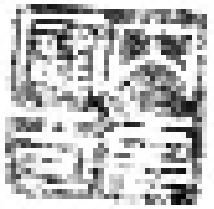

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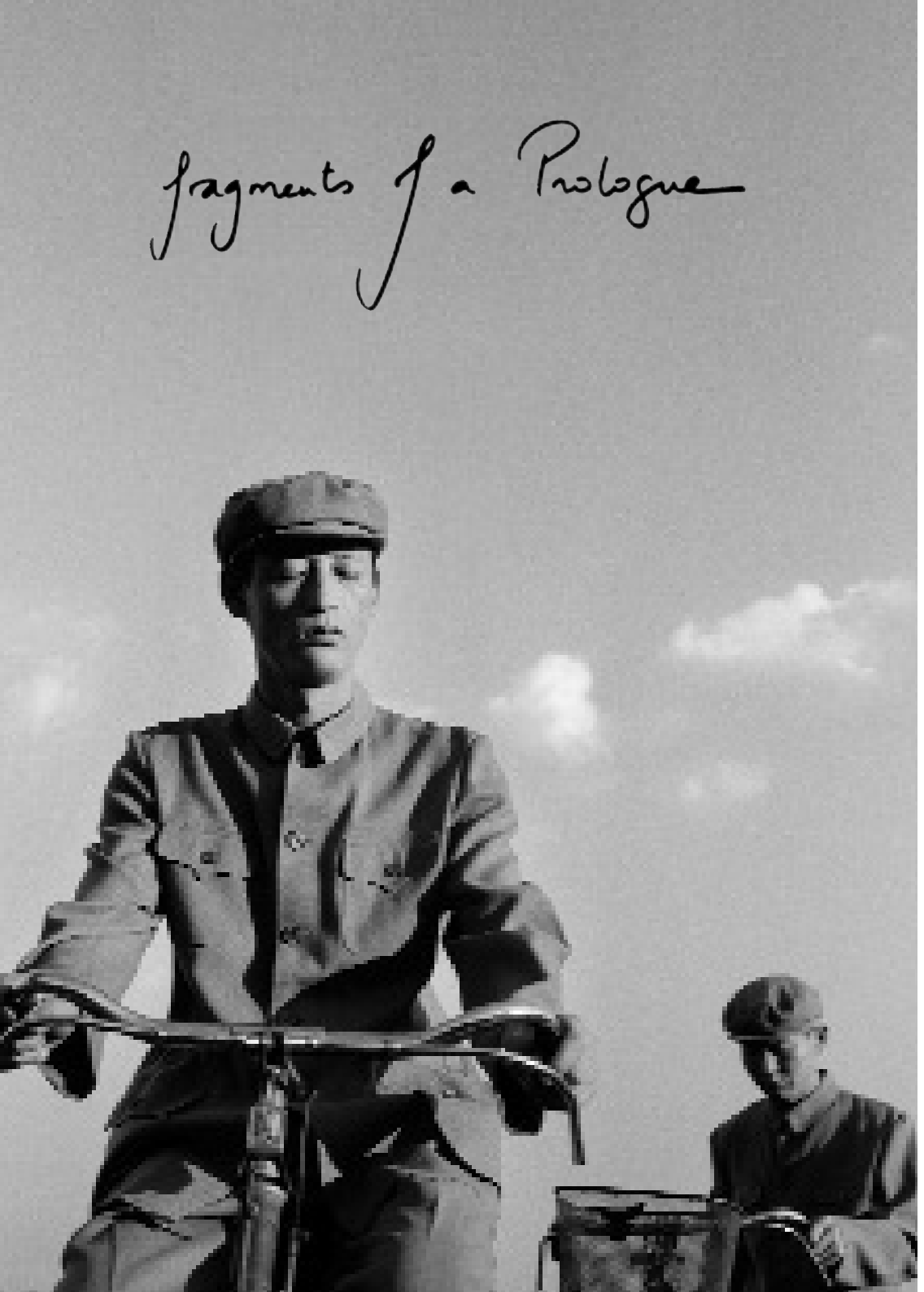


< **Start** >

Lorenzo Marsili

Images of China

< ... >

China. A train drives to Shanghai at 300mph, a young woman with a bamboo hat washes Soya beans by a river, a water buffalo walks past carelessly in the swamp, throbbing crowds push into pulsating shopping malls.

The past that erased the past, the Maoist totality that enveloped consciousness and memory, is now the past of an indecipherable present. Looks of puzzlement, at a present that has become spasmodic vortex. The resignation of those left out, the excitement of those born within, the nostalgia of the simple, the resentment of the old.

In the eyes of the peasant, the madness of the other, the advance of a mechanical giant that bears no promise or utopia. Indifference, alarm with peaks of horror, enmity, as the train cuts through the fields blowing the hat in the air.

Cheering away in a velvet red Jazz bar, the heavy man embraces a mini-skirted smoker. The beer that's worth the waiter's salary drops dead in the stomach, waves of excitement sweat from the forehead, electrical impulses enliven the body, proud without belief.

The park on Sunday is a beautiful sight. Men and women exercise tai-chi, tea houses smell of Jasmine, pagodas become the quarters of the lazy, the grass softens under the wondering crowd. The old woman by the white tree sings old revolutionary slogans. Evoking the ghost, in this patch of artificial nature, of a time where beliefs were solid and tomorrow certain.

→ Wang Ningde

In a neon-lit shopping promenade, the bustle of the many, the excess of the few, the smell of money being exchanged, the electrified eye of the customer, the satisfaction of the newly dressed, ice-cream a token of love. The torturing gaze of a woman too old to have had, and now too tired to desire.

It is a strange story that of modern China. The collapse of the empire, the proclamation of the Republic, the Communist takeover and the sublimation of all sense and of all past, the abandonment of certitude, the departure from the last great ideals, and the ongoing schizoid ferment whose direction is yet unknown.

Chords play, the orchestra moves, the tone absent, the director out to lunch.

The workers collapsed, the peasants starved, guards with terrifying looks marched ahead and torched the past. The seeds planted, insufficient, miserable, beaten by the wind and humiliated by the rain, trampled over, flattened to the ground, still attempted, decisively, with belief, the movement that would make them blossom.

The day the sky was knocked to the ground, the day the demigod was silently wrapped and turned into an empty idol, the day the flowers no longer came, the day of mourning for the past, the day the past was trialled and the day the past was sentenced.

The transition that bore expectation, the transition that seemed like a mother's touch, the transition to happiness, that transition that opens up and makes the world come alive, a looking-around, the perception of the other, an end to intestinal madness, a long breath.

The present of absence, the present of the senses, the present where utopia is lost and the direction blurred, this present that seems to run everywhere simultaneously, this present ready to implode, this present that can no more, this hypocritical stretching towards a future no-one sees.

* * *

The special section that follows, varied, eclectic, and arbitrary as it may be, colours

a movement from utopia to disbelief, to use such words, a departure from the eschatology of the Maoist promise and an adventurist fall into confused hedonism, noisy upturning of life's past stability, and puzzled accumulation for an end always to come. This is explicitly addressed in the two articles of philosophy, the first drawing the grand-narrative of the movement and the second trying to come to terms with the results.

Within the context of contemporary art, it is easy to mark the great divide of the Tiananmen massacre of 1989. The new Chinese avant-garde, developing full of creative energies and optimism in the 1980s, generally a period of relaxation of social and political control, bangs straight against Tiananmen when the *China / Avant-Garde* exhibition of 1989, taking place just before the protests and the ensuing repression, is closed down by the police after an artist shoots two bullets at her own installation. As Karen Smith remarks in her interview, during the 1980s artists truly believed of being invited to participate in the great transformation of the new China, furnishing a solid cultural basis to the emerging economic might. This optimism comes to an end as tanks roll in the square.

The early 90s, on the other hand, are the years of Political Pop and Cynical Realism, a truly ironic reaction *malgré lui* the first, a cry of resignation, failure, and indifference the second. Political Pop, mixing as it does Cultural Revolution imaginaries with multinational logos, surrenders its irony in the most ironic (albeit bitterly so) of manners—by joining the army of corporate logos it employs. Itself now a logo of Chinese contemporary art, finally become repetitive in its industrial production of requested collectors' items. Cynical Realism, with its distorted faces and absurd conglomeration of masses, shows the absurdity of the inhabited reality with a detachment that smells of resignation, with a distance that prohibits contact.

* * *

As I write, the Dashanzi Art Festival is taking place, hosted and organised by Beijing's art village, Area 798. Varied, eclectic, impossible to categorise, it nonetheless shows a

particular attention to notions of "modernity". The theme of the festival is *Beijing/Background*, and it would not be a mistake to claim that Beijing, today, *is* the modern. Modernity understood as perpetual and complete transformation, as ceaseless up-turning of the established order, as the erasure of the past and the glorification of the future, the eternal "new" covering the familiar ancient.

In philosophy and critical thought, an analysis of Chinese modernity/post modernity is at the order of the day, with numerous conferences, publications, and fervent debates.

Judging by some the works presented at the Dashanzi Festival, the process of the modern, replacing an idealised but frightening past with an affluent but spiritually empty present, is viewed more as a destructive then a creative force. One exhibition, *Seduced and Abandoned*, features the work of eight Chinese photographers investigating the passage of time and the unfolding of progress over the Chinese reality. A telling and technically exquisite photograph presents a lonely, nude, withered tree at the centre of a flattened field at the edges of the city. What it once was — blooming countryside, or perhaps a small urban enclave, a few houses and a few goats — is rendered sacrificial object to the passage of time. And what approaches? At the far edges of the photograph, we can distil the relentless advance of anonymous, alienating, frightening tower blocks.

A video, by the name *The Last Judgement*, presents a characterless human figure, produced with digital technology, floating in an empty, grey, homogeneous haze. The question "where must I go?" is endlessly repeated, receiving, as sole answer, the unintelligible, confusing, paradoxical, bitterly ironic response "You must go there".

Lorenzo Marsili
Beijing, May 2006

Qalandar Bux Memon

Three Studies for the Portrait of an Intellectual

< ... >

Break the pen, spill the ink, burn the paper
lock your lips, be silent, shhh...
say, 'I saw nothing' even if you did
or else have your eyes gouged out
keep humming eulogies, be silent
it is the season of burying the truth...
Bashir Manzar

FIRST STUDY: THE *LAISSEZ FAIRE* INTELLECTUAL.

On a Thursday afternoon I made my way up to a fifth floor of a London School of Economics building to hear what was to be the final lecture for an Empire course. Professor Francis Lewis was to talk to us about "Globalization and Empire". His language, inherently gendered and Eurocentric; he argues that the British Empire did not penetrate into the lives of its subjects to the extent Power (American Empire!) today (via cultural Hegemony) does, he words, 'For the Indian women under the Raj the biggest fear was her mother in law, followed by her father in law... the British Raj was not a present power...'

Claiming the virtues of American Cultural Hegemony, apologising for its shortcomings but dreaming of an 'end of history' because being from Kensington this 'suits me' — take note: hypocritical democracy, Neo-Liberal Globalization, 'western' cultural and economic 'sense' of superiority, suit our Laissez faire intellectual. The alternatives he says do not exist or are much worse (citing: 'Wahhabism') and so let us accept that we have faults and all. It will be no surprise that the reading set for this lecture was Fukuyama's irritant but sophisticated thesis "*The End of History and the Last Man*". (Those who are not 'men' are either fortunate to be able to partake in the historical dialectic or are written out of history altogether). So here then we have a brief sketch of our Laissez faire intellectual. Let us note that for 'him' history is seen as created for us, already placed and one in

which the future is not to be created but accepted.

Q.B.M

Words, spoken with adulterated backing of authoritative prefixs and institutions — Professor of Moral Philosophy, Government Department London School of Economics - determine, enable or curtain acts. They act to form - from the outside - my being. These are powerful actional discourses that form our existential bearing; they condition the filter by which we experience. Prisoners, those fathers and sons, are humiliated and rendered servile because of their human desire to exist in prisons all across Iraq; I hear it and am able to see it but I am informed there is no better alternative and besides of what interest is it to me here in Kensington! *C'est la vie*! Says our *laissez faire* Professor along with many of his neighbours. Our *laissez faire* intellectual either fails to see/feel the power of his/her own words (in which case we must question the very institutions that baptized him/her) or if he/she does he/she is implicit in the exercise of the very power he makes legitimate by his/her conservatism.

SECOND STUDY: THE HUMANIST INTELLECTUAL.

The late great Edward Said, another student of Empire and in particular Imperialism, had an alternative ideal of the intellectual (one that escalated and determined his work and life) as speaking 'truth to power'. He writes, "The intellectual's role generally is to uncover and elucidate the contest, to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power, wherever and whenever possible".

The Humanist Intellectual sets himself in the academy and from here wishes to 'speak truth to power'. She/he poses, sincerely, to champion the marginal. Crucially, they fight a war in language and with meagre resources take on to correct, at every step, our *laissez faire* intellectuals and the power they legitimate...

There are problems with this. To speak truth to power is to speak nonetheless to power. It is to implore it and react to it. The intellectual is thereby situated vis-à-vis his role as intellectual to analysis, process, and predicates the Action and movement of Power. Vinously located behind it, with bravado and often heroism our intellectual sets himself to speak truth to an unashamedly bashful power. The intellectual has a vertical relation to power and we know who is documenting and who is doing. And who is allowed to speak. Our intellectual is constrained by the mutations and movements of power. Tightened muscles are preparing to react to power and then hoping for a reaction from power - 'but if I show him he will see and change', so believes our intellectual. What structures the pose of our intellectual is precisely his **belief** in 'words', 'humanity' and the 'rationality' of those who hold power. There is another intellectual to be drawn, to find him/her we need to go much deeper into our allegorical cave, to that spot where wrapped muscles, in darkness, position themselves to act.

Q.B.M

THIRD STUDY: THE LIBERATIONIST INTELLECTUAL

The liberationist intellectual is by his/her bearing a Utopianist. S/he speaks from 'nowhere' into the present - unconcerned with power, her dialogue is elsewhere they don't speak to power, she writes/speaks rather into an uncared-for abyss. It is not his/her desire to speak the truth but to *imperatively inform and physiologically energize the present towards its own creative self-emergence*.

The Liberationist is not concerned with class or historical ascendance. S/he is not the Gramscian "organic Intellectual'. Alignment is an opportunistic fortune. S/he is positioned and moved by basic ethics as old as the sun. Radiating from within for the chance to love, denied at every opportunity

Q.B.M

to embrace souls - she sets about to discover the malady and creatively implores towards its cure - I would suggest that Emerson, Nietzsche, Philip Guston, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Simone De Beauvoir, Audre Loude, Fanon, Neruda, Adida Parveen and to an extent the great Edward Said among countless others camp here.

Let me draw clearly, it is not 'the abolition of class' that is sought nor the egalitarianism built on trampled beings but the psychic possibility of love.

And because 'organizational reality' (that interplay of essential power structures which shape, form, and represent our bearings) prohibits what it itself proclaims, the liberationist intellectuals have to erase while simultaneously creating. Love is an anguish-manifested peace in the heart of our intellectual's soul.

The liberationist intellectual dances within the crust of time enticing marooned muscles to flex. Fanon is no archetype, but worth a listen. Listen:

"The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions".(This is not an empirical statement but a performative strategy to energize.)

Listen again:

"It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that (wo)men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.

Superiority? Inferiority?

Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?"

Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask

But let me also leave you with Nietzsche:

"Culture demands of her/him, not only inward experience...but finally and above all an act, that is to say a struggle on behalf of culture and hostility towards those influences, habits, laws, institutions in which she/he fails to recognize his/her goal"

Qalandar Bux Memon

London, May 2006.

Jacopo Moroni

On the Future Prospects of Political Participation - Theory and Practice

< ... >

For those of us who became politically aware during the tumultuous years of the Seattle movement, it is difficult to witness contemporary socio-political trends without thinking thoroughly about the status of political participation as a form of civic activism. At a time when the idea of democracy is taken for granted and considered uncritically, the meaning and sense of political participation remains a category shrouded in doubt and contradiction. With the ongoing legacy of Seattle in mind, then, it is my aim to offer a few clarifying thoughts on its prospects worldwide, in theory and then in practice. Indeed, what followed those protests in 1999 represented - and still represents, - an important point of departure that informs us on novel ways to intend activism and to experiment *practices of mobilization* on the ground. What, then, are the future prospects?

First, the theory. The motto back in 1999 was: *Think Global and Act Local*. Political participation and social mobilization were tied to a capacity to imagine activism beyond national borders and along new conceptual lines that escaped the homogeneity of reasoning based on ideological dogmas and grand narratives of linear development. The task here is to take this conceptual enterprise even further.

Sociologist Roland Robertson uses the term *glocalization* to refer to the *global interconnectedness* that defines our age - something that is primarily social and collective as opposed to politico-financial in scope and therefore something apart from the 'fundamentalism' of the free-market economy (and its equal counterpart, religious fundamentalism). Political participation in the future will be framed around this idea of 'global consciousness'. In this sense, one needs to

find voice and even access to power operating on a *common although heterogeneous* ground with workers, students, immigrants, indigenous movements and the billions of subaltern figures worldwide where poverty and disenfranchisement are the hard facts of life. This 'prospective' conceptual standpoint that fosters a permeating sociality fits in with the variety of clearly-defined issues that the *globalization from below* movement has been tackling for quite some time — namely, social justice, an end to wars of aggression and an ethical reform of the conduct of financial institutions and corporations. The subjective experience of each individual actor on the global stage must inform that of others going as far as creating a collective *culture of mobilization* — a fusion of prospects, a fusion of horizons.

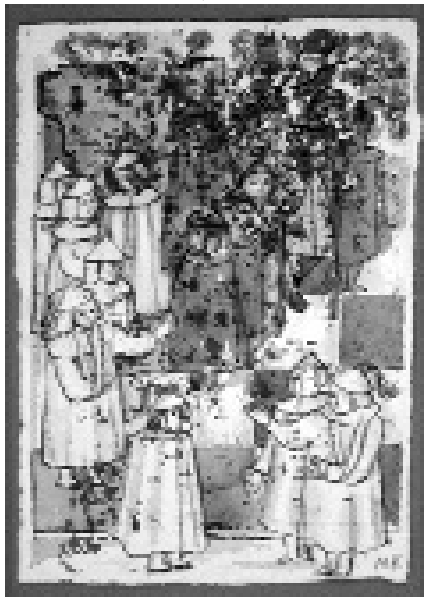
→ THE TWO ARMIES ARE MIRROR IMAGES OF ONE ANOTHER

* * *

Secondly, the practice. In fact, the question remains whether, once rightly framed, political participation can translate into meaningful and effective mobilization. Recent history - the March 2003 anti-war marches that brought millions of people on the streets worldwide, - underlined the remarkable willingness of a large share of the public to voice their concern via active participation but, at the same time, the inability to affect policy and halt the war-engine. The future prospects of political participation, therefore, will much depend upon moving on from the practical *impasse* of this contradiction.

We are moving towards the resolution of this *impasse* by raising the stakes of direct action as a proper form of civic mobilization. First, the expanding global Social Forums network serves as an alternative *political laboratory* where debate on a variety of issues occurs from the ground-up. These are the easily accessible resources that the public needs in

order to understand how collective ideas are created and how in turn they can truly influence policy. Secondly, and more importantly, the recent scenario of social mobilization in France, with the protests against the implementation of the *Contract Première Embauche* (CPE), is an indication for the future. It showed how effective a mobilization can be - however it was framed by the mainstream media as mindless riots, - when alliances, even temporary ones, are forged among the public (students and workers of *both* the private and public sector) and especially when the scenario is in turn informed by an issue, working precariousness, that is far from being a *solely* national problem. Practice flows from theory.



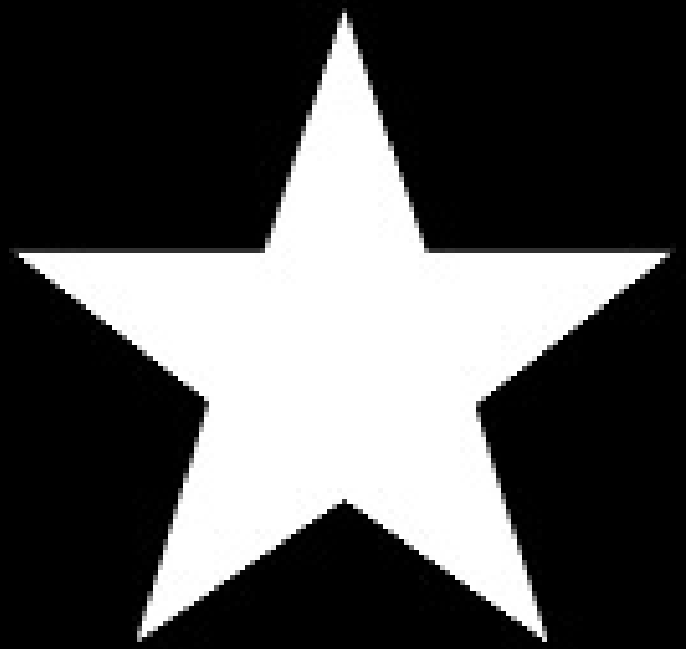
→ WHAT PAWNS LACK IN POWER THEY MAKE UP IN SHEER NUMBERS

* * *

The ongoing theoretical and practical output of the Seattle movement, with its capacity to move from national to supranational issue, still informs the way we intend and actualize political participation. The socio-political power base that came of age during those protests in 1999, an heterogeneous global community in-the-making, profoundly reformulated the level and quality of the dialectic between institutional power (both practical and discursive) and the general public. The challenge remains to find a conjunction between prospective theories and prospective outcomes, keeping in mind that meaningful participation in the political and social sphere of the contemporary world remains the safest bulwark against the many threats to a truly 'democratic' process.

