representational theory, but also philosophical movements ranging from posthumanism, object-oriented ontology, new materialisms, and speculative realism. Media studies has been a field deeply engaged with the intersections of such insights. As such, most of the secondary sources I utilize for the analytic of *minor china* come from media scholars. Although all these movements have different genealogies, they nonetheless follow similar modes of speculation in terms of representation and the ontological formations of key categories. Patricia Clough emphasizes how these philosophical orientations "call for a philosophical reset of terms changing perspectives on media, bodily matter, networks, processes, objects, subjects, identity, difference, relations, and relata."[34] Such calls "rethink the ontological grounds of knowing and representation in the wake of deprivileging or decentering human perception and cognition, and alternatively putting sensation, affect, or matter/energy generally into theoretical relief."[35] In developing the minor in relation to affect, I theorize the minor to reset terms such as body, subject, and relations through a focus on sensation and energy.

This trend away from symbolic representation has primarily engaged Western art, literary objects, and artists. In deploying this eclectic body of work for the context of China, I orient the speculative and new materialist turns towards considerations of social difference. The minor, through affect and a shift from representation, places these various strands emerging within the academy to renegotiate the dominant notions that uphold the Major. Although I acknowledge the limits of representational analysis, the method of the minor is nonetheless emerging from and engaging questions of difference from China and the non-West. Thus, I take stock of such developing discourse within affect studies in order to understand how notions of Chinese and non-Western racializations might destabilize and advance this broader theoretical output.

I follow others who have similarly engaged affect through questions of difference that are not invested in maintaining difference, but rather using it as a resource for questioning epistemological and ontological categories. Lisa Lowe identifies "the problem of representation itself" which arises from artistic production and globalization.[36] Lowe reveals how contemporary artists are not simply representing what globalization is; rather, art functions at the level of Raymond Williams' "structure of feeling" for globalization. In other words, a work's affective contours are necessary to discuss our late modern period. Lowe questions representational analysis through notions of racial and cultural difference, as such populations experience globalization in different ways. Lowe relies on

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[31] Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler are a few of his common references.

[32] Bruno Latour, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Pierre Bourdieu are common references.

[33] Jakob von Uexkull, Georges Canguilhem, Gregory Bateson, Michel Serres, and Gilles Deleuze are commonly referenced.

[34] Patricia Clough, "In the Aporia of Ontology and Epistemology," *Feminist Media Theory* 10, no. 3 (2012), http://sfonline.barnard.edu/feminist-media-theory/in-the-aporia-of-ontology-and-epistemology-toward-a-politics-of-measure/ (last visited April 21, 2014).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Lowe, "Metaphors of Globalization," 38.

affect to interrupt a system of theorization that presumes the knowability of objects and entities. Within this questioning of representation and my development of affect through social and cultural difference, I rely upon insights from critical race, gender, queer, and disability theories to ground how non-Western otherness can be situated and relate to discourses on affect, object-oriented ontology, new materialisms, non-representational theory, and speculative realism.

In drawing from such diverse philosophical movements, two key figures emerge as central informants for affect studies, new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology: Deleuze and Bergson. As such, this dissertation situates many of my theorizations on affect in relation to Deleuze[37] and notions of relationality. Although China and Deleuze are not often discussed in relation to one another, there has been a growing interest in this pairing. A recent 2012 conference on Deleuze and China at Henan University in Kaifeng, China "marked a new phase in the translation of Deleuzian thought and concepts into the diverse languages and cultures of East Asia."[38] Most of the conference proceedings apply Deleuzian contexts to Chinese sites, without engaging the larger issue of how Deleuze and China relate. Deleuze rarely references China in his work, although he (along with Guattari) occasionally reference Mao. Additionally, Bergson heavily influenced one of the first curators of contemporary Chinese art, Fei Dawei. As a central figure to the contemporary Chinese avant-garde movement, Fei trained in philosophy and focused his studies on Bergson. As such, his influential writings on China have been associated with these key figures. Deleuze's concepts not only inform my theorization of affect, but also destabilize what we may know and think about China.

On Context – The minor of becoming china

Contextualization is central for discourses on contemporary Chinese art. Most authors reference the Long March, Cultural Revolution, and the liberalization of markets in the 1990's to situate artists and works. Yan Xing is often framed "as openly gay [who] lives in a country (if not a world) that tends to frown upon (if not actively suppress) displays of sexuality that are deemed outside of the norm."[39] He is also situated as a younger artist, who was born in 1986 and hence supposedly distanced from the legacy of the Cultural Revolution.[40] These narratives contextualize the author and presume the full knowability of events like queer politics and the Cultural Revolution. This representation of past events as knowable often glosses over possible idiosyncrasies or singularities that surround the formation of queerness and the past. Thrift directs us to such singularities: "Events must take place within networks of power which have been constructed precisely in order to ensure iterability. But what is being claimed is that the event does not end with these bare facts."[41] Non-representational theory captures a sense of what Adorno calls "the not-integrated, the unassimilated, the not yet established" in terms of history and events. However, how can we understand context in such a

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[37] Although Deleuze worked with Guattari and I cite co-authored texts by both, I utilize the shorthand of "Deleuzian" as opposed to "Deleuzian and Guattrian" because I use some of Deleuze's single-authored texts for this project.
[38] Craig Lundy and Paul Patton, "Deleuze in China," in *Theory and Event* 16, no. 3 (2013), https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/toc/tae.16.3.html (last visited April 21, 2014).
[39] Edward Sanderson, "Fantastic Five," *ArtSlant*, http://www.artslant.com/cn/articles/show/28128 (last accessed August 31, 2013).
[40] Edward Sanderson, "On/Off: China's Young Artists in Concept and Practice," *Yishu* 12, no. 5 (September/October 2013), 88-97.
[41] Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*, 114.

way? What other theoretical models might direct us to account for the "not-integrated" in relation to China?[42]

Throughout this project, I utilize the Deleuzian notion of becoming to work through such minor and indeterminate contours. As contextualization is a dominant mode for the Major, this minor approach to context renegotiates how we theorize events. However, I delineate how this minor engagement of context translates methodologically in this section, as it can be difficult to imagine how such destabilizations of history translate. In an interview conducted by Antonio Negri, Deleuze defines becoming as distinct from history: "The thing is, I became more and more aware of the possibility of distinguishing between becoming and history. It was Nietzsche who said that nothing important is ever free from a 'nonhistorical cloud.' This isn't to oppose eternal and historical, or contemplation and action: Nietzsche is talking about the ways things happen, about events themselves or becoming. What history grasps in an event is the way it's actualized in particular circumstances; the event's becoming is beyond the scope of history."[43] To engage past contexts, Deleuze emphasizes two approaches: "one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it's prepared and then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components and singularities. Becoming isn't a part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to "become," that is to create something new."[44] Becoming differs from contextualization in that the former does not presume the knowability of context, an event, or the past. As a method, becoming approaches objects and events in "unassimilated" and "not yet established" ways, in order to find new or additional modes of formulating and imagining historical moments and events.

Within multiple fields, China has demanded deep contextualization[45] due to concerns ranging from public policy to the discursive. On the more materialist end of the spectrum, the context of China has required translation for Area/East Asian studies. The rise of area studies itself holds a strong relation to Cold War era politics.[46] From this period, area studies emerged in response to the "pragmatic" need of knowing more about regions and countries pivotal to US diplomacy and policy. Thus, the linguistic, historic, and political contexts became of central import to the field of China studies. From an Area studies perspective, this desire to know more about China was enhanced by the lack of access during the Cultural Revolution. With such limited communication, the desire to decode the mysteries of the East became more "urgent." Asian American and ethnic studies were created by activist movements during the middle and end of the 1960's[47]. Such mobilization led to

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[42] In addition to Thrift, scholars such as Elizabeth Povinelli have similarly disrupted the ways events are understood and theorized. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and *The Empire of Love* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[43] Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," in *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[44] Ibid.

[45] The imagining of Asia as a mysterious center of Orient requiring translation has roots within many discourses. Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, and Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Eric Hayot, *Hypothetical Mandarin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

[46] These politics have a long history. Tani Barlow, "Editor's Introduction," *positions* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 1-6; Rey Chow, *Age of the World Target* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Learning Places: the Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Ban Wang, "The Cold War, Imperial Aesthetics, and Area Studies," *Social Text* 20, no. 3 (2002), 45-65; and Harry Harootunian, "'Memories of Underdevelopment' after Area Studies," *positions* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 7-35.

[47] The field itself was established primarily on the West Coast of the US during the late 60s and early 70s (UC Berkeley and SFSU being the first programs).

the field's institutionalization well into the 1980's[48] and 90's. With such an orientation, China, or more broadly Asia as a region, was imagined as a geographic locale. China, or more generally Asia, became the diasporic center by which certain immigrants, and those whose families have been in the US for decades, could identify with in order to create a locale by which to create solidarity that challenged the racialized aggression from within the US nation-state. Although the field emerged out of different circumstances than the Cold War, Asia needed to be understood in similarly homogenous ways. Internal debates within Asian American studies illustrate how such stable understandings of Asia have been complicated. Many have questioned how the notion of China glosses over its dominance of Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; in addition "Asia" has primarily been oriented towards East Asia at the expense of Southeast and, to some extent, South Asian studies. The critiques of diaspora similarly demonstrate the need to destabilize Asia from such pre-determined theorizations.[49] Asia and China itself became stable ideas within the field, as issues around racialization, essentialism, and Orientalism congealed the categories in order to challenge white supremacy within the US.

For both fields, understanding the context of China has relied upon knowable forms of representation surrounding either geography/history (Area studies) or race/diaspora (Asian American studies). Deleuzian becoming produces an open and unstable sense of China in order to provide space to work within representation and between the fields of Asian and Asian American studies. This project sits at the intersection of these two fields in that both must be situated together in order to understand their dual role in constructing, for very different reasons, the notions of China and Asia. Rather than presuming what we may understand to be the culture, history, and events of China or the racialization of the Chinese population, thinking of China as becoming, what I refer to as *becoming China*,[50] approaches the entity of China in more open formations. In other words, rather than situating China as context (Area studies) or as a construction or part of a global imaginary (Asian American studies), I utilize the notion of becoming China to problematize the types of narratives that inform both fields.

Through the minor of context in becoming, this project asks why Deleuze, as a theoretical figure, has not been centrally taken up in both Asian and Asian American studies. As discussed earlier, Asian studies has gestured towards the use of Deleuzian conceptual models; however, this maneuver is fairly new and rare. For Asian American studies, most primarily refer to Deleuze in relation to his and Guattari's notion of minor literature, as it demonstrates how minoritized populations utilize majority language.[51] What might Deleuzian critique do for these two fields as they relate to one another?

During a research trip when I met and encountered Yan Xing, I grappled with situating his work within a context of queer politics in China, along with his relationship to a transnational network of

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[48] The first Asian American Studies program at an Ivy League was at Cornell, which arose in 1983. Thus, the push for the field continued from the late 60's and well into the 80's and 90's.

[49] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[50] Deleuze most notably situates the notion of becoming to becoming animal. Although the links between animalization and racialization, particularly in relation to the Chinese imagined as barbaric dogeaters and other problematic images, exist, becoming China is meant to not occlude such an exploration but to understand how China becomes in relation to such racist images. However, rather than discarding the notion of becoming due to its neglect of the relationships between animalization and racialization, I push the theoretical exploration of becoming to enhance the methodological possibilities of this project.

[51] Yoon Sun Lee, *Modern Minority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

diasporic (queer) Asian artists. However, both of these analytic frameworks (informed by my studies in China and Asian American studies) presumed a way of knowing China and transnational networks in predictable ways: his works might offer narratives of resistance for a queer subject that represents counter-cultural critique or of contextual specificity for a uniquely Chinese form of queer performance. For me, both approaches not only overlooked the complexities of Yan Xing's artistic production, but also could not contend with how China is neither wholly unique nor universal. Becoming thus arose as a framework to situate contemporary China, as it offered a way to track difference within China without making such differences static. *China is not different but has differently become.* In order to augment context, which presumes the knowability of such differences, becoming acknowledges difference without maintaining it. In other words, becoming emerges as a theoretical model that balances this acknowledgement of difference without reifying and ascribing such difference to all Chinese people. In her ethnographic research on Chinese health, sexuality, and reading practices, Judith Farquhar insists on more complex ways of engaging Chinese modernity: "It is not uncommon to insist on a Chinese essence that distinguishes this nation and its people from all others, nor it is unusual to denounce the latest fashions in ideas or products as too thoroughly "American." But given that many ordinary people do not seem to care about the national identity of their modernity, this paired romanticism and denunciation begins to appear facile."[52] Farquhar directs us towards the ordinary and unknown by refusing to "conflate Chinese experience with a universal, natural human experience" because of the material differences in the construction of China.[53] Similar to Farquhar, I attend to a mode of theorizing China through becoming that cannot be located in such romantic or denunciatory stances. As such, this section draws from my ethnographic observations during my interviews with artists and my time spent in the "ordinary," everyday interactions with strangers, acquaintances, and friends.

To further flesh out the dynamics between Asian and Asian American studies, I develop the notion of becoming with China through religion. Throughout the dissertation, I draw from Buddhism, with brief references to Daoist thought. Although the two are different systems, they nonetheless manifest through popular and vernacular understandings. During research, I was struck by the ways popular awareness of religion inflected some of the conceptual categories and approaches with which artists and producers engaged. From a differentiated awareness and relation to time and events like death, popular religious understandings of these concepts informed those I interviewed. I noticed such differences but did not want to attribute them to some quintessential, Orientalist otherness. However, I additionally knew, from my own Buddhist practice and study, that these concepts tracked in different ways when they have been circulating within popular culture and education.

I remarked upon this disconnect and noticed parallel tensions between the fields that inform me as a scholar. Asian and Asian American studies emerge from different circumstances; they additionally possess different methodological inclinations. With a more historical relation to social scientific frameworks, Asian studies has typically located stability in the ideas of culture, religion, and history. Following from deconstructionism and critiques of essentialism, Asian American studies[54] emphasizes the instability of the subject. Although Asian American studies stabilizes notions of

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[52] Judith Farquhar, "For Your Reading Pleasure," in *Media, Erotics and Transnational Asia*, ed. Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 69.

[53] Ibid., 61.

[54] There is certainly a heavy social scientific framework utilized within Asian American studies; however, most cultural analyses within Asian American Studies rely upon critiques of essentialism and Orientalism.

China and Asia in order to create an anchor for communities to coalesce around, the subject is presumed not fully knowable, along with ideas such as culture and religion. Anti-essentialist and orientalist critiques emerged from this inclination towards a destabilized subject and social construction. The category of religion places in tension these two fields: Asian studies typically conceptualizes religion as stable, while Asian American studies generally eschews the stability of religion.

As such, such tensions direct us to issues of secularism and the construction of the subject. My use of religion throughout this project complicates the presumed binary between secularism and religion, whereby the former is associated with progress and modernity while the latter is reduced to regression. Instead, I utilize religion in order to move away from the bind that Anne Pellegrini and Janet Jakobsen locate: "While there is no doubt that some religious formations are dominating, it is both a poverty of imagination and a continued entanglement in the various assumptions that go along with the secularization narratives that leaves us in the bind where we must choose either (supposedly) conservative religion or (supposedly) progressive secularism. Not only does this opposition force us to ignore or deny the ways in which religion can be central to progressive politics and the ways in which secularism can limit such politics but it limits our imagination of secularism to only one narrative."[55] Religion in relation to becoming China highlights the tensions between Asian and Asian American studies, in that the former presumes religion to be stable while the latter often dismisses religion as essentialist. Religion becomes an epistemological base to inform our understandings of context and minor china and to complicate the presumed distance between these two fields.

Productive tensions arise between Asian and Asian American studies, specifically around what we deem as stable or not. Religion does not assert an essence to Chinese cultural production; instead, religion destabilizes how we conceptualize China and the relationship of religion to culture. Rather than presuming an anti-essentialist stance, I operate in a mode of indeterminacy or the minor. In relation to Asian studies, I do not presume religion to be a transhistorical, traditional notion that possesses the answers to Chinese civilization; rather, religion operates in less deterministic ways that provides epistemological foundations by which to analyze contemporary Chinese cultural production. In relation to Asian American studies, I do not immediately dismiss religion as essentializing; rather, religion forces us to contend with material differences that have arisen within China and for Chinese subjects. Before engaging in fieldwork in China, I was admittedly allergic to the essentialist tendencies that presumed stable categories of China. However, when I was researching, observing, and talking with various subjects, I became attuned to subtle differences amongst a diverse set of Chinese artists and art producers. In my discussions, I was struck by how unsustainable anti-essentialist critiques were, as differences amongst individuals but more importantly between Chinese and Americanist understandings of society and culture arose. Thus, Buddhist and Daoist practices, as located within the vernacular, became ways of situating these subtle differences that may have been overlooked if I held deeply onto anti-essentialist critiques. At the same time, I could not presume these religious practices as transhistorical. Religion in relation to becoming repeatedly emerges in my analysis to engage in this dilemma.

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[55] Janet Jakobsen & Ann Pellegrini, *Secularisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 27. Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) is another key text that pulled secular discourse into the fore. I will draw more from this text in later iterations of my introduction.

At first, my focus on religion to inform how China becomes may seem idiosyncratic within a project with theoretical inclinations towards affect, racialization, and queer studies. Some of the pieces I focus on do not explicitly reference religious iconography. However, I build upon scholars that argue how popular religious ideas emerge in everyday, vernacular life[56] in order to situate artistic production in relation to religion. Furthermore, conceptual models and ideas within Buddhism and Daoism are additional theoretical resources that I develop and use to intervene in current debates within critical theory. For example, in Chapter 5, in order to destabilize what we understand as endurance art and performances of resistance towards the state (as past discourse has done), I engage cognitive modes within meditation that linger in the performance art of He Chengyao and Zhang Huan. Meditation provides both the conceptual and epistemological foundations for my formal and discursive analyses. Although I could have chosen to only discuss works that explicitly reference religion, as artists such as Cang Xin and Zhang Huan (in his later works) have vividly and explicitly presented, I have purposefully chosen works that do not always explicitly reference religion in order to attend to the ways popular religions become a strong yet oft-ignored influence on aesthetic production.

Questions around religion have emerged within critical theoretical production. Within literary studies, religion has been focused on as a mode, as much as the economy, that informs our postmodern condition. Both *Partial Faiths* by John McClure and *Postmodern Belief* by Amy Hungerford are key texts that situate religion and the contemporary. Hungerford emphasizes the import of accounting for religion: "The view of late-century American literature I am presenting calls into question the assumptions entailed in postmodernism as a critical paradigm. Postmodernist critics such as Frederic Jameson, Brian McHale, Linda Hutcheon, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and others have defined the period by the self-conscious ambiguity, fractured narratives, ironic play, and aesthetic virtuosity of writers… and have looked to the economic substructures of culture as a way of understanding these aesthetic developments. Attending to religion allows us to see how several prominent features of postmodernism thus conceived are eclipsed."[57]

To shift away from overly broad categories like spirituality and religion, I analyze what and how Buddhism and Daoism contribute to understandings of becoming China. Following Hungerford, I deploy religion to theorize how these popular concepts within these religious forms help us think deeper about aesthetic and cultural production in contemporary China. My repeated invocation of religion throughout the dissertation is meant to engage a regionally specific epistemological formation that is not all-defining of but a critical tool for understanding China.

Upon utilizing Buddhism and Daoism, the specters of essentialism and Orientalism certainly arise, particularly for Asian American and ethnic studies scholars that focus on issues of representation. To deny the materially different history of cultures perpetuates the dominant Western theoretical foundations that these critiques of essentialism and orientalism originally sought to counter. I do not argue for parity ("the East is as powerful as the West"); power constructs how the other has been historically differentiated. This project is an attempt to contend with material differences that

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[56] Most of these texts reveal this connection within a Judeo-Christian tradition. Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Nancy Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). However, some have focused on Buddhism and Daoism as popular religions within parts of East Asia, especially within film studies. Gregory Watkins, ed., *Teaching Religion and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John S. Harding, ed., *Studying Buddhism in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[57] Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Belief since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University, Press, 2010), xix.

structure the very terms of difference and power. Power manifests in multiple forms, which demands our artistic and theoretical production to similarly relate in multiple ways. To structure art and theory as "counteracting" power creates a one-to-one relationship between critique and power; however, since power manifests in a myriad of forms, our artistic and theoretical productions must similarly interrelate. Exploring Eastern religious practices is my attempt at finding different ways of being and relating to power. Anti-essentialist and orientalist critiques primarily emerged from representational analysis, as scholars "revealed" problematic representations of race, gender, and sexuality embedded within cultural works. In my move towards both affect and becoming, I expand the methodological limits produced by these critiques. Orientalist and anti-essentialist critiques often function with knee-jerk aversions to categories one may deem traditional, like religion. Such quick responses become almost automatic after anti-essentialist critique; however, what other options might be available for analyzing works?

Writing in the late 1980's, Diana Fuss artfully critiques both essentialist and (de)constructionist approaches to identity. Asian American Studies has certainly benefited from such critiques. However, because of Area/Asia studies' close relationship to essentialism and Orientalism, Asian Americanists have embodied a skeptical stance against most notions like "culture" and "tradition." What these critiques reproduce is a mode of, what Eve Sedgwick calls, paranoid reading that dismisses an open engagement to texts, objects, and people.[58] Paranoid reading forecloses an open approach to becoming; paranoid reading presumes the knowability of what we understand as orientalist, racist, or essentialist. Paranoid reading often denounces without taking pause to attend to the additional complexities and nuances of an object. In order to move away from paranoid reading, Sedgwick offers reparative reading as a supplemental mode.[59] Reparative reading informs the method of the minor by engaging works not through denunciation or praise but by attending to a work's surface.[60] Becoming China emerges from the reparative by allowing us to approach an object by taking pause before determining what the object means and represents. At the start of section 3 on the subject and agency, I further develop the minor and becoming in relation to the reparative by analyzing world dance and the choreographer Tao Ye.

Becoming and religion also question the presumed secularity of critical theory.   In today's secular discourse, most theorists assume a binary between religion and secularism; however, as scholars have revealed, the emergence of the secular from Enlightenment discourse holds Eurocentric and Christian leanings: "This Enlightenment narrative separates secularism from religion and through this separation claims that secularism, like reason, is universal (in contrast to the particularism of religion). However, this narrative also places secularism in a particular historical tradition, one that is located in Europe and grows out of Christianity."[61] As Alena Alexandrove and others describe of Jean-Luc Nancy, he demands that we must "conceive monotheistic religion and secularization not as opposite worldviews that succeed each other in time but rather as views that spring from the same

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[58] Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is about You," in *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-152.

[59] Benjamin's notion of immanent critique operates similarly to reparative reading, where attention to not judging but assessing has a different relation to works and a work

[60] My use of surface is meant to reference and work through ideas of "surface reading" as proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. I hope to eventually develop this idea more. Heather Love notes the parallels between Sedgwick's turn to paranoid reading to debates around surface reading. Religion operates at the level of surface, in that

[61] Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2.

origin and that are intertwined to the point of synonymy."[62] Utilizing Buddhism and Daoism as epistemological bases makes the Judeo-Christian roots of critical theory more transparent.

My use of Buddhism is admittedly complicated by the fact that Buddhism has a historically complex relationship to Western culture.   Scholars ranging from Schopenhauer[63] to Lacan[64] have made parallels between their theories and Buddhism.   Within religious studies and philosophy, most have made explicit connections between Buddhist thought and deconstruction (à la Derrida and Levinas). Buddhist scholars have taken up Derridean notions of the instability of the subject, as seen in Youru Wang's edited collection.[65] In addition, analytic philosophers have engaged Buddhism.[66] *Buddhism and American Thinkers* outlines the enmeshment of Buddhism since the late 19th century into American and European philosophical schools.[67] These discourses reveal parallels between Buddhist concepts and Western theory.   However, beyond similarity, I use Buddhism as an epistemological base to rethink related concepts in critical theory, such as the subject, agency, act(ion), and the political. Furthermore, Buddhism in the United States has a complex role in relation to late capitalism. During the late 1960's and into the 70's, Buddhism became an idealized, orientalized answer to the ills of rapid Western modernization.   Slavoj Zizek critiques Western appropriations of Buddhism: "although 'Western Buddhism' presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement."[68]   Zizek highlights how "the 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way, for us, to fully participate in the capitalist dynamic while retaining the appearance of mental sanity."[69]   Zen practices have become a way to answer late capitalist ills. Scholars have remarked upon the ways Zen/Buddhist practices informed the shifts in the Bay Area from the 1960's into the formation of Silicon Valley in the 1970's (in addition to today's culture of mindfulness to benefit capitalist productivity).[70]

Buddhism is not an ancient practice that speaks to our contemporary conditions. Rather, popular religious concepts articulate themselves within Chinese contemporary cultural production. However, in my theorizations, I keep the above critiques in mind in order to avoid reproducing Western appropriations of Buddhism and use religion to critique the secularism of critical theory. Beyond showing parallels between Buddhist and Western concepts, I also rethink how key Western categories might be revised through religion.   As referenced earlier, many contemporary philosophical movements around object-oriented ontology, new materialisms, and speculative realism are invested in questioning the ontological formation of categories.   Particular religious concepts within Buddhism and Daoism speak to such concerns.   For example, in new materialist reformulations of ideas like consciousness and subject-object relations, most return to theorists like

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[62] Alena Alexandrove, et. al., "Re-Opening the Question of Religion," in *Re-Treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 22.

[63] Peter Abelson, "Schopenhauer and Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 2 (April 1993), 255-278.

[64] Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book X* (New York: Polity, 2014).

[65] Youru Wang, ed., *Deconstruction and the Ethical in Asian Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[66] David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000); Jay Garfield, et. al., *Pointing to the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[67] Kenneth Inada and Nolan Jacobson, ed., *Buddhism and American Thinkers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984).

[68] Slavoj Zizek, *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 12.

[69] Ibid., 13.

[70] R. John Williams, "Techne-Zen and the Spiritual Quality of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (2011), 17-70; Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. However, I draw from vernacular Buddhist concepts that have been theorized apart from this Western continental philosophical discourse, in order to supplement and renegotiate many of these theorizations interventions.

On Media – Performance and the Visual

In addition to questions of method and context/becoming, media is central to the development of the method of *minor china* and a critical aspect of *Kill (the) TV Set.* Yan Xing's projects exemplify the trend of expanded art practices and cross media art. *Kill (the) TV Set* spans several media, ranging from film, photography, sculpture, and performance. The piece brings together multiple media and examines how media relate to one another within contemporary Chinese art. Furthermore, Yan's reperformance of Nam June Paik's work that focused on the relationship between technology and performance reveals a complex relationship to the mediums of performance and media art. In particular, the title that flashes periodically across from Yan's reperformance announces a relation of killing in terms of (the) TV Set. This is a reference to Nam June Paik's repeated use of television in his art. Thus, what does it mean for Yan to "kill" such an iconic body of work for the history of Western performance and media art, along with such histories in relation to Korea and Asian America?

As expanded art forms or cross media art practices become more prevalent for contemporary artists, questions around how to write about different mediums arise, particularly in relation to art historical discourses that have typically separated these mediums from one another. The relation between mediums provides insights into how contemporary artists are currently operating. The methods associated with and developed by specific media engage questions of method/affect and context/becoming in different ways. For example, foregrounding dance and movement engages issues of embodiment, affect, and space differently from a privileging of visual art that methodologically engages a different set of concerns. Thus, what we privilege as a medium-specific analytic produces *minor china.* How do we account for performance, film, sculpture, painting, and movement within a piece? Which analytic methods do we make primary or secondary? What are the implications of the methods we choose? For Yan Xing, how do we account for the role of reperformance (of Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman's original piece) through the medium of film? How can we understand a Chinese artist's reperformance of another transnational Asian (American) artist who contributed greatly to the Western genealogy of performance art? This section focuses on two specific relationships with media to explore such questions for contemporary China: 1) medium relations and 2) the use of new media technologies.

In relation to the first issue of expanded art practices, let us first turn to the relationship between mediums within China. *Xingwei yishu* (行為 藝術), which translates into behavior art, is the Chinese term most often used to refer to performance art. Although *biao-yan* (表演) in Chinese is more closely analogous to the English meaning of performance, *biao yan* possesses a closer relation to theatrical and dance genealogies. Thus, why would Chinese artists during the late 80's and early 90's choose behavior (*xingwei*) to describe performance, when other words were available? Archival research shows debates between Gao Minglu and other instrumental figures in the 90s art scene in China around the use of this term. The choice of behavior (*xingwei*) arose from an anti-theatrical stance, where the Chinese version of "performance art" (*xingwei yishu*) wanted to be differentiated from the spectacle and virtuostic associations with theater and dance. Meiling Cheng describes

Yang Zhichao's choice of *xingwei* over *biao yan* in order to demonstrate how Chinese performance artists desired to sinicize Western concepts, such as performance art.[71] This process of sinicization focuses on the "specific local content," which makes "xingwei yishu and xingwei-zhuangzhi in Beijing open creative windows into the surrounding sociocultural environment, providing durational and vigorous snapshots about a metropolis undergoing breathtaking changes."[72] The sinicization of performance art leads to its popular and global circulation: "not only translated imported global stimuli into local circumstances and aspirations but also begun mutating the very translation in order to develop an indigenous contemporary art heritage, now ripe for export."[73] Cheng presumes stability in the sinicization or translation process, as performance art is made into its own unique entity. However, this project focuses more on the tensions between performance as a medium and a visual art understanding of performance (art) in order to highlight the methodological differences and possibilities in medium-specific analyses.

The etymologies of these words provide some direction in understanding the tensions between mediums. *Xingwei* translates as action, behavior, or conduct. The first character *xing* has a variety of meanings that primarily circulate within the realm of pedestrian acts, such walking, traveling, carrying out, behaving, and doing. The second character *wei* is a preposition, which means to be in the interest of, for the purpose of, and towards the goal of such pedestrian acts. Unlike the pedestrian frame embedded in *xing wei*, *biaoyan* circulates within the realm of performance, meaning to perform, act, and play. The first character *biao* circulates within the realm of expressive actions oriented to outside reception and comparison: surface, external, expression, and example. Opposed to the internal focus of *xing* on daily action, *biao* orients itself externally as its meanings encompass how people might engage or judge an act or performance. The second character *yan* encompasses a sense of practice and cultivation inherent to external acts: develop, evolve, practice, act, and put on. This second character reveals how the external orientation of *biao* must be rehearsed and frequently engaged in order to maximize its potential.

As we see from these two ways of describing performance, *xingwei* privileges the notion of the everyday over spectacle. Most analyses of performance art in China situate the practice in relation to a visual art practice, considering some of its practitioners were primarily trained in painting. In addition, *xingwei*'s anti-theatrical status shifts the analytic tools away from those of dance and theater, or *biaoyan*. These medium relations demonstrated in the use of the Chinese terms for performance art reveals how dance and theater are often considered minor in relation to a visual and performance art orientation for *xingwei yishu*. In most accounts of performance art in China, the discourse relies upon understandings of visual art. The deep relationship between visual and performance art emerges in relation to the art market. However, what happens when we understand medial relations within expanded art practices in more complex ways that additionally engage the minor forms of dance and theatre? By focusing on the minor of dance, theater, and performance in thinking about mediums, we engage these sets of artistic practices differently. When discussing Yan Xing, an emphasis on the minorness of breath can be further supplemented through the analysis of dance and affect. Yan Xing's use of performance manifests in not only the movement of the body, but also the formal construction of the piece. Yan's use of screens within an art space is split between two sides, producing a sense of the theatrical construction of stage left and stage right. By demarcating and differentiating the space similar to a black box theater, one emphasizes the performative qualities of

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[71] Meiling Cheng, *Beijing Xingwei* (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 92-93.
[72] Ibid., 94.
[73] Ibid.

the work in order to think through the historic tensions between different art practices within China. The minorness of theatre and dance directs us to productive methodological insights. Thus, orthography, visuality, corporeality, and choreography become analytics by which to work through the dynamics of these artworks.

In addition to questions on medium relations, the second aspect with regards to media is the rise in the use of new media in contemporary art. The more established analytics from visual art and performance benefit by integrating frameworks from new media. Conversely, new media theories are renegotiated through a more thorough understanding of performance and the visual.

In Yan Xing's slow film, he mimics photography. In the striking film, one at first presumes one is looking at a photograph. However, small movements produced through breath and other gestures disturb this photographic sense. Affect and the disturbance of the photographic image destabilize the lines between mediums. Yan Xing's work blurs the line between film and photo. This blurring occurs through the mechanism of performance. By foregrounding a performance analysis, we better understand how Yan Xing juxtaposes these multiple mediums. Subtle movements and breath destabilize the line between photography and film. It is through the minor sense of breath or affect, as identified by Laruelle that provides the glitch that shifts the still photo into a film. The performative apparatus of affect, located inside the body, drives this expanded art practice. Through this complex interplay between performance, photography, and film, Yan Xing produces a work that contends with the intersection of performance with new media.

Throughout this project, I note the rise of animation and play for many artists working in China today. Rather than arguing for remediation, where artists are taking in older media in their newer forms, I think about this dynamic more in terms of the historic and contemporary relations to newer media through the end of the 20th century into the start of the 21st. The rise in new media, particularly online games and virtual play, within contemporary Chinese art has greatly increased; thus, I resist solely talking about these works in terms of either older or newer forms. In my focus on shifts in media, along with the use of non-representational and affect theory, the level of analysis for situating China shifts. Patricia Clough emphasizes how these newer philosophical discourses help us move our focus from individual subjects to populations: "While there is much debate about precisely how to engage with self-measuring entities or with entities as media, the recent debate about ontology across speculative realism and process philosophies would nonetheless seem to meet a shift in thought about subject formation and ideological interpellation away from their operation in disciplinary societies toward thinking about *populations* that are not reducible to subjects and, as such, are better fitting the biopolitics of control societies."[74] Clough reveals the import of populations in how we discuss media. Accounting for ideas of population is important for such developments in media. For my analysis on becoming China, I look at how formulations of Chinese bodies are focused less on subjects and more on populations. In Chapters 2 and 6, I track this shift towards populations within new media. This focus on population speaks to what Eric Hayot and others have described as seeing the Chinese as hordes or masses.[75] These hordes are deindividualized to the point of only seeing masses and not singular human beings.

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[74] Clough, "In the Aproia of Ontology and Epistemology.*"*
[75] Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin*, 34 and 16-17.

Chapter Organization

I've chosen and paired seemingly idiosyncratic theories, methods, and objects to produce tensions amongst ideas that are normally not in conversation with one another. It is within such tensions that I foreground the minor, attempting to not replicate the dominant conversations that have emerged on China and its cultural production. From pairing religion with new materialist discourse, along with exploring the tensions between Asian and Asian American studies, I follow reading and writing practices from within feminist and queer studies: Barbara Johnson's open methods in *The Feminist Difference*, Sianne Ngai's focus on multiple affects in *Ugly Feelings*, and Eve Sedgwick's reparative reading practices in *Touching Feeling*. The method I offer is not per se about being inter or transdisciplinary. Rather, I seek to produce a method that models the theoretical bases of affect and becoming: that of openness and indetermination.

Within new materialist and speculative realist developments in critical theory, I have been deeply attracted to methods of openness and questioning. I was particularly drawn to media studies, which continues to think through these multiple divergent threads that contend with destabilizing the centrality of the human and distinctions between subject and object. However, I found it difficult to negotiate how these theories help me think about China and its contemporary cultural production. In particular, these discourses often imagine a subject (be it individualized like a cyborg or understood as a mass through notions like the multitude, third person, or the generic) that is presumably neutral and universal. However, this individualized and multiplied subject is often thought about within Western contexts and does not fully contend with non-Western otherness. I do not see this solely as a problem with the inclusion or representation of the non-Western other; rather, this forces us to expand how this type of subject is theorized within a global landscape. Hence, throughout this project, I not only question the Major frames that often situate discourses around Chinese art, but also rework many of the "minor" theories that are part of my method but are often limited in their conceptualizations of non-Western otherness. As such, this dissertation is an experiment that places an archive not normally associated with this body of theory in order to trouble not only the archive of contemporary Chinese art, but also the theoretical discourses around affect, media, and the (post)human. In order to ground these questions around universality and being, I take into account a material analysis of the global operations of racialization, gendering, disability, and sexuality as they mediate how these objects, subjects, and affects circulate transnationally.

China is often discussed in Major ways, where authoritarianism, historicization, and the resistance of artists dominate how culture is situated. However, after research visits to China and conversations with artists and other cultural producers, I realized that what I perceived to be limited discussions around Chinese cultural production could not be attributed to simply which artists and works were focused on (archival) nor the context that was being accounted for (historicization). Instead, I found that how these archives and histories were engaged and what was focused on (method) resulted in over-determined discourses. When analyzing the archive and history on contemporary Chinese art practices, the many affective and minor contours were ignored in order to produce a historically necessary and cohesive narrative, considering the ways Chinese artists were being misread or decontextualized. However, the reproduction of such narratives has resulted in other problems, which this dissertation is meant to engage. By emphasizing the role of method for both older and newer works, my hope is to reshape the discourse to contend with the minorness of the non-West.

The three minor turns towards affect, becoming, and performance (as a medium) that I've identified in this introduction inform *minor china*. I explained each of them, as this project will repeatedly reference all three issues. In addition to the theoretical and methodological frameworks that I offer, my discursive analyses engage the artistic works of artists including Liu Ding, Ai Weiwei, Zhang Huan, He Chengyao, Cao Fei, Feng Mengbo, and Tao Ye, amongst others. In order to develop minor analyses of their works, I first take stock of how they have been discussed, offering a general background on artistic production and their lives. Thus, my hope for this dissertation is two-fold. This project is meant to introduce readers to an archive of contemporary Chinese art practices that are based upon the body. In this sense, this project is art historical with a focus on interdisciplinary art practices that engage performance. However, my primary aim is to produce a method and way of reading that avoids reproducing the dominant narratives that have constructed the critical discourse.

Each section unfolds in thinking about China within the Major frames discussed earlier: history (Chapters 1 and 2), state and other institutions (Chapter 3), and the subject's consciousness and agency (Intermission, 4, 5, and 6). The conclusion takes a general overview of how my engagement with multiple mediums is critical for an account of contemporary Chinese art. In the construction of my chapters, I've moved away from a chronological account of media in China (from performance and visual culture to new media), in order to emphasize a sense of medial relations. Although each chapter moves between distinct art objects, the theoretical thrust is accumulation-based. I use Trisha Brown's choreographic tool of accumulation as a writing structure for this project. In *Accumulation* (1971) and *Set and Reset* (1983), Brown produced a choreographic model that repeated movement patterns in order to produce discrete units that arose out of the accumulation of past motifs. As such, each chapter is meant to stand alone; however, the arguments and objects developed in past chapters accumulate throughout the dissertation. Hence, the conclusion returns to many of the objects mentioned throughout, including Yan Xing's *Kill (the) TV Set*, in order to theorize the relations between media and the import of the minor for China.

SECTION 1: HISTORY

Chapter 1: Shadows
Liu Ding's *Little Movements* & Affect as Method

Chapter 2: Glitches & Specters (of Marx & Martyrs with Chinese Characteristics)
Historical References Beyond Political Pop in *Game Over* and *RMB City*

CHAPTER 1 – SHADOWS
Liu Ding's *Little Movements* & Affect as Method

The 2012 7th Shenzhen Biennale, *Accidental Message: Art is Not a System, Not a World*, provided an overview of the formation of contemporary Chinese art practices during the late 1980's through the 2000's. Artist Liu Ding collaborated with Carol Yinghua Lu and Su Wei to curate the biennale.[1] The team constructed the biennale to shift the historical focus on contemporary Chinese art in terms of social context and Chinese specificity to forms of relationality, affect, and feeling. In other words, their project moved away from dominant modes of formulating history to a more minor key. The main goal is to organize and display works to not simply represent key moments in art history, but rather to revisit how these creators envisioned their production and ideas.

The biennale was imagined in relation to an earlier project called *Little Movements*, which similarly curated art objects in ways that emphasize the affective as opposed to the contextual. The same team worked together to create *Little Movements*. Born in 1976, Liu Ding is from Jiangsu Province and currently based out of Beijing. He eschewed a formal art education and has since been working within performance, painting, installation, photography, and conceptual art since 2001. In 2009, he represented China at the 53rd Venice Biennale; since then, his work has shifted towards curation as artistic practice. Although many of his art objects deserve critical attention, I focus on his movement towards curation. In 2011, he began a project *Little Movements* which curates different Chinese and other international projects that relate to one another not in terms of a temporal or geographic scope, but their political and artistic stakes. Liu Ding and Lu group these varied artists, producers, and intellectuals together because they utilize art to emphasize minute ways of critiquing life and the social, thereby renegotiating what it means to be political. These projects do not rely on didactic forms of political critique. The 7th Shenzhen Biennale, entitled *Accidental Message: Art is Not a System, Not a World*, builds upon this analytic to reflect on the development of Chinese art during the late 1980's through the 1990's. In this large-scale project, the artists organize and display works to not simply represent key moments in art history, but rather revisit how creators (artists and producers alike) envisioned their production and ideas. Their ultimate goal is to reexamine the art at the level of individual artistic engagement, instead of fitting the art into a social context; they explore the oft-ignored contours of feelings and relations that exist in these emblematic works. They explore the minor details typically eschewed as unimportant and irrelevant for most historical accounts of contemporary Chinese art.

For example, rather than choosing some of the main artists that have represented contemporary Chinese art in most shows, the curators choose specific works that are not as popular or historically (re)presented. Although I could discuss the minorness of individual works, what's most important in their curation is the organization and production of space. In particular, they construct the walls of the biennale with short ledges and walls, rather than the usual height that separate works from one another through the construction of individual rooms. This spatial organization enables a viewer to have a different orientation from one of engagement with individually curated works within a singular room to one of complex sensations. The curators purposefully create lines of flight between works in spaces across, next to, and between. This sense of openness and indeterminacy is mirrored in the construction of these shorter ledges. Liu paints the bottom of these walls in royal

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[1] Throughout this chapter, I refer to Liu Ding without reference to these other collaborators. However, Liu Ding often collaborates with others, especially Carol Lu. Thus, in utilizing Liu Ding's name as a shorthand, I do not meant to erase the centrality of collaboration for his practice.

blue to emphasize and draw our attention to those details often overlooked and to provide the pathways for the viewer to create such lines of flight. These blue shadows provide a sense of their method, which I will describe in more detail below. The shadow is a figure that is often ignored in relation to the object that casts it – the object or figure generally predominates and the shadow is ignored or secondary. Much of their work creates a methodology that directs us to and emphasizes these shadow spaces. The shadow becomes an individual's creativity, relationality, feeling, thought, or the un(der)stated – all elements that one may consider under the rubric of affect.

I open with a brief description of the Shenzhen Biennale and *Little Movements* as Liu's curatorial projects highlight some of the problems surrounding the historiography of contemporary Chinese art. Most accounts of the art "movement" maintain stable understandings of Chinese culture, history, tradition, and its people, in order to produce a historiography of the art form that excavates and reveals the details of the history. However, Liu Ding's work does not produce more knowledge but rather questions what exactly we know to be history and how we function within history. Through a focus on affect and feelings, Liu Ding's artistic project and curatorial goals destabilize both our epistemological approaches to and ontological accounts of history.

Ontology directs us towards questions about the existence of an object, while epistemology circulates around what methods one uses to know about such an object. Ontology and epistemology are related in that a reworking of the latter leads to a reformulation of the former. An ontological understanding of history questions what we presume history to be (narratives, evidence, and/or objects that show the past). In order to question history, one uses methods and epistemological inquiry. When we complicate what counts as the epistemological bases for history, one also engages in questions of ontology and being. Liu Ding operates at this interplay by disrupting what we understand to count as historical proof. By shifting the epistemological registers in the accounts of contemporary Chinese art from narratives and facts to affects and feelings, he produces an ontological understanding of history that directs us towards issues surrounding ethics. More specifically, by focusing on feelings, Liu Ding's ontology of history and China negotiates what we understand to be the experience and livelihood of "others." When we examine our relation to otherness and what we define as care or investment for an other, the ethical dimension arises. This chapter traces through these multiple dimensions of epistemology, ontology, and ethics in Liu Ding's curatorial projects.

Liu Ding provides an alternative approach to history that operates at different epistemological and ontological registers. Through a focus on affect and relations, Liu questions what we utilize to construct history (epistemology), along with what we consider and value as history (ontology). To understand the implications of such a model, we must first account for the dominant ways contemporary Chinese art has been framed. I will provide an overview of previous framings in the next section. In such accounts, the notions of what we consider China, art, and the contemporary are presumed to be stable and knowable, which often eschews more affective accounts of the past. This dynamic privileges Major ways of understanding China. Liu Ding destabilizes the Major accounts of China through an interplay of ontology and affect, where one focuses more on sensations within the past. Liu Ding's reconfiguration of history's ontology and epistemology offer us different ways of thinking through the predicament of the Major. Through the minorness of affect and performance, we question both the epistemological approaches and the ontological accounts of China, time, and art. In so doing, we open up space to think about the ethics of whom we include in historical accounts.

In this general description of the affective mechanisms involved in the construction of these curatorial projects, I've momentarily deemphasized an analysis of individual works. Although I perform such an engagement in the next section, I additionally think through the spatial and affective production of Liu Ding's work. In order to reveal how Liu Ding achieves these affective effects, I will first examine how curators have generally framed and discursively analyzed key artists that repeatedly arise in the archives and curated shows on contemporary Chinese art. In turn, we understand how Liu Ding's curation as artistic practice destabilizes some of these previous formulations. For those less acquainted with contemporary Chinese art, this section provides an overview of how contemporary Chinese performance and art have been theorized.

The Discourse

A comparative account of how different contemporary Chinese artists have been presented and curated reveals how Liu Ding destabilizes the art historical narrative. Before discussing Liu Ding's exact methods, this section reviews how scholars have framed and produced the movement known as contemporary Chinese art. Specific art objects have been repeatedly discussed and dominated the global art market; in particular, the key artists are Gu Dexin, Wang Guangyi, and Huang Yongping. They have been showcased by some of the largest venues in contemporary art: *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, Centre Pompidou, 1989), 45th Venice Biennale (1993), and *Inside Out* (New York, Asia Society, 1998). By comparing how certain works have been framed, we better assess how Liu Ding's curatorial and performative practices in the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2012) and *Little Movements* renegotiate history, affect, and ethics.

Liu Ding's projects respond to the predicament of what I discussed in the introduction as the Major. The predicament of the Major is reproduced in the academic accounts of contemporary Chinese art, shaping the discursive contours of most non-Western art. Dominant narratives surrounding modernity, originality, and ingenuity frame the racialized frameworks of works emerging out of non-Western contexts. The introduction delved into the minor-Major relationship, along with the historical emergence of the predicament vis-a-vis anti-essentialist discourse. This chapter extends this analysis and examines the predicament of the Major as it relates to the academic discourse and key exhibits on contemporary Chinese art.

The majority of the historical accounts around the emergence of contemporary Chinese art mark its beginning with the end of the Cultural Revolution.[2] Historical contextualization is often emphasized in most of the books and catalogs about contemporary Chinese art. This body of literature generally unfolds as follows: in the late 90's, authors demand historicization[3] and localized accounts of Chinese art; the second wave of criticism primarily catalogued key artists and their artistic tactics; and lastly, issues of diaspora, globalization, and modernity emerge. Gao in *Total Modernity* encapsulates this demand for the particular that is emblematic of the discourse: "It becomes unlikely, therefore that either of these [avant-garde] theories (Marx's alienation nor Burger's institutionalized capitalism and avant-garde) will work for the Chinese model of the avant-garde,

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[2] Liu Ding's 2014 project is currently researching the relationship of socialist realism, which at its height during the formation of the Communist party and the Cultural Revolution, to contemporary Chinese art practices.

