

IN THE IN-BETWEEN: CHINESE EXPERIMENTAL ART IN THE THIRD SPACE

Gloria Habes

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**IN THE IN-BETWEEN: CHINESE EXPERIMENTAL ART
IN THE THIRD SPACE**

by
Gloria Habes

A dissertation in Humanities
Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies
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This dissertation is dedicated to Alicia:
Por dar importancia a la "señorita con doctorado".

ABSTRACT

This dissertation would like to shine a light on how Chinese experimental art created by Chinese artists overseas is being portrayed and interpreted within the international art scene. It pays special attention to the alternative models that go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy or the centre-periphery model such as the in-between and the third space.

This present study consists of three blocks that could be seen as the theoretical foundation, the analytical part followed by the conclusions. Within the analytical part, twelve exhibitions are thoroughly analysed by studying the exhibition itself, the exhibition catalogue, the artworks on display and the reviews that were generated by the survey. The selection of these particular exhibitions has been for various reasons, as they represent a range of surveys that is varied and that can provide answers to the reception of Chinese experimental art in a Euroamerican context from different perspectives. These exhibitions have been chosen first of all because they often represent the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in that specific nation; secondly, because they aim to portray Chinese experimental art as a non-exotic, international art current that actively participates and changes the international art scene; thirdly, because they include three or more of the artists studied within this dissertation, which often provides for the opportunity to speak of alternative spaces such as the third space or the in-between; fourthly because they shine a light on the evolution of Chinese experimental art reception within a Euroamerican context, be it by illustrating how Chinese art evolved from sight specific exhibitions in rather peripheral venues (*Chine demain pour hier*, Pourrières, 1990) to major events sponsored privately as well as publically such as *Le moine et le démon* (2004). The intention is to dig deeper into how certain exhibitions and works of the overseas Chinese experimental artists were received within the Euroamerican context in the period from 1990 until 2004.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The world of the overseas Chinese experimental artists is a captivating one, and I am enormously grateful to the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya to have granted me the opportunity to dive into it, face first, for the last three years. While I am wrapping up my doctoral thesis I realise how much I have learned in the past years and what an interesting journey it has been. Many people have lent me a helping hand along the way and this would be the perfect place to thank them. First of all, a very big thank you to my director, Dr. Laia Manonelles Moner, for guiding me through the process and keeping me going. Without your feedback and extreme hard work this dissertation would not be as it is now. To all the librarians at the UIC, especially Mariona Vila and Néstor Company, who have patiently endured my sometimes strange petitions over these past years, always doing their best to locate books and articles for me in the most remote places. Also a special thank you to Nicholas Keyzer, librarian at the University of Sydney, for helping me out big time. Your wish is my command, and your name has been here immortalized forever.

I would also like to mention all the experts, artists, professionals, and professors who have helped me during my research by locating quotes that I had written down wrongly, answering questions, and by sending me interesting articles, exhibition catalogues, reviews, and so much other useful information: Hans Ulrich Obrist, Karen Smith, John Clark, Jason Kuo, Claire Margaret Roberts, Francesca Dal Lago, Wu Hung, Lü Peng, Eva Fernández del Campo Barbadillo, Winnie Won Ying Wong, Enrique Banús Irusta, Franziska Koch, Katie Hill, Ni Haifeng, Ien Ang, Patricia Almarcegui, Joan Grimalt, Xavier Escribano, Ivo Bargallo, Marta Crispí Canton, Lian Duan, Susana Sanz, Nixi Cura, Monica Dematte, Vivianne Liekens of the Museum Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, the librarians at the Pori Art Museum, the people at the Friends of Chen Zhen's Association (ADAC), the Hanart TZ Gallery, the people at xubing.com, the curators at Art Santa Mònica, Elise Vion Delphine of the MAC Lyon, Cassandra Smith from the Salina Art Centre, Sachi Yanari-Rizzo of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Imma González Puy,... and so many others that I am surely leaving out.

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Lastly, I would like to thank you, reader, for making time to read (or maybe just peruse) these pages. I sincerely hope that this study might inspire you somehow, and that my interest for experimental Chinese art and the “in-between” spaces will rub off on you too.

Gloria Habes
Terrassa, November 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
INTRODUCTION.....	1

BLOCK I: THEORETIC PART

SECTION I: CONTEXT 15

Introduction.....	17
1.1 The Avant-garde.....	21
1.2 The “East-West” binary.....	29
1.3 Centre & Periphery.....	37
1.4 Globalization.....	43
Conclusion.....	51

SECTION II: CHINESE ARTISTS OVERSEAS 53

Introduction.....	55
2.1 Diaspora & Exile.....	57
2.2 The dynamics of transexperiences.....	63
2.3 The Unhomely.....	75
2.4 New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-Ground, and the In-between.....	79
Conclusion.....	89

SECTION III: EUROAMERICAN RECEPTION OF CHINESE EXPERIMENTAL ART 91

Introduction.....	93
3.1 Euroamerican art theory as universal art language.....	97
3.2 Chinese experimental art as political, dissident art.....	103
3.3 Chineseness.....	113

3.4 Chinese experimental art as the Other	123
Conclusion	129

BLOCK II: ANALYSES OF THE EXHIBITIONS

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITIONS	133
1. CHINE DEMAIN POUR HIER (1990)	149
1.1 Introduction to the exhibition	149
1.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	153
1.3 The artworks on display	171
1.4 Conclusions on <i>Chine demain pour hier</i>	179
2. SILENT ENERGY (1993).....	183
2.1 Introduction to the exhibition	183
2.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	186
2.3 The artworks on display	196
2.4 The exhibition reviews.....	206
2.5 Conclusions on <i>Silent Energy</i>	216
3. FRAGMENTED MEMORY: THE CHINESE AVANT-GARDE IN EXILE (1993)	219
3.1 Introduction to the exhibition	219
3.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	223
3.3 The artworks on display	240
3.4 The exhibition reviews.....	251
3.5 Conclusions on <i>Fragmented Memory</i>	253
4. OUT OF THE CENTRE (1994).....	257
4.1 Introduction to the exhibition	257
4.2 The analysis of the exhibition catalogue	262
4.3 The artworks on display	274
4.4 Conclusions on <i>Out of the Centre</i>	290

5. HEART OF DARKNESS (1995)	295
5.1 Introduction to the exhibition	295
5.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	300
5.3 The exhibition reviews.....	330
5.3.1 Newspapers	330
5.3.2 Magazines and newspaper supplements.....	337
5.4 Conclusions on <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	345
6. DES DEL PAIS DEL CENTRE: XINA: 15 ANYS D´AVANTGUARDES ARTÍSTIQUES (1995)	349
6.1 Introduction to the exhibition	349
6.2 The exhibition catalogue	352
6.3 The exhibition reviews.....	371
6.3.1 Newspapers	372
6.3.2 Magazines.....	381
6.4 Conclusions on <i>Des del País del Centre</i>	386
7. CITIES ON THE MOVE (1997-1999)	391
7.1 Introduction to the exhibition	391
7.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	394
7.2.1 Analysis of the Hayward Gallery’s exhibition catalogue.....	395
7.2.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue- the Vienna Secession edition	402
7.3 The works on display	405
7.4 The exhibition reviews.....	413
7.4.1 Specialized magazines	413
7.4.2 Non-specialized magazines	420
7.5 Conclusions on <i>Cities on the Move</i>	427
8. INSIDE OUT: NEW CHINESE ART (1998-1999)	431
8.1 Introduction to the exhibition	431
8.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	434
8.2.1 The interpretation of Chinese experimental art within a political context	446
8.3 The exhibition reviews.....	451
8.4 Conclusions on <i>Inside Out</i>	486

9. PARIS POUR ESCALE (2000-2001)	491
9.1 Introduction to the exhibition	491
9.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	494
9.3 The exhibition reviews.....	516
9.4 Conclusion on <i>Paris pour Escale</i>	523
10. PARIS-PÉKIN (2002).....	527
10.1 Introduction to the exhibition	527
10.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	531
10.3 The artworks on display	544
10.4 Analysis of the exhibition reviews	560
10.5 Conclusions on <i>Paris-Pékin</i>	565
11. ALL UNDER HEAVEN (2004)	569
11.1 Introduction to the exhibition	569
11.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	572
11.3 The artworks on display	584
11.4 The exhibition reviews.....	590
11.5 Conclusions on <i>All under Heaven</i>	617
12. LE MOINE ET LE DÉMON (2004).....	621
12.1 Introduction to the exhibition	621
12.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue	626
12.3 The artworks on display	642
12.4 Analysis of the exhibition reviews	647
12.4.1 Reviews that misinterpreted (the aims of) <i>Le moine et le démon</i>	651
12.4.2 Reviews that did capture the aims of <i>Le moine et le démon</i>	664
12.4.3 The more extent reviews.....	668
12.5 Conclusions on <i>Le moine et le démon</i>	678

BLOCK III: CONCLUSIONS

1.1 Critics and their reviews.....	685
1.2 The exhibitions and their catalogues.....	691
1.3 Recurrent artworks.....	697
1.4 To conclude.....	700