Jacopo Moroni
London, May 2006

Images:
MARINA KALINOVSKY, New York based artist
www.marinakalinovsky.com
Part of series "Chess", *medium*: tea, pen & ink



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Laura Carlsen

An Uprising Against the Inevitable

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"'The inevitable' has a name today: fragmented globalization... the end of history, the omnipresence and omnipotence of money, the substitution of politics for police, the present as the only possible future, rationalization of social inequality, justification of super-exploitation of human beings and natural resources, racism, intolerance, war."
Subcomandante Marcos

THE INDIGENOUS INSURRECTION of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation on January 1, 1994 produced shock waves throughout the world. For much of Mexican society, the response was twofold and simultaneous: fear and exhilaration. The fear of finding that--wholly unexpectedly--war had broken out in the homeland, and a rush of exhilaration that something had finally thrown the train off its track.

The train in this case was the inexorable imposition of the neoliberal model in Mexico. The administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), a Harvard-educated member of the Mexican elite, had forged its legacy as a classic example of neoliberal modernization. The pace of liberalization of trade and investment, and privatization was unmatched in any other part of the developing world.

For Mexican social movements and the left, as elsewhere in the world, that meant a series of major defeats. Social farms and communal lands that

had been a conquest of the Mexican Revolution were open to privatization, state-owned enterprises and basic services—including banks and telecommunications--passed to private hands in crony deals, government cooptation split opposition movements, mobilization of production led to loss of leverage for workers, and major sectors of society were not only exploited but excluded in the vertiginous process of economic restructuring. Most damaging of all, most of the population believed that trade liberalization and foreign investment would pull the country into the First World, and many who didn't believe had nonetheless come to view the neoliberal path as inevitable.

With the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that liberalized trade and afforded unprecedented privileges to transnational corporations, the stage was set for decades of corrupt control and "development" marked by a sharply unequal distribution of wealth and power and loss of national sovereignty.

In this context, the left was in defensive mode and the prevailing metaphor—except among sectarian groups whose rhetoric is reality-resistant—was no longer revolution but survival. On the eve of NAFTA's implementation, the promise of prosperity through free trade blasted through the media on a daily basis; opposition voices barely registered as static compared to the main message hammered through the airways.

The last thing anyone expected then, was an armed rebellion in a forgotten state in southeast Mexico. A state that historically suffered the nation's highest rates of poverty, illiteracy, mortality and sickness. A state where a large indigenous population had been controlled by rural bosses and corrupt politicians connected up through the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). A state of

great natural-resource wealth and immense poverty that had, through equal doses of bloodshed and dependency, historically maintained political stability despite sporadic attempts at rebellion.

It was in part the long list of contradictions present in the state of Chiapas that attracted the handful of Marxist urban guerrillas who joined with a few indigenous leaders to form the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1983. In her excellent account of the Zapatistas' dual anniversary-- "20 and 10: the Fire and the Word"--Gloria Muñoz Ramirez describes how the organization grew during those first years. Testimonies from Subcomandante Marcos and members of the first villages to join reveal a painstaking effort to build toward insurrection, a trial-and-error process that grew family by family, village by village, region by region.

The villages in the jungle had been built on a history of resistance so the idea of rebellion was not new. A mix of Mayan indigenous populations and mestizos relocated by agrarian policies, many had participated either in land struggles or in the centuries-old battle of the indigenous population for cultural and physical survival. More recent history provided new experience, most of it in failed attempts to find ways to accommodate to the new economic system through appropriation of productive processes and marketing. One of the first members of the EZLN, Comandante Abraham describes his experience:

> "When the Zapatista Army first came to our villages, around 1984, 1985, we had already taken part in peaceful struggles. The people were already protesting against the government. When the clandestine organization arrived, they talked to us about revolutionary struggle...
>
> We understood pretty much right away, because anyway we had participated in other movements, not in the revolutionary sense,

but in struggles where we negotiated with the government for land, for coffee, for a road in the Lacandona Jungle in Montes Azules. Since we already experienced the repressions that the *compañeros* told us about, when the message of the EZLN arrived we were glad, and we felt happy there was another struggle to defend the security of the small farmers and the poor."

In some ways, the idea of armed revolt was less of an obstacle to the indigenous villages than perhaps to most other segments of the population. Not due to a propensity for violence, but rather to a combination of an acceptance and familiarity with death, a recognition of having little to lose given the desperation of their daily circumstances, and a frustration with the dead-ends reached through other forms of organizing for social change. The political-military organization grew, until the EZLN villages called local assemblies to ask their members if it was time to rise up. The answer was a resounding yes.

Millions of words have inundated pages and computer screens in the attempt to describe and explain what happened next. The war itself was brief. In the first of a long line of communiqués released on January 6, the EZLN set forth conditions for dialogue. On January 12, the government suspended fighting and open warfare came to a halt. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation had lost some 200 soldiers, but most surprisingly it had captured headlines throughout the world and brought over 100,000 people into the streets of Mexico City to call for peace and to support its demands.

A "movement of movements" had begun that was to mark the course of indigenous organizing, civil society activism and the anti-globalization movement into the 21st century.

II. THE WORD THAT SHAPES US

"It was words that created us.
They shaped us and spread their lines to control us."
Subcomandante Marcos

In its review of its first twenty years of existence and first ten since the uprising, the EZLN identifies three axis of struggle: fire, which is the war and military aspects of their organization; the word; and an overarching third axis of popular organization. While the third supports and defines all actions and strategies, among the first two "the word" has been by far the most important. More malleable than the sword and--in the age of Internet--'faster than a speeding bullet,' the Zapatista word has been crafted carefully into a weapon, a bridge, a dream, a story.

What is now recognized as a modern case study in political communication draws on several strengths. The most obvious to outsiders is the skilled pen of Zapatista spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos. With remarkable versatility and craft, the thousands of texts coming from "somewhere in the Lacandona Jungle" aim at distinct audiences and purposes. Some are intellectual and engage directly with leading intellectuals of the times. These comply with what Marcos calls the critical analysis role of progressive intellectuals: "to convert the word into both scalpel and megaphone." Others are formal political declarations, communiqués and letters.

A second enabling factor in the shift from a primarily military to verbal battlefield was communications technology, especially the Internet. Indeed, the Zapatistas would never have encountered the reception they have without the Internet. Free and available, the net has been the medium for creating armies to spread the word. Volunteer translators grab the latest communiqués and send them out in new languages within a day; web junkies post to listserves that in turn multiply on other lists. Electronic media and the decentralized, network-style

organization of the anti-globalization movement fit with the Zapatista movement's non-vanguard style and the independence initiative of its solidarity groups.

But the Zapatista word and the movement itself cannot be reduced to a propaganda machine and the accusations of that reflect fear and in some cases envy more than a careful reading of the reality. The texts are written by an army in the mountains, defending itself and its communities against harassment and hostile actions. Its language grows out of a daily praxis of living the worst aspects of an unjust society while seeking to communicate to an outside world. This has given the movement an uncommon legitimacy from the outset.

The indigenous culture that values the word as a constituent element of humanity and society has also lent weight to the Zapatista word. Many of Mexico's indigenous peoples name themselves precisely for their capacity for language: the Zoques call themselves "O´de pöt"--"people of language"; the Chatinos "Chátnç"--"work of the words"; the Chols "Lak´ tyan" meaning "our word". In indigenous communities the integrity of one´s word is considered essential to social cohesion and human dignity, although practice as always may deviate from the norm. This contrasts markedly with modern conceptions of messaging and communication as a sales tool in a competing marketplace of ideas by stressing truth, consistency and sincerity.

When the guerrilla organizers first arrived in the Chiapas jungle and began work in the early eighties they expected to spread a fairly classic model of Marxist guerrilla "foco" organizing. According to Subcomandante Marcos in an interview with Yvon Lebot, not long after gaining acceptance in several villages, indigenous people they worked with complained: "Your word is too hard"--meaning "hard" not as difficult, but "hard" as edgy, intimidating, impenetrable.

The language then underwent a metamorphosis in the chrysalis of the jungle, in which it shed much of the standard rhetoric of revolution. In the search for a common language, the guerrillas adopted simple terms, baseline ideals and shared historical and cultural icons. "Democracy, freedom and justice" took the place of socialism and revolution as central goals and demands, and Mexico's revolutionary heroes Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa stood higher than Che Guevara. Clearly, some of this thinking had occurred before the intense contact with the communities (hence the name "Zapatista"). But the capacity to listen and adapt fundamentally altered not only the language but the practice and the idea of the ultimate objective. When they adapted the rhetoric, it was because their perspectives were being altered by their chosen core constituency—the Mayan Indians of Chiapas.

The Zapatista word has found an echo, not only among indigenous people but among "civil society" in general; not only in Mexico but in countries throughout the world. It has gained credibility from a respect for the word that the indigenous rebels often compare to the Mexican government's many retractions, contradictions and false promises. The combination of the skilled use language, a grounding in experience, and a cultural respect for the integrity of speech has enabled the Zapatista movement to leap borders and acquire great moral authority within the anti-globalization movement.

III. THE PROBLEM WITH POWER

The Zapatista movement proved the power of language to weave global webs of resistance at the same time as it rejected the language of power. From the First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle on Jan. 1, 1994, the EZLN announced its intention to defeat the federal army and march into the nation's capital to "allow the people to freely and democratically choose their own author-

ities." Unlike previous revolutionary movements, they did not announce plans to take power and install a socialist state.

Since then, and in the context of the switch from military to political means of social change, the Zapatistas have deepened their commitment to building alternatives that empower from the grassroots rather than controlling, competing for or often even confronting the formal power of the state.

Building autonomy is central to this process. Before the Zapatista uprising the Mexican indigenous movement had already formulated a concept of autonomy that focused on recuperating traditional forms of self-government in the community. This soon came to play a central role in Zapatista discourse and practice. In the first stage starting in 1996, indigenous autonomy became the unifying principle for forging a national indigenous movement. The idea was not that legislation could bring about the needed changes, but that constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples would offer the space to strengthen and rearticulate their societies and would be a first step in a profound reform of a multicultural state. When Congress rejected legislation based on these agreements, the EZLN entered a second stage of creating *de facto* autonomies within its territory. It formed autonomous townships and later coordinated them under Good Government Boards that sought to deepen democracy and separate civilian self-government from the political-military structure of the EZLN. This experiment is on-going.

Zapatista roots in indigenous culture and the movement's encounter with the communalist current of the Mexican indigenous movement helped forge a very different understanding of political power than previous revolutionary forces. The maxim is "*mandar obedeciendo*"—to rule by obeying. The National Indigenous Congress describes the guiding principles of this power as: "to serve, not be served; to represent, not supplant; to build, not destroy; to

propose, not impose; to convince, not defeat; to come down, not climb up." The principles of organization aim to develop grassroots leadership that is "horizontal, rotating, collective, inclusive, flexible, representative, plural, gender-equal and non-partisan."

Within the Indian movement, *to rule by obeying* leads to a different kind of organizational structure as well, based on a loose network of assemblies, coalitions, liaisons and forums that assure flexibility and serve to decentralize power—what Ramón Vera calls "the invisible web".

The Zapatista concept of democracy, like the indigenous concept seen in other countries of Latin America, challenges the liberal formulation by positing the central role of difference in society. It does not view citizens as indistinguishable cogs in a democratic machine, each with an identical function that corresponds to the exercise of individual rights--mainly voting to delegate representation. Rather it sees the "others"--marginalized for diverse reasons by the economic system--as the building blocks of a new world. These new social actors are not defined exclusively by their relationship to the means of production nor by an immutable identity politics; "the other" posits a new way of affirming identity without congealing it.

The EZLN in Mexico: The Sixth Declaration and the Other Campaign

In June of 2005 the EZLN came out with the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle. The Sixth Declaration sets out a bold set of political definitions: it declares the movement anti-capitalist (in those terms) and describes neoliberal globalization as a global war of conquest. It posits that "a new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible if indigenous people join with workers, peasants, students, teachers, employees... that is, all the workers of the city and

countryside." It reclaims the label of "left" saying "we believe that it is on the political left where you find the idea of resisting neoliberal globalization and building a country where there will be justice, democracy and freedom for everyone."

After a simple explanation of the problems generated by neoliberalism, the Sixth Declaration proposes to hook up directly with people fighting back in Mexico and beyond. The objective is to free organized discontent from the reductive trap of electoral politics that fails to offer an alternative to neoliberal model. The second goal is to articulate these struggles and the third is to develop a more precise reading of the national situation from below, a constant in the Zapatistas' four (1996, 1997, 2001 and 2006) forays out of the jungle.

It also announces the beginning of the Other Campaign. With presidential campaigns in full tilt, Subcomandante Marcos left Chiapas in January of 2006 to tour the country and meet with groups that had signed on to the Declaration. In scores of meetings throughout the country, he has registered their demands and activities: battles against environmental destruction, for workers' rights, against the ostracism and oppression of sex workers, for indigenous civil and territorial rights. Organized groups of youth, punks, leftists, alternative media, small farmers, homosexuals, workers, women and "others" have mobilized to receive the EZLN representative.

Accustomed to swimming against the current, the Zapatistas chose to denounce party politics just when a significant part of the left saw in center-left presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador hope for prying open the neoliberal stranglehold on the nation. Lopez Obrador has criticized aspects of NAFTA and neoliberalism (without rejecting them), called for a stronger role for government and national sovereignty, and opposed the most politically sensitive

privatizations, particularly of petroleum and the electrical system. On the other hand, the Zapatistas correctly point out that Lopez Obrador has not taken a clear stand against capitalism, neoliberal globalization or U.S. domination. The harsh criticism of Lopez Obrador and the split over the prospects of his candidacy to effect social change have caused polemic within the Mexican left, although the Zapatistas have not called on supporters to vote against Lopez Obrador or abstain.

The Zapatistas' criticisms of the electoral campaigns aim to articulate the left and expose the elections as a siren's call that pulls progressive forces into a process that continues to be fundamentally flawed and essentially illegitimate. Instead of seeing active participation as a "necessary evil" or bulwark against the right, they believe it could detract from the formulation of the more radical demands needed to address Mexico's problems.

Zapatismo in Latin America and the World

Social movements throughout Latin America are watching Mexico with great interest. Latin America has seen the ascendance of center-left parties in recent years that has led to a grand debate on whether this is a boon or an impediment to the aspirations of social movements for more profound change. The center-left governments of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela and now Bolivia have plunged those countries into uncertainty about how to relate to the state and the potential of governments to solve core problems of the poor in a globalized economy.

In this debate, the Zapatistas provide lessons that cannot be seen as universal but add theoretical and practical elements. One is their experiments with autonomy, self-government and rejection of government aid in Zapatista territory.

The EZLN asserts in the Sixth Declaration "Latin America, we are proud to be a part of you" and cites the shared political heritage of Che Guevara and Simon Bolivar. They do not, however, mention any contemporary figures that

many associate with a new counter-hegemonic movement in the hemisphere. In fact, when the EZLN was invited to the inauguration of indigenous leader and Movement toward Socialism candidate Evo Morales in Bolivia, it did not attend and in fact did not even respond publicly to the invitation.

> *What we want in the world is to tell all of those who are resisting and fighting in their own ways and in their own countries, that you are not alone, that we, the Zapatistas, even though we are very small, are supporting you...*
>
> ***Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle***

Zapatismo has developed its own brand of solidarity. The tremendous outpouring of sympathy from abroad following the uprising was channeled into shared political commitments, respectful of the diversity in each person and group's role in society. 'Don´t copy us, we are not a blueprint or an example to follow. Create your own Zapatista movement and we will walk together' was the message from Chiapas. European cities have established Zapatista political and cultural centers, and groups and networks exist around the world that set their own agendas and decide on their own actions.

The creation of the Good Government Boards and the Sixth Declaration both took steps to reorganize the EZLN´s relationship with leftist, revolutionary and anti-globalization forces throughout the world. International solidarity has been a mainstay for the survival of Zapatista communities and the constant contact with other groups oxygenated a movement enclosed in a remote part of southeastern Mexico, adding new political perspectives to their experience.

The reorganization clarified relations. The Good Government Boards recognized the contribution of international civil society but applied new rules to solidarity by subordinating it to the priorities of the communities. The Sixth Declaration gets down to brass tacks in Zapatista foreign relations: it promises to

send maize and petroleum products to Cuba, crafts and organic coffee to Europe, and non-genetically modified maize to Ecuador and Bolivia. The quantities are insignificant of course, but the symbolic point is to construct concrete relationships outside the nation-state apparatus that emphasize shared ideological commitments.

For the visitors that have streamed through the jungle since 1994, the Zapatista experience offered vision, hope, enthusiasm. Through praxis, an alternative view of politics and political change develops that at the same time serves to bolster action aimed at rebuilding the links that have been destroyed in people's lives and communities, and creating collective identities that go beyond wounded nuclear families and market-oriented societies and are founded on a sense of shared purpose. This vision has had particular appeal among youth in Mexico, Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world.

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PhotoReportage: The CPE French Protests.

Photography by Charlotte Gonzalez
Edited by Luigi Galimberti Faussone
See www.nakedpunch.com/cpe for more information

Protests against the CPE

The CPE (*Contract Premiére Embauche*) is the law proposed on the 16th January 2006 by the French government in order to amend the pre-existing first-employment contract, believed to be discouraging employment. The law was meant to bring flexibility in the labour market for the employers, allowing them to fire young workers under the age of 26 without a just cause during the first two years of employment.

The necessity of the introduction of the CPE was felt because of the high rates of unemployment, around 10% for the whole population and reaching peaks of 25% among youngsters and people living in the *banlieues*. The French government, particularly in the person of the Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, believed that the high costs and difficulties that an employer faced when firing a worker discouraged the hiring process and thus they represented the main cause of the high rates of unemployment.

The main critics of the CPE opposed it vehemently arguing that it would make it easier for employers to exert pressure on employees and would encourage the phenomenon of precariousness. Hundreds of thousands of French students, trade unionists, workers of both public and private sector reacted to the proposition of the CPE organizing public demonstrations in Paris and across the country. It was an unprecedented *national* movement; there even were demonstrations in very small towns with three millions as a whole on the streets on 28th March and 4th April 2006.

While the protests have been inspired by pacific sentiments and by a belief in the preservation of a sense of collective welfare, they sometimes developed into ill-directed violence. The achievement of the work by Charlotte Gonzalez is to convey the powerful sentiments of rage and frustration of the young protesters, while employing high technical standards for her photography. Her photography is both on-the-street journalism and art.

After weeks of protests, characterized by marches in the streets of the major French towns and the occupations of a substantive number of universities throughout the country, on the 10th April 2006 the French government finally decided to withdraw the CPE. Nonetheless, the relations between the government and part of the civil society remain tense. The protests against the introduction of the CPE follow just by a few months the violent insurrections of November 2005 in the French *banlieues*.

The political situation in France remains unstable, mainly because of the internal contrasts within the centre-right wing party, the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) and, namely, between the President of the Republic Jacques Chirac, the Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and the chief of the UMP, Nicolas Sarkozy. In addition, the left struggles to find a leader for the next presidential elections and the lack of a solid opposition does not certainly help the already difficult social situation in France.

< Luigi Galimberti-Faussone >

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRISTINA FIGUEROA-PALAU

< poetry >

Qalandar Bux Memon

"Because I am not Catholic" and other paragraphs

The sun, I saw, setting with its orange haze — it was past...I watched, collecting in my mind the colors that the night was to throw at me...blue's; indigo tilted with orange, all kinds of blues, layered with black now — a Van Gogh night...

With these colors in the periphery but nonetheless active I sit ...waiting at Café Prague. Waiting? For whom? I guess I am waiting for an enigma, an imaginative sapping who I or destiny has called Sophia.

And it is my relation to this Sophia that bothers me...I wear a blue coat and yellow vest coat and on the brink of expectance I am to consider in words with ink (red) on paper, and through paper, my relation - in language- to Sophia.

Café chatter rings past my ears, and I tell them — my ears - 'don't pay attention, don't pay attention'...obediently they arrive to affirm my cry and only a mummer is accepted,
That too occasionally, and with great hesitance...

Sophia's neck remains invincible, it does not exist and I have never seen it, her eyes confess in their brown ways to have seen utopia...in her step she relates to air as a bonsai plant relates to stillness.

My nose and my hands are tortured for the calmness of her sight...they are especially frightened by her voice, which terrorizes them into pockets and sweat...in her presence all speak with a rhythm associated with wayfarism...

Because I am not catholic I do not confess and instead have to carry pens, and paper, and engage in conversations with strangers on buses, with cats and newspaper seller, and bottles of wine - not scared but dam fun.

Back to Sophia and the problem of her being...that she exists and has hands is true, but that she is in my dreams, and in my fragrant fantasies, in a web of my mind, and that she somehow pours through my figure nails...

This too is also true — and the problem. For whatever she is she is nonetheless to me part of my creation, and as my creation she cannot have a substantive presence in my being...I will gaze at her internally

A painting, I alter it, and add dabs here and the problem is common and we know it well, let me turn to Cristina...who on a cold night over the phone told me to 'see her' (Sophia)...

I did not understand this cryptic advise, but now as I await Sophia, as I avoid the indiscretions of smoke, and chatter, I would like her to come with her stillness and terrorizing voice, so that I may 'see her'...

Bird

Contemplating nothingness in indigo blue/ you come bird/and sing/did i leave dry grass for you in the spring/ did you settle your nest for the coming winter/why do you sing oh bird?

< poetry >

Frederick Pollack

Late

As if an enormous house, all wings,
alcoves, and common rooms, were shutting down
for the night. I have had the last
inconclusive, yawning conversations — wit
enough, intended
or unintended revelations,
to justify the day and fill
the days to come. Not sleepy,
throwing on another log
(the dogs in their heap,
the gargoyles on the mantel
will take responsibility
if I should leave the room), I read —
moderate struggle with preoccupation
allowing one idea more,
perhaps, to enter. Here and there
a distant toilet flushes,
water runs into a tub,
jacuzzis hum. A quarrel
seeks aid and comfort, is absorbed
by the carpeting and hangings
of a far hallway. A solemn sudden word
goes on and on but possibly
is one I lately said or read, not heard.
I find a kitchen, some leftovers and
a wetbar. Roam
the corridors. Sconcelight; quiet, except

for murmurs. Yes,
squeaking. Too little or much
for the mood? I enter, am welcomed;
went in a week ago, have been there all evening;
move on and pause and pass,
tactfully. Then all is silent,
especially the unruly shadows peeking
from corners, down stately stairwells;
left to their own devices by those sleeping,
and which I call to order. Still
wakeful; should return to my book,
the fire, join
them ... By four o'clock
in a great house, the human
element has vacated,
unless one insists on it.