[3] Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Minglu Gao, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

because the Chinese institutional system has been constructed in a totally different way."[4] The push towards specificity and contextualization are central to the field of contemporary Chinese art.

Performance historically played a central role. Although most authors mention performance, few publications have analyzed how performance fits into the broader landscape of art and culture in China. Instead, earlier accounts of performance labeled it as "apartment art," since most of these artists were working in less commercial environments following governmental censorship following the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. Gao Minglu and others describe apartment art as "deal[ing] with nonsense of meaninglessness. It has lost the option of attempting to move or impress an audience — much less the broader public — which avant-garde figures of the eighties strove to do."[5] In other words, performance and the "retreat" to intimate performances in private spaces were much less about public affect and effect. Gao situates performance as seemingly secondary to the larger history of art in China.

However, some scholars have more explicitly centralized the role of performance in the formation of contemporary Chinese art. Thomas Berghuis' *Performance Art in China* situates his analytic in relation to Amelia Jones' central work on performance art in the US and Europe. He moves away from locating performance in art to Jackson Pollock in order to privilege a more unique and specific historical arc for China: "we need to arrive at a historical analysis of the local development of modern and contemporary performance art and to reveal how the new subject in art became increasingly central to modern and contemporary practices in Asia."[6] Following Jones' focus on the production of the subject, Berghuis emphasizes historical contextualization and particularization with the rise of contemporary art practices. Such contextualization is related to China and to Western developments in art theory and technique: "Such an analysis can be extended by tracing commonly accepted historical conceptions of origin in performance art in Asia by looking for events that pose direct references back to early Futurist manifestoes, or by tracing back to Dada, where 'performance art can include any kind of theatrical production on the part of visual artists.' This would facilitate focus on performance art as part of the advent of conceptualism in China, which is proposed by some of the most prominent art critics working in the field of Chinese art."[7] Berghuis demands a focus on explicit citations between Western movements and artists in China. Thus, for him, "[s]pecific historical contexts are critical, however, for understanding recent experimental art practice, and analyzing how artists across Asia have started to produce new visual structures that challenge the notion of a singular discourse on contemporary art."[8]

To articulate this context, Berghuis' historicization of contemporary Chinese art relies on the role of the subject. Following Jones, Berghuis emphasizes the import of the subject in relation to performance art: "To understand Chinese performance art we need a similar emphasis on the *subject* being performed in many of the artworks produced over the past decade. Performing the subject can be related to the body/*self*, as is evident from extensive conversations with the artists. The social, historical and political-economic contexts in which both the artist and his work are situated are equally critical. […] one should examine the role of a specific context of time, space, and social-

[4] Gao, 6.
[5] Ibid., 161.
[6] Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 207), 23-24.
[7] Ibid., 24.
[8] Ibid., 28.

economic position of the artists whose work is analyzed."[9]   In Berghuis' articulation, the subject becomes imbued primarily through context. The subject becomes a stable entity that performs, critiques, and exists within China. Meiling Cheng's *Beijing Xingwei* similarly focuses on performance art in China but shifts away from explorations of subject formation[10]. Cheng analyzes time-based performance, as it was sinicized by artists in order to produce a "brand China" in relation to a global art market. Throughout her analysis, she examines the formation of multiple centers that arise from art production within a global landscape.

These theorists generally produce a history that traces the emergence of experimental art practices following the end of the Cultural Revolution. This history offers a general background to the construction of contemporary Chinese art and highlights some of the key events and artists that have become canonical for many historians and curators.

1976

Many narrativize the development of contemporary art in China with the re-opening of educational institutions following the end of the Cultural Revolution. After the death of Mao in 1976, struggles around the control of the Communist party emerged. However, most of the leaders at that point were seeking a shift in politics from the controlled environment of the Cultural Revolution. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China liberalized its control on education and economic development. As a result, literature, art books, and other texts became more easily accessible during this time period.   Texts about aesthetics and Western art history became increasingly available in Chinese and English.   In addition to texts, art objects from Europe and the US increased in circulation. An exhibition that is often cited by artists and historians is Robert Rauschenberg's 1985 exhibit at the National Art Museum in Beijing. The Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange exhibit was the first American show on the mainland in 50 years and included over 125 works. After an apprenticeship at the world's oldest paper mill in Jingxian, China, Rauschenberg became further acquainted with China, influencing his desire for his touring show to be exhibited in Beijing. The show attracted an estimate of over 300,000 viewers in its 20-day run. Experimental artists in China were inspired by the show and a rise in what some call avant-garde and conceptual art in China occurred. From this moment, many have remarked upon an increase in different groups in experimental art: the Stars, Northern Art Group, Pond Association, and Xiamen Dada.[11] These art groups were located in divergent geographic locations and had different aesthetic agendas.

With the historical focus on Rauschenberg's 1985 show, most discourses about these groups and individual artists have contended with issues around derivation and originality. Some have dismissed Chinese artists as derivative of Western art, while most scholars and critics allude to the debates and the controversies surrounding derivation. To counter such critiques, scholars often emphasized the need for a focus on the particular context and history of China. This is where much of the above-discussed academic discourse enters. In order to counteract critiques of the art as derivative, scholars often fixated on the need for contextualization.   Rather than resolving these debates, I bring up this historical account and discourse to reveal how questions around derivation were privileged over an engagement of the formalist, emotive, or intellectual qualities of the work. The

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[9] Ibid., 125.

[10] Meiling Cheng, *Beijing Xingwei* (London: Seagull Books, 2014).

[11] For a thorough discussion of each of these groups, see Paul Gladston, *Avant-Garde Art Groups in China* (London: Intellect, 2013).

history reveals a privileging of certain types of analyses, or, in other words, certain epistemological concerns were centralized over others. A key component of this history from the 1980's is the overlap between theoretical discourse and artistic production. During this period, avant-garde art practices, journals, and education systems arose in relation to one another. *Meishu*, the primary art journal spearheaded by Gao Minglu from 1985 to 1991, served as a primary vehicle for debates around art and aesthetics during the development of art during this time period. Furthermore, within this entwinement of the education system and discourse, we see a privileging of visual art discourse over performance and other mediums such as sound.

1989 & Beyond

Another key moment is the Tiananmen Square student protests of 1989. Following the atrocities of Tiananmen, the discourse on apartment art emerges in the historical narratives. Following the event, censorship increased within China. As such, artists found it difficult to publicly display work. They retreated to private homes and often worked on more ephemeral forms of performance that didn't necessarily have an end product. Scholars have called this period "apartment art." As discussed earlier, apartment/performance art was dismissed as lacking in public impact, due to its privatized nature as enacted within the domestic space. However, such distinctions between public and private are destabilized when one considers how artists who mobilized between different "apartments" produced an admittedly smaller in number but still critical network and "public."

Global interest on Chinese art increased following the Tiananmen incident. One particular show was *Magiciens de la Terre* at Paris' Centre Georges Pompidou. This 1989 show was the first to present contemporary Chinese artists within Europe or the United States. The show was initially constructed as a critique of the Museum of Modern Art's 1984-1985 "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." The MOMA show was criticized for a limited representation of non-Western art. The head curator of *Magiciens*, Jean-Hubert Martin, showcased non-Western art from around the world.[12] Three Chinese artists were part of this show: Gu Dexin, Huang Yongping, and Yang Jiechang. Fei Dawei served as an interlocutor to Martin by introducing him to different artists. The next exhibit noted for its presentation of Chinese artists is the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993. Wang Youshen, Wang Guangyi, Xu Bing, Fang Lijun, Li Xianting, Feng Mengbo, Wu Shanzhuan, Geng Jianyi, and Liao Wen were all part of the exhibit. This was the first inclusion of contemporary Chinese artists in the biennale. Ten years after the show, China had its own pavilion in the Venice Biennale.

In 1998, the Asia Society presented *Inside Out*, the first show to present contemporary Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong artists within the US. The lead curator Gao Minglu was primarily concerned with framing the show in relation to notions of modernization and contextualization: "If we do not keep in mind this transition in contemporary Chinese art and instead view such shifts from ideological perspectives current during the Cold War, we may misunderstand contemporary Chinese art in both its original context and in terms of global modernization. Such misunderstandings may create political and aesthetic dislocations."[13] Gao emphasizes the need to shift away from Cold War notions of ideology in analyzing the art; instead, he states that the original

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[12] *Magiciens de la Terre* also had its share of controversy. Most notably, there was a special issue of *Third Text* following the exhibit that heavily critiqued the show. More recently, in 2014, the Asian Art Archive in New York held an event which revisited the construction and controversy surrounding the show, particularly in relation to Chinese artists.

[13] Gao Minglu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 29.

context and questions around modernity must be foregrounded. The history he creates in this show emphasizes a discourse on modernity, a highly dominant theme within contemporary Chinese cultural studies throughout the 1990's into today. Questions surrounding modernity are often preoccupied with a return to the dilemma of derivation and originality. If Chinese artists are deemed as lacking ingenuity, they are often dismissed as modern. Thus, the dominant historical concerns of the late 90's were primarily situated within similar concerns during the late 80's and early 90's.

Inside Out also engaged performance, framing it as critiquing a growing materialism in China: "In performances in Beijing's East Village, Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming have confronted the system of art marketing and institutions and engaged in pseudo-religious meditations on highly personalized objects (including their own bodies and experiences) in private spaces to seek a now-disappeared spiritual "aura" and a "purification" in the midst of a materialist society."[14] Performance is instantly aligned with the social.[15] Although Zhang and Ma's respective works possess a political critique, a repeated negation of the affective and seemingly less political arises.

This period has been noted for artists working in what some identify as political pop and cynical realism. The repeated question around derivation emerges again, as artists often invoked popular American influences from figures such as Andy Warhol. Thus, artists, such as Feng Mengbo and Wang Guangyi, were identified for their references to kitsch.[16]

In 2000, the unofficial art show "Fuck Off" shadowed the Shanghai Biennale. The "Fuck Off" exhibition, curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, has become infamous for controversial works involving pain, animality, and other taboo topics. The curators envisioned the show as a third way of creating art that wasn't responding to the Western art market nor about government pandering. As such, the stance of "Fuck Off" (or a more direct translation of "Uncooperative Art") was situated to both the state and the West.

Key Pieces - A Comparative Study

Certain artists are repeatedly discussed in the above-discussed shows, producing a cannon of artists and events for the dominant accounts of this historical moment. Most of these artists are men, as few women are narrativized within this history. Liu Ding engages affect, ontology, epistemology, and method through his treatment of individual art objects and/or artists; this greatly differs from other key shows. The earlier general overview of the key shows and texts that have focused on performance reveals a reliance on stable notions of history and the subject, where events are presumed fully knowable. However, Liu Ding does not rewrite this historical account, but rather directs us to the shadows, tears, feelings, and affects that normally go overlooked in the focus on the

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[14] Ibid., 31.

[15] During this time, one also witnesses a rise in performance art festivals circulating throughout Asia, where practitioners globally would congregate to present their performance art practices. Although this book does not fully discuss this network and proliferation of such festivals, they are critical to attend to in thinking about the use of performance in relation to visual art.

[16] In response to these two major identified trends in the 1990's, another group of artists created work around what they call post-sense sensibilities. This group of artists wanted to differentiate themselves from political pop and cynical realism, through a reliance on less visual art means: performance, photography, installation, and video. In addition to mediums, the group relied up on the human in grotesque, animal'esque forms.

stable subject and context. He is not trying to make such minor contours on par with these dominant accounts of the past; rather, such minor contours open up different discourses that engage 1) a reconsideration of what we consider to be history and 2) the ethics around the production of such a history. The ethics he brings to the table are ones that critique multiculturalist and intersubjective approaches to include China into global discourse; he is not simply bringing the Chinese other to the table for public knowledge nor illuminating the particular context of China in relation to artistic production. Instead, he examines the ethical ramifications of how and why the other enters into such a discourse and, more specifically, how such an other is understood and ontologically formulated. Liu Ding's ethics directs us to the ontology of the other. By analyzing a set of artists that span the various historical accounts in some of the main exhibitions on contemporary Chinese art, we understand how these projects often maintain an ontological stance that presumes what we know to be history and China. Additionally, the epistemological modes of previous projects reveal how they often rely on particular narratives and "facts" to construct and maintain ontological presumptions around China and history.

The first piece that is cited in most discourses on contemporary Chinese art is Xiao Lu and Tang Song's *Dialogue* (1989). Xiao Lu walked into the opening hours of the group exhibit, which held her original installation of two phone booths facing one another. A large cut-out of her colleague Tang Song was placed inside one of the booths. Open entering, Xiao Lu fired gun shots from a concealed weapon.   This piece has become almost legendary, as it occurred right before the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident.   Furthermore, the narratives around state critique for this work are repeatedly invoked, as both of the artists involved came from families of high-ranking officials. Following the immediate release of both of the artists, the piece became a critique of nepotism and preferential treatment since the gun itself was registered to a government official.   In Liu Ding's Shenzhen Biennale, there is no mention of this work. Although there are many pieces one could omit from the "history" of contemporary Chinese art, the absence of "Dialogue" is striking.   The repeated inclusion of "Dialogue" into the historical archive and accounts establishes particular narratives about the state, censorship, and art as political critique. Liu Ding's shift away from the piece gestures towards different ways of understanding the development of contemporary Chinese art.

Liu Ding, however, includes two out of the three artists who were in the first international exhibition of contemporary Chinese art, *Magiciens de la Terre*: Huang Yongping and Gu Dexin. *Magiciens* included Huang Yongping's iconic piece *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987), a clump of paper mixed together from two texts on Eastern and Western art. In addition, the show included his *Reptile* (1989) installation which similarly worked off of his practice of washing books. By working against the archival impulse to maintain the text and book as sacred, Huang blends many texts together to create large mounds of pulp that are formally constructed.

Unlike *Magiciens*, Liu Ding does not include these two "important" works in his overview of contemporary Chinese art. Instead, Liu Ding includes Huang Yongping's *Bat Project* (2003), a half complete replica of the rear of a US spy plane. In 2001, a standoff between a US spy plane and two Chinese fighter jets led to a fatal collision in Hainan, heightening tensions between the two countries. Huang was originally commissioned to recreate the entire plane for an earlier Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, not curated by Liu Ding. However, the project was abandoned, with the artist's name and artwork removed from the exhibition, due to possible diplomatic tensions between French, American, and Chinese governments. As such, the half-constructed plane has been left on undeveloped land and has become a notable public landmark, often referred to by locals as "that

place with the tail of an airplane." Eleven years later, Liu Ding decided to include this abandoned and half-created work into the biennale, as opposed to Huang's more notable pieces that have become almost symbolic of the contemporary scene during the 80's and 90's.

Liu Ding's curatorial choice to not include Huang Yongping's more iconic works forces us to take pause, as the biennale was meant to provide an overview of the history of the formation of contemporary Chinese art. The curatorial excerpt for the biennale on *Bat Project* states, "We will officially exhibit and list this artwork as part of the 2012 Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale. As we see it, it provides a new opportunity for projection. What we are projecting onto it is the importance of art having a lasting relevance not based on time, and the importance of establishing connectivity that is internal to the creation. Though the event it touches on is already in the past, as we see it, this massive object's existence as an artwork serves as a reminder that the internality of the artwork is not moved by time."[17] This description of *Bat Project* is concerned with the "internality" of the work, or what may be called its affect. Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* describe the art object as being imbued with affect and sensation: "What is preserved by right is not the material, which constitutes only the de facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied, it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself."[18] Affect remains in the internal workings of the art object, and Liu Ding and his team privilege this aspect in his production of a contemporary Chinese art history. In particular, the large-scale work evokes questions around the *how*. Rather than asking *what* the abandoned plane represents and means, one is more shocked by the sheer size of it to ask how it got there. Questions of *how* concentrate on the process and relationality that circulate within the work. Locals in Shenzhen refer to the work as "that place with the tail of an airplane," rather than "the site of Huang Yongping's *Bat Project*." This reference to "that place" refers an affective relation of the public that simply remarks on the existence of the work, as opposed to identifying its meaning. The work operates within an affective register that is undefined and more concerned with how it got there. Rather than replicating the historical narratives of Huang Yongping through the expected pieces of *Two Minutes* and *Reptile*, Liu Ding identifies a less identifiable work for its affective possibilities.[19]

Gu Dexin is another artist presented in *Magiciens* and the Shenzhen Biennale. In *Magiciens*, Gu Dexin's iconic *Plastic Objects* (1987) were installed. This installation comprises of multiple remade pieces of plastics in faded earth-toned colors. The pieces are hanging from walls or placed on the ground and in mounds. The distorted plastic sculptures evoke the grotesque, as the figures resemble intestines and mounds of decayed trash. As lights hit the texture of the installation, the reflections resemble liquids and other fluids that one would normally avoid touching. They appear like dirty puddles of blood, shit, and sewer water – things that one would normally avoid while walking. Although these installations produce an affective sense of disgust and other "ugly feelings," in the words of Sianne Ngai, through its textures and colors, such details are not discussed in the

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[17] Liu Ding, Carol Yinghua Lu, and Su Wei, *The 7ᵗʰ Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale* (Shenzhen: OCT Contemporary At Terminal, 2012), 277.

[18] Gilles Deleuze & Feliz Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 166.

[19] In addition, all three works contend with history, albeit in different ways. *Two Minutes* and *Reptile* critique our archival urges to preserve books and objects; in addition, *Two Minutes* destabilizes the boundaries between Eastern and Western art histories. *Bat Project*, however, is a less explicitly engaged with history. Of course, Huang Yongping was referencing a current event when he created the work and, as such, the replica could memorialize a historical moment. However, through Liu Ding's focus on internality and affect, history becomes less about archives, writing, and objects. Instead, through Liu's focus on the affect of *Bat Project*, he produces a tension between a work's affect and the temporality in which a work exists.

exhibition catalog. Instead, the exhibition catalog describes Gu's work in relation to artistic process: "For him, art is a radical way to liberate sensuality and instinct. It's also a way to approach intellectual truth."[20] In addition, the work was exhibited in *La Grande Halle*, in the fourth section of the exhibit labeled "Does the decor make the wall?"[21] The piece is situated in relation to decorative art and is framed in relation to artistic process, rather than its affective and sensorial qualities.

Liu Ding similarly did not choose this earlier iconic work to be included in the biennale. Instead, he used Gu's equally iconic work *August 26th, 1996*. The work involves a close-up of a photo of a hand overexposed in red. The work documents the performance process of a hand rubbing a single piece of meat until it is rendered flat, save for tendon and bits of flesh. The work is chosen as it has "become so cheap and unreliable[22]" as most focus on the striking nature of the work. The team of curators emphasize the image's inclusion in the Shenzhen Biennale for the import of its title, a date. The date has no prescribed meaning per se; instead, the curators hope that a revisit of the work's title will bring back a sense of sensations and relations embedded in the work – that a focus on the date forces audiences to imagine what the artist was sensing and how he was relating the work to others around him. The description of the work emphasizes the senses of "the oily sense and texture of that meat which has been rubbed in the hand for so long."[23] Unlike the description of Gu's *Plastic Objects* in *Magicien*'s catalog, these curators focus on texture and sensation, thinking through the affective production when one renders a piece of flesh flat. The immediate reaction one has to the work is the stark contrast of bloodied red hand against a black background. The foregrounding of the hand directs our immediate attention to the fleshy object flattened between the thumb and forefinger. Is the hand red from the squeezing of flesh – an editing effect by the photographer? The formal qualities of the work create an affective relation of disgust and confusion, imploring the audience to engage more and remark. Affect becomes a key frame by which these curators contend with objects. They also emphasize the need for the work's "ambiguity and grandiose sensory nature [to] lead us to reconsider the nature of images, of writing, of history, and imagination, if only for a moment."[24] Thus, the affective qualities of sensation are privileged in this overused image; the image's minor contours are emphasized. Similarly, the curators direct us to "the insight and wisdom of these art practitioners of those times." Rather, than stressing historical context, the curators identify how artists were thinking, creating, and relating. Thus, in addition to sensation, the work's relational aspects are foregrounded. The focus on the work's ambiguity is strikingly different from how Gu is framed in *Magiciens* as a work that approaches "intellectual truth," "sensuality," and "instinct." Liu Ding privileges sensation, ambiguity, and relations between artists over artistic process and grand narratives.

These examples of how Gu Dexin and Huang Yongping have been curated offer insights into the different ways Liu Ding is creating an affective, sensation-based, and ontological sense of history. Rather than focusing on truths, facts, and context, Liu Ding takes these aspects into account while additionally focusing on affect, indetermination, sensation, and relations.

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[20] Translation mine. "Pour lui, l'activite artistique est un moyen radical pour liberer la sensualite et l'instinct. C'est aussi un maniere d'approcher la verite intellectuelle." Mark Francis Jean-Hubert, *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1989), 145.

[21] Translation mine. "Est-ce que le decor fait le mur?" Ibid., 12-13.

[22] Liu Ding et. al., 67.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

Little, Movements, & Affect as Method

Liu Ding works against the formation of a history based on over-determined notions of periodization. He is not attempting to rewrite the history nor create a better or more proper history; Liu Ding is not arguing over the epistemological formation of periods. Rather, Liu and his team are destabilizing the ontological conditions of history, what we consider to be history, and how we exist within and in relation to it. By highlighting the differences between how Liu Ding and other curators/historians have constructed the history of contemporary art, we see how Liu emphasizes seemingly minor and trivial things like feelings, affects, and relations. However, by doing so, he focuses on the ontological formation of history through such minor epistemological registers. The notions of little and movements, the curatorial concepts that inspired the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, illuminates the implications and import of Liu Ding's approach.

Liu Ding responds to the problematics of the Major through the construction and methodological approach of his exhibits. The physical construction of the 7th Shenzhen Biennale offers a deeper sense of how they seek to work at this interface. As discussed earlier, they created shorter walls for the exhibition space to open up lines of connection between works. Liu Ding orients us to these intricate details (or shadows) in order to rework how we understand and think about art and our experience of the moment. These oft-ignored details force us to relook at the past or history. Such an orientation to these "shadow'ed" details captures the affective contours of artworks, opposed to the dominant historical and political accounts of artists and artistic movements. These contours in turn reconstruct a different sense of the past.

Through interviews and archival research, the artists curate details that are often overlooked in most of the context-driven exhibits and events. Thus, the "shadows" gesture towards such contours, directing us to reconfigure the registers by which we understand and situate art. The shadow is a theoretical trope that has a long history, ranging from Plato's allegory of the cave to Jungian psychoanalytic accounts of the unconscious. Without delving too deeply into the trope, the shadow operates differently from Plato's theorizations in that Liu Ding's shadow does not dismiss the import of the secondary sensations produced by true form. In other words, I invert the Platonic relation to shadows and secondary sensations to explore what arises when artifice displaces true form.

Liu Ding and Lu develop a method that is grounded in local practices, tracking the feelings and thoughts of artists and producers. In using the notion of method to describe their work, they do not per se follow a set scientific method that they diligently apply to every work. On the contrary, their method is precisely rooted in a constant questioning, or Deleuzian deterritorialization, of assumptions, principles, and ideas. They destabilize what has become familiar and standard in artistic practice.

To do this, they track an affective history of contemporary Chinese art. The overall goal of their work is first to question how we understand history, ultimately restructuring our accounts and understandings of the past. The artists do not rely on text or speech; they use affect and other less textual modes of connection (feelings, thoughts, and relationality) to reconfigure how we know what happens at a moment, past or present. By unearthing something like affect from these projects, they renegotiate how we experience the past. Rebecca Schneider directs us towards some of these other senses in her discussion of how performance remains rather than flees: "And yet, in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other

modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently? The ways, that is, that performance resists a cultural habituation to the ocular — a thrall that would delimit performance as that which cannot remain to be seen."[25] Liu Ding captures Schneider's call for moving beyond the ocular. Through the affective, Liu Ding restructures our historical accounts in ways that move away from the over determined narratives that solely focus on the state and artistic influences.

The notions of *little* and *movements* further define this method. First, little does not simply refer to scale (big/small); instead, little demands an attention to localized, personalized practices. Little refers to internalized forms and affect. Liu Ding works within a sense of affect as discussed in Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant reveals the potential of affect theory, as it "can provide a way to assess the disciplines of normativity in relation to the disorganized and the disorganizing processes of labor, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation."[26] In other words, affect enables us to see how individuals contend with history, time, and their attending processes of labor, grief, and desire. Affect engages history at the level of how we exist in time, rather than at the level of pre-defined processes shaped by psychological, sociological, or political economic discourse. Liu Ding and Lu track these modes of experience through an artistic practice that does not simply operate at the level of events; their focus corresponds to the minutiae of intuition, affect, thought, feelings, and relationships. Affect is like the painted shadows in the space of the 7th Shenzhen Biennale – those aspects most often subsumed under the primary object or figure.

However, affect is not transhistorical. These artists attend to time's political contours. Similar to Berlant, Liu Ding and Lu reshift how we measure and contribute to notions of the past. Berlant distinguishes between different ways of knowing of the past, seeking to "move analytically beyond the moment when a happening moves into common sense, or a process congeals into an object-event that conceals its immanence, its potentially unfinished or enigmatic activity."[27] Instead, she emphasizes the need "to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing whose demands on survival skills map not the whole world in one moment but a way to think about the history of sensualized epistemologies in the atmosphere of a particular moment now (aesthetically) suspended in time."[28] Affect is historically contingent and provides a way to measure one's experience in time. The "sensualized epistemologies" Berlant offers are ways of knowing and feeling that cannot be captured in most historical accounts. As such, Liu Ding returns to previously analyzed works to find the shadows and senses that were once overlooked, ultimately enabling us to better understand experience and the past.

The import of time, or a moment, for affect engages the second notion of *movements*. Movements respond to the idea of a teleology or development in history. A movement can occur in multiple directions – to the side, backwards, forwards, standing still, and simply gesturing in place. Their use of movements does not correspond to a sense of a teleological or forward-directed form of development, where one things leads to the next. The ambiguity of movements, especially in their

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[25] Schneider, Rebecca. "Performance Remains" in *Perform, Repeat, Record* ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (London: Intellect, 2012), 139.

[26] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 53.

[27] Ibid., 64.

[28] Ibid.

little or affective form, produces a sense of this desire to not remain within a developmental sense of history. Movements are also plural, offering a sense of their project as ongoing and multiple. History is typically experienced and made known through narratives that erase the messiness of ordinary life. Historical accounts often privilege certain forms of evidence to reconstruct the past, ignoring the precarious processes that shape experience, feelings, and senses; these narratives also ignore details that may seem unimportant or little. Thus, movements disturb a clean narrative and provide moments that cannot fit into its logic. Movements correspond to different models of history that move away from teleology.

In the curatorial layout for both the Shenzhen Biennale and *Little Movements*, the artists de-emphasize the notion of a linear progression for a viewer. They instead create a non-directed engagement with space in order to emphasize their restructuring of time and experience. It is precisely at the level of the senses (sight in site, feeling, etc.) that these artists rework our dominant ways of being in space and time. Although the exhibition catalogs for both *Little Movements* and the Shenzhen Biennale are structured by themes, the layout of both shows are not organized thematically. Instead, works are juxtaposed in less focused ways – they do not follow the logic of the exhibition's text. There is no direct narrative nor center for the exhibition. Liu Ding produced multiple entrances for audiences to enter in order for them to choose how they construct their own narrative of the space and art works. The curators are not invested in situating the viewer within a linear narrative; instead, they produce space for viewers to simply be in the space and produce an affective engagement with the space, as they grapple with multiple sensations and aspects of the curatorial process. Furthermore, there are no fixed routes in the exhibits, enabling people to pass by and choose to engage with works or not. In other words, these curatorial projects are situated within confusion. Liu Ding does not sanitize human experience; in his curatorial projects, we map and create spatial and intellectual relations amongst parts to orient ourselves. Liu Ding is engaging experience ontologically, forcing us to question and negotiate what experience is. Rather than producing an ideal viewer or path for the audience, Liu Ding and his team produces what art historian Irit Rogoff describes as a project of "looking away."[29] Rogoff emphasizes the need to de-privilege an ideal viewer and allow moments of impasse, confusion, and lingering to emerge in experiences with art. From such a place, Liu Ding produces an experience that enables such an orientation. In other words, through a shift in the ways audience members experience a curated show, Liu Ding changes what we experience in time, shifting the ontological dimensions of current and historical experiences of the past.

In addition, Liu Ding differentiates between what we experience with text and the unwritten. In their exhibition catalogs for these exhibits, they organize their works temporally and thematically. However, in the layout of the spaces, they intersperse multiple sources in a different order from their catalogs in order to emphasize a disjointed, non-linear experience. Logics produced through text are not mirrored in the curatorial layout. Liu Ding and Lu work at the interface of text, space, time, senses, and phenomenological experience. The exhibition catalogs for both shows involve a blend of theoretical essays that explain the logics of the shows included. However, one's own experience within the show does not mirror the logic of the text. Liu Ding plays at the intersection of orthography and choreography, where text and embodied experience are placed in tension with one another. This differentiation between written and experiential produces space for a viewer to ask questions, rather than being offered answers and explanations. Liu highlights how the logic of text and experience do not align.

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[29] Irit Rogoff, "Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture," in *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, ed. Gavin Butt (London: Blackwell, 2005), 117-34.

Although the curatorial layout of the show does not follow the logic of the exhibition catalog, Liu Ding has purposefully placed works in relation to one another. He placed Wang Luyan's notable *Walking Man* in the center of a room. Wang's work is within the sight line of Ding Yi's *Appearance of Crosses* series. The relationship between Wang and Ding is one based not upon aesthetic style, but more upon the relationship they have to the their respective dominant artistic moments. For Wang, his work, along with a collective New Measurement Group he worked with, were trying to function differently from the Political Pop Art that became emblematic of contemporary Chinese art during the 90's. Wang's abstraction of the human body shifts away from the kitsch aesthetic of Political Pop. For Ding, his projects responded to the dominant theme of using art to rebel against ideological repression during the 1980's. Similar to Wang's relationship to Political Pop, Ding's use of formalism and repetition (the piece is actually constructed by + and x' signs) reacts to the lack of formalism during his time period. Although temporally different, Liu Ding places these works together to produce a sense of the feeling of producing work "in the shadows," as little, or seemingly unrelated to their respective historic moments. Furthermore, rather than comparing Wang's work to the likes of Giacommetti or other similar works from a Western cannon or explaining the sociopolitical critique of *Walking Man* (which most have done in terms of the Man lacking direction or purpose), Liu Ding stresses *Walking Man's* affective contours in terms of its relationship to previous moments in art history – the work's relationship to others during its time, the thoughts and emotions that preoccupied the artist during the work's creation.

Affect, senses, and shadows (all little movements) interrupt this sense of history, forcing us to ask how we get to know or understand the moment. Affect situates itself in formulations of the ordinary, as opposed to the everyday, which Berlant distinguishes between: "The ordinary is, after all, a porous zone that absorbs lots of incoherence and contradiction, and people make their ways through it at once tipped over awkwardly, half-conscious, and confident about common sense. Laws, norms, and events shape imaginaries, but in the middle of the reproduction of life people make up modes of being and responding to the world that altogether constitute what gets called 'visceral response and intuitive intelligence.'"[30] Thus, Liu Ding and Lu unearth Berlant's ordinary, which is messier in form and less measurable than "laws, norms, and events." These collaborators destabilize how we understand what happens at a moment, which has ramifications upon our understanding of the past and how we obtain knowledge about it. In other words, the movements operate on the epistemological level; the ordinary inherent in movements becomes a way to reframe what we know. By doing so, we question the ontology of history, what constitutes historical experience and what we consider to be history.

This methodology arose through Liu Ding's performative practice. In *Conversations*, the artist created a series of chats with different colleagues involved in the art world. None of these conversations were recorded or made for the public. Instead, the goal was to not be "for the record." This practice highlights his desire to shift the predefined norms of an interview or a public talk. Liu Ding formulates modes of interaction outside of previously defined economies to produce new ways of understanding the contemporary, present, and past. This evolving method is not about formulating value around objects as good or bad. The artists destabilize the accepted norms of behaving for the art world and market. The goal of little movements is to formulate new ways of tracking experience, where we begin to create a sense of the then and now through the little movements and affective relationships that most historical narratives tend to ignore.

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[30] Berlant, 53.

Ethics and Universal History

Critiques of *Little Movements* illustrate the necessity for the Liu Ding's approach. Following the creation of the exhibit, Lance Wang in *LEAP,* one of the main publications on contemporary Chinese art, reduced Liu Ding and his collaborators' method to oral history:

> An oral history, even one recounted by a central figure like Wang, is overly simplistic when the goal is to understand the origins and nature of a moment in history. An oral history is not a primary source; the facts asserted therein need the corroboration of other, additional materials. The biggest problem with oral histories is not that the narrator intentionally obscures or alters historical facts, it is that during the process of recounting, the narrator unconsciously selectively forgets. This is the reason why autobiographies include primary sources, because the presence of these documents serves to rectify facts that the narrator forgot.[31]

Skepticism around political utility is embedded in Wang's critique, whereby the minor that he locates in oral history is discredited as a historical method. However, such skepticism forces us to not simply argue for the political import of the minor but rather to reveal how the minor destabilizes epistemological foundations and assumptions. In other words, the minor forces us to rework the register in which we engage and think about epistemology and ontology.

In particular, the method produced by Liu Ding is rich for approaches to history. Critiques of history and teleology have been developing for a number of years; however, these artists offer an aesthetic method that contributes to artistic and academic concerns around this concept. Questioning the ontology and epistemology of history is important for contemporary China, where these dominant ways of historicization shape how China's cultural production is understood. Liu Ding disrupts the sense of a developmental narrative surrounding culture's emergence in relation to the Chinese state. Although such contextualization and attention to the state are crucial, he instead lingers in the shadows of the state and context. Affect or shadows redefine our experience with time in the past, present, and future, renegotiating what we know about history and how we write about it in the contemporary.

This concern with how we understand ourselves in relation to time speaks to the artists' preoccupation with self-definition. Liu Ding and Lu have critiqued artists' fixation on accessing the United States and Europe, highlighting the problematic of defining oneself in relation to the West – an issue that shapes not only China but also the larger notion of the non-West. They emphasize the need to immerse oneself in the local and the past. In *Little Movements*, their method complicates the past beyond state discourse. This analytic move not only reworks historical narratives, but also provides the opportunity for non-Western others to redefine themselves outside of these over determined frameworks. Little movements approaches the affective and oft-ignored details of history (thoughts, feelings, connections) to obtain a different sense of the past. From this place, the method refigures how we think of history in order to gain a better sense of the self. Applying the method enriches historical projects and current artistic and academic practices.

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[31] Lance Wang, "Wang Guangyi's "Little Movements"?— On the Origins and Nature of the Zhuhai Symposium," *LEAP,* http://leapleapleap.com/2012/02/wang-guangyi%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Clittle-movements-%E2%80%9D%E2%80%94-on-the-origins-and-nature-of-th-e-zhuhai-symposium/ (last accessed April 21, 2014).

However, in addition to their concerns with self-definition based on localized experience, Liu Ding fixates on relating his and others' works to a larger international landscape and making connections between projects. Although they critique the dynamic of relating work to the West and demand a focus on the local, why turn to the international?

Little Movements has gained international interest. Some have attributed this turn as a way of either 1) showing the universalism of art or 2) legitimating Chinese artworks within a Western genealogy. However, another possibility in the international exists, which may be admittedly less grandiose. In particular, within the shadows of the international, there exists the artists' feeling of wanting to find connections to others, a desire to find friends or not feel alone. Within the international's shadows, we find the seemingly simple need to find connections with others. In interviews with the artist and his collaborators, they stress the simple act of being together, being with others, and to be in the company of one another. They are focused on placing things in relation to one another in order to create affective bonds. Although this may be a form of universal connection, the universal takes on a more minor tone. Buck-Morss' influential *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* directs us to these dimensions in the universal. She distinguishes her use from a focus on "giving multiple, distinct cultures equal value, whereby people are recognized as part of humanity indirectly through the mediation of collective cultural identities."[32] The universal thus "emerges in the historical event at the point of rupture. It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits. And it is in our *empathic identification* with this raw, free, and vulnerable state, that we have a chance of understanding what they say. Common humanity exists in spite of culture and its differences. A person's nonidentity with the collective allows for subterranean solidarities that have a chance of appealing to universal, moral sentiment, the source today of enthusiasm and hope."[33]

Buck-Morss uses the Haitian revolution to illustrate her sense of universal history. She does not look for the universal in the "specifically Haitian articulation of that event," but rather seeks the universal within "the moment of the slaves' self-awareness that the situation was not humanly tolerable, that it marked the betrayal of civilization and the limits of cultural understanding, the nonrational, and nonrationalizable course of human history that outstrips in its *in*humanity anything that a cultural outlaw could devise."[34] The universal is located at the moment of vulnerability, opening up the possibility for empathic relations. This creates connections that make us feel less alone in this world. This may be a "little" feeling, but it is something that allows us to work at the level of the universal that is not fully ingrained within a discourse that eviscerates contextualization. Although Liu Ding and Lu are not necessarily looking back at such a massive event as the Haitian Revolution (in some ways, however, they are looking at the legacy of the Cultural Revolution and the rapid marketization in contemporary China), they are trying to register a similar sentiment with the notion of vulnerability. This vulnerability is the locus for reworking the universal outside of how it is often conceptualized. Thus, when Liu Ding and Lu turn to the international, they operate at this level of universal connection to feel like they are not alone in their projects – to find comfort in vulnerability.

Liu Ding's approach focuses on the universal in order to identify vulnerability and whom we identify within this vulnerability. Liu Ding forces us to question when and how we think about the lives of

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[32] Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 133.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 133-134.

others and whom we enfold into historical accounts - what are the limits we place in the narratives and information we count as valid or important?

The limits around whom we value and do not direct us to the realm of ethics. In the turn to affect and relationally, Liu Ding's notion of relations differs from the relational turn in contemporary art. Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term relational art to mark a trend that involved public engagement, where an artist bases their work in "the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."[35] In such a turn, Bourriaud imagines the production of "ways of living and models of action[36]." This turn to the relational has been critiqued for its over idealized notions of subjectivity and community.[37] In addition to these critiques, Liu Ding's art practice reveals a minor notion of relations. Liu Ding is less interested in producing a mode of interculturalism, multiculturalism, or intersubjective experience between the viewer and art object. Liu Ding explores what the limits and excesses are around whom we decide to include and enfold into historical narratives. Liu Ding is not asking how the other can be included and communicated to an audience. Rather, Liu Ding questions the ontology of experience that forces us to rework the possibility of understanding the other. In other words, the ethical orientation becomes of prime concern.

In invoking ethics, I do not mean a set of moral attributes. Rather, the realm of ethics brings to mind, similar to Foucault's later works on the topic, the orientation and relations one has to an other. Thus, moving away from an ethics ingrained in morality or doing what is right, ethics becomes how one engages with an other object, person, or community.

Liu Ding's projects opens up this question around ethics. By destabilizing how history and experience are constructed, Liu Ding directs us to blurring the ontological understandings of experience and how history has been constructed. In so doing, such a process of destabilization produces questions around whom we include within notions of experience and history and the lines we draw around whom these included others might be. Liu Ding renegotiates experience in order to interrupt how the other is situated in relation to experience. In this process, the other becomes less legible in order for us to open up and universalize their experience in more ethical formations. In the words of Buck-Morss, "The less we see historical actors as playing theatrically coherent roles, the more universally accessible their human dilemmas become."[38]

Do these ethics simply mean an inclusion of all? How do such ethics manifest? As we see in *Little Movements*, Liu Ding emphasizes the need for open processes and enabling people to produce their own affective sense to history and art objects. Within such a process, we obtain a sense of this ethical orientation as not about inclusion, but rather about a constant process of questioning and engagement. Rather than following a multiculturalist tendency that seeks to include others so the public can learn from such an other, the ethics of otherness Liu Ding stresses produces an engagement that questions the limits we create around inclusion. Or in other words, it is an ethics based in *little movements* that perpetually create space to question and engage, even when we appear to be including the other.

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[35] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 1998), 113.

[36] Ibid., 13.

[37] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells* (London: Verso, 2012); Shannon Jackson, *Social Works* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[38] Buck-Morss, 145.

In a series of conversations between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou in *Dispossession*, the authors examine how this ethics might play out in terms of relations. Rather than measuring vulnerability based upon the body of the other, the authors emphasize relationality: "the global archives of dispossession seem to become an occasion not for a new identity politics but rather for the possibility of forming a basis for relationality or community. Such community would be centered on considering the vulnerability of others and recuperating collective responsibility for the lives of one another. Perhaps what is at stake here is a shift from the (wounded) narcissism of autonomous and sovereign self-identity, which lies at the heart of the individualistic ontology of modernity, to an ethics and politics of post-identity subjectivities, which are consigned and exposed to the exposure, abandonment, precarity, and vulnerability of others."[39] Butler and Athanasiou produce an ethics that is not premised upon creating a more inclusive multiculturalism through the incorporation of the hurt individual; rather, vulnerability arises from singular experience, which allows us to produce relations

Berlant echoes this sense of identification not steeped in an ethics of multicultural inclusion: "Empathic imagination may well be our best hope for humanity. The problem is that we never seem to imagine this humanity inclusively enough, but only by excluding an antithetical other, a collective enemy beyond humanity's pale. As a consequence, any political movement that attempts to transform the death's-head (the skeletal remains of the victims of history) into an angel's face (history's redeemer) is far more likely to unleash a human hell."[40] Ethics move beyond inclusion and exclusion; Liu Ding's ethics focus on the production of a constant process, or little movements, that leave space to be open.

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[39] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession* (Malden: Polity, 2013), 136-136.
[40] Buck-Morss, 144.

CHAPTER 2 – GLITCH & SPECTERS (OF MARX & MARTYRS WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS)
Historical References Beyond Political Pop

This chapter turns towards minor negotiations of history in the use of historical references. Many artists allude to modern and pre-modern Chinese history through the deployment of key figures, including the Red Guard, Karl Marx, and Chairman Mao. What does it mean when artists reference Chinese history? Are such historical references forms of representation of the past and artistic re-interpretations of history? Is this a manifestation of kitschy political pop art, as discussed by past scholars? Or are there other, more minor ways of understanding such references to historical figures? I introduce two artists, Feng Mengbo and Cao Fei, who frequently reference history. Both of these artists also appear later in section three which discusses the subject and her agency.

Feng Mengbo was born in 1966 and is currently based out of Beijing. In 1992, he graduated from the Central Fine Arts Academy with a focus on graphic arts and painting. In 1994, he first created a series of paintings called *Game Over: The Long March* to depict the history of the Long March as imagined within popular 8-bit video games. He then developed his paintings into a playable video game, when the technology became available. Feng's *Restart* series engages the entwinement of play, populations, and biopolitics. This set of works references the history of modern and contemporary China. In the last section of this project, I will focus more on *Restart* and the use of animation and play. However, this chapter analyzes how Feng's references to history operate within his paintings. In addition, this chapter analyzes the work of Cao Fei, who was born in Guangzhou in 1978. She graduated from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 2001. She currently works and lives in Beijing. After connecting early on with renowned curator Hou Hanrou and other key figures, she was curated into major shows early on in her career. In 2007, she presented at the Venice Biennale. Her work has primarily engaged performance and film, focusing on youth cultures. In 2009, she created *RMB City* on the internet-based world of Second Life. Cao created a playable avatar and world within Second Life that repeatedly references major historical figures and martyrs from Chinese history: such as Laozi, Marx, and Mao. Through an attention to the role of historical references in both of these projects, I will develop two minor notions to assist in thinking about the use of historical references in contemporary Chinese art: the glitch for Feng Mengbo and specters for Cao Fei.

I develop the glitch through an analysis of Feng's paintings, which are based off of video games. The glitch refers to momentary interruptions within a system, as Chinese bodies in animated forms inspire modes of play and critique that do not necessarily subvert or challenge a system. Instead, the glitch is a theoretical concept that tempers notions of rewriting history through art and performance; the glitch reveals momentary disturbances within a system but which ultimately allow it to sustain, maintain, and continue. When the Chinese are situated and understood as population, horde, and mass, the resistance of a singular being loses is epistemological and political significance. The glitch has begun to be theorized within new media and the visual arts.[1] The glitch or error directs us away from the singular mechanics of the glitch towards the glitch's relationship to dominant systems: "While the error notice signals failure, it does so within the successful, efficient operation of a system."[2] The idea of a glitch, as a type of error, is an "outlying signa[l]– the statistical abject – [that]

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[1] Mark Nunes, ed., *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 142.
[2] Ibid., 13. Cascone thinks about the notion of glitch in relation to trends in experimental music and new media. She situates the glitch in relation to the failures within technologies, and modes of creating sound works from such failures.

falls outside of the sample space, a singularity that deviates 'out of range.'"[3] However, the glitch is not an outlier but rather a condition that has become so common as to be normalized and presumed. The glitch is not simply a momentary error that has the potential to challenge and/or change power[4]; instead, the glitch is a condition of being by which these works are limited in their existence. Such an exploration of the glitch as a condition, unlike a temporal momentary error, enables me to theorize how the glitch is not simply a limited problem but rather a problematic that structures the ways Chineseness operates within a transnational frame.

Cao Fei often conjures the specters of martyred figures within the history of modern China.   I theorize the notion of specter drawing from Wendy Brown. She defines the spectral as "an individual [or] institutional nor collective memory of "what really happened"; it is, rather, a dynamic, episodic, agentic, and imagistic form of remembering that counters the force of one conjuration of the past with that of another. It is simultaneously a coming to terms with our losses and a redemption of them, achieved by cultivating a different version of them in a rearticulation of past and present."[5] Specters are historical references that are not meant to show the "real" history of China nor rewrite such a history. Instead, specters complicate notions of historical truths and direct us towards the normative forms of historical recuperation that dominate discourses on contemporary Chinese art.

I cull both the glitch and specters from affective registers, less the representational contours, of a piece. I locate affective responses, ranging from laughter to boredom, to these two projects to reveal where, when, and how critics and others remark difference and Chineseness within an object. The places where people remark upon work through affective response (laughter, confusion, boredom, or anger, to list a few) offers a space to think about where and how a work glitches a system, ranging from political discourse to formalist aesthetics.

The Politics of *Game Over*

For modern China, the biopolitical shapes much of its history: the control of populations in reeducation camps during the Cultural Revolution, the endurance and loss of life during the Long March, and the callisthenic exercises imposed during the Cultural Revolution and well into today.[6] For modern China, the Long March is a central place to think through notions of death and China itself. Feng Mengbo reimagines the event through painting and animated games.

The historical context of the Long March involved many characters and biopolitical factors. The march emerged through the conflict of two national competing parties in the formation of modern China.   With the official end of the Imperial China in 1911, control and power was not centralized but rather was dispersed amongst different lords regionally. Leaders, such as Sun Yat-Sen of the Nationalist KMT party, sought to unite the varied geographic regions.   In his attempt for

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[3] Ibid., 14.

[4] Ibid., 15. Nunes aligns his work to Galloway and Thacker's *The Exploit*.

[5] Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 172.