LIST OF EXHIBITIONS IN WHICH ARTISTS FROM THE SELECTED GROUP

PARTICIPATED.....	705
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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	709
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Liu Di, <i>Animal Regulation No. 7, and No. 4 (2010)</i>	27
Figure 2: Xu Bing's name written in <i>Square Word Calligraphy</i>	66
Figure 3: <i>Practicing Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy</i>	67
Figure 4: Shen Yuan, <i>Perdre Sa Salive, 1994</i>	71
Figure 5: <i>Example of Book from the Ground (2003-2012)</i>	81
Figure 6: Yue Minjun, <i>Execution, 1994</i>	108
Figure 7: Xu Bing, <i>Case Study of Transference, 1994</i>	117
Figure 8: <i>Frontcover of the Chine demain pour hier exhibition catalogue</i>	153
Figure 9: The “no-return” sign outside of the 1989 China Avant-Garde Exhibition put on at the National Art Gallery in Beijing.....	154
Figure 10: <i>Frontcover of the Silent Energy exhibition catalogue, 1993</i>	185
Figure 11: Gu Wenda, <i>Oedipus Refound #2: The Enigma of Birth, 1993</i>	191
Figure 12: Gu Wenda, <i>United Nations Series, Babel of the Millennium, 1999</i>	193
Figure 13: Cai Guoqiang, <i>Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17: The Oxford Comet, 1993</i>	196
Figure 14: Huang Yongping, <i>Yellow Peril, 1993</i>	202
Figure 15: Yang Jiechang, <i>100 Layers of Ink 1 no. 2, 1994</i>	204
Figure 16: Anselm Kiefer, <i>The Women of the Revolution, 1992</i>	209
Figure 17: <i>Frontcover of the Fragmented Memory exhibition catalogue (1993)</i>	223
Figure 18: Gu Wenda, <i>Oedipus Refound #3: Beyond Joy and Sin, 1993</i>	234
Figure 19: Huang Yongping, <i>Human Snake Plan, 1993</i>	243
Figure 20: Xu Bing, <i>Cultural Negotiations, 1993</i>	245
Figure 21: Huang Yongping, <i>What should we prepare before going out of the centre? (Also known as Out of the Centre), 1994</i>	275
Figure 22: Yang Jiechang, <i>Brutstätte, 1994</i>	276
Figure 23: Yang Jiechang, <i>Testament, 1991</i>	279
Figure 24: Chen Zhen, <i>37°C, Human Body's Temperature, 1994</i>	281
Figure 25: Yan Pei Ming, <i>Invisible Man, 1998</i>	284
Figure 26: Chen Zhen, <i>Resonance, 1994</i>	322
Figure 27: Gu Wenda, <i>United Nations, Dutch Monument: V.O.C. – W.I.C., 1994</i>	325
Figure 28: Gu Wenda, <i>United Nations – Africa Monument: the World Praying Wall (1997)</i>	326
Figure 29: Huang Yongping, <i>Overtured Tomb, 1995</i>	328
Figure 30: Xu Bing, <i>Book from the Sky, 1987-1991</i>	357
Figure 31: Huang Yongping, “ <i>The History of Chinese Painting</i> ” and “ <i>The History of Modern Western Art</i> ” Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes, 1987/1993.....	362
Figure 32: Xu Bing, <i>Case of Transference, 1994</i>	364
Figure 33: Wu Shanzhuan and Inga Thórsdóttir, <i>Showing China from its Best Sides, 1995</i>	366
Figure 34: Xiao Lu, <i>Dialogue, 1989</i>	375
Figure 35: Wang Ziwei, <i>Mickey and Mao, 1993</i>	376

Figure 36: Cai Guoqiang: <i>The Century with Mushroom Clouds – Projects for 20th Century</i> , Nevada nuclear test site, 1996.....	405
Figure 37: Cai Guoqiang, <i>Red Golf</i> , 1997.....	406
Figure 38: Frontcover of the Hayward's gallery edition of the <i>Cities on the Move</i> exhibition catalogue...408	
Figure 39: Huang Yongping, <i>Turtle Town</i> , scetch of the artist, 1997.....	409
Figure 40: Installation view of <i>Cities on the Move</i> , Vienna Secession, 1997.....	411
Figure 41: Gu Wenda, <i>United Nations - China monument: Temple of Heaven</i> , 1998.....	455
Figure 42: Cai Guoqiang, <i>Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows</i> , 1998.....	455
Figure 43: Cai Guoqiang, <i>Installation Inopportune: Stage two</i> , 2004.....	456
Figure 44: Cai Guoqiang, <i>Installation Inopportune: Stage one</i> , 2004.....	457
Figure 45: One of the hand-carved woodblocks with Xu Bing's "invented" characters used for <i>Book from the Sky</i>	461
Figure 46: Chen Zhen, <i>Paysage intérieur du corps (Inner Body Landscape)</i> , 2000.....	507
Figure 47: Shen Yuan, <i>Un matin du monde</i> , 1999.....	510
Figure 48: Wang Du, <i>Entrer</i> , 2004 (height 260 cm)	511
Figure 49: Wang Du, <i>Promener Mon Chien</i> , 2000.....	512
Figure 50: Yang Jiechang, <i>Eye of the Storm</i> , 2000	514
Figure 51: Cai Guoqiang, <i>explanatory drawing for Sun Dial</i> , 1995.....	547
Figure 52: Chen Zhen, <i>Human Tower</i> , 1999.....	548
Figure 53: Gu Wenda, <i>Pseudo Character: Wind (Sky Dynasty Format #4-1)</i> , 1996	549
Figure 54: Huang Yongping, <i>One Man Nine Animals</i> , 1999. Installation for the French Pavillion.	552
Figure 55: Wu Shanzhuan, <i>Today No Water Series</i> , no. 37, 2001	554
Figure 56: Wu Shanzhuan, <i>Paradise</i> , 1993.....	555
Figure 57: Wu Shanzhuan, <i>Vege Pleasure</i> , 1996	556
Figure 58: Yang Jiechang amidst his black squares at the 1989 <i>Magiciens de la Terre</i> exhibition	557
Figure 59: Cai Guo Qiang, <i>Project for extraterrestrials No. 8: reviving the ancient signal towers</i> , 1991..	585
Figure 60: Huang Yongpoing, <i>The Bat Project</i> , 2001-2004.....	586
Figure 61: Yang Jiechang, <i>3000 Needles</i> , 1993.....	588
Figure 62: Yang Jiechang, <i>Scroll of Secret Merits</i> , 2004.....	643
Figure 63: Huang Yongping, <i>Tête d'Or</i> , 2004.....	644
Figure 64: Shen Yuan, <i>Pousse-pousse 18 km/h</i> , 2004	645
Figure 65: Frontcover of <i>Le moine et le démon</i> exhibition catalogue. On the cover: Lin Yilin, <i>Our Future</i> , 2002.....	670

INTRODUCTION

Why do we go to exhibitions? The question is short and simple but have we ever stopped to think why we visit exhibitions, or why they are organized? An exhibition, be it about art, an artist, a historic event, or on topics such as biology or science, should be thought-provoking, it should expand our horizons, deepen our knowledge, and introduce us to other cultures and values. Yet, especially when it comes to art exhibitions, art has sometimes become somewhat of a business, and surveys are not always held to broaden our cultural horizons or to deepen our knowledge about the arts and cultures. Expositions, especially when it comes to non-Euroamerican art, have become a highly complex phenomenon that touches aspects related to money, fame, identity, globalization, post-colonialism, the portrayal of the Other, and often misunderstanding and misinterpretation. This dissertation would like to shine a light on how Chinese experimental art created by Chinese artists overseas is being portrayed and interpreted within the international art scene.

When this Ph.D. project started about three years ago, I had no knowledge about Chinese experimental art. It is an art which is not usually taught in Euroamerican countries and as a humanities student, I had never come in contact with it. This is actually a very strange occurrence that not only should be changed but more importantly should be questioned. Why is it that the arts within the Euroamerican academic syllabus are mainly focused on Euroamerican art theory and history? This thesis does not focus on this topic alone but an answer is given in paragraph 3.1 of the theoretic part of this dissertation which has been titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*. The title partly provides an answer to this question and points to the fact that Euroamerican art language is, at present, the dominating art vocabulary within the arts. Alternative art histories or theories that would be extremely useful and necessary within the global art scene have not yet been implemented on a wide scale. As a consequence, non-Euroamerican art, like Chinese experimental art, is interpreted and understood from a mainly Euroamerican perspective, based on Euroamerican art history and references. This is a serious problem for the interpretation of non-Euroamerican art but due to the lack of alternatives, the situation remains unchanged. As long as Euroamerican art history is employed as the prevailing language within the art world, non-Euroamerican art cannot be fully comprehended.

In the twenty-first century global world in which cultural and geographical hybridity has become nothing out of the extraordinary, how is it possible that alternative references and theories capable of interpreting and doing justice to this dynamic reality of interculturalism and hybridity within the arts are not widely acknowledged and used? How is it possible that Euroamerican art history, with all its obvious shortcomings when it comes to the interpretation of non-Euroamerican art remains the prevalent language within a global art world? In our day-to-day life we are in constant contact with other cultures, yet the tools to truly understand these cultures are mostly unavailable. This often leads to fear of the unfamiliar, of the Other, of the unknown, and it is precisely here where the arts, along with exhibitions can make a difference. These should become one of the tools capable of lifting barriers between cultures, and eradicating the fear of the unknown by demystifying the Other. Art has the ability of introducing the unfamiliar hereby relieving the fear of the unknown, and when interpreted “appropriately” on its own terms, according to its own artistic language, history, and cultural background, it becomes one of the most powerful instruments capable of surpassing cultural differences, stereotypes, and xenophobia.

Within the arts, the artists that have left their homeland and moved abroad become creators and providers of these tools. Leaving the familiar behind and adapting to a new and unknown environment often results in somewhat of an identity-crisis, but eventually it leads to a privileged position of being in-between two or more cultures, to become an insider as well as an outsider to one’s own as well as the adopted culture. Artists are moreover privileged on another level as they have been given the gift of transmitting their experience, their feelings, and their vision through artistic language, which often speaks to other individuals in a direct, sometimes even universal way. This dissertation focuses on the Chinese experimental artists who have moved abroad becoming global citizens living in this in-between position where identity and culture are no longer perceived as static and isolated entities but where they are acknowledged, accepted and appreciated as dynamic and essential parts of a changing global reality. It is especially these overseas artists who are paving the way to the establishment of alternative artistic vocabularies so desperately needed within the international art scene.

This thesis has been limited to a group of Chinese experimental artists that at the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s decided to leave their homeland and to settle in Europe or the United States.¹ After living in Euroamerica for many years they explain that when they return to China they feel as tourists and no longer feel “at home” there. However, they do not consider themselves American or European either and they are not considered as such by the “locals”. This leaves them “homeless”, or as Homi K. Bhabha defines it “unhomely”,² as they have shifted into an alternative space that lies in between two cultures. This in-between space is what Homi K. Bhabha has coined the third space in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). It has been referred to by some of the Chinese art critics and curators, as well as some of the Chinese experimental artists, as the “in-between”, the “Mid-Ground”³ or, as the artist Yang Jiechang calls it, the “grey area”.⁴ But this alternative space is not limited to the overseas Chinese experimental artists alone. For further research on the topic one could look to African artists abroad, Indian art overseas or even research areas related to immigration and travel. One would expect that in a global twenty-first century in which people are constantly on the move and in which children are born into multicultural families the third space concept would be more widely known. Interestingly, it is not. This is a sign that much research remains to be done in this particular area, and this is where this dissertation would like to contribute.

The first step that had to be taken was to choose which artists to include in this study and which would have to be left out. At first, this left me swimming in an overwhelming ocean of information however I quickly noticed which artists were better known in Euroamerica than others, as they were more frequently mentioned in articles and books. By discarding the artists that did not leave China for Euroamerica the group was significantly reduced. The Chinese experimental artists that moved abroad and that are more frequently spoken of in Euroamerica are: Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Cai Guoqiang, Huang Yongping, Shen Yuan,

¹ This thesis only focuses on the artists that have moved to Euroamerica, as New York and Paris were the main destinations of most of these artists. Some of the artists have decided to move to Australia but due to its relatively close geographical situation to China, and also due to the fact that Australia cannot be considered part of Euroamerica, they have not been included within this study.

² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994.

³ See Hou Hanru's book, *On the Mid-Ground*, 2002. Hou Hanru is one of the better known art critics and curators within the Chinese experimental art world. He is also one of the pioneers when it comes to the transmission and defence of the third space concept, and tries to sometimes convey its message through his exhibitions, as shall become clear in Block II. Hou Hanru is a recurrent figure within this thesis and a lot more shall be said about him throughout the following chapters.

⁴ Yang Jiechang in Martina Köppel-Yang, *Painting Beyond the Visual*, 26/04/2001
http://yangjiechang.com/data/pub_paintingbeyonthevisual.xml. Date of last consultation: 15/5/2014.

Wang Du, Chen Zhen, Wu Shanzhuan and Yang Jiechang. I therefore decided to limit my group to these nine artists.

In the following table the nine artists that are included in this dissertation are mentioned along with some brief background information.⁵

Name⁶	Year of birth	Date of leaving	Destination
Cai Guoqiang	1957	1986	Japan / USA
Chen Zhen	1955 (Paris 2000)	1986	France
Gu Wenda	1955	1987	USA
Huang Yongping	1954	1989	France
Shen Yuan	1959	1989	France
Wang Du	1956	1990	France
Wu Shanzhuan	1960	1989	Germany
Xu Bing	1955	1990	USA
Yang Jiechang	1956	1989	Germany/ France

The second step that this dissertation makes is to find out how the artworks that these artists presented within Euroamerican art venues were received by the art critics and how their art was described within the exhibition catalogues. This in order to dig deeper into the way Chinese experimental art from the overseas artists is received within the “international” art world. In order to answer this question, I decided to look towards the exhibitions of Chinese experimental art that were held in Euroamerica. These were plentiful⁷ and it was again necessary to limit the field of research. I therefore decided that I would only include the exhibitions in which three or more overseas Chinese artists of the selected group of nine had participated. Maintaining the measure of three or more lead to twelve exhibitions of Chinese experimental art held in Euroamerica. This seemed a research ground that could be encompassed.⁸

⁵ It should be mentioned that some of the artists, such as Xu Bing, have gone back to China. Other artists of this list are frequently travelling back to China as most of them have studios there.

⁶ The artists’ names are mentioned in Pinyin and it has been chosen to place family name first, followed by the given name, as is custom in China.

⁷ A list of all the exhibitions in which members of the selected group of this dissertation participated has been included at the end of this dissertation. See page 706.

⁸ For a detailed explanation on the exhibitions included within this research and why they have been selected, see the introduction to Block II on the analyses of the exhibitions.

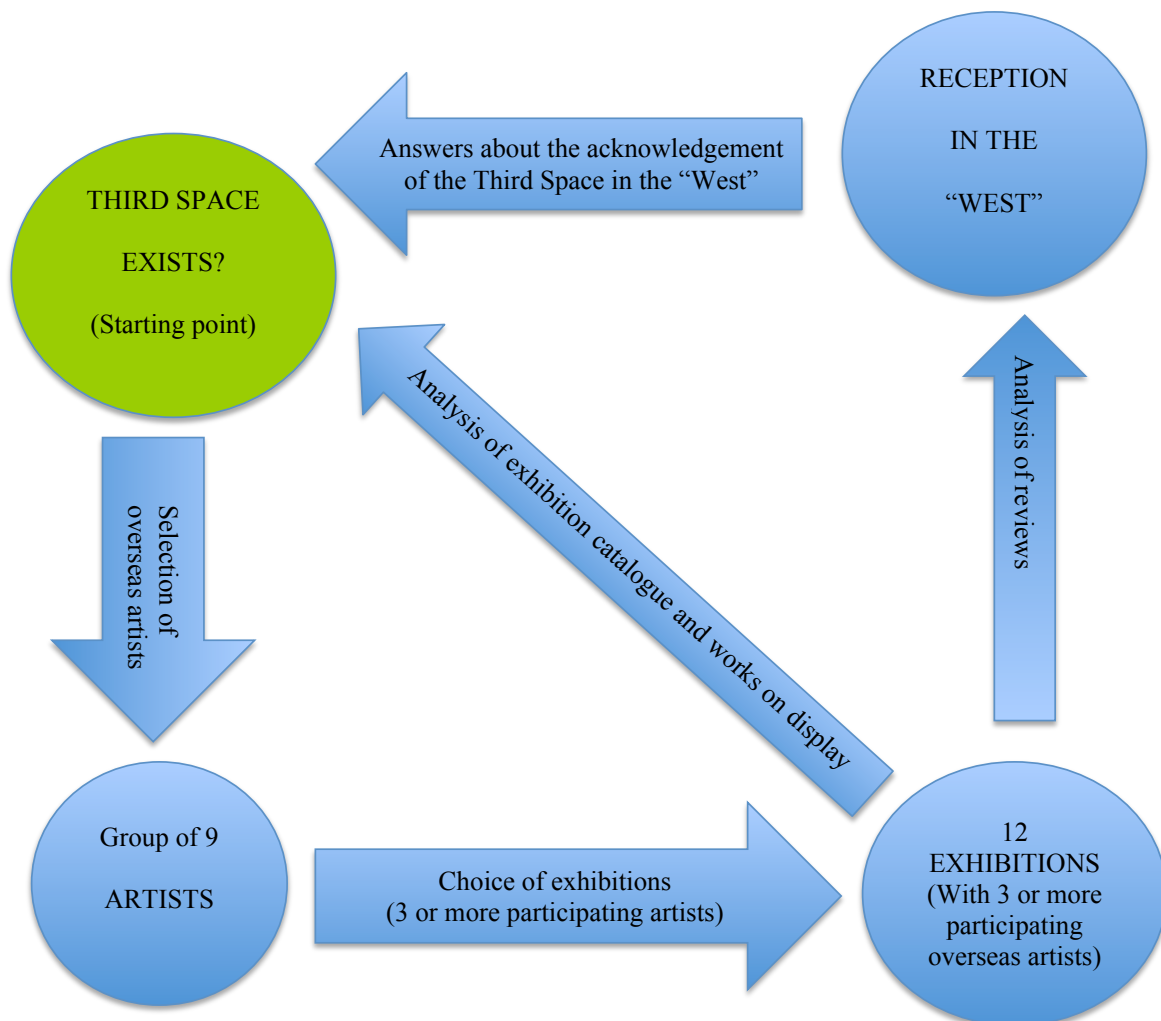
The exhibitions analysed in this dissertation are (in chronological order):

- *Chine Demain Pour Hier*, Pourrières, France, 1990
- *Silent Energy*, Oxford MoMA, UK, 1993
- *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, Ohio, USA, 1993
- *Out of the Centre*, Pori Art Museum, Pori, Finland, 1994
- *Heart of Darkness*, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo, the Netherlands, 1995
- *Des del pais del centre: avant-gardes artistiques xineses*, Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain, 1995
- *Cities on the Move*, Wiener Secession, Vienna, Austria, 1997-1999
- *Inside Out*, Asia Society New York, San Francisco MoMA, USA, 1998
- *Paris pour Escale*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris, France, 2000
- *Paris-Pékin*, Espace Cardin, Paris, France, 2002
- *All under Heaven*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, 2004
- *Le moine et le démon*, Musée d'art Contemporain (MAC) de Lyon, France, 2004

This is a representative selection of art exhibitions as it includes various kinds of surveys: some held in the United States, and some in Europe; some on a large scale held at international venues, others organized on a smaller and more local scale in alternative venues such as colleges or local art galleries; some curated by Chinese curators, others by Euroamerican curators, some by both; and all exhibitions with their own specific main theme and selection of artists. Some of the exhibitions date from the early nineties,⁹ when Chinese experimental art started to enter the Euroamerican art world while the latest exhibition dates from 2004, more than a decade later, when Chinese experimental art had become a “hot item”. This selection provides an enormous variety of exhibitions that will lead to diversified yet founded conclusions on how overseas Chinese experimental art is received in Euroamerica. Moreover, this dissertation does not only limit itself to the analysis of the exhibitions (the artworks on display and the analysis of the exhibition catalogue) but also tries to trace the reviews that were written by the art critics about these surveys.

⁹ It should be mentioned that information on Chinese experimental art, exhibition catalogues, etc. only became available in the early 1990s. Before this time, Euroamerican art experts, curators, collectors and critics were quite oblivious of what was going on in China artistically. It is also for this reason that no art exhibitions on Chinese experimental art were held before 1989-1990. This topic shall be further explored within Block I, section I (titled *Context*) of the theoretic part.

Schematically, the selection process that this dissertation underwent is as follows:



As to the structure of this Ph.D. research, the study is divided into three main blocks that could be described as the theoretic part, the analytical part, and the conclusion. Block I explains the theoretic concepts that are necessary in order to understand this research and the analyses that are explained in Block II. This first part of the thesis could be considered the foundation and the essence of this dissertation. It has been divided into three sections:

Section I titled *Context* provides information on the context of Chinese experimental art. Chinese experimental art is very different from Euroamerican contemporary art and in order to understand it, certain aspects that make it unique within the international art scene have to be explained. Chinese experimental art is not a continuation of Euroamerican art but has its own particular historical, political and cultural background.

Therefore, Euroamerican art theories and references are only partly sufficient in order to understand this art. In section I, concepts that are often used within Chinese experimental art such as the term “avant-garde”, “contemporary”, etc. will be explained and questioned. It has also been considered essential to address certain systems and models that hugely influence the interpretation of Chinese experimental art within a Euroamerican environment. Therefore, paragraph 1.2 and 1.3 are dedicated to concepts such as “East”, “West”, “centre”, and “periphery”. Lastly, paragraph 1.4 shall speak of the term globalization, as its influence within the international art scene, as well as within Chinese experimental art is undeniable.

Section II of Block I focuses specifically on the Chinese overseas artists. It explains their unique position of living in between cultures, which sets them apart from their mainland counterparts. Their experience of leaving the homeland and adapting to a new environment immensely influences their art and differentiates it not only from mainland Chinese art but also from Euroamerican art. Concepts that shall be elaborated upon within this section are diaspora and exile in paragraph 2.1; transexperiences, a term coined by the overseas artist Chen Zhen that explains this transitory experience of moving from one place to the other shall be further clarified in paragraph 2.2; and in paragraph 2.3 specific terms that can be applied to the particular situation of living abroad such as the concept of homelessness and the in-between shall be explained. In paragraph 2.4 special attention will be paid to the alternative models such as New Internationalism, the Mid-Ground, and the third space that go beyond the strict separation of “East” and “West”, and reflect more accurately the hybrid and multicultural reality of our global environment.