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of Ginsberg's "Howl"

First public reading, Six Gallery, San Francisco, October 7, 1955

No lasting shame
accrues to his later
vanity — the water glass,
the microphone and cushion placed
just so or else he wouldn't read.
The consumption
of Orlovsky, the playing
Goebbels to a drunk Tibetan Hitler
might stop the conversation
if there were any; but
with fifty useful pages in eight hundred,
there isn't.
Incredibly, never bourgeois; slept anywhere.
Few levitate the Pentagon, he at least tried.
A month from death, he said:
"I thought I'd be afraid, but I'm EXHILARATED!"

And to have been there ...
Being born too late
is no excuse, is actually false:
everybody was there!
Kerouac passing the hat
and bottles and yelling "Go!
Go!", Creeley
off to one side smiling — less
importantly present
than the familiar, beetle-browed,
mustachioed, sickly, peering,
unnoticed figure heard
laughing twice that evening.
The first laugh was unpleasant
as he thought, This is the Slave
as poet, inciting
his insincere revolt.
The second laugh was joyous,
embodying the mood of the crowd — seeing
in this Jew "shaking with shame"
the Overman, the revaluator of values.

North Face, 1976

Self-pity is a discipline, for he
who embraces it receives no sympathy,
and learns to hold his peace
in a vast, sordid courtroom with
incompetent counsel, a sleeping judge,
the endless prosecution witnesses.

And should he in the midst of trial transcend
that punishment, the fear of worse, and extend
his pity to another, it will be
a ghostly gift to one who can't perceive
ghosts; a letter written in thoughtful tears
and the heart's blood, without an addressee.

Ruined at thirty, I worked part-time.
The black girl who taught me to run
the phone system could not conceive
so white a failure, and was neither friendly
as towards the bosses (former hippies, adjusting
to money and the need for union-busting)

or as she was with employees
if black or Filipina. The Chinese
("instinctively hierarchic," said my boss)
reported organizers. Others left
half-sewn the double sleeping-bag or parka
and vanished whenever someone cried "la migra!"

When not manning phones, I filed.
Ate, once, at the management table.
Never said what was wrong with me,
which meant it was all they heard.
They talked about dirt-bikes, self-fulfillment,
est, deals for down from the PRC.

My boss was the most unctuous, although
he could be curt. One day
a black girl — she had something wrong with her hand
and mind, and worked at one of the presses —
approached him, with an equally terrified friend
in tow, and, not exactly babbling,

gave him a page from a secretary-pad
filled with jumbled writing.
I actually only recall the words "please PLEASE"
towards the end. The rest concerned
a supervisor, a phone call,
noise — like what she was saying,

not impossible but too much to take in.
"Is it important?" snapped our boss.
Taut shoulders slumped; she turned and whispered "No."
His expression was one
of schoolmasterly triumph.

"Should I file this?" I asked when they were gone.

He shrugged, and strutted off somewhere.
I stood before the proper drawer,
then folded the page and put it in my pocket.
Mislaid it, later, in one of many moves.
And here the poem becomes, inevitably,
no longer about her request but me,

white, and with chances then. I remember
unfolding it on my desk that night
beneath the usual sole dramatic light
in my slum apartment. Thinking
The written words of people who can't write
easily are especially revealing,

I spurred that thought and rode it out of sight:
Some magazine
should systematically investigate
the notebooks crazy people keep, the stuff
you see them scribbling in libraries.
Sure, most of it's crap

but who knows? it might contain
unsuspected intellectual plenty. Create
a revolution in thought, an alternate
canon, a new
world. I'd live to see the Minotaur
on the dollar bill, Medusa on the twenty.

Frederick Pollack → is the author of numerous poems and essays, including two book-length narrative poems: "Happiness," (1998) and "The Adventure" (1986). He teaches creative writing and despondent leftist thinking at the George Washington University, USA.

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CONTEMPORARY CHINA SPECIAL

Curated by Lorenzo Marsili

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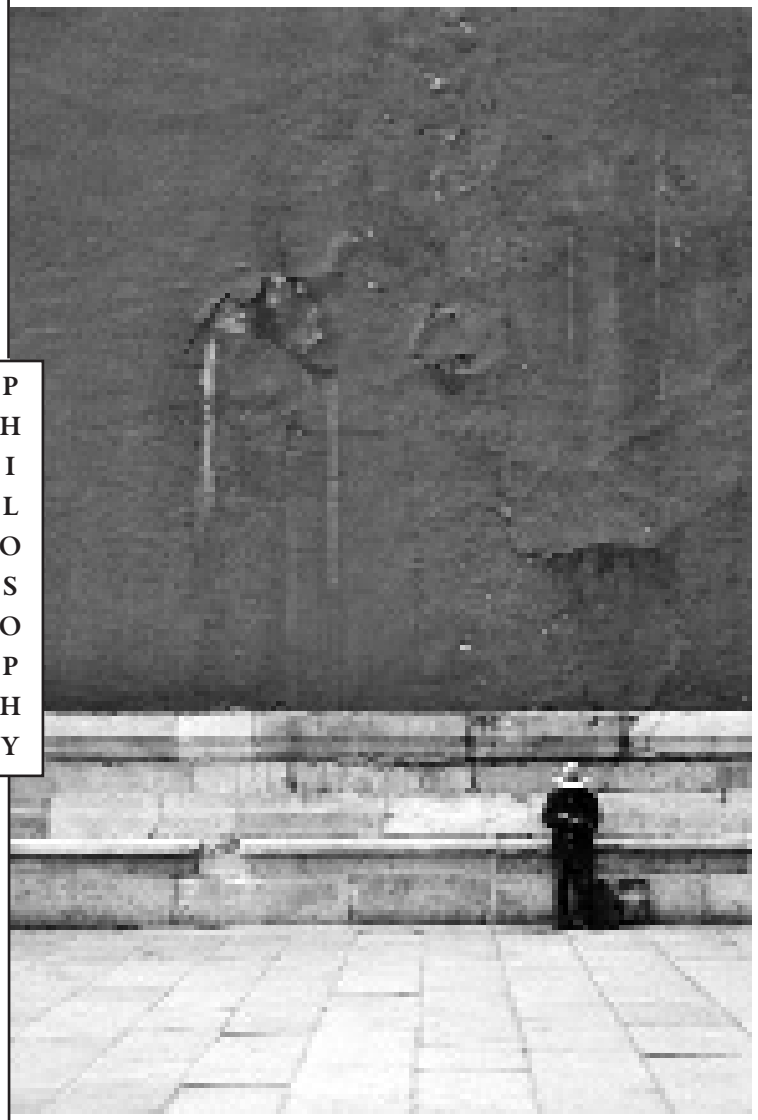


→ Charlotte Gonzalez

From Utopian Negation to Negated Utopia:

A Critical Perspective on Chinese Modernity

>> an article by Shaobo Xie and Fengzhen Wang

What Ernst Bloch remarks in a conversation with Theodor Adorno several decades ago seems especially pertinent to the present topic of utopia and modern China. "At the beginning," Bloch notes,

> *Thomas More designated utopia as a place, an island in the distant South Seas. This designation underwent changes later so that it left space and entered time. Indeed, the Utopians, especially those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, transposed the wishland more into the future. In other words, there is a transformation of the topos from space into time. (3)*

ONE FASCINATING HISTORICAL phenomenon in modern China is just this transformation of the utopian topos from space into time. The earliest champions of Chinese modernization at the beginning of the twentieth century upheld the ideals of the European Enlightenment, galvanizing the nation with a utopia of freedom, democracy, and advanced science and technology. That imaginary future of China in fact was a distant wishland across the oceans, which the liberal intelligentsia identified as a would-be sinicized version of the West. Decades later, the utopia in Mao's China "left space and entered time," or we should say, it was transformed into a pure time—when Mao and his colleagues relentlessly rejected the modernity model of both the first and the second worlds, blazing an intransigent trail of modernity unprecedented in history, which is a pure utopian exploration into the unknown and the untrodden.

In post-Mao China, however, utopia either as a remote wishland or as an imagined future seems to have completely disappeared from its intellectual, cultural and psychological horizon except in a few rare cases. This is the moment when the Chinese, tired of utopia and disillusioned with revolution, jump to be sucked into the vortex of the empire of globalized capitalism. In this paper we intend to argue that the itinerary of Chinese modernity portrays a movement from utopian negation to negated utopia with an emphasis on the Mao and the post-Mao period. We also argue that the local negation of utopia in China echoes a global fact that, as Adorno and Bloch cogently pointed out thirty years back, the utopian element has disappeared from both the East and the West which are governed by similar tendencies that generate the unity of the epoch despite divergences and conflicts between them.

Descriptively speaking, the three phases of Chinese modernity can be respectively termed the cultural, the political, and the economic. The cultural phase of modernity, initiated by late Qing reformist intellectuals, spanning the first two decades of the century, is defined by its discursive energy towards cultural rejuvenation and reconstruction, and towards national sovereignty and independence against the threat of Western powers. The political phase, covering the years of the Maoist revolution during the Cold War, is underwritten by a determination to break with tradition and with hegemonic Western modernity. The economic phase, designating the last twenty-five years or so, is marked by a general incredulity towards Maoist socialism and its politico-cultural legacy. All these moments of modernity, to borrow terms from Habermas, "rebe[l] against all that is normative" ("Modernity versus Postmodernity" 344), but the cultural and the political moment, iconoclastic and idealistic in mood, display a shared uncompromised utopianism, whereas the economic totally rejects utopianism. The Chinese discourse of modernity at every moment is informed and shaped by its relations with a certain notion of the West. In the first phase, the Chinese anxiously

borrowed Western cultural, moral, spiritual, and aesthetic forms and values, enthusiastically upholding the legacy of Enlightenment. In its second phase of modernity, the Maoist China reluctantly insisted on development outside the Grand Narrative of Western modernity. The third phase of Chinese modernity coincides with the age of globalization, which emerges as Western imperialism rerun via TNCS, IMF, Hollywood films, computer technology, American values and lifestyles. The Chinese now redefine modernity as convergence into the processes of globalization, economically, technologically and culturally, unabashedly celebrating and subscribing to the Western paradigm of modernity.

In the first phase, for all their insightful diagnoses of diseased Chinese tradition, the May Fourth intellectuals' anguished desire for national rejuvenation and their discourse on modernity bespeak an unmistakable utopianist voluntarism. It is more of a symptom of the crisis of Chinese culture than a feasible project. For China at that time was not yet equipped with socio-economic conditions for totalistic modernization or Westernization. To strive for Western-style modernity without the West's social and historical conditions or without a dominant capitalist mode of production and relations only managed to lead to an abortive modernity project. If Western modernity has had the rise and development of capitalism for its condition of possibility, then this condition never fully materialized in China. True, a modern Chinese bourgeoisie took its shape at the beginning of the twentieth century, but "it was a numerically small and economically weak class" and "was primarily a commercial and financial bourgeoisie," which functioned largely as "an intermediary between the Chinese market and the capitalist world market" (Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 5). China still remained defined by an agrarian economy or the Asiatic mode of production. There were not large enough middle classes championing a pragmatic, scientific conception of the universe and pressuring for political freedom and constitutional legal protection from the state (Glassman 13). The discourse of modernity not predicated on

the capitalist mode of production and social relations would only lead to a partial disenchantment, which was limited to the radical intellectual elite. After unrelenting critiques of and fierce skirmishes with Confucianism, Chinese culture and social life continued on largely as it was before. However, the May Fourth movement legacy defined by a negative utopianism, the radical critical spirit, and the conviction that a transformed consciousness leads to a transformed material social reality was to pass into the cause of their communist successors.

If the first phase of Chinese modernity was the outcome of the logic of Chinese cultural crisis instead of the logic of capitalism in urbanized areas, then the second phase of modernity was the result of the logic of Chinese Communist revolution engineered by its charismatic leader Mao Zedong. Unlike the first phase which, though causing fundamental changes to Chinese society, was only confined to the radical intellectual elite, the second one involved the common people in their millions, but it was a totalitarian project of modernity designed by Mao Zedong himself. The Maoist utopian anxieties for a reconstructed collective identity and renewed social relations can be traced back to the times of Ruijin in Jiangxi Province and Yanan in Shanxi Province, which were the enclaved spaces of future created in the here and now. In the late 1950s, visionary Maoism took the form of the political imagination of the People's Commune and the Great Leap Forward. This was the moment when the whole country was taken by a euphoric dream: everyone was inspired by Mao's vision that six hundred million people's emancipated creative energy could produce as much grain and steel as they wished, and that China was only a few decades away from Communism. Mao's plan for the Great Leap Forward was grandiosely utopian--to catch up with the Great Britain in fifteen years, to transform agricultural production, using people's communes to walk the road from socialism to communism, from poverty to abundance. Such utopianist confidence was also portrayed in Mao's own poetic writing: "Six hundred million Chinese all equal Yao and Shun (legendary sages and emperors of remote ancient times). / Crimson

rain swirling in waves under our will, / Green mountains turn to bridges at our wish" (35). Obviously, at that moment, Mao believed that he should try to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, which would speed up the coming of communism.

Indeed, this is a moment of unprecedented utopian anxieties, a moment when, as Northrop Frye says in a different context, nature no longer contains man, but "is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way" (119). The full swing of Maoist utopian imagination came in 1966, the year inaugurating the Cultural Revolution, which was the most audacious attempt at expedited transformation of social consciousness, social relations and politico-cultural ideology. Perhaps one should situate Mao's Cultural Revolution in the historic moment of decolonization or third world beginnings, when all those previously marginalized and repressed sub-humans suddenly became militant, self-conscious subjects of history. The former European empires were collapsing, nationalism was emerging as a counter-hegemonic ideology, and American neo-imperialism was being challenged and resisted everywhere. Fanon's expression of the awakening consciousness of the wretched of the earth went hand in hand with wars for national independence. While heading his country unswervingly through two decades of isolation by the West, Mao established the concept of Three Worlds in global power struggle, never relaxing in his battles against the hegemony of imperialism. Maoist socialism, as Wang Hui points out, represents "a type of modern anti-capitalist modernization theory" (14), which uncompromisingly insists on development outside the syntax of Western modernity. This is best registered in Mao's consistent rejection of the hegemonic Western discourse of development predicated on economic premises, which dictate, to borrow terms from Arif Dirlik, that "the economic efficiency must take precedence over considerations of equality and democracy in the organization of work, and the structure of social relations in general" (30). Mao refused, however, to be subjected to this modernist narrative

of development, for, as Dirlik has succinctly pointed out, revolutionary goals "must shape the course development would take" (30).

It is difficult not to agree with Maurice Meisner's unconventional view that Mao was "more successful as a modernizer of his nation" ("The Deradicalization of Chinese Socialism" 352), except that he followed a radically different agenda of modernity. For Mao Zedong, the whole process of development "was characterized by a continuous series of radical revolutionary ruptures with the past, by a qualitative break with existing reality, and by changes in social relations and popular consciousness" (Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* 227). If economic development is one grounding premise of the whole hegemonic discourse of Western modernism or imperialism, then we need to connect Mao's revolution against his economic-developmentalist colleagues with his persistent resistance to imperialism. The primacy of economic development lies at the heart of Western modernist or imperialist ideology, which self-congratulatorily conceives Western industrialized countries as far superior to and more advanced than those developing Third World countries, primarily on account of their economic and technological superiority as well as their derived military power. Mao's commitment to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" accounts for his long-term confrontation with and isolation from the former Soviet Union and the First World, both of which sanction the economic premises of development. This is partly why Mao, time and again, warned that his revisionist colleagues were the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Maoism with all its utopian anxieties and revolutionary paroxysms is over, leaving behind a legacy of a politico-cultural model to be drawn upon or to be judged by posterity. The Maoist Cultural Revolution evokes the memories of a time when the world's largest population with its utopian political imagination lived outside the bounds of tradition and outside the hegemonic stream of Western modernity. What nursed the Chinese political imagination and enthusiasm were a

shared utopian vision of classless future society and a binding sense of solidarity engendered thereby. This is a time when all philosophical and social discourses were subordinated to the Maoist project of collective emancipation, a time when all traditions and knowledge were laid open to critique and every aspect of civilization--art, social relations and institutions, and government--underwent regeneration. True, the Cultural Revolution has an undeniably violent and brutal side to it, and during the movement, millions of Chinese and their families were implicated, undergoing traumatic or unspeakable experience. For some time, schools were closed down, factories and fields were left deserted, and the whole country was in disarray and chaos. The revolution that had marked out capitalist-roaders for its targets converted so many innocent ordinary people into enemies of the revolution. As the revolutionary action grew out of control, bloody violence prevailed in large areas of the country. The ambiguity of revolutionary language (the term the "bourgeoisie" for example) makes possible the ceaseless metamorphosis of the counter-revolutionary in different relations, thus turning the thrust of the rebels' political action against the original intention of the Maoist revolution. Such are the kinds of revolutionary alienation produced "in real historical circumstances" by "the long revolution against human alienation" (Williams 82). Like any other massive revolutions in history, the Maoist Cultural Revolution came as a genuine attempt, in Williams' terms, to change "the *form* of activity of a society, in its deepest structure of relationships and feelings" (76). It promised a total recreation of humanity, which spelt the end of classes. Never before had history witnessed a time when the ruled and the oppressed enjoyed so much freedom and demonstrated so much concern with the destiny of their country and of the world. For all its tragic reversals, the Maoist Cultural Revolution constitutes an epiphanic moment of man struggling with nature and desperately trying to reshape and recreate nature. It purports to snatch moments of Freedom from Necessity, to rescue subjectivity from inexorable, all-engulfing history, to destroy order to reconstruct

order, and to grasp and shape unrepresentable History.

The third phase of Chinese modernity took the form of a violent reversal from its preceding phase--an entire negation and rejection of the utopian modernity project championed by Mao and Maoists. It comes closer than ever in Chinese history to achieving definitive components of Western modernity--an autonomous and independent civil society, social individuation, autonomous will formation, critical consciousness, the desire and will for legal constitutional democracy and freedom, and the separation of economy from the polity. A genuine and penetrating revolution is taking place in all realms of culture and society, namely, in the spheres of ethics, structures of feeling, cultural theory and production, social relations, coded values and meanings, and lifestyles. Deng's economic reform not only emancipated the Chinese people's long-repressed desires for material wealth and well-being, but legitimized to a large extent the separation of economic activities and entrepreneurial undertakings from the polity, granting limited but unprecedented ideological and intellectual freedom unless it proved overtly subversive to the Communist power. All of a sudden, the Chinese society became fully alive with all kinds of ideologies, lifestyles, politico-cultural agendas, aesthetic mannerisms, cultural creations and religious imaginations. As Shaobo Xie points out in a different context, "with fresh memories of material poverty and political sufferings in the past, people are vying with one another for oblivious immersion in the immediate present of hedonistic materialism—the Chinese version of what Jameson calls reversed millenarianism" ("Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism" 12). With the intellectual elite and university-educated new middle classes the official capitulation to capitalism and the popular desire for freedom are sublimated into an inspired New Enlightenment Movement for democracy and science, which privileges Enlightenment over national salvation. The New Enlightenment intellectuals opt for complete Westernization as did their May Fourth predecessors[1]. They insist on objective values and universal rationality,

subscribing to the Euro-American model of modernity and history. Their political anxieties are perhaps best registered by *River Elegy (He Shang)*, which narrates how the Yellow Civilization (the Asiatic mode of production) has been defeated by the Blue or Oceanic Civilization (the Western industrial revolution). The authors of *River Elegy* maintain that the Yellow (Chinese) civilization is of necessity to be replaced by the Blue or industrial civilization.

For all their apparent continuity with the May Fourth intellectuals, however, the New Enlightenment Movement should not be taken as a return of the same despite its argument for Westernization. First, the New Enlightenment project of modernity is nurtured by a pervasive pro-democracy sentiment shared by the broad masses of people rather than a desire possessed by a handful of intellectual elite. Second, the present phase of modernity either as a structure of feeling or as a self-conscious critical discourse comes when the Chinese, after nearly a hundred years of political upheavals, wars, and revolutions, have totally lost faith and interest in totalizing Grand Narratives—the largest among them being the narrativized journey through capitalism to communism. Last but not least, the third phase of Chinese modernity emerges in a historical moment when socialism is disintegrating on a global scale, and when capitalism, gathering unforeseen momentum through processes of globalization, is triumphantly reinvading the previous colonized countries and areas. The processes of globalization irresistibly taking place in every corner of the world are

1. Li Zehou, for example, reversed the old conservatives' *tiyong* doctrine which had been dominant at the beginning of the century, contending for "Western substance and Chinese application," that is, for the sinicization of Western culture. He "calls for a new Enlightenment movement to establish the principles of democracy and science" (Li Min 991). What is taken as a fierce challenge to Deng's regime is Li's argument that "national salvation suppresses Enlightenment" (qtd. in Li Min 991). What Li calls for is actually wholesale Westernization, for his *tiyong shuo* essentially champions the project as headed by Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi. In much the same way, Fang Lizhi opted for complete Westernization as well. "I personally agree with the 'complete Westernizers,'" Fang said. "What their complete Westernization means to me is complete openness, the removal of restrictions in every sphere" (158). He highly recommended Lu Xun for the latter's perceived "complete Westernization" and his rejection of the "entire Chinese tradition" (Fang 183). Both Fang and Li derived their arguments for Westernization from their belief in universal rationality and objective truth and values. While Li insisted on the universal criteria for assessing degrees of progress and backwardness, Fang maintained that "the basic principles and standards of modernization and democratization are like those of science--universally applicable" (Fang 184).

powerfully impacting upon the life of every individual and community. Global capital is penetrating into every social and political space, and China is becoming "a fully capitalised society" and has been completely brought "into the global capitalist mode and relations of production (Wang 26). If the Chinese had been struggling with capitalism for over a hundred years, they now seem to be no longer able to withstand the logic and culture of capital. Actually, it seems that the whole country is eagerly yielding itself wide open to capitalist baptism. For the common people, the celebration of capitalism ultimately promises capitalist consumerism and lifestyles; for Dengist modernization engineers and party bureaucrats, it is a desire for the capitalist mode of production and productivity; and for the New Enlightenment intellectuals, it refers to capitalist superstructure--liberal humanism and legal constitutional freedom and democracy. From this point of view, it seems that the common people, the ruling clique and the radical intelligentsia are all, consciously or unconsciously, acclaiming capitalism though each with a different itinerary and agenda.