[6] All of these practices are modes of population maintenance and control, and by stating this, I purposefully flatten their significance here in order to destabilize the hierarchies that structure what is considered political or Major. In these examples, the body is central for the control of populations - not just its disciplining but also its modes of survival. Rather than setting in place or hierarchalizing forms of the body's subjectivation, I do not argue equivalence but rather reveal what assumptions we make when we understand an event as more "political" or important than others.

unification, Sun relied on the aid of the Soviet Union. Through the assistance of the Soviet representative Aldoph Joffe in 1923, Sun created an agreement for aid through the multi-tiered support of the Communist International organization, the KMT, and the Chinese Communist Party (CPC). It is through this effort that the Nationalist KMT party came to rule under the leadership of Sun Yat-Sen. Upon Sun's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-Shek became the leader of the KMT. The relation between the Communist and Nationalist parties was destabilized during Chiang's ascendance. In particular, during Chiang's Northern Expedition, which involved his attempt at unifying China, the Chinese Civil War erupted in 1927 and lasted until 1950.

The Long March arose out of this context; the event spanned about 370 days in 1934, where the Communist Party's Red Army, led by Mao Zedong, retreated from the Nationalist party a total of about 8,000 miles through the undeveloped terrain of western China. The march consisted of three separated armies, crossing from the south of China to the north and west, ending in Yan'an in Shaanxi province, where all three forces reunited. Of the 70,000 to 80,000 that embarked on the march, only about 8,000 to 10,000 made it to Yan'an. It was through this process that established Mao as the leader of the Communist Party. Eventually in 1937, the KMT and CPC united forces to fight off Japanese occupation of Manchuria. However, upon the defeat of Japan (with the help of both Soviet and US intervention), the truce between the KMT and CPC disintegrated, leading to a final period of civil war. Through the assistance of Soviet forces, the CPC's ability to utilize arms and resources from the then defeated Japanese, and the CPC's mobilization of peasants to fight against the KMT, the CPC was eventually able to win the Civil War. Although the KMT received military and financial support from the United States, the party was unable to ward off CPC forces. By October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared victory over the KMT, as its 2 million members fled to the island of Taiwan.

The historic event of the Long March represents a pivotal moment in the narrative of how the Communist party arose. The march is imagined as establishing Mao's rise to power. There were rivalries within the CPC, and Mao lost control of power before the Long March; however, it is the actual march that has been mythologized as the moment that solidified his control of the party. Of course, this purported history cannot necessarily be validated as truth, as scholars have debated the exact distance of the March comparing Mao's accounts to other calculations.[7] I will not settle such historical questions surrounding the event, although I find it necessary to recognize the various forms of truth formation and myth creation that surrounds this journey.

Performance has been a crucial vehicle to both reinscribe and critique these myths surrounding the march. Many historical accounts and memoirs[8] have been written; film, theatre, and performance have also generated reactions towards the event. The film *Ten Thousand Rivers and a Thousand Mountains* (*Wanshui Qianshan*) was the first feature film about the march, released in 1959. More recently, *The Long March, A Walking Visual Display* was initially thought of in 1999 and inaugurated in Beijing in 2002. New York-based curator, Lu Jie, organized a five-month traveling art show, where artists presented works that engaged urban elites, local inhabitants, and art market enthusiasts. Jiayung Zhuang theorizes this traveling show and the "performing subjects…[as] the new historians

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[7] Mao's biographer Edward Snow in *Red Star Over China* cites Mao's estimate of 8000 miles, while Ed Jocelyn and Andrew McEwen estimate a 3700 mile journey. Edward Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1994); Ed Jocelyn and Andrew McEwen, *The Long March* (London: Constable, 2006).

[8] Most notably, *The Long March Chorus (Changzheng Zuge)* is series of short stories accounting soldier's experiences in the March.

who reenact and restructure the particular revolutionary history and translate original teleologically-oriented, binary narrative into a postsocialist/postmodern one, which encapsulates a surplus of signifiers and transforms the former narrative into non-narrative and even anti-narrative modes of somatic and semiotic resignification."[9]   Zhuang aptly directs us towards the ways performative bodies challenge teleological accounts of history. However, this chapter focuses on how the body may not necessarily disrupt or rescript notions of teleology and historical memory; Feng's work reveals how historical references function and operate. Shifting from the Major focus of what Feng's work does to history, we investigate a more tempered question that asks what history does in Feng's work.   How does history function for Feng? This question directs us to the minor aspects of history, as we cannot argue that his work can *do* something but rather explore what history does for Feng. By doing so, we shift the emphasis away from what a work performatively does for a concept (like history, biopolitics, etc.) to how it functions.

Although historical contextualization is certainly crucial, the minor is often overlooked. The minor of the glitch involves what history does rather than what a work does for history. Zhuang describes the artist as the subject that learns history and then disturbs its teleological formation through performance and the body. The subject/ artist is imagined within a positivist formulation, as she becomes a conscious, performative agent in challenging historical narratives.   However, as will be discussed in the last section of this dissertation on the subject and agency, the artist produces from a place of confusion and lingering, rather than clarity, where creation is not embedded in overtly political critiques or clear goals. Thus, I theorize from this place to better understand how artists create work that cannot critique teleology outright. Such a shift in the focus on the use of history rather than what they may do to history theorizes less how Chinese artists are capable of critique, and more on the assumptions surrounding such discursive narratives about artists.

Feng Mengbo follows in this artistic trend that responds to the Long March. However, the minor forms of animation and play provide some direction in rethinking the Major narratives surrounding this history.   Within the historic biopolitical event of the Long March, we locate Feng's minor practices in ways that cannot amount to an alternative historic account. Feng offers a minor entry into rethinking the way we exist within history. His art produces a play of glitch that makes historical referentiality less about stating his accounts or rewriting history and more about the production of laughter. Feng does not create a counter or anti-narrative of the Long March. His playful and gamic depiction enables one to fantasize within the narrative.   It is through the affect of laughter that enables new ways of imagining and existing outside of the predefined narratives surrounding history.

In relation to history, most of Feng's critics have emphasized a strong correlation between Feng being raised during the Cultural Revolution (he was born in 1966 and the Cultural Revolution is historically delineated as occurring from 1966-1976).   Although this is certainly a crucial context, such details often over determine an analysis of his works to notions of symbols and representation, where the use of images of Mao, the Red Soldier, or popular American Culture become instant critiques of the state or of capitalism. For example, a reviewer in *Art in America* universalizes and limits Feng's historical references to a sense of no-time: "Nor, despite the allusions to the Long March and American capitalism, does the work proselytize for any particular system. Instead, it seems to achieve the weightless ahistoricity that is common to most video games and has proved,

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[9] Jiayun Zhuang, "Not Yet Farewell: Postsocialist Performance and Visual Art in Urban China," (dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009), 149.

one suspects, the safest ideological position in contemporary China."[10] Through Feng's use of the video game format, the reviewer argues that the use of history becomes ahistoric and thus represents a "safe" ideological position in relation to the Chinese state. Although I do not necessarily take issue with the idea of ahistoricity, I do note the way the reviewer instantly associates the video game to symbolize an ahistoric relationship to the Chinese state. In addition, noted Chinese art historian Thomas Berghuis frames Feng as representing generations of those growing up in the Cultural Revolution: "Many of Feng Mengbo's works further bear witness to generations of Chinese citizens growing up amidst the veneration of revolutionary struggle and the glorification of the People's Liberation Army."[11] Both responses to Feng's work produce a relation to history that is one of rewriting and representation. By "bearing witness" to the Cultural Revolution or by using the format of a video game to create the "safest ideological position in contemporary China," Feng's work is instantly inscribed with an agency to critique, reveal, or rework a problematic Chinese history of the Long March. In other words, he becomes a symbol of direct resistance and critique against the State and its history.

Rather than assigning a symbolic value in his work as either signifying ahistoricity or a deep historicity, I resist reading each object as forms of symbols and representations. Instead, affective production in the humor and play of the work help us see the dominant formulations around history, time, and representation. Notions of humor and laughter, along with other seemingly minor tropes, go unnoticed. However, such minor contours direct us towards their excess – to rethink the normative turn and mode of relying on representation, symbols, history and the state whenever we contend with China. For Feng, history becomes a backdrop by which a playing subject and her animated object avatar situate themselves within a landscape of history that is wholly inaccurate and failed. There is no counter- or anti- narrative since his work is precisely absurd and loose. It is in this looseness, produced by the glitch, that I explore what forms of living, or *bios*, arise for the subject.

Feng's central character for both the paintings and video game is a Red Soldier, based off of his favorite character Yang Zirong from the famous Beijing opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. In the opera, Yang is a communist scout that goes undercover to destroy a group of bandits that supports the KMT party in Manchuria during 1946, ultimately benefitting the Communist movement.   The use of this historic character offers some insights on the situated context that is imbued in the play and animation of the game.   Similar to this character, other references in Feng's paintings and animated game are momentarily or quasi referential.

In his 1994 paintings, he uses the figure of the Red Soldier and places him in an animated world. In one series of paintings, Feng depicts characters from the game *Double Dragon*. He depicts the "Player Selection" screen that displays all characters' vital stats: name, power, team, and weapon of choice. The expected players from the classic arcade game, Billy Lee, Chin Wang, and Yagyu Ranzou, appear with their appropriate name and choice of weapon, ranging from "bare hands" to "ninja blade." However, Mao Zedong appears as another selected player and he belongs to the Red Army and uses a flag as his weapon of choice. The painting depicts one's stats; the statistics that reveal one's vital force. However, the choice of Mao using a flag to go up against the bare hands and ninja blades of his opponents provides a comic moment that interrupts the seriousness of the match. The

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[10] Eleanor Heartney, "Feng Mengbo," *Art in America* (Feb. 17, 2011)*,*
http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/feng-mengbo/ (last visited April 21, 2014).
[11] Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2007), 138.

use of Mao and a flag inverts the notion of vital statistics into a sensibility of inevitable end or death, or a thanato-oriented animation; Mao simply cannot compete with the pure force and vitality of his opponents. This sense of inevitable death accompanies the humor of using Mao in this painting; thus, humor and death interact in ways that disrupt a normative sense of play between players within Feng's painting.

In another series, he paints a frame from the popular *Street Fighter*; a Red Soldier fights Chun Li. Li is from China and is the only female character in *Street Fighter II*. She is dressed in a qipao, in which the bottom is looser and shorter than the traditional dress to allow for greater mobility and to expose her muscular thighs. Her hair is tied up in ox horns, a hairstyle popular in China until the 20th century. Chun Li references Chinese characteristics in her dress and hair, and her body embodies that of a fighter. The painting captures her in an engaged pose; her body is slightly perched back in a defensive position with her quads engaged, elbows bent, and arms ready to fight. She is situated in a cityscape; a duck vendor hangs dead ducks while boxes with Coca-Cola logos fill another storefront. Feng's literal depiction of the game does not reimagine the space of the classic game; he maintains it. The additions of details from the Long March primarily become referential and always maintain the sense of the referenced video game. In other words, unlike the performances in the 2002 reenactment of the Long March, performance and animation do not reimagine new ways of history for the Long March. Instead, Feng's *Street Fighter* uses the Long March simply as points of reference and humor. Feng maintains the "integrity" of the original arcade game, while using historical references to create small glitches within the larger game.

Historical references, such as Mao and the Red Soldier, become a glitch. Within technology discourse, the glitch is usually thought of as a momentary interruption[12] or fault within a system. It is seen as extremely temporary and transient which usually corrects itself; thus, it is nearly impossible to troubleshoot. In other words, the glitch is a mere inconvenience. The glitch here is not necessarily temporal, although it could appear for a short period; instead, the glitch is the mode in which a referent operates. In other words, a glitch could appear throughout a piece but plays a similar interruption that is "light" and "minor" in effect. Historical references become a momentary minor glitch within a system.

Feng's references to history function as a minor interruption in order to produce an affective relation to humor and play; the glitch offers a conceptual tool to think of historical references outside of Major argumentation, which often situates Feng's work as political pop art. Similar to a Derridean slippage, the glitch interrupts a chain of signifiers and meanings; however, unlike the slippage, the glitch is not meant to "deconstruct" and destabilize a system of meaning. The glitch instead merely plays and makes light of a system. The glitch is limited in its capacity to provoke social change; the glitch is the momentary occurrence that operates as a way for us to remark on something - it produces space to take notice but not necessarily resist a given system. Furthermore, the glitch functions not as a corporeal act, as the glitch is not about the body's representational capacities. Instead, the glitch focuses on the relationship between things - the glitch arises for an object that we view and in which we relate to. The glitch is affective, less representational.

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[12] Although a glitch can also lead to video games being unable to play, I primarily theorize the concept in relation to its sustaining a system. Glitching has a connotation of a player taking advantage of a fault in a game system in order to achieve results that were never intended by the gamemakers' intentions. Thus, interestingly enough, this external performative of the glitch contributes to the glitches' sense of excess play.

Historical references in Feng's work do not rewrite history nor critique the past; Feng produces a playful glitch that inspires a sense of play and laughter in audiences. By marking where and how this affective laughter emerges, we better situate what these historical references do. Henri Bergson's[13] set of essays on laughter offers insights as to when we laugh in relation to form, movements, situations, words, and characters. Bergson identifies a few key factors to laughter and comedy.[14] First, it is "strictly *human*."[15] For Bergson, even when inanimate objects or animals inspire laughter, it is contingent upon the anthropomorphic qualities of these non-human entities. Second, it involves the "*absence of feeling.*"[16] When one cares and is emotionally invested in a topic, the ability to laugh disappears. Third, laughter is "always the laughter of a group"[17] and hence possesses a "*social* signification."[18] Although one could certainly question each of these elements, some of his theorizations offer a sense of the operating logics of laughter. Such insight into these logics direct us to analyze where and how remarks upon a work emerge - one's affective registers to an object.

The glitch is not a form of resistance; the glitch is momentary and eventually dissipates back into a system. It is incapable of changing the conditions in which one functions. When Bergson discusses laughter, he emphasizes that the logic of the comic relies on the audience recognizing a given system: "you will find that the art of the comic poet consists in making us so well acquainted with the particular vice, in introducing us, the spectators, to such a degree of intimacy with it, that in the end we get hold of something of the strings of the marionette with which he is playing, and actually work them ourselves; this it is that explains part of the pleasure we feel."[19] Bergson reveals that laughter is not inspired just by an innate virtue of being funny; humor arises from the audience's ability to see the system and the way things function. This contingency gives us a handle of the strings that construct how a system functions. The system is maintained through laughter and the glitch; it is not overthrown or changed. The system maintains itself.

Another way to understand the glitch is as nonsense. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze discusses Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* to understand the forms of sense that arise in the work. Deleuze describes nonsense as "that which has no sense, and that which, as such as it enacts the donation of sense, is opposed to the absence of sense. This is what we must understand by "nonsense.""[20] Deleuze emphasizes the relationality, as opposed to the binary of nonsense and sense. Thus, nonsense does not mean no sense exists; rather, nonsense "donates" or produces a sensibility. Since sense involves an effect rather than a truth or an origin, the production of sense (or a sense from nonsense) accounts for the mechanics of its production. When nonsense arises, Deleuze emphasizes different forms, one of which is a type of surface nonsense. In such a form, language or the signifier become momentarily disruptive of a system yet maintain its sensibility and form. Thus, some of Carroll's lines involve a surface nonsense that is strikingly silly yet doesn't penetrate anything else. Nonsense as an aesthetic category involves momentary disruption; it stops the logic of

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[13] As discussed in the introduction, Henri Bergson has been an influential figure in Chinese artistic movements during the 1980's and 90's. In particular, the influential curator and critic Fei Dawei focused his philosophical studies on Bergson and framed many of his theories in relation to Bergson.

[14] Bergson and others are primarily focused on the poet and language in determining the logics of laughter; however, the body and the actor himself are also crucial for Bergson and his analysis.

[15] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008), 3.

[16] Ibid., 4.

[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Ibid., 8.

[19] Ibid., 16.

[20] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 71.

sense. Like the glitch, such a disruption is momentary. In addition, the nonsensical glitch produces a different sensibility or "donation of sense."

Bergson reminds us that laughter rises from gestures and movements[21], whereby things become "laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."[22] Gestures and movements give us a sense of laughter. The glitch is gestural, as one feels a flick on the body - a momentary interruption. Glitches are not cumulative and cannot eventually add up to changing a system. The glitch is a momentary (although repeatable) reference meant to simply make you laugh but limited in its ability to overthrow a system; it normally makes one aware of the site of humor but is often subsumed under the major system. The glitch within animation does not possess political potential; instead, the glitch is minor and operates on a different level of political critique that is not complicit with the dynamics of power or directly resistant to them.

Specters in Cao Fei's *RMB City*

We now turn towards historical references that identify highly identifiable political figures in pre-modern and modern Chinese history. Cao Fei also contends with historical referentiality in minor modes. She focuses on the exceptional figure of the martyr, which plays a key role in controlling and producing populations. Cao deploys the glitch in ways that deals with history making and memory. Within the context of the Long March and modern Chinese history, the martyr has been a key figure in biopolitically organizing and controlling the will and desires of populations. Following the Cultural Revolution, the state formulated what some call the cult of the red martyr, arising as a way to commemorate those lives lost since 1911. Official policy emphasized the need to remember those who died, particularly from several historic conflicts: the 1911 revolution against Manchu control, the 1924 to 1927 Northern Expedition, the revolutionary war from 1927-37, the resistance against Japan in the 1930s, the Civil War against the KMT, and all political prisoners and those killed by imperialists and those in power during the formation of modern China. The state deployed the sheer volume of those who died into cultivating a culture of martyrdom, inspiring publics to understand the loss of life beyond individual loss into the realm of political purpose or necessity. The scope of the culture of the red martyr primarily encompassed those lost soldiers and civilians that contributed to the formation of the Communist party. Martyrdom also configures global leftist politics with iconography surrounding political figures like Mao and Marx. The Long March is part of this larger culture of martyrdom, and Feng, Cao, and others' works help us think about how the figure of the martyr relates to the production of history. From repeated appearances of Red Soldiers and Mao, Feng and Cao utilize the martyr not simply as forms of propaganda or outright political critique of the State. The martyr becomes more than a dead historical actor; the martyr serves as a way to expand critique.

The cult of martyrdom surrounding Mao and the Red Soldier plays a particular role in producing humor for Feng, as discussed earlier. Feng's work direct us to explore how the martyr can be used to destabilize dominant understandings of the biopolitical. Cao Fei's *RMB City* furthers another form of thanato-oriented animation to think more about the martyr. In Cao's piece, Mao Zedong, Laozi, Karl Marx, and other martyrs fly around, play hacky sack, and converse in Cao's constructed city on Second Life. In other words, Cao Fei shows martyrs in moments of play. Cao Fei's use of digital

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[21] Bergson, 29.
[22] Ibid.

art on a website offers a space to think through the figure of the martyr. Although Cao's reference to such famous figures could be reduced to a form of political pop, popularized as an art historical discourse during the 1990's, her work takes on a different function that queers our understanding of historical references.

How do we understand the use of the historical figure? How do we approach the specter of martyrdom that haunts socialist realism, particularly how martyrdom operates for modern and contemporary Chinese history? How do we deal with the figure of the martyr in political iconography? The martyr is a product of state discourse. As historians have argued[23], how we remember history is imbricated with the state, and the figure of the martyr assists in ways of remembering. For China, Chang-tai Hung has argued that the "creation of the cult of the red martyr uses death both to achieve maximum political power and to reaffirm social values." Hung also stresses, however, the inability of the state to control all since mourning was also of "private relevance" which meant that "ceremonies could never be entirely manipulated by state hegemony."[24] There remains a space of excess that cannot be fully controlled.

The martyr has primarily been theorized in relation to ancient Roman and early Christian practices.[25] Most of these writings focus on the function of martyrdom, particularly in relation to the political and social use of martyring the self. Elizabeth Castelli defines martyrdom as "requir[ing] an audience (whether real or fictive), retelling, interpretation, and world- and meaning-making activity. Suffering violence in and of itself is not enough."[26] Martyrdom involves construction whereby it "refus[es] the *meaninglessness* of death itself, of insisting that suffering and death do not signify emptiness and nothingness."[27] David Potter has written on martyrdom as spectacle, whereby one's death becomes a public event that were scripted. The public became accustomed to these forms of death and life. From this body of work, the martyr is explicitly tied to the construction of the state. The martyr's death and life must be discrete and finite in order to produce a sense of meaning-making for an audience. Furthermore, the public itself must recognize the individual as an exceptional subject, whereby his suffering and life must be more than located on the individual. In other words, the martyr relies upon the biopolitical concepts which involve the finitude of life and death, along with the notion of the individual subject.

Within China Studies, the figure of the martyr has been traced from the thirteenth century into today. In *Wind Against the Mountain: The Crisis of Politics and the Culture in Thirteenth-Century China*, Richard Davis offers an historical account of how "martyrdom came to be linked to many other powerfully compelling symbols, including masculine virtues and gentry dominance."[28] In addition, Hung focuses on the role of the martyr for modern China. Hung reveals the Communist understandings of the martyr in relation to Christian formations of the figure. This influence, along with the political need to organize populations to understand death as serving a larger purpose for

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[23] Chang-tai Hung, "Cult of the Red Martyr," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Pierre Nora, "Introduction," in *Conflicts and Divisions, Volume 1*, ed. Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[24] Hung, 290.

[25] Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: Harper One, 2013); David Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle," in *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, ed. R. Scodel (Ann Arbor, 1993).

[26] Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 34.

[27] Ibid., 34.

[28] Richard Davis, *Wind Against the Mountain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1996), xv.

the state, enabled martyrdom to be a key mode for the state to control and rationalize biopolitical action. The figure of the martyr is a central legitimizing force for the state.

The martyr is always exceptional in nature. It is within this exceptionality that produces forms of remembrance for the state and its control of populations. What does the death of exceptional bodies enable and produce? Rather than critiquing the concept of the martyr for its imbrication with the state, I engage the figure to understand how it upholds the notion of biopolitical while also offering possible alternatives around ways of remembering history and time. Cao's imaginary urban landscape collapses historical time, where martyrs interact with one another through the computer-animated world of Second Life. The appearance of ghosts within animation produces a minor entryway to think more deeply about time, history, and the exceptional. The martyr is a specter which provides different ways of relating to history.

RMB City - *Games & Humor*

Cao's *RMB City* is a virtual city on the website Second Life that became an art installation presented at the 52nd Venice Biennale. Second Life is an online virtual world launched in 2003 by Linden Lab. Each user has an avatar that she creates to live a second life; the avatar is a user's online representation of herself. The computer-generated animated world enables a user to construct not only an other self but also virtual space and objects, in this case a fully-interactive city. Users meet others within the site and explore each others' constructed spaces. As an open source site, users have the option to code their own applications within Second Life for any purpose, ranging from personal to business. Some businesses and education institutions use the site for training and pedagogical reasons. Second Life becomes a space for interaction; it is not necessarily a parallel world but rather one operating with its own economic and social formations.

Cao plays through her avatar China Tracy.[29] China Tracy has the same ox horn hair style as Chun Li in *Streetfighter*. Her outfits change frequently; however, they usually are form-fitting, accentuating her slim waist and pronounced breasts. Her eyeliner is fairly defined, with light rouge on her cheeks. RMB references the Chinese currency of the *renminbi*, highlighting the role of capital in its naming and formation. *RMB City* blends imagined spaces with recognizable references of contemporary Chinese cities. Within the cityscape, various elements gesture to China's past, present, and possible future, a mix of global ideas of China: a view of the Three Gorges dam emerging out of Tiananmen; the Oriental Pearl TV tower in Shanghai; manufacturing factories common in various parts of China; Beijing's National Theatre; statues of Mao suspended in space and time; floating pandas; and Rem Koolhaas' CCTV building, amongst others. The space consists of these various objects, while avatars move within and around them. Cao Fei constructs the city to encourage avatar interaction. There are central areas for people to gather together. Within these spaces, she has presented speeches, interviews, and also a Naked Idol contest, reminiscent of the singing competition American Idol that involves a competition of nude avatars. In addition, Cao utilizes the space for artists to present performance and artworks. Different institutions pay Cao to buy buildings and space in *RMB City* and often display art. The space has shifted in use since its debut in 2005 at the Venice Biennale. It first began as an exploration of Second Life; it has since developed as a site of a

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[29] There are parallels between the avatar Anshe Chung and China Tracy. Anshe received popular attention as one of the first people to make over a million dollars from virtual play. I will not discuss Anshe in this article; however, there are crucial insights into the flow of capital within Second Life.

documentary, to display artworks, and for film creation.[30] The space continues to expand with later iterations.

Funding to maintain the site comes from a variety of collectors and institutions. At the start of the project, Cao revealed to me in our interviews that many different galleries and funders were initially interested in the way Second Life could become a new way to present work for museums and galleries. Some funders purchased buildings within Second Life in order to sell their collections and/or promote a brand. Cao Fei provided the city for which art institutions and individuals could possibly find more means to broaden audiences and generate capital. Cao and her team of technically-skilled workers provide the support, while ownership of images would be fully retained by purchasers. However, since the economic crash of 2008, such hopes have been limited. Currently, *RMB City* is still funded by a few key figures. Ullens Center for Contemporary Art purchased a castle in the city; Uli Sigg owns a large portion of the project. Since there are no material goods produced, collectors and investors have rights to archived materials and films. As of 2013, Cao states that there is money to sustain the site but she doesn't envision more projects that might expand her presence on Second Life. The *City* itself as an art work requires financial maintenance; it is not per se a static object that shifts in value. Instead, the medium requires a continual payment to keep the city open and active on Second Life.

This economic situation and the change in the ease of obtaining funders led Cao to create a set of films in 2009, one of which focuses on the status of capital after the global financial crisis. Cao's shift to film represents a reverse relationality to media, since Cao relies on an "older" medium to renegotiate the financial burden and shifts of the work following the financial crisis of 2008. In *People's Limbo*, China Tracy interacts with historically popular figures: Mao Tsedong, Karl Marx, Laozi, and one of the Lehmann Brothers. In the 20-minute clip *Limbo 8*, the music chimes along like generic background music in a Chinese restaurant, while the 4 main characters enter the scene. The four historic figures fly into the city or drive construction trucks and other electronic or animal-carted vehicles to a building. Upon demolishing the building together, they meet on top of the pile of remains and play hacky sack together. In other versions of videos, they play other sports and mahjong. Regardless of the activity, the act of play produces a space of nonsense and lightness. It is through play in *People's Limbo* that Cao engages death, capital, historical memory, and biopolitics. As in Feng's creation of the glitch, Cao's produces laughter and nonsense.

With hands behind their upright backs, all four balance hacky sacks with their feet. Within this nonsensical act, they converse about the limits of freedom, the uncertainty of life, and different forms of ending. All the characters speak in their characteristic, almost stereotyped, ways: Laozi offers proverbs; Marx critiques capitalism; Mao offers grand pronouncements; and Lehmann relies on capitalist ideals. Lehmann acknowledges his ghostly presence with 158 years of living, pondering the relationship between freedom and economics. Marx predictably highlights the limits of his notion of freedom and its connection to capital accumulation and desire, while Laozi offers a proverb that critiques the oversaturation of desire in one's life. Mao pronounces the need for self improvement and dedication to the world. Lehmann acknowledges his finite existence, while Laozi emphasizes the need to "empty yourself" in order to "know more clearly where you are heading." They then all speak to the uncertainty of life, with Mao emphasizing crisis as a place for change; Laozi theorizing on the Dao; and Lehmann acknowledging the limbo inherent in living. The conversations shift from freedom to uncertainty, as each character answers the themes in

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[30] In the work *People's Limbo* (2009), China Tracy gets pregnant and gives birth.

prototypical ways that are concurrent with how they are remembered in history and as figures. Their answers correspond to how history remembers them, while they play and exist in the nonsensical world of animation and as ghostly figures.

When speaking with Cao about *RMB City*, she refers to *RMB City* as "like a game." Her hope for it to be like a game is to make the work less serious and didactic. As something becomes more playful, she hopes that this offers space to imagine an otherwise and different ways of being; play expands the possibilities of meaning. The simile of being "like a game" functions as a way to mark something as similar but not quite. The "not quite" marks a space of difference within similarity that produces thinking anew, outside of the predictability of critique and theory. Second Life is "like a game." Unlike Feng's animated game, Second Life is not per se a game in terms of normative gamic conventions. Users are not trying to kill an enemy nor rescue a princess (or prince). However, in stating this, I do not mean to imply that play isn't involved. The animation and forms of creative interaction involve a deep play. Second Life functions like an interactive chat room, with multiple space and activities. This difference in the form of play does not merely make this an alternative space for human interaction; rather, this difference points to degrees of play that are produced.

In addition, during discussions with her about her use of Marx and other martyred figures, she describes her work in relation to humor. Similar to Feng, Cao creates laughter through the glitch. The glitch can be understood similar to Wendy Brown's theorizations on Walter Benjamin in terms of disruption and blasting: "Benjamin seeks to cast "interruption" as the spirit and metaphor not only of revolutionary politics but also of everyday politics. Interruption or "blasting open the continuum of history" becomes a kind of persistent revolutionary orientation that breaks both with the notion of progress and with its cousin, uniquely "ripe" revolutionary conditions, even as it attends closely to historical configurations of opportunity or possibility."[31] Glitching, or blasting, here for Cao operates similarly to Benjaminian interruption, in that Cao produces lightness and play to open ways of learning, knowing and being. The "everyday" formations of interruption take on the form of the glitch. Although Cao is concerned with the context of the 2008 financial crisis and what these martyrs think about the situation, her use of the glitch as interruption produces multiple avenues to explore history beyond dominant narratives. The way Cao uses the martyr differs from how the state normally deploys the figure for biopolitical control; Cao's martyrs serve as a glitch to interrupt how historical narratives are situated and framed. The martyr is thus not a mere referent or emblematic for state representations of history, memory and power; instead, the martyr as glitch operates in ways that renegotiate history.

Avatars & Specters

In addition to the glitch, these martyrs fly through Second Life as ghosts, dead historic figures existing in the virtual world. How can these ghosts be understood as avatars or perhaps specters? A user that represents herself through the avatar of Marx, Mao, Lehmann, or Laozi reveals that not all avatars are pure self mimesis. Fantasy and play construct how a user fashions a different self as an online avatar. Sue-Ellen Case emphasizes how avatars online "do not function as masks for users."[32] Instead, Case focuses on the corporate infiltration into the space of the internal and the self, where

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[31] Brown, 157.

[32] Sue-Ellen Case, "Dracula's Legacy," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Joseph Roach et al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 553.

avatars become logos or brands. Her 2006 theorizations of the avatar hope for its radical possibilities: "But what if users with more activist agendas began to people cyberspace with the images of the poor, the weak, and the disenfranchised? What if the body types of the avatars did not match the requirements of young, thin, toned, Anglo avahunks, or digital divas? What if they did not hang around chat rooms, but used them as sites to organize, to educate, and to radicalize? What if they could imagine the "discoursemachineweapon," as Kittler called it, as one of the most powerful tools available for intervention — turning it back onto the logos who would manage it? What would it take to make that happen?"[33] Although this 2006 article ends differently from its rewriting in her later book[34], her questions reveal a historically-located hope for possibility. Since the avatar was a newly emerging presence online (not necessarily a new idea, since the notion of avatar was taken from Hindu religion), Case is invested in producing a queered notion of the figure. Cao's use of these martyrs as avatars offers one possible answer to Case's 2006 hope. Although Cao does not present "the poor, the weak, and the disenfranchised," she offers something a bit more complicated than the opposite from "young, thin, [and] toned" and "digital divas." She uses the martyr as avatar and places them within the nonsensical to offer a critique that is not within the form of direct opposition to privileged representation. Cao Fei reworks the idea of an avatar to not become a form of direct critique through play, as imagined by Case; instead, the avatar becomes a way to play and produce more open-ended engagement with the political.

These figures are also characters within a film. Cao directed *People's Limbo* within Second Life. How do we understand this gathering of dead characters or ghosts, particularly ones dominant in the historical imaginary? Brown defines the ghost in relation to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*: "Ghosts figure the impossibility of mastering, through either knowledge or action, the past or the present. They figure the necessity of grasping certain implications of the past for the present only as traces or effects (rather than as structures, axioms, laws, or lines of determination) and of grasping even those as protean."[35] Cao presents not only ghosts, but also ghostly formations of exceptional historic figures. The ghosts of Marx, Mao, Lehmann, and Laozi function less as direct political references, and more as traces and reminders of the impossibility of knowing. Ghosts represent the limits of how and what we know: "Ghosts thus emblematize a postmetaphysical way of life, a way of life saturated by elements — could we call them "material conditions"? — that are not under our sway and that also cannot be harnessed to projects of reason, development, progress, or structure."[36] Ghosts cannot solve or provide exact ways of how the past relates to the present. Instead, similar to Cao's project of producing more meaning through something light or funny, "it may offer some initial insight for those who wish to discern a ground for political action that attends to and mobilizes history once history appears to lack a distinct shape and trajectory."[37] The glitch and ghosts produce this formlessness and lack of shape.

The deaths of these four key figures function within the spectral. The martyr does not become a form of knowing and remembering the past; instead, Cao renders the martyr affective and ghostly. In Cao's collapsing of temporality and worldmaking, she does not simply flatten history, but rather exists in notions of history that maintain some of their structures to then produce a mode of critique that is glitching or blasting. Carla Frecerro defines spectrality as "in part, a mode of historicity: it

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[33] Ibid., 560.

[34] Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Science and the Virtual* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[35] Brown, 146.

[36] Ibid., 145-146.

[37] Ibid., 173.

describes the way in which "the time is out of joint"; that is, the way the past or the future presses upon us with a kind of insistence or demand, a demand to which we must somehow respond. "Hauntology" as the practice of attending to the spectral, is then a way of thinking and responding ethically within history, as it is a way of thinking ethics in relation to the project of historiography by acknowledging the force of haunting."[38] What are the ethics Frecerro asks for? If the spectral for Frecerro is juxtaposed against the necrological model of history ("which foregrounds the idea of burial. We bury the dead, giving them monumental tombs to "commemorate" them[39]"), then the spectral diminishes the focus on burial and relies less upon remembrance and commemoration and more upon an ethical stance that acknowledges the discontinuities of these figures. Although Frecerro is writing within queer historiography, her understandings of spectrality inform the spectral, particularly for China. Within memories of the post-social, China requires the spectral and the glitch to destabilize the Major narratives that heavily construct China's own becoming within the contemporary. Cao turns the figure of the martyr into a specter, that refuses to commemorate these exceptional figures. Instead, the martyr is laughed at and remarked upon to produce glitches into dominant forms of historiographic memory.

Cao's use of martyrs produces a spectrality that expands understandings of the historiography of China beyond Major narratives of the state. As Brown reveals, this spectral mode moves beyond "an individual [or] institutional nor collective memory of "what really happened"; it is, rather, a dynamic, episodic, agentic, and imagistic form of remembering that counters the force of one conjuration of the past with that of another. It is simultaneously a coming to terms with our losses and a redemption of them, achieved by cultivating a different version of them in a rearticulation of past and present."[40] The spectral provides a historiographic method that enables us to "think historically, a way to develop political consciousness of the historically inflected construction of contemporary political life and to discern or fashion openings or possibilities there."[41] Cao's use of spectral martyrs engages this "think[ing] historically" to formulate different political configurations and possibilities for China.

Both Feng and Cao queer the historical reference beyond the framework of political pop that has shaped contemporary Chinese art history. The glitch and specter are not minor operations that take on Major modes of reconstructing historical time and teleology. In addition, they are not simply lazy minor references that are derivative of Andy Warhol's practices. Instead, the glitch and specter operate in modes in-between and less determined; they are minor analytics that shift away from the performativity of objects towards an object's function.

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[38] Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 70.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Brown, 172.
[41] Ibid.

SECTION 2: INSTITUTIONS – The State & Art Market

Chapter 3 – Cybernetics & Being (Plural) Singular Plural
Ai Weiwei's *Fairytale*, 1001 Chinese, & the Multitude

CHAPTER 3 – CYBERNETICS AND BEING (PLURAL) SINGULAR PLURAL
Ai Weiwei's *Fairytale,* 1001 Chinese, & the Multitude

Ai Weiwei has become *the* representative of contemporary Chinese art. On one hand, due to his popularity on the art market, he is the easy target for both praise and mockery in relation to the merits of his artistic worth.[1] On the other hand, he is upheld as a dissident artist that challenges the state.[2] Due to the fact that he circulates quite publicly within popular culture along with the institutions of the state and art market, the controversies around Ai have become emblematic of the operations of Major China. Ai is usually depicted as the dissident artist par excellence, due to the harsh and public punishments he has endured by China. In addition, although some of his art works vary in their degree of political critiques, they have been made into emblems of artistic resistance. In these scenarios, the minor – Ai Weiwei – is deployed as a subject whose resistance and presumed quest for autonomy maintains the logic of the Major. Thus, it might appear that Ai is a difficult artist to think and write about as a minor subject operating in a minor mode. Instead, he becomes the primary example of the dissident artist who, in working against China, upholds a Major logic. Everything about Ai comes to seem quite Major.

Take for example Ai's large-scale project *Fairytale* which appeared at Documenta 12 in 2007. The work included art objects (1001 chairs sprinkled throughout the festival spaces and an outdoor sculpture made of salvaged doors and building materials), along with live bodies. Ai raised over $3 million USD to bring over 1001 Chinese people to Documenta. The festival's curatorial framework included artists like Ai Weiwei based upon the following questions or motifs: "Is modernity our antiquity?," "What is bare life?," and "What is to be done?"[3]. These questions direct us towards locating ourselves historically within modernity and then implicating cultural production as responding (what is to be done) to the realm of the political (bare life). The head curator Roger Buergel conceptualizes art as holding the possibility of working within the critical political and material questions of our time, as art, with regards to notions of bare life, "dissolves the radical separation between painful subjection and joyous liberation."[4] In addition, art is imagined as the place for education, since "[art's] mediation sets the stage for a potentially all-inclusive public debate."[5] The minorness of art is framed as enabling debate, education, and exchange. As imagined by the curatorial frame of Documenta 12, the minor subject of art possesses Major political possibilities for the 21st century.

Documenta 12 included Ai Weiwei as he embodies and his works represent some of these ideals that privilege the aesthetic for its Major potential. The festival frames Ai's work as "playful, subtle, absurd" (what may be deemed minor subjects), while "at the same time critically introspective to everyday objects, national heritage, and cultural traditions."[6] His use of discarded doors and

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[1] Jed Perl, "Ai Weiwei: Wonderful Dissident, Terrible Artist," in *The New Republic* (February 1, 2013); Roberta Smith, "A Provocateur's Medium: Outrage," in *The New York Times* (April 17, 2014).

[2] Mark Stevens, "Is Ai Weiwei China's Most Dangerous Man?," in *Smithsonian Magazine* (September 2012), http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/is-ai-weiwei-chinas-most-dangerous-man-17989316/?no-ist (last accessed April 21, 2014).

[3] Roger Buergel, "Leitmotifs," Documenta 12 http://www.documenta12.de/leitmotive.html?&L=1 (last accessed April 21, 2014).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Documenta 12, http://www.documenta12.de/uebersichtsdetails.html?L=1&gk=B&level=&knr=2 (last accessed April 21, 2014).

windows from recent construction in China to erect an outdoor temple structure entitled *Template* becomes emblematic of "the differentiation between old and new [which] falters and with it the authority of the authentic."[7] In addition his other art object *Prototype for the Wave* (2004), which involved old porcelain being cracked under heavy weight, "evokes the ambiguous figure of breach and continuity between antiquity and the Modern."[8] Documenta situates these art objects as minor and playful things, which take on a political critique at the interplay of modernity and authority. These minor subjects operate as Major.

Discussions around the inclusion of 1001 Chinese citizens in Ai's work are often framed in similar ways. On the one hand, *Fairytale* is situated as minor - playful, interactive, and imaginative. One of Documenta's press releases discusses *Fairytale* as if it were a moment from summer camp, emphasizing the insignificant but fun and memorable interactions between Chinese and Germans. The release describes a seemingly multicultural moment where a group of Chinese youth played soccer against Germans at a local park.[9] Photos document the game, along with the crowds of Chinese viewers, evoking a lingering sense of the end of the halcyon days of summer camp. On the other hand, *Fairytale* takes on a political potential. Ai Weiwei screened an 8-hour version (taken from over 1500 hours of footage) of the process of choosing and bringing together the 1001 Chinese who eventually went to Kassel. Documenta framed the film as offering "insight into the individual intellectual conditions and the living conditions of the artist's native country" along with "discuss[ing] the political circumstances of China."[10] Documenta frames Ai as the subject who utilizes minor concepts, like play, the fairytale, and the aesthetic, to critique and reveal the problems with China, modernity, and bare life. The reliance on the minor within a curatorial framework for an international art event is emblematic of the current market that privileges minor subjects to possess Major political possibilities ("This work comments on the bare life conditions in China) or to market the object ("The framework of the fairytale shows the play and agency of the Chinese"). Such deployments of the minor have become the dominant ways of curating Chinese and non-Western projects; such frames benefit the capital-producing goals of the art market.

Thus, it seems that *Fairytale* and Ai Weiwei's overall career can only be understood as possessing Major potential. However, I want to complicate this framing in order to explore how Ai's work directs us towards the minor as a method. His work does not simply turn minor affects into Major political critique; rather, *Fairytale* produces *minor china.* Ai utilizes minor modes to make transparent the Major frameworks of how institutions function and global communities operate through a supposed intersubjectivity. In the previous chapters, I've emphasized the minor as an analytic as differentiated from minor subjects. This chapter further develops this differentiation by engaging how the political is defined within the minor as an analytic. In particular, I first examine Ai Weiwei's critique of a recent British show *Art of Change* to cull the political contours that inform Ai's assessment of a curatorial framework premised upon minor subjects (play, change, and relationality). We then concentrate on *Fairytale* to examine the minor, indeterminate, and cybernetic models of institutions in order to destabilize our understandings of state and economic power. Afterwards, I engage the construction of a community in *Fairytale* that is not about intersubjective encounters or

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Documenta 12, http://www.documenta12.de/uebersichtsdetails.html?L=1&gk=A&level=&knr=1 (last accessed April 21, 2014).

[9] Documenta 12, http://www.documenta12.de/1020.html?&L=1&no_cache=1&sword_list%5B%5D=weiwei (last accessed April 21, 2014).

[10] Documenta 12, http://www.documenta12.de/1364.html?&L=1&no_cache=1&sword_list%5B%5D=weiwei (last accessed April 21, 2014).

the construction of a mass or plurality. Instead, the political framing of the notion of the group and Chinese population take on a minor key of singularity. Ai complicates the intersubjective, along with understandings of plurality and singularity, that have typically ignored how Chinese and non-Western bodies operate within such theoretical tropes. As such, *Fairytale* reworks many of the recent discourses by Jean Lucy Nancy, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt. *minor china* destabilizes not only our understandings of institutions, but also our theorizations of the singular, plural, and multitude.

Art of Change(?)

Before we delve into *Fairytale*, I want to take a moment to better understand how the minor functions within the art market, considering how deeply embedded Ai is within it. In a recent public controversy over a show on contemporary Chinese performance art in London, Ai has made quite vocal his critiques of the minor as a curatorial framework. *Art of Change: New Directions from China* (2012) was held at the Hayward Gallery in London. Chief curator Stephanie Rosenthal produced the show to examine performance and installation art in China. Ai's critique of the show demonstrates the complex negotiation of how we define the political in producing *minor china*.[11] In *The Guardian*, Ai chastises *Art of Change* for its lack of social engagement; his critique is embedded in the use of the minor simply for minor's sake. The lack of attention to political life is not meant to make art relative to the world; instead, his critique around the political reconfigures our understanding of what the political might mean and entail. What type of politics is Ai arguing for? How should art relate to the state and discourse? What is the function of the minor for art? Ai's response to this show, along with *Fairytale* at Documenta, brings to light the tension of the minor as a privileged curatorial frame within the current art market. However, by more clearly articulating the minor in its analytic possibilities (as opposed to merely a curatorial frame or theoretical subject), we clarify the possibilities of the minor beyond its current market-based use.

In response to *Art of Change*, Ai pointedly asks, "How can you have a show of "contemporary Chinese art" that doesn't address a single one of the country's most pressing contemporary issues?"[12] He takes issue with what he perceives as a shallow form of curation that privileges works without a political critique. The notion of "change" is the show's curatorial frame: change in terms of each "artist's development," "as rooted in Eastern philosophy," and as an aesthetics of "transformation."[13] However, change, according to Ai, is not emphasized in its application to China's own political landscape. Although at first it may seem that Ai Weiwei demands direct political engagement, his sense of the political is complicated by his own complex relationship to Western politics and Chinese socialism.

The choice of such a curatorial frame that emphasizes change, shifts, and transformation reveals the privileging of projects coming out of China that could be understood as affective or relational. Ai's critique is not merely dismissing the minor or the affective; Ai demands that art should acknowledge human struggle and possess a political commitment or an allegory: "But any show curated without respect for the people's struggle, without concern for an artist's need for honest

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[11] Although many of the artworks in *Art of Change* deserve critical attention, I focus primarily on Ai's critique as it demonstrates how the nuances of the political for *minor china*.

[12] Ai Weiwei, "China's art world does not exist," *The Guardian* (Sept. 10, 2012), http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/sep/10/ai-weiwei-china-art-world (last visited April 21, 2014).

[13] Art of Change, Hayward Center, http://china.southbankcentre.co.uk/exhibition/ (last visited April 21, 2014).

self-expression, will inevitably lead to the wrong conclusion. Anything that calls itself a cultural exchange is artificial when it lacks any critical content. What's needed is open discussion, a platform for argument. Art needs to stand for something."[14] Some may attribute Ai's call for "meaning" as resembling a politics based on Western liberal inclusion and democracy, as many often discuss his engagement with the West along with his time spent in New York City during the 1990s. Many have conceived this period as him having experienced the possibilities of democracy. His political commitment could be understood as requiring the minor to take on Major form or legibly Western modes of critique. However, when attending to his complex political ideals, one sees a politics that expands beyond Western liberalism. Ai does not demand that art embodies a singular form or goal. His politics have been framed by a deep Communist legacy that does not derive from the current iterations of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Ai has critiqued Western style democracy and the seemingly simplistic understanding of China within Western art markets. In addition, he is equally condemning of China. He criticizes China for its totalitarian society, along with its use of "soft power" initiatives to promote a brand of China. In his review of *Art of Change*, he cites the Chinese state's use of culture, along with its public relations campaign in the US by featuring large-scale video billboards of China's actors, athletes, and classical pianists throughout Time Square: "To me, these are an insult to human intelligence and a ridicule of the concept of culture — vehicles of propaganda that showcase skills with no substance, and crafts with no meaning."[15] However, Ai is simultaneously invested in China and does not merely serve as a mouthpiece for colonial tropes that privilege the West as the primary source of modernity. As Christian Sorace reveals, Ai is influenced by early Chinese Marxism that engages modes of criticism and self criticism that were emblematic of the ethos during the early development of communism in modern China: "Ai continues state discourse in a subversively orthodox manner by enacting its own failed promises as the material for his own discursive struggle."[16] Ai's allegorical orientations and politics are not geared towards a simplistic privileging of Western democracy; instead, his politics are based on practices in not only democracy but also Maoism and Chinese Marxism. Such an orientation does not necessarily mean that all art should take a singular form of political critique; rather, Ai renegotiates how we curate contemporary Chinese art in terms of our understandings of politics. In other words, Ai's relation to the Chinese state and the West is one based not on clarity, linearity, nor a one-to-one correspondence, in terms of Ai's relationship to the West or with China. Ai redefines the political for the minor, in which the political does not take on an explicit or Major critique. The *minor china* Ai produces draws from multiple political genealogies that are not only about Western forms of democracy and free expression, but also commitments to Chinese Marxism and socialist practices.