Section III takes a closer look at the reception of Chinese experimental art in the Euroamerican art world. As explained at the beginning of this introduction, the reception of non-Euroamerican art is highly complex and within this section certain ways of perceiving Chinese experimental art from a Euroamerican perspective will be further observed. Paragraph 3.1 addresses the fact that Euroamerican art seems to be the main reference within the global art scene, which inevitably leads to a very narrow-minded and closed-off interpretation and perception of non-Euroamerican art. Paragraph 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 will dig deeper into the different ways Chinese experimental art is interpreted within the Euroamerican art scene: as a political, dissident art; as “Chinese” art; and as art of the Other.

Block II of this dissertation contains the analyses of the twelve exhibitions that have been selected for this research. All analyses are structured in the same way that is as follows:

1. Introduction to the exhibition: here, basic background information is given on the exhibition. This gives an idea of the context in which the exhibition took place. Information is provided on, e.g., participating artists, the exhibition venue, the curator(s), etc.
2. Analysis of the exhibition catalogue. In this part the exhibition catalogue is thoroughly analysed and special attention is paid to the third space concept.
3. The artworks on display: In this part an analyses is made of the artworks on display created by the participating overseas artists. In the case of some exhibitions, this part has been integrated into the analysis of the exhibition catalogue.
4. The exhibition reviews: This part critically studies the reviews that were published in magazines, newspapers, and the internet about the exhibition in question. The aim is to find out how the exhibition was received and how the works on display as well as the exposition in general were interpreted. This particular section provides essential information and insights on how Chinese experimental art is received within the Euroamerican art world.
5. Conclusion on the analysed exhibition.

The third and last part of this dissertation, Block III, consists of the conclusions of this research. Here, deductions shall be made on how Chinese experimental art from the overseas artists is received within the Euroamerican art scene based on the findings achieved in the analytical part (Block II) of this study, while at the same time keeping in mind the concepts explained in Block I (the theoretic part). Special attention will also be paid to the reception and diffusion of the third space concept within the “international” (Euroamerican) art scene.

Before moving on, a few aspects of this dissertation should be clarified and justified. First of all, this study is not an advocate of using the concepts of “East” and “West” as it

believes that these definitions have become long out-dated within a twenty-first century global world. Therefore, the words “East” and “West” shall be placed within quotation marks throughout the whole dissertation. In general, this study will speak of the term “Euroamerica” when addressing the geographical areas of Europe and the United States. Whenever the word “East” or “West” appears, a larger geographical area that goes beyond Europe and the United States, for example including the Middle-East or Australia, is here alluded.

As to the concept of the Other, whenever the term is mentioned within this study it points to the anthropological definition of this concept. The Other is here meant as the opposition of the Self and in the situation of Euroamerica, the Other is often the exotic, the unfamiliar, the inferior, and the non-Euroamerican. In the art world, Chinese artists are often seen as the Other, even when residing within Europe or the United States.

Like all thesis, when one is doing research it sometimes feels like a constant battle in order to make way. Looking back, this thesis has not been an easy ride and it has bumped into some difficulties along the way. First of all, the fact of not being able to visit the exhibitions in person makes it difficult to form an exact idea of how the exhibition must have been like. Experiencing an exhibition first-hand would have made the analyses a lot more detailed and could have included information not provided by the exhibition catalogue, photographs, and the reviews. Also, it would have given the opportunity to elaborate surveys which would have provided a lot of valuable data about the impact the exhibition had on the audience. On the other hand, it does permit to remain objective towards the exhibition which often results in a more unbiased way of analysing.

Secondly, in some cases, not many or no reviews could have been traced. Not all museums keep records in their archives about the exhibitions they organize nor do all curators. Often, reviews have been able to be traced on the internet or by requesting them from archives, magazines or newspapers. However, this has not always been possible, especially when the exhibition was held in the early nineties. This affects this research, as it makes it quite impossible to find out what impact an exhibition had on the audience and the art-critics. In some cases, there was simply nothing written about the exhibition. This of course is a sign in itself as it indicates a possible disinterest in (or “silencing” of) the particular exhibition.

Looking back, it might have been a good option to have included monographic exhibitions in this research as well. If the third space is expressed within the works of the artists, this might have been more impacting with only one artist on display. In some occasions, the exhibitions analysed in this thesis were of enormous proportions with sometimes more than a hundred participating artists from all over the world. In these exhibitions, the influence that might have been generated by the overseas Chinese experimental artists could be considered very small. In posterior research projects I would like to explore this option by continuing this study however taking into consideration the monographic exhibitions. Yet in this particular study only group exhibitions have been considered as it particularly focuses on the effects that the Chinese experimental artists overseas have had, as a collective, within the Euroamerican art world. Monographic exhibitions are not the same as group exhibitions and it has been considered more coherent to not mix the two within one single study. This also in order to limit the amount of selected exhibitions to be analysed in this dissertation.

It has not been possible to travel abroad to interview the artists that are being studied in this research, which would have provided unique material and probably would have been greatly insightful.¹⁰ This point shall have to be postponed to future research projects. On the other hand, a lot of bibliography and interviews are available on the artists that are studied within this dissertation. In most cases, the artist also has a very well maintained website on which a lot of information on the artist as well as his or her work can be freely accessed.

To conclude, this Ph.D. thesis is the result of three years of research and its intention has been to dig deeper into the existing alternative models that go beyond Euroamerican hegemony in the (art) world such as the in-between and the third space that are at present largely ignored. Although there is existing literature about the concept of the third space, it usually comes from Chinese art critics and curators. The same occurs when speaking about Euroamerican art reception of the art of the Other. Bibliography exists yet in the majority of cases it is written by non-Euroamerican art experts. This alone seems to be a clear indicator that both topics are highly underexposed and are more often than not ignored or avoided by Euroamerican art experts, curators and critics. This study not only

¹⁰ I did however visit the artist Ni Haifeng in his art studio in Amsterdam in 2012. The conversation with him was very enlightening and I thank him for his time and guidance. I also had the opportunity to meet with Francesca Dal Lago and Wu Hung during a workshop and a conference that was organized at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in 2013, and with the curator Lü Peng during his curatorship of the *Pure Views* exhibition that was held at the Arts Santa Mònica in Barcelona in July 2013.

tries to draw attention to this condition but also tries to provide insights into the reason *why* this occurs. Hopefully these pages will not only generate more questions on these topics but more importantly I hope that they will lead to a further *questioning* of Euroamerican dominance within the international art world.

Coming back to the initial question of this introduction, I believe we go to art exhibitions to see creations that capture our everyday world from a completely different perspective. These works open our eyes to the fact that reality consists of different layers, and that not all is what it appears to be. Art enriches us as human beings. It has the power to change our way of thinking, and the way we perceive the world. Yet, its weakness lies in the fact that art is in the eye of the beholder. For it to be fully comprehended, it must be interpreted and understood on its own terms. Even though this might never be achieved, exhibitions could and should hand out the necessary tools in order to really appreciate art, to understand it, and to see it as it is. Not as we want or need it to be. And this is where its main challenge lies, now and well into the future.

BLOCK I: THEORETIC PART

SECTION I: CONTEXT

Introduction

This first section titled *Context* is meant to provide background information on the context in which Chinese experimental art acts. The chapter is divided into four paragraphs, which are:¹¹

- 1.1 The “Avant-garde”
- 1.2 The “East-West” binary
- 1.3 Centre & periphery
- 1.4 Globalization

This section of the dissertation is important, as Chinese experimental art is not the same as Euroamerican contemporary art. Therefore it should be addressed on its own terms, as far as possible. It is for this reason that certain concepts, that are here explained, should be kept in mind when dealing with Chinese experimental art. First of all, Chinese experimental art has undergone a unique historical evolution, incomparable to western art history, due to the fact that China, geographically, historically and culturally is a whole different continent with its own particular background.

Secondly, the way Chinese experimental art is perceived within the Euroamerican art scene is also quite distinct from the way “western” contemporary art is seen. Chinese experimental art is frequently understood and interpreted according to Euroamerican standards and Euroamerican art history,¹² and is still regularly seen in an exclusively political and exotic way.¹³ Often, this “erroneous” interpretation is a direct consequence of the lack of knowledge about Chinese experimental art and its history. This is somewhat comprehensible, as Chinese experimental art was quite unfamiliar in Euroamerica until the 1990s. It was not until that period that information on Chinese experimental art, in the form of for example exhibition catalogues, became available. This can also be observed in the exhibitions that are analysed in this dissertation as the earliest one is the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier* that was held in France in the year 1990. Therefore, it could be said that two factors contributed to the “unfamiliarity” of Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica.

¹¹ It has not been considered necessary to include a chronology of the evolution of Chinese experimental art as these can be easily found, written by experts, on the internet as well as in the majority of exhibition catalogues about Chinese experimental art.

¹² See paragraph 3.1 titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*.

¹³ See paragraph 3.2 titled *Chinese experimental art as political, dissident art, and paragraph 3.3 titled Chineseness*.

On the one hand, even though Chinese experimental art already took its first steps in the 1970's,¹⁴ exhibitions on this art in the United States or Europe would not be organized until the late eighties, beginning of the nineties. Before this time, Chinese experimental art was more of an internal affair of the Chinese artists. Some of them had already moved to the United States or Europe by that time while others had their hands full creating their art and trying to exhibit within China after a long period of strict political propaganda painting: a big challenge indeed.

On the other hand, it might be alleged that it was not until the 1990s that Euroamerica became interested in portraying Chinese experimental art as a contemporary art form within the international art scene. Maybe it was due to the postcolonialism of that particular period that Euroamerica felt obliged to pay attention to non-Euroamerican art and to open up their art scene to a wider spectrum. 1978 is considered the beginning of postcolonialism as this was the year that Edward W. Said published his book *Orientalism* in which he critically looks towards the Euroamerican image that was created of the (Middle) East. This awareness of the false, exotic and orientalist image that was created of the East might have led to the efforts of portraying non-Euroamerican art in a non-exotic way,¹⁵ as an equal. An example of this good intention can be illustrated with the *Magiciens de la Terre*¹⁶ exhibition that was held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Even though the exhibition was strongly criticized for portraying non-Euroamerican art as exotic and as the Other, for many it has become a milestone exhibition, considered one of the first to display non-Euroamerican art on this scale.