True, there is a growing disillusionment with hegemonic Western modernity among the Chinese in the 1990s. This sentiment is best registered by what is known as neo-authoritarianism or neo-conservatism, whose followers advocate "Confucian capitalism," which, premised on the successes of the so-called Four Small Dragons--Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, can be taken as a proposed reconciliation of tradition and modernity, or of China and the West. These neo-conservatives argue that China, like other developing countries, does not have to repeat the Western model of modernization and that the Chinese must free themselves from "the ideological and psychological 'Westernized mindset'" (Zhao 736). However, the neo-conservatives' "theory still uses efficiency as its only yardstick" (Wang 25) and does not break out of the hegemonic economistic syntax of modernity. Their oxymoronic conception of Confucian capitalism already betrays their belief in the inevitability of capitalism except that they still deem it

necessary and possible to preserve traditional Chinese ethics and coded values and social rites. Apparently, the neo-conservatives are subscribing to a different path of modernity from that of the New Enlightenment intellectuals, for the latter advocate wholesale Westernization, whereas the former only approve of economic Westernization. But upon closer examination, one will find the two discourses of modernity much less incompatible than they appear to be: They both can be taken as symptoms of Chinese anxieties for modernization; they both owe their emergence to the impact of global capitalism; they both reject the Maoist path of modernity; they both surrender to the hegemony of capital.

As we mentioned earlier, the third phase has emerged in the area of globalization, but neither the New Enlightenment Intellectuals nor the neo-conservatives have analysed the situation dialectically. To the New Enlightenment intellectuals, globalization is nothing more than the neoliberal ideology of the free market—the capitalist market of exchange values, which they regard as the only way to economic growth and social progress. And to the neo-conservatives, globalization seems to change only the economic system but not the social institutions so that the Confucian ethics and values can be perpetuated. What is lacking in their analyses is a dialectic assessment of the positive and negative effects of globalization in China. Indeed, globalization is the general offensive of monopoly capital (transnational corporations) to maximize the extraction of profit and accelerate capital accumulation everywhere, particularly through the use of modern technology such as robotics and information technology, and more importantly, through the political diktat of liberalization, deregulation and privatization. Supposed to refurbish the nostrum of modernization, globalization enables rapid economic restructuring, centralization of capital, takeover and control of production resources in the Third-World countries including China. While the New Enlightenment intellectuals and the neo-conservatives see the positive elements of globalization, they do not pay enough attention to the negative ones. As we can see

in China, globalization has worsened the effects of the destructive paradigm of "growth and development." Instead of social stability that is promised, globalization has brought about or increased political and social tensions. The systematic assaults on labor are dissipating the working class gains, causing widespread unemployment, job insecurity, and loss of benefits. The massive displacement of workers leads to the rise and further commodification of migrant workers. The peasants' limited gains in the reform are likewise being reversed, resulting in more rural unemployment and penury. Large numbers of women are becoming displaced, commodified and economically and sexually exploited. Millions of rural people have been transformed into the lumpenproletariat hired as wage workers by multi-national corporations, millions of *liumin* (migrants) emerging in coastal or metropolitan cities like Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, where they are reduced to a ghostly, spaceless, homeless existence. No wonder Slavoj Zizek writes that, "Today, the two superpowers, the USA and China, relate more and more as Capital and Labor. The USA is turning into a country of managerial planning, banking, services, and so on, while its 'disappearing working class' . . . is reappearing in China, where the majority of US products . . . are manufactured in ideal conditions for capitalist exploitation" (*Revolution* 290). As the majority of the people are marginalized economically, they automatically become disempowered politically.

This is the context in China for a complete surrender to the hegemony of Western modernity and for a total loss of utopian resistance to the global empire of capital, which accounts for the failure of the champions of the post-Mao modernity discourse to make a dialectic assessment of the negative as well as positive effects of globalization in China. Unlike the May Fourth and the Maoist modernists, the New Enlightenment intellectuals and neo-conservatives, as well as the state and the ordinary people, no longer think towards alternatives to the already existing reality, no longer believing in the primacy of consciousness in transforming a society, their political and cultural imaginary no longer informed by

the utopian element. True, over the past twenty years or so, the Chinese have made continuous sea changes in economic, political and cultural realms, adopting new modes of production and consumption, greeting new knowledge and ideologies, pushing deterritorializations and re-territorializations geographically, psychologically, economically and politically, and those changes are no doubt forward-looking and are arguably informed by a kind of economic utopianism, which fervently believes in the magic power of market-oriented economic reforms. But paradoxically this is at best a utopianism without a utopia, for it does not offer an imaginative alternative to the already existing order of global capitalism, nor does it offer a conception of a placeful good nowhere, from whose perspective the undesirable reality can be held up for critical examination. What economic utopianism generates are institutions, norms, and relationships that have already been invented and established in the West.

According to Adorno, "Utopia is essentially in the determined negation, in the determined negation of that which *merely* is (our emphasis), and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be" (12). What the cultural politics and political culture in contemporary China are advocating is exactly the opposite to the utopian socio-political project as suggested by Adorno. In succumbing to the hegemonic syntax of capitalist modernity, the Chinese today anxiously accept "that which merely is"—the already existing, well-established order of global capital and American democracy, enchanted by its aura, and blinded to its problems and crises. Instead of transcending the given horizon of global capitalism, they organize their modernity discourse, plan their economic development, and reform their cultural and ideological habits in accord with the hegemonic rules of form, efficiency and legitimacy prescribed by the global order of capitalism. If what is emerging in the post-Mao China are capitalist economy, American cultural capitalism, commodification, deterritorialization, unemployment and lumpenproletariat, drug trafficking, prosti-

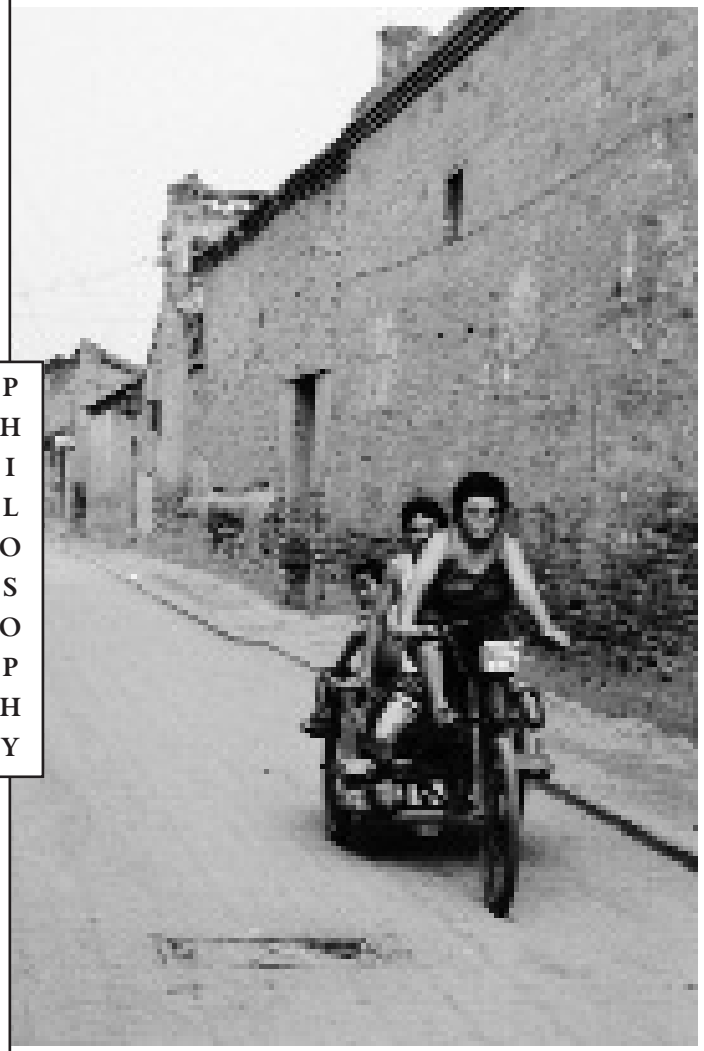
tution and aids, consumerism, the Internet, the widening gap between rich and poor, neutralized or contained opposition, then one can argue that the Chinese version of modernity seems to stand for a mere replica of the Western capitalist modernity that *already is*, and that nothing is farther from utopia than accept that which merely is. The populace's *fin de siecle* material hedonism, the New Enlightenment and neo-conservative intellectuals' celebration of Americanized political and ideological liberalization and economic democracy, the government's capitulation to global capitalism, all these combine to radically negate the kind of utopianism that has inspired the May Fourth and Maoist modernists to transformative revolutionary visions and actions. If the Chinese have first attempted to translate the utopian ideals of the Western Enlightenment into a Chinese context and then reluctantly rejected the syntax of Western modernity in their utopian passion for a differential passage to a modernized China, now they are unreservedly and unhesitantly succumbing to the postmodern West.

As has been argued all along in this paper, the Chinese trajectory of modernity at every moment has to be defined in relation to Western capitalism. The iconoclastic May Fourth movement prematurely advocated a totalistic utopian repudiation of traditional Chinese culture; the Maoist project of modernity single-mindedly championed the leading into communism through speed reculturation via political and ideological transformation of the people; the post-Mao modernists prioritized economic development with a view to radical but gradual transition towards a democratized society, relentlessly negating the utopian spirit upheld by the May Fourth and Maoist modernists. These moments occurred in different historical horizons: the first in the age of imperialist expansion, the second in the age of Cold War—ideological war; the third in the age of globalization. The imperialist expansion threatened the survival of China; the Cold War isolated and forced Maoists to blaze a new trail of modernity; the processes of globalization persuaded the Chinese that the West is the absolute norm of civilization or progress and that economic successes are the real guarantee of China rivaling a powerful, expansive,

aggressive West. In the first moment the concept of modernity has for its historical content national rejuvenation intended to emulate a modern West; in the second moment it is displaced from emulation to utopian drives for socialism against and parallel to the West. The world is caught in the tension of two competing paradigms of modernity—the Soviet-style path to modernization and the Western-style path to modernization. This is the historical context for the emergence of the Maoist intransigent counter-hegemonic discourse of modernity. Had there been no confrontation and equilibrium between the two systems respectively represented by the Eastern Europe Socialist Bloc and the Western capitalist camp, there would have been no interstitial space for the inception and development of the Maoist romantic, totalitarian project of modernity. The third phase of Chinese modernity emerges with a fully capitalized economy.

The past twenty-five years have witnessed a worldwide crisis in socialism. The former Soviet Union's defection to capitalism, the disintegration of the Eastern Europe Socialist Bloc and the sweeping hegemony of global capitalism, all these seem to have destroyed the last space for socialist modernity. At every phase of Chinese modernity, the Chinese have undergone a process of disenchantment: In the first moment of disenchantment the Chinese questioned the validity of Confucianism, but the sceptic spirit largely remained confined to the relatively small number of the intellectual elite; the second phase of disenchantment led to a traumatic loss of faith in the revolution itself; the third moment of disenchantment resulted in a general loss of faith in grand narratives and utopian hopes and in a nihilistic hedonism[2]. What is especially worth noting here is that the itinerary of Chinese modernity defined by the movement from utopian negation to negated utopia, in an important sense, coincides with the Western itinerary of modernity from Enlightenment to postmodernism.

2. See Ci Jiwei, Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994). This book contains illuminating philosophical discussions on nihilistic hedonism in contemporary China. According to its author, the Chinese Communist revolution follows a four-moment trajectory--utopianism, nihilism, hedonism, and political liberalism.



→ Charlotte Gonzalez

Desublimation and Resublimation in Post-Mao China

>> an article by Jiwei Ci
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DESPITE GRADUAL RELAXATION of central control in the economic sphere, strict political management of crucial areas of life remains a feature of post-Mao China. One area of life still subject to such political management is that of the propagation of systems of belief and meaning. This area is distinctive, however, in that it has an internal aspect (the "internalization" of belief and meaning) as well as an external one (the propagation itself) and yet only its external aspect is amenable to effective monitoring and control.

Not surprisingly, such management has succeeded in one way but failed, or succeeded less, in another. It has succeeded in preventing alternative systems of belief and meaning from emerging and or at least from acquiring sufficient critical mass to compete with the official one. Yet it has fallen some way short of getting the official system of belief and meaning understood, accepted, and absorbed—in a word, internalized—by the populace. Up to a point, people still have to act as if they embraced this official system, but more and more of them have learned to cope by going through the motions without taking up the spirit. What is the "spirit" anyway? This creates a troubling situation: systems of belief and meaning that might have a chance to be internalized and help give significance and direction to everyday life are not allowed much room to develop, on the one hand, and the only system that is given free rein offers little that lends itself to internalization, on the other, and the result is an *inner* vacuum of belief and meaning.

This situation has been much analyzed in terms of "moral vacuum" (*daode zhenkong*), "crisis of belief" (*xinyang weiji*), and so on, and various official solutions have been tried. I do not disagree with this line of analysis but want to push it further, in terms of desublimation and resublimation. My hope is that these terms of analysis will provide a new perspective on the nature of the situation and on the thrust of the official attempts to cope with it.

By desublimation I mean the reversal or undoing of sublimation. More specifically, I have in mind the undoing, in post-Mao China, of the original sublimation, characteristic of Mao's China, of hedonism into utopianism. To cut a long story short, the original sublimation had been made necessary by circumstances of poverty and made possible, and given direction, by belief in a future of communism. Accordingly, the desublimation that was to occur in post-Mao China was made possible by a significant reduction of poverty and the realistic prospect of further reduction; and it was made necessary by nihilism, that is, by loss of belief in communism. In the context of this trajectory desublimation means, more precisely, the desublimation of utopianism into hedonism via a combination of nihilism and improved material conditions[1].

Most crucially, it is necessary to speak of desublimation as a process involving three distinct dimensions, epistemic, moral, and corporeal. The *epistemic* dimension has to do with belief in the truth of communism as a moral-political system. The *moral* dimension is a matter of the stringency of that system's moral codes and practices, that is, the degree to which they require self-denial and self-sacrifice in favor of collective interests. The *corporeal* dimension pertains to the organization of desires, in ways that are more or less ascetic or hedonistic. The unity of these dimensions lies in the fact that all worldviews and moral beliefs are embodied in everyday corporeal practices (by no means the only practices, to be sure). Of course such practices

1. For a more detailed account of this process as well as the antecedent process of sublimation, see my Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), introduction and chap. 4.

cannot help but be informed by worldviews and moral beliefs, if only implicitly. Nevertheless the concept of desublimation helps draw attention to the often easily neglected corporeal dimension of phenomena.

When we put the accent on this dimension, we think of the reorganization of desires, in post-Mao China, in increasingly hedonistic rather than ascetic ways. If we replace "hedonistic" with "self-regarding" and "ascetic" with "other-regarding" (or "collective-regarding"), we will be shifting our attention to the moral dimension of desublimation. On this dimension we are concerned directly not with the organization of desires (or relation with oneself) but with the organization of power relations (or relation with others).

Especially important for my purposes in this essay, by distinguishing the three dimensions of desublimation (and yet taking careful note of their close relationships), we are able to spot contradictions in attempts to reverse desublimation in one or two but not all three dimensions. This is not to suggest that it would be wiser or more feasible to reverse desublimation comprehensively, in all three dimensions at once. As far as present-day China is concerned, a comprehensive reversal of desublimation is simply not on the cards, and this is (arguably) a good thing, too. What *is* being attempted, as we shall see, is a selective reversal of desublimation. To understand and assess this selective reversal, we cannot do without a clear distinction between the three dimensions of desublimation. Indeed, it is only on the basis of this distinction that we are able to understand what is going on as a *selective* reversal of desublimation.

Let me say a little more about each of the three dimensions of desublimation in order then to say something about why they tend to go together. By the epistemic dimension of desublimation I mean the decline of belief in the truth of communism as a system of action-guiding (and state-legitimating) ideals, ideals which used to make the sublimation of hedonism into utopianism possible. This decline is not a purely epistemic matter but an integral part of the process of

desublimation: it is the devaluation not of an epistemic system as such but of the epistemic *basis* of what happens in the moral-political sphere.

By the moral dimension of desublimation, I have in mind the relaxation of state prescriptions of altruism, collectivism, and so on, on the one hand, and the reduction of behavior in keeping with such prescriptions, on the other.

Finally, by the corporeal dimension of desublimation I refer to the gradual replacement of the ascetic organization of desires with a more and more hedonistic one. This replacement goes hand in hand with the gradual withdrawal of negative moral and political judgment on the expression and satisfaction of desires, not least the desire for pleasure and consumer goods.

To see how the three dimensions of desublimation implicate one another, one may take the moral dimension, for example, and start with the antecedent process of sublimation. If people are to act on a moral code that enjoins altruism and collectivism, both of which involve a high degree of self-denial, they must be presented with a set of reasons for doing so, reasons to which they are able to give (epistemic) credence. In Mao's China, those reasons took the form of the whole belief system know as communism. At the same time, people must be able to control their own desires in order to act in altruistic ways: it is much easier for them to practice altruism or collectivism if they are also drawn to asceticism. Every member of a revolutionary collective "carries within himself a small traitor who wants to eat, drink, make love," as Elias Canetti colorfully puts it[2], and this hedonism, rather than any so-called egoism and individualism per se, is the archenemy of altruism and collectivism. This explains why in Mao's time asceticism (*jianku pusu*) and altruism/collectivism were almost always preached in the same breath, and—to bring in the epistemic dimension as well—almost always with some reference to communism. Now, once the belief system on which prescriptions of altruism and collectivism rest is weakened, and

2. For a more detailed account of this process as well as the antecedent process of sublimation, see my Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), introduction and chap. 4.

once asceticism ceases to be a regular feature of everyday life, the practice of altruism and collectivism begins to lose not only its rationale but also what we may call its corporeal condition of possibility. Thus unfolds the multi-dimensional process of desublimation.

That we must see sublimation and desublimation in such comprehensive terms is because a certain way of organizing power relations (in terms of altruism and collectivism, and ultimately, of denial of self and obedience to authority) has a close affinity with a certain (ascetic) way of organizing desires, and because both in turn must, short of relying exclusively on coercion, rest to some degree on belief in the truth of a certain (communist) doctrine. Thus it is that we tend to encounter sublimation in all three dimensions at once, and the same is true of desublimation.

It is one thing to suggest, as I have just done, that the three dimensions of desublimation—and of the antecedent process of sublimation—go naturally together. It would be something altogether different to say, however, that those who preside over the process of desublimation want it to occur in all three dimensions at once and to the same degree. As a matter of fact, there is every indication that they have been trying to prevent, halt, or slow down desublimation in its epistemic and moral dimensions while actively promoting desublimation in its corporeal (not least consumerist) dimension. What results from such attempts is an uneven process of desublimation that is rich in contradictions. This unevenness, or the desire for it, is dictated by the overriding need to maintain a semblance of public belief in the legitimacy of the political order, on the one hand, and by the almost equally pressing systemic need for heightened consumerism as part of the new economic order, on the other. At bottom, the contradictions that mark the uneven process of desublimation are contradictions between the political and economic imperatives of the brand-new type of society that has emerged, gradually but inexorably, since the start of the reforms.

How to keep these contradictions in check—it is impossible to resolve them without fundamentally changing the new social paradigm itself—is one of the toughest challenges in present-day Chinese politics. The fact, as I see it, is that desublimation has actually occurred quite evenly in all three dimensions, to a degree sufficient to give rise to the "moral vacuum" and "crisis of belief" I referred to at the outset. Thus, the relative evenness of desublimation was the problem, to begin with, and what I have called *uneven* desublimation, with all the contradictions it entails, has resulted from official attempts to tackle this problem. Maintaining the existing political system in the face of an increasingly even or comprehensive desublimation no longer seems a viable or safe option. The officially preferred state of affairs, it appears, is one that may be described in terms of a partial resublimation—*partial* because this resublimation applies only or chiefly to the epistemic and moral dimensions. This seems to have been attempted for some years now, with renewed momentum since the present leadership took over[3].

If an even process of desublimation is fraught with risks, not least political ones, the attempt to counter such risks through partial resublimation is itself difficult to bring off. I have noted that the three dimensions of sublimation and desublimation have a natural tendency to go together. One major consequence of this affinity is that partial resublimation is something that goes against the grain, as it were. In the case of current attempts at *partial* resublimation, given the omission of the corporeal dimension, it should come as no surprise if resublimation does not materialize in the epistemic and moral dimensions, either. Nor should it be a cause for surprise if this kind of selective resublimation does not make

3. When I wrote Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution back in the early 1990s, I thought that China's problems had been greatly simplified by the desublimation of utopianism into hedonism. On the basis of this assessment, I located the prospect of future crises almost entirely within the framework of the new hedonism—in terms of a possible "management crisis of hedonism," as I called it (see Dialectic, pp. 241-242). In retrospect, I underestimated potential contradictions between the economic and political imperatives of the order that was emerging, or, put another way, between the radically new organization of desires and the in part (though only in part) old organization of power relations. These contradictions have come to the fore since, and I now find it necessary to make up for my lapse of judgment by reopening the subject of desublimation and complicating it with the idea o resublimaion. Hence the title of this essay.