By complicating his relation to the state beyond both direct critique and the privileging of Western democracy, we disturb the linear narratives surrounding how his art functions within a larger art market and in relation to the state. There are not simply two options between Chinese socialism and Western democracy; Ai points to the complex possibility of navigating both simultaneously. Such an allegorical orientation directs Ai's politics in more complex ways, beyond the linear understanding of how an artist relates to both the state and market. Ai is not merely pandering to the West, nor fully critical of the Chinese state; he is adaptive and receptive to the multiple demands that shape his

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[14] Ai, "China's art world does not exist"

[15] Ibid.

[16] Christian Sorace, "China's Last Communist: Ai Weiwei," in *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 2 (2014), 401.

being and politics. Thus, the minor of the aesthetic realm functions not merely as a subject and object that produces critiques of the state. Rather, the minor as an analytic within Ai's work shows us the limits and presumptions around the functions of the market and state; the minor is not privileged here as a subject that creates "change."

Cybernetic Models of Institutions

Although Documenta frames Ai's *Fairytale* in Major ways by situating the piece in relation to bare life, the multi-media work possesses a more complex and minor function in relation to institutions. Similar to Ai's complex political orientations as exemplified in his critique of *Art of Change*, *Fairytale* embodies less direct critiques of power. Institutions are central within the accounts of contemporary Chinese art. The art market and its economic infrastructure increased their interest in the art during the 1990's, and the state magnified its censorship and closure of art shows and performance during the same period. In the demand for contextualization of this burgeoning art, many analyses have relied on contextualizing the works in relation to such institutional interactions. For the art market, artists are depicted as producing a "brand"[17] and forms of self-orientalization[18] to become legible within such modes of economic exchange. For the state, artists are normally seen as critiquing or finding ways to work outside of pre-defined state networks, with the state depicted as perpetually authoritarian. Within these narratives, institutions function in predictable modes: the art market operates through the accumulation of capital and the state reacts against dissident artists. Power presumably functions in linear ways - the state censors artists, as they then respond to the state through critique, and artists accumulate power and cache through a self-branding that is determined by the art market. Ai has become the ur-representative of this particular model of artist reacting to the state, which increases his visibility, popularity, and economic valuation.

However, when we look more closely at the interactions between the state, market, and artists, a more complex picture emerges. An increased art market interest around contemporary Chinese art arises with stronger state censorship. However, the state is quite aware of its global public image, along with its desire to produce a form of "soft power" in its cultivation of artists. Furthermore, the art market and its multiple institutions and producers are becoming more cognizant of over-determined contextual critique. Thus, curators have begun to focus on less state-centered analyses in order to focus on fairly minute and minor forms of fantasy and play to situate the art, as in *Art of Change*.[19] These various considerations complicate our understanding of how institutions function; systems operate through reverberations between entities, as opposed to being based upon a linear set of reactions. Thus, what models of systems and institutions might account for this less direct chain of interactions and encompass more complex accounts of the negotiations and struggles connecting the artist to the state and art market, along with the state to the market?

Most have situated Ai in linear modes of political critique, presuming the art market and the state to function in predictable ways. For example, his work has regularly been discussed within the global

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[17] See Jing Wang, *Brand New China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Meiling Cheng develops the notion of "Brand China" to think about contemporary Chinese performance and installation art. *Beijing Xingwei* (London: Seagull Books, 2014).

[18] J.P. Park, "The Cult of Origin: Identity Politics and the Cultural Capital of Contemporary Chinese Art," *Yishu* 9, no. 4 (2010); and Danielle Shang, "Orientalism and the Landscape of Contemporary Chinese Art" *Yishu* 8, no 6 (2009), 41.50.

[19] In China, Qui Zhijie's show *How to do Useless Things* focuses on minute ways of interacting. Within Europe and the US, recent controversy has arisen through the show *Art of Change* in London.

context of markets in which *Fairytale* and other works are emblematic of a "branding" of China, where the works become "cultural ciphers coded with information about China's quantum leap into modernity!"[20] Meiling Cheng explores how Chineseness is produced through not only institutions, but also artists. Chineseness becomes "a performative assemblage of ideas, images, rhetorical forms, ritualistic practices and behavioral modes available to be appropriated and regenerated by creative agents."[21] This formulation of global branding presumes a stable relationship between the state, market, and transnational circuits. Although Cheng emphasizes the model of assemblage for "ideas, images, rhetorical forms, ritualistic practices and behavior modes," this assemblage is ultimately packaged by the artist to become its form of branding on the art market and as critique of China. In other words, through branding, Ai is imagined as a dissident artist that functions as direct challenge to state power and pandering to the market.

However, in *Fairytale*, Ai enacts a different, more minor model of how institutions function that can be called cybernetic. Cybernetics theorizes how systems, like governance, operate. Initially discussed by Plato in *Alcibiades* as "the study of self-governance," cybernetics has been developed to theorize how governance and systems operate.[22] Although Alexander Galloway expands the historical purview of cybernetics into the late 19th century,[23] most reference cybernetics in relation to British and American philosophers, scientists, and systems theorists following the Second World War. This history of cybernetic "movements" focused less on robotics and engaged different non-linear relations within systems that privileged complex, parallel operations over linear, serial functions. In addition, many cyberneticists focused on animal and human relations. As such, cybernetic models are less linear in that multiple actants, ranging from animals, objects, individuals, and institutions, interact in parallel. This model does not necessarily replace how "systems" are modeled; rather, cybernetics directs us to the over-determined assumptions around Chinese artists existing within linear relations. By emphasizing non-linearity, ontology, and affect, cybernetics opens up a space to rethink how the Chinese operate in more distributive ways.

Documenta is one of the primary institutions for the global art market and has a played a central role in developing the public visibility of contemporary Chinese art. The event occurs every five years. The artists involved are not normally announced until the opening of the show, although they are often given two years in advance to prepare. Documenta is located in Kassel, Germany, which is where the Grimm Brothers developed as fairy tale collectors and linguists. Kassel became Ai's starting point in thinking about fables and imagination. Ai brought objects to Documenta: 1001 refurbished Ming and Qing dynasty chairs and a towering statue made out of 1001 abandoned doors and windows. However, the centerpiece of *Fairytale* was not technically on display; Ai's producers raised funds from foundations, government entities, and individual donors to provide travel and housing for 1001 Chinese to attend events and walk Kassel's streets. The scope, size, and economics of the piece was produced within two years. As such, the work operates as a complex system and network that places Ai in relation to state apparatuses, the art market, and many other logistical entities.

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[20] Meiling Cheng, *Beijing Xingwei* (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 65.

[21] Ibid., 67.

[22] In 1834, the French physicist Andre-Marie Ampere used cybernetics to describe modes of classifying systems and governance.

[23] Alexander Galloway, "The Cybernetics Hypothesis," *differences* 25, no. 1 (2014), 107-131.

Due to *Fairytale*'s complexity and multiple components, it could be described as, drawing from Galloway, a "system" or "ecosystem, swarm, a cloud," as opposed to "a problem or a poem."[24] Galloway locates a model of a system that is highly distributive, like an assemblage or network. In theorizing such an expansive model, Galloway distinguishes between three different forms of mediation that can occur: hermeneutics (mediation of a concept as representation, translation, or extension), pure communication (mediation as immediacy and immanence), and multiplicity (complexity, networks, and rhizomes).[25] The last form embodies "multiplicity, heterogeneity, parallelity, rhizomatics, horizontal topology, complexity, and nonlinear systems"[26] or what may be called in Galloway's typology as "cybernetics."[27]

Within discourses on globalization and contemporary Chinese art, most theorists imagine the Chinese state as authoritarian and enacting power from above onto its population.[28] Theorists have also stressed the reverse directionality of power functioning from the bottom-up, where masses of individuals critique power from below. However, systems often function in more complex modes, in which directionality cannot account for how objects and entities, ranging from the human to nonhuman, affect one another in unpredictable ways. Power spreads across multiple units (from affects, bodies, movements, states, markets, and the transnational). Cybernetics directs us towards these complex systems. Michel Foucault was revolutionary in his works as thinking about power as vastly distributed. Although his earlier works (*Discipline & Punish* and *Birth of the Clinic*) have been critiqued for over-determining the role of institutions in constructing power, his latter works situate the inner-workings of systemic power spread throughout multiple levels from individuals to institutions. This distributive understanding of power has opened up a large body of theory that has complicated how power is understood. From questions surrounding agency, the role of objects, and ontology within the field of science and technology studies, typified by the work of Bruno Latour, power has embodied a more distributive model. Related inquiries have arisen in fields such as object-oriented ontology, disability studies, critiques of social constructionism, and cybernetics. Although these multiple fields diverge, power is generally understood in modes that stress distribution. Furthermore, as noted by Heather Love, these multiple fields are deeply interrelated through an emphasis on reworking previous theories about the subject and power.[29]

Cybernetics operates within this larger body of theory that engages the destabilization of agency, epistemology, and the human. The genealogical formation of cybernetics reveals momentum around its intellectual development during the 20th century by British and American academics; however, there was a lack of institutionalization during this period. Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist that was one of the first to bridge cybernetics/systems theory to the social sciences, stressed the epistemological focus of cybernetics as involving careful observation rather than the pre-defined event: "the subject matter of cybernetics is not events and objects but the *information* "carried" by events and objects. We consider the objects or events only as proposing facts, propositions, messages, precepts, and the like."[30] Similar to Deleuzian notions of becoming as discussed in the

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[24] Alexander Galloway, "Love of the Middle," in *Excommunication*, ed. Alexander Galloway, et. al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 56-57.

[25] Ibid., 28-29.

[26] Ibid., 57.

[27] Galloway, "The Cybernetics Hypothesis."

[28] The framework of authoritarianism is repeatedly invoked to discuss China. Political theorists, in addition, refer to different versions of authoritarianism, ranging from 1.0 to 2.0.

[29] Heather Love, "Close Reading and Thin Description," in *Public Culture* 25, no. 3 (2013), 402.

[30] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 407.

introduction, Bateson was concerned with observation over predefining an event or object. Andrew Pickering has traced the development of cybernetics in relation to questions of ontology and performativity. In his analysis of the development of British cybernetics during the 1940's and 1950's, Pickering reveals how the theory developed a notion of the brain "not [as] representation but *performative*, as I shall say, and its role in performance was *adaptation*."[31] Rather than conceptualizing the brain as a storage mechanism in which knowledge was accumulated, cybernetics understood the brain as a muscle that operated through adaptation in space. In other words, objects within a system operated less as pre-determined representations and more as adaptable. This became a model by which to understand how entities exist within a system, as human beings and other actors do not merely behave in prescribed ways but adapt and react within at times divergent and at other times similar modes. This attention to the indeterminate directs us to the level of ontology, which Pickering defines as "questions of what the world is like, what sort of entities populate it, how they engage with one another."[32] In so doing, cybernetic theorists "stage[d] for us a non modern ontology in which people and things are not so different after all."[33] This blurring of subject and object becomes the norm in which this body of theory operates. In his account, Pickering also notes cybernetics' unexpected relation to Eastern spirituality, where it offered models by which cyberneticians developed their theories and practices: 1) less direct modes of consciousness produced through meditation and other spiritual practices, 2) a destabilization surrounding the subject and object, and 3) a distinction between knowledge and experience or performance.[34] Similar to other chapters in this dissertation, epistemological insights from Eastern religions reemerge in developing the notion of the minor. Cybernetics is also minor in that it emphasizes the indirect, the instabilities between subject and object, and the import of attending to experience and observation.

Ai's multi-media work operates cybernetically. Through the use of multiple media Ai creates a swarm and network of bodies and objects at Kassel. The 1001 Chinese subjects that walk around Kassel, exploring its space and residents, distribute themselves during the entire Documenta, which runs throughout the summer. In addition, the use documentary film, twitter, photography, performance, visual art, and installation, further expand the reach and scope of *Fairytale*, as many audiences interact in non-linear and unknown ways. This piece can never be fully replicated, considering the financial and logistical requirements for visas and travel for over 1001 people. However, its afterlife through a documentary, photographs, and the memories of participants (Chinese and non) will further distribute the work. *Fairytale* is cybernetic in that it emphasizes Galloway's third form of mediation that exists within systems, networks, and nonlinear systems. Rather than revealing Ai's work as a representation or hermeneutic to China's modernity or a direct reflection and immediate connection to the troubles of contemporary China, *Fairytale* operates in multiplicity - its many objects, mass circulation of 1001 individuals, and mediated distribution. Cybernetics becomes not only an analytic frame but also a methodological model by which to engage the multiple economic, intermedial, and production apparatuses within the work.

To become a minor methodological and analytic model, cybernetics must similarly contend with the Major/minor problematic surrounding how the political functions. Cybernetics is minor in that it stresses the indeterminate over the pre-defined and directs us to the inability of fully representing

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[31] Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 6.
[32] Ibid., 17.
[33] Ibid., 18.
[34] Ibid., 386.

systems, like globalization. Although Galloway directs us to the theoretical possibilities of cybernetics, the models of rhizome, swarm, or network are often indeterminate in their political utility. Similar to the use of the minor subject within the art market and curation (as demonstrated in Ai's critiques of *Art of Change)*, cybernetics can be utilized to either 1) remain minor or 2) become Major by displacing past models. Thus, to situate cybernetics in relation to the analytic of *minor China* requires understanding how networks, swarms, and rhizomes can possess complex political ideals and commitments. The political contours of such distributive and cybernetic models must be defined since, similar to minor within the art market, they can be utilized to benefit market-based accumulation. Cybernetically-inspired notions, like the network, distribution, or assemblage, often coincide with the logics of contemporary capitalism. Galloway questions the utility of such open models that emphasize ontology, speculation, immateriality, and networks: "Why, within the current renaissance of research in continental philosophy, is there a coincidence between the structure of ontological systems and the structure of the most highly evolved technologies of post-Fordist capitalism?"[35] Cybernetics, in other words, operates as an open metaphor, lacking in its theoretical and political commitments to rework contemporary modes of dominant capitalism. Cybernetics presents another way to understand the difference between the minor subject and the minor analytic.

Lisa Lowe thinks through the limits of metaphor and such open-ended theorizations. In "Metaphors of Globalization," Lowe critiques the social scientific reliance on metaphor to contend with the messiness and indeterminacy of globalization. In so doing, she emphasizes the need for a hermeneutics to guide and produce a political critique through metaphor. Lowe amplifies Galloway's insights by relying on hermeneutics as a directive and guidance for cybernetic analysis. Although Galloway eschews didactic hermeneutics and meaning, Lowe returns to allegory and hermeneutics in order to ground the seemingly open and nebulous discourse of cybernetics into the material world. This is not a retreat to representation, as she acknowledges the limits of representation;[36] rather, allegory provides a material base for open, cybernetic models. Allegory is a literary device that offers narrative possibilities. Lowe does not rely on allegory to provide a definitive meaning; rather, allegory "presents an hermeneutic to instruct us how to read after the failure of those narrative meanings."[37] This hermeneutic operates as a suggestion, as opposed to a demand. Thus, rather than swimming within the nebulous realm and openness of cybernetic possibilities (the minor for minor's sake), Lowe's use of allegory as a political guide situates this posthumanist and affective model (cybernetics) in relation to the material world. Allegory provides a simultaneous commitment to not only indeterminacy and questions of the non- or post-human, but also a sense of political commitment and urgency.

My dual focus on cybernetics and allegory contends with recent questions surrounding the limits of these turns that question the ontology of objects and speculate our understandings of realism. In such turns to cybernetics and the destabilization of hierarchies that have constructed how we understand the subject or object, Galloway asks "What kind of world is it in which human are on equal footing with garbage? What kind of world is it in which the landscape is a chaotic nothing-world, unfounded at its core and motivated by no necessary logic (Meillasoux) or by the logic of the

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[35] Alexander Galloway, "The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism," in *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2013), 347.

[36] Lisa Lowe, "Metaphors of Globalization," in *Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 38.

[37] Ibid., 53.

market (Latour)?"[38] Galloway directs us to questions surrounding the limits of a model like cybernetics. Lowe similarly engages such questions through her focus on allegory that, similar to Galloway, attempts to find a politics to become "aligned" with such modes of destabilization. These political alignments, however, are not to be over-determined. Both Galloway and Lowe direct us to the import of possessing a simultaneous intention and commitment for political change with an acknowledgement of the limits of symbolic, representational analysis.

Ai Weiwei negotiates the indeterminacy of cybernetics through an ethics and care that is produced through an emphasis on multiplicity, plurality, and mass. As discussed earlier in relation to Ai's critiques of *Art of Change*, his allegorical orientation is informed by both democratic and socialist ideals. *Fairytale* balances the indeterminacy of cybernetics with the materiality of allegory. As a genre, the fairy tale is related to allegory through its focus on producing meaning, although such meanings are open and divergent. The fairytale typically engages both fantasy along with a theme or, dare I say, a moral. The directive function of the fairytale relates to allegory through this construction of "meaning"; however, the fairytale differs in its open-ended narrative through the use of talking animals, objects, and other unpredictable occurrences – what can be called the fairytale's cybernetic possibilities.

The development of the fairytale in China has a particular materialist grounding, along with the openness and play with objects and animals. The Chinese word for fairytale is *tonghua*. The first character (*tong*) means child and connotes a sense of the new and undiscovered. The fairtyale has also functioned as allegory. As Andrew Jones reveals, in the construction of modern China, particularly through the literary May Fourth movement,[39] the fairy tale operated as not simply a way for children to learn moral lessons, but also a means to develop the nation and modernization in China. Jones' study reveals how the interplay between the figures of the child and the beast within *tonghua* served an allegoric function for children and the nation-state. However, such forms of meaning do not necessarily take on a singular tone. Through a close reading of numerous fairytales by early modernist writers in China, Jones reveals the complex allegorical function of the fairytale. Although meanings exist, they are less directive in that they offer a form of "suspended animation" where a text "places a reader in a temporal trap, one in which the end has arrived before the beginning, and there is little or no recourse for further narrative development."[40] The "meanings" or allegories of fairytales are not always linear nor direct; however, similar to the allegorical directive for cybernetics, the indirect possibilities of the fairytale are balanced with a commitment to a political ideal.

In addition to the reference of the history of the fairytale in China, Ai Weiwei's project furthers this dual structure of openness with allegory. Although this history reveals a commitment to the notion of development as a teleological way of modernizing China, Ai constructs the notion of *tonghua* in less teleological logics. Throughout his documentary film, Ai presents interviews with primarily Western journalists. When questioned about the meaning of bringing 1001 Chinese to Kassel, he often provides a direct answer but also conditions it with "I don't care." He states the such when asked about how Chinese citizens will receive avant-garde work. Furthermore, when asked by a German journalist how Ai will respond if a participant does not return to China (presumably to seek

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[38] Galloway, "Poverty of Philosophy," 364-365.

[39] Andrew Jones, *Developmental Fairytales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China from Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (Armonk: M E Sharp, 1999).

[40] Jones, 11.

political asylum from the West), he first offers a template answer that states that he intends for people to return. However, he then says, "I really don't know," since he cannot control the actions of his participants. Although all the participants returned to China as planned, his stance of "I don't know" and "I don't care" presents an allegorical condition that is invested in not producing a direct critique. Ai does not offer answers that reproduce Western logics of modernization and aesthetic progress. In terms of the aesthetic, Ai does not simply hope that the Chinese will learn about and from displays of the avant-garde. In terms of politics, Ai does not default into notions of Western modernization for those Chinese seeking political asylum. His performance of lacking care and knowledge is not simply meant to avoid offending the state; rather, the surface meanings of "I don't know" and "I don't care" reveal an open critique that is guided by his simultaneous commitments to diverse political genealogies, simultaneously democratic and socialist.

For example, in the only interview with a Chinese journalist to be included in the documentary, Ai discusses his hopes for Beijing. Ai talks about his collaboration with the architecture firm Herzog and de Meuron for the Beijing Olympics' Nest Building and how he is committed to a better future for China. He wants Beijing to become "more chaotic" and a place of "violence and tenderness." Ai does not retreat to narratives of creating a city that is embedded in Western ideologies of modernization; rather, he states his hope for China to shift and open up space for multiple ways of being and existing. After this interview, the documentary changes our focus to scenes within Beijing. Rather than displaying the typical images of the Great Wall, the film concentrates on the traffic and density of Beijing. Even amidst the pollution, traffic, and overcrowded spaces, this montage of Beijing produces a sense of Ai's care for the city and its population. He intimately zooms into individual faces within crowds to obtain a sense of humanity amidst the shifts in the city. Thus, in addition to his open stance around meaning, he commits himself to a space and time and way of understanding a future condition for Beijing and China more broadly.

The allegory of cybernetics is that it is simultaneously materially situated but also destabilizes how we understand dominant concepts. Thus, rather than making minor subjects on par with Major critiques, the minor and cybernetic as analytics rework concepts as opposed to making them equivalent to the Major. The minor emphasizes a sense of openness and examines questions dealing with affect and ontology. As such, Ai's use of the minor within *Fairytale* allows us to understand how such minorness takes on an allegorical tone that is not simply political and critical of the Chinese state. Instead, such an allegory of the minor and indeterminate is guided with a political genealogy that contends with the tensions inherent in Western democratic modes and Chinese socialism. At the level of the (minor) subject, Ai directs us to how cybernetics functions with an allegory that does not simply correspond with post-Fordist logics.

Intersubjectivity and Being Singular Plural

The minor as an analytic also emerges in the ways Ai engages the concept of community. Some have attributed *Fairytale* to a sense of intersubjective exchange by situating his minor aesthetic work as operating in Major modes that change relationality and global connections. However, Ai fractures the notion of community. Cheng situates the use of multiple bodies as a mode of multi-centricity (developed from her earlier work) which "is then intersubjectivity multiplied, extending the interpersonal to the inter societal, the international and the inter glocal and perhaps, one day, when

extraterrestrials decide to join us earthlings, to the inter global and the intergalactic"[41] The mass represents a way of situating and integrating multiple perspectives together. Ai pushes against the over-romanticization of community and the intersubjective, by emphasizing the disjunctions produced at Kassel and amongst the 1001 Chinese subjects. Ai negotiates a sense of *being singular plural* to push against the intersubjective. *Fairytale* however also complicates notions of singularity and plurality, as they relate to the experiences of the Chinese and other racialized populations. Through notions of forgiveness and ethics, Ai reworks theories of the multitude to account for the ways such populations have been limited within understandings of the global. In particular, Ai contributes to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's notion of the multitude by locating an allegory and politics that is informed by what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call an undercommons. Ai contends with the open-endedness of cybernetics along with finding a non-universalist politic (or allegory) that does not default into post-Fordist logics that similarly privilege the immaterial, the open, and the mass.

Ai complicates intersubjectivity. At the end of Ai's documentary, he interviews German citizens on their interactions with and insights on the Chinese visitors. There were some comments that appear intersubjective, where Germans learned about "Chinese" perspectives. However, many responses were racist, in the sense that they revealed assumptions about Chinese bodies as lacking a sense of humanity and being uncivilized or unmodern. Ai begins his interviews with German citizens' experience of the Chinese in a seemingly multicultural way. One interviewee states, "Before I had bad impressions of Chinese, I've had unpleasant experiences with them. They always make loud noises while they're eating. That's what I saw in Australia. They didn't behave very well there. But now, very good! They're nice and very neat." Regardless of a shift in perspective, Ai presents a viewpoint that homogenizes all Chinese in their lack of civilizational norms. In a more blatantly derogatory way, one interviewee discusses how the Chinese gathered in Kassel: "Maybe they get together somewhere. Perhaps in the rice fields. (Laughter) I don't know. Maybe they just stand in the fields, and that is presented as a work of art." Upon associating the Chinese to the labored position of rice field workers, the interviewer then asks if the interviewee would like to meet any of the Chinese citizens. The German respondent replies, "Not really. You can meet all kinds of interesting people in Kassel. I don't care if they're part of an art project." Afterwards, as she walks away, she beckons her child, who follows obediently; the camera follows the child holding her mother's hand. This scene emphasizes not only the production of globally racist understandings of the Chinese, but also the continuation of such ideologies through generational reproduction. However, beyond revealing European forms of racism, the comments also engage the limits of community. Ai's editing choice to include such comments towards the end of the documentary directs us to the limits of intersubjectivity, especially as scholars frequently invoke this interactional dynamic in speaking about Ai's and other non-Western artists' work. Intersubjectivity becomes radically impossible considering the globally racialized understandings of certain populations. These moments in the documentary disrupt a narrative of exchange. The multiple production of centers surrounding the Chinese and Germans are globally inflected by power and uneven distributions of social and political capital. In other words, the seemingly minor notion of the intersubjective is disrupted through Ai's insistence on a more radically difficult encounter between subjects. What other more cybernetic or open models of "communal" formations create such a radical and difficult relationality, without romanticizing the idea of community and the global?

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[41] Cheng, 72.

Ai's construction of a fractured sense of the communal emerges in relation to Jean Luc Nancy's notion of being singular plural. The concept offers an open (cybernetic) and politically directed (allegorical) understanding of how such multiple beings interconnect. However, Ai reworks his theories, which I will discuss below. Nancy attempts to undo our understanding of being. By shifting away from a being premised on the individual, Nancy proposes that being always involves being *with*. Hence, human existence involves being singular plural since we are always implicated with an other: "[This is the] singular plural in such a way that the singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many and *because*, in general, a singularity is indissociable from a plurality… The singular is a plural."[42] The other includes not only the stranger but also objects and other "bodies": "The ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they be inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on. Above all else, "body" really means what is outside, insofar as it is outside, next to, against, nearby, with a(n) (other) body, from body to body, in the dis-position. Not only does a body go from one "self" to an "other," it is *as itself* from the very first; it goes from itself to itself…"[43] However, in blurring the lines between human and nonhuman, Nancy is insistent that this is "not a matter of making all these curious presences equal."[44] Instead, the goal of critique should be shaped by a consideration of being with others, human and non: "critique absolutely needs to rest on some principle other than that of the ontology of the Other and the Same: it needs an ontology of being-with-one-another, and this ontology must support both the sphere of "nature" and sphere of "history," as well as both the "human" and the "nonhuman"; it must be an ontology for the world, for everyone."[45] Similar to the concerns surrounding cybernetics and networks (with the minor only for minor's sake), being singular plural is directed in allegorical ways. This is not a singularity that reduces or flattens all forms of power. Rather, Nancy's singularity acknowledges how power is constructed in uneven modes. Being with implicates a sense of compassion, not as care for an other, but as "the disturbance of violence relatedness."[46]

Nancy differentiates being singular plural from the intersubjective: "the "with" is not the sign of a reality, or even of an "intersubjective dimension." It really is, "in truth," a mark drawn out over the void, which crosses over it and underlines it at the same time, thereby constituting the drawing apart and drawing together of the void. As such, it also constitutes the traction and tension, repulsion/attraction, of the "between"-us. The "with" stays between us, and we stay between us: just us, but only [as] the interval between us."[47] The difference between Nancy's being singular plural and the intersubjective is that the subject itself for Nancy is always implicated with a sense of being with. The intersubjective, however, presumes and maintains the notion of individuality for the subject. This subject only becomes intersubjective and related to an other when he is brought into relation with another individualized subject. By presuming being singular plural, the subject is always implicated with others which destabilizes the dominant ontological way of understanding being as primarily about the individual.

The intersubjective has often been theorized as presuming this sense of self that is reliant upon the other for understanding and becoming the self, which serves as the basis for how a community is

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[42] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 32.
[43] Ibid., 84.
[44] Ibid., 20.
[45] Ibid., 53.
[46] Ibid., xiii.
[47] Ibid., 62.

formed. Drawing from Husserlian phenomenology, the notion of intersubjectivity has often been framed as a means by which a person constructs a sense of self through distinguishing himself in relation to another. In such an intersubjective moment, performance studies scholars have often relied on the notion to represent how one becomes a "center" as a "perception that compels me to recognize the co-existence of those who frame my margins."[48] The other complements the self as center by forcing one to account for one's own "limit of my centricity."[49] Within this model of intersubjectivity, the other may not complete but rather complements the self. Intersubjectivity becomes the expansive glue to produce a community and relations.

Although others have certainly deployed intersubjectivity in different ways[50], the notion often conceptualizes a distinction between self and other while imagining community as holistic.[51] However, as Ai demonstrates in his interviews with German nationals, a sense of community is rarely ever whole. If anything, a community "signifies the chaotic and multiform appearance of the infranational, supranational, para-national, and, moreover, the dislocation of the "national" in general."[52] Community is not a stable structure for Nancy nor for Ai's work; instead, community becomes constantly moving and shifting, as opposed to a stable construction. Community is not a structure; it is rather a perpetually negotiated formation that does not exist through multiple centers of intersubjective connection. Community is a cybernetic complex of objects, bodies, affects, and politics.

Ai's deploys the minor form of the fairytale and affective disconnects between Germans and Chinese to direct us to the problems of community and the intersubjective. The racist comments by Germans disrupt the romance around the communal, emphasizing the discomforts over the pleasures at Documenta. In addition to the racist understandings of the Chinese as uncivilized rice field workers, they are also situated within uneven modes of modernity. One interviewee discusses how bringing the Chinese to Germany introduces them to civilization, which could have a fairytale ending for the Chinese: "If the hosts do a good job, then it might really be a fairy tale. It could be a huge step for them, for people who have never know modern civilization, such as electricity, hot water, automobiles, and aircraft, or all the little aspects of technology. This experience could become a fairy tale for them." Similarly, another German citizen blatantly lays out the uni-directionality amongst understandings of modernization: "It's important that they learn about us, but not the other way around. To know how the Europeans are living." Thus, the moments of seemingly intersubjective and multicultural exchange are disrupted by such discourses surrounding the impossibility of a global community. Ai works "against the romance of community," in the words of Miranda Joseph, by creating a community filled with fissures, disconnects, and perpetual negotiations between bodies, languages, and affects. Ai also emphasizes the impossibility of intersubjective community between racialized groups due to the ways uneven modes of modernization frame such populations.

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[48] Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[51] For critiques, see Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 229; and Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[52] Nancy, 36.

In one scene of the documentary, Ai focuses on a dark-skinned Chinese farmer, walking alone amidst the usual well-dressed, cosmopolitan, and light-skinned crowd of Documenta.[53] While looking pensively at the fake giraffe in Peter Friedl's *The Zoo Story*, he is asked by a reporter speaking Mandarin Chinese what he thinks of the work. However, the farmer cannot communicate in Mandarin, as he speaks another dialect of Chinese that requires translation from another participant. This moment of linguistic difference within the Chinese-speaking world reveals the limits within the notion of "community" for the Chinese-speaking world. These moments of translation amongst Chinese speakers describe the limits of community captured by Nancy: "So it appears to us that what is proper to community is nothing more than the generalized impropriety of banality, of anonymity, of the lonely crowd and gregarious isolation."[54] The documentary's interviews and focus on the farmer walking through the exhibition halls highlight his disconnect from not only Documenta attendees, but also other Chinese.

In addition, the ways art objects are theorized as producing community and relations are destabilized in the documentary. Friedl's work engages multiple levels, including war, animal domestication, and Israeli-Palestinian relation. Brownie the giraffe was initially from South Africa and shipped to the West Bank's Qalquiliyah Zoo. Upon Israeli occupation of the Palestinian town in 2002, the giraffe panicked and died from head trauma. Friedl's preservation of Brownie attempts to capture these multiple meanings, as they theoretically situate the viewer to such politics and communities. When the farmer is asked if he thinks this giraffe is "art," he responds "If it's realistic or life-like, then it's good." In addition, upon a downpour of rain at Documenta, he is asked if the rain or the giraffe excites him more. He responds that "farmers are always thinking of rain." The nostalgic naiveté and romanticism embedded in his answers highlight the limits of aesthetic communication. His answers do not reveal the transnational frameworks of war, animality, and sovereignty that Friedl considers. Rather, art takes on a more minor, limited function for the farmer. He is distanced from not only other Chinese, but also the art itself. Ai presents a scene in which art does not necessarily possess the "power" to change politics or create connections between people. Instead, Ai focuses on the limits of art in its inability to produce a global community. Communication in relation to the farmer becomes, in the words of Nancy, "the laborious negotiation of a reasonable and disinterested image of community devoted to its own maintenance, which constantly reveals itself as nothing but the maintenance of the spectacular-market machine."[55]

Ai Weiwei emphasizes in the film how he wants to engage how Chinese locals "experience[s] the so-called high culture" and "to look at their way of looking." In other words, Ai limits the communal and global potential of art; its reach and effects might perhaps be more localized, as opposed to community-forming.

The farmer is thus neither completely isolated nor fully integrated into the art world and with other Chinese citizens; he exists in a more limited relation to both communities. Thus, he embodies being singular plural in terms of his limits as opposed to his possibilities. Within the scenes Ai includes of the farmer, disconnects arise from language, both aesthetic and cultural: "The incorporeal [language] exposes bodies according to their being-with-one-another; they are neither isolated nor mixed together. They are *amongst themselves* [entre eux], as origins. The relation of

[53] Although I would like to provide the farmer's name, there is no reference to it in the film.
[54] Nancy, 63.
[55] Ibid.

singular origins among themselves, then, is the relation of *meaning*."[56] Amidst this redefinition of the self in relation to community, being singular plural limits the possibility of the communal and intersubjective. Being singular plural privileges a porousness between bodies that simultaneously acknowledges the power differences between them. Ai explores this sense of *being singular plural* and questions the openness of the intersubjective through an emphasis on the allegory and politics of how Chinese populations are limited in relation to global and artistic communities.

Subject, Community, & Global

Ai also extends his minor analytic beyond individual interactions to a sense of the global. Philosophical discourses that analyze the transnational often emphasize the production of a network, plurality, and multitude. However, Ai reworks these theories through the production of an allegorical politic that takes into account non-Western others within the global landscape. Through the proliferation of 1001 bodies and objects throughout Kassel, Ai reveals the limits of the multitude.

The transnational, the art market, and global aesthetics circulate within Ai's multimedia project. Within the work, one is unable to track the whole performance piece within the quaint town of Kassel. Multiple bodies swarm throughout the town; audiences know that there are Chinese bodies roaming but they cannot track their exact whereabouts; and the performance spans the entire run of Documenta. Ai, in other words, produces a microcosm of the difficulties in tracking the spatial, epistemological, and temporal dimensions of globalization. Due to the size and magnitude of globalization, Lowe reveals that one must resort to metaphor to describe the phenomenon. When aesthetic and academic projects contend with globalization, we are directed "to *the problem of representation itself* with respect to our late modern present."[57] Lowe argues for culture's centrality in contending with globalization. She critiques the social sciences for conceiving culture "as secondary and ephemeral to, rather than constitutive of, the social": "Although social scientists commonly declare that "culture" is an important barometer of globalization, their analyses have tended to subordinate culture as a passive effect of political economic processes."[58] Culture thus interprets the social and "newly conceptualize[s]" social change.[59]

This dilemma is brought to the fore in *Fairytale*. At the end of the documentary, following interviews with German citizens that depict their racist understandings of the Chinese as a population, Ai interviews Chinese citizens and how they experienced Kassel and Documenta. One of his interviewees echoes Lowe's insights by emphasizing the limits of representation and the impossibility of capturing the global: "We can grasp our immediate environment. But we can never have a complete understanding of human beings. We can only have a general impression. What is that general impression? It is the movement of many things, which are similar to you." The speaker directs us to the difficulties in grasping beyond our immediate environment; however, he also finds possibilities in relations that "are similar to you." Ai highlights this interview in order to move away from stable understandings of the individual to institutional power. The interview emphasizes the impossibility of directly knowing and understanding globalization; thus, relations and other less

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[56] Ibid., 84.
[57] Lowe, 38.
[58] Ibid., 52-53.
[59] Ibid., 53.

linear connections provide the minor yet key ways of understanding how we exist within the global. *Fairytale* emphasizes the unknowability of others, scale, and the transnational.

Fairytale directs us to this global system through the interplay of scale. Ai's work multiplies the magnitude of his work by a factor of 1001 – in his art objects and subjects. Rather than privileging a representational reading of the chairs, ceramics, or *Template* installation, Ai often produces an affective and relational connection with objects and space. Each chair could represent a seat for the 1001 Chinese in Kassel. Beyond being representative of a Chinese past tradition (objects) or of the visiting bodies (performance), *Fairytale* lingers in the affective feeling of what is missing or lacking. Such a position emphasizes the cybernetic and indeterminate, expanding how we understand scale. The empty chair is not only a place for a Chinese body to sit, but also the location for a viewer to realize something is missing. This affective relation to the empty chair opens up a space for the Documenta attendee to feel and ponder why such chairs exist and whom might be sitting within them. Ai multiplies this affective effect through the distribution of 1001 chairs. In addition, Ai constructs the 1001 luggage pieces he provides to the participants in similarly expansive and affective ways. He attaches white velcro to the outside of visitors' carry-on luggage in order to attract objects. In his documentary, he includes a vignette of him visiting the fabric store and discussing his intentions for his use of velcro. His choice emphasizes a static and clingy relation to space, as velcro often traps dirt and other debris. In other words, the luggage does not simply represent Chinese citizens entering the cosmopolitan; the luggage pieces produce an affective relation to space and others. The luggage attracts attention, along with debris and other matter. Ai's aesthetic production is cybernetic (expansive and plural) and allegorical (singular and racialized difference), in that he emphasizes masses of people but inflects a political understanding of how such masses have been dehumanized and discussed without singularity. In other words, his use of 1001 racialized bodies contends with a discourse that is simultaneously expansive/plural and singular and localized. Ai reworks what Nancy describes as being singular plural and what others have described as the multitude.

Redefining Singular Plural & Multitude

The 1001 Chinese bodies have typically been imagined as tasting the luxuries of cosmopolitanism: "While Ai benefited from his interactions with his fellow Chinese citizens who trusted him enough to become his artworks, these same individuals got to experience variegated trials and pleasures of becoming twenty-first century globalized subjects, even if just this once in their lifetime."[60] These subjects do not operate in linear ways in which they leave their unmodern, rural homes to experience Western civilization; rather, in terms of cybernetics, this relationally is unstable. These bodies direct us to the racialized condition of being conceptualized as a population and mass within a global order. Thus, how might such conditions of mass, multitude, group, and plurality be imagined as holding political possibilities? In response to developing a way of organizing and constructing a mass movement to challenge power, recent philosophical interest has turned to the multitude and the plural. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of multitude, Robert Esposito's third person, and Nancy's singular plural emphasize the many to think through ways that contend with power. Such turns to the mass have been tempered for their overly universalizing discourses to account for difference through the notion of singularity. The singular attempts to account for the individual and her difference, while the turn to the plural and multitude responds to the neoliberal discourses that privilege the individual. Ai expands these theories through his exploration of multitude and plurality

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[60] Cheng, *Beijing Xingwei*, 74.

in the deployment of 1001 Chinese bodies. He directs us to both the limits and possibilities of such recent philosophical turns, by revealing an allegorical and political tone that considers Chinese difference within notions of the multitude. The Chinese, as discussed in the introduction, have historically been imagined as a faceless mass or, as discussed by Patricia Clough and Craig Wilse, a population racism.[61] Thus, how might non-Western others revise Nancy's being singular plural and Hardt and Negri's multitude through an account of "being Chinese" which often forecloses the possibility of "being singular" since singularity seems to be afforded primarily to those not racialized? Within a global landscape, being for the Chinese does not hold the same ontological condition as being for the West - the being for the Chinese or non-Western other is theorized as being plural as opposed to being singular. Ai's work redefines the notion of multitude and plurality to account for such radical difference.

Hardt and Negri develop the multitude as an answer or response to a global network of power, what they call in their earlier work Empire. The minor is differentiated from notions of identity or uniformity: "Insofar as the multitude is neither an identity (like the people) nor uniform (like the masses), the internal differences of the multitude must discover *the common* that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced."[62] The multitude is constructed in relation to multiple singularities: "The multitude is composed of a set of *singularities* — and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different."[63] The multitude is bound through discovering what they have in common: "The multitude, designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common."[64] Within this formulation, these authors emphasize singularity to account for difference. They correctly resist the urge to create an additive understanding of difference, where we must account for all forms of social identities in a multicultural fashion. However, they instead ask, by citing or rather footnoting Audre Lorde's essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,"[65] that we radically transform the world by "tak[ing] away the limiting, negative, destructive character of differences and mak[ing] differences our strength (gender differences, racial differences, differences of sexuality, and *so forth*)."[66] The authors primarily focus on class to develop the notion of multitude, stating that their "focus on economic class here should be considered in part as compensation for the relative lack of attention to class in recent years with respect to these other lines of social difference."[67]   These authors conceptualize accounts of "other" forms of difference (as the "so forth") to have been privileged over class in recent years; yet, many critical race, feminist, and queer scholars have emphasized the critical role of class in constructions of power.[68]

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[61] Patricia Clough and Craig Wilse, "Gendered Security/National Security," *Social Text* 28, no. 4 (2010), 45-63.

[62] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005), xv.

[63] Ibid., 99.

[64] Ibid., 100.

[65] Ibid., 373 n 2.

[66] Emphasis mine. Ibid., 101.

[67] Ibid.

[68] For critical race theory, see Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory,* ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, et. al. (New York: The New Press, 1996); David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso, 1997); and Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1983). For queer theory, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). For feminist theory, see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007)

Although I do not disagree with focusing on a specific organizing notion (like class) to develop the idea of the multitude, the way race, gender, sexuality, and other "so forths" are perpetually acknowledged but then displaced forces us to contend with this conceptual maneuver. More specifically, Ai Weiwei's *Fairytale* relies on the analytics of race, gender, and sexuality as they shape how Chinese populations operate within a transnational framework. However, such modes of "difference" within continental philosophy and critical theory have so frequently been set aside (particularly in relation to class). Hardt and Negri replicate this dynamic, even with their well-intentioned reference to Audre Lorde. Hardt and Negri seem to possess a simultaneous appeal yet distaste for those who are part of that enumerated list of differences. They are asking such racialized, gendered, and sexualized people to put such differences aside in order to form and join the multitude - to relinquish the sites of difference that originally politicized their lives. In other words, the multitude appeals to one's sense of change but also replicates an approach to social difference that eschews "so forths" in lieu of class.

Hardt and Negri produce a liberal, multicultural sentiment towards racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference: "When we say that we do not want a world without racial or gendered difference but instead a world in which race and gender do not matter, that is, a world in which they do not determine hierarchies of power, a world in which differences express themselves freely, this is a desire for the multitude."[69] Although Hardt and Negri differentiate themselves from a conservative colorblind ideology, they nonetheless theorize the multitude as a way in which race and gender are acknowledged but then are ideally not given a social stigma. This approach can be described as multicultural, a liberalized sentiment that emphasizes not the forgetting of race but rather a limiting of its critique. To think through the different ways in negotiating class, let us return to the source Hardt and Negri rely upon to "make differences our strength."[70] Lorde critiques the liberal multicultural relationship to race, gender, and sexuality. Hardt and Negri depict Lorde's ideas as locating the problem with difference through how it is deployed as either "the limiting, negative, destructive character of differences" or "strength."[71] However, Lorde, on the contrary, is not preoccupied with how difference is deployed. Rather, Lorde privileges and demands the need for difference: "Interdependency between women is the way to freedom which allows the *I* to *be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative."[72] Racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference is "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic."[73] Difference is a source of survival, not something one simply chooses to use in problematic or beneficial ways. When Lorde claims "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"[74] she is not simply calling for difference to be used in positive ways for change. Instead, this phrase highlights how difference is a source of survival for racialized, gendered, and sexualized individuals in order to exist outside of the master's narrative. Lorde demands a full account of difference within the context of white feminism; she is writing her insights due to intragroup (amongst women) difference and demands an account of difference and for white feminists to acknowledge privilege. For Lorde, difference is central to radical change and should not simply be considered for its use value. Hardt and Negri depict her essay as if she discusses all forms of difference to be used for good. In considering the context in which Lorde was writing, she is concerned with how privilege is

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[69] Hardt & Negri, 101.

[70] Ibid., 101.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 1984) 111.

[73] Ibid., 111.

[74] Ibid., 112.

acknowledged and difference is radically considered for political change. Change does not arise by ignoring difference (colorblind) or making "race and gender [to] not matter…[to] determine hierarchies of power[75]" (multicultural). Lorde privileges race, gender, and sexuality consciousness, situating difference as resource and necessity.

Similar to Lorde, Ai contends with difference, specifically Chinese difference within the global landscape. Difference in *Fairytale* demands that we not ignore the "so forths" and that privilege is accounted for within and outside of marginalized communities. Ai and Lorde gesture towards a process that forces a deep encounter with how power has constructed such relations of difference. To account for race, gender, and the "so forths" does not mean that we ignore nor dismiss difference; consciousness of difference is the source of possibility. To contend with the limits of the multitude as currently theorized, Ai reworks the concept through multiplication. Ai makes transparent the problems of the multicultural stance that thinks of difference as simply a problematic or positive use, rather than an important source for change. By taking a racially pluralized and homogenized group like the Chinese and bringing in 1001 bodies, Ai multiplies an already pluralized singular body within the small population of Kassel (220,000 plus visitors to Documenta) to make more transparent the condition of being plural for non-Western bodies. Ai pluralizes an already pluralized condition of being. Ai takes the condition of the Chinese as already made plural within a racialized global landscape. However, by overemphasizing the plural through size and scale, Ai overwhelms the space of Documenta and town of Kassel. He exposes the operating logics of the plural since singularity cannot exist for the Chinese. Thus, this does not become an intersubjective moment in which Germans and visitors get to know the historically othered Chinese; rather, Ai reveals the impossibility of intersubjectivity for the non-Western body which has been stripped of its sense of singularity within its being - there is no being singular for their bodies within a globalized landscape. In other words, Ai directs this condition of multitude and the plural for the Chinese towards a **being (plural)**. Being (plural) directs us to the non-western condition of being dehumanized and given a sense of being part of a horde or group. They are never initially understood within a sense of singularity.

Although the mass that arises from processes of racialization differs from that which emerges from the multitude or plurality, both groups are similar in that they both eviscerate difference and reveal the limits for non-Western populations. These racialized groups are flattened of difference and conditioned as a mass. Through theorizations of the multitude, these others are asked to put aside identity to join the multitude. Although many in the underclass would join the political aims of the multitude, this demand seems all too historically familiar. Thus, what allegorical directives might help produce a more robust notion of the multitude that takes into account Chinese difference?

Being (Plural) Singular Plural

In establishing how being is conditioned towards plurality for the Chinese, Ai then provides an understanding of singularity throughout the documentary and at Documenta. However, this singularity is not meant to merely humanize the Chinese; instead, this being (plural) singular is further augmented back towards the plural in order to allegorically and politically situate this discourse: being (plural) singular plural.

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[75] Hardt & Negri, 101.