¹⁴ The death of Mao Zedong could be seen as one of the impulses that would lead to the first steps of the Chinese experimental art movement within China. His death implied more freedom for the artists who were no longer obliged to produce political propaganda art, strictly controlled by the Chinese government. Artists started to experiment with art, finding ways to break with the artistic past of propaganda painting and to recuperate its traditional roots. This experimentation would lead to a first culmination in 1979 when the Stars group (xing xing 星星), the first organized group of Chinese experimental artists, hung their works on the park railings outside of the Chinese Art Gallery after being denied permission to display within the building. This initiative was then shut down twice by the Chinese officials but after a protest march organized by the Stars group, the exhibition was finally held from the 23rd of November until December 2nd 1979. Ten years later, the emblematic *China/Avant-garde* exhibition in Beijing was held in 1989, which was also shut down twice. Then, another important exhibition would be held in Paris the same year. *Magiciens de la Terre* was one of the first, if not to say the first introduction of Chinese experimental art in the Euroamerican context, even though this survey was not exclusively on Chinese experimental art.

¹⁵ More on this topic in paragraph 3.4 titled *Chinese experimental art as the Other*.

¹⁶ *Magiciens de la Terre* curated by Jean-Hubert Martin was one of the first exhibitions to present non-Euroamerican art to a Euroamerican audience in a non-eurocentric way. The show of enormous proportions included one hundred artists, fifty from the so-called "centre countries" (Europe and the United States) and fifty from the "peripheric" continents such as Asia, Africa and Australia. One of the aims of this survey was to counteract the tendency of presenting artists according to their ethnic background and to interpret and perceive non-Euroamerican art as the Other. Even though the show was heavily criticized for portraying the non-Euroamerican artists as an exotic object of gazing (even though it precisely tried to achieve the contrary) *Magiciens de la Terre* has become a reference in art history as one of the first intents to display non-Euroamerican art in a non-exotic way within the Euroamerican context.

Another factor that influenced the upcoming of Chinese experimental art was the ending of the Cold War. Although the experts do not agree on the exact date, the Cold War ended more or less in the 1990s. This gave Chinese experimental art, seen in Euroamerican eyes as a repressed art coming from a communist country, a shot at the international art world and it might have been one of the factors contributing to its success. This interest for Chinese experimental art can be observed at the Venice Biennale held in 1993 to which fourteen Chinese artists were invited to present their works. It was the first time that so many Chinese artists were to participate in a mayor international art fair and the event hugely contributed to putting Chinese (experimental) art on the map of the mostly Euroamerican auction houses, art galleries and museums. China had been present at the Venice Biennale since the 1980s but had, at that time, represented its art through traditional arts and crafts which put Chinese art in a rather traditional and exotic light. The Venice Biennale of 1993 is considered the first time Chinese experimental art was presented at the Venice Biennale. This particular exhibition was organized by the curator Achille Bonito Oliva in coloboration with Francesca Dal Lago. *Passaggio a Oriente* included fourteen Chinese artists and was the largest group of Chinese experimental artists ever presented at the Venice Biennale. Since then, their evolution has been exponential. In 1999 the curator and Chinese art collector Harald Szeeman included twenty Chinese artists to partake in the Venice Biennale. In 2003 China inaugurated its first national pavillion at the Venice Biennale and in 2013 it has been said that Chinese art literally flooded the city of Venice: seven artists were invited to represent China at the Venice Biennale at the largest national pavillion present at the event. Moreover, more than 350 Chinese artists organized exhibitions throughout the city.¹⁷

Chinese experimental art is also unique as it first became successful outside of China before it did within its own national market and art circuits. Another factor that contributed to this unique phenomenon is the fact that the Chinese government was not as permissive as have been the governments in the Euroamerican nations. In China, this excessive control consequently made it necessary for some of the artists to go underground with their art. At certain times, there was no possibility of exhibiting their creations in public and therefore, to interact with society. This has made for a unique characteristic in which

¹⁷ See the article by Chinese experimental art expert Richard Vine in Art in America magazine: <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/a-chinese-biennale>, July 3 2013, date of last consultation: 2/11/2014. More references to the Venice Biennale of 1993 shall be made throughout this dissertation.

Chinese experimental art first became successful outside of China before it was acknowledged within mainland China. The writer Barbara Pollack explains:

Chinese artists were shoved, prominently and perhaps prematurely, on the world stage before they ever got a reception in their own country. They demonstrated an uncanny intuition about the kind of work that could be appreciated on that stage, reaching international audiences long before they had substantial support back home in China. (...) This is a history entirely unique to China, probably the only country whose art first achieved world acceptance before it was promoted by its own people. We are used to art histories specific to a geographical location and closely identified with it. Dutch masters, French impressionism, American Pop Art. All of these movements evolved in a particular national setting and time period.¹⁸

As can be seen by this brief introduction, Chinese experimental art is highly complex and should be understood and regarded on its own terms. This first theoretic section intends to provide this essential background information that should be kept in mind when it comes to the interpretation of Chinese experimental art.

¹⁸ POLLACK Barbara, *West goes East – A new generation of Asian artists has become a force in the international art market*, *Artnews*, March 1997, p. 86-87.

1.1 The Avant-garde

"I don't think it's worth discussing new directions in the context of Chinese art – there were no old directions, either. Chinese art has never had any clear orientation."¹⁹

¹⁹ Ai Weiwei, *China's art world does not exist*, The Guardian, 10 September 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/sep/10/ai-weiwei-china-art-world>. Date of last consultation: 09/06/2014.

Euroamerican as well as Chinese art critics often speak of the Chinese experimental artists as the Chinese avant-garde but what do we understand by this definition? The question seems simple but the answer is complicated. Critics and artists do not always agree on the term and explain the concept differently. Moreover, the word “avant-garde” is conflictive in itself as the origin of the definition lies in Euroamerican art history. Can this definition then be applied to Chinese experimental art?

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Chinese art has followed a different trajectory than Euroamerican art due to its unique political, historical and cultural background. Is it therefore “accurate” to resort to Euroamerican concepts such as “contemporary” or “avant-garde” in order to define Chinese experimental art? Would it not be more precise to employ a unique term to define the Chinese experimental art movement that would take into account this particular Chinese context that clearly differentiates Chinese experimental art from Euroamerican art history? The art historian and curator Gao Minglu²⁰ explains:

Terms as ‘avant-garde’, ‘modern’, ‘post-modern’, have different meanings in the West than they have in Chinese. In Chinese they don’t refer to a historical period but to the spirit of the times. The question is raised: can one define Chinese avant-garde only in terms of the standard Western model of avant-garde? Looking at Chinese modern and contemporary art from this perspective, we may find that it has never been motivated by aesthetic-autonomy, nor has it been seen as a means for expressing alienation and isolation from society. Rather, art in China has always been considered a way of totalizing human society and integrating aesthetics and politics together. One could say that concern for the well-being of the people in one’s social environment has been a consistent and integral concern of the Chinese avant-garde. Only in the late 1990s, with the arrival of the ‘Museum Age’, did this concern begin to fade.²¹

Here, Gao Minglu touches upon essential points within Chinese experimental art. Firstly, he poses the question if Chinese experimental art should be defined according to Euroamerican standards and art vocabulary. This is one of the “problems” that non-Euroamerican art has to battle with when acting within the international art scene. This point shall be further elaborated upon within paragraph 3.1 titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*.

Secondly, Gao Minglu compares the perception of time within Euroamerican and Chinese art. As he mentions, Chinese experimental art is not the result of a chronological passing of time but it is a reflection of the “spirit of the times”. Euroamerican art currents have

²⁰ Gao Minglu was also one of the curators of the emblematic exhibition *China/ Avant-Garde* held in 1989 in Beijing.

²¹ GAO Minglu, *The Wall- Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art*, exhibition catalogue, The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy and the Millennium Art Museum, Shenzhen, 2005, p. 47.

mostly followed each other up in a chronological order, some movements being the consequence of a previous art movement. In China however, due to the particular and unique historical events and due to their own cultural heritage, Chinese art did not develop following this chronological order of art movements and this is what sets Chinese art apart from Euroamerican art.

In China as well as in the “West”, different art periods such as the avant-garde movement have been the consequence of historical events that are unique to a nation. In the case of the Chinese avant-garde, the current is closely related to the historical events that occurred in China and not the consequence of what was going on in Europe or the United States. Therefore it is a unique art current, tightly intertwined with Chinese history. Although Euroamerican art hugely inspired the Chinese art of the early twenties and thirties and then again in the eighties and nineties,²² in no case can it be considered a continuation of it, nor is it an art current that developed parallel to Euroamerican art. The evolution of the Chinese avant-garde has taken place in a different historical and geographical context and this makes Euroamerican and Chinese art quite incomparable. Considering the differences between the Chinese and “western” avant-garde, the question remains: should a period of time from “western” art history define a Chinese art current? Would it not be better to define it according to its own standards and historical background?

Taking a closer look at the historical background of Chinese experimental art, already in the early twenties and thirties some of the Chinese artists were granted the opportunity to study art in Europe, especially in Paris. While some of these artists decided to stay, others returned to the mainland and shared their acquired knowledge on the arts with their students and fellow artists back home. Shortly after, during the long years of Mao Zedong’s reign, China was closed off from the outside world for many decades. Yet, in the late 1970s, after the decease of Mao and when Deng Xiaoping took over and implemented his “Open Doors” policy, the Chinese artists again re-established contacts with the outside world. An important event that took place during this period of “opening up” was the 1985 Robert Rauschenberg exhibition that was held at the Beijing National Gallery. It was the first exhibition of an American artist to be held in China after fifty years of Chinese isolation. Rauschenberg’s ready-made objects and installation works had a

²² Here it should be stated that in the early decades of the 20th century, the university of Paris and the university of Beijing had a good contact and Chinese art students were sometimes granted the opportunity to study in Paris which provided them with knowledge on Euroamerican art which they then often took back with them to China. In some cases, they decided to stay in Europe, becoming overseas artists in the 1940s.

huge impact on the Chinese artists and many of the currently most well known Chinese experimental artists have mentioned that they were enormously inspired by his works. The artists were also stimulated by other Euroamerican art currents and artists of which they had not known about until then such as Pop art, Duchamp or Dada.²³ It was especially during the eighties that the Chinese artists went through decades of Euroamerican art history in a matter of a few years. Logically this avalanche of information had a big impact on their way of thinking and their art, and for many artists, incorporating Euroamerican art into their works was a way to break with the past: it offered them the possibility of creating a new kind of art that was not limited to and ruled by political propaganda.