→ **Poster in a KFC, Beijing**, Nathan Brenville

any but the most superficial sense to those generations of people who never went through the process of sublimation in the first place and cannot rely on their memory to understand what is going on in the current experiments with partial resublimation.

In these experiments, resublimation is taking the form of a revival, the bringing back of the substance or spirit of an earlier sublimation that has unraveled during the reforms. It is arguable, of course, that what is being revived is not so much the old system of belief and meaning as the old ethos of conformism and mass allegiance, together with the institutional means of creating and sustaining this ethos. The important thing for my purposes is that whatever is being revived depends for its meaning and possibility of internalization on the old social and political context, one of whose defining features was its future-oriented asceticism. That context is nothing less than the habitus that made sublimation in the epistemic

and moral dimensions both necessary and possible and gave substance to those moral and political values. There is little doubt that that context itself is not being brought back. For those who never lived in that context, what the current partial resublimation is reviving are mere discourses, discourses that bear little relation to a habitus, a concrete way of life. Just imagine what sense it makes to try and make the younger generations understand and act on the moral-political imperative "Serve the people," a dictum that used to be meaningfully embedded only in an ascetic, anti-consumerist form of life.

What about those who went through the original process of sublimation and can draw on their memory to understand what is being revived? Major difficulties stand in the way of their *re-internalizing* the old values now. Obviously, the attempt at resublimation is taking place in a social context that is very different from the original one in which those ideals used to make some kind of sense to them by being integrated with their everyday, ascetic existence. It could even be argued that those ideals were but ways of making a virtue of the necessity of a materially impoverished life. Now that that kind of life is no longer either a necessity or an expression of virtuousness, any attempt to bring back the old moral and political values without reintroducing asceticism itself is likely to strike those who used to live those values as a kind of pure propaganda, as it were. Those who have memories of the old values are of course able to go through the (discursive) motions, with a little updating here and there, but they can no longer embody those values, since the context of those values is a thing of the past and most of them have no desire to return to that context.

None of this is contradicted by the seemingly widespread nostalgia for the Mao era. The main objects of nostalgia, the sort of things people in significant numbers seem to hark back to with approval—such as a guaranteed livelihood, relative equality of income, and low incidence of monetary corruption—are often exaggerated or taken out of context in response to the perceived lack of these

features in the reform period. The nostalgia appears to be real, up to a point, but there is little evidence to suggest a widespread desire to return *wholesale* to the Mao era. Many of those who remember Mao with fondness are no keener than anyone else to pick up ascetic values again. It is their sense of being left out or left behind, and unfairly so, rather than any principled objection to the new way of life in itself that breeds resentment and nostalgia.

One should not be surprised if this kind of selective nostalgia is found among the worse-off, especially among those who have joined the ranks of the less well-off since the reforms. Among the better-off, however, such nostalgia carries a rather different meaning, bespeaking a desire to have the best of both worlds or a measure of dissatisfaction with one's own (relative) place in a new order of things which they otherwise prefer to the Maoist one.

As long as the desire for a wholesale return to the Mao era is lacking, there is an obvious limit to how much can be accomplished by heightened attempts in the media (for example, TV dramatization or re-dramatization of wartime and peacetime "revolutionary" heroes or events) to construct memory for those who lack the experience presupposed by resublimation, or to reconstruct the memory of those whose recall of the Maoist past is too negative to serve as an effective aid. To be sure, the Maoist experience of poverty, hardship, and struggle is recaptured to some degree in the media representation of revolutionary deeds and personalities in the past. And implicit in that representation is a re-valorization of those ascetic and combative values that served as the vehicle for sublimating the unfortunate experience of poverty into the willed pursuit of an ascetic existence for the sake of posterity's eventual enjoyment of material and spiritual plenitude in a communist society. What is missing is any relevant similarity between that past experience and people's experience today.

Equally missing, by the same token, is any connection between the old values—the values that used to sublimate that experience—and a present

experience that clearly does not call for the same kind or degree of sublimation. In the absence of such a connection, the implicit re-valorization is only of disembodied values, values that have outlived their usefulness and can no longer inform everyday, corporeal practices. Memory can be created and recreated through media representation, up to a point, but what such representation cannot by itself create is the relevance of such memory for the present-day context, still less that context itself.

In this way, *partial* resublimation can easily end up as resublimation *out of context*. If such resublimation is unlikely to give a new lease of life to old moral and political values, what can it possibly accomplish?

One of the things it can do, perhaps even effectively, is to keep the public space of belief and meaning occupied and send a "hands off" signal to all alternative sources of belief and meaning that might otherwise expand and compete with the official one. In view of the internalization requirement for any system of belief and meaning, some may regard the increased levels of official propaganda as amounting to little more than going through the motions—and this on the part of initiators and recipients alike. Yet these motions are by no means idle, for they succeed in the external aspect of political management despite lack of success in the internal one. The result of this combination of success and lack of success is, predictably, the vacuum of belief and meaning that is so often talked about.

It could be that those who are presiding over the project of partial resublimation are not unaware of the likely outcome of their efforts. Should this be the case, it is not inconceivable that current ideological operations not only tend to perpetuate the vacuum which they are supposed to fill but are designed to achieve this second-best result.

→ Wang Guanyi

On Contemporary Art from China

>> Lorenzo Marsili meets with Karen Smith, author of *Nine Lives, the Birth of Avant-Garde in New China*, published by Scalo Press.

Lorenzo Marsili: Let us begin with a general question concerning the very term "Chinese Contemporary Art"—is it anything more then a mere geographical signifier pointing to a location where "art" happens "today"? Can some distinctive feature be located, or is there any affinity between works of contemporary art from China distinguishing them from the art of other countries?

Karen Smith: The short answer is that it is just a geographical signifier, but within any cultural framework certain local elements are inalienable to the subtext of the work; that is unavoidable. You cannot really take out the received experience or the learned experience of being born and growing up in a particular framework. Of course in somewhere like London you have a far greater number of artists who travel from Europe and have the choice of making London or whichever city that appeals their home. This results in a natural cultural bleed over between different sensibilities in Europe. China still remains relatively closed, or isolated. We have an enormous number of people coming here now, but that number cannot compare to the number of people who travel to Berlin or Madrid or wherever with such frequency. So in the Chinese context, where you also have a country that is as big a Europe, and with each province being almost as different as a European country, you have a range of different sensibilities and different ethnicities co-existing. At the same time these are subsumed by a very specific cultural frame-

work, which is really the paradigm of socialist Chinese ideology of the past fifty years. Where you have a Communist ideology imposed upon society it is almost impossible for artists to be as free of that cultural framework as a British artist, say, who sees no barrier to deriving their impulses from New York, or Japan, or Papua New Guinea even. In China, where all the people have grown up with a socialist education, where everyone was required to be the same, that received experience is integral to how this generation of Chinese artists view the world, to the way they use language, what they understand language to be, and how it is supposed to communicate ideas. There is an underlying common characteristic to much of the art produced here, and I do not mean that in superficial terms, but I think perhaps the one common thread that runs through all of Chinese contemporary art practice today is its narrative, because somehow the understanding of narrative has become central to how people make art here. The other thing is the fact of the art being almost entirely figurative.

LM: A recurring worry seems to be that the West's interest in contemporary Chinese art focuses more on the word "Chinese" then on the word "art". Artist Zhou Tiehai cleverly mocks in many of his works what he perceives as a situation of cultural subjugation and dependency. To mind comes the sketch of a Chinese artist visiting a foreign curator like one would visit a doctor, worryingly asking, about his own work, "So is it any good!?". With the engines of the Western media increasingly focused on the rising Chinese power, would you think there is a risk of shallow, orentalist, or even neo-colonialist approaches to Chinese contemporary art?

KS: I think there was, and that is Tiehai's point up to the 90s. It goes back to post '89 where the vision of China in the West was of an oppressive regime that harshly controlled all freedom of expression. That reinforced the image people

had received about China in the 60s and 70s, when the Cultural Revolution was going on. There's always been a seam of mystique in western visions of China but in the second half of the 20th century, this was outweighed by a sense of this animal, this beast of Communism in the Western mind. I think 1989 was a pivotal year, partly because of the downfall of the Berlin wall, which changed Europe's political situation and its understanding of the iron curtain regime. With that gone and the world seemingly opening up in many ways, I think people started to view China as almost the last bastion of communism, and you see a pattern in which people who in the late 80s studied Russian political art, then turned their attention to Chinese Political Pop. In the 90s the number of people coming here independently was, however, still very small. The change has been enormous since China's opening up and de-regulation; for example, foreign people—in particular journalists—now can live where they want. Chinese people themselves no longer need to have a residency permit to live in a particular city, they no longer need to bring ID cards wherever they go, ID cards no longer register their parents' social status, etc., so you have a much more open society. Also, today the tide of interest in China is much more tied to its economic growth. You now have a whole generation of collectors and museums who are looking at Chinese art because the economic engagement of corporations in the country is enormous, and corporations are the patrons of these museums. So is the understanding superficial? I don't think so. In the 90s it was a bit, because the linguistic and cultural barriers were simply enormous. China has changed a lot since then. There is a much more common language between young people in the West and in China, they look at the same TV programs, they watch the same movies, they read the same type of magazines, which means you start to get a much greater cultural understanding. There is a huge number of curators coming here today who are very passionate about what they are looking at. I think that even when Chinese artists in the 90s who used to complaint that the western people only understood art from one superficial angle,

it was because people at the time only knew about the political side of China. So in the 90s what Zhou Tiehai was really laughing at is the fact that the Western people were only interested in looking at Political Pop, which definitely has to do with that particular era, where there was an overriding image of political oppression. I think people in the West wanted to believe there was some type of reaction to this crushing regime.

LM: In this same volume two Chinese philosophers both highlight a certain movement from a Utopian-eschatological belief in a Maoist heaven to come, to the hedonist-nihilist ennui of the generation living the results of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and the political retreat following the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Fang Lijun, one of the artists you discuss at length in your recent book *Nine Lives,* has described himself as "a painter of loss, ennui, and crisis". To what extent do you think this movement of Chinese self-consciousness can be discerned in contemporary art?

KS: I think to an enormous degree; it was Herbert Reed who said that there is nothing worse for artists than to feel they speak to a void with no-one to listen to what they are saying or to respond to what they are doing. The 1990s was pretty much like that, because within their own cultural context, where the subjects these artists were tackling should have resonated most clearly, there was no real audience, except for other artists who were already relatively familiar with what was going on and already empathised with the situation. So you get this huge sense that artists were shouting into empty spaces with no-one there to hear them. At the time many were working in the artists' villages at the fringes of society.They were considered outsiders because they did not belong to the normal work units, they did not have the normal jobs in society. Of course for most young people that sounds like a great deal of fun, but it is one thing to feel there is an opponent out

→ Wang Ningde

there, and you are playing a game of cat and mouse and are having some effect, but to feel you are invisible is something completely different. The Chinese government often played that hand. Conversely, you have cases like the performance artists in the Beijing East Village in the mid 90s; there was a big cry of these artists being persecuted, and actually that's partly true but it's also partly an exaggeration. This is a discussion I've had with them since. As I mentioned before Chinese people used to be required to have a residency permit to live in a city, and if you did not have one you would be sent back to wherever you had your residency permit, for you were not allowed to travel unless you had a reason for doing so. Many of the artists

who were moving to Beijing were caught as the urban city expanded. The first waves of migrant workers coming into the city formed temporary communes on the edge of the city, and the artists were able to rent cheap houses within their communities. Once the influx of migrant workers into the city begins, you have the first wave of street crime, which Chinese cities never had before. With the rise of crime the police began to seek the cause of this rise, and attention became focussed on these communities of migrant workers. Artists often got caught up in police raids on migrant communities, and were sent back to their hometown with the migrant workers. Where the performance artists are concerned, most Chinese performance art pieces are enacted in the nude: China is a society with almost Victorian attitudes towards public nudity. Looking back, it was somehow better at the time for these artists to feel they were being persecuted, that they were important, or so subversive that the government would be forced to pick on them specifically. It is like a cry for attention: but that goes back to the artists' painful awareness that they did not have a voice, did not have a presence, and were totally unable to make any difference in the society they lived in.

LM: That makes me think of Yang Fudong's First Intellectual, where a lost figure is trying to throw a brick at an enemy he cannot see nor, possibly, even give form to.

KS: Absolutely. For this reason, in the 1990s, when artists started travelling abroad, attending some of the finest museums, the situation continued; this too bred bitterness, in the sense that if your "parents" do not love you, the affections of your "neighbours" make for a poor substitute.

LM: How would you describe the situation between today's artists and China's turbulent past? I was just at the exhibition of recent works by Wang Ningde, an artist depicting wondering figures drifting through desolate landscapes

and abandoned buildings, wearing traditional suits, and always with their eyes closed. Perhaps this could be seen as a *J'accuse* towards a society blindly accepting the present status quo, refusing to critically and historically assess it...

KS: Or it could be seen as the people refusing to acknowledge the present, refusing to see *now*. In Beijing you can go to the parks on Sundays and hear people singing revolutionary songs. There is a concern amongst the older about the direction in which China is moving, and about the loss of basic social moral values. This then is their form of quiet protest: to recall a time when at least there was a hope--which was the image promulgated as the Maoist utopia.

LM: Quite. I suppose what I am asking is this: to what extent, and beyond the mockery and resignation of political pop and cynical realism, can we find a bald and daring political dimension to contemporary art from China?

KS: I don't think there is an awful lot at the present moment. In some ways this is a natural state of evolution the art world has to go through. One of the benefits of the situation in the 90s was that in the Chinese mind everything was clearly defined in black and white terms. Artists were considered outsiders, and everything else was inside: they were viewed as people trying to undermine the system So the works gained great poignancy and often from very simple touches: if you showed someone from the back, when everyone in China knew that the rules about art were to show the face, smiling, healthy, then to show the back of the head was a very political gesture. But of course all of those things no longer apply, they have slowly faded away to the point where such concerns no longer apply. It has been a difficult transition period for many artists. With the sense that everything could be made the subject of art that gained increasing currency in the 1990s, people began to look around frantically for help in deciding the most effec-

tive topics to appropriate. This resulted in a lot of trends. In the last few years one hugely popular topic has been the urban environment, with a large number of artists focusing on displaced migrant workers. These are often ideas being fed by outside critics, people who have commented on the system here, a particular curator who has been interested to develop an exhibition on a particular theme...

LM: Like Hou Hanru's and Hans-Ulrich Obrist's *Cities on the Move*...

KS: Yes. This inspired whole groups of artists to explore urban themes. People have also become interested in history. For the first time artists are really looking back at China's dynastic, imperial history, and a lot of pop artists now spend time to re-acquaint themselves with traditional culture looking at ink painting, jade carving: all those things that were denied to them in their education. I think many artists feel that in chosing art today they are seeking something more spiritual or enduring. Political consciousness in China primarily relates to Marxist ideas of art, and is not particularly relevant to where artists want to be today in 21st century China. I feel there is a separation today between political ideology and art.

LM: Philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto describes the expression "Bad Aesthetic Times" thus: "The heavy engines of the art world turn and turn without any of this massive energy, economic and *publicitaire*, translating into creative energy". Isn't the short history of the Chinese avant-garde exactly the opposite? An immense innovation and genuine appreciation in the midst of a country lacking, especially until recently, a sound infrastructure for, and public understanding of, contemporary art. What would you see as the driving factor for the immense artistic vitality of the past twenty years?

KS: I think the actual motivating force was really when Deng Xiaping

made his pronouncement about opening and reform; that there would be a proactive modernisation process. Of course, modernisation then meant economic, agricultural, etc., and the one item that was left off the list was culture. This is what the students really wanted to see added. Wei Jinsheng , who was in prison for many years for his activities at *Democracy Wall*, started the idea that modernisation cannot be compartmentalised, that you can't take cultural modernisation out of the equation if social advance is to be achieved. The problem there was that in the 80s the artists, having grown under the Cultural Revolution, assumed that they would contribute to their country by creating the best contemporary art the world had yet seen. We should not underestimate Mao's promises like "what the West has China also will have, what the West does not have China will also have". In the 80s the artists really felt they were going to contribute, and it was only in 1989 that there was suddenly this awakening that perhaps they were not being invited to contribute after all, that their contribution was being refused even. This came as a shock to many people. But through the 1980s, that impetus was enough to kick start a contemporary art movement basically out of the ether. And they wanted to keep it going: they had their practice and their pride, a need to express themselves, and that provided a renewed impetus. In 1993 Chinese artists went to Venice for the first time. We must also remember that China is still a very poor country, especially in the countryside, and the force of the impact when suddenly these artists started earning in US dollars, which propelled them to the higher strata of society...

→ Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China. Quotation from Chairman Mao, Xu Bing, *calligraphy*

LM: But this could have a detrimental effect on artistic creativity…

KS: Of course

LM: …this swarm of market-oriented Western collectors booking First Class flights to Beijing! It seems to me that quite a few artists are currently striving to achieve a personal "style", a tag or signature, which can then be repeated on endless canvases with little formal or conceptual variation. Talking the other day with Katherin Don she lamented visiting artists she had not seen in many years, only to find out their were producing exactly the same paintings.

KS: You know, it's really odd, coming from my background as a European, this is an issue. We are taught that artists develop, change, and move forwards. There are also artists, like Picasso, whose output was enormous, and although he had different phases, each phase resulted in a great number of similar works. This is what Chinese artists would point out if you mention the volume of similar works they produce. It is clear that many artists have one great idea, and that's it. A number of paintings are not nearly as powerful today as those produced ten years ago, when the artists first had the great idea. But whilst ideas may become diluted, and worn thin, what constantly amazes me is the efficacy of the motifs employed, and that demand for and interest in the work is growing at such an enormous rate. For many collectors, even institutions, volume doesn't seem a concern. The biggest problem with Chinese art right now is the absence of a strong or meaningful critical framework. There are no real good critics at work within the Chinese framework, primarily because it is so hard for them to retain a critical independence because they have almost no means of achieving financial independence. It is a very tricky situation.

LM: Do you refer to Chinese critics or critics generally speaking?

KS: Generally speaking, although it is definitely Chinese critics who have the greatest influence on Chinese artists, simply because of the linguistic barriers that exist between Chinese artists and non-Chinese speaking critics and curators. Groups formed where close ties of friendship are forged between artists and critics. And where artists are the ones publishing their own catalogues, it is them rather than a middleman like a publisher, or a dealer who commissions the critical commentary. Also because writing in China pays virtually nothing, there is a lack of a more general public debate on artistic practice; something the artists themselves would benefit from enormously.

LM: In discussing the work of Xu Bing, you report the following quote of his: "The problem with contemporary art is that it relies entirely upon cultural context and required knowledge of the artist's place within the art world, in time and in his/her career." What exactly are we to understand with cultural context? Is it something that applies to contemporary art in general or Chinese art specifically? What are the cardinal points of a correct understanding of the cultural context?

KS: I think the context of Xu Bing's reference is of an awareness that came to him when he moved from China to America: his perception of a fascination with him as someone who represented a—communist—China people were afraid of, but knew little about, except for a vague notion of ink painting. He had stumbled across a heap of cultural baggage that contradicted views of the type of art Xu Bing ought to be producing as a "Chinese" artist. Cultural context was thus especially visible for him. He works with calligraphy, and as I mentioned earlier one of the most interesting conundrums for a Chinese artist today is the language

barrier. We discussed earlier that a cultural framework feeds certain ways of thinking and of perceiving things, which accounts for why elements of Chinese art relate directly to the Chinese context, and therefore talks more directly to someone who understands the situation in China, for example the urban and rural divide, class tension, etc. There are lots of British artists whose work references particular culture-specific circumstances. You have seen artists like Sarah Lucas who has produced works that reference entirely British institutions like the Sun newspaper.

LM: Don't you think one may risk placing too strong an emphasis on the "Chinese" context behind an artwork? In your book you discuss the work of Li Shan, one of the key figures of Political Pop. Li Shan created scandal with his *Rouge* series, depicting an ambiguously effeminate Mao and working with explicitly homosexual imagery. If the paintings were to be the expression of a Western artist, no similar emotion and contestation would have been aroused. To what degree does the brilliance of Li Shan's work derive precisely from the particular post-Cultural Revolution context he found himself working within? And if the attention is placed primarily on the relation between art and socio-political context, doesn't this risk converting aesthetic judgement into a strange sort of cultural anthropology?

KS: But Li Shan is a very good example of that. Consider the early style of his painting that he still prefers today-- a naïve style a la Rousseau which partly due to the specific circumstances of the era here, he relinquished in favour of a popular political motif. I do not think he would have continued painting Mao as long as he did if there had not been an early Western interest in his work which encouraged him to the idea that this was something that was well received in the West. So the point of including him in my book is to show how an artist can be shaped by the circumstances of the times in which they live. My discussion of his

work in that context is less about the aesthetics, than about how a cultural framework can make or break an artist. And it shows how in China these situations have arisen: because he did some paintings of Mao, Li Shan suddenly became super famous, whereas if you look at his work as an ongoing process it is much more about a folk tradition, and an ideal of beauty that in the West post-modernism had already dispensed with. So what I am questioning there is the idea that China has this cultural context which has allowed artists to achieve success, who otherwise would not have been where they are now. This is equally applicable to the development of photography in China. There are so many photographic images that are entirely bland, but because there is a cultural fascination with China right now these works are included in exhibitions that would normally not have accepted them.

LM: Again the attention to the "Chinese" rather then the "art".

KS: It's a huge problem but it goes back to the fact that, again, there is not a great enough systematic discussion out there. And until we find ways to address the problem of the language barrier, it is hard to see how the discussion can move productively forward.