Throughout the documentary, the director Ai focuses on the experiences of a few of the 1001 participants. He provides them a sense of singularity within their own life. One such group of people are the elders from Jichang village in Guangxi province. These elders are seen leaving their hometowns to interact with Germans on the plane ride to Kassel and then in the foreign country. Some of these participants had never traveled before; in addition, they were located in rural and isolated areas where they not only had never received a passport, but also were never given "official names." They had to produce names, which literalizes this sense of being (plural). In addition, in the documentary, Ai focuses on Liu Yu, a safety inspector at a highway checkpoint in Yingkou City in Liaoning Province. When we first encounter him in the film, he is framed within the banality of his daily life, directing trucks on the traffic control area that he works. However, juxtaposed against his routinized life is his desire to travel abroad. This worker, in many ways, is the ultimate being (plural) for the non-Western other, as he occupies an extremely unromantic position – he is neither a rural peasant nor a glamorous cosmopolitan. His comfortably middle-class status pluralizes him, as he is neither the abject migrant worker nor the capitalist flexible citizen so often discussed in popular culture and academic accounts of China. However, the way the director treats the subject is one that singularizes and gives voice to this everyday worker. Ai directs us towards a sense of this being (plural) singular within the narratives of both the elders and traffic control worker. In addition, one obtains a sense of this being (plural) singular throughout the film as the Chinese visitors interact with people in Kassel, doing conga lines and taking pictures of the landscape. These moments produce a sense of joy and hope that arises when people are provided the opportunity to interact and laugh.

However, in producing the being (plural) singular, Ai does not simply stop his critique and humanize the Chinese. Ai does not replace pluralizing with a sense of individualism and humanity or cosmopolitanism; rather, he conditions singularity with a perpetual relation to others. In other words, Ai reworks Nancy's being singular plural to consider the condition of the non-West into being (plural) singular plural, by which the racialized condition of being plural is provided a sense of humanity that does not retreat into a multicultural or intersubjective moment. Ai simultaneously humanizes and pluralizes the being (plural), advancing Nancy's insights.

Although we see individual singularity throughout the film, Ai stresses "I think, even when we talk about individualism, it's not the act of one person." In this comment, he redirects the singular to the plural. At the end of the film, after he interviews German nationals, Ai interviews Chinese participants. One of them gestures towards the condition of being (plural) singular plural: "As we come to Germany from China and go back to China, what state are we in in the midst of this movement? Maybe I have respect for myself as a part of a whole. As one out of one thousand one." The speaker directs us to the being (plural) of the initial encounter; however, he then emphasizes the movement of also being singular plural through his sense of "respect for myself" (singular) and then becoming "part of a whole" (plural).

So why return from the singular and humanizing move that Ai mobilizes to then return to the plural? Why loop all the way from *being (plural) singular* to *being (plural) singular plural*? Ai produces the being (plural) singular plural in order to contend with the non-Western condition of being (plural) and to resist the maneuver of pure humanization or singularization. This is important for theorizations of the multitude, as Ai reworks how the multitude and plurality have currently been imagined. To become plural or part of the multitude after being singular, one must find a space in common. According to Hardt and Negri, the common is the space which returns being to the plural. However, in finding a common for singular beings, it requires finding relations that do not

eviscerate and universalize difference. Hardt and Negri locate "the common" as the space for the multitude to find and produce alliances, locating the production of the common from "the conceptual shift from *habit* to *performance*."[76]

However, how do we formulate the multitude and congregate to produce the common? Hardt and Negri locate the common in the experiences of those repeatedly disenfranchised. They invert the usual stigma against the poor, migrants, and "thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, and the like" or the *lumpenproletariat* (rag proletariat).[77] These are the people who are required to let go of their difference the "so forths."[78] The authors reverse the dominant understanding of these groups by revealing how "the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself."[79] In other words, these others become the possibility for multitude to find affinity and relations. However, this task demands multiple negotiations by not only the privileged but also a destigmatization process that is historically embedded in processes of power and disempowerment for those "thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, and the like."

Hardt and Negri view these others as wanting to refuse and resist their current status: "Part of the wealth of migrants is their desire for something more, their refusal to accept the way things are."[80] In addition, these authors depict such populations as desiring what those with power already possess: "Certainly most migrations are driven by the need to escape conditions of violence, starvation, or depravation, but together with that negative condition there is also the positive desire for wealth, peace, and freedom."[81] However, in so doing, they privilege a normative way of being that is based upon becoming normal and obtaining the "good life" of those with privilege. Many of these groups may not be committed to such a reversal. When "wealth, peace, and freedom" are privileged as the ends for a political movement, one replicates the goals and desires of a dominant society. Thus, rather than focusing on finding a common, the plural and multitude might discover possibilities within what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call the undercommons – a commons produced in and through historical injury. These "so forth" and enumerated "others" have operated within modes of survival; as such, they have understandings of change and politics that may not simply replicate the normative politics Hardt and Negri emphasize. Through survival, the "so forth" have developed an undercommons that is rooted in a politics and allegory not simply defined by past movements. Although Hardt and Negri dismiss the notion of the commons from a pre-capitalist past[82], the undercommons operates differently with respect to their genealogy of the commons. The undercommons offers a minor space by which these queered others can find possibilities to acknowledge their past racialization via homogenization and also enter a different sensibility of plurality and multitude.

Towards the end of the documentary, Ai displays the production of an undercommons during the last evening in Kassel. This part of the film is not about Germans and Chinese being together; instead, the gathering involves the many random Chinese strangers enjoying each others' company.

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[76] Ibid., 199.

[77] Ibid., 130.

[78] This refers to queerness, not in terms of sexual identity. Rather, similar to Cathy Cohen's work, queerness is broadened to accommodate intersecting forms of difference. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," *GLQ* 3, no. 4 (1997), 437-465.

[79] Hardt & Negri, 133.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., xv.

Together, they sing and perform for each other, creating a community that is focused on their existence, past, present, and future. This moment directs us to not only the singularity of each Chinese person, but also the plurality and production of an undercommons. It is a space that still acknowledges difference amidst this racialized population. It is a space for the Chinese to produce their relations. The undercommons does not reverse systems of power and make the "so forths" the source of resistance. To simply demand for "wealth, peace and freedom" replicates a cycle of recuperation and for the multitude to be included and enfolded into recognition's logics. Ai does not depict the 1001 Chinese as demanding for co-equal status in terms of "wealth, peace and freedom," where the pathways of how power funnels capital are redirected towards those without. Rather, Ai emphasizes the need to find and produce relations amongst each other in order to question why and how such pathways exist.

The undercommons is not seeking change in order to reverse how power operates and to benefit those who have been historically injured by it. Instead, the undercommons allegorizes change through the production of a multitude that finds a commonality in the destabilization of hierarchies since they not just "bad for some of us, they are bad for all of us."[83] This is a commonality located not in the common space Hardt and Negri identify, but in a place that acknowledges past privilege and power. The undercommons does not demand that the other let go and join the multitude. The undercommons demands those with privilege to radically see the problematics of past hierarchies - an ownership that demands difference. Moten and Harney emphasize how the undercommons requires even those with privilege to see the limits of the ways institutions operate: "the coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?" The undercommons, as Moten and Harney argue, are not premised upon a logic of visibility; instead, hiding and being under is precisely the ways in which the undercommons operate. Akin to critiques by David Eng and Nicole Fleetwood[84], visibility and this reversal of such minoritized groups into major possibility that Hardt and Negri theorize does not acknowledge the limits and problematics of visibility. By remaining invisible, these groups also possess the potential to create a multitude and shift the terms that structure "political action" and "social change."

Moten and Harney also discuss the formation of the undercommons in relation to the institution of the university; rather than simply declaring the utopic and anarchic notion of dispelling and destroying power and reserving it, the authors argue for the nuanced balance of working within and outside institutions. Ai demonstrates such a balance, as he accepts foundation and government money in order to bring over 1001 Chinese. Ai raised over $3 million USD for this project. This economic dimension reveals the complexities of the undercommons in the production of its politics and approaches. Ai utilizes such capital accumulation in order to produce his large-scale critique and reworking of the multitude and singularity. Similar to Moten and Harney, Ai's undercommons is not premised upon a simplistic negation of institutions. One works and uses the resources of dominant institutions in order to produce critiques and work from within and without. In other words, within the undercommons, one's relationship to institutions is cybernetic, not fully against nor complicit to the state but rather working from within.

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[83] Ibid., 10

[84] David Eng, *Racial Castration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Ai Weiwei has become the primary figure that situates contemporary Chinese art within the problematic of Major China. He is emblematic of the dissident Chinese artist that challenges the state and benefits from the art market. However, through the minor analytics of cybernetics and being (plural) singular plural, Ai complicates these narratives. Chinese artists do not simply reproduce critique in linear ways; rather, they operate in disparate and minor modes that reframe not only our understanding of Chinese art, but also theorizations surrounding institutions, community, and what defines the political.

SECTION 3: SUBJECT/AGENCY/RESISTANCE

Intermission – Remarking
> Tao Ye's *4* & The Ethics of World Dance

Chapter 4 – Lingering
> Meditation & Duration in Zhang Huan & He Chengyao's Performance Art

Chapter 5 – Fabulating
> Cao Fei's *Cosplayers*

Chapter 6 – Dying
> The Politics of Game Over in Feng Mengbo's *Restart*

INTERMISSION – REMARKING
World Dance & Ethics in Tao Ye's _4_

Before we engage questions of the subject and her modes of agency, this intermission proposes a minor ethical orientation to objects and subjects – the remark. How do we approach the object of art? What ethical orientations do we create in relation to the performative subject? This interlude embodies the form of the remark with a short analysis of Tao Ye's choreography. A choreographic analysis formulates an understanding of Tao Ye's _4_ in relation to affect and relationality. Affect offers insights for questions surrounding world or global dance. Although approaches to World Dance have been critical of imperialism and legacies of colonialism, theorists often take a denunciatory stance to artists who claim a relationship to a universal aesthetic and to critics who, especially for their discussions on artists from Asia, default into easy Orientalist fantasies and analyses. Such approaches have been important; however, other ethical orientations and modes of engagement with the body and artist are required to open up new modes of understanding the non-Western body in its global circulation.

While dance and questions of affect and embodiment have played a central analytic role thus far in developing _minor china_, it nonetheless occupies a complex relation to other contemporary artistic practices. Due to different funding structures from how visual art, music, and performance art circulate, dance continues to occupy a diminished and less publicly visible role. However, similar to critiques of visibility in Chapter 3, dance does not necessarily need to be more visible in the public imaginary. There is potential in dance's invisibility in circulating amidst and within other mediums. However, the goal of this intermission is to be more explicit with how dance analysis operates, even when it exists in the background. I foreground how such analytics have been discussed and will continue in this project. In particular, this interlude further defines my use of affect and ethics (as they emerge within questions of dance) as it relates to globality, China, and culture.

The emergence of affect in literary studies has privileged a mode of engagement that promotes what Eve Sedgwick calls "reparative" as opposed to paranoid reading and what theorists Heather Love, Sharon Marcus, and Stephen Best advance as "surface" reading. Reparative reading involves a different approach located within hope, as advanced by Eve Sedgwick: "Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters and creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn could have happened different from the way it actually did."[1] Love reminds us that Sedgwick does not fully dismiss the practice of paranoid reading; rather, reparative and paranoid readings simultaneously occur to engage texts and objects in a different tempo.[2] Although such ideas are stooped within the literary, non-Western dance revises such modes of engagement and examines why something like affect has helped promote this shift in engaging a text or object. Affect studies reorients the ethical orientations in analyzing bodies in global circulation and performative movement. By the ethical I do not mean an ethics premised upon moral judgments or

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[1] Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is about You," in _Touching Feeling_ (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146.
[2] Heather Love, "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," in _Criticism_ 52, no. 2 (2010), 235-241.

the law; instead, I utilize ethics here as a mode of approaching or relating to an object - the stances and patterns we use in relation to the things in our lives.

Tao Ye's *4*

Tao Dance Theatre recently emerged on the contemporary dance scene from mainland China. The primary choreographer Tao Ye was educated in Chongqing in dance and worked with Jin Xing Dance Theatre and Beijing Modern Dance Company. Since starting his company in 2008, it has toured throughout China, Sadler Wells (London), and the Lincoln Center (New York), amongst many other notable places, becoming a fixture on the World Dance market for avant-garde works out of China. Tao Dance Theatre's recent production *4* (2012) is a 30-minute kinetic work performed by four women whose faces are covered in black cloth.[3] They wear voluminous gray and black shirts and pants which puff around the body. The costumes consist of various wraps that tie around the waist. The movement is abstract in nature, with little references to concrete symbols or ideas. Even the costumes cover up physical references to gender, and the black masks on their face gloss over physical features. The sound score by composer Xiao He is similarly abstracted and draws from rhythmic bells and voices, singing and speaking indistinguishable sounds. The sounds produce a hyper-kinetic mood, as the rhythmic voices produce a consistent beat that syncopates at double the rate of a resting heart.

The movement is unrelenting as they are in constant motion. The four performers move in unison for the entire work. Sequences from bone to bone drive the movement, as multiple sequential directions ricochet throughout the body and stage. The movement primarily exists in internal circular momentums centered around the shoulders, head, and hips. From there, the sequence carries through the limbs and extends through space during the piece, leading into quick momentary extensions of the legs and arms. The internal energy also manifests in traversing the proscenium stage, as internal potential energy translates into kinetic energy. The movement and music together produce a highly formalist and abstracted piece.

The pure movement that leaves room for little rest produces a sense of exhaustion for the audience, as some critics have noted their own and other audience members' sense of fatigue[4] when watching. A critic for the *Financial Times* noted audience members walking out midway of the performance, while other critics have celebrated the hypnotic allure of "4." The physical demands are intense for the dancers, while for the audience, the piece becomes almost an endurance for watching something formally abstract – an endurance that can be captured through either exhaustion/boredom/leaving or an endurance that leads to being hypnotized and drawn in.

In other words, the viewers' affective responses to the piece range from exhaustion to excitement. These varied responses offer a gauge to understand such divergence in relation to works that fit under the rubric of world dance. Tao's choreography may or may not correspond to the hyper-virtuostic and aesthetic expectations surrounding Chinese bodies. On one extreme, the affective response of boredom and exhaustion possibly responds to what some may expect of Chinese bodies

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[3] The piece was originally intended for four women, but due to changes in casting, the piece has changed to 2 men and 2 women

[4] Apollinaire Scherr, "Tao Dance Theatre," *Financial Times* (July 26, 2012).

and virtuosity.   Chineseness is normally associated with a sense of hypervirtuosity.[5] Although "4" is precise in its execution, it often produces other responses such as boredom and exhaustion.   World dance exists within this range of affective responses, as Tao exemplifies how a non-Western, Chinese artist often circulates on the global dance circuit.

In "4," Tao produces a range of affects such as destabilization, precarity, indetermination, and excitement.   In other words, Tao produces an aesthetic zone of what can be considered merely interesting.   The piece operates in an affectivity of interesting, as it, according to Sianne Ngai, "waver[s] between the boring and the interesting".[6] The affective responses of critics greatly ranged from the bored to the compelled.   Thus, rather than arguing for a particular way of "reading" or "understanding" the dance, the range of affective registers of the piece situates how Chineseness operates within the larger framework of a supposed "universal" formalist aesthetic narrative.   This affective zone enables Tao to formulate a different sense of the universal, which I will return to upon further engagement with the interesting and affect.

The Interesting & Ethics

In *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Sianne Ngai develops interesting as an aesthetic category for our contemporary moment.   Through an investigation of the notion of interesting in theorists ranging from Schiller, Schlegel to Nicholas Luhmann, Ngai examines what the category of interesting, and its multiple attendant affects, means for literary and cultural criticism. According to Ngai, "'Interest' is [] a particularizing attachment to an object (one that endows it with empirical qualities); yet the feeling seems to have no qualities of its own."[7] She highlights an affective relationship to an object that involves a range of feelings and qualities.   Interesting operates here within a lower affective register.   Drawing from Silvan Tomkin's system of affects, Ngai builds upon Tomkin's interest-excitement affective range to reveal how "interest has the capacity for duration and recursion. In contrast to the once-and-for-allness of our experience of, say, the sublime, the object we find interesting is one we tend to come back to, as if the verify that it is *still* interesting. To judge something interesting is thus always, potentially, to find it interesting *again*."[8] Interesting creates an affective engagement of return for a viewer.

The range of affective registers, as tracked by critics' varied responses to the work, situates *4* as interesting.   *4* makes a viewer stop to remark on an object and return to it. In other words, the piece is remark-able. The interesting is less remarkable in the grand sense and more remark-able in a minor way where one takes notice but does not have a high intense reaction to an object. The virtuosity of flexible limbs maintain a viewer's attention, while the repetitive, formal structure might make some audiences bored or uninspired. Regardless of the intensity within one's reaction, one will always remark or take notice. *4*'s aesthetic of interesting has a low affective intensity; the work does not inspire grand passions of something being remarkable. Tao's use of the aesthetics of interesting and the production of a range of affective registers thus operates at a minor register; the goal of the work is to force one to remark, rather than to inspire or move (although this might occur

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[5] One sees this in the virtuostic performance by Chinese bodies in martial arts films and the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony of 2008.

[6] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 135.

[7] Ibid., 129.

[8] Ibid.,786.

within the range of responses). The production of the remark forces us to ask questions, rather than create pronouncements. It is within this stance of questioning that possibilities arise in reflecting on non-Western avant-garde practices in relation to modernized American-Euro traditions. The political and theoretical possibilities of the interesting and affect for Tao and other non-Western artists enables us to ask questions and make remarks rather than ascribing narratives and meaning.

To better understand the role of the category of interesting for Tao, consider the specific critical responses to *4*. The choreographer often uses repetition to create a minimalist and formalist aesthetic, provoking some to compare choreographer Tao Ye's works to Lucinda Childs, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, and other postmodern choreographers. As alluded to earlier, Tao Ye deploys the commonly-deployed rules of sequence-based movement, by which the momentum created by a lift of the leg articulates through the spine and into the rolling of the skull. This use sequenced patterns of movement places Tao Ye within a minimalist genealogy of modern and contemporary dance. Alastair Macauly of *The New York Times* orientalizes "4" while simultaneously situating it within a larger (white) postmodern legacy: "In "4" especially the movement combines the characteristics of Asian martial arts forms (tai chi not least) with the physicality of American postmodern dance or early Twyla Tharp choreography. (Those tics of the head and shoulder!) Human individuality is not the point. In each work the movement seems both involuntary and visceral: a powerful drive, like a collective unconscious onstage."[9] Tao is described in predictable ways for most choreographers emerging out of Asia, and Asian/American ones as well. These types of narratives about Eiko and Koma, Shen Wei, and other Asian American choreographers[10] have been a long part of modern and contemporary dance discourse; thus, I will not take up more space here to elaborate on the ways in which Asian/American choreographers are constantly held within a bind of acknowledged virtuostic formalism that is always framed in relation to Taichi, butoh, or martial arts. One could merely label this as Orientalist, which admittedly it may be. However, by simply calling something Orientalist, we tend to ignore what else lies in excess of such critiques.

When questioned on the influence of Eastern aesthetics, Tao often responds with a sense of universalism: "I believe that true art transcends geographical or cultural boundaries, and can touch people's hearts and influence the way people think regardless of its place of origin. It doesn't matter whether it's Western or Eastern. Trying to label something as either Western or Eastern only shows how limited human perception is. In my eyes, both [Taiwanese choreographer] Lin Hwai-min and Shen Wei are among the greatest artists of the era, and I have tremendous respect for them. I don't care about whether there are any preconceptions about my work because of what people think about them. I don't think that's very important."[11] Although Tao respects other Asian choreographers, he distances himself from a genealogy of Asian choreographers and privileges a sense of the universal.

It may be tempting to dismiss Macauly as Orientalist or to question the multicultural orientation of Tao's response. However, how might the remark, with its tendency to pause, reflect, and return, enable us to break from such temptations? The production of the remark through Tao's aesthetic of interesting offers a model by which to engage and think about his, and by extension other non-Western choreographers', work. What would it mean to take Macauly's comments at face value or to think through what Tao Ye might mean with his invocation of the universal? By engaging the aesthetic range of the interesting for Tao's movement, rather than assigning a singular aesthetic to

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[9] Alastair Macauly, "The Strength of (Small) Numbers," *New York Times* (July 26, 2012).
[10] See Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).
[11] Gia Kourlas, "Interview with Tao Ye," (last accessed March 24, 2013).

the work, we produce space to engage the subject and object of art in order to remark upon it, creating an ethical orientation to the work that opens up rather than forecloses or dismisses the artists' and reviewers' comments as either ideologically backwards or limited.

The remark pauses discourse and enables us to ask questions. Both Macauly and Tao Ye's comments direct us to questions regarding how world dance is constructed in relation to aesthetics and the universal. Macauly opens up space to think about Asian aesthetics ("martial arts") in relation to popular Western choreographers. In addition, the affective force, or "powerful drive," of the work directs us further to how world dance might operate outside of a sense of "human individuality." Tao Ye's retreat to a universal role of art produces questions around the existence of universals for non-Western artists. In other words, a reliance on the merely interesting, with its low affectivity, enables us to enter the piece in ways that take pause from the needed yet obvious critiques of Orientalism and universality. The interesting curates a different ethical orientation to the work – the remark. As Ngai explains, "'interesting' is that it inevitably diverts attention away from itself so as to throw the spotlight entirely on the question of its legitimation. […] when someone feels compelled to make public his evaluation of an object as interesting, we seem equally compelled to ask immediately: why?"[12] As interesting "extend[s] the period of the act of aesthetic evaluation," it enables us to remark (not in any remarkable fashion) but in a more limited way that ultimately "has the capacity to produce new knowledge."[13] The aesthetic of interesting for Tao produces a type of critical mode that questions in open ways; this ethical orientation does not rely on quickly denouncing a work nor recuperating it for its potentially resistant qualities. The interesting prolongs engagement and forces us to question as opposed to judge. The interesting allows us to see World Dance in its *construction*, rather than forcing the object to have a meaning or to be critiqued.

Remarking on World Dance

Through the aesthetic of interesting, we obtain a sense of how someone like Tao Ye and other World Dance artists are situated and constructed. Affect and the ability to remark from the aesthetic of interesting follow Marta Savigliano's call for a mode that first asks how as opposed to delving into denunciation. She shifts away from a predominantly representational politics of World Dance and directs us to the contextual formation of the category and the interest in World Dance: "What is legitimating this object [World Dance], and the ends (justifications) inscribed in it? What is arranging this desire to learn, and learn about world dance?"[14] Savigliano is less invested in defining world dance and concentrates on asking questions – the how and why one takes notice of world dance. Similar to Ngai, Savigliano takes pause to explore the contours of world dance's construction, limits, and excess. By questioning the construction of and interest in World Dance, the unevenness around the notion of the universal emerges. This ethical approach to a work is embedded in questions and understanding the limits of concepts, as opposed to denouncing the existence of such concepts.

The notion of World Dance has emerged throughout dance studies, with theorists emphasizing questions about authenticity, appropriation, and the limits of Western audiences. One could imagine

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[12] Ngai, 169.
[13] Ibid., 170.
[14] Marta Savigliano, "Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World," in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 178.

the responses to both Tao Ye and Macaulay, criticizing multiculturalist oversimplifications and Orientalist frameworks. A critical approach to World Dance has been steadily theorized within the field. Joann Kealiinohomoku's early work from 1969 on situating ballet as ethnic dance was a crucial space that sought to destabilize the Euro-American form as the presumed standard for dance.[15] Similar preoccupations have continued. More recently, Annanya Chatterjea's reappraisal of the category of contemporary dance in Asia engages similar questions: dance's presumed universality and the predominance of Western forms over non-Western.[16] The problem of universalism and movement shapes many recent explorations around dance and globalization. The debates around the category of "world dance" reveal the critical investment in questions surrounding representation, appropriation, and the moving body.[17]

In critiquing the category of contemporary Asian dance, Chatterjea writes: "What seems to be increasingly popular in the sphere of Asian "contemporary" dance is a kind of ventriloquism, where contemporary Asia finds its voice through the signifiers of Euro-American modern/postmodern, the latter passing once again as the neutral universal, which is able to contain all difference."[18] Scholars often focus on the representational politics of universal aesthetics, where Asia represents itself through indexes of Euro-American formalism as a presumed universal. Chatterjea is aware of the problems surrounding notions of tradition and artistic "freedom." Her critiques often rely upon the way "choices are political, [and] that bodies come with visual histories and contracts."[19] Inherent in her analysis is a reliance on representational politics. Although such approaches are fully valid, what would it mean to expand the analytic repertoire for non-Western performance through affect and the category of interesting. Representational analysis for dance has been important, as exemplified by Ann Cooper Albright's influential *Choreographing Difference*. Cooper Albright is focused on a "process of unraveling the various meanings of movement images, physical bodies, and cultural identities."[20] She wants to show meaning from images and experiences, or what can be called representation.

The interesting and the remark shift the ethical orientations we have to moving bodies – an orientation that questions rather than making a work remarkable for its representational potential, such as resistance or challenges to global capitalism. Through the aesthetics of the interesting and its attendant affective relations, we catalyze a process of remarking and questioning which shifts our ethical orientations to objects, dances, bodies, and movement. Critiques by Cooper Albright, Chatterjea, and others have been extremely fruitful in developing critiques of colonialist and imperialist logics with regards to movement. However, affect as a methodology for dance produces more modest accounts of world dance through the remark. Tao Ye's *4* cannot operate with a resistant potential.

The ethical stance of the "remark" is one I am privileging over critique or denunciation. Remarking attends to the surface and contours of a work rather than trying to give the definitive reading of a piece. Rather than defaulting to discourses of self-orientalization and mimicry by artists, the remark

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[15] Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Culture*, ed. Ann Cooper Albright and Ann Dils (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), 33-43.

[16] Annanya Chatterjea, "On the Value of Mistranslations and Contaminations: The Category of "Contemproary Choreography" in Asian Dance," in *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 1 (2013), 4-21.

[17] See Foster, *Worlding Dance*.

[18] Chatterjea, 11.

[19] Ibid.,12.

[20] Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997).

explores additional critiques that examine the construction of Orientalism and mimicry for world dance. The ethical stance of remarking offers the art object space to breathe before we automatically assign narratives to it. This differential relationship to the object is less invested in recuperating its power as either resistant or contextually rich. Although both notions have been crucial maneuvers for world dance, I propose that we ask "what else?" What else exists beyond the parameters of recuperation and context? What other orientations to works may be less grand and what emerges from these less grand positions?

When Savigliano argues that "identity politics has turned from a source of organization and mobilization for those disempowered into a dangerous ideological device in the hands of Empire,"[21] she directs us to the limits of representation and identity. The questions around the construction of world dance, enabled by remarking, direct us away from the politics of identity and representation towards an ethical stance of the reparative. Sedgwick's reparative reading practices and literary theory's recent appraisal of surface reading by Heather Love, Stephen Best, and others opens up new orientations for dance studies. The literary turn towards affect, surface, and the reparative speak directly to some of these questions that have been long-standing in dance studies. We find some close and unexpected bedfellows for the field of dance studies within literary scholarship through this turn towards affect and ethics. As both surface and reparative reading draw from affect studies, differentiations between the internal and external relationship between object, body, and other emerge. When dance and affect are theorized together, we produce more complex relations between the body and language and new methods for dance itself in engaging its object. Thus, this dissertation has thus far engaged these dynamics around movement, the body, affect, ethics, and the remark. In this intermission, I have made such investments more transparent in order to further understand the contours, approaches, and ethics of *minor china*.

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[21] Savigliano, 183.

CHAPTER 4: LINGERING
Meditation & Duration in Zhang Huan & He Chengyao's Performance Art

Both Zhang Huan's *12 Square Meters* (1994) and He Chengyao's *99 Needles* (2002) have become emblematic of contemporary Chinese performance art, as theorists generally frame and understand these works as forms of endurance art that present modes of resistance to state practices and gendered norms.[1] Noted Chinese art historian Wu Hung has described *12 Square Meters* as "combin[ing] personal experience with a social critique".[2] In various exhibitions of *99 Needles*, curators describe the work as emblematic of critiques of the Chinese state and oppressive gendered norms. Such critiques theorize He Chengyao within a feminist mode of recuperation that contends with the traumas of family and the Cultural Revolution. Although these interventions and framings have been crucial, they often replicate an understanding of the Chinese, non-Western other, as situated in resistive practices against backwards state and cultural practices, ignoring more nuanced formulations of contemporary China. The dimensions of breath, feeling, affect, and other seemingly minor details are eschewed in light of discourses on the Chinese state, tradition, and politics, while such minor dimensions have been easily situated in relation to Western artworks.

This chapter explores the methodological possibilities of utilizing the minor frames of breath and affect for the Chinese artists Zhang Huan and He Chengyao. Through the haptic feel of breath produced through the practice of meditation, I reframe notions of endurance away from conscious forms of resistance and towards confusion and less determined modes of consciousness. I utilize the minor analytics of affect, meditation, and breath to renegotiate how resistance and consciousness are constituted. Meditation reframes dominant Marxist formulations of consciousness, critically engaging the possibilities of failure, play, and melancholy in lieu of overt agentic 'resistance'. By offering meditation to reveal the varying degrees of consciousness, I rework this idea beyond notions of intention and awareness. Rather than reinforcing a binary between awareness and non-awareness—true consciousness and false consciousness—the concept of meditation offers ways to track different dispositions, modes of apprehension that emphasize relationality, play, and a variety of other pervasive, if 'minor', affects.

Narratives of endurance and resistance problematically limit contemporary Chinese art, placing the works in what China studies scholar Lydia Liu locates as the "single possibility: resistance."[3] I attribute this problematic to the ways resistance is deeply imbricated with dominant Western theoretical notions of agency, consciousness, and performed action. When resistance becomes the dominant frame to understand non-Western artists, we limit other possibilities for ways of being and existing. More specifically, when the imaginative possibilities of the non-Western other is reduced to conscious critique, we are unable to explore alternative forms of imagination that may not be fully understood within a critical theoretical emphasis on demystification and that provide different modes of knowing. Furthermore, within such accounts of consciousness and resistance, the subject

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[1] Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 107; Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2007); Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); and Alexa Olesen, "Making Art of Masochism and Tests of Endurance," *The New York Times* (Nov. 11, 2001).
[2] Wu, *Transience*, 107.
[3] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity - China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

is presumed to embody an able, normative, holistic sense of being.[4]   By renegotiating consciousness and resistance, we destabilize such ableist orientations surrounding cognition.

Consciousness is crucial to unpack because of its theoretical and political implications. Within the academic and journalistic accounts of the United State's decline in relation to China's "rise," China is often depicted as possessing economic and industrial strength due to its hyperproductivity while lacking one key component "unique" to the West: ingenuity.   Although China is understood as lacking creativity, it simultaneously possesses a work ethic that enables the hyper-execution of action. This dual image of China's uncreative diligence perpetuates a racially inflected ideology, one that arises from Western Enlightenment constructions of China as its regressive other.[5] New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman echoes this essentializing logic in a 2005 article: "Even the Chinese will tell you that they've been good at making the next new thing, and copying the next new thing, but not imagining the next new thing."[6] He goes on to explain how the Chinese tech industry has identified and is trying to develop creative capital amongst its workers, positing the imagination as at once the source of the West's current sense of superiority and its future anxiety in relation to China.   Within this shift from Fordist to post-Fordist economies, scholars note how the line between play/games and labor collapses, where the imagination becomes a dominant mode by which the privileged forms of immaterial labor arises.[7] Immateriality relies upon the imagination to produce, in positivistic ways, new ideas that benefit the entrepreneurial spirit of post-Fordism. In other words, the imagination is often figured within the individual who has conscious thoughts that can be logically rationalized or scientifically verified.[8] This trope circulates in areas like education,[9] business,[10] and discourses of the body. Chinese bodies are viewed as robotic automatons yet capable of performing as hyper-flexible gymnasts or large masses moving in unison as seen in the Beijing

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[4] I deliberately draw here from disability studies to question the normative operations around consciousness. Drawing from Foucault's earlier work on institutionalization and normality, disability studies has a begun to focus on normative formations around the mind. Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Ellen Samuels, "Cripping Anti-Futurity, or, If You Love Queer Theory So Much, Why Don't You Marry It?" available online http://ahead.org/SDS/...16/.../Samuels,%20Cripping%20Anti%20Futurity.doc; and Jasbir Puar, "The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints," *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 18.1 (Fall 2011): 149-158.

Furthermore, critiques from disability studies on our dependency on modes of visualization ("seeing the problems"), which are inherent within demystification discourse, are crucial for this analysis. Through my emphasis on different modes of consciousness, I attempt to utilize other modes of sensing problems outside of the visual, feeling/affect/mood, movement, and sensation, in order to rework the dominance of the visual and its presumptions of clarity and coherence. I do not eschew visuality, as I am certainly focused on visual culture; however, I seek to work within and outside of visuality to draw from multi-sensory modes. In addition, I utilize disability studies to draw out relationships with critical race theory.

[5] Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Larissa Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[6] Thomas Friedman, "From Gunpowder to the Next Big Bang," *New York Times* (Nov. 4, 2005).

[7] Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 12; Patrick Jagoda, "Gamification and Other Forms of Play," *boundary 2* 40:2 (2013); and Ian Bogost, "Gamification is Bullshit," *The Atlantic,* August 2011.

[8] Although I will not delve into it here, the role of gendered relations is important within this nexus of post-Fordism, affect, and the imagination.   See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[9] "Chinese Schools 'Kill Imagination," *States News Service* (Aug.18, 2009); Emily Eakin, "Writing as a Block for Asians," *New York Times* (May 3, 2003); and Friedman, "From Gunpowder to the Next Big Bang".

[10] Richard Florida, Charlotta Melander, and Haifeng Qian, "Creative China? The University, Human Capital, and the Creative Class in Chinese Regional Development" http://martinprosperity.org/media/creative_china_october_2008.pdf (last visited April 30, 2011); "China In Search of Imagination," *New York Times* (November 26, 2006).

Olympics.   Western discourses on contemporary art from China took on this tone during the 90's, accusing artists of being derivative of the West.[11] Chinese artists were framed as lacking innovation and only capable of copying Western ingenuity. These narratives further inscribe the Chinese as lacking "true" imagination and creativity while they succeed in copying Western "ingenuity." Thus, expanding the theoretical understanding of imagination/consciousness beyond dominant notions of agency illuminate these problematic discourses in relation to the Chinese.

After examining how consciousness, performance, and resistance have been theorized in relation to one another, I then provide additional modes of consciousness within meditation in the works of Zhang Huan and He Chengyao. Beyond enduring through pain and performing resistance, I offer lingering, emerging from the practice of meditation, as a different mode of existing within time, apart and different from the normative mode of endurance often attributed to Chinese artists. Lingering exists within what Henri Bergson locates within duration, an experience in time that is "pure mobility" and heterogeneous. Meditation and lingering embody Bergson's sense of duration as "a succession of states each of which announces what follows and contains what precedes."[12] Within Bergson's formulation of duration and my theorizations of lingering, consciousness becomes more amorphous and indeterminate than current neoliberal understandings of the term and its related articulations (concepts like creativity, imagination, and ingenuity). I conclude by exploring the political possibilities of meditation and lingering for contemporary Chinese art and performance as they relate to both Zhang Huan and He Chengyao. In particular, Zhang and He rework political failure in relation to historical injury, trauma, and pain.   Throughout my analysis, I resist ascribing overt political narratives to the art works and rather swim within their moods, moments, and affects in order to explore the theoretical implications of such an analytic shift.

Consciousness & the Chinese

In photos taken by noted photographer and frequent collaborator Rong Rong, Zhang Huan rests in a moment of stasis in between multiple extreme states. During the afternoon heat of the summer, he sits naked on top of a public toilet in the less developed outskirts of Beijing. With Zhang Huan's head seemingly finding balance on top of his slightly curved spine, the weight of his body gravitates downwards on top of his crossed legs which rest on a toilet seat.   The counterbalance of his upward-sensing spine against the weightedness of his sitting provides a sense of stasis, as his closed eyes further this in-between state.   This sense of precarious balance, reflection, and being in a moment is augmented by Zhang Huan's lack of reaction to the swarm of flies stuck onto and around his honey and fish oil smeared body.   The horde of flies makes the viewer aware of the intense stench of shit that permeates the seemingly serene moment that Zhang Huan inhabits. In other archival photos of the event, one sees used bits of toilet paper left along the floor, providing a deeper sense of the tactile sensation of flies on the skin, along with the summer heat and the smell of urine and feces. The photograph captures a single moment of the 40-minute performance. Although both the photograph and the performance present a breathing stasis *in media res*, the performance offers a richer sense of Zhang's being in the present moment – the passing of time and

[11] One can see this in the lack of scholarship on ingenuity in contemporary Chinese art and the earlier focus on how the artwork is tied to tradition and established notions of "Chinese'ness." Vishakha Desai discusses this trend in her introduction to the edited collection of *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*. Vishakha Desai, *Asian Art in the Twenty-First Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[12] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Dover: Dover Publications, 2010), 192.

the practice of stasis. This is not to privilege the live event over photography for capturing the ephemerality of his work; rather, performance reminds us of the long, lingering duration within which he sits and remains.[13]

In discourses on Zhang Huan, he is often discussed as possessing a political agenda or program that demystifies and reveals the problems with China's rapid "rise" during the late 20th century, with his endurance art presumably critiquing the rural/urban divides in the rapidly shifting neoliberalizing space of China.[14]   The artist is conceptualized as a knowing, aware subject who is fully conscious of the problems that surround him. From this standpoint, he performs resistance through his endurance-based performances. In other words, Zhang turns into a subject of demystification by becoming conscious of problems and actively performing resistance through endurance. This framework elides the sense of internal meditation and breath within the photo documentation and performance.

Zhang and other Chinese artists are situated within the norm of stable consciousness, as they perform the dominant mode of critique within critical theory: demystification. Paul Ricoeur locates the practice of demystification in Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx[15], and Friedrich Nietschze. Ricoeur reflects that "the *Genealogy of Morals* in Nietschze's sense, the theory of ideologies in the Marxist sense, and the theory of ideals and illusions in Freud's sense represent three convergent procedures of demystification"[16] that counteract the Cartesian reliance upon a stable consciousness. As Ricoeur argues, although all three are invested in deciphering hidden ideologies, they nonetheless maintain consciousness as being fully aware. In other words, although these important theories undo Enlightenment presumptions of a stable consciousness, the paradigm of demystification relies upon consciousness to remain stable in order to produce critique. This consciousness merely redirects its "powers" and potential towards unveiling society's ills and does not complicate the notion of consciousness itself. Rather than following ideology, consciousness for Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche instead follows ideology's problems. Within this equation, consciousness remains constant while its critical focus varies.

Rather than perpetuating the presumptions of demystification (although I have greatly benefitted from its analytics), it is necessary to unravel consciousness as it is a driving force for the paradigm of demystification. Drawing from new materialist philosophy, Rey Chow directs us to this dominant relationship between consciousness and radical politics, where material change "is conceived of as, or analogized with, agency — more precisely, an agency of motion and transformation, an agency aimed at an increasingly *better* (that is, more advanced, more enlightened, and more democratic) world."[17]   In this formulation, "materialism/materiality (understood as human activity), change

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[13] This is not to privilege the live event over photography for capturing an ephemerality of his work; rather, performance offers a reminder of the long, lingering feeling within which he sits.

[14] Wu Hung, *Transcience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 107; Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 1997).

[15] In classic Marxist terms, the imagination is one's agency to gain consciousness of class alienation. In the first preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx famously states "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." In Marx's formulation, one's consciousness is formulated by one's social situation. In other words, Marx relates the conscious mind to one's being, where one obtains class consciousness through one's alienation and experience. Thus, consciousness becomes the ability to become aware and understand these problematic class dynamics.

[16] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). 34.

[17] Rey Chow, "The Elusive Material, What the Dog Doesn't Understand" in *New Materialisms*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 223.

(understood as progress), and agency"[18] are intertwined as forms of action (resistance and activity) that arise from conscious intent. Chow reconceptualizes the notion of "a unified "being" with a rational "mind" or "consciousness."[19] This equation between consciousness, agency, and resistance is crucial to rework as it structures how Chinese artists, like Zhang and He, are understood as agents of demystification, further perpetuating an understanding of these artists as resistant, stable subjects. As such, it is now crucial to find an alternate framework. Lydia Liu agrees. She elaborates on "the irony that, in the very act of criticizing Western domination, one often ends up reifying the power of the dominator to a degree that the agency of non-Western cultures is reduced to a single possibility: resistance."[20] Although such critiques have been critical for Chinese cultural studies and, more generally, discourses surrounding non-Western cultural production, there has been less of an elaboration on the particular modalities and states of consciousness that help us think outside of this resistance and consciousness arithmetic.

Working within similar philosophical orientations, Jane Bennett questions demystification as it "tends to screen from view the vitality of matter and to reduce *political* agency to *human* agency."[21] In such a formulation, Bennett pushes for non-human objects to matter, which reveals our theoretical assumptions around a normative form of human agency. However, some humans have been imagined as lacking human and political agency. For Bennett, the stakes in problematizing demystification are to destabilize the primacy we place in the human. Although the Chinese are certainly human, they have not always been imagined as such. As part of the mysterious Orient, China has been racialized as the West's unknowable other. China and its citizens become an object that requires translation for the West. In other words, China has been theorized as less human, lacking agency and requiring demystification. As such, demystification augments the racialized contours of Bennett's critique by expanding her questioning of demystification to racialized subjects. With an understanding of the Chinese as subhuman object, Bennett's insights on the import of accounting for the vitality of matter become ever more critical in terms of race.

Meditation & Consciousness

In *12 Square Meters*, Zhang sits in silence, with eyes closed, in a public toilet on the outskirts of Beijing. The size of the toilet area is precisely 12 square meters. He sits on top of the toilet, naked, and smeared in honey; flies congregate around his exposed, sticky flesh while he sits for about an hour. The vibrations from the flies' sonic buzzes and physical contact on Zhang's body produce sensations for the artist to sit with and through. Born in 1965, Zhang is often cited as one of the main performance artists in China, as he was quite active in the development of an art scene in Beijing's East Village. His works span performance, sculpture, and photograph, as he continues to be based out of New York and Shanghai. Born around the same time as Zhang in 1964 in Chongqing in Sichuan Province, He Chengyao graduated from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in painting in 1989. Similar to Zhang, her most notable works have included performance art, in which she produced 20 pieces between 2001-6. In "Mother and I," made in 2001, she took her first set of photographs with her mother. He's mother sits in front of her on a chair, with a white cloth covering her from the stomach down. Her mother's chest is exposed, while He stands behind her

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[18] Ibid., 224.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Liu, *Translingual Practice,* xv-xvi.
[21] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xv.

with hands resting on her mother's shoulders. They peer into the camera lens as if they are taking a family portrait – slightly serious but relaxed. He was born at the start of the Cultural Revolution, and, like many, her father was relocated to a labor camp. He's mother supported the family alone, since her mother and father were not married. Due to such stresses, her mother fell into depression and her family believed her to have a mental illness since she would periodically bare her chest in public. This led to her family forcing "treatment," including a coerced round of acupuncture. In response to witnessing this as a child, He utilized performance to ponder the multiple themes of her mother's experiences: the effects of the Revolution and the trope of the hysterical women needing treatment. He reperforms her mother's treatment in *99 Needles*. He presents a physically uncomfortable situation involving 99 acupuncture needles inserted into her upper torso and head; she reenacts a traumatic experience that happened to her mother. These needles pierce her skin; she eventually faints from overstimulation.

These artists have both discussed religious practice and explicitly referenced Buddhism in relation to some of their works. [22] Practices of meditation, as theorized from vernacular culture and religion, emerge. Through breath and meditation, the vibrations from the flies and the puncture from needles are enfolded into their corporeal experiences. The physical sensations become part of their present moment, as opposed to an external challenge they must endure. They linger, sit, and breathe with such haptic sensations in order to cultivate a deeper sense of being in the present moment, rather than waiting to end their durational performance. In other words, breath and meditation situate these works as modes of practice that are more about lingering within the moment and less about performing from start to finish. The experience of time shifts from marking a duration to locating oneself in the present. By shifting understandings of time in this way, experience and consciousness become located in more confused and less precise formulations.

Through discourses of endurance art, the Chinese are usually framed as experiencing time in finite ways, from beginning to end. Such performances situate these artists as resisting pain during a duration, where such a performance of resistance reveals an agency that arises from consciousness of political problems. This equation of consciousness of politics, agency to critique, and the performance of resistance is embedded in how we frame Zhang Huan and He Chengyao as agents of demystification. Furthermore, this equation informs the logic of endurance art and durational performance because the Chinese are usually framed within a limited understanding of both conscious agency and performed resistance. By focusing on a different experience with time through breath and meditation, we complicate the paradigm of demystification. Time disintegrates as a finite durational experience and becomes a momentary practice of being present within a moment. These artists experience time as located in a lingering and indeterminate present, as opposed to within the finite moments of the past or a future end.

An understanding of meditation from Buddhist texts and the latter works of Michel Foucault and Eve Sedgwick offer insights into meditation as an epistemological and minor analytic. Meditation offers alternative modes to the dominant forms of consciousness/imagination that shape the

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[22] Zhang Huan has increasingly referenced Buddhism in his later works during the early 21st century, such as *Dharma Circle* (2004) and *Berlin Buddha* (2007). Thus, to discuss *12 Square Meters* (1994) in relation to Buddhism is not meant to show how Buddhism has been a concern for Zhang Huan since early on. I instead utilize the framework of meditation, informed by popular religious conceptions, to helps us rethink some of the limited ways of discussing Zhang and his work. Similarly, He Chengyao has referenced Buddhism in some of her latter works and in addition to her performance practice, although she has not spoken explicitly about it with regards to *99 Needles*.

resistance narratives of the Chinese. As discussed in the introduction, Buddhism in relation to critical theory and Orientalist critique exists inside and out of an Orientalist framework. To engage Buddhism is to negotiate how secularism and critical theory often pre-prescribes the conditions of non-Western situations. Thus, this use of Buddhism is meant to work at this intersection. Buddhism brings to the fore tensions that arise between Asian or Area Studies and Asian American Studies. Although we've been trained to historicize non-Western sites, we nonetheless resist the idea of difference for fear of being essentialist. However, these non-Western sites have differently become, in the Deleuzian sense. China has become from a distinct history, which does not demand particularity but rather requires a renegotiation of the terms that structure how we understand the non-Western other (a primary function of the minor method). Dismissing a turn to Eastern practice as "orientalist" is too easy an answer and perpetuates the secular assumptions of critical theory. In other words, in utilizing meditation as an additional epistemological framework by which to rethink categories like cognition, agency, and the subject, I revise the operating presumptions of theoretical production. M. Jacqui Alexander emphasizes how religious practices exist not as "cultural retention and survival," but as a means "to get inside of the meaning of the spiritual as epistemological, that is, to pry open the terms, symbols, and organizational codes."[23] Through my invocation of Buddhism in relation to transnational feminism, I bring to the fore not only the presumed secularism of "theory," but also the tensions between Area/Asian studies and Asian American studies. Both fields have very different positions on ideas like tradition. Buddhism placed in relation with an understanding of gender and racialization works within the tensions of these two fields to produce different practices of reading, theorizing, and relating. Buddhism in relation to critical theory touches the contours of spiritualism within Zhang and He's respective works in order to take pause from Orientalist and essentialist critiques.

Meditation is a mode of imagination that refrains from rapid judgment; meditation experiments and lingers outside of the finite temporality that typically structures time and art. Meditation is not a form of imagination that provides consciousness of power or class alienation; instead, meditation lingers and expands political possibilities and forms of critique. Although diverse in form, meditation within the Buddhist tradition involves multiple genealogies yet most stress how meditation involves "a set of practices or experiments in awareness that are performed with an enormous amount of rigor."[24] A sense of practice emerges from the ways Zhang and He's bodies are trained within the act of sitting and the sensations on their bodies (flies, sounds, and needles).