The negative backlash of this has been that Euroamerican art critics often “accuse” the Chinese artists of copying Euroamerican art.²⁴ They often do not understand or are not aware of the underlying reasons why the Chinese artists resort to Euroamerican contemporary art within their creations. Also from the mainland, critical voices of artists and curators have been raised who see these influences as “westernizing” Chinese art, and turning it into a commercial product or a brand, attractive for the international art market. Therefore, the Chinese experimental artists are confronted with this dilemma: How to open up new doors for the Chinese experimental art world by integrating what is considered “Euroamerican” art styles yet without losing one’s own identity? How to incorporate the undeniable western influence into Chinese experimental art without changing its (Chinese) identity?²⁵

The fact that Chinese experimental art is titled avant-garde is only one of the signs of this existing struggle against the “westernization” of Chinese experimental art. But it seems that the artists are slowly finding their way out of this situation. The infatuation with Euroamerican art from the 1980s is slowly making place for a reevaluation and reappraisal of the own cultural and artistic heritage, and Chinese artists are going back to their roots in order to discover new possibilities for the Chinese experimental art world. The fact that Chinese artists have looked into their own cultural and artistic heritage and have been inspired by it once again results in a unique combination of past and present

²³ An example of the influence of Dada can be clearly seen in the artist Huang Yongping, now living in France, who in 1986 founded the art movement Xiamen Dada while still in China. The name of the movement pays tribute to his hometown, Xiamen, and the Dada art movement that hugely inspired the artist. This is also partly due to the fact that France and China, as explained in the previous pages, has a history of interchange that originates from the early 1920 and 1930s.

²⁴ See paragraph 3.4 titled *Chinese experimental art as the Other* and also the analyses of the exhibitions made in Block II.

²⁵ This then also becomes a recurrent topic within the exhibitions that present Chinese experimental art in the Euroamerican context. See Block II.

which is singular to Chinese art and which makes it unmistakably different from Euroamerican art currents.²⁶

Currently in the twenty-first century, Chinese experimental art still struggles to be evaluated and interpreted on its own terms,²⁷ as it also continues to battle exoticism and the sometimes orientalist view that seems to linger within the Euroamerican art world. However, Euroamerican art is no longer seen as the one and only role model or the saviour of the future of Chinese art but is more and more seen as an equal and a partner to dialogue with. The Chinese artists no longer see themselves as secondary or inferior to Euroamerican culture and a new appreciation has appeared for Chinese tradition. In the words of the curator Fei Dawei: “Chinese artists in the 1980s, although inspired by new ideas from the West, had begun to write their own story, and this was the real beginning of Chinese contemporary art.”²⁸

It should also be taken into account that a new generation of Chinese artists are arriving at the global art scene and these young artists are an active part of the current art movements in China and abroad. Although this generation is also considered part of the Chinese avant-garde, they distinguish themselves from the previous generation of avant-garde artists. Their focus lies on different topics, often non-political, as they have grown up in another time and environment. The art critic Barbara Pollack comments:

Here is a generation of artists (...) those born in the 1980s, with only the sketchiest knowledge of China's repressive past. They have grown up with the upswing in the Chinese economy, learning nothing about the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square in school, watching Japanese Astro Boy cartoons on television and traveling with their parents to Europe and the United States. Their comfort and privileges are reflected in their art appropriations of video games and cartoons with very little underlying tension. (...). If these artists are rebelling against anything, it's the somber tone of the post-Tiananmen Square generation of painters, Cynical Realist artists like Zhang Xiaogang with his solemn faced subjects and monotone palette.²⁹

²⁶ According to professor Eva Fernández del Campo this revaluation of the traditional arts within Chinese experimental art is also a way of rebelling against foreign impositions: “(...) in China during the 20th century, the use of tradition by some artists has often not been in an accommodative way, nor has it been a nostalgic look at the past, but in the contrary, a way of rebelling primarily against foreign impositions that, especially with the Japanese occupation, removed all trace of optimism regarding foreign goodwill, and second, also, as a form of rebellion against the communist regime and against the Cultural Revolution, which banned and persecuted the expression of the past.” FERNANDEZ DEL CAMPO Eva, *Some reflections on the emergence of art in China into the contemporary scene*. Art in China. 2011-12, winter issue 4, p. 113.

²⁷ As shall become clear in Block II in which some of the exhibitions on Chinese experimental art shall be analysed. See also paragraph 3.1 titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*.

²⁸ Fei Dawei in author unknown, *Chinese contemporary art scene reviews evolution*, Xinhua News Agency December 20, 2007.

²⁹ POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 177.

One of the artists belonging to the new generation is Liu Di (1985) who is mostly known for his *Animal Regulation Series* (Fig.1). Here, he explores the different ways in which one can perceive reality by manipulating digital photographs. With *Animal Regulation* (2008-), Liu Di explores the relation between the natural world and urban society, and the way both are radically changing in our current day:

Liu Di got the idea for his bizarre *Animal Regulation series* (2008) on a bus ride through the crowded suburbs of Beijing. "Looking out at the decrepit housing blocks, I had a vague but strong feeling that there was something missing between the ground and the sky", he recalls. He felt the urge to add something that would make people take a fresh, long look at these familiar scenes. The extra thing should be "powerful and impossible to ignore, but not something that would make people panic...Eventually I decided it should be a huge animal." Using photo editing software, he repositioned a panda, a rhinoceros, a monkey, a rabbit and a frog and inserted them at gigantic scale into shabby urban settings. By shoehorning these bottom-heavy beasts into back streets, construction sites and tenement courtyards, he highlights the relationships "between nature and human society, between the material world and the intellect, between obedience to and violation of the laws of nature." It is only when our preconceptions are jolted, Liu Di concludes, that 'we wake up and truly see.'³⁰

This new generation of artists, born in the 1980s and 1990s have a different perspective on Chinese society and the world in general and, as explained Barbara Pollack in the previous quote, the environment in which they grew up is completely different from the artists who are studied within this study that were born in the 1960s. Some of them first handedly experienced the Cultural Revolution or were Red Guards themselves. Many of them were members of the Stars group or the '85 New Wave, and they form the first generation of Chinese experimental artists to promote experimental art within China as well as the first generation to enter the international art scene. Their life experience and their views on Chinese society are sometimes radically different from the way this new generation looks towards China and the world. Yet, although a new generation of Chinese avant-garde artists born in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Liu Di, are part of the Chinese experimental art scene, they share the stage with the previous generation and groups of experimental artists from China born in the 1960s. The different generations within Chinese experimental art are often not distinguished and are usually included under the label "Chinese experimental artists". But the battles these two generations face are different as their cultural and historical background are as night and day. This puts in evidence that the term "avant-garde" not only remits to Euroamerican art history but also

³⁰ Taken from the website of the White Rabbit Gallery: <http://www.whiterabbitcollection.org/artists/liu-di-%E6%9F%B3%E8%BF%AA/>, n.d., date of last consultation 7/11/2014. According to their website: "The White Rabbit Gallery opened in 2009 to showcase what has become one of the world's most significant collections of Chinese contemporary art. Dedicated to works made in the 21st century, the White Rabbit Collection is owned by Judith Neilson, who was inspired to establish it on a 2001 trip to Beijing." <http://www.whiterabbitcollection.org/the-gallery/about>, n.d., date of last consultation 7/11/2014

results to be too all encompassing, and too generalizing a definition for the immensely complex world of Chinese experimental art.



Figure 1: Liu Di, *Animal Regulation No. 7*, and *No. 4* (2010)

This paragraph has tried to make it clear that the term Chinese avant-garde is in fact a problematic, highly complex definition. First of all because the term unjustifiably links Chinese experimental art to Euroamerican art history and does not consider the particular and unique historical, political and cultural background in which Chinese experimental art developed and flourished. By applying the definition of avant-garde to Chinese art, it also emphasizes its “westernization”, which in fact is an erroneous interpretation of this art that the Chinese artists have been struggling against for years. It is true that Chinese experimental art was greatly inspired by Euroamerican art currents and artists in the 1980s however, in the 1990s and the 2000s, these artists have long-passed their “adolescent” infatuation.

The second drawback with the term avant-garde is that the definition does not differentiate the various generations of avant-garde artists that are currently active in and outside of China. In Euroamerica, the Chinese avant-garde is seen as a homogeneous group, often with a preference for the “older generation” of Chinese experimental artists, when in fact it is formed by different generations of artists that do not have the same outlook on China and the world.

Definitions that are currently used to define the Chinese experimental artists such as “contemporary” or “avant-garde” have all become part of the mainstream art vocabulary.

Even though they might not be the most accurate terms to define Chinese experimental art, its use has been widely accepted. Some critics, such as Wu Hung, prefer the term “experimental art”³¹ which seems to be a more proper definition as the “western” art world has not known an art current with the same appellation. This makes it unique to Chinese art and its evolution, and makes it possible to consider it independently from Euroamerican art history. Also, the term “experimental” does justice to the initial period of Chinese “contemporary” art when the artists were literally experimenting in order to create new possibilities for their art, combining Euroamerican influences with their own Chinese roots. It is for these reasons that it has been considered more accurate to use the term “experimental” rather than “Chinese contemporary art” or “Chinese avant-garde art” throughout this dissertation.

³¹ See for example the title of *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*, Wu Hung, exhibition catalogue, 2000. Within this catalogue he also explains why he prefers the use of “experimental” instead of “avant-garde”. See p.11-19.

1.2 The “East-West” binary

“Comparisons between Orient and Occident can only be made with utmost caution and based on a true understanding and true appreciation of one another.”³²

³² “Las comparaciones entre Oriente y Occidente solamente pueden hacerse con la máxima cautela y partiendo de una verdadera comprensión y una verdadera apreciación de uno a otro.” DAWSON Raymond, *El camaleón chino*, original title: *The Chinese Chamaleon. An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization*, translated by Fernando Calleja, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1970, p. 119.

A lot has been written over the centuries about the “East” and the “West”, and the relationship between the two. This is not the place to elaborate extensively on the matter, as this dissertation is not about this topic alone. Nonetheless, it has been considered important to dedicate a paragraph to the concept of the “East” and the “West” as they are recurrent within this study.

“East” and “West”, like the definition of “avant-garde”, are two highly problematic terms and it is not always clear what is understood when speaking of them. It could be questioned if the “East” and the “West”, “Orient” and “Occident” are still valid definitions for two parts of the world that are no longer as divided as they used to be. That is if they ever existed at all. In the twenty-first century, the frontiers between “East” and “West” have become blurred and one could argue if countries, like for example Japan or China, are still part of the “Orient” or if they have shifted, technology-wise, economically, and culturally, towards the “West”. Therefore, the employment of the terms “East” and “West” within this dissertation, just like the definitions “Chinese avant-garde” or “Chinese contemporary art”, has to be questioned, further explained and justified.