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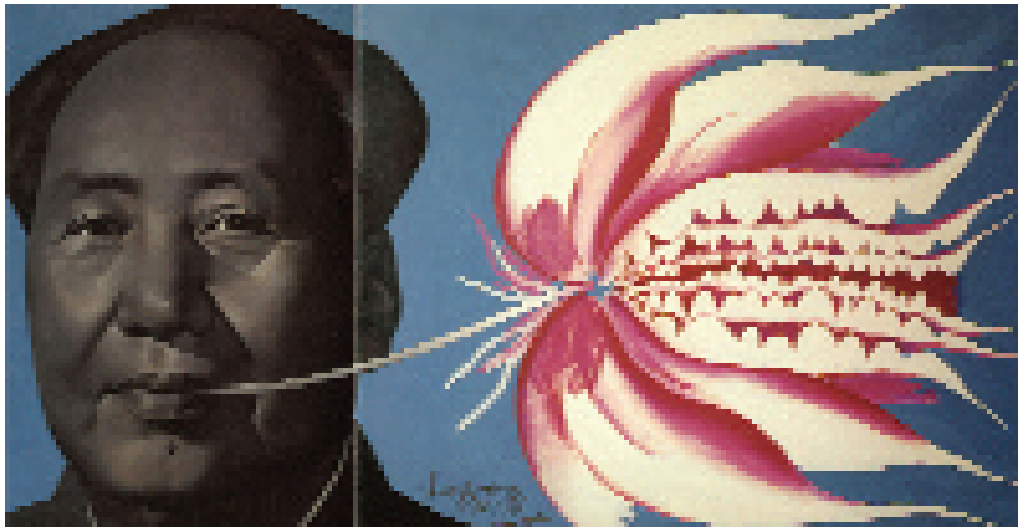

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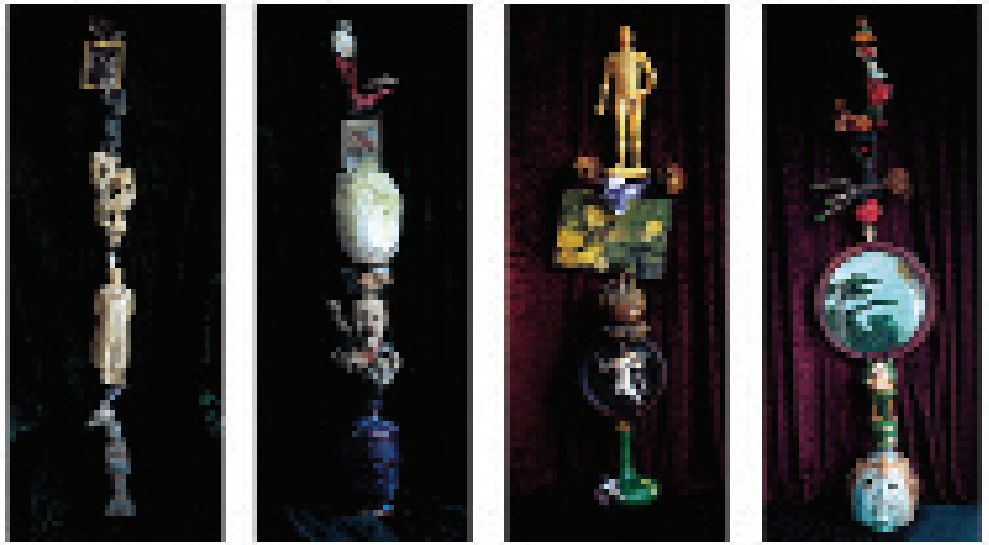

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Wandering Photographic Poet: Han Lei

>> an article by Wang Wei Wei

"The props, which I used to build this serial of pagodas and to reflex a mixture of my youth, my paradox and doubts, are in remembrance of my memory. They are bound to collapse...My childhood, my paradox, my education and the ideological romanticism of my deeply engraved boyhood all are hung on the pagodas."

Han Lei

IN 1967, JUST after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Han Lei was born in an ancient town in Kaifeng, Henan Province. The life of locals in this small, self-sufficient village was simple. The hardships of life came as naturally as sunrise and sunset. The dense feeling of history in this town, and the ordinary people inhabiting it, gave Han Lei a deep understanding of the basics of life and a sentimental attachment to Chinese traditions. After arriving in Beijing to study at the Central Academy of Craft Art at the age of 18, he laid hands on a camera for the first time and could not part with the magic it contained. With that, he started down the photographer's road of no return.

Over the past 25 years, China has undergone drastic changes in society, economy and culture. These changes are the nutrients of artistic innovation in Chinese art. Since the 90s, following the period of reform, a group of Chinese artists born in the 1960s have begun to reflect on the immense changes in

Chinese politics, economics, society and culture, the fruits of which is expressed in their artworks. These artists started as students of painting, but after being confronted with popular overseas creative trends, they began to employ still photography and video as media, inventing an expressive language that departed from mainstream painting, and simultaneously signaling the entry of Chinese art into a diverse age.

After graduation of university in 1989, the year of the market-oriented reform and the June 4th incident happened in China, Han Lei traveled to Guangdong province in southern China to search for work. As a student of design, after one year he had saved enough money to travel around the country by train. In the following two years, he wandered through nearly every small village in southern China with his camera. Under the instruction of his instinct, Han Lei got off the train without a clear itinerary. Han turned down offers to become art editor of different magazines. When his money ran out, he free-lanced as a part time graphic designer to maintain a basic level of sustenance.

Started in 1986, Han's "China" and "Portrait" series are still being added to today. Why portraits? Han explains that society is composed of individuals. Shooting one hundred people, a small society appears in front of the lens. Han believes that attitude is the most important thing to an artist. Art without attitude is simply garbage. If the intention to create is serious, then the artist should still have this persistence twenty years later.

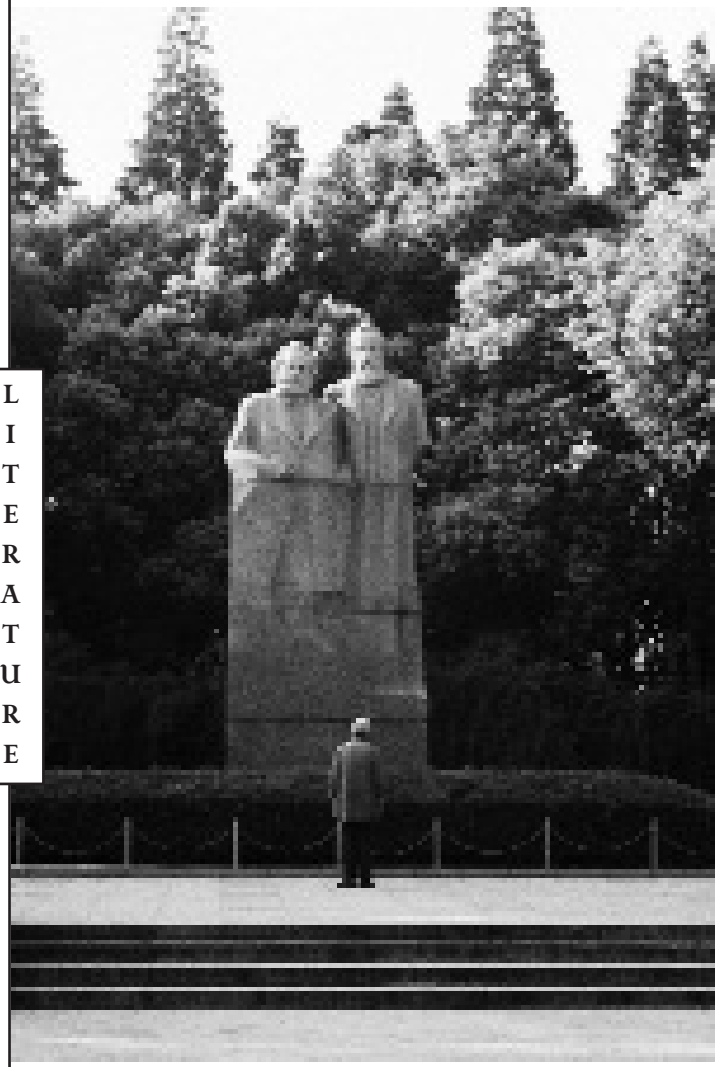
The Chinese contemporary photography market took ten years to mature, starting when employees of foreign embassies purchased individual works directly from artists. However, these scattered purchases failed to produce any systematic collecting. The contemporary art market only took shape after the

emergence of collectors specially interested in Chinese contemporary art, like Uli Sigg, and the founding of galleries dedicated to contemporary Chinese art.

Currently, large Chinese photography exhibitions include the Pingyao International Photography Exhibition, established in 2001, the Guangzhou Photography Biennale, founded in 2005, and the Lianzhou International Photography Exhibition. Some auctions in China are starting to be dedicated to photographic works, but overall, photography still occupies a marginalized position in Chinese contemporary art field. Contrasted with over one hundred years of photographic history in the West, Chinese contemporary photography is just learning to take its first steps.

However, the popularity of Chinese contemporary art has allowed money to obscure the focus of Chinese contemporary art. Many artists have begun to analyze the tastes of Western collectors and use this to create "easy-selling" artworks. In an age where Photoshop has become a fundamental tool of photographic creation, Han insists on avoiding digital cameras and computer retouching.

Han Lei remembers once in the past, there was a mentally-challenged man in the ancient town, always standing silently and alone on the street, never moving. After Han returned from his first year at university, he found the man standing in the same place. "I was surrounded by these characters while growing up. When I was young I could not recognize them. But after growing up, I faintly felt that we had met before." On their faces emerge an image of society. Traveling to so many different places, Han says they are all the same place in the end. In 1986, Han photographed a man and a dog facing each other in his hometown of Kaifeng. To him, this photo can explain everything related to human life.



→ Charlotte Gonzalez

Some Thoughts on Kafka and Chuang Tzu

>> an article by Tully Rector

FRANZ KAFKA WAS born in Prague in 1883 and died of tuberculosis on June 3, 1924, at a sanatorium near Vienna. A week later his body was returned to Prague and buried in the old Jewish cemetery. Let us look at the mind suspended among these facts. I open Kafka's *Diaries* at random: "How badly I even read. And with what malice and weakness I observe myself. Apparently I cannot force my way into the world, but lie quietly, receive, spread out within me what I have received, and step calmly forth." Follow it in reverse: Kafka enters the world calmly, but only after the world pierces him with a vision of his own (malevolent) introversions; literature, or the failure to measure up to it, occasions a counter-epiphany with literary shape: he writes it in a diary, and we trust its truth because he wrote so well. The purity of Kafka's style (lucid, geometrical) tracks the opacities of his world. We cannot force our way in.

This is, in part, an essay on force. Many writers are transfixed by it. Chuang Tzu, a Chinese philosopher from the 4th century BCE, shares with Kafka an endless concern with the operations of force. Chuang Tzu was a Taoist. Of his life know only that he came from the province of Henan, where he served as a minor court official, a bureaucrat who spent his days in debate and his nights alone, writing and thinking. An eerie music controls his stories. They are peopled by changelings, cripples, mad cooks, dialecticians, shadows, penumbras, mythic animals and melancholy kings, and like Kafka's tales they study the problem of our access to the world and our fitness for it, our intimacy with ourselves and others in

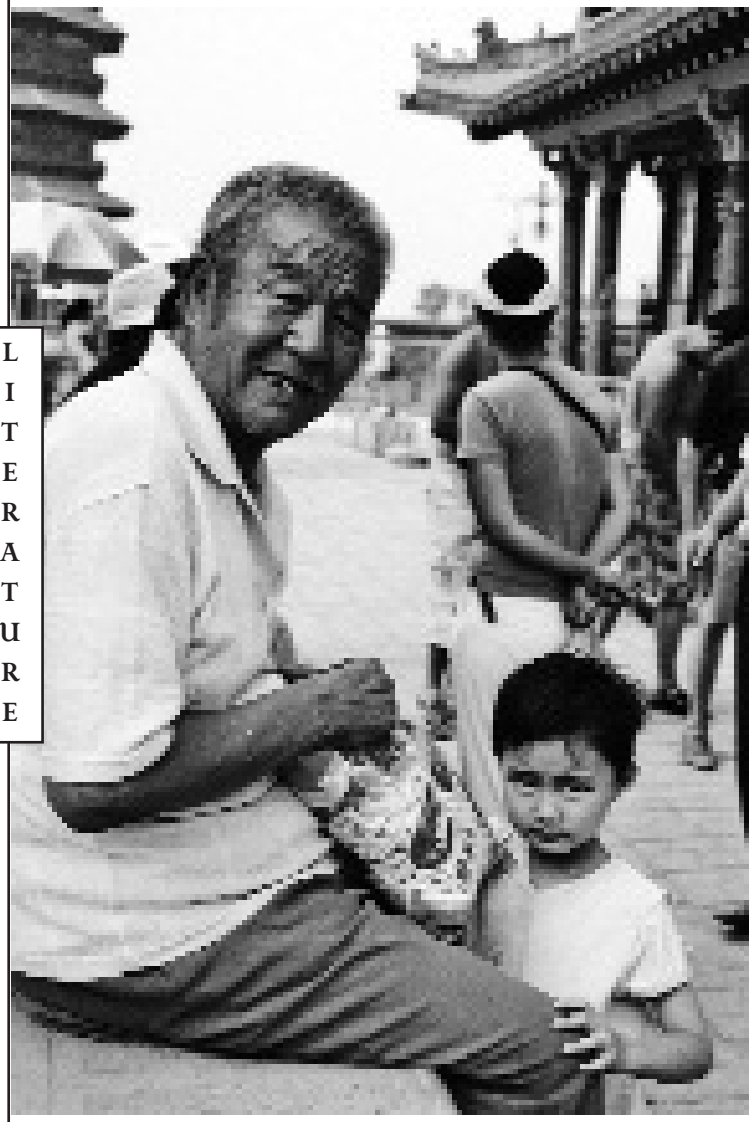
the teeth of its insatiable force.

Once, in a dream, an old skull appeared to Chuang Tzu and told him how the dead live. "We have no rulers above and no subjects below, so our springs and our autumns are endless. A king facing south on his throne could have no more happiness than this!" No rulers, no subjects: happiness is freedom from being the vehicle and victim of force. If only the dead enjoy this freedom completely, then you must die to the forceful self, to this world of power and influence and necessity, in order to transform your will. Chuang Tzu relates this logic in a manner familiar to readers of Thoreau and Emerson, themselves readers of his own sourcebook, the *Tao Te Ching*. Emerson called it "moral perfectionism": a restless war against your artificial habits and perceptions. Recall Thoreau on nextness and the ecstasy of thought. A living world is always beside your own and you must listen to its laws, hear them and let them instruct you, let them change the place where you are. This "hearing" is a form of thinking (disclosive, dreamlike, bright with sensation and bodily awareness). You are "beside yourself in a sane sense". To step outside yourself in meditation is to project your life into futurity, to participate in the overcoming of yourself. Kafka: "Our salvation is death, but not this one." Not *this* one: the good death is endless, like your springs and autumns.

The world exerts pressure. The self is a pressure-box of resistance. Both are stubborn. Although we want our perceptions to be "stained by the world, made to take the force of it in" (Jorie Graham), we cannot help but fear the asymmetrical rigors of that relationship. The world is stronger than we are. Kafka felt this fact so deeply that he found himself writing: "in the struggle between yourself and the world, take the part of the world." Others have despaired of our collective subjectivity to force. Simone Weil located it at the center of human history and defined it as "that x that turns anybody who is subject to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a

corpse out of him." If Kafka did not fear force in this sense, as a corpse-maker, it was only because he felt himself unborn. He arrived too early for life. In his stories, force is whatever keeps time away from its completion in human affairs. K. will never gain access to the Castle; the man from the country waits his whole life before a door made only for him; The Hunter Gracchus' ship will always be at sea. Force is a kind of stillness for Kafka, the impossibility of some particular change *mattering* to us. Newness is impossible in the world of Kafka's characters. If a change is to mean something to us then it must change us, it must alter who we are, and therefore we must participate in it as it comes into being—we make an event out of a change and are faithful to its meaning (we become, in Badiou's terms, "subjects to truth"). This is only possible in a space of freedom. Force is compulsion, the opposite of freedom.

"The poet is just like the fabled hunter who naps beside a tree, waiting for hares to break their skulls by running headlong into the tree trunk. After waiting for a long time, the poet discovers that he is the hare."— Gu Cheng, 1987. He sounds like Kafka or Chuang Tzu, funny and strange and achingly sad at the same time. But what does the poet make of his discovery? The artwork is itself an allegory of freedom. Chuang Tzu wrote that Artisan Ch'ui could only draw with true perfection because he had silenced his calculative mind. He "knew the comfort of forgetting what is comfortable". Kafka's characters are always hankering after comfort, peace, and rest, and are therefore fated to their special tortures, unable to live. In this way Kafka is the dark twin of Chuang Tzu. Each is an answer to the other. If Kafka recognized that life was impossible for a self, for a robust and forceful and well-defended ego, Chuang Tzu located his wisdom at the heart of that impossibility: die to that ego, decreate the self. "Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached."



→ Charlotte Gonzalez

Insight and Blindspot:

Walter Benjamin's Theory of the Storyteller and the Chinese Experience

>> an article by Hui Jiang
(New York University)

IN "THE STORYTELLER," Walter Benjamin constructs a paradigmatically non-bourgeois aesthetic discourse by way of the concepts of storytelling and the storyteller. For him, storytelling is a critical force that facilitates interaction and transformation between art and life, and questions the rift between the individual and the collective. It is only through storytelling that the real and the essential are communicable in the collective body, whereby men can maintain a sense of unity despite the phenomenal fragmentations in time and space. Benjamin places communication at the center of his aesthetic concern and at the origin of art in the people's life.

The immediate relevance of Benjamin's theory of storytelling to Chinese leftist literary thought is evident but still less than satisfactorily studied. For example, Mao's famous essay "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and art" that guided socialist literary creation and criticism for decades, can be read as a Chinese version of Benjamin's "The Storyteller," in which Mao also radically justified the artworks by the values of unity, communication and spontaneous creativity, and devalued the cognitive and reflective functions of a literary creation. Mao's literary thought represented an important dimension of modern Chinese aesthetics: a rejection of the theory of representation.

What came to represent the ideal type of the modern narrative arts was storytelling. While not its initial promoter, Mao claimed with political forceful-

ness in 1942 that storytelling was the resource for the creation of "the national forms." After 1949, he also consistently advocated institutionalizing the activities of storytelling in the countryside since Mao appreciated, though implicitly, storytelling as the carrier of the essence of the people's literature. He took storytelling as an ideal literary guerrilla force, to maneuver toward any threat whatsoever he purported to negate: the pretentious literary professionalism, the authorial authority, the hegemony of the written text, or anything that might result in the separation of literature from the people, of truth from unity, of reason from spontaneous impulse. Students of modern Chinese literature may be easily misled to the idea that Mao should have sponsored socialist realism, an orthodox principle introduced from the Soviet's literary circle, but Mao's central storytelling-oriented literary ideas expressed in his "Talks" and the latter theory of the Cultural Revolution do not so attest. That is to say, for him, the act of literature was in nature not a representation of a given socialist truth but rather an uncurbable rebellious force, one that unified the people to subvert the given social order and establishment.

In fact, any effort to grasp the logic of the Chinese revolutionary literature (1927-1976) cannot afford to overlook the aesthetic thrust of the Chinese writings of storytelling. Some literary critics assert that storytelling is nothing more than a means of the Chinese Communist Part's (henceforth, CCP) propaganda. For example, in "Reeducating a Blind Storyteller," Chang-tai Huang offers an informative account of how the Chinese Communist Storytelling Campaign reeducated a blind, gifted storyteller, Han Qixiang, in the revolutionary fundaments to make better use of his arts to serve the revolutionary course. For Hung, Chinese Communists viewed folk culture simply through a political lens. He argues that Chinese Communists "turned folk songs into anti-landlord and anti-Guomingdang ditties." This kind of criticism, though justifiable in a certain sense, would fail to recognize the aesthetic thrust of the storytelling from a comprehensive view of the driving force of Chinese literary modernity.

Generally speaking, at the center of the project of each literary revolution in modern China lay the same fundamental goal of democratizing literature. The group of Chinese enlightenment intellectuals paved this path by privileging the traditional low-end popular form *xiaoshuo* (novel) as a graceful literary form that modern intellectuals had to master in order to reflect the life of the masses. In ancient China, writing fiction could not bring renown and fame to an author, for it was conventionally regarded as a means of entertaining the masses, having nothing to do with the aesthetics of the sublime and of beauty. Therefore, the rediscovery of this literary form could not be appreciated until the Chinese intellectuals were enlightened by the western idea of democracy to understand the nature of art and literature. While their aim of imposing the Western forms of the novel to reform *xiaoshuo* achieved great success, it also soon suffocated the spirit of democracy they once strived for. The literary language applied in fiction was often too westernized to be understood by the masses. Moreover, the nature of newly invented narrative skills was also overly analytical and reflective, and thus void of intellectualism. Take the example of Lu Xun, the father of modern Chinese literature. When he revolutionized a series of narrative forms in light of his reading of hundreds of Western novels, he consequently betrayed in his newly styled writings the soul of unity intrinsic to Chinese storytelling, for a Nietzschean self-reflective and schizophrenic subjectivity was placed in the center of his stories. Georg Lukacs' "the transcendental homelessness" was also the condition of existence that Chinese writers like Lu Xun tried to articulate in their writings.

After 1930, the Chinese Marxist critics began to attack the idea of the liberal art embraced by the enlightenment writers. They stated that literature should be an arena where the people expressed their own ideas, feelings and views of the world. But they were divided at the point of what the definition of proletarian literature should be. The Marxist elite insisted on understanding the people's psychology and mentality in terms of the proletarian consciousness, an abstract

essence of the people that lived up to Marxist dogmas. They were called on to promote the proletarian literature earlier and the socialist realism later. Other Chinese Marxists granted the highest value of literature to its communicability and saw the essence and promise of democracy to be realized in leveling the intellectual standard of literature, such that it would be understandable to the masses. They organized special agencies to promote the movement of storytelling and urged the urban writers to digest vivid forms of folk culture to de-westernize their language and narratology. These two directions continued in parallel, not without fusion and collision on some points, during the long run of Mao's socialism. In hindsight, the formations of modern Chinese literature were largely marked by the tension between intellectualist and populist visions of literary democracy.