In preparation for *12 Square Meters,* Zhang tested different food products to smear onto his body in order to maximize the number of flies that would sit on his skin. Along with a practice that involved sitting in the stench of a public toilet in the middle of the summer, he worked his ability to sit with the tactile sensation of hundreds of flies crawling on his body. These itches and the buzzing of flies on his face and around his ears make one aware of multiple sensations beyond the visual. Such tactile, olfactory, and auditory sensations place Zhang in a space of practice and training. For Zhang, his performance is less about enduring through pain from start to finish; rather, his use of breath through discomfort inspire a sense of practice and being with pain.

Similarly, He Chengyao's body is covered with needles. Acupuncture needles usually feel like pinches on the body's surface; however, the contact of needles with nerve centers underneath the skin's surface creates another level of sensation. The intensity of contact on the surface and inside

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[23] M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 293.

[24] Ken Wilber, "Foreword," in *The Experience of Meditation*, ed. Jonathan Spear (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2006), xi.

of He's body increases this sense of practice, as she sits through such multi-layered punctures. He presents a physically intense situation involving needles inserted into her upper torso and lower body. The performance spans the time to insert the needles (20 minutes); the performance did not occur in front of an audience – only photo documentation remains. Upon the acupuncturist finishing the insertion of needles, the intense blood circulation, along with a poorly placed needle in her wrist, made her faint. The Brooklyn Museum includes this piece in their Feminist art section. In identifying the work as feminist and Chinese, the museum and other art spaces continually situate the work to personal and historic traumas. Through He's embodiment of pain, she engages a sense of practice. Acupuncture usually feels like pinches on the body's surface; however, the needles come in contact with nerve centers underneath the skin's surface, creating another level of sensation. He practices and trains to work through the haptic feel of needles onto and into the body. She lingers within sensations to become present. Practice engages both the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of experience. As a reperformance of her mother's treatment, He is not merely enduring her mother's pain. Rather, she practices within it. In additional photos of the performance, one witnesses her acupuncturist inserting needles into her face. As a reperformance, He renegotiates the insertion of needles from one based on coercion to engaged practice.

Alan Klima's striking anthropological accounts of meditation and death in Thailand in *The Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* offers a nuanced phenomenological account of what meditation as a repeated, cultivated practice involves. Although Thailand comes from a different context and strands of Thai Buddhism emerge differently from those in China, his phenomenological descriptions of meditation as practice offer some key insights: "One begins by sitting still and noticing the active sensations of breaths as they are occurring in the present moment. To aid in this notice, one chooses a single point of contact […] The common simile has it that the breath is like a saw, which moves back and forth on a piece of wood, but through it is always moving back and forth, it makes contact continuously on the same, unmoving spot…. The purpose is to be awake, to awaken […] Unfortunately, our minds are not ours to control and do with just as we will […]"[25] From such concentration, one is able to "shatte[r] the barriers between the mind and a single object of its attention [which] is jhana. In jhana the mind impinges upon its own object of attention and fascination."[26] Zhang and He's practices engage in these cognitive modes that move beyond intention and demystification; they linger within sensations and feelings in order to practice being present, in the moment. Meditation as a practice situates *12 Square Meters* and *99 Needles* beyond endurance. Practice engages both the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of experience.

In addition to the notion of practice, meditation provides states of being where one becomes "present, so replete with awareness, that no idea of past or future can enter."[27] Traditional notions of time are destabilized through repeated practice. Traditional subject-object distinctions are similarly reworked. Within Taoist Qigong and other traditions, delineations between the self, nature, and others are blurred as one's body is connected to a larger metaphysical entity or force. He Chengyao's practice engages the destabilization of such categories. He re-performs a violent event that was previously forced upon her mother, as a mode of mental health training. He meditates within her (re)enactment of pain, enfolding her individual body into that of her mother's. The borders around time and their bodies temporarily destabilize to reconstitute He Chengyao's sense of

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[25] Alan Klima, *Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 177.

[26] Ibid., 178.

[27] Shodo Harada Roshi, "Zazen Meditation in Japanese Rinzai Zen," in *Zen Training* (Boston: Tuttle, 2002), 12.

self. Feminist Buddhist scholar Anne Klein describes this reconstitution through meditation: "experience of mind and body as only a seething flow of sensations is a dismembering of the self. But there is also a remembering, a bringing together, in the sense that mind and self are reconstituted for one's experience." [28] Meditation blurs subject and object distinctions in ways that help reconstitute one's sense of being. Klein balances both the instability and sense of self-making from meditation: "Some feminist make a case for referring to "woman" as an essentialized category when this is useful for political purposes, even though they recognize this term as a fiction. In contrast to such strategic essentialism, Buddhist theories and practices envision a subject for whom groundlessness *and* a sense of the constructed nature of self can be simultaneous, so that there is never a necessity to "choose" strategically between them. There is place and possibility for both."[29] He Chengyao engages in this attempt at groundlessness (as bodies and time merge with that of her mother's), along with the construction of the self (through practice). Although He is certainly performing a feminist critique of historically gendered dynamics that police women and different forms of cognitive ability, she also expands the possibilities of feminist critique through meditation. Such an expansion emerges from the practice of meditation as a source of destabilizing the presumed stability and borders surrounding self and other, subject and object.

Within critical theory, similar concerns around meditation as practice and changes in temporality and subject-object relations have become central to various projects. Both Michel Foucault and Eve Sedgwick turned to theorizations of meditation during the latter part of their lives. For Foucault, this involved a turn to forms of meditation in the Stoics; for Sedgwick, this involved Tibetan Buddhist practices. In Foucault's last two lectures, he shifts his primary concerns away from defining power or knowledge and directs it to the question of "What are we in our actuality?"[30] He relies on discourses from the eighteenth century and the Stoics, as these two schools were concerned with the formation of the self. Without abandoning epistemological concerns, Foucault primarily situates these epistemological questions in relation to an intellectual trajectory of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Weber, amongst others, to explore one's ontological status. Foucault distinguishes technologies of the self from technologies of production (objects), signs (meaning and signification), and power (organizing individuals). Meditation is a technology of the self, "which permit[s] individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."[31]

In Foucault's formulation, meditation becomes a different form of consciousness that is not structured around resistance to power - it involves multiplicity and openness. Foucault clarifies that care of the self is "not of the body but of the soul."[32] In order to care for the soul, one "cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror. Thus, it must contemplate the divine element. In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action."[33] Foucault uncovers practices of "meditation and preparation" from Stoic practices in Plato's *Alcibiades* which involved "to study, to read, to prepare

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[28] Anne Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self* (New York: Snow Lion, 2008), 67.
[29] Ibid., 68-69.
[30] Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals" in *Technologies of the Self* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 145.
[31] Ibid., 18.
[32] Ibid., 25.
[33] Ibid.

for misfortune or death."[34]   The Latin term *melete*, meaning meditation, is one of the techniques of self where one must "[i]magin[e] the articulation of possible events to test how you would react[35]" and that which "trains thought."[36]   Meditation is a training or practice of self-making.   Foucault similarly connects meditation to the Orient and the privileging of reflection over action: "This technology of self-examination of Oriental origins, dominated by obedience and contemplation, is much more concerned with thought than with action."[37]

Sedgwick more explicitly draws from "oriental" discourse for her theorizations on meditation. In the edited collection of Sedgwick's later talks and essays, *The Weather in Proust*, Sedgwick is preoccupied with Buddhism and its relationship to critical theory. Sedgwick felt strong connections between Buddhism and Proust: "I've learned to look in Buddhism for something I now realize I've always found in Proust: a mysticism that, unlike many uses of Buddhism, is made up out of dailiness; a mysticism that doesn't depend on so-called mystical experiences; that doesn't rely on the esoteric or occult, bur rather on simple, material metamorphoses as they are emulsified with language and meaning."[38]   Similar to Foucault and religious theorists on meditation, Sedgwick focuses on meditation as a practice. Meditation becomes a different form of consciousness that is not structured around resistance. In order to care for the soul, one "cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror…it must contemplate the divine element."[39]   Similar to He's embodiment of the wound and pain, she does not endure through and mirror her mother's pain; rather, she reperforms it within her own self (as a mirror) in order to contemplate within it. He and Foucault invest in a practice that produces an ethics that is cultivated by being present. As exemplified by Zhang and He, it is only through self cultivation and breath that meditation becomes a way to help destabilize dominant modes of knowing and being within time. These artists, Sedgwick, and Foucault invest in a practice and self-training that does not produce immediate political critique, but rather an ethics and care that is cultivated by being with the present.

Lingering in Duration

With a focus on meditation in these performances, the notions of time-based and durational art come to the fore. Through the framework of history, the state, and trauma, most imagine He's and Zhang's performances, and other body-based performers, as endurance artists. However, through meditation, I destabilize endurance by situating the artist beyond a mode of consciously critiquing historical pain. Endurance and its related terms, durational and time-based, are often discussed in gender neutral and colorblind ways, although the practices are often understood in relation to white and masculinist norms. In particular, most cite the works of Vito Acconci and David Hall in framing time-based practice, which emphasizes this sense of a racialized and gendered genealogy. The term time-based purportedly first arose in print in artists David Hall's writing during the early 1970's. He utilized the term as a phrase to accommodate the shift away from object-based art into time-based mediums such as film, video, performance, and sound. In addition, his "use of the term was intended to encompass any work structured specifically as a durational experience."[40]   Hall

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[34] Ibid., *27*.
[35] Ibid., 36.
[36] Ibid., 37.
[37] Ibid., 45.
[38] Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, 113.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Joanne Heatwole, "Media of Now: Interview with David Hall," in *Afterimage* 36, no. 1 (2008), 14.

emphasizes a shift in relation to the notion of the object, where seemingly ephemeral forms became generative to the formation of time-based as a category. Although this narrative is currently complicated with the commodification of film, sound, and performance via distribution, media, marketing/branding, and photography, it provides a sense of the relationship between time and objects where the latter seems to dwindle with the rise of the former. Additionally, the notion of duration that time-based art relies upon is one that implies a finite moment, revealing a normative sense of duration. This normative sense of time is structured around a beginning, middle, and end. Teleology structures trauma and performances of resistance from the development of thought (beginning) to performed action (end): one becomes conscious of the negative event, has agency to act, and then performs endurance or critique. Durational and time-based art are associated with the category of endurance, as they both are framed within ideas of agency. Patrick Anderson provides a sense of this finitude as he connects duration to a work's "life spans that hinge on their eventual disappearance."[41]

Furthermore, durational and time-based art are normally associated with the category of endurance art, as they both are framed within ideas of consciousness and agency. The notion of endurance art has been connected to masculinist practices. Anderson has explored the "spectacular imbrication of endurance and masculinity" in his study of male self-starvation practices.[42] Endurance implicates not only gender but also race. Masculinist discourse often structures racialized subjects.[43] Thus, the whiteness and masculinity of endurance influence how we imagine non-Western subjects within the form of endurance art. Endurance may be an aspect of these works; however, the label of endurance often intertwines non-Western subjects into the paradigm of demystification. This neglects different forms of enduring that occur, particularly within the practice of meditation. Endurance itself is racialized and gendered within a white masculine cognitive ability that normalizes the category of endurance, limiting how otherness can be understood.

Situating the works of Zhang and He in relation to meditation (as opposed to resistance and agency), questions the normative foundations of time-based as a conceptual category. Since meditation changes our understanding of how we experience time from developmental to unstable and less determined, the practice of breathing undoes the category of time-based art. As a practice, meditation involves reconceptualizing one's relationship to time. Meditation offers a culturally specific possibility of what time-based could mean.

Past and current temporalities collapse in He Chengyao's performance. The re-embodiment of her mothers' experiences involves a meditative[44] practice that offers He the opportunity to feel, think, and reflect on her own mothers' past. Time becomes flexible, as He's present practice enfolds into her mother's previous trauma. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* describes how practices of meditation provide "a sense that all moments of existence are 'between' moments, unstable, fluid, and transformable into liberated enlightenment experience."[45] Meditation provides states of being where one becomes "present, so replete with awareness, that no idea of past or future can enter."[46] In the

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[41] Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 92.

[42] Ibid., 60.

[43] *See* David Eng, *Racial Castration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[44] Meditation can be differentiated from the adjective meditative, as the former implies a mode of being while the latter implicates a state. Meditation as a mode is what allows lingering to occur; meditative action can occur in either the acts of lingering or enduring. I utilize the adjective meditative here to refer to meditation practices.

[45] Robert Thurman, trans., *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Boston: Bantam Books, 1993), 34.

[46] Shodo Harada Roshi, 12.

words of Alexander, "the embodiment of the Sacred dislocates clock time, meaning linearity, which is different than living in the past or being bound by tradition… Time becomes a moment…experienced in the now, but also a space crammed with moments of wisdom about an event …. already having inhabited different moments."[47] Time becomes flexible, as He's present practice enfolds into her mother's past trauma. Within Taoist Qigong, delineations between the self, nature, and others are blurred as one's body is connected to a metaphysical force. He meditates within her (re)enactment of pain, enfolding her body into that of her mother's and reconstituting He's sense of self He engages this groundlessness (as bodies and time merge), along with the construction of the self (through practice). He expands the possibilities of feminist critique through meditation, destabilizing the presumed stability and borders surrounding self and other, subject and object.

Zhang and He's works as meditative practices question duration and temporality. Although "time" can mark the contours of start to finish for these works, time cannot accommodate the more complicated forms of a meditative imagination that occurs within the pieces. Duration becomes not only marked time, but also destabilized time, one that never followed a path from start to finish in the first place.   Zhang and He can be understood as existing in a durational space that simultaneously borders marked and destabilized temporalities. The physical world continues to count time; however, as they enter their internal meditations, time cannot be quantified in similar ways.

For Zhang, the duration of endurance involves a finite time where he places himself in a situation for a period longer than the "average" person could deal with such a situation, an abject space of a public restroom while one's naked body is smothered in honey. If time shifts in this moment and the practice of meditation provides a differentiated relationship to time, this does not mean that the material structures of pain magically disappear. Instead, a focus on meditation provides a way to re-conceptualize how we understand how these artists deal with pain.

Zhang and He do not merely endure through pain; they allow it to become a form of practice and self-cultivation - they *linger* in pain and allow meditation to question endurance's structures.   The category of endurance art as applied to Zhang and He are incomplete as they perpetuate the notion of resistance and agency. Endurance implies a sense of resistance because one must work against a negative force through such a performance. However, here, Zhang and He are not merely resisting a situation; they linger and practice within it. I utilize here the notion of linger to differentiate it from endurance.   The latter usually implicates a fixed sense of time. Lingering describes the melancholic feeling and dwelling in space and time. When looking at the etymologies of both words, one sees a convergence of the meanings of linger and endure to be structured around continuation and existence around the fifteenth century. However before the fifteenth century, these terms had different meanings, where to endure implies "to undergo or suffer" and "to make hard, harden" while to linger involved "to resolve, dwell, or prolong."   To endure involves a durational period where one either suffers or hardens, while to linger involves a dwelling and a staying. Similarly, in Mandarin, most of the characters for endure (*jing*, *ting*, and *ai*) refer to a similar sense of suffering and hardening, while the characters for linger (*panhuan* and *yingrao*) connote a sense of prolonging. It is within these etymological differences that lingering implicates a melancholic weight for duration.

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[47]Alexander, 309.

Lingering differentiates how one experiences durational time, especially within meditation. Although Bergson has connected duration to enduring[48], his theorization of duration lies more in what I identify as lingering, in its prolonged and ongoing form. Bergson differentiates between time and duration – the former being a scientific measurement, while the latter is "what one feels and lives."[49] Bergson describes the constant movement of duration: "The inner life is all that at once, variety of qualities, continuity of progress, unity of direction. It cannot be represented by images. But still less could it be represented by *concepts*, that is, by abstract ideas, whether general or simple."[50] Duration implies a constant movement that is not pre-determined. Lingering reworks the notion of endurance art away from a frame of finitude. Lingering art makes duration not an object to prolong but to work through and exist within.

Zhang and He are not only enduring through resistance to pain and social structures, but also lingering in the pleasures and difficulties of pain and the social. As Zhang sits within the multiple tactile, olfactory, and auditory sensations of his practiced meditation, he does not simply suffer or try to prove a point through resisting such multiple sensations. Rather, he dwells and engages with multiple sensations. At the end of his piece, he walks to a local river to wash off the honey on his skin. Zhang does not simply end the piece to prove his suffering and endurance; instead, he dwells in it and, upon washing it away, he continues his durational process. In addition, He Chengyao's practice is meant to not simply endure the pain that her mother had experienced; instead, the unstable borders between time, bodies, and pain open up space to dwell in the problems that structure the female body in China. Zhang and He cultivate a sense of self not to simply question and endure through power; instead, they perform a more complicated notion of lingering in power and pain. This lingering involves questioning the predominant forms of resistance that structure how the Chinese are understood. Resistance is not about counteracting power per se, the prolonged lingering requires a different relationality to time and space.

Politics of Meditation & Lingering

What are the political possibilities of meditation and lingering? Is it political to meditate? The notion of lingering, as opposed to endurance, contends with the possibilities of an incomplete, constantly moving, or failed politics. As Foucault described, meditation is a technology of the self that "is much more concerned with thought than with action."[51] This lack of action may seem like a failed politic as it does not follow the dominant notion of consciousness - agency - resistive action. In order to understand the politics of meditation, we must renegotiate politics itself. Meditation in *99 Needles* and *12 Square Meters* involves a sense of failure, where political consciousness and resistive agency cannot be easily attributed to Zhang Huan and He Chengyao. My turn to meditation is not meant to depoliticize their work through the realm of mysticism; instead, meditation refigures what the political signifies. Meditation becomes a way to move away from a logic of resistance to forms of indeterminacy and open-endedness. A shift from endurance, resistance, agency, and time towards meditation resituates their works as producing an affective relationality to the world steeped in failure.

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[48] Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 191.
[49] Ibid., 12.
[50] Ibid., 194.
[51] Foucault, *Technologies*, 45.

The affective dimensions of meditation practices centralize failure, relationality, and a shift in how duration/time is conceptualized. This in turn reformulates how we understand these artists and their relationship to time, art, and the political. Reframing Zhang Huan and He Chengyao away from endurance and within a rubric of meditation situates their works as enabling an affect that is "productive" in its ability to provide "an hermeneutic to instruct us how to read after the failure of [dominant] narrative meanings".[52] Lowe provides a sense of the political possibilities of failure. For Lowe, these possibilities exist not in creative alternative meanings (alternative, in the sense that they may replace dominant narratives) but in open, failed meanings that are formless and provide space to read anew. Meditation, in its privileging of a lack of direct political critique, directs us towards the limits of dominant accounts of politics and opens space to rethink the concept. Through failure, we understand the limits of the political (as currently theorized), while expanding its possibilities.

Zhang Huan is responding to state practices, but the meditative practice in *12 Square Meters*. He may be resisting and critiquing the state, but limiting discussion of his work to such a discourse perpetuates a racialized image of the Chinese as only capable of such a political narrative. *12 Square Meters* does not provide a sense of positivistic critique; rather, the melancholic mood inspired by the smell of shit and urine and the tactile sensation of flies produces a lingering political confusion that cannot narrativize success. Rather, it narrates a political ambiguity that critiques the normative ideas around politics, time, and resistance. Meditation produces an affective relationality that cannot be encapsulated in a simplistic critique of the state; Zhang, in his practice of breathing, fails in providing such an easy narrative.

He's *99 Needles* responds to gendered disparities; however, simply recuperating her work as resistant to gender and the state ignores the nuanced contours of her political critique. She responds to both gender and disability, as she reenacts an abusive treatment her mother was forced to undergo to "deal" with her mental illness. The 99 needles inserted into her body, however, is not simply re-enacting egregious acts that were done to her mother's body. Instead, the meditative practice of inserting the needles into the body train and allow her to linger in a space of indeterminacy. The melancholic affect of the object lingers. Melancholy has a mass, similar to objects. The weight of melancholy marks the possibilities of meditation's failures. This weight produces a politics beyond resistive action; instead, it produces a politics that forces us to linger and attempt to reimagine precisely where these dominant forms of imagination fail. The lingering weight of melancholy directs us to what Anne Cheng calls a process of "the introjection of a lost, never- possible perfection, an inarticulable loss that comes to inform the individual's sense of his or her own subjectivity."[53] This can be juxtaposed against the linearity of trauma, which associates trauma with direct redress. Lingering, melancholy, and their attendant affects provide space for the victim to grieve and sit within one's own pain.

As discussed in the introduction and Chapters 1 and 2, the Cultural Revolution looms as the historic event that continues to shape different generations of artists and the general population. The Revolution, Mao Zedong's effort to inscribe Communism into the entire cultural and social landscape between 1966-76, sought to remove past feudalist practices and "Western" influences. The Revolution was a mass engineering project that displaced families into labor camps in China's

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[52] Lisa Lowe, "Metaphors of Globalization," in *Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice*, ed. Ranu Samantrai, Joe Parker, and Mary Romero (Albany: State University of New York, 2010),

[53] Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xi.

rural regions. It led to the shaming and murder of intellectuals that did not prescribe to Maoism. For this event, the framework of trauma is often utilized to discuss Chinese artists and subjects, as evinced in film scholar Michael Berry's 2011 book *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* and other pieces about the period.[54]

He Chengyao's performance rethinks the relationship of the Cultural Revolution to the artist and her agency. *99 Needles* augments the organizing framework of trauma for discourses on Chinese women. Theorized by Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Feldman and typically discussed in relation to the Holocaust, trauma studies requires a renegotiation in relation to non-Western sites. From the horrors inflicted by Japanese troops on comfort women to US imperialist violence exacted upon women in Vietnam, trauma has become the dominant frame for women across Asia. As such, trauma conceptualizes culture, law, and other acts of resistance as primary means of agency in addressing past harm. However, this framework pathologizes victims as unable to let go until adequate redress arrives through self expression, culture, or legal reparations. As Mimi Nguyen reveals in relation to US imperialism in Vietnam, trauma "often reproduces a relation of psychic to political dispossession that is ubiquitous and presumptuous."[55] As such, trauma is thought to "impos[e] itself again and again on his or her consciousness, as nightmare or repetitive compulsion."[56] Trauma becomes all-encompassing, as the female victim is imagined as needing adequate redress in order to obtain a sense of closure. The subject is imagined as located within a singular historic event and a linear narrative continuity, where the traumatic event leads to victimization and, only through a process of recuperation, can the normative subject find closure. The trauma of the Revolution produces Major narratives around the Chinese as existing within limited forms of agency (either resistance or subjection).

However, what other frameworks augment trauma by emphasizing the single event, along with acts of ordinary violence? What additional modes do not pathologize the victim as unitary and situate non-Western women with more open forms of subjectivity? The answer lies in queer, feminist, race, and disability studies to supplement trauma. The minorness of affect reveals the presumptions of trauma to further trauma studies' insights.

99 Needles has become emblematic of Chinese performance art and its relation to trauma. Hong Kong theorist Eva Kit Wah Man situates He's "performance in its cultural context,"[57] where Man cites the Cultural Revolution and "[m]adness and family traumas" as "the main references of her artistic creativity."[58] She situates performance as a form of art therapy, producing the sense of a normative subject. The gendered artist's subjectivity is imagined as fully cognizant of past wrongs and seeking closure through culture. Man's reference to madness evokes the work of Michel Foucault. He offers insights for He's work; however, his earlier books and essays primarily assess

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[54] Arthur Kleinman & Joan Kleinman, "How Bodies Remember: Social Memory and Bodily Experience of Criticism, Resistance, and Delegitimation following China's Cultural Revolution," *New Literary History* Vol 25, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 707 – 723; Tonglin Lu, "Fantasy and Ideology in a Chinese Film: A Zizekian Reading of the Cultural Revolution," *positions* (12)2, 2004: 539-564; and Tomas Plankers, "Psychic Impact and Outcome of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 8(3), 2011: 227-238.
[55] Mimi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Pesss, 2012), 60.
[56] Ibid., 57.
[57] Eva Kit Wah Man, "Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: the Case of He Chengyao," in *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art*, ed. Mary Bittner Wiseman and Liu Yuedi, Leiden: Brill (2011), 175.
[58] Ibid., 177.

the institutional formation of madness in relation to the apparatuses of the police state and medical sector, which are less helpful for "99 Needles."

He's photos function within an economy that places photography, China, trauma, and resistance together. Her work rests within a tradition that includes the iconic image from June 5, 1989 – the stopping of tanks in Tiananmen Square by a single man. The photograph captures how the West understands contemporary China. In *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers discusses this image in relation to trauma. In theorizing the increased circulation of the wounded body, Siebers stresses the import of disability in formulating understandings of global media:

> [trauma art] is at once impersonal and painful – which means it both communicates between cultures and retains an affective power […] On the one hand, media images of traumatic and disabled bodies travel so easily … because they are floating signifiers of the cultural. On the other hand, these images gain a stunning potency in local contexts because any given culture will readily attach its own communal meanings to them.[59]

99 Needles operates within this economy of images of China that are normally associated with trauma. Siebers' framework is applicable to He's photograph, as her work represents a specified Chinese context where one understands the wounded body in "99 Needles" as particular to trauma; however, the repeated reliance on trauma by both Western and Chinese cultural studies scholars continues to shape our understanding of these artists.

As discussed above, Buddhist theories of meditation destabilize the normative construction of cognition. In addition, queer disability scholarship similarly assists in such a process. At the point of puncture, He's skin turns slightly pink, looking as if her body were punctuated with mosquito bites. Within such punctuations, how might we capture the minor pain and injuries that are in excess of trauma? What does it mean for He to literalize the wound and pain? In *States of Injury*, Wendy Brown situates pain with the formation of identity politics. Brown complicates both the conservative dismissal of identity, alongside the liberal humanist ahistorical and utopian approach to identity. She questions the problem of historical pain to identity formation, "locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past – a past of injury."[60] By identifying a site to blame, one can then avenge past hurt. However, Brown reveals that such "wounded attachments" reproduce a subject preoccupied with holding onto pain. Brown does not call for a forgetting of the past but rather demands a politics that cannot simply claim an identity premised on such pain. Brown believes that identity should be politicized and allow for a release from such wounds. One achieves this through an ethical orientation that does not individualistically claim identity as "I am" but rather expands the self to others through "I want this for us."[61] Trauma locates blame for third world women, where one's pain produces their identity of "I am [a third world woman]." However, in He's embodiment of pain, she meditates and sits within it to produce the ethics of "I want this for us," releasing herself from past trauma and a reliance on identity politics. Her embodiment of the wound directs us to not simply a dispensation of blame "for an unlivable present" but rather a way of "forging an alternative future."[62]

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[59] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 115.
[60] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 74.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid. 76.

Melancholy accounts for trauma's excess, in that it considers the ineffable effects of historic trauma, along with daily forms of repeated, ordinary violence and rejection, that are normally eschewed in trauma's linear narrative. The affect most closely associated with melancholy is anxiety, as Sianne Ngai connects them in *Ugly Feelings*.[63] Anxiety's state of constant unease directs us to melancholia as a condition and state of being within the ordinary, as opposed to an easily identifiable feeling associated with a traumatic event. Melancholy as an affect is an "expectant emotion" which exists within the future and which is projected outwards. In other words, melancholy and its affects are less about feeling the effects of the past and more about the state of being that moves beyond the past and into the everyday. Unlike trauma, melancholy and affect account **for** the ineffable anxieties that condition the melancholic subject and **for** the ordinary orientations that structure the excesses of trauma.

With accounts of He's work as dominantly framed within trauma and theorizations of meditation, trauma has been distinguished from the minorness of lingering and affect. These multiple fields contend with the normative construction of consciousness, a critique also heavily developed in disability studies. The relationship between disability and feminism provides an understanding of the political import of meditation and a destabilization of consciousness. First, disability destabilizes what we assume to be normative consciousness, amplifying transnational feminisms' work of 1) exploring different epistemological frameworks (such as Buddhism) to rethink theoretical production and 2) expanding modes of agency for gendered and racialized subjects. In relation to epistemology, Alexander's question becomes central: "What would taking the Sacred seriously mean for transnational feminisms and related radical projects?"[64] In relation to subjectivity, questioning trauma through disability destabilizes the presumed linearity of agency. Ngai emphasizes that "there is an underlying assumption that an appropriate emotional response to… violence exists, and that the burden lies on the racialized subject to produce that appropriate response legibly, unambiguously, and immediately."[65] Such expectations are often fulfilled through trauma's linear narrative; however, what would it mean to linger in its excesses and in queer cognitive modes? Meditation, lingering, and destabilized forms of cognition involve less of a sense of intentionality; the female subject is not engaged in a mode of endurance that is steeped in political critique. In interviews, He often states that she does not identify as feminist nor with such overt critiques. Relatedly, in my interviews with artists, they state a similar type of non-deterministic relation to the state and do not identify as political. They certainly understand how they operate within a global market that demands branding, but I was and continue to be drawn to writing from the place of the artist to capture this sense of queer and unclear cognition.

By focusing on lingering as a less direct form of subjectivity, disability studies amplifies the import of such a shift for the subject and her agency. The field directs us to critiques of normative cognition and ways of thinking beyond a subjectivity geared for direct critique. Lingering moves away from our privileged modes of existence. Although some in disability studies, such as Licia Carlson, Eva Kittay, and Anna Stubblefield, have validly questioned the construction of cognitive abilities, they often uphold a normative understanding of the subject to be expanded to include different modes of cognition. However, through lingering, an alternate sense of the subject that thinks and processes differently emerges. Queer disability theorists, such as Robert McRuer, Mel Chen, and Jasbir Puar, imagine different subjective and cognitive states, which move us out of

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[63] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 187.

[64] Alexander, 326.

[65] Ngai, 188.

normative ideas of proper or improper, better and functional subject. More expansive notions of experience beyond the effects of the traumatizing event do not ignore material pain but rather emphasize how such experiences are lived in the every day. To see trauma in its ordinariness produces different understandings of Chinese women, moving away from sensational and legible depictions. This provides a sense of agency that is more about agency as the capacity to act, as opposed to freedom or grand critique; or action without being pregnant with intentionality.

The second connection between these fields is their respective focus on governing populations. Cheng situates melancholy within the US to rethink history and pain, particularly for the racialized subject. Her critique reveals how notions of legal justice cannot make the racialized subject whole because racialized subjects have never been in a complete state. They are melancholic and in a constant place of negotiation. Thus, identity must be understood as melancholic to contend with the ways racialization affects the lived subjectivity beyond past pain; melancholy emphasizes the states and conditions of daily life – or what I term the excesses beyond historical trauma.

Thus, the question that has animated this chapter is how might an account of trauma's excess through affect expand our understanding of harm beyond racialized and gendered subjection in the US to account for the third world woman – a subject who is stuck within not only the continual shifts in global capitalist production, but also localized forms of subordination? The difference between trauma and affect is not about transplanting US forms of difference globally. Rather, this difference points to how trauma is utilized to govern – that the figure of the traumatized non-western woman is deployed to create forms of pity towards the other to rationalize intervention.

By augmenting trauma, we generate ways to understand pain and historical time in more nuanced formations, making explicit the role of trauma in controlling populations. Melancholy, meditation, and lingering augment trauma and historical pain, accounting for the ordinary, everyday, and minor. This shifts the sense of urgency in the desire to save Chinese women, especially as the discourse of human rights violations is oft deployed to shame the Chinese state. Without dismissing the harms of the Cultural Revolution or current atrocities performed by the state, the rhetoric of trauma often rationalizes intervention. By accommodating the ordinary, along with open forms of agency, we attend to trauma's biopolitical functions. Trauma's excess directs us to its outside, allowing us to see how trauma functions as a mode of governance of Chinese women in modernity. Although trauma has waned in critical discourse, it continues nonetheless to frame China and non-Western spaces. Trauma and historical injury offers a clear context that is directly linked to the politicized individual, creating a linear narrative that traces the event, conscious critique, and then performed action. The framework of pain and trauma enables a normative politics. However, trauma and injury also reproduce the condition of the Major in which the affective and other seemingly minor formulations (like melancholy and meditation) are eschewed through the repeated privileging of historical context. Through and with Zhang Huan and He Chengyao, we destabilize such narratives and understand how they function within an economy of control.

CHAPTER 5 - FABULATING
Cao Fei's *Cosplayers*

From the 1990's to the early 2000's, Chinese artists increasingly explored the intersection of performance-based practices with new media. In *Cosplayers* (2004), Cao Fei presents a video and photo series that explores the world of cosplay. Cosplay, short for costume play, arises from the growing popularity of animation and a massive gaming culture.[1] Originating in Japan in the 1990's, the social practice involves groups of youth that congregate in order to dress like, but not fully reenact, the costumes and lives of their favorite manga and anime characters. These fans meet in public gatherings, like annual conventions throughout Asia and the US, cultural festivals, and other events. Photography is a key medium that captures the trend, as fan websites often circulate and rank images of cosplayers. In the behavioral norms of cosplay, participants often walk around gatherings and interact in pedestrian ways, except when these emblematic photos are to be taken. At the moment of being photographed, cosplayers will often pose and perform as their costumed characters. However, after photos are taken, cosplayers often return to a disengaged affective state.[2]

Cao Fei explores this interplay of multiple performative states from the everyday to the "animated." Her project uses cosplay and new media culture to complicate definitions of performance and the subject. In one image from the series, *A Mirage*, two cosplayers wear costumes that do not reference popular animated characters but are a generalized reference to the culture of animation.   One player wears a short purple dress over black leggings. She wraps white fabric in a crisscross pattern on the lower part of her leggings and around her torso. This player sits on top a replica of a cheetah that stares across a field at a zebra. Another player sits atop the zebra, dressed in all black while holding a large bunch of black balloons. He stares off into the hazy smog encompassing Guangzhou, which serves as the background for the photo. The players peer off in opposite directions and appear to not pose in the customary ways of cosplay. They linger in their thoughts, as they sit atop animals and amidst a luscious green field populated with orange flowers and a gilded antelope. Cao Fei presents a moment of disengaged affect, which is not normally documented in traditional cosplay imagery. It is within this disconnect between moments of everyday and animated behavior that Cao complicates traditional notions of performance. She shifts notions of performance away from forms of cohesion and awareness; instead, she offers a more complex notion of performance located within confusion and limited forms of agency.

Most scholars frame Cao Fei as an artist that consciously critiques the rural/urban divides in the rapidly shifting neoliberalizing space of China.[3]   Cao Fei is often discussed as possessing a political

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[1] Anthropology has attended to the question of cosplay through analyses of photography and conventions. Susan Napier's ethnographic study situates cosplay in relation to communal formation and fandom. Susan Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2007). This paper shifts this discourse to engage the representation of cosplay in Cao Fei's work, parsing out different modes of imagination/consciousness that emerge.

[2] Cosplay is a global phenomenon broadly distributed through fan sites and art markets. With the rise in digital photography, sites like Flickr, cosplay.com, and other photo sharing websites rapidly distribute photos of these costumes to international audiences.   Viewers utilize the photos in a multitude of ways, comparing costumes, creating communal interaction, and making art.   These websites have also garnered the attention of art galleries, where artists like Cao Fei attempt to formally present cosplay. Photos have become the primary means of documenting cosplay.

[3] Maya Kovskaya, "Heroes of the Mundane: The Syncretic Imagination of Cao Fei," *Yishu,* (2007): 82-85; and Hou Hanru, "Living With(in) the Urban Fiction (Notes on Urbanization and Art in Post-Olympic China," *Yishu* (May-June 2009): 25. For the general framing of contemporary Chinese artists in this vein, see Wu Hung, *Transcience: Chinese*

agenda or program that reveals the problems with China's rapid "rise" during the late twentieth century. In this body of literature, Chinese artists are situated within these over-determined formations of agency, as they are framed as an intentional subject who is fully conscious of the problems that surround her and, hence, perform accordingly. In other words, art and culture seem to emerge in China through a direct correlation between conscious intent and performed action. However, in interviews I conducted with Cao Fei, she invites a different reading of her sense of intention that moves away from a determined stance. She often stresses her lack of overt political critique within her work, along with her own confused stance on the current political landscape in China. Furthermore, a discursive and movement analysis of *Cosplayers* complicates the notion of consciousness, as the affective qualities of cuteness, lightheartedness, and levity present a less determined correlation between awareness and performed critique.

Performing Resistance & the Chinese

To extend the insights from the previous chapter, we turn towards the connection between consciousness and performance. The Chinese are often framed within the dominant understandings of demystification and human agency. [4] Demystification often involves the enactment or performance of critique.   Performance is a critical category that encompasses consciousness and agency because the dominant model of consciousness discussed in Chapter 4 relies upon one's intentions to manifest through execution and action. The field of performance studies arises from multiple disciplines, ranging from philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, music, theatre, dance, and art history. Although diverse in perspective, the majority of the field's theorizers rely upon agency and resistance to uphold their claims. A thinker central to the dominant formulations of agency and performance within theatre and performance studies is Bertolt Brecht. Brecht drew from Marxist and Frankfurt School[5] ideologies to develop his theorizations of aesthetics and politics. Although Brecht himself was a contentious figure within the Frankfurt School, he nonetheless based many of his aesthetic theories in relation to the School.   Of particular import is his notion of "alienation effects" in its role in creating an epic theatre. Brecht first developed alienation effects in his 1936 essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting." Moving away from Aristotelian rhetorical models based on empathy and identification with actors, Brecht's alienation effects focuses more on an

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Experimental Art at the End of the 20ᵗʰ Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 107; Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2007).

[4] These dominant notions of consciousness as intentionality and agency often influence and construct racialist discourses of the Chinese as lacking imagination and ingenuity.   The inability of the Chinese to "live up" to these theoretical constructs of consciousness perpetually places them in a relation of lack to those more enlightened.   I do not recuperate the Chinese as possessing imagination equal to the West or so particularized as to be unseen by the West; instead, the epistemological foundations that undergird these dominant formations of consciousness, agency, and resistance must be brought to light in order to move beyond and through them.   These key terms limit non-Western others within this economy, especially within discourses of contemporary artistic production.

[5] Through the development of the notion of ideology, Frankfurt school scholars utilized ideology as a method, where they juxtaposed ideological assumptions with material realities. Herbert Marcuse understands the imagination and mind as consciousness: "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world." *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 5. Marcuse places art at the center of demystification, not in its ability to create material change but to make one conscious and aware of power.   Thus, art's potential exists in the sphere of consciousness. This consciousness is the key for demystification in that consciousness drives and directs action/agency: "the need for radical change must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence and their passions, their drives and their goals." *The Aesthetic Dimension,* 3-4. Marcuse's project of demystification and radical change relies upon art to be the vehicle of consciousness raising.

audience's "[a]cceptance or rejection of [an actor's] actions and utterances… to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious."[6]   Brecht theorizes consciousness as a stable and knowable plane by which an audience becomes aware. The Chinese technique that enables the alienation effects to take hold within this conscious plane is an actor's ability to remove the "fourth wall" separating her from the audience.

To achieve this separation, the actor observes himself and engages with the audience to reveal a sense of removal from one's character. Such an engagement emerges from a lack of passion and a limited affect, qualities that Brecht praises in the Chinese: "These Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold. That does not mean that the Chinese theatre rejects all representation of feelings. The performer portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated."[7]   The Chinese produce the alienation effect through a restrained sense of affect, "not in form of absence of emotion, but in the forms of emotions which need not correspond to those of the characters portrayed."[8] Brecht finds the Chinese actor's ability to produce a distanced affective relationship to the portrayed character a key tool for the alienation effect, one that can be transferred to other cultures: "It is not entirely easy to realize that the Chinese actor's A-effect is a transportable piece of technique: a conception that can be pried loose from the Chinese theatre."[9] Affect becomes a *techne*, in that the Chinese production of distanced feeling becomes a tool and means that can be learned, relearned, and repeated. Alienation effects, as produced through the *techne* of distanced affect, ultimately enables the audience to become conscious of power. For Brecht, this consciousness must be stable in order for such alienation effects to make one aware.

Chinese theatre studies scholars Claire Conceison and Rossella Ferrari draw from this Brechtian genealogy for their work on Chinese theatre. Both theorists attribute the "avant-garde" goals of the directors they theorize to a Brechtian system of aesthetics.   Ferrari situates many of the "avant-garde" theatre directors she discusses, such as Meng Jinghui, who draws from and is "indebted"[10] to Brechtian techniques.   This reliance on Brecht presumes this mode of demystification and consciousness for the archive of Chinese theater and performance that Conceison and Ferrari have helpfully analyzed. However, these authors' projects do not question nor are critical of Brecht's theoretical and aesthetic assumptions.[11]

Outside of Chinese theatre, the broader fields of theatre and performance studies have inherited this avant-garde, Brechtian tradition that privileges the possibilities of alienation effects. In addition, the field upholds performance for its ability to instill and inspire "political effects" through alienation and other mechanisms. Alan Read in *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement: the Last Human Venue* relies on the "intimate acts of theatre" to "afford us the commonest sense of being alive and determine our social engagements as sentient participants in the processes of politics."[12]   In a similar vein, Judith Hamera celebrates dance as "a testament to the power of performance as a social force, as cultural

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[6] Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (Boston: Hill and Wang, 1964), 95.

[7] Ibid., 93.

[8] Ibid., 94.

[9] Ibid., 95.

[10] Rossella Ferrari, *Pop Goes the Avant Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 177.

[11] Others, such as Haiping Yan and Rey Chow, have been somewhat critical of Brecht's relationship to China, complicating some of his assumptions.

[12] Alan Read, *Theatre, Intimacy, & Engagement: The Last Human Venue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-2.

poesis, as communication infrastructure that makes identity, solidarity, and memory sharable."[13] These theorists rely upon art to produce awareness and thus open up political possibilities and action; within this equation, Brecht's presumptions around consciousness remain intact. Although performance certainly possesses a particular influence on the body and mind, these theorists often over determine performance's possibilities due to their overreliance on a dominant sense of consciousness that leads to a sense of agency, resistance, and, ultimately, political action. By questioning Brecht's conceptualization of consciousness as a stable whole for the alienation effect to arise, we begin to rework the role of performance and art in terms of their political and social possibilities. Within Brecht's formulation, consciousness becomes something stable in order to inspire agency and resistance. This sense of a "unified being" with a rational mind or consciousness, as Rey Chow reminds us[14], is what undergirds the conception of the human subject for critical theory.

Performance is a particularly important form of art to understand, since performance itself is often imagined as possessing potential to challenge the static temporality of other forms of art. In relation to other art forms and discourses, performance is often cited for the possibilities it provides through the notion of performativity. J.L. Austin theorizes how speech acts are not merely statements but can become performative, hence affecting and activating a social space; thus, theorists rely upon performativity to show how language and other art forms become more than just objects or words. Through performativity, language and objects become active participants. To develop this notion, Austin privileges felicitous performatives over infelicitous ones in his linguistic accounts in *How To Do Things with Words*. This particular privileging is perpetuated within performance studies, as it often theorizes performance in primarily felicitous over infelicitous modes. In this chapter, I destabilize this reliance on felicity.

Although the infelicitous certainly arises within performance studies through analyses of gender constructs and sexual shame in the works of Peggy Phelan, Judith Butler, José Muñoz, and Eve Sedgwick, amongst others, the felicitous is the primary mode of analysis and the privileged site for the field to imagine performance's social possibilities - what remains is this sense of the unified being as operating within consciousness, agency, and performed resistance. This reliance on the felicitous furthers a Marxist/Brechtian project of social change, agency, and demystification through performance. Thus, the figure of China and others forms of imagination/consciousness undo this Eurocentric relationality between performance's "success" and intentionality, agency, and resistance. As I will discuss later in this section, the notion of sustaining a character within theater studies perpetuates the dominance of the felicitous. While Erving Goffman and others acknowledge the ways people use multiple roles in the everyday, most performance theorists rely on positivistic notions of "action" but have not really questioned the *intensity* by which these characters enact or present. We are not always "on." Thus, we must move away from Austin's celebration of felicitous action and find possibilities in performance's "etiolations."[15] This feebleness and lack of substance is precisely where I locate potential through the notion of the minor. The minor forms of imagination, meditation (discussed in Chapter 4) and fabulation (discussed here in Chapter 5), rework some of these hierarchies that structure not only forms of art (performance art in relation to theatre, photography, visual, music), but also political relations between China, the US, and Europe.

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[13] Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

[14] Chow, 224.

[15] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 22.

These additional forms of consciousness rethink the notion of materialism and action that sustain critical theory.

Shannon Jackson acknowledges this failure of agency and the complications of this dominant form of consciousness within Butler's notion of performativity and José Muñoz's development of disidentification.[16] Yet, Jackson questions how these theoretical gestures may not "resolv[e] the issues of intentionality. The defamiliarization paradigm still might assume the self-consciousness of a subject who does the displaying, the pointing, and the outlining — that is, the subject who has a "program.""[17] Thus, following Jackson's provocation, I complicate these ideas of self-conscious awareness and the unified being that undergird performance and theatre studies through affect and fabulation.

Cosplayers *&Fabulation*

Similar to critiques of consciousness in the last chapter, I utilize fabulation to further untangle this presumed relationship around the subject and agency by examining them in relation to new media and performance. By locating the disconnect between how theorists have discussed Cao Fei's *Cosplayers* series with an aesthetic examination of how the artist produces imagination in *Cosplayers*, we rework consciousness and performed action. Born in 1978, Cao Fei is a part of a generation of Chinese artists whose works have recently attained much international acclaim. Her pieces have been exhibited in New York, Shanghai, Venice, Hong Kong, Taipei, London, and the Netherlands, amongst other place. Growing up under the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980's, Cao came of age during an era of rapid change on the mainland. Much continues to be written on Deng's program of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics," which I will not do here in relation to Cao Fei. However, it is important to note that this historical context provided access to travel and popular culture that was not as easily accessible to earlier generations. During this era of shifting power, Cao's location in the southern city of Guangzhou enabled a fair amount of travel to Hong Kong with her family. There, she gained exposure to a globalized pop culture, including MTV during the late 80's and 90's.[18] The series consists of photos and an 8-minute film made in 2004 and 2005, blending Cao's previous work in performance, video, and documentary film. The work follows six youth in Guangzhou who "costume play," dressing in anime costumes as they traverse the city in real time while fighting, moving, and dreaming in an urban landscape.

Although video games have been present since the 1970's,[19] new modes of mass interaction arose during the late 1990's into the early 2000's with the rise of Massive Multi-Player Online Games (MMOG). What modes of imagination and consciousness emerge through these modes of play and games? The development of the Internet permitted new forms of interaction and relationality. In the world of MMOG, animation becomes a key mode of expression for gaming culture. Cao captures the rising popularity of animation and gaming through her aestheticization of cosplay, exploring the multiple modes of imagination emerging from these phenomena.

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[16] For details on Butler's theory of performativity and Muñoz's notion of disidentification, see Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 185-192.

[17] Ibid., 191.

[18] Interview of Cao Fei by Oyama Hitomi, ARTiT, http://art-it.asia/u/admin_interviews/ynp3HLEuY6UWvhZtz4XI/ (last accessed May 6, 2011).

[19] Atari and other individual computers have been present since this time. However, with the increased use of video games for leisure, the game console has undergone rapid change and use.