In a way, the “East-West” binary could be seen as a system that separates the first world, i.e. Europe and the United States, from the third world. But the strict separation between the first and the third world, “West” and non-“West”, has become less obvious as countries, cultures, and people influence each other every single day. Also, what used to be considered the heart of “western” culture, Europe, has slowly shifted across the Atlantic Ocean towards the United States, as its cultural and economical influence on the world has significantly decreased. So, not only have the frontiers *between* “East” and “West” been shifting, the borders *within* what is considered the “West” have been shifting as well. If “East” and “West” do exist, they should be considered flexible entities and should not be understood in a rigid, static way. This static relation between and within “East” and “West” in an interconnected and rapidly changing world seems to point to the fact that these definitions that divide the world in two have become rather out-dated.

Although our lives are in constant contact with a global world, it seems that the “East-West” dichotomy has been kept intact and that it is still very common to divide the world according to these two halves. Not so much anymore in the academic world but more especially in the media and also within the art world. A reason for this could be the insecurity of the “West” as it is facing an upcoming and progressing “East”. The Other, in

this case the upcoming “East”, generates a questioning of one’s own values or might even provoke the change of these. It is natural to believe that one’s own values and points of view are “normal” and valid. In some cases, and especially in the “West”, they are believed to be the *only* acceptable ones. Therefore, other points of view will be considered strange or a threat to one’s own beliefs, and this is when barriers are put up to create a distance between the Other and the Self. Orientalism and exoticism are two ways among many to achieve this.

It has been said that the “Orient” and orientalism are a Euroamerican creation, better said an Anglo-French one. They were coined in order to define the Other and to separate it from the Self. Therefore, the “East-West” binary is a *man-made* separating mechanism: the world was not divided into “East” and “West” naturally. Proof of this is that the “East” and the “West” changes according to where one is situated geographically. “East” and “West” is, as the professor of Art History Hsyinyuan Tsao has written, a “hangover of colonialism”³³ that originates from the necessity of the European countries to remain superior and to reign over the inferior colonies. A time when Europe wanted to be perceived as the leader of the world that had to transmit European values of “progress” to other, more “fallen-behind” nations, usually non-“western”. One forgets, especially in Europe, that the “East” has been highly advanced for centuries and that it has brought great knowledge to Europe. China is an excellent example of this.

Another problem when speaking of “East” and “West” is that the terms are too simplified. The “East” includes vast nations, individually highly complex culturally and historically, such as India, China, Japan, Korea, etc. These countries do not have a lot in common if one takes a closer look. The “West” is confronted with the same problem when nations such as France, the UK, the United States and Canada are lumped together into one single “West”. We speak of Europe as a vast unity, however every country that forms it has its own unique history and characteristics. These generalizing concepts do not do justice to the individuality of every country, its tradition, its culture and its population. So, it seems that the concepts of “East” and “West” are not meant to realistically describe the world but that they are employed to stereotypically differentiate and classify what is considered modern and traditional, first world and third world, progress and backwardness. For the superior Euroamerica, it is a strategy to distinguish itself from the

³³ TSAO Hsyinyuan; Ames Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p. 148.

inferior non-Euroamerican even though the foundations that sustain this binary system seem to be lacking.

What has happened in the arts is quite a similar process. Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica is usually perceived as exotic and with an air of orientalism.³⁴ In most occasions it is clearly defined and emphasized as non-Euroamerican art, and in general there has not been much understanding or the will to comprehend this art on its own terms. Customarily, Chinese experimental art is interpreted through Euroamerican references and art vocabulary which seems to be universally applied within the international art world.³⁵ A clear example of this is when Chinese experimental art is defined as Chinese “avant-garde” or Chinese “contemporary” art, as seen in the previous paragraph. This is an indication of the hegemonic power that Euroamerica still maintains in our global world and especially in the art world. As the art and culture critic David Carrier mentioned quite recently: “Today in China, art history writing is based upon Western models, a situation that depends, of course, upon the political balance of power.”³⁶ And in the words of the overseas artist Gu Wenda: “If China had been the strongest after World War II, artists of the West would use my language and not I theirs.”³⁷

Although the global art scene is assumed to be international with a participation of “western” as well as non-“western” artists, in reality it is a place where the “East-West” binary can still be felt. There is a clear distinction between the way “eastern” and “western” art are presented at exhibitions, for example, and the way they are interpreted by art critics.³⁸ The perception of non-Euroamerican art, and especially Chinese art in this “global” art world as exotic is a sign of this inequality and also points to the fact that the art scene is not as international as it makes believe. It is as the artist Yang Feiyun mentioned in an article by the writer Andrew Solomon: “When West and East meet, art does have limits.”³⁹

³⁴ See chapter 3 of the theoretic part about the reception of Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica.

³⁵ See paragraph 3.1 titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*.

³⁶ CARRIER David, *Chinese Art: How Different Could It Be From Western Painting?*, History and Theory volume 51, issue 1, p. 116-122, February 2012, Wesleyan University, p. 120.

³⁷ Gu Wenda in SOLOMON Andrew, *Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China*, The New York Times, December 19, 1993. For the full article, see: <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/19/magazine/their-irony-humor-and-art-can-save-china.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>. Date of last consultation: 18/8/2014.

³⁸ See chapter 3 of the theoretic part and also the reviews analyzed in Block II.

³⁹ YANG Feiyun in SOLOMON Andrew, *Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China*, The New York Times, December 19, 1993.

Even though the existence of an “East-West” binary seems to be evident, especially outside of the academic world, what is occurring now is a shift in the power-balance between the “East” and the “West”. As has been mentioned previously, in the 19th century the main influence came from European countries, and in the 20th century this power shifted over the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. Now, in the twenty-first century, the process is shifting once again. China is spoken of as the nation of the future, the economic power that will soon take over from the United States as the main leader on a global scale. Also in the arts, eyes have been directed towards China, and Chinese experimental art has become hugely successful in Euroamerica, especially booming in the last two decades. Also, “Asia” has become one of the main buyers of Chinese experimental art with Sotheby’s Hong Kong as one of the leading references when it comes to the auctioning of this type of art.⁴⁰

Yet, maybe the point is not to decide who is influencing who. The question that really should be asked is whether this binary system has become out-dated and if it will cease to exist in order to make place for a hybrid space that includes both “East” and “West”, in equal positions. Seen from a twenty-first century context in which the world is characterized by constant dynamic interconnectedness, this seems to be a logical outcome. Some of the Chinese experimental artists and curators who have left mainland China in the late eighties, beginning of the nineties, and have moved abroad, sometimes to Euroamerican countries, are starting to speak of this hybrid alternative space, also known as the third space.⁴¹ It was Homi K. Bhabha who coined the term in his book *The Location of Culture* published in 1994. Therefore, the concept is not new. Yet, two decades later, it is only on rare occasions that the third space is mentioned, and when it is, it is usually by non-Euroamerican art experts.

Chinese (experimental) artists are currently not widely acknowledged as individuals who are influencing the international art scene and who are easing it into an alternative system that goes beyond the strict separation of “East” and “West”. The problem lies in the fact that the international art world still retains aspects of Euroamerican-centricism. Even though post-colonial studies have tried, and in some occasions successfully reoriented the image of the orient within a Euroamerican context, non-Euroamerican art is still frequently perceived and evaluated according to Euroamerican standards and points of view that are

⁴⁰ More on this particular topic within the introduction to Block II.

⁴¹ See paragraph 2.4 titled *New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-Ground, and the In-between*.

universally applied to all arts and artists. Quoting the words of the professor Hsyngyuan Tsao: “As long as the ‘non-Western’ subject continues to be discussed within ‘Western’ narratives, the unbalanced political situation will never improve.”⁴² The artworks of the (overseas) Chinese artists is often perceived and understood from this Euroamerican point of view, also because there is no alternative model to be employed, and is therefore repeatedly misunderstood and misinterpreted. As long as non-Euroamerican art is not evaluated within its own terms, respecting its particular background, it will be very difficult for these artists to have an effect on the international art scene, and to implement an alternative, hybrid, third space.⁴³

The first thing that will have to change is the will to understand non-Euroamerican cultures on their own terms, and not from a limiting Euroamerican point of view. Even if in the art world this process is only in a very initial stage, this same process has already taken off outside of it. Due to global travelling, migrations, and highly advanced communication technologies, more and more people are getting in touch with other cultures that are not their own. This on its turn makes them more open-minded, seeing the world from a global perspective instead of a nationalistic, or strict “East-West” point of view. The Chinese experimental artists who live abroad are a great example of these travellers and migrants. Living abroad makes them true experts on hybridity and they usually become excellent interpreters of both cultures, as they are the personification of the fusion between “East” and “West”. On various occasions they have been described as bridges that overcome the separation between “East” and “West” and they are perceived as pioneers who can truly materialize this alternative space.⁴⁴ In the case of the (experimental) artists overseas, they become individuals who are “acculturated”⁴⁵ and who broaden their cultural horizon to include the culture, traditions, values, etc. of the adopted land. This overlapping of cultural horizons, which takes place ever more in our globalized world, is slowly breaking down the age-old “East-West” binary and as a consequence, alternatives to this system of opposites are naturally appearing as part of our new reality. This acculturation is an essential task for the future, as without it, no true understanding will be established among the different cultures of the world. Without this understanding the natural tendency is to

⁴² TSAO Hsyngyuan; Ames Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p.148.

⁴³ See paragraph 2.4 and 3.1 of Block I.

⁴⁴ See paragraph 2.4 of Block I titled *New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-ground, and the In-between*.

⁴⁵ GOLDEN Sean, *Orientalisms in East Asia. A Theoretical Model*, Inter Asia Papers, no. 12/2009, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, p. 1-22, p. 17-18.

cling to the “East-West” model out of fear for the Other. To quote the art critic David Carrier: “Developing a world art history, an account that does justice to Chinese and European art, is very difficult. But it is also very important, for unless we have an adequate picture of the other cultures, we cannot fully understand our own. And that is true as much for the West as for the Chinese.”⁴⁶

However, for an “adequate picture of the other cultures” to be established, one assumes that there is an interest or a will to do so, and that “East” and “West” are facing each other. What happens if one is ignoring the other or is not interested in really *seeing* the other? What seems to lie at the very core of the “East-West” binary are stereotypes and preconceived ideas that are not based on reality and which are signs of a lack of knowledge, and the fear of losing a power-struggle that is currently in favor of the Euroamerican nations. There is also an ancient old fear for the Other, for the unknown which makes the “West” cling to its separatist model. Presently, alternative models are not widely acknowledged and often fall on deaf ears. Yet, like David Carrier mentioned only four years ago, for the arts to be truly global, it is essential that these alternative spaces become a reality.