In the opening phrase of "The Storyteller," Benjamin wrote: "Familiar through his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force." Yet, this prophecy does not ring true for Chinese reality. The CCP used its political power to create a condition for restoration and prevalence of the storytelling in the remaking of the national literature and profited from it. But more importantly, under the protection of the political power, modern Chinese storytellers made their contributions to enriching the idea of the people's literature with some distinctive features. Zhao Shuli was the greatest among them.

In the 1940s, Zhao was an officially announced model of revolutionary writers. His masterpieces, "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," "Little Blackie Gets Married," and "Changes in Li Village," were acclaimed to found a new national form in the tradition of storytelling. His fame even reached post-war Japan, and the famous Japanese philosopher Takeuchi Yoshimi regarded his works as a promising model for forming an identity of Asian Literature, which would shatter the shackles of Western literary modernity. Indeed, Zhao arguably bears every trait that

Benjamin relegated to Leskov: he was a gifted storyteller, familiar with the peasants' vernacular, humor, folk cultures and customs, and good at narrating their ways of life in oral form in a way that makes his writings popular among the peasant audience. He also shares Leskov's idea of literature: "writing is to me no liberal art, but a craft." There are many episodes told by Zhao's biographers about how he put aside his writing plans and busied himself with various village affairs instead. In Benjamin's term, Zhao was a "counsel" for his readers: "Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom."

His "The Rhymes of Li Youcai" is more than a story about the class struggle in the scene of a mountain village. It is in essence an inquiry into how an affair of the revolution could be told not as a represented fact or truth but as a lived experience that can be compacted into a form of wisdom transmittable through the people's mouth. Unlike the majority of the revolutionary writers, Zhao was conscious of the incompatibility between the revolution as a material force and as a symbolic act. For this reason, this widely read text starts by defining what the nature of artwork is before it narrates a revolutionary event according to it. For Zhao Shuli, the essence of an artwork consists in the organic relationship between the author and the audience. Li Youcai, the character of the main storyteller in the story, assumes such a friendship with his listeners: "Li Youcai was the most popular man in the ash-tree grove. Every night after supper, any gathering without him was thought dull. He had a way of making people laugh." The simple sentences have sufficiently distinguished the storyteller from the roles of the author in both Enlightenment literature and the literature of socialist realism: he is a man of brotherhood, the source of fun and enjoyment, the color of the people's everyday life. Yet since he is also a man with great talent in composing oral art, his identity is thus two-fold: the peasant intellectual. As the story develops, Li Youcai composes "satirical rhymes about village events and village characters, which were catchy and easy to recite." All these intense artistic labors do not however allow him to

earn a living; even worse, he cannot claim originality for his artistry. Close to the thought of Heidegger on the question of the origin of art, Zhao Shuli intended to downplay the role of an artist in creating an artwork; instead, he established Youcai's identity as storyteller in the speaker-listener dialogic relationship with his villagers.

Most interestingly, Zhao invented a character, the cousin of Little Fortune, who is a guest of one of the gatherings in Youcai's house, where the villagers recite Youcai's rhymes one by one to him. This is the beginning plot of the story. What is remarkable about the cousin character is his response to what he hears: he shows great interest, listening carefully and collapsing with laughter all along; yet he never comments on or shows any hint of anger toward the vicious performances of the rich villagers mimicked in the rhymes. Even more strikingly, this character will forever disappear when the first plot is over so that readers cannot help asking why Zhao designed such a faceless and role-free listener. The answer lies in his reader-centered literary thought: the essences of art and artist can only reveal themselves on the condition of the presence of the readers. The presence of Little Fountain's cousin opens a field that turns Youcai's songs into the people's intellectual property. In such a way, the fundamental form of the Chinese enlightenment novel, (1917-1927) characterized by its indifference to the readership and the authorial monologue, was imaginarily solved. Now a writer can go nowhere but to the people to find the meanings of his art. Meanwhile, the making-present of the audience also distinguishes Zhao's storytelling from socialist realism where the ubiquitous and omnipotent figure is the history in a teleological process.

Following Zhao Shuli the idea of democracy, one of the highest values pursued by the Chinese people, had been transformed into literary thought as the theme of the unconditional making-present of the audience. As China has entered into the age of Deng's opening and reform and especially into the epoch of globalization, the marketization of culture to all corners has almost destroyed the

socialist tradition of storytelling and socialist idea of democracy. Meanwhile, I even wonder if modern Western cultures have ever had a figure equivalent to Zhao Shuli.

Nikolai Leskov, the model based upon which Benjamin developed his theory of storytelling, is of a completely different sort. It seems on the surface that Benjamin's theory can equally apply to Leskov and Zhao Shuli. However as far as the readership is concerned, their incompatibility is obvious. Leskov lived mainly in the cultural environment of Petersburg, the most westernized cosmopolis in Russia; his main readers came from the newly rising middle class (the populace of illiterate Russian serfs was not his implied readership). In this background, his storytelling can hardly be distinguished from what we call popular culture while curiously his readers are not from the urban masses. There are many Chinese writers of popular literature that can be categorized into Leskov's model but none of them could be endowed with the title of the storyteller by the criteria of Benjamin's idea of storytelling, namely "wisdom," "counsel," "orality," and "experience." Like Leskov, they were professional writers writing for the urban readers and profiting from the capitalist cultural market.

In fact, since Benjamin's approach is author-centered, which can be demonstrated by his entitling the essay with "The Storyteller" rather than "The Storytelling," his analytical framework cannot fully explain the unique reader-centered format of Chinese storytelling. Why is this author-centered perspective so important to Benjamin? Benjamin probably believed that in modern capitalism, the people as social essence had lost their revolutionary potential insofar as they had already been transformed into the category of the masses, whereas the most gifted storyteller could survive. His list of modern storytellers includes Proust, Baudelaire, Kafka, Poe, etc.—a group of people who stood aloof from the masses' feelings and way of life even more than Leskov did, not to mention Chinese storytellers. In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," he writes: "Proust's eight-volume work conveys an idea of the efforts it took to restore the figure of the storyteller to the

present generation." But if the modern world was regarded by Benjamin as the reservoir of information, what kind of experience can the storyteller possibly convey? To this question Benjamin answered: a storyteller can no longer articulate the experiences of the people except for how traumatically he has been alienated from them. A storyteller, as he said using the example of Poe, only "deals with 'people', pure and simple."

If the storyteller can no longer believe in the revolutionary potential of the people, the only way to redeem human suffering is to wait for the messianic moment. Such a notion of the messianic redemption or any trace thereof was not relevant to Zhao Shuli and his contemporaries as they had strong confidence in the people's will to change of the world. We may wonder if Benjamin had happened to know Zhao Shuli, how might "The Storyteller" have meant something different, for both Benjamin and us.

ILLUSTRATION BY EUNKYUNG KANG

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Hegemony and Counter-hegemony:
A Conversation with Noam Chomsky

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Tully Rector: You've said that in our society, real power does not lie in the political system but in the economy. That's where the decisions are made about what goods are produced, what services can employ people, what is consumed, where investment takes place, and ultimately who has jobs and who controls the resources. And in order to participate in the *electoral* system, you have to conform to kind of subjectivity it demands; you have share the guiding and structuring assumption that the political parties and the other political organizations that we have are what Marx called "authorized representatives of Capital": they exist, basically, to execute decisions made by corporate interests. Is that a fair representation of what's going on in America?

Chomsky: Well, part of it is just truism. It's just truism that in our societies with their institutional structures, decisions about production, distribution, and so on are made within the corporate system. That's not debatable. The same is true of the information systems insofar as they're part of corporate structures. That doesn't mean that they don't respond to other pressures, like public opinion—because they have to. But that's also true of a totalitarian state. Beyond that, there is a political system. So far, this description is what's true *in principle*. This is the way the institutions are constructed. So, you and I don't participate in deciding what car General Motors is going to produce next year, except indirectly as consumers in the market. But in the political system, at least in principle, it's supposed be under popular control.

However, that is only true to a limited extent in practice because of the enormous effect of concentrated power and wealth and privilege. John Dewey didn't exaggerate very much when described politics as "the shadow cast by business over society". He went on to point out that society isn't going to be removed from the shadows until "industrial feudalism", the existing system, is replaced by "industrial democracy", in which the decisions about production, what happens in the workplace, distribution, communication, and so on are also in public hands. That's pretty close to truism. Beyond that, it's a matter of looking at particular societies and particular stages of society and seeing how they function.

It's not widely recognized, but if you want to look for functioning democracies you'd do much better looking in the Third World than in the First World. Take the western hemisphere: the richest, most powerful country is the United States; in South America, the poorest country is Bolivia. They both just had elections recently. Let's compare the elections. In Bolivia, the election had very clear and definite issues, important issues, and the population knew what they were. The population was organized in many different ways, and it wasn't organized just for the election. The political organizations were functioning all the time. So the same popular organizations that managed to elect their own candidate at the national level were also able to *block* privatization of the water system which, by World Bank directives, would have sold water "at cost", meaning most people would not have gotten any water. They're too poor. So these are functioning organizations operating all the time with widespread participation at the time of the election. They elected a candidate from their own ranks. That's a functioning democracy.

Now take a look at the richest country in the hemisphere. We had an election in November 2004. There was no genuine participation. There are no authentic popular political parties. The parties we have are candidate-producing organizations. The choice in the election was between two men, each born into wealth and privilege, who went to the same elite university, Yale, where they were trained to be members of the ruling class, and they were able to enter into the political race because they were supported by huge concentrations of wealth and power—the same

controlling interests, basically, with only slight differences in distribution. They had similar programs. The real issues were kept out of the electoral arena. Most people had no idea where the candidates stood with respect to the important issues, the extent of which is dramatic. This is a very well-studied society so we know a lot about public opinion. Just to take one example, consider the Kyoto Protocol. The public is very strongly in favour of it. A majority of Bush voters thought *he* was in favour of it. Now that failure to be acquainted with the positions of the candidates and the parties is very widespread, and it's not because people are stupid or uninterested. It's because the elections are designed that way. The elections are run by the public-relations industry, and their task is to package the candidates and sell them very much the way they sell other commodities. So when you turn on the TV set and see an advertisement for a lifestyle drug or a car or something, you don't expect to *learn* anything from it. Markets that are based on consumer choice, you know, based on *rational* consumers making informed and rational choices, those are inventions of the economics profession. Business would never tolerate anything like that. They try to establish markets in which *un*informed consumers make *ir*rational choices. Again, that's a truism. That's what advertisements are for. They're meant to delude and deceive with imagery, not to present information, and the political campaigns work the same way.

TR: How is it exactly that information is only accessible to educated elites?

Chomsky: Because you have to do a research project on it. To learn most of these things you don't pick it up off television news or the front page of the newspaper. You have to have the resources, the training, the background and so on to pick your way through the mass-communication and find out what's happening. But I mean it's there, it's a free society. You can find out all sorts of things. Take something like the lottery. The lottery is just sheer robbery. No educated person, unless they're out of their minds, is going to by a lottery ticket. And there have been studies of where lottery tickets are sold, and it's exactly where you'd expect.

They're sold in poor communities to people without education. That's how the rich rob the poor. It's massively advertised, there's a lot of publicity given to this poor person who suddenly became a millionaire and so on. There are these forms of carefully constructed mass-delusion; in this case it's largely state-propaganda. It's basically a tax burden they shift onto the poor.

TR: Okay so in this particular case, the lottery, the ruling interests force this picture of how the social world works into the minds of the poor? That the only kind of release from their condition imaginable is something like the lottery, you know, a miracle. That they have no *reasonable* hope—

Chomsky: "I can't participate and get a rational tax system, so therefore I'll hope for a gift from God." It's outright propaganda. And public attitudes are carefully studied in the US, you can find out a lot about them. So take the budget. For the last budget we have the polling results, for February 2005. They're very striking. They show that what the public wanted was sort of a mirror-image of the budget. Where spending was going way up, the population by a large majority wanted it go down. Where the spending was going down, the population wanted it to go up. So military spending, supplementals for Iraq and Afghanistan: the public wants it way down. Social spending, health, education, renewable energy, veterans' benefits, funding for UN peace-keeping operations, things like that: the public wants it to go way up, by large margins and big increases.

TR: So despite all the propaganda machinery in place to package this idea that the defence budget should grow steroidically every year...

Chomsky: Attitudes remain the same. People just don't know what's happening, or they feel they can't do anything about it. So you measure people's helplessness—can I do anything about it? That keeps going up. Take the tax cuts. The public, by very large majorities, wants to rescind the tax cuts for people with

incomes over $200,000. Well that's almost all of them. But when tax cuts are described in the press, they're called "sacrosanct". You can't touch them. Incidentally, these polling results were not published. I had a friend do a database search and he couldn't find a single newspaper in the country that reported public attitudes on what the budget should have been. Now in a functioning democratic society that should be headline news. You want to know what your neighbour thinks. This is very consistent. Studies like this are either barely reported or not reported, which means that people are left with the belief that "I'm a weird duck, I have these funny opinions that nobody else does. All I hear is the opposite of what I think." One of the most striking examples is health care. For most people in the country that's a very serious problem. The health care system is extremely inefficient. It's the worst among the industrial countries in terms of per capita cost, something like twice as high as comparable societies, and health outcomes are way down at the bottom. The reason is not a great secret: it's because the health care system is privatized. For a long time a considerable majority of the population has been in favour of some form of national health care. But that is not on the political agenda.

TR: How could we get it on the political agenda? We say "apply pressure", but what form should that pressure take?

Chomsky: By having a functioning democratic society.

TR: But, okay, by definition a functioning democratic society is one that recognizes the very kinds of public belief that we see going unrecognized, so I'm sort of wondering what form of pressure that popular will can take to alter our institutions?

Chomsky: Exactly the way it was done in the past. The limited benefit system that exists came about through public participation and pressure.

TR: So does that mean, say, joining a party and running a candidate who's in favour of—

Chomsky: No, it means having an organized population that participates actively in elections and in between elections, participates in the democratic process constantly. That means having what are sometimes called "secondary associations"—unions, political groupings, professional groupings, etcetera—working constantly to formulate policies and to produce their own representatives who will vote for them. That's what a democratic society is, and we have bits and pieces of it. In the past we've had more. That's why we have the benefits that we do have. But right now, it happens to be one of those periods of extreme regression. The population is very atomized, excluded from the political system by elections which are mostly extravaganzas run for show, where you sell commodities called candidates. People don't know the issues, don't participate, they're separated from one another, the information is not available to the, the mass organizations have mostly been dissolved. About the only ones that still exist are church organizations, and that's why they have inordinate influence. They at least exist. But this can all be changed.

TR: How can it be changed by people without vast resources of wealth?

Chomsky: The same way it was done in the past. The activism of the 1960s, for example, led to huge changes in the society. It led to civil rights legislation, it established high standards of protection for freedom of speech for the first time. Freedom of speech is not guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. The major Supreme Court cases that really determined what the laws are didn't deal with freedom of speech very much until the 20th century, when it slowly came into the court system, usually through dissents—and they're pretty reactionary dissents when you look at them; the Holmes dissent is not much to cheer about—but it gradually entered into the system. Finally, in 1964, in the course of the Civil Rights Movement,

another court set a very high standard for the protection of freedom of speech. They rejected finally the "laws of seditious libel", the 1798 laws were declared unconstitutional in 1964. We set a standard of freedom of speech that is probably unique in the world. It improved through the 60s until finally another decision in 1969, Brandenburg v Ohio, and that did set a higher standard. But that was in the context of large-scale political activism. The '64 case was one involving Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. The same with women's rights.

TR: Yeah, this was largely extra-party activism, activism that consolidated itself through other forms of social interaction.

Chomsky: It was substantial activism that influenced what the parties were doing. So you got Johnson's Great Society measures under the influence of plenty of popular turmoil. The early post-WW II welfare state innovations through most of the industrial world were the results of the radicalization of most of the population through the Great Depression and the anti-fascist war. Look back at popular attitudes in the late 40s, when they demanded social democratic measures, even more worker-control of industry. There were enormous popular pressures, they couldn't be disregarded, and the Bretton Woods system—the economic system that was established after the WW II—took this into account. It was designed by Keynes from England and Harry Dexter White from the United States. They crucially introduced into the system capital controls and regulated currencies.

TR: Which Nixon later reversed.

Chomsky: Well, they lasted until the early 70s. And it was done for a purpose. They understood very well, and articulated the understanding, that if governments are going to have any space for responding to public pressures they will have to be able to control capital flight, attacks on currency, and so on. Otherwise, if you eliminate these control mechanisms, you get what economists

sometimes call a "virtual parliament" of investors and lenders that carry out a moment-by-moment referendum on policy, and if they regard it as irrational to help people and not profits, as they regularly do, they simply undermine the economy by capital flight and attacks on currency and so on. So financial regulation was understood to be a measure that grants space for governments to respond to popular pressures and demands. The financial liberalization of 70s, a core neoliberal measure, was one of the array of mechanisms that were designed to undercut the democratic pressures that were developing and arising in the 1960s and very much frightened elite opinion. You can see it in the literature. Read a book like "The Crisis of Democracy", the first study of the Trilateral Commission, which is liberal internationalist. This is not the right wing. These are the people who pretty much staffed the Carter administration. They were very upset by the rise of democracy in the 60s. They said normally passive and apathetic parts of the population are entering the political arena to press their interests and concerns, and that's creating an overload on the state and we need more "moderation" in democracy, so we have to beat back these pressures and marginalize people. They called literally for—these are their words—they said that the institutions responsible for "the indoctrination of the young" are not doing their job.

TR: The universities?

Chomsky: The universities, the schools, the churches and so on are not indoctrinating properly, and if they continue to lack this capacity the state's going to have to move in to ensure better indoctrination. They even threatened measures to control the press if the press is too adversarial, which is a joke. The press is so subordinate to power you have to laugh at them. But too much was happening, women and young people and the elderly, farmers, workers, people who were called "the special interests", which basically means the whole society, they were just getting too much involved in the political system. They felt they had to respond. And that's what's been going on. We've had a period from the mid-70s,

increasing in the 80s, of trying to beat back this democratizing wave. And there were all sorts of measures taken.

TR: Including political assassination in the case of the Black Panthers.

Chomsky: In the case of the Black Panthers it went as a far as political assassination. Fred Hampton, a black organizer, was murdered in his bed. And it's quite striking, because it's not considered a problem in the United States. So the information about COINTELPRO[1]...

TR: You've written about how we were distracted from COINTELPRO by the spectacle of Watergate. Watergate, which is considered the paradigm case of journalistic integrity and independence, has been described by you and others as more a result of inter-elite competition.

Chomsky: Watergate was mostly a matter of minor offenses given to powerful people. So if you break into the Democratic Party headquarters, you're annoying half of the wealth and privilege in the country. If you have an "enemies list"—actually, I was on it, but that's not why anyone was upset about it—if you have an enemies list that includes a McGeorge Bundy, or the CEO of IBM, then the Republic is crumbling. But if you murder a black organizer, well who cares? And COINTELPRO was much more serious than Watergate. It went through four administrations, it used the national political police, it went as far as assassination but it involved plenty of other things as well. The destruction of small political parties, actions that led to suicide, you know, the destruction of people's lives. It was real state harassment of the general population. It was revealed at about the same time as Watergate, but Watergate was annoying powerful people while this was just disrupting, attacking, and in one case killing "unimportant" people. And the Press'

1. COINTELPRO: short for "Counterintelligence Program"; a large scale FBI operation to undermine political freedom in the United States, which lasted from 1959 into the 1970s. Its operations included political assassination, attacks on the American Indian Movement, attacks on the women's movement, organizing race riots, intensive efforts to disrupt and discredit (through burglaries and threats) the entirely legal Socialist Workers Party and so on. COINTELPRO was publicly exposed in the courts at about the same time as the Watergate exposures.

reaction and the general elite reactions were instructive: what you do to the general population just doesn't matter. And if the national political police is doing it, who cares? On the other hand, if someone bothers the rich and powerful, they're going to defend themselves.

TR: Is it maybe possible that because there is no comparable resistance, no well-organized popular resistance to corporate control over government, that we don't see these sorts of extreme measures today? I mean, we don't really have anything like what went on in the 60s. The level of apathy and hopelessness and lack of organization is much greater.

Chomsky: I don't really agree with that. I think there's more activism now than there was in the 60s, it's just less visible.

TR: Well, the big 2003 anti-war rally in London drew 2 million people, apparently the largest in British political history, but they still invaded Iraq. There were big rallies in the US as well. What was the effect of those demonstrations?

Chomsky: They constrained the use of power. For example, the US did not resort to a lot of the mechanisms it used in Vietnam. The same was true in the 80s, when the US was carrying out a major terrorist war in Central America that killed hundreds of thousands of people and practically destroyed four countries. But they could not do what they wanted to do. The Reagan administration, when it came in, tried almost point by point to duplicate the model used by the Kennedy administration against Vietnam in the early 60s. But there was so much popular reaction that they had to back off. They could not go on and do what Kennedy and Johnson did; they had to resort to what's called "clandestine terror". It's "clandestine" in that everyone knows about it except the general population. The media know about but they just don't report it. It was bad enough, but it would've been a lot worse. B-52s and hundreds of thousands of troops are a lot worse than the

large-scale terrorism that killed thousands of people. And they knew that they couldn't get away with what they'd done in the past. It's the same situation now. There something called "the Vietnam syndrome", which in the ideological system means "people don't like to take casualties." That's not what it means. Take a look at the polls. People don't like casualties of course, but in a war that they think is just and required they don't object to casualties, just like they didn't object during the Second World War. But for a war of aggression and conquest they won't accept casualties. The real objection is to the nature of the war. And the indoctrination system doesn't want to concede that. It can't publicize what people actually say. The polls since the late 60s show that a large majority of the population, something like 2/3 or 70 %, describe the Vietnam War as—in the words of the polls—"fundamentally wrong and immoral, not a mistake". You can't find that expression in elite discussion, which ranges between two bounds: "it was a benign effort to do good which turned out to be a mistake", that's the Left as it's called, or else "it was a noble cause and if we hadn't been stabbed in the back we could've won". That's the debate. And it's the same in scholarship.