In the act of cosplay, the youth do not fully embody nor completely reenact their characters. Instead, they vacillate between different states of engagement with their environment, each other, and themselves.   When one experiences the photos as a series, one has a sense that all of the characters traverse multiple states of engagement. They range from being "in character" as they fully engage in a fight sequence (*Deep Breathing)* to being semi-disengaged as they traverse city streets or sit idly in apartments or fields (*A Mirage*).   When juxtaposed against one another, *Deep Breathing* and *A Mirage* reveal the multiple states we embody. The crouching, defensive postures of the cosplayers in *Deep Breathing* depict the moment before a battle erupts. The title directs us to the vital force being cultivated within the static photograph. *A Mirage* shifts to a sense of lightness as the two players disengage and stare off into the fantastical world of animals, balloons, and fields.   The characters in *A Mirage* reveal the multiple and cognitively diverse states we embody. The crouching, defensive postures of the cosplayers in *Deep Breathing* depict the moment before a battle erupts. The title directs us to the vital force being cultivated within the static photograph. *A Mirage* shifts to a sense of lightness as the two players disengage and stare off into the fantastical world of animals, balloons, and fields.   Their corporeal gestures, a bent wrist and relaxed shoulders, and the levity provided by the open sky and bundle of floating balloons activate a sense of rest. The use of animals[20] in both photos further the sense of multiple, conflicting states. In *Deep Breathing*, the cow and zebra remain in the background, observing the ensuing battle. In *A Mirage*, the zebra and cheetah participate in the foreground, with cosplayers mounting the animals' bodies. The animals similarly perform a range of affective relations.

Cao Fei is less interested in sustaining a single character; instead, she reveals multiple states of engagement, activating an affective sense of play with the lack of a consistent performative status for her subjects. Anthropologist Teri Silvio describes these multiple states as "acts of alterity"[21] that cannot describe actions of self-identity – actions that do not necessarily portray an internal self or desire. These acts of alterity do not always align with an "authentic" self.   Silvio understands cosplay as one of these acts of alterity and uses it to complicate the theoretical concepts of performance and performativity.

Cosplay as a social phenomenon does not per se sustain a character; there are moments of infelicitous action that traverse the space between character and self. Silvio offers an additional concept that stimulates and enlivens notions of performance and performativity to direct us to these multiple states: animation.[22] Silvio defines animation as a means of "projection of qualities perceived as human – life, power, agency, will, personality, and so on – outside of the self, and into the sensory environment, through acts of creation, perception and interaction … [which] require[] a medium."[23] This rich definition of animation emphasizes projection and objects/mediums. Chapter 6 will more explicitly engage the latter notion of objects.   I engage here the idea of projection as being

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[21] Hastings, Adi and Paul Manning, "Introduction" *Language and Communication* (2004), 291-311.   Silvio references and uses this idea of alterity.

[22] Silvio relies on relationships between economic structures and theoretical insights on human behavior to inform her focus on animation. She links the emergence of performance during the 1980's and 90's to "a period which saw the decline of traditional American manufacturing, and the rise of the service, information and high-tech sectors, along with the increasing feminization of labor" which demanded accounts of the performance of gender identity with the performance of feminized labor. Silvio, 425. In contrast, she proposes that animation accounts for "work in computerized, postindustrial societies." Ibid.

[23] Silvio, "Animation: The New Performance?" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no.2 (2010), 427.

imbricated with performance and art in China. Silvio directs us to animation as integral to contemporary notions of performance and performativity. Cosplay is a central practice where performance and animation converge, where the body embodies the projection of an animated object. Embodiment and the object intersect through fabulation. Fabulation operates within the interface of animation and performance, giving us analytic tools to contend with the movement, body positions, space, and affective effects in Cao's art. Drawing and departing from the work of Henri Bergson, Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Rey Chow, fabulation is a mode of imagination that enables an open-ended, non-didactic exploration of existing, being, and becoming; it is an approach that enables a sense of purposelessness that does not signify a certain political discourse nor easily ascribe to narratives of state resistance. Fabulation encompasses how Cao captures these "acts of alterity" and multiple states of being in her artistic work. Through the imbrication of animation and performance, fabulation and its affective contours become a primary means of understanding contemporary Chinese art during the end of the 20th century.

Typically, Cao's work is discussed in relation to Major China. Following the dominant framing of consciousness, *Cosplayers* is usually understood in terms of critiquing, depicting, and performing the social realities of real life in China. Most have stressed the way Cao mediates the shifting demands of urbanization, globalization, and modernization on China's youth. Maya Kovskaya places Cao Fei within the figure of Major China: "Cao Fei emphasizes the problem of shifting and constraining social roles that have been brought to the forefront by China's attempts at 'modernization.' Perhaps now, more than ever, people need to tap into the power of their imagination."[24] Although Kovskaya gestures to imagination, she situates the imagination within the Major, where one must become aware and be intentional of their relationship to power. Kovskaya's use of imagination is framed within the arithmetic of consciousness, agency, and performed action. Hou Hanru similarly focuses on Cao Fei's work as "bring[ing] us to question the validity of the established social hierarchies, values, and justice, and hence, the meaning of the relationship between people and historicity, a core issue of the power system itself."[25] These narratives reveal a tendency to read her work as exposing the realities and paradoxes of modernity and urban development – displacement, effects of digital communities, and globalization at large. Within these narratives of materialism and the politics that typically frame Cao Fei's work, theorists situate the artist as being conscious of power and utilizing her own agency to create art that resists such problematic dynamics. Kovskaya ascribes the "need to tap into the power of their imagination" in order understand "China's attempts at 'modernization.'"[26] Agency is limited to forms of resistance to the state, as the artist possesses the type of consciousness and intent that enables such a critique. Fabulation complicates this narrative and avoids perpetuating the entwinement of agentic resistance with consciousness that structures how the Chinese are understood. The minor dimensions of animation, play, and affect enable us to build a notion of fabulation that ultimately reformulates the political. Fabulation's politics rework the Major narratives surrounding Cao Fei and other contemporary Chinese artists.

Fabulation in *Cosplayers*

Fabulation is a mode of imagination that emphasizes non-didactic and non-normative ways of thinking, feeling and being. Rey Chow uses the notion in *Sentimental Fabulations,* a series of essays

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[24] Kovskaya, 85.

[25] Hou Hanru, "Living With(in) the Urban Fiction (Notes on Urbanization and Art in Post-Olympic China," *Yishu* (May-June 2009): 25.

[26] Kovskaya, 85.

about contemporary Chinese film. Her use of the term primarily relies on Nietzsche's notion of fables as world-making and Deleuze's use of fabulation as part of minority literature where fabulation is the "constitution of a people … A people, in a way, is what's missing."[27] Deleuze builds this concept from Bergson's use of fabulation while also attempting to give "political meaning" to Bergson's work.[28] This brief genealogy reveals its connection to the notion of becoming a people or formulating a community. Fabulation serves less as a lens to form a community and more as a mode of imaginative potential for contemporary Chinese art and avant-garde aesthetics more broadly.

Fabulation is the potential to imagine *otherwise* without particular narratives or political ascriptions. It is about future making; however, fabulation is not per se a cognitive mode that is utopic. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault delineates between utopia and heterotopia by marking their difference in terms of their relationship to language: "This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*."[29] Utopia, for Foucault, involves a form of future imagining that is directly connected to the linguistic; we have words to easily label a vision for the future. By contrast, fabulation involves imagining a future that cannot be easily narrativized with language. Fabulation does not necessarily exist outside of language; however, it permits forms of imagining that may seem un-imaginable. Fabulation is thus not utopic; by contrast, it creates an agenda of the unbelievable. This form of imagination challenges the dominant Marxist and Frankfurt-inspired forms of consciousness described earlier by shifting focus away from conscious thought and more upon relationality. Fabulation relies more on affective relation as opposed to conscious, enlightened thought and fact. Fabulation arrests performed action to linger in the incomplete and the indeterminate. Affect offers an alternative outside of the overwrought narratives of resistance and agency; affect situates discourse away from the state and into the arena of relationality, imagination, and objects. Fabulatory imagination arises out of the affective resonances of the cute, lighthearted, and failed. In order to better understand the affective contours of fabulation, I explore each of these affects.

The lighthearted is an affect that involves a relationality that seems inconsequential or without purpose. In a short essay "Is Art Lighthearted?," Adorno associates lighthearted art with Kant's notion of "purposelessness" in which "not its [art's] content but its *demeanor, the abstract fact that it is art at all*, that …opens out over the reality to whose violence it bears witness at the same time" structures lightheartedness.[30] Although *demeanor* possesses the current connotation of behavior, its original meaning from fifteenth-century England involves a sense of self-management or conduct. With this etymology in mind, it is precisely through the avant-garde's self-management that art exhibits lightheartedness. In the full series of *Cosplayers*, their elaborate costumes are placed in contrast against the daily wear of drab khakis and dingy t-shirts of those around them. Not only do Cao's subjects ignore their environments, but also others surrounding them ignore the performative, animated actions of the cosplayers. The bodies in "daily" clothing situate themselves as if the flamboyant costumes are not there; the bodies relate to one another as if there is little tension. The affective force of levity and humor arises from this juxtaposition in costumes and bodily positions. In *A Ming at Home*, the cosplayer in *A Mirage* and *Deep Breathing* is taken out of the fight and fable and placed next to her father. The affective relationship between the two is one of disconnect; he

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[27] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 124-125.

[28] Ibid., 174.

[29] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage, 1994), xviii.

[30] Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 248. (emphasis mine)

sits in his home sandals, reading the paper, while his daughter texts away on her telephone in full repose. The disconnected relationality is amplified by the everydayness of the scene, where the usual apartment fixtures (white walls, old posters, tile floors, old bottles and tea kettle) litter the photo.

In addition, the demeanor of Cao's work operates within the framework of cuteness. Sianne Ngai in "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde" critiques the privileging of aesthetic categories like beautiful over the "cute… whimsical… or wacky."[31] It is within these oft-ignored aesthetic categories of lightheartedness that Ngai reveals the capacity to "conceive the powerlessness of both poetic forms and the social formations built around their production in the arena of political action as the source of an unsuspected power in the domain of political imagination: a fantasy about the very capacity to fantasize."[32] In a related series *Cos-Cosplayers*, Cao removes the youth from landscapes and presents them in full "cuteness," from head to toe. Formally, the stark white background drastically foregrounds the costumes and bodies. The costumes reference and juxtapose seemingly opposing characteristics: Hello Kitty's head on top of a yellow animal jumpsuit or Darth Vader's head placed on top of a frilly lacey dress. These costumes reference popular tropes while redeploying them to formulate new meanings and connotations. The affective dimensions of cuteness and whimsy emerge through her use and reference to popular culture and animated characters. The stark white background formally offers an affective relationship to the viewer, where she is confronted with multiple affects - disturbing yet humorous, familiar yet distanced. Cuteness fails to provide a single narrative or commentary.

In addition to lightheartedness and cuteness, fabulation circulates within failure. Cao depicts and focuses on the failures of cosplay, as the characters attempt to project their presence to those surrounding them but perpetually remain unnoticed. Those within a player's immediate environment constantly ignore the ostentatious costumes and physical gestures of the cosplayers. This lack of reaction and moments of failed connection structure the cuteness and humor of Cao's photos. In *Diversionist*, the public does not notice the scythe or movements of the character. The intense engagement of the body on the sidewalk evokes a flamboyant flâneur walking the city streets. However, the intense movement of the flâneur with object in hand is ignored with equal levels of disregard by objects and subjects of daily life – people and food trucks upholding objects of blockage, like umbrellas. The scythe in bare daylight disappears in the small symphony of umbrellas and disengaged residents.

The infelicitous and failed is furthered in the translation from animated image to embodied performance. Cosplay is an act of the embodiment of media. Animation engages multiple spatial dimensions, from the one-dimensional plane of sketches to its two-dimensional rendering. From these 2-D images, cosplayers reproduce these singular dimensions into a full person. In doing so, the body is within a cycle of etiolations, as the process of embodying an animated character is weak and lacking vigor. These etiolations exemplify the difference between understanding the body as a natural entity as opposed to corporeally constructed. Cao's depiction of cosplay reveals the limits of what the body can do, as we understand its constructedness or corporeality. Corporeality offers an analytic to examine what Cao does to the body in this series. Cao does not present a naturalized body that is perfected in its performance. She captures the failures of the physical body to embody animation's animatedness. Their bodies are corporeally constructed to fail, as they cannot fully embody the singular dimensions of animation. Furthermore, the projection of the animated

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[31] Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005), 812.
[32] Ibid., 838.

characters onto their own bodies via costuming fails as the subjects cannot fully reenact, replicate, nor take on the demands of the costumes. The costumes themselves typically signify being "in character;" however, it is precisely the inability of being in full costume that inspires these dynamic affects and moments of play and imagination. All of the costumes are imperfect by design. The details of Cao's photos reveal tattered and frayed ends of costumes in *A Mirage* and *Deep Breathing*. The tattered details amplify a sense of incompleteness.

Within a framework of speech act theory, Cao does not present felicitous performative acts; she offers humorous and cute yet infelicitous and failed moments. In other words, the multiple affects that surround her work move beyond the idea of performing and maintaining a single character. Through the lighthearted, cute, and failed, Cao highlights the many dimensions and intensities located within a single body. The multiple photographs present a range of performance from being "in character" to failing, playing, and disengaging. In other words, Cao Fei captures many moments of being in and out of character, which becomes *the* normative mode of existence. Thus, animation, in conjunction with performance, develops a discourse on infelicitous acts in order to shift performance studies' privileging and investment in the felicitous. Cao's work as a speech act of alterity explores failure and its productive possibilities. While Goffman and others acknowledge how people use multiple roles in the everyday, most performance theorists rely on positivistic notions of "action" but have not fully questioned the intensity and failures by which these characters enact. Silvio's research and Cao Fei's *Cosplayers* force us to renegotiate the idea of performance to accommodate ideas of failure and engagement/disengagement.

The Politics of Fabulation

If fabulation, with its attending affects of cuteness, lightheartedness, and failure, is a form of imagination that is not didactic and open-ended, then what is the political use of such forms, particularly for the Chinese? In thinking about Western accounts of the Chinese as uninmaginative, what does fabulation enable? If fabulation imagines the uninmaginable, then what political possibilities exist? Fabulation does not have a political valence.[33] It is similar to Walter Benjamin's notion of "pure means" which emphasizes a politics and aesthetics where the ends are either non-existent or wholly fabulous, extravagant, impossible, and materially failed. Fabulation's affects produce ways to "imagine an otherwise."[34] Although some may find this redefinition of the political as unrealistic, fabulation is meant to shift our understanding of politics away from grand theories. For example, although social constructionist argumentation was originally deployed by leftists scholars to reveal how categories and ideas are "constructed," this conceptual tool has also been utilized by conservatives to critique and limit notions of identity.[35] Thus, fabulation redefines our typically ends-oriented definition of politics and shifts the concept towards a more open-ended and means-focused orientation. Furthermore, fabulation's minor affects of the cute, lighthearted, and failed could easily be dismissed for lacking purpose and meaning, especially when situating such

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[33] Ascribing a political valence to fabulation is dangerous. One could argue that the Tea Party in the US uses moments of fabulatory imagination, as some of their political demands are open-ended.

[34] I borrow this phrase from Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[35] One notable example is Justice Powell in *US v. Bakke* who used social constructionist thought to end affirmative action. His argument stated that since identity and race are socially constructed and shifts (Irish becoming White, etc.), then race should not be considered for affirmative action due to race's malleability.

minor affects in relation to China which is often framed as critical and meaning*ful* within the realm of politics. However, such purposelessness for the Chinese opens up space to imagine new modes of theorizing the non-West.

The role of art in creating "change" does not necessarily take the form of didactic critique; art's and affect's open-endedness or purposelessness holds political possibilities. Following Kant and Adorno, theorists have attempted to explore how the purposelessness of art enables a sense of purpose. This apparent paradox is what Frederic Jameson and Ngai label as Adorno's anti-social thesis of art where "the work of art itself is social and non-social all at once."[36] When Ngai asks, "So how *is* art made social by means of its nonsociality?," she brilliantly presents this paradox in which art has meaning precisely through it indirect meanings.[37] Ngai explores this question in relation to experimental poetry: "We can thus see why the commodity aesthetic of cuteness might be mobilized by the poetic avant-garde, particularly in times of war or global crisis, as a meditation on its own restricted agency in a totally commodified society of ends-means rationality, as well as on the social effeteness of its small and all too easily fetishized texts."[38] Thus, similar to the poetics Ngai explores, Cao's use of affect offers the means to comment on the didacticism of life, particularly within dire political climates. Ngai offers critical insights for discourses on Chinese, and by extension non-Western, art. For a context like China, which is usually depicted as a regime of censorship and authoritarianism with regards to artists and dissidents, cuteness in its minor dimensions reveals the problematics of such a depiction of the nation state. Cao utilizes such affects to direct us to the problems of Major China, which is always situated as an authoritarian state.

In thinking about how art is made social through the nonsocial, fabulation makes cuteness, animation, and lightheartedness take on a social function. Fabulation enables us to imagine an otherwise, outside of predefined narratives. This framework opens up a theoretical and political potential that does not re-prescribe narratives of resistance for Chinese artists. Through affect and animation, Cao shows that the Chinese imagine through fabulation. Cao mutates form and content in order to avoid overly didactic narratives about the shifting political and cultural landscape in China. She makes a real, material situation light or animated in order to make it more transparent and evident. Lightheartedness can illuminate dire circumstances. Rather than using form and content to present a social reality, she fabulates lightheartedness in order to shed more light on a shifting and traumatic social life.

The formal elements and affective qualities discussed above contribute to fabulation's possibilities. By destabilizing our understandings of the entwinement of agentic resistance and conscious action or performance, fabulation disrupts this equation in order to rework how non-Western artists exists. In opening up such possibilities for the Chinese, we reexamine the theoretical assumptions undergirding the dominant and normative formulations around cognition, resistance, and agency.

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[36] Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990): 177.
[37] Ngai, 843.
[38] Ibid., 838

CHAPTER 6 – DYING
The Politics of Game Over in Feng Mengbo's *Restart*

From remarking, lingering, and fabulating, this section has moved through minor modes of conceptualizing the subject and agency. Moving away from the dominant notions of meaning-making, resistance, and endurance, I've engaged these different modes to destabilize and rethink how we understand the Chinese subject. We now enter the terrain of playing and dying, particularly as Chinese artists have been working through such themes within video games and other animation-based practices. Through an examination of Feng Mengbo's 2008 animation and performance-based game *Restart* which drew heavily from his 1994 *Game Over* paintings (discussed in Chapter 2), I theorize how play and death function in relation to China. How exactly do the Chinese play and die?

Feng's 2008 large-scale interactive animated game was produced once the technology became available to develop his 1994 paintings. Feng returned to the history of the Long March and the themes explored in his earlier paintings to develop a playable video game that used the figure of the Red Soldier as the primary character who throws coke cans as bombs to kill alien enemies and popular game icons (Super Mario amongst others). With a handheld controller, audience members play and control the animated characters to perform actions within *Restart* for a total of 14 levels. The goal of the game is to save China, by using coke cans to fend off demons, ghosts, aliens, and a host of animated characters from the teenage Mutant Ninja turtles, Super Mario Brothers, and Chun Li and others from Street Fighter.

Play emerges in not only the animated game, but also the performative actions of the player and viewer. The ludic or play constitutes how individuals function at this intersection of performance and media. Play is also tied to understandings of agency and performances of resistance against the more material demands that construct our lives. In addition, the lines between play and labor have certainly come into question with post-Fordist, immaterial modes of production discussed by scholars like Maurizio Lazzarato, Andre Gorz, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Kathi Weeks, amongst others.[1] Thus, how do we mediate these competing connotations to play – fun or resistance and leisure or labor? This chapter explores the multiple dimensions and degrees of play that emerge throughout Feng's *Restart*. In particular, I track how play shifts and changes with technological innovation and animated videogames, with its emphasis on objects, hand-held controllers, and avatars. Furthermore, I examine if and how different groups play. More specifically, if the Chinese are understood as a population and less as individuals, what are the implications for the concept of play, which is normally focused on the individual player or body? And in this shift from individual to population for play, how might this change our understandings of performance and new media?

For animated games, play is also tied to death, as most games are structured for one to fail and to attempt to play again and again.[2] In addition to questions around play, this chapter also thinks through play within the dynamics of death and restart. Although some in queer and new media

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[1] Andre Gorz, *The Immaterial* (London: Seagull Books, 2010); Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor." For a feminist rereading of post-Fordism, see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[2] Not all games are per se structured this way; however, the majority of games rely on death to force a player to restart and try again.

studies emphasize the relationship of failure to gamic death, I delve deeper into the moment of gamic death rather than recuperating failure as a privileged mode of learning or queer world-making. Although such deployments of failures have been critical in destabilizing hierarchies around the proper and improper, such theorizations of failure often side-step the moment of true failure – dying – and focus more upon the moments of failed play. When Jack Halberstam proposes that a queer art of failure "revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures" instead of "resisting endings and limits,"[3] he privileges a focus on the moments of play rather than the end via death. This chapter works through the pinnacle of failure in animated games, death, in order to further examine what a focus on dying can do for theories of play, animation, and queerness. Failure's possibilities exist in not only play, but also the act of dying.

Play, Death, Bios – A Way of Life

The concept of play possesses both a long and short history. Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* offers two drives, the rational and the sensuous, that produce different forms of reality.[4] Within this system, Schiller develops the play drive, which combines the material and rational and enables beauty to arise and morality to exist: "The object of the play impulse, conceived in a general notion, can therefore be called living shape, a concept which serves to denote all aesthetics qualities of phenomena and – in a word – what we call *Beauty* in the widest sense of the term."[5] Schiller wrote *Aesthetic Education* in relation to what he saw as the failures of the French Revolution: extreme violence and the limits of the state. Schiller views aesthetics as elevating a population's moral character away from violence; thus, an aesthetic education through the play drive enables this change in morality.

Although some of Schiller's ideas on play and "living shape" relate to 20th century theorizations of the concept, most contemporary theorists cite play's shorter history. This history emerged during the earlier half of the 20th century. Play arose within the social sciences to think about its constitutive role in culture and society. Sociologist Roger Caillois updated John Huizinga's original work on play, expanding Huizinga's focus on competition to incorporate other modes within the ludic.[6] Anthropologist Clifford Geertz shifted the focus on play towards ritual practices in Bali, opening up the geographic and cultural possibilities.[7] Although some have discounted play as solely fictive and unimportant[8], play became imagined as constitutive of culture. Jacques Derrida negotiated earlier cultural anthropological notions of play from a holistic form towards a productive mode of disruption and failure.[9] In addition, the incompleteness of play, and an emphasis on play as a mode of thought and living, arose within psychoanalytic discourse. Moving away from the Lacanian focus on the internal subject, D.W. Winnicott, along with Melanie Klein, theorized play as a mode of a subject's self-constitution in her relationship to objects. People play and use objects to

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[3] Jack Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* (Boston: Beacon, 2011) 187.
[4] Schiller has had a fairly large influence on Chinese aesthetic theory. See Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
[5] Friedrich Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 12th letter (Mineola: Dover Press, 2004), 76.
[6] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, Games* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961); John Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
[7] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Culture* (Basic Books, 1973)
[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004).
[9] One could argue that queer theory's recent turn towards failure draws from such a discourse on play and its disruptive potential.

work through states, feelings, and existence. Within the contemporary moment, play has been linked to modes of immaterial labor and post-Fordist production. Scholars like Lazzarato and Hardt & Negri remark upon shifts in forms of labor, as it has moved from material production to immaterial creative work. The critical stakes for most of these scholars surround the question of how play and immateriality affect human life and existence.

It is from this genealogy that play has emerged as a central discourse for both performance and media studies. Both fields have latched onto the ludic, since such immaterial activity not only is symptomatic of our "contemporary" postmodern moment, but also constitutes the ontological conditions by which the mediums of digital art and performance emerge. Within new media, play is often theorized in terms of immaterial labor, creative capital, and the gamification of society.[10] For performance, earlier theorists drew from the above-discussed sociological and anthropological discourse to understand play in relation to ritual.[11] Building upon such work, performance theorists have focused on the ludic to think more about immateriality and post-Fordist production. Both fields engage how play functions in relation to capitalism, exploring the degree to which one possesses agency to play in relation to late capitalism.   Primarily media, but some performance scholars, have noted play's collusion with capitalism within the rising trend of society's gamification, limiting one's agency in relation to power.[12]   Others, however, in both fields celebrate individual agency through play to critique capitalism, via physical and online protests or dissent.[13]

What these discourses reveal is a preoccupation with play as a mode of living, a way of being in the world. With the rise of immateriality, play becomes a way to exist and engage. Debates over play's efficacy and import arise, as scholars both celebrate and denounce its possibilities; however, the question of play itself directs us to the ways of living that have become quite central to ideas of *bios*. Giorgio Agamben distinguishes between *zoe* and *bios* in his influential *Homo Sacer*. *Zoe* involves the general quality of life that all beings and animals possess, while *bios* involves ways and modes of living that cultivate a proper being. Timothy Campbell in *Improper Life* takes on the possibility of play as *bios* to question the deathly orientation of the concept of biopolitics that has been developing throughout the end of the twentieth century. Campbell critiques the majority of discourses on biopolitics, ranging from Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Peter Sloterdijk, for their thanatopolitical orientation that draw from Heidegger's limited notion of *techne* as oriented towards death and end. Campbell relies on play to expand notions of *bios*, modes of living, outside of a pre-determined deathly relation to *techne* to reformulate biopolitics. Play becomes a way to exist differently and in less determined ways.[14] In addition, Campbell is one of the few scholars to look at play in relation to the intersection of media and cultural production.

This chapter situates Campbell's directive, by thinking more about play through the intersection of performance and new media and within the context of contemporary Chinese cultural production.

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[10] Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 12; Patrick Jagoda, "Gamification and Other Forms of Play," *boundary 2* 40:2 (2013); and Ian Bogost, "Gamification is Bullshit," *The Atlantic,* August 2011.

[11] See the works of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner.

[12] Ian Bogost, "Gamification is Bullshit*," The Atlantic* (Aug. 9, 2011); See David Golumbia, "Games Without Play," in *New Literary History* 40, no. 1 (2009): 179-204.

[13] Marcela Fuentes, "Zoning In and Out: Tactical Media Performance in Transnational Contexts," in *Performance, Politics, and Activism*, ed. John Rouse and Peter Lichtenfels (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[14] Timothy Campbell, *Improper Life: Technology and Biopolitics from Heidegger to Agamben* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 153.

The work of Feng Mengbo does not simply dismiss or celebrate play; instead, it reveals how media and performance intersect in ways that demonstrate different degrees of play. Play and biopolitics operate together, since play has become a *bios* or way of living within late capitalism. Both performance and media studies direct us to play's connection to the biopolitical: play, as a way of life, either follows the dominant modes of governance or becomes a way to exist outside of such governmentality. Regardless of play's constitutive or disruptive possibilities, it has become hailed as a way of life central to our political moment. Thus, my argument here is not to lean on one side nor to argue that play is both complicit with *and* challenging of capitalism. Instead, the thrust of this chapter reveals how play must be differentiated in terms of its degrees and modalities, [15] particularly when thinking about how certain groups or populations are imagined in their abilities to play. The Chinese reveal a particular degree of play that is ascribed by its non-Western status as a population (less as individual beings), and it is from such a population status that we can better understand how they play as a form of *bios* within late capitalism and transnational exchange.

In addition to play, this body of discourse also engages death. Both animation and performance circulate around the ludic and to different ways of living and dying, as animated bodies restart in video games. Rather than focusing on virtual or real bodies that emerge at the intersection of new media and performance,[16] my analysis concentrates on how these bodies perform the notion of population in their fatigue, dying, and rebirth in play. By doing so, we work through some of Campbell's assertions of the import of play for biopolitics.

Campbell's work on biopolitics explores the notion of play to shift *bios* towards the ludic in order to reorient the thanato-orientation of the biopolitical.[17] However, unlike Campbell, I do not situate play as an out to death and, instead, delve directly back into the place he seems to avoid: into death through play. This is where I locate the vitalism of death, a thanato-oriented animacy. Animation engages play, and modes of death arise in such forms of play to reflect on the cycles of death and indeterminate zones of life. A thanato-oriented animation contends with forms of play and

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[15] Caillois's position was to distinguish 4 forms of play, opposed to Huizinga's earlier work. However, his distinctions do not take on the racialized implications of play in which groups are differentiated in the ways they are allowed to play. In addition, Jagoda & Bogost both highlight the problematics of play within the context of today's gamification trend. However, they do not suggest how such complications arise and in what ways they do.
More recent discussions of play argue for its differentiation from games: "…but a game is not play. Games have rules. Agility has rules. Play breaks rules to make something else happen. Play needs rules but it is not rule-defined. You can't play a games unless you inhabit this muddle." Haraway, "Training in the Contact Zone," in *Tactical Biopolitics*, 459.
[16] This discourse has been quite fruitful by scholars ranging from Bernadette Wegenstein, *Getting Under the Skin* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); however, I ultimately find these works limited in the ways they can engage the lack of an individual body conditioned onto the Chinese population.
[17] Timothy Campbell has similar critiques and ultimately questions "How might we extend this notion of play into the realm of biopolitics as a form of resistance to biopower? … Looking to children at play, perhaps we can make out the horizon of a living art in play that would allow us to see how the self, by withdrawing to play as *bios*, might be able, if not to block, then to slow down the speed with which borders and defenses and, with them, the instinct for destruction are made manifest. A *techne* of *bios* thought through play might be one yet unexplored way to forgo "the dour naturalism" of biopolitics today, in which the object of politics would be merely biological life or that would have the object of life be thinkable only as part of a negative politics." Here Campbell hopes for play to produce a way of resisting or shifting how we think about destruction and the material. However, the minor as a method is less invested in recuperating play to replace or reinvigorate Major concepts. Instead, the minor attempts to use these concepts in more limited ways; for biopolitics, the minor highlights the assumptions and limits of its concepts. Play within death itself becomes a way for us to renegotiate the terms of such powerful analytics. Although Campbell correctly locates play, he does not fully analyze how play transpires in techne and technology and rather seeks to mobilize it as a Major way to respond to biopolitcs' thanato-orientation.

movement that bridge the line between life and death. Mel Chen describes animacy as a flexible concept that troubles the distinctions made between concepts like "dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object"[18] through the slippages in meaning of animacy. Drawing from linguistics, Chen develops animacy to describe the degree of "agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness"[19] attributed to words, objects, metals, and people. Chen's definition of animacy is meant to undo the binaries of life and death and move away from notions of life and liveliness; however, he orients animacy within a positive vitalism associated with notions like "agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness"[20] to define the concept. Jane Bennett's theorizations of matter's vibrancy are similarly oriented towards the positive and lively, arguing for an inanimate object's vital qualities.[21] Although such insights have been immensely helpful, I am less interested here in furthering this investment in the positivism of objects and look more at their negativity — not in them as lifeless but somewhere between vibrant and dead, or what I am situating as a thanato-oriented animacy.

This chapter pushes animacy towards a negativity and thanato-orientation that explores what happens when animacy exists within a negative, or deathly, valence.[22] Different forms of animacy in Feng's video games situate these practices not in terms of liveness and mobility, but rather in death, end, and arrest. Although new materialist and object oriented discourses are extremely helpful for this chapter, they often circulate around positivist and vitalist orientations that reveal how certain objects can "matter" or be "vibrant." The negative and deathly valences of how things die or end beyond a notion of finitude offer critical insights for biopolitics and play.

Foucault reminds us of the epistemological stakes in how we theorize and understand life and death, particularly in relation to scientific discourse: "I would say that the notion of life is not a scientific concept; it has been an epistemological indicator of which the classifying, delimiting, and other functions had an effect on scientific discussion, and on what they were talking about."[23] It is through understanding life in its epistemological formation that we understand how the boundaries of life and death as finite are not simply a pre-given. Furthermore, by analyzing the presumed borders between life and death, we unearth how exactly play offers ways to understand the problematic structures that limit Chineseness. The minor method draws again from Buddhism, where delineations between life and death offer such an analytic by which to understand contemporary Chinese art.

Feng's paintings and video games clarify this deathly-orientation of animacy. Through the act of death in animated games, a prolongation of life can be imagined. Gamic death is not an end to life but rather a prolongation of life through death. When a character dies, one must restart. Upon restarting, the character is rejuvenated to full stature and normally capable of reentering the game where one died. Even when the animated character has to start from the game's beginning or at the start of the highest level achieved, the player is able to reengage her muscle memory and gamic tricks gained to retrain oneself again - to play anew but with more information when one reengages. What this reveals is a corporeal reenactment that allows us to think through the vitalism of death itself - or what can be vibrant about delving into death. Rather than arguing over the status of an

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[18] Mel Chen, *Animacies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Ibid., 2-3.

[21] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[22] This is not meant to align myself within an anti-relational turn of queer theory. EXPLAIN

[23] Michel Foucault, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. A.I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 110.

object as vital (a dead object, a rock, etc.), encounters with death explore what forms of vitality and matter emerge from this intersection of dying and playing. Before describing the thanato-oriented animacy and play for Feng's series, I first discuss how we play through objects to help us think more critically about forms of agency that emerge through play. I briefly utilize the phenomenon of Chinese gold farmers in the *World of Warcraft* to present our relations to objects/avatars and the problem of the notion of the mass/population for the Chinese. I then work through Feng's *Game Over* and *Restart* to analyze how an account of dying amplifies notions of play and failure.

Populations in The *World of Warcraft*

Before I focus on *Restart*, I examine a more distributed animated practice that is more anonymous in its authorial status. Animation and performance also intersect in the *World of Warcraft*, as play arises at the level of population for the multi-player online game.[24] Different conquests, primarily through mining, enable users to accumulate gold to maintain one's armor and to advance in the game. However, rather than winning gold on one's own account, some players purchase it from other users.[25] An underground economy that exchanges capital for game gold has emerged. This economy has produced players whose sole goal is to accumulate as much as possible to sell offline to users; this subset of players are often understood and racially imagined as Chinese. Many have discussed the role of these Chinese gold farmers in the World of Warcraft.[26] Popular attention was paid to this phenomenon in the 2007 *New York Times Magazine* article by Julian Dibbell.[27] She describes the small working conditions of groups of normally thought of as Chinese players that are paid about 30 cents an hour to harvest gold on World of Warcraft. Lisa Nakamura has directed us to the racialization of these gold farmers, arguing against liberal color-blind notions that often shape the internet and online gaming.[28] Patricia Clough and Craig Wilse reveal how this example reveals not just simply that populations matter, but that "population capacities for life and death" lead to differences in how populations are treated in the larger political discourse.[29] In the policing of this population, Clough and Wilse reveal how the boundaries of work and play are reinforced within an American "nationalist-capitalist, masculinist imaginary."[30]

Chinese gold farmers are targeted to die, as some players have become antagonistic to their existence. In addition, Chinese players kill themselves. Since gold farming is highly policed on World of Warcraft and players often report users for such activity, some gold farmers have resorted to killing masses of their own animated bodies and laying them out in ways that provide a URL address that directs players to sites where they can purchase gold. Such an activity implicates a

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[24] Some scholars question if games like *World of Warcraft* can be considered games or play. Golumbia, "Games Without Play".

[25] There are additional ways to accumulate gold in which players join raiding guilds together to raid dungeons to accumulate weapons. They enter online market places and pool resources together to assist in advancing within the game.

[26] Alexander Galloway, "Does the Whatever Speak" in *Race After the Internet*, ed. Lisa Nakamura (Routledge, 2011); Lisa Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game," in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 2 (2009); Patricia Clough & Paul Wilse, "Human Security/National Security," in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[27] Julian Dibbell, "Video Games – China – Money – Online Games," *New York Times* (June 17, 2007).

[28] Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game."

[29] Clough and Wilse, "Human Security/National Security," 53.

[30] Ibid., 56.

racialized population using many individualized bodies to enter an economy geared towards not simply their death but the entire population's destruction. These gold farmers play to die.

The figure of the Chinese gold farmer enables us to think about how the Chinese are imagined within animated games. Their play is oriented towards gamic death. The thanato-orientation of this animated play reveals how play and death intertwine in new media. The deaths of Chinese gold farmers occur at the level of a population. Although individual bodies die, they die en masse and without individuality. The ludic directs us to the central place that Foucault identifies as the key source of biopolitical governance, the population. Foucault utilizes the concept of population to develop his notions of governmentality and biopolitics. His focus on population is meant to show how the state instrumentalized[31] the idea of population to govern, rather than using the population as a measure or model of a society. The population does represent people; it becomes a way to conceive sets of people in abstracted forms for biopolitical action, securitization, and governmentality.

Death, however, is usually understood as universal. Similar theoretical dynamics arise around well-established discourses of death within critical theory. Although quite different in terms of focus, Freud's death drive and Heidegger's being toward death are constructs that provide a sense of a universal experience with death. Freud's death drive is taken as a universalized compulsion towards self-destruction. However, in this articulation, Freud's internal focus avoids the environmental and institutional conditions that lead to the death of populations. Heidegger's being toward death is an enlightened way of living that makes the *dasein* aware through dread or death. This articulation imagines an enlightened being who enters a universalized experience of awareness. However, one may become aware of death in many different ways, through meditation or through the systemic apparatuses of power that makes one's life limited in scope. In addition, *dasein* may not be fully enlightened by an acute awareness to death. An awareness of death through repeated policing or biopolitical forces will not lead to a universal experience.

Although the notion of death and mortality is central to biopolitics, the differential ways populations die through play highlight the uneven ways death operates within governance. Death is not a universal experience. Populations may all die as a universal concept, but not all populations experience death equally. Many queer and disability theorists have questioned how we categorize life, death, and what we qualify as a life "worth living." Sharon Holland theorizes ideas of death and queerness, emphasizing the racialized contours of dying. Relatedly, Jasbir Puar articulates the varied ways death is experienced by different communities. Death is not a universal act. Jasbir Puar brings to light how populations experience death and time differently: "Prognosis time should ideally articulate with other theories of queer temporality and social death that work through the unevenness of how populations live and get to live time, from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's framing of a carceral racism that produces premature death, to Lauren Berlant's elaboration of the "slow death" maligned populations must often bear, to Michael Ralph's argument about an artistic creativity that "surplus time" engenders in hip-hop artists — that is, time 'freed up' by virtue of a prognosis that says you don't have much time to live, a euphoric release of freedom occasioned by the sense that you have exceeded the dismal prognosis that you will die at an early age."[32] Puar proposes prognosis time as a means to articulate this unevenness. To question the universalizing theories of Freud and Heidegger reworks and makes such difference in dying an integral part of how these

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[31] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (London: Picador, 2009), 105.
[32] Jasbir Puar, "Prognosis Time" in *Women and Performance* 19(2) (2009).

theories operate. Thus, Puar's prognosis time reformulates these theories to not simply accommodate difference but to see prognosis and differentiation as integral to these definitions. In relation to Chinese death in *World of Warcraft*, death transpires in uneven ways.

The harvest of gold harkens back to the actual experience of laborers during the California gold rush. And in today's world of animation, this labor continues to be distributed racially. Death shapes the Chinese population. The racialization of the entire Chinese population leads to a *population towards death*, rather than simply a being towards death. Similar to Clough and Wilse, populations must be understood differently and in turn be treated within a different economy. A population towards death enables us to see the different political economies that circulate for how groups are treated and framed within a larger global network. The condition of the Chinese as a population towards death, as exemplified through the logics of play within animation, directs us to the limits of their ability to play.

Restart or *Game Over*?

In relation to our understanding of the condition of population for China, the moments of gamic death in *Game Over* and *Restart* further clarify the intersection of play and death, along with new media and performance. Populations repeatedly die en masse. What emerges in the continual play that these repeated deaths provide? How do these characters die and what models of death can help us think about this process of playing, living, and dying? Similar to the thanato-orientation of Chinese gold farmers in *World of Warcraft*, the deathly orientation of Feng's characters direct us to a cyclical, repetitive relation to death. Galloway's *Gaming* offers methodological frameworks to situate the interaction of death, play, and animation. Rather than seeing games as merely interactive, Galloway focuses on games as action-based. When games shift away from interactive to action-based, they operate less as forms of ocular experience and more towards corporeal/bodily action. Thus, videogames in animation require attending to the life, cycles, and actions of the body, the primary analytics that I utilize to analyze Feng's 1994 paintings and his 2008 playable game. Galloway differentiates between the operator and the machine, where the player/operator is distinct from the codes and rules of the machine. With this, the operator has control over an animated character who must maneuver within the machine world. The last distinction Galloway provides is between the diegetic and non-diegetic space of the videogame. In a game's construction, there are elements internal/diegetic to the experience (fighting against a dragon) and those external/non-diegetic (the amount of energy one loses when hit by a foe).

The three elements of action, player/machine, and diegetic/non-diegetic direct us to how a game ends via gamic death, which is "[t]he most emblematic nondiegetic machine … 'game over.'" Galloway further defines gamic death: "While somewhat determined by the performance of the operator, or lack thereof, death acts are levied fundamentally by the game itself, in response to the input and over the contestation of the operator."[33] Galloway distinguishes gamic death as a disabling, as opposed to an enabling, act.[34] However, Feng's work reframes the death act as enabling one to continue. Although a character may die, the player is interpellated to play again. Gamic death results in a complete restart, a partial restart at the beginning of the highest level achieved, or at the moment to reengage. Regardless of the moment of death, death in *Game Over* and *Restart*

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[33] Galoway, *Gaming*, 31
[34] Ibid.

functions as productive in order to push Galloway's formation of gamic death as disabling into a territory of enabling.

Gamic death produces a prolongation of one's experience through the shortening of life. In one painting from *Game Over*, Feng captures the ending of the soldier's playing life (possibly after Chun Li crushes him with her thighs).   At the moment of game over, Feng catches a frame that asks the player to either "End" or "Continued?". The use of the past tense of "continued" connotes a sense of repetition. The past tense evokes a sense of destiny for one to continue again.   The present tense of "continue" implies a sense of choice, while the past tense of "continued" makes it seem inevitable. This sense of the inevitability of continuation connotes the cyclical and the continual; there will never be an end.   In other words, one is destined to always continue the action of life into death and back again.   In the painting, the cursor highlights "Continued" to be the option of choice, amplifying this sense of inevitability.

As Galloway reminds us, video games, unlike "visual arts [which] compel viewers to engage in the act of looking," "compel players to perform acts."[35]   When the operator clicks on Feng's "Continued?" or "End," what implications arise? Is it simply a matter of replaying, or what types of acts are players encouraged to enact upon continuing a game?   The repeated choosing to be "continued" offers players a repetitious performative, a replay; the boundaries between life and death here are destabilized.

It is in this indeterminate zone that the performative act of replay enables the operator to experience a sense of repeat in life, or *bardos*.   As a minor method, Buddhism furthers our understanding of life, death, and play.   As discussed in the introduction, Buddhism offers an epistemological basis that disrupts presumptions of Judeo-Christian norms within critical theory. Vernacular forms of religion make more explicit a presumed secularism that shapes theoretical notions around death and finitude. Buddhism, particularly Tibetan philosophies on death, do not simply state that life involves rebirth, but rather religion enables us to linger in this problematic of how we think about death within a supposed secularism that frames death in relation to finitude and end.   Theories of biopolitics are usually understood in relation to death as deterministic and final. However, the practice of death in animation ("game over") offers an alternative form of sociality and relationality that refigures this overly determined discourse. Different modes of death help us make this dominant critical position more transparent. By making the assumptions around the biopolitical more obvious through play and religion, we investigate the boundaries of *bios*, life, and death outside of a presumed secularism. The method of the minor directs us to the immaterial practices of animation and play to refigure the Major notions of biopolitics and subjectivation that shape how we think about populations, groups, and life.[36]

Feng's games directs us towards death as a cycle where one is "continued." The structure of death in games reveals the normative ways we demarcate between life and death. Regardless of where one must restart after gamic death (where one dies, earlier at a level, or at the beginning of the game), the ability to restart and reenter a cycle provides a helpful model by which to rethink finitude. Death is

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[35] Ibid., 84.

[36] Similar to Farquhar and Zhang who look at the seemingly unimportant or minor phenomenon of group exercise in Beijing and its implications for biopolitics, I focus on the minute practice of gamic play to place the practice historically which then "harbors a sense of the political that has everything to do with life and death." Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, "Biopolitcal Beijing," in *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2005), 306.

more centrally located around how we conceptualize the act of death. The game is structurally similar to Buddhist philosophies with regards to how lives are constructed in relation to rebirth and cycle. Buddhism formulates different relationships to death outside notions of end and finitude. Although different branches of Buddhism imagine death in various formulations,[37] most think of death in relation to rebirth or reincarnation. If one looks at life beyond the end of gamic action and focuses more on how it enables a form of prolongation of experience, we begin to change the durée of what we understand life to be. Death enables a productive repeated failing. There is a prolonging of life through repeated play, although a "life" may be shortened in the immediate moment of gamic death. What if our investments shifted from prevention of gamic death to seeing it as part of a larger process - letting go of our attachment to loss in order to understand a larger process of life that extends beyond finitude? For Buddhism, physical death can be dictated by either 1) samsara, which involves a cycle of rebirth placed in unenlightened craving and ignorance or 2) laws of impermanence, which involves the bodhisattva's enlightened relation to death. Within the latter, the notion of *bardos* enables these transitional states between life and death to emerge. In addition, these different places where one must restart within a video game mimics the different places one reenters upon transitioning out of *bardos* - one could be reincarnated into a different species or another human being, depending on one's own form of spiritual path.[38]

When Feng's Red Soldier avatar dies in the large-scale video game *Restart*, multiple rolling screens display the phrase "Game Over" with the image of the soldier laying in a pool of blood. Compared to the full size images that players and audience members watch on the single screen, smaller screens display the "Game Over" upon gamic death. The repeated scrolling of Game Over within this fractured format invites the player to restart and play again. These repeated images evoke a more playful ending, as opposed to the bloody avatar and phrase "Game Over" being displayed across the entire screen of the exhibition hall. The sonic quality at this moment of "Game Over" is similarly inviting, as the arcade music that is also inspired by Revolutionary era songs, continues to play from earlier in the game. The sonic quality of the work does not change from playing the game to dying, producing a sense of continuation through restarting. In addition, when one decides to play again with the wireless controller, the full screen reappears with the invitation to Restart. Juxtaposed against the multiple "Game Over" screens, this single restarting screen invites the viewer (through its size) to play again. The game implores the audience to enter into a cycle of play, death, and restart.

Bardos theorizes these shifts in notions of cycles, repeat, and restart, extending the temporality of what we consider to be a "lifetime." *Bardos* offers the suspended and in between states that prolong life after physical death. In such an indeterminate zone, we question where we demarcate life's boundaries. Eve Sedgwick in *Touching, Feeling* engages Buddhist teachings and explores its ramifications on pedagogy: "From a pedagogical view, at any rate, the Tibetan teachings on bardos and rebirth are irrepressibly rich. The framework of rebirth casts the single human life in the context of a much longer, very complex learning project. Instead of constituting a single, momentous master-class graded on a pass/fail basis, like Christianity — or even ungraded, like the secular version — the individual lifetime is more like a year of one's school, a year preceded and

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[37] For a general introduction to these varied traditions, see Jacqueline I. Stone, "Death" in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr.. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 (56-76).

[38] Admittedly, the notion of reincarnation reifies a hierarchical notion of species, with humans on top. I do not here seek to work against such hierarchies.

followed by other school years at the appropriate levels."[39]   The notion of bardos expands our formulations of temporality and what we understand as a lifetime. The duration of life is expanded through bardos, similar to shifts in understandings of time in forms of lingering as discussed in chapter 4 on the performances of He Chengyao and Zhang Huan. This minor definition of life and death brings to light the presumed ideas of finitude that structure most theoretical accounts of life and death; thus these different models from animation and Buddhism offer alternative accounts that highlight these limits. Furthermore, Feng's move away from the longplay video format does not rely on maintaining the health of its characters, as the point of the longplay game is to survive through an indeterminate amount of time (World of Warcraft, etc.). Arcade games, like *Restart, Street Fighter,* and *Double Dragon*, are more about lives.   Feng's depiction of characters' lives offers a sense of how life can be lost at any point - the recycling of lives. He depicts soldiers in the Long March not as survivors of longplay but as recycled lives. Here, Feng is less interested in prolonging health; instead, Feng gives a sense of the prolongation of a larger experience that involves many lives. Gamic play finds kinship with Buddhism by offering minor models of life and death, making more transparent how most dominant accounts of conceptualizing life and death.