TR: That's the "frame" of the question.

Chomsky: That's the frame. But public opinion is somewhere else. Public opinion is: It was not a "mistake," it was "fundamentally wrong and immoral". And that's 2/3 or 70%: pretty remarkable numbers when you see that those are the answers given in isolation. They're like the answers to the questions about national health care. People who are saying that must be thinking "I'm the only person who believes it", because they never hear it anywhere. If these issues were open and discussed in the public, the numbers would surely be far higher. But even as they are it's dramatic enough, and it shows. It forces certain constraints on policy. The US government right now is dedicated to trying to impose a client-state in Iraq. Anything else would be a disaster for their policy. But the measures that might be required to do that they cannot carry out. They cannot send half a million

troops to wipe out a province.

TR: Because we'd know about it. The channels of public communication are open *enough*.

Chomsky: They're open enough so you'd know it, even with all the distortion and deceit and suppression and so on. And the population just won't accept what they would easily accept during the early 60s. Those are changes. They're just like women's rights, environmental concerns, and so on. There are changes, and the systems of power have to adapt to them. They do it in various ways. We happen to be in a period where there's been a striking effort over the years to marginalize and isolate and atomize the public, so that we don't get organized and we don't participate in an effective way. These measures range across the board. I don't know whether it's just a coincidence or not, but the financial liberalization measures, which do undermine democracy—there isn't much question of that—these measures were instituted at the same time as a whole series of other measures, like very sharp increases of lobbying in Washington to make sure that the legislators conformed even more than normally to concentrated power. Even things like, say, imposing debts on students. That's a disciplinary device. On the side there are great reasons to let students go to college; it's in fact good for the society if they do. But if you ensure that they have debts imposed on them, they'll be very disciplined. They're not going to feel free to do the kinds of things that students were doing in the 60s. So that was instituted. There's a whole array of other systems of straight indoctrination, trying to revise and beat back the waves of dissidence and protest. It's successful at least in atomizing and isolating people. This is connected with straight social policies. Let's take the last 25 years in the United States. We're supposed be in awe of Allen Greenspan and the wonderful economy he presided over. Well yeah, for people in my income bracket it's a bonanza. For the majority of the population it's probably the worst period in American history. We've had 25 years in which real wages and incomes for the

majority have stagnated or declined. Back in the 70s, the US had probably the lowest working hours and the highest wages in the industrial world. Now it's pretty much reversed. People are deeply in debt, they're working very hard, their benefits—which were always low—are being reduced. That's discipline. That's a disciplinary device.

TR: And part of what cultivates that is the control the advertising culture has over the public imagination. The way people are taught to see themselves. If you can teach people to think about themselves mainly as consumers, to self-identify as consumers, then you can drive them easily into debt.

Chomsky: And then you've got them trapped. But that was understood back in the 1920s. It was just nowhere near as organized and massive as it is today. Take a look at the business literature in 1920s, when the PR industry really began to take off in the United States. It was pointed out that, you know, we—the powerful—have to carry out what Veblen called "fabrication of consumers", where if we can direct people to what were called "the superficial things of life", fashionable consumption, then they'll be out of our hair politically and socially. Especially if we can get them into debt. These are processes that have repeatedly happened in history. Take the slave rebellion that happened in Jamaica in I think around 1830. Look at the records of the British Parliament. They were deeply concerned: how are we going to keep the plantation system if the slaves are free? There's plenty of land, they can just farm their own land. And they quickly hit on the right method: trap them into consumption. Trap them into wanting consumer goods with whatever propaganda devices they had at the time, get them into debt, and pretty soon they'll be back on the plantation in a "free" form. The United Fruit Company did exactly the same thing a century ago on the coast of Central America, where the freed slaves were going to look for land. They tried to sell them Stetson hats and silk stockings, get them in debt to the company store. These are just ideas that come naturally.

TR: I have one question about this. You've talked about the role of universities as social indoctrinators, but in the way that a so-called "humanistic" education is set up in universities here and in Europe, a student is taught some pretty effective tactics of resistance to these forms of self-identification. There's no way you can read deeply in the history of Western philosophy, you know, take those writers seriously and still take seriously the suggestion that who you are is a function of your choices as a consumer. Do you agree with that?

Chomsky: Well, the history of Western philosophy is mostly before the development of the consumer society. The consumer society really explodes in the 20th century and especially in the massive propagandas of the last few decades. So this is a phenomenon that has not reflected itself in the history of philosophy.

TR: But we're reading and taking in, as students, the anti-materialistic values of the tradition.

Chomsky: What are the values?

TR: Well, you see it in Plato, you see it in Augustine, Kant, Kierkegaard, pretty much everybody, that your idea of yourself and what you care about, what you ought to care about, should not be determined by your "interests" as someone apart from others and in competition with them, in need of power over them. The pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of material accumulation, the pursuit of that kind of power is considered morally empty and pretty hopeless, right?

Chomsky: But these were philosophies directed to the privileged elite. There was a philosophy directed to the poor. It's called the Gospels. The Gospels contain a revolutionary, pacifist philosophy directed to the poor. Christ was crucified because he was working for the poor. That was changed when Constantine took over Christianity and turned it into a religion of the rich and

powerful. That's when you get the symbolism and the ceremonies and the holidays. It's why people don't actually read the Gospels; they just look at the birth and the death and forget everything in between. And in fact attempts to revive the religion of the poor have been crushed.

TR: Liberation Theology.

Chomsky: Liberation Theology was destroyed. A lot of the 1980s wars, the terrorist wars in Central and South America, were an attack on the church. Actually the School of the Americas, which trains Latin American officers in counter-insurgency tactics and so on, one of its slogans or talking-points is that the US Army helped defeat Liberation Theology. The idea that you should have a philosophy directed to the poor, a pacifist, radical philosophy that holds that the poor should inherit *the earth*—not heaven, but inherit the earth—that they should control their own lives and their communities and so on, this is considered intolerable. It's why you have symbols like that one. [Gestures to a painting on the wall of his office; it depicts Archbishop Romero of El Salvador and six Jesuit priests confronting the Angel of Death].

TR: The murder of the Archbishop.

Chomsky: Yes, that's Archbishop Romero, who was assassinated at the beginning of the decade, and the six Jesuit intellectuals who were murdered towards the end of the decade: that sort of frames El Salvador in the 1980s. Plenty of other people got slaughtered too, like the usual victims—peasants, workers, human rights activists, and so on—but they were all killed by forces armed and directed and controlled by the United States. I put that painting there to remind me of the real world. And it serves an incidental purpose. A lot of people pass through here, and the people from Latin America know what it is. Almost nobody from the United States knows what it is. From Europe, maybe 10% of the people recognize it.

Now if anything like the murder of Romero and the Jesuits had happened in Czechoslovakia, if in 1980 an Archbishop had been murdered by people connected with the Russians, and if in 1989 Vaclav Havel had been murdered along with half a dozen other leading dissident intellectuals, everyone would've known about it and we might have had a war. There would've been great lamentations about the hideous character of Communism, about how we need to defend ourselves from the beast. But when *we* do it, the people don't know about it. *That's* successful indoctrination. *That* you can trace right back to the schools, the universities, the media, and so on. Same on Vietnam.

TR: We refuse the principle of universality, you know, that our judgements about what is right and wrong must also apply to our own conduct.

Chomsky: Absolutely. The most elementary moral principle becomes totally unacceptable. Take this morning's newspaper. Front page article, lead article in the New York Times[2]: the US and Iran are going to meet to discuss the insurgency in Iraq. And it's based on the claim by Rumsfeld and Cheney and others that the Iranians are unjustly "intervening" in Iraq. Well, you know...

2. March 17th, 2006.

TR: What are we doing there? *Not* intervening?

Chomsky: Suppose that Germany in 1943 was complaining that Britain was "intervening" in France, or the Japanese in Manchuria were complaining, as they did, that Chinese bandits were interfering with the peaceful country of Manchukuo (their name for occupied Manchuria). You'd just collapse in ridicule. But when *we're* doing it, it's exactly right. There's no question. It's the proper norm. I mean, the imperial mentality is so completely ingrained by the indoctrination system, and that includes higher education, it includes philosophy and everything else, that the question just can't arise. This is a point that Orwell made. He wrote an introduction to *Animal Farm*, which nobody read because it was suppressed, but

he talks about literary censorship in England and says look, even here in "free" England we also have suppression of opinion. Unpopular ideas can be suppressed without the use of force. Not like the totalitarian monster I'm describing, but...

TR: The subtle force.

Chomsky: The subtle force. And he says one of the subtlest forces is a good education, which just trains you to understand that there are certain things it wouldn't do to say. He didn't go far enough. There are certain things you're not supposed to *think*. You're not supposed to think that maybe there's something a little odd about Rumsfeld and Cheney and Blair complaining about Iranian interference in Iraq. We're not interfering because we own it, right? We own the world, so we can't be interfering. Take the doctrine of pre-emptive war, which was just announced again in the National Security Strategy a couple of days ago. I mean, if anybody believed in that doctrine they should be calling on Iran to carry out military operations against the United States. The United States is basically openly threatening them with attack. And it's certainly a credible threat. We have the forces to do it. If there's ever been a case for pre-emptive self defense, you know, that should be it. How come we're not calling on Iran to set off a dirty bomb in New York City? It's because we don't believe in elementary ethical principles like universality. *We* have the right to terrorize people and carry out pre-emptive war, because we own the world. But certainly nobody else does. And this extends to just about anything you can think of. Take, say, what they call "fumigation". It's actually a form of chemical warfare we're waging now in Colombia. You carry out chemical warfare to destroy crops; in this case we say we're trying to destroy coca production. Even if that were true, which it isn't, but even if it were true suppose that Colombia were to carry out chemical warfare in Kentucky or North Carolina to wipe out a far more lethal crop, tobacco. More people die in Colombia from smoking than they do here from cocaine. Well, would they be allowed to do it? I mean, okay, you can *claim* that the Colombian government allows us to do it, but just look at

the relations of power. The thing is that nobody questions the imbalance here, the double standard. The only thing that is questioned is its efficacy, not the *right*. Because we think we have the *right* to do anything we want, anywhere.

TR: And that's a refusal of the whole concept of "right". I mean if you simply associate right with will, the will of the state, then it ceases to mean anything...

Chomsky: So we have the "right", the will, and the power, and therefore what we do is justified. And you can't raise questions about it.

TR: Do you think that's sort of reproduced at the level of the individual ego here? The PR industry, the advertising industry, all the mechanisms of desire-creation that teach us to be good consumers, one of the ways they do that is to teach us that we don't need to measure our conduct by anything other than our own desirous will. The ego is supreme.

Chomsky: I wouldn't just limit it to the advertising industry. The same is true of higher education. The way historical events are presented, the way contemporary events are presented, they all appear within the framework that "what we do is justified" and you can't raise questions about it. Doubtless that's appealing to something in human nature, otherwise it wouldn't have any effect. But, you know, human nature is a complicated affair and you can appeal to what Gospels were appealing to as well. And that happens. It's why you get the sharp distinction between public attitudes and public policy on many issues. People are fundamentally pretty decent. Take something like foreign aid. There are constant polls on the question of foreign aid and they're extremely interesting. What they show is that people, if they're asked "what do you think about the amount of foreign aid we give?" , they say we give way too much and that people in other countries are lazy, we work hard and so on, so we shouldn't give them all this foreign aid. But if you ask a follow-up question like "how much aid should we give?", the answers are almost always ten-

times higher than we actually give. So, people are indoctrinated into a belief that we're giving away everything to these poor, lazy people, but they feel themselves that we ought to be helping them way more than we do.

TR: So that produces a kind of schizophrenia?

Chomsky: Well, it's not really schizophrenia because people don't know what's going on. Their estimate of actual foreign aid is way above what it actually is. When they learn what it is, they're appalled. Reagan and his speechwriters played on this like a violin. You remember Reagan and his stories about welfare mothers and their Cadillacs?

TR: That great mythic figure, the rich and predatory welfare mom.

Chomsky: This goes on across the board. I'll just take one last example. The day when you pay your taxes, April 15th, your supposed to understand—and it's deeply indoctrinated—that there is this alien force called the "government" who is taking away your money and you don't want to give it to them. Well it takes work to make people look at the world that way. The natural way to look at it is "we're a community". We're deciding that we want roads and schools and health-care and social security and so on, and together we're collecting the funds to ensure this. But you're not supposed to look at it that way. You're supposed to see taxation as some alien force stealing from you. Now, the people who are creating this propaganda, this indoctrination, they are not conservative in the traditional sense. They don't want a small state. They want a very large state that works for them. They want the rest of the population to hate the government while they love it.

TR: And sometimes you even hear traditional, Burkean conservatives speaking about against this.

Chomsky: Sometimes. Old-fashioned conservatives barely exist. What is called "conservative" today is really radical nationalist-statist, reactionary statist. But this indoctrination is done from schools to sitcoms and so on. Every means that exists is used to create this image. But I think it's very superficial. Right below the surface people know better. You can see what happens when the government tries to go after, say, Social Security. There was way too much popular resistance. But there were successes nevertheless. They did manage to convince people, mostly young people, that the system was in a fiscal crisis. Most young people think it's not going to be there for them. This "fiscal crisis" is mostly manufactured, but it was a successful propaganda campaign and it sets the stage for the next attack on entitlements. The attack on Social Security has almost nothing to do with fiscal problems, but it has a lot to do with ethics. The problem with Social Security is that it's based on humane feelings. It's based on feelings of social solidarity and social care. It should be a community responsibility to make sure that a disabled widow has food to eat. That's normal human emotion. You have to drive that out of people's heads and make them feel like a lot of young people maybe do now feel, that, you know, I didn't make bad investments or decisions for her, I didn't get her to marry the wrong person, why should I pay for her problems? Well, if you can turn people into savage beasts you've done a lot to destroy the threat of democracy. I think the attack on Social Security is mainly motivated by that. The fiscal crisis is mostly manufactured. That's why when they talk about a fiscal crisis, they package social security with medical care. Yeah, medical care is in a crisis, so when you put them together it looks like a huge problem. But social security itself works very well and there's no projected crisis for the future. There would be trivial ways to overcome it anyway. But you have to destroy it because it just teaches the wrong lessons. It reinforces the idea that you're really a human being who cares about others, and that's dangerous. You're supposed to be an individualist who cares about yourself.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: "BODY SERIES 2" BY CRISTINA FIGUEROA-PALAU

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Amelie Barras

Absent Baby Girls – China's Achilles' Tendon?

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'Better a handicapped son than eight healthy girls'

"BABY GIRL DUMPED IN SHANGHAI" (SOUTHERN CHINA MORNING POST, 08—04-2004)
"NEWBORN BABY IS LEFT IN RUBBISH BIN" (SCMP, 13-04-04)
"TODDLE ABANDONED OUTSIDE MALL" (SCMP, 15-04-2004)
"RURAL TREND OF ABANDONING BABIES SPREADS TO CITIES" (03-05-04)

ONE ONLY NEEDS to read the South China Morning Post for a month to get a sense of the problem threatening China or should we say Asia - a whole generation of women is missing: more precisely 100 million women. According to the World Health Organization, biologically a society should have around 103 boys for 100 girls at birth; this proportion evening out in the months following birth. In China, these numbers are skewed and conservative data states that there are 120 boys for 100 girls while the most alarming ones will give a ratio of 150 boys to 100 girls. Discrimination against girls is an ancient tradition in many parts of the world, common among poor rural families who practice female infanticide or abandon unwanted progenitor. In China, this phenomenon has expanded into the middle urban classes that have access to modern technology such as ultrasound scans revealing the baby's gender and allowing for selective abortions. Although gender

diagnostic in ultrasound scans has been prohibited for the past 10 years, it remains available for families that can afford to pay off local doctors and province governors. It is estimated that every year over 7 million abortions are practiced in China; that 2 women out of 3 had an abortion in the last trimester of their pregnancy; and that 99% of babies in orphanage are girls.

Westerners are barely aware of this phenomenon, which is not openly discussed in China. If not dealt with soon, this trend could be the origin of great social unrest and uprising in the next decades – a direct consequence of the hopelessness of a generation of men without spouses.

TODAY'S CONSEQUENCES OF GENDER IMBALANCE

In today's China the need for women is already felt in rural areas. Men are often forced to leave their hometowns and take up jobs as construction workers in Beijing or Shanghai to be able to earn a decent living. This has become the only way to flirt with the idea of finding a spouse, as Chinese women - because they are less numerous than men - have the luxury of selecting their future partner and financial wealth is the key variable. A more dramatic factor triggered by this gender imbalance is the rise of baby girls trafficking networks. In March 2003, in a train going from Yulin to Haozhou in the Guangxi province, the police found 28 newborn baby girls caught in a trafficking network destined to be sold at destination. It was later estimated that through this network 118 newborns girls had already been sold for $30 each.

Trafficking of women has been going on in Chinese poor provinces such as Guangxi for a decade or so now – extreme poverty pushing peasants to buy spouses, as they cannot afford a proper fiancée and dowry. Yet, trafficking of

babies is a recent trend, and the one child policy could perhaps, in part, explain the availability on the market of newborn girls. In rural China, unless it belongs to an ethnic minority, a Chinese couple that has a boy as a first child is forbidden to have a second child. If that happens, the couple is fined 5000 yuans. On the other hand, if the first child is a girl the couple is allowed to have a second child but not before 4 years. If any child is born before that time, parents are subject to a fine of 3000 yuans, and that rises to 8000 or 10000 if they dare to have a third child. Consequently, for most families who cannot afford to pay fines and who want a boy, giving up their second girl is almost an obligated choice. It is through midwives and other hospital staff that traffickers can get their hands on unwanted female progenitor and sell them to families in need of a future spouse. Spouses have become such a precious resource that families have resorted to buying baby girls, raising them in their family - often using them as maids - and then marrying them to their own sons.

Why do boys remain so important for Chinese couples? Mao had tried to put an end to entrenched sexism in Chinese society – why has he failed?

Researchers have offered many answers to these questions, poverty being one of them. Already centuries ago poor population in China and in Japan chose the sex of their baby by killing or abandoning their baby girls. But since the early 1980s, the urban middle-class in China has resorted to selective abortion. Thus, poverty does not explain entirely this phenomenon. The one child policy is also referred to as an explanation but it has been felt more severely in urban areas. In rural areas, this policy has been more flexible, and has directly affected only 1% of the population. Also, other Asian societies, such as Taiwan, South Korea or Singapore are facing similar imbalance even though they did not go through an authoritarian family planning.

Therefore, although these answers are factors that have influenced this trend, another element should be considered to complete the puzzle. With the restructuring of the state-owned enterprise in the 1990s and the end of Mao's iron rice bowl policy – a system of lifetime employment accompanied by health, unemployment and life insurances provided by the state-owned enterprise, - third age insecurity has reappeared in China and sons have become the sole safety net for the elderly. Indeed, Chinese reverted to their old traditional system where married sons had the duty to take care of their elderly parents since girls married into other families and where sons were the only ones allowed to practice the ancestor cult. Because of this embedded traditional system and because there is no fixed age for retirement, the Chinese government has failed to introduce a sustainable pension system. Even in the richest provinces such as Canton, the pension system is ill fitted to support the elderly. Thus, most of the population has no other choice then work as long as they can, and then rely on their sons.

It took Europe more than a century to develop a social security system for the elderly, when its population was ageing at a very slow pace. In Sweden for instance, the percentage of the population older than 65 went from 7% to 14% in 85 years. In China it will take less than 30 years. Thus, if social safety-nets are not put in place the importance of sons will continue to increase. On the other hand, if with urbanization filial piety weakens and women's role remains unchanged, the future of elderly seems quite gloom.

BARE BRANCH MALES

In an article published in the South China Post in January 2005, Dr. Den Boer, lecturer at Kent University argues that this surplus of single boy is destined to trigger social unrest and violence. Indeed, she explains that bare

branch males have existed in China throughout centuries – often bursting out in time of crisis. For instance, in the mid-1800s, an uprising by a predominantly bare branch rebel group in northern China called the Nien took over a territory of 6 million people before the government crushed it. Bare branch males were also heavily implicated in the Boxer rebellion in the early 1900s.

In today's China, unmarried men are found in the lower levels of society, often unemployed and with little education. Because it is not acceptable in Chinese culture to remain unmarried they cannot aspire to have any stake in society. Thus, Dr. Den Boer indicates that this could be one of the many reasons explaining why in the past 10 years crime has risen sharply in China and has been committed by men who are unmarried, not fully employed and whose last resort is theft to have access to the resources denied to them. She also highlights the political implication of having bare branch males. Indeed, a country needs to be quite authoritarian to deal with rebellions, thus this might directly impede on the Chinese democratization process. If China does not provide a quick remedy to this situation, 12 to 15% of young male in the next decades will be bare branches leading to a rise of crime and social uprising or a tightening of the authoritarian regime – both prospects being quite dim.

When western media refers to the fate of unwanted Chinese baby girls, they often solely concentrate on the human rights dimension of the phenomenon while forgetting to mention its origins or the demographic consequences it could have on China. Yet, to understand why this demographic concern could perhaps shatter the rising Chinese power one needs to look at all the pieces of the puzzle. In that optic, we have tried to consider some of the neglected aspects of this demographic problem, which nevertheless seem to be essential to grasp what is at stake for China.

This demographic problem has been exacerbated in the last decades because the Chinese government has failed to introduce a sustainable social system supporting the elderly. Ironically, to fill this gap the Chinese have turned to old traditions, the same ones that communism had tried to erase. The central government has slowly been trying to fight this gender imbalance by launching countrywide publicity campaigns promoting the virtues of girls; yet this might fail to address directly the root cause of the problem. Perhaps, the remedy to the bourgeoning numbers of bare branch males could be found in the manner assistance to the elderly is planned, but it remains to be seen how the government will adequately respond to the rising needs of a society that is ageing at a very quick pace. In any case, if not dealt with quickly, gender imbalance could soon become Chinese Achilles' tendon.

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