Galloway views gamic death as an "emblematic nondiegetic act," where "the controller stops accepting the user's gameplay and essentially turns off."[40]   In the moment of play and death, Galloway reveals how Huizinga theorizes play as a form of creating order out of the imperfect world. Galloway juxtaposes this theory of play against Derrida's, which argues the opposite and situates play in "the inability to achieve order."[41]   Galloway privileges this place of "noncentering, putting the gamer into a temporary state of disability and submission."[42]   In this moment of game over, the decentering of life echoes the instability of the *bardos*, the in between state and the cycle of rebirth. This indeterminate zone is a part of the messiness of life, immeasurable under current standards of science.

Objects & Play

The player of *Restart* dies through the interface of multiple objects: the controller and character avatar. Feng's work enables us to think more about how we play, particularly through objects and avatars. How do we play and learn through objects? What forms of agency arise from such modes of playing through objects?

Feng changes the title of his Long March series from *Game Over* to *Restart*, which shifts away from ideas of finite end. Whereas his 1994 version emphasized finitude (*Game Over*), the title *Restart* puts at the forefront ideas of continuation and cycle. This large-scale interactive animated game unfolds through the players' controller.   The operator plays in front of an 80 by 20 foot screen, with a wireless controller that is the size of a regular game control. The space is overwhelming as the screen takes up the entire wall of an exhibition hall. The player's body is immersed into the room, as the game surrounds his experience. Feng develops this sense of space, as audience members are interpellated as players (perhaps performers?) who traverse the entire hall of the exhibition space, tracing the movements of the avatar along the screen. The game follows the side-scrolling genre of

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[39] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 177.
[40] Galloway, *Gaming*, 28.
[41] Ibid., 31.
[42] Ibid.

video games. In addition to *Street Fighter II* and *Super Mario Brothers*, Feng throws in iconic images from *Contra III*, Americana (flags, coke cans, and the Statue of Liberty), and China (Tiananmen Square and Mao). The game's narrative structure is loosely based on the Long March; however, similar to his paintings, history is simply referenced as a glitch, in cursory and referential ways.

The on-screen objects become glitch-like in comparison to the intense size of the screen. Its size overwhelms the individual player. One almost feels as if one is riding the middle of a wave. The 80 by 20 foot screen is much larger than a regular television set. The sense of play is amplified for player and viewers. Fun and play, over politics, are often emphasized in Feng's *Restart* series.[43] However, what arises from this fun and play, especially as one's character repeatedly dies? Gamic play and how an operator experiences the repeated death of the animated avatar, especially as it is amplified on the larger immersive exhibition space, assist in theorizing not only play but also death. As discussed earlier, the moment of an animated player's death can be expanded out of finitude and into a notion of restarting. However, different forms of agency emerge from the repeated death and restart of the animated character for a player. As machines affect operators, they do not simply become one. How can we account for this process? Object relations theory provides a sense of how an expanded self relates to objects and what arises for such play with objects. What does it mean that a game's operator (the player) uses an animated character to fight, play, live, and die? When the animated character dies in the game, the player usually does not die with it;[44] thus, what arises from such distinctions between operator and animated character? Object relations theory directs us to how we play with objects and what we are able to figure out through play, moving us towards a more complex understanding of agency.

Although the animated character "dies," the operator of the game continues to live. The operator repeatedly uses the object of the character to prolong her experience with the machine. What implications does this have? How can we begin to understand this dynamic? As mentioned in the last chapter, Teri Silvio offers insights on this dynamic, as she accounts for the rise of animation in relation to the notion of performativity. Silvio defines animation as a means of "projection of qualities perceived as human – life, power, agency, will, personality, and so on – outside of the self, and into the sensory environment, through acts of creation, perception and interaction … [which] require[] a medium."[45] This definition of animation focuses on three components: 1) projection of qualities outside of the self and into the environment 2) via acts 3) which all require objects and mediums. Silvio remarks upon the unique status of the object in relation to the growing presence of animation. She explains how earlier theorizations of performance/performativity were based on a self-based, identity-informed analysis; thus, she suggests that animation accounts for our newer object-based existence. She aligns the analytics of performance with Lacanian models of the self and mirror, proposing that performance emerged from these notions of self identity formation. Animation is based upon object-relations theory, which emphasizes an individual's attachment to transitional objects or mediums in order to formulate a sense of self and others. For Silvio, animation reveals the "projection of the self into the environment"[46] because "animated characters are not so much introjected role models as psychically projected objects of desire."[47] Within the

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[43] In most blogs and online discussions of Feng's work, discourses around play dominate. http://hyperallergic.com/15898/feng-mengbo-long-march/

[44] There are certainly cases of death by playing too long, particularly for East Asian boys that stay in playing games - Chinese and Korean in particular.

[45] Silvio, "Animation: The New Performance?" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2010), 427.

[46] Ibid., 426

[47] Ibid., 429

context of gaming, the death of the animated character reveals more to us as an object that affects us, maintaining a sense of distinction between player and animation while enabling an engagement with what objects do to and for us.

D.W. Winnicott speaks directly to the ways objects are deployed in relation to play. As a Kleinian psychoanalyst, Winnicott studied the play of children and the implications for how adults engage with objects. In *Playing and Reality*, he situates play as becoming permissible through a "potential space" where individuals are encouraged or feel safe to play. Through "transitional objects" (teddy bears, etc.), a child uses a real and imagined object to play and work through different emotional states. Transitional objects and phenomena are "the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral erotism and the true object-relationship…"[48] Winnicott proposes that people use transitional objects to formulate a healthy sense of self; however, when one attempts to skip over such development he produces a "false self" which molds to others' expectations. Winnicott develops notions of true and false selves to understand different forms of human development, as opposed to Freudian formulations of the id and ego. Although one could debate the existence of the formation of a true, false, or healthy self, especially when juxtaposed against Foucault's and others' theories on subjectivation, Winnicott's insights help us think about the import of the object in producing subjectivity.

In relation to video games, the operator uses the machine to create a sense of being in the world. Playing is crucial for "the individual child or adult [as she] is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."[49] Play and the production of illusion produces a sensibility of self; however, Winnicott at the same time fears for the overreliance on illusion for adults: "I am therefore studying the substance of illusion, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion, and yet becomes the hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own. We can share a respect for illusory experience, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings."[50] Winnicott situates adult play and illusion in art and religion, but he also demarcates between lines of normality and madness for illusion.

Winnicott is quite concerned with the risk of illusion. He describes a patient that grew up primarily fantasying and playing games. As an adult, she "managed to construct a life in which nothing that was really happening was fully significant to her."[51] He describes her life as "disassociated from the main part of her, which was living in what became on organized sequence of fantasying."[52] Winnicott theorizes that "fantasying interferes with action and with life in the real or external world, but much more so it interferes with dream and with the personal or inner psychic reality, the living core of the individual personality."[53] However, as video games, costume play, and animation become further embedded in youth and adult life in China and elsewhere, how can we better

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[48] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.
[49] Ibid., 54.
[50] Ibid., 3.
[51] Ibid., 29.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 31.

understand fantasy beyond notions of risk and normality and population formation? What else can fantasy, play, and gamic death provide beyond an investment in a normative formation of the self?

Winnicott provides some direction in this regard. He identifies the formless in moments of fantasy: "The key word to be carried back into the dream was *formlessness*, which is what the material is like before it is patterned and cut and shaped and put together. In other words, in a dream this would be a comment on her own personality and self-establishment […] Her childhood environment seemed unable to allow her to be formless but must, as she felt it, pattern her and cut her out into shapes conceived by other people."[54] Similar to Schiller's "living shape" that arises from the play drive, Winnicott's notion of formlessness provides a sense of the malleability necessary for play, existence, and ways of being. It is through the formlessness of imagination and in our work with objects that we locate modes of existence outside of subjectivation.

Feng negotiates formlessness through several aspects in *Restart*. In Feng's shift from painting to video game, *Restart* becomes a source of play for himself. In interviews, Feng stresses how he felt the paintings were incomplete, which inspired him to continue to working through the themes in another form and media. Although most cite his use of the videogame as his primary shift in media, Feng is also experimenting with performance. Moving away from painting, his animated game forces the audience to engage space, as they must follow the game avatar throughout the hall. As the side-screen continues to scroll, the player with the controller and the audience must also shift through space. As such, Feng not only plays with animation, but also choreographs bodies, space, and objects.   This engagement of different media enables Feng to play with form to produce a work that offers the space for formlessness to arise. Furthermore, *Restart* is considered retrograde in comparison to newer games like *World of Warcraft* and *Quake*. Feng's desire to work within this well-understood genre of games similarly produces a sense of formlessness. Feng queers the usual relationship of characters, as the Red Soldier must fight against Super Mario who has normally been understood as a "good character." By reverting the roles between good and bad characters, Feng destabilizes our associations of gamic play in order for formlessness to arise.

The space of formlessness, enabled by the constant failure of games and play, momentarily blurs distinctions between player and fictional character, providing a space to destabilize the distinctions between subject, object, self, and other.   In other words, the formless offers language to relate to the Buddhist notion of no self.   The formless is the space in which we develop a sense of agency that is not imagined as opposing but rather attendant to subjectivation. Such an understanding of agency through formlessness is one deeply removed from a focused self.

Winnicott discusses the function of the destruction of objects and its role in fantasy.   His approach takes into account the relation of a subject to objects and the environment, rather than a subject's internal desires. Winnicott proposes that "destruction plays its part in making the reality, placing the object outside the self." The repeated death of the character makes it an object separate from the player's body, where such "destruction belongs to the object's failure to survive." Animated games embody this repeated failure of survival. In this repetition, Winnicott reveals how this space of destruction enables a mode of fantasy for the subject:

> In the destruction of the object to which I am referring *there is no anger*. There could be said to be joy at the object's survival. From this moment, or arising out of this phase, the object

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[54] Ibid., 34.

is *in fantasy* always being destroyed. This quality of 'always being destroyed' makes the reality of the surviving object felt as such, strengthens the feeling tone, and contributes to object constancy. The object can now be used.

Although anger and frustration certainly arise from gamic play at the moment one loses, Winnicott directs us towards what happens with repeated death and destruction. He emphasizes a notion of an object's survival and how that enables the object to be used and reused. Winnicott focuses on how the repeated destruction of an object enables forms of fantasy to arise, which ultimately alleviates anger from the long durée of play but not per se the immediate experience. Fantasy is the primary mode that arises for a subject through the repeated destruction of an object. Repeated gamic death produces a mode of fantasy for a subject to obtain a sense of self and a way to find relationality with others. Winnicott reveals how this destruction and fantasy enables "the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control." Gamic death offers a way to relate to something out of one's immediate realm of control. Furthermore, it is through the amorphous and, as discussed earlier, *formless* space of fantasy that enables a subject to gain a sense of self.

In this regard, agency might be theorized as not necessarily central to the self. Agency might be thought about in more relation terms. Through the constant fantasy and repeated play/death via objects, the thanato-oriented animacy distribute agency. Winnicott directs us beyond the individual subject. In the subject's realization that life may not be in one's full control, we begin to see a space for one to find relations to others outside of the self. *Formlessness* refers to the individual; the self as formless though extends the individual body into a relation with others and objects. The cyclic death of the character operates within a mode of fantasy production. And it is from this play/fantasy that the subject formulates a sense of self beyond the individual through the repeated death/destruction of the animated object. Although this could be read as a form of failure, I move away from such an account. As Halberstam and others have discussed, failure produces political potential. However, this potential lies more in a model of life that extends notions of life beyond individual failure. Locating power in an individual's failure through moments of play, a crucial project of queer theory, is only half the story. The remainder exists in pointing to different modes of existence, such as the prolongation of life through repeated death. Failure asks what the concept may point to in terms of different modes of existing and relating outside of individual success. However, moving away from finitude and failure, which are often celebrated within the individual subject, expands the possibilities of queer relationality through the act of dying.

Although Buddhism is drawing from very different intellectual genealogies, this larger theorization that privileges a destabilizing of the self is a crucial way to situate the self - a notion made transparent in the animated video games and paintings by Feng. Play is removed from outside the realm of the whole self, the stable subject; the self is expanded in relational ways through gamic, animated play. The Buddhist theory of no-self provides a different model by which to think subject-object, subject-self, and subject-other relations:

> At the heart of Buddhism lies the concept of *anatman*, or no-self. *Anatman* stems from the idea that since ultimate reality is "empty," there cannot be an eternal self or soul. This does not mean that a conventional sense of self does not exist, but that one's "self" is dependent and constituted. Often translated as "co-dependent origination," the doctrine of *pratitya-samutpada* captures this notion of dependent arising. Everything in the universe, including our lives and our thoughts, is wrapped up in a circular web of cause and effect. Nothing has

lasting substance; everything is conditioned by everything else. Thus while one has the impression that there is a person rightly identified as "I," and that one's sense of self continues through space and time, one is not the same self as one was when one was three years old, and one hundred years from now one's self will have ceased to exist.[55]

This sense of no-self is produced through the practice of cognitive work through meditation and study. Anne Klein describes the "dissolution of separation between subject and object" as "cognitive nondualism."[56] This form of cognition is cultivated through a variety of practices that are called different things depending on the type of Buddhist practice. From these practices, agency can be rethought not as non-existent but rather as diffuse.

As a choreographer of space, Feng expands the interactive zone between audience and player. The large screen expands a player's sense of space from one of a computer or television screen to an entire hall. Within such an expansion, the subject must broaden not only her visual capacity, but also her kinesthetic awareness – one would not necessarily want to run into other audience members. As such, a video game player's corporeal and kinesthetic awareness must be negotiated in more expanded forms due to the large-scale format of *Restart*. In watching video footage of audience members using a remote controller, I focused on audience members in order to obtain a sense of where their focus would be. Although some people watch the player with the remote controller, most viewers direct their visual attention to the avatar. In these moments of focusing on the moving avatar, a relational sensibility is produced. This is not a relationality that forms a community within an art space; rather, this relationality is based upon a focus onto an object outside of oneself – an object to which others also anchor themselves.

The notion of no-self expands fields of relationality beyond the bounded individual and into ways that relate us in different temporal forms. The self is related to others in the past and future; in addition, the self becomes situated to others within the present. The implications of such a theorization are crucial, as they do not presume death within finitude and the individual. Patrick Anderson develops a politics of morbidity for artists and political dissidents engaging in self-starvation practices. He defines the politics of morbidity as "the embodied, interventional embrace of mortality and disappearance not as *destructive*, but as radically *productive* stagings of subject formations in which subjectivity and objecthood, presence and absence, life and death intertwine."[57] However, Anderson here produces a subject bound by death in its finite form. When death is not conceptualized as finite end, we expand the duration of experience and shift from locating life's end as a spectacularized moment of subjectivation. Death is not an end but rather a cycle to better understand how subjects live outside of only an individualized sense of self.

This practice resonates with how Foucault situates bios and life outside of the self, where the subject is expanded and situated within a process of learning how to live for not solely for an individual's edification or subjectivation. This process of dying produces a different sense of relationality that is not only about self growth. Cyclic death allows us to separate bios/life from the self, where life is expanded and relational. Foucault in *Fearless Speech* separates bios from the self:

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[55] Anne Klein, http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/klein.htm
[56] Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, 21.
[57] Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

What I want to show is that the general Greek problem was not the *tekhne* of the self, it was the *tekhne* of life, the *tekhne tou biou*, how to live. It's quite clear from Socrates to Seneca or Pliny, for instance, that they didn't worry about the afterlife, what happened after death, or whether God exists or not. That was not really a great problem for them: the problem was: Which *tekhne* do I have to use in order to live as well as I ought to live? And I think that one of the main evolutions in ancient culture has been that this *tekhne tou biou* became more and more a *tekhne* of the self. A Greek citizen of the fifth or fourth century would have felt that this *tekhne* for life was to take care of the city, of his companions… With Plato's Alcibiades, it's very clear: you have to take care of yourself because you have to rule the city. But taking care of yourself for its own sake starts with the Epicureans — it becomes something very general with Seneca, Pliny, and so on: everybody has to take care of himself. Greek ethics is centered on a problem of personal choice, of the aesthetics of existence."[58]

Foucault's use of Stoic practices informs this sense of living beyond the individual subject in consideration of others. The parallels with Buddhism show how the subject and death are expanded. Comparing Buddhism to Foucault's focus on the Stoics offers productive temporal, historical, cultural, and intellectual slippages. A sense of self practice and cultivation produces a different relationship to the self - one that becomes more than the self. These modes of selfhood expand beyond an individualistic frame; these discourses do not abandon the self but deepen this sense of relationality which emerges from a focus on self cultivation - a practice that also emerges through Buddhist meditation and study.

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[58] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 260.

CONCLUSION: MEDIATION & PERFORMANCE

In my introduction, I discussed three critical axes that have shaped this dissertation's arguments: religion/context, Deleuze, and media(tion). I have explicitly traced the first two to situate the method *minor China* in relation to modes of contextualization that shifted away from over-determined modes of historicization. Buddhist mysticism and the Deleuzian approaches of context/becoming offer minor ways of analyzing specific artworks. Although it has existed more in the background, I have deployed the third aspect of media and mediation to produce minor analyses by privileging the medium of performance over the more traditionally used methods from visual studies and representational analysis. Performance has directed us towards breath, affect, and the body. However, I want to conclude by explicitly foregrounding my use of performance as a critical analytic for the minor. Why emphasize performance over the visual, or why shift from a discussion of *xingwei yishu* (behavior art) towards *biaoyan* (theatrical and movement-based art)? What is the relation of the minor in its affective capacities to media? What importance do questions of media provide in analyses of China and for its theorizations in relation to art histories on contemporary Asian, Asian American, and global art? And most importantly, what are the limits of performance as a medium?

Alexander Galloway differentiates the object of media from the process of mediation. The latter involves "the physicality of transmission and message sending,"[1] where "practices and effects" are central rather than "objects and operations."[2] Similar to Galloway, this project has emphasized this process of mediation, which involves relationality and the communication between self and the world, others, and objects. Rather than providing an account of media objects as they've changed within contemporary Chinese performance and art (from performance to new media and animation), I have emphasized how objects relate to others. Although many of these works involve performance-based artists integrating new media forms, such as animation, film, and online games, I have resisted accounts of the use and integration of "media" and emphasized different mediation processes. As such, technology or *techne* becomes less about the apparatuses and objects used by the human and more about *techne* as "technique, art, habitus, ethos, or lived practice." This differentiation has been key for the construction of *minor china*, since the minor attends to the process of mediation over the identification and meanings of defined and stable objects.

An attention to such differences between media and mediation is crucial for questions of China. Media, rather than mediation, has been a large part of the historical discourse surrounding China and technology. As Christopher Bush argues, "a lot of writers used China to talk about media and used media to talk about China."[3] Questions of the sinograph/Chinese ideograph as media have become a central way of situating the question of media to China. Especially during shifts and changes in mass media, discussions of China continually arise. Throughout reflections on the printing press and mass mediated distribution of text, comparisons of the moveable alphabet with sets of ideographic characters were discussed to situate China as lagging (although the Chinese invented mass-replicated text before Guttenberg) in relation to the flexible print. In discourses about photographic reproduction, China's ideograph has been compared to the capturing of a stable image. At the advent of film, scholars and journalists often compared moving images to the moving ideograph or the shifting hieroglyph.

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[1] Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (London: Polity, 2012), 15.

[2] Ibid., 24.

[3] Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xviii.

China is repeatedly theorized as the perpetual other within a global landscape, relying on its media objects (rather than the process of mediation) as symbolic of shifts in modernization, technology, and social life. The ideograph operates as a way to understand China as a stagnant object by which to compare, contrast, and understand the shifts of the West. The imagined stagnancy of the ideographic object becomes the stable reflective surface for the West to understand its media ruptures and "revolutions." In other words, China has become a media object in and of itself, as the Chinese nation repeatedly mediates an over-determined relation to history, institutions, the subject, and agency.

However, with all of the focus on the media of writing as it transfixes China, what exists in excess of language and writing – in the gesture, the sigh, and exhaustion? Rather than imagining China through the framework of media, what emerges when we think of China in relation to mediation? This project has directed us to questions of mediation to produce different approaches to China. In terms of Major and minor, mediation amplifies the minor, while media maintains the Major. With China and its ideographic function as a static reflexive surface, the analytic of media has reproduced the Major by maintaining the epistemological presumptions of what we assume an object to be. Media holds objects, like China, stable and knowable. Mediation directs us to the process and relations within works, which renders palpable the minor within such objects. This project has worked through the mediation of the minor in order to produce unstable yet productive ways of understanding China, particularly as it relates to the global.

In order to deploy mediation for *minor china*, the medium of performance has been privileged through its attention to body, affect, and relations. The minor medium of performance, in its relation to visual studies and other media, directs us to processes of mediation that resituate the object(s) of China in new directions. As such, the corporeal accounts for much of *minor china*. With such concerns in mind, the question of performance as media is less about the intersection of performance with new media practices (dance and projection, video art and theatre, etc.), although this project has tracked such intersections. Instead, thinking of performance directs us to the body as a form of mediation with the environment, others, self, governance, institutions, history, and objects. For example, in chapter 1, Liu Ding's curatorial practices direct us to the import of the media of performance in understanding key works in the history of contemporary Chinese art. In *Little Movements*, Liu Ding displayed Wang Luyan's *Walking Man* in relation to drawings (inspired by Rauschenberg's 1985 show), cardboard cutouts, observations on the walking body, and a metal sculpture. Liu Ding stresses the shifts in media in considering Wang's emblematic work. The curatorial inclusion of these diverse objects direct us to the many media that could be used to understand *Walking Man*. The medium of performance as a primary analytic enables us to think through the construction of *Walking Man* in its attempt to situate the body in relation to multiple media, including drawings, cardboard cutouts, and a metal sculpture. The artist Wang Luyan observed walking bodies to obtain a sense of movement within these static mediums. Thus, performance has been privileged not as an object (or form) but as a mode of mediation. In other words, performance emphasizes the unstable and the relational embedded within the concept of mediation. As a comparison, situating *Walking Man* within drawings by Rauschenberg produces questions around originality, authenticity, and derivation with regards to Chinese artists. Similarly, a counterpoint through sculpture situates the work in relation to referentiality, in terms of Giacommetti and other Western "masters."

This corporeal and performative turn directs us to what Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark identify as the "central question" of media theory, "what is mediation?,"[4] rather than focusing on specific media objects. As argued throughout this dissertation, performance operates as mediation with the world, governance (Ai Weiwei), consciousness (Cao Fei, Zhang Huan, and He Chengyao), history (Liu Ding, Feng Mengbo, and Cao Fei), and relationality with others and the self (Tao Ye and Ai Weiwei). Rather than focusing on inter-media art to look at the intersection of different art practices, mediation for *minor china* centralizes performance as a medium that is not per se a "better" analytic lens but rather engages Chinese objects in open and different ways.

As mentioned in the introduction, each chapter accumulates in terms of the theories and objects previously discussed. Thus, I return where we began, Yan Xing's *Kill (the) TV Set*, and reengage many of the artworks discussed in this project to work through questions of media(tion), China, and the minor. In addition, a discussion of technology and art can rarely avoid Walter Benjamin's essay "Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." As such, I return to objects in past chapters and relate them to Benjamin's ideas in order to surface some under-noticed elements in his essay. Such elements direct us to medial relations, mediation, and China. In conjunction with other objects in this project, Yan Xing's piece directs us to two critical issues. First, the body is situated in relation to language and other media in Yan and others' works. As such, the relationship between different media arises, as this dissertation has tracked a multitude of art practices. Second, Yan Xing and others engage discourses surrounding performance, ephemera, and remains. These concerns direct us to not only the limits of performance, but also questions of originality that place non-Western/Asian, Asian American, and global art histories in tension with one another. Through an analysis of the act of "killing" in Yan's piece, we explore *Kill (the) TV set* through the Oedipal act of destroying one's past and lineage. Both of these concerns further the method of *minor china*, as the minor makes more explicit the tensions between objects and processes in the construction of a contemporary Chinese art history.

Medial Tensions

In *Kill (the) TV Set*, two videos are projected apart from one another. On stage right, the screen repeatedly flashes in succession "Kill," "(the)," "TV," and then "Set." A bonsai tree that Yan Xing took care of for a year remains in the background of the flashing words. The other screen does not utilize words; as described in the introduction, Yan Xing reenacts Nam June Paik's performance art collaboration with Charlotte Moorman. Yan Xing produces a tension between the two screens, as English language is on one screen while the other uses the Chinese body. Rather than utilizing Chinese ideographs to signal difference between the opposing screens, Yan Xing's body operates similarly as the linguistic symbol would. Yan Xing shifts the sinograph directly onto his body through the tensions produced between English text and Chinese body on the two opposing screens. Such a juxtaposition of languages, symbols, and the body present not only different media but also different modes of mediation. Yan Xing displaces the media of the ideograph and writing by creating a piece about mediation across screens, besides bodies, between film and artists, and amongst object and audience.

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[4] Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, "Introduction: Execrable Media," in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 9.

Yan Xing's juxtaposition places orthography and choreography in tension with one another, as the body symbolically becomes the ideograph that is animated with subtle movement and breath. In other words, Yan Xing grapples with these multiple media to explore questions of mediation and how objects relate to one another. His reliance on the body highlights the limits of a primarily orthographic work when considering China and media. In addition to Yan Xing, the artists and works discussed throughout rarely rely on language as a primary means of expression (although traces of the linguistic exist). Rather than simply situating these within a singular analytic like performance or a visual art genealogy of performance art, an account of Yan Xing's work directs us to the complex negotiation between orthography, choreography, visuality, the sonic, and affect. However, how do these multiple media relate to one another? Is this remediation of past into present media or an assemblage of media? In other words, what is the mediation of media?

Mediation, Teleology, & Arrest

How are multiple media discussed in relation to one another? Based upon the objects discussed in this project, what process of mediation occurs in the use of multiple media by contemporary Chinese artists? In accounts of contemporary media art, most situate the relation between media as teleological or as an assemblage. However, an account of the body and performance provides a different account that acknowledges the death and end of media.

When Yan Xing displaces the ideograph directly onto his body, his embodiment negotiates the relations between life, movement, and death. Both the body and ideograph capture these multiple frameworks. "Orientalist discourse and media theory's common tendency towards a morbid rhetoric of embalming, mummification, entombment"[5] conceptualizes the ideograph as stagnant and in relation to death. In addition, the ideograph becomes an animated character that is alive and operating within an "ensemble" of other characters. Relatedly, Benjamin describes the ideograph as "images" that "are based on resemblance" and "made of change, like life."[6] These multiple formations are captured within Yan's embodiment of the ideograph. Yan juxtaposes the choreographic and orthographic in order to rework how these multiple media are normally framed and understood.

These three modes serve as models by which to theorize the mediation of media: 1) remediation/progress/living, 2) assemblage/movement, and 3) death. The body has been discussed in a developmental or teleological sense, where time advances the body and the past. Such a model understands mediation as remediation. This first framework situates media in relation to replacement, where photography replaces painting, film replaces photography, and digital art replaces both film and photography. Remediation situates new media as refashioning older forms. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin propose remediation as the logic embedded in our contemporary life that "wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation."[7] Remediation historically situates works while simultaneously proposing a developmentalist narrative to media ("with time, new things arise that are actually old but kind of not"). Although mediums become remediated, Bolter and Grusin nonetheless possess a teleological sense to their theory as media develop or "multiply" in relation to others.

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[5] Bush, 22.

[6] Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume IV (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), 604.

[7] Jay Bolter & Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 5.

In response to these frameworks, scholars often refer to mediums in movement or as assemblages, jumbling media together to disrupt this sense of teleology. In discussing Lin+Lam's *Unidentified Vietnam* which weave together multiple mediums to think about the history of the archive, Una Chung depicts the work as "refus[ing] an evolutionary narrative of new media and instead work[ing] with the space of installation to invoke assemblages that allow us to investigate the intermedial play of the diverse, outmoded archival technologies of transitioning, transferring, translating, and capturing. Technologies, in the form of specific media, may be written into obsolescence by a progressive, developmental history of technology symptomatic of the residual idealist tendencies unavoidable in such a formulation. The assemblage offers various ways of moving between and across apparatuses, thereby suggesting — precisely where it is not possible to fully materialize — the multiplicity of time.[8]" The notion of assemblage primarily moves between mediums; however, assemblage does not fully account for the ways mediums interact and interrelate with one another.

Instead of looking forward or intermixing time, we might take guidance from Benjamin. He directs us towards the ends and failures of media in his second version of his oft-cited essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility:" "The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard — that is to say, in a new art form."[9] Benjamin focuses not on innovations in the new art forms but rather on what art forms do to the past; in other words, he reflects back and behind into loss. In "Theory of Distraction," which was written during his rewriting of the notable essay, Benjamin situates mediums in their endings: "The survival of artworks should be represented from the standpoint of their struggle for existence."[10] Relatedly, Benjamin emphasizes the failing and destruction of mediums as situating art: "Just as the art of the Greeks was geared towards lasting, so the art of the present is geared toward becoming worn out. This may happen in two different ways: through consignment of the artwork to fashion or through the work's refunctioning in politics."[11] In such formulations, Benjamin is fixated on how media end or fail. Thus, we might look backwards at mediums in a third way – towards their extinction, ends, and ruptures. Rather than seeing mediums as teleological, we might theorize them as constantly failing. Rather than theorizing mediums remediating or replacing one from the next and "improving," we can think about the failures and deaths of mediums as unsustainable in and of themselves. Media do not necessarily improve; they are always failing and arresting in their development. This orientation backwards is not remediation, since the latter emphasizes a repeated refashioning throughout developments in technology.

When analyzing the multiple objects in this dissertation, what emerges is a sense of how media relate within China in such modes of ending, rather than progress or assemblage. For example, from *Game Over* to *Restart*, Feng Mengbo's use of painting to new media illustrates this sense of arrest. Newer technologies became available for Feng to make *Restart* after his initial vision 14 years earlier. New technology is typically understood as enabling unexplored possibilities and generating aesthetic innovations (a teleology). However, technology will also lead to the piece's future demise. New York's MOMA purchased *Restart* into their permanent collection in 2008.   As software and hardware are upgraded, there will be a time when this game will no longer be able to be

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[8] Una Chung, "'Seeing' Spectral Agencies," in *Beyond Biopolitics*, ed. Patricia Clough and Craig Willse, 280.

[9] Walter Benjamin, *Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008), 38.

[10] Ibid., 56.

[11] Ibid., 57.

technologically supported. Thus, the artist and museum discussed these issues with archiving work. Technology is momentary and does not perpetually lead to a forward movement in terms of creation. Technology is both what enables "advancements" but also makes objects incompatible with the future. *Restart* may never be restarted when the technology used becomes obsolete. Thus, the endings and the wearing out of mediums helps us better understand how animation and new media interrelate, rather than seeing them as progressively improving past mediums.

In addition, Cao's work on Second Life requires sustained funding in order for *RMB City* to continue to exist. Thus, new media is not simply an immaterial way of existing; it is still quite dependent on the materiality of payment through dues and maintenance. Cao additionally must pay a team of developers to maintain the site and assist funders with their needs and presence on Second Life. According to Cao, if one doesn't continue to pay for Second Life, then the city will disappear. It is in such a disappearance that directs us to "new" media's failures.

The Hand, Deskilling, & Animation

An attention to the body and mediation directs us to contemporary modes of production that are focused on corporeal gesture, specifically the hand. In animation, film, online games, and other forms of "new" media, the hand plays a key role.[12] For animation, the hand has historically been central. When painting, the hand physically operates similar for drawing, which was used for older forms of animation. However, in today's animated work, most use the hand to type in codes and digitally draw onto a computer. Although training is still central, the way the hand relates to a medium shifts. In addition, the hand enables and creates changes to the body, as Benjamin notes how, within animation, "we see for the first time that it is possible to have one's own arm, even one's own body, stolen."[13] The hand becomes less skilled and trained, and it is such openness and play of the hand that can lead to different ways of perceiving and interacting.

Benjamin indirectly guides us towards the role of the hand. In one particular section of his essay where he reflects on changes in mediums, he focuses on how painting and film function. He compares painting to the act of a magician (they look at a sick body and attempt to fix it detached and away from it) and film to a surgeon (in which, filmmakers like surgeons enter into and penetrate the body). Benjamin focuses on the figure of the dying body, with an emphasis on how these vocations respond to death. This reliance on the dying body pushes his insights on how mediums perform. What does this figure offer us in thinking about the relationship between mediums and their mediation, especially animation as a technological shift from painting and film? And what is the role of the hand for the surgeon or magician in relation to the dying body?

Feng Mengbo's pieces contend with the role of the hand and its relationship to the body. He was originally trained as a painter at the Central Academy for the Arts in Beijing. Thus, in 1994, his hand utilized paint to depict video games; however, Feng's hand shifts away from the brush to a keyboard and mouse in order to input the code necessary to create his video games. In this shift from brush to digital object, the analog of paint is replaced. The code that creates the animated video moves away from the idea of the inspired painter. Although learning code involves intensive training and creativity similar to painting, the notion of artistic inspiration seems to be deeply wedded to the role

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[12] The hand plays a key role in Heidegger's work on techne and writing. I may want to frame this section in relation to this.
[13] Benjamin, 338.

of the painter. This does not mean that new media artists are less "creative" or inspired but that the modes of training and skills have shifted in what the hand performs. From the skill of the hand for paint to the skill of the hand to input code, there exists a deskilling of the hand that does not rely on the idea of specialization that exists for paint. These different conceptualizations of the hand are shaped through a discourse of a presumed two-handed ability.[14] Deskilling is also amplified by those playing *Restart* with a hand-held controller. The hand is not deploying the trained skill of the brush nor of the knife; the hand inputs code or presses commands via buttons. The role of the hand in using a control thinks of the body in a more removed relationship. Benjamin demarcates a sense of internalization with different mediums: "The painter's is a total image, whereas that of the cinematographer is piecemeal, its manifold parts being assembled according to a new law."[15] A result of this internalization is a loss of aura and an increase in play. The hand to the controller does not only view things in piecemeal ways but also locates not just the director's but also the player's bodies to enter into play. Deskilling directs us towards a culture more geared towards a do-it-yourself (DIY) mentality for most arenas of life. From medicine to home improvement, DIY culture and modes of deskilling predominate our contemporary moment. This DIY culture can be understood in *Kill (the) TV Set* as Yan Xing reenacts Name June Paik's iconic work. Yan Xing's practice of trimming the bonsai tree enacts a sense of craft and DIY culture. In addition, Yan Xing follows the current trend in reperformance, as contemporary artists are repeatedly reenacting past works. Reperformance highlights the DIY mode by which artists currently operate.

Cao's use of Second Life and Feng's anonymous players using controls for *Restart* emphasize a shift towards the deskilled hand that is located not only in the artistic creator, but also that of users engaged in the work. Many hands are involved, and unlike film which hides the general apparatuses ("the many hands"), the playable game makes such labor more transparent because the user physically engages the work. This flattening of labor is reiterated in Benjamin's notion of common property. In the shift of relations marked by technological reproducibility, Benjamin remarks on literary and writing competence as not just about "specialized higher education" but is a form of "polytechnic training." Writing, as a medium, becomes "common property." This common property shapes the idea of the hand and control for animation. Although all may not partake in video games, the sense of distribution it provides seems markedly different from Benjamin's theorizations of play. The contradictions within animation in relation to past media are amplified when we consider the role of the hand. This turn towards the body to think about 1) the relationship between media and 2) the role of the hand has amplified the methodological reach of *minor china*. Through an emphasis on the indeterminacy of mediation, media are not sustained as discrete, unrelated objects and China is understood in less linear ways.

(Anti-)Oedipal Histories

In addition to models of how different media relate to one another in China, questions of mediation similarly arise in the ways contemporary Chinese art practices relate to the various histories that they engage: non-Western, Asian, Asian American, and global. As a reenactment of Nam June Paik's

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[14] Within an ableist frame, the idea of inputting code versus painting are more amplified. If one does not possess both hands, they can nonetheless find ways to input data and code through another body but will be presumed to have thought of the code sequence. However, if someone without both hands paints, the idea of that body having painted an object are not fully assumed.

[15] Benjamin, 35.

work, *Kill (the) TV Set* produces questions surrounding the production of the history of performance art, along with the stability between Asian, Asian American, and Global art histories. Through reperformance and intermedial practices, Yan Xing creates tensions between performance, film, and photography. He creates queer affects that question and "kill" the histories, pasts, objects, and subjects that circulate around contemporary Chinese art.

The title and the repeated flash of "Kill" on-screen connotes Sigmund Freud's theorizations of the Oedipal complex. This schema involves the formation of a "normative" sense of self during a child's early development, specifically his phallic stage. According to Freud, a son's "normative" development involves the sexual desire for the mother along with patricide.[16] The desire to kill resolves the Oedipal complex, as the son is able to develop "normatively" avoiding desires for pedophilia, homosexuality, and neurosis.

Yan Xing's call for killing evokes these forms of relationality. In Yan Xing's desire to kill, he inscribes an imagined killing of Nam June Paik and the various art histories with which contemporary Chinese art practices must contend. Yan Xing's oedipal relations involve Asian, Asian American, and global art histories. Yan Xing produces queer affects and relationality in order to open these multiple relational possibilities. As such, Yan does not answer nor produce a direct critique of these histories; instead, he directs us to the possibilities and complexities that are not solely about representation, media, contextualization, historicization, or global flows. The indeterminacy of queer mediation and affect from a Chinese subject reframes the role of the nation-state, along with questions of representational methods. Yan Xing complicates two particular relations: 1) the medium of performance and 2) Yan Xing's relation to Nam June Paik, an Asian, Asian American, and global subject. Yan Xing's work rethinks the construction of performance and its contingent art histories.

The TV Set was central to Nam June Paik's performance art practice. His use of technology reveals an inter-media approach to art practice. Nam June Paik utilized televisions for a variety of reasons, including grappling with the results of such technological shifts in media, reproduction, and distribution. The TV represents shifts in mediation, similar to the earlier changes in reproducible text, photography, and film discussed earlier. Yan Xing's act of "killing" the TV Set thus references a relation of killing a past history.

In addition to the TV Set, Nam's earlier practices were also invested in sexualizing classical music, often stating he wanted to discover classical music's equivalent of literature's DH Lawrence or theory's Sigmund Freud. Nam's sexualization of classical music through the deployment of his and Moorman's nude bodies reveals the use of explicit sexuality to perform such a queering of music. Yan Xing's reference to Freud's Oedipal schema through the act of killing is not meant to enable him to normatively develop and become a "proper" artistic subject. Yan Xing does not merely accept the oedipal relation; instead, his desire for killing is invested in rupturing this normative reproductive mode. Rather than reperforming Nam's hypersexualization with nude bodies, Yan Xing clothes his and his partners' bodies in respectable freshly-ironed white collared shirts tucked into black dress pants. This restrained sense of identification ruptures practices of explicit sexual referentiality not into a politics of respectability but rather one that shifts queerness from a sense of

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[16] Due to Yan Xing's perceived and self-identified gender identity, I focus on how Freud theorizes the relation of the male son to his mother and father. I do not do this to ignore Freud's misogynist theorizations. As scholars like Wendy Brown and David Eng have revealed, his theories must be tempered in order to produce critical insights.

identity to a sense of relation. Most of Yan Xing's other works deploy nudity and often display fully erect penises and nude torsos. Thus, the use of conservative dress in *Kill (the) TV Set* signifies a distinct shift in how queerness articulates itself – from the act of sex to a relation between bodies, objects, and audience. This queer affect produces a mode of mediation that is indirect and less about identifiable sexual acts, objects, or media. Yan Xing produces queerness as a mode of mediation (as a process), rather than a thing.

Queerness as relational and as a form of mediation directs us to performance, as both queer affect and performance operate within such modes of indeterminate mediation. In addition, Yan Xing utilizes both performance and queerness to work through their mediation with the non-West and China. Rather than making both performance and queerness stable and knowable objects and identities, he uses their indeterminate modes of mediation to produce questions and ruptures around the oedipal process and relations to performance, art, Asian, and Asian American histories. Rebecca Schneider directs us to performance and the body as modes of indeterminate mediation: "The bodily, read through genealogies of impact and ricochet, is arguably always interactive. This body, given to performance, is here engaged with disappearance chiasmically — not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked "disappeared." In this sense performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive re-appearance. It challenges, via the performative trace, any neat antimony between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence through the basic repetitions that mark performance as indiscreet, non-original, relentlessly citational, and remaining." [17] Schneider complicates the conflation of performance with disappearance and argues for performance's remains, which constitute its ontological status. Schneider is contributing to a debate within performance studies on the ontology of performance – is it always disappearing or does it remain? This question has been central to the media of performance.[18]

A sense of the remains of performance and the body operate similarly as modes of queer mediation. In relation to the ephemeral and the remains or disappearance of performance, issues concerning the documentation and archiving of such remains/disappearance also come to the fore. Meiling Cheng reveals the connection between questions of ephemerality and documentation: "But, underneath the surface, ephemerality, or the sense of ceaselessly losing touch with the evaporating moment-to-moment, is precisely what drives the impulse for documentation." [19] Performance studies' focus on remains, disappearance, and the archive have arisen due to questions surrounding the ontology of performance. However, the subtext within this discourse engages the question of the original or non-original. Derrida highlights this connection of the original and the archival: "It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to *return to the origin*, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement."[20]

This question of the original and the origin seems particularly difficult for non-Western subjects to

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[17] Schneider, Rebecca. "Performance Remains" in *Perform, Repeat, Record* ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (London: Intellect, 2011), 143.
[18] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains* (New York: Routledge, 2011); and Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record* (London: Intellect, 2011).
[19] Meiling Cheng, "The Prosthetic Present Tense: Documenting Chinese Time-Based Art," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 184.
[20] Emphasis mine. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

engage. These debates around performance's ontology as either remaining or disappearing are premised around questions of originality. However, the non-Western, racialized other has often been precluded from question of originality as they are usually seen as derivative of Western innovation. Yan Xing places performance and queerness into question, as he highlights the limits of both in relation to the condition of non-Western otherness. Chineseness is constantly situated within a condition of being derivative or unoriginal. The theorization of performance as disappearance presumes that an original exists, while the question of remains presumes the opposite of the non-original. The simultaneous remaining and disappearing operations of performance forces us to think outside of the idea of the original or derivation, particularly for the case of the Chinese as they are racialized as lacking originality and constantly within the derivative.[21] In other words, the terms in which this debate is set up are structured to preclude non-Western others from its discussion, since they are never original. Rather than focusing on performance as remaining or disappearing, Yan Xing situates the problem of the original through his reference to multiple art histories and use of queer affect.

The problematic of the Major is an attempt to respond to the idea of the original and ontology, as most past responses tried to problematize the nature of the original by focusing on contextualization to offer more nuanced understandings of contemporary Chinese art. However, the continual reliance on contextualization reproduces over-determined and stagnant narratives about Chinese artists and art. Thus, a consideration of the media of performance certainly possesses limits. Although performance as media has provided helpful methodological contributions for *minor* china, mediation further assists in rupturing the Major in its presumptions of objects.

Yan Xing pushes against the problematic of the origin and original through his reproduction of the Oedipal Complex. He queers the notion of origins by disrupting the reproduction of a normative subject. When Yan Xing reperforms Nam June Paik's work, Yan Xing embodies Charlotte Moorman's position. Within the heteronormative relation of the Oedipal complex, Yan Xing should theoretically be desiring and holding the character of Moorman rather than embodying her. Yan inverts the oedipal complex, as Nam June Paik becomes both the objet of desire and the object of killing. In Yan Xing's embodiment of Moorman's role, his corporeal gesture produces an affect of tenderness, as he holds the figure previously performed by Nam. As such, Yan Xing desires the object. However, he also states his desire to kill, repeatedly displayed on the other screen.

These multiple dimensions produce queer affective ties that disrupt the normative foundations of the Oedipal complex. Yan's simultaneous desire to care and to kill reflects a negotiation to an object that is similarly situated as an Asian yet global subject. Unlike Nam June Paik, Yan Xing is not Asian American. As an Asian American subject, Nam June Paik can be understood within a politics of what David Eng describes as racial castration.[22] Yan Xing, however, works inside and out of these forms of masculinist castration. On one hand, racial logics manifest globally and notions of lack compared to globalized images of white men emerge for Asian subjects.[23] On the other hand, Yan Xing does not operate within a logic of racial castration, bringing to light the different relational dynamics that emerge between Asian and Asian American subjects, directing us to processes and relations rather than set identities. Furthermore, Yan Xing complicates the power dynamics

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[21] For a complex analysis of derivation and China, see Winnie Wong, *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[22] David Eng, *Racial Castration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[23] Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

inherent between and within Asia and Asian/America by thrusting the different subjective sensibilities historically and legally produced within each locale against one another.

Although Yan Xing operates within the social and political, he produces a destabilized sensibility, rather than one rooted in identitarian and identifiable norms, objects, and media. In other words, Yan Xing produces queer, racialized affects as modes of mediation within the world. Such mediations reverse the usual flows from center to periphery, which normally think of the transnational flowing from Asian American (a new center) towards Asia. Rather, Yan reverses the flow and produces a transnationality from within Asia that forces us to rework how such concepts operate within the contemporary moment and the US itself.

Yan Xing's different relations to the Oedipal complex complicate how non-Western/Asian, Asian American, and global subjects and the history of performance art do not simply take Freud's theorizations to heart. Yan Xing not only queers but also critiques such theories. By making the act of killing radically transparent through the repeated flashing of "Kill," he overemphasizes this Oedipal relation in order to transcend and complicate it. In other words, Yan Xing does not merely replicate Freud's model of becoming a proper subject. Instead, he is decidedly Deleuzian, in that he pushes against the Freudian stigmatization of desire and the notions of proper and improper. Yan Xing produces a Deleuzian critique of the Freudian Oedipal scheme by displacing desire outside of perversion. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Deleuze and Guattari critique Freud and Lacan. Since psychoanalysis understands perversion, specifically sadomasochism, from the standpoint of neurosis, this stigmatizes desire and perversion as neurotic rather than seeing desire as pleasure or other affects. Deleuze and Guattari uncouple perversion and desire from neurosis. This critique of psychoanalytic desire moves beyond the individual to notions of capitalism. According to these authors, capitalism benefits from the Oedipal scheme, as desire is individualized within this father-mother-self schema. Due to psychoanalysis, desire is theorized solely within the individual and thus apart from capital production. Deleuze and Guattari privilege desire as productive rather than stigmatizing it as lacking (where desire within the subject lacks proper subjectivation). When desire becomes productive, the notions of proper and improper are reworked and the dominant understandings of capital and other constructions are renegotiated and destabilized. In other words, the Deleuzian critique of Freud privileges minor modes of mediation over a focus on discrete objects and media. Through Yan Xing's production of queer affects, he reworks notions of desire within this Deleuzian and anti-Oedipal frame. Thus, Yan pushes the Oedipal complex towards such modes of mediation and destabilization. He contributes to this Deleuzian framework by producing queer desires and affects beyond identity, towards queer as a mode of mediation. It has been this process that I've traced throughout this dissertation – a sense of queer as a method that contributes to producing minor affects and a minor method for contemporary China, its media, and its mediations.

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