This dissertation questions the existence of “East” and “West” within a global twenty-first century in which the boundaries between the two are constantly shifting. “East” and “West” are, within this study, perceived as residues of the colonial times in which the “West” was considered superior to the “East”, but that now seems an out-dated model that no longer corresponds to current reality. This thesis encourages the questioning of the “East-West” dichotomy and strongly promotes the introduction of alternative models that go beyond this artificial separation. It is for this reason that quotation marks are used within this dissertation when referring to the terms “East” and “West”.

⁴⁶ CARRIER David, *Ernst Gombrich's Account of Chinese Painting*, NCU Journal of Art Studies 6, no. 5, p.1–30, 2010, p. 27.

1.3 Centre & Periphery

"It is time for the centre to be set in exile."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 53.

[Chen] Zhen: (...) [F]irst look at the global structural set-up of multiculturalism under this definition of 'Others'. Now imagine a picture in front of you: at the center of the picture is a big circle with lines connecting its perimeter and radiating outwardly in all directions. At the end of each of the radiating lines is a small circle. The big circle in the middle is of course where the concept of 'Others' was defined: i.e. the western world. All the surrounding small circles represent the 'Others' group: Asians, Africans, Latinos, middle easterners... Things couldn't be simpler here: each small circle on the outskirts is interested only in the big circle in the center. For many decades, you have heard such things as: China-West artistic exchanges. East-West cultural conflicts, black-white integration, white-black clashes, anti-West, challenging the West, anti-American, etc. (...) But how many artists, if any at all, I mean non-western artists, move among the small circles on the periphery? How many of them, if any at all, have taken an interest in the outer circle formed by the cluster of small circles? Why do we hear so rarely or see so rarely in the art world such things as 'inter-permeation between yellow and yellow', 'yellow-black exchange', or 'South-South dialogue'? In reality, the more you step on a piece of ground, the more solid that ground becomes. That is the law: 'whatever it is, the more you are opposed to it, the greater it becomes', and 'the more you criticize it, the more popular it becomes.' We therefore should often change our courses.

Zhu: Therefore, your strategy is to avoid the center?

Zhen: No. I want to change the picture entirely in my inner world. I want to eliminate the big circle, so that all are 'Others', and all cultures are 'Other cultures', including the white culture. Therefore we will have a 'multi-other world'. This is called 'among the colors'. The center will be left totally blank. This is my revision of the definition of 'Others'.⁴⁸

This paragraph has started out with a fragment of the book *Transexperiences* (1998) by the overseas artist Chen Zhen. It provides a graphical image that helps to understand the centre-periphery system. In a way, this system is quite similar to the "East-West" binary. If one compares the two, the "East" would be considered the periphery (and the Other) and the "West" the centre. The centre-periphery model can also be defined in a geographical way: the centre being the first world (Euroamerica) and the periphery all the remaining areas that are generally considered the third world. The system becomes more complex as within the centre, one can also distinguish a centre and a periphery. On a small scale, an example could be the city centre of Paris and the *banlieus* as its periphery. On a bigger scale, an example could be the "West" in which the United States can be seen as the centre and the periphery as, for example, Finland. What becomes clear is that the centre-periphery model, like the "East-West" binary, is a highly complex system as "East", "West", centre and periphery are dynamic entities that constantly change. They are hugely influenced by globalization, migration, travel, global economic fluxes, etc.: what is considered periphery today might be considered the centre tomorrow. It is for this reason that it becomes difficult to put a finger on these models and to find an adequate definition that takes into consideration their dynamic character. In fact, one of the problems of this model is that it could be alleged that the centre-periphery system does not take into account this dynamic aspect and is based on the assumption that centre and periphery are static entities that will not change over time.

⁴⁸ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

Although geographically seen the model seems clearly defined, in a globalized world it becomes more difficult to outline centre and periphery. Nowadays, the differences between “western” countries such as the United States or some of the European countries, and some of the most modern nations of the “East” have become considerably smaller. One could argue that Japan or China, for instance, no longer belong to the periphery and have become part of the centre due to its modernizations, economy, and modern technologies. As the centre is considered the “West” and periphery the “East”, its unclear and shifting boundaries imply that the “East-West” binary is also becoming more obscure. Japan, which is considered an “Eastern” country has maybe not entered the “West” geographically, but technology-wise it can be compared to the most advanced “western” nations.

The centre-periphery binary can also be seen from a rural versus urban perspective. In this case the city is considered the centre and the rural areas (which are often considered backward) are defined as the periphery. As the cultural historian Joep Leerssen mentions, the centre is then seen as a “locus of dynamism, modernity and innovation” while the rural areas are seen as “backward, slow-moving and bound up in timeless traditions”.⁴⁹ This representation can be extrapolated to the “East-West” dichotomy in which the “West” is seen as advanced and modern, while the “East” is seen as traditional and inferior. It thus becomes clear that periphery and centre are not only geographically determined but can be defined by other characteristics as well. One of these characteristics is power. As mentioned previously, the centre is often related to dynamic, modern areas which are advanced technologically and have a certain air of (cultural) sophistication to them. They are considered the heart of contemporary culture and progress. It is where culture is generated and where the energy is; it is the future. The periphery, on the other hand, is often seen as traditional, passive, backward, and related to the past. It is the land of the minorities, the primitive, and is often perceived as the land of the Other (or the non-“westerner”). In the same way, the expression of considering something “peripheral” means that it is considered unimportant while something or somebody who takes centre-stage or is in the centre is considered the main focus of attention.

Now that the “East-West” model and the centre-periphery system have been commented on, one could question how this model became an accepted and acknowledged reality?

⁴⁹ LEERSSSEN Joep; BELLER Manfred (ed.) *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*. A critical survey, Rodopi, the Netherlands, 2007, p. 280.

According to the art critic Hou Hanru, the centre-periphery model, like the “East-West” binary, is a man-made, “western”, creation founded on the axis of modern versus backward. He alleges that the term “modernity” is also a man-made, “western” construction and calls it a “purely Western product”.⁵⁰ The “West” started to develop a model based on the concept of “modern society”, which is perceived as positive and advanced, and applied the term to its own “western” countries. At the same time, the concept of “modern civilization” was (sometimes violently) implemented on the more traditional nations, known as the peripheries. This way the “West” created the centre-periphery dichotomy, while at the same time crafting a superior position for itself in respect to the inferior “not so modern” peripheries.⁵¹ Yet, like the “East-West” binary, the centre-periphery model should be questioned. Is the status quo still valid in the twenty-first century? China, which has long been considered the periphery, has rapidly advanced into one of the (most) important nations in the world. And it is not the only country of the “East” that has done so. Again, the maintenance of both models seems to be based on seeing “East” and “West”, centre and periphery as static entities that do not change over time. The reality is however that due to globalization, a growing economy in some regions of the world, and the advanced technology, these models are no longer sustainable. To not acknowledge that the status quo is changing and that these models are no longer justifiable is to turn a blind eye to the reality of the twenty-first century.

This reluctant “western” attitude to acknowledge a shift in the power status quo is clearly noticeable in the international art world. As for the Chinese experimental artists overseas, they are often considered Chinese, even if they have been living outside of China for years.⁵² In “western eyes”, China is clearly considered the “East”, the exotic Other, the Oriental and even the periphery due to its political system. Even though the “West” is not ready to admit that it is slowly losing its hegemonic position, the upcoming of non-“western”, peripheral countries proves that it has. The question that should consequently be posed is how to break these rigid binary models that no longer correspond to our current situation?

⁵⁰ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 13.

⁵¹ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 13.

⁵² On many occasions, the Chinese overseas artists are portrayed as *Chinese* artists. Rarely are they described as overseas artists within exhibition catalogues and especially reviews. This will become evident in Block II.

The art critic and curator Hou Hanru provides us with a possible solution. According to him, the answer lies outside of the binary systems as the hegemonic political, economical, and cultural power within the centre (Euroamerica) is still too strong and dominant within the world.⁵³ Therefore, shifts and changes will not be generated from within the centre itself but will have to come from the peripheries, from outside of the centre. Overseas artists, like Chen Zhen who was quoted at the beginning of this paragraph, play an important role as they act from outside of the centre. Due to their in-between position amid cultures and nations, these artists are slowly causing shifts and fissures within the “East-West” and centre-periphery systems. As they are living and working between centre and periphery, between “East” and “West”, their perception of the world changes and they no longer form part of these dichotomies but are able to live outside of the established systems and to provide new and hybrid alternatives that go beyond the dichotomy and beyond “western” hegemony. Recalling the words of Chen Zhen at the beginning of this paragraph, the solution does not lie in avoiding the centre, but in eliminating it to make all cultures equal and “Other”, to eliminate the man-made constructions of superiority and inferiority of cultures within a global world. A new system in which nor the centre nor the periphery occupies a central position. This way, the centre-periphery binary would automatically cease to exist. Artists and all people who are constantly moving between centre and periphery and who no longer identify with either of them can incite this radical shift. According to Hou Hanru, these are the people who “open themselves up to a kind of chaotic vision of the world”.⁵⁴

Although the shift seems logical, in our present time the centre-periphery binary, as traditional and out-dated as it seems, still has a tremendous influence on contemporary culture. It hugely influences our world perception and the way the world works. It is as if the world is rapidly advancing technologically yet our mindset is not evolving at the same speed and seems to be stuck in the past. This is where the (overseas) artists can play an important role in the changing of our world perception. Through their work, they are trying to “normalize” hybridity, in-betweenness and true interculturalism.⁵⁵ They are breaking down these rather colonial models of centre-periphery and “East” and “West”. In a way, they are opening our eyes to a reality which has been denied for too long and which has

⁵³ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 19.

⁵⁴ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 63.

⁵⁵ See the following paragraph.

been kept in place out of fear: fear of losing hegemonic power and fear for the unknown, the “Other”.

To end with the words of Hou Hanru: “Art has to be anarchic. It’s the place where one can challenge established values. What is great about working in art is how one has to continuously reinvent oneself and the process of deconstructing established power.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ HOU Hanru in STORR Robert, *Not only possible but also necessary: art in the present tense*, ArtAsiaPacific, issue 53, May/June 2007, p. 5.

1.4 Globalization

“Within the context of global space,
everybody is located in a transcultural position;
Evenwhile self and Other encounter each other,
both are simultaneously displaced.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ TSAO Hsyinyuan; Ames Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p. 27.

Globalization is a phenomenon that has become inseparable from the current times we live in. Travelling around the world, migrations, the incredibly fast telecommunications we use on an everyday basis are all part of our daily lives. It is no longer rare to live in a multicultural society in which the Other has become our next-door neighbour, or to become the Other ourselves when we travel abroad. Neither is it extraordinary to be in contact with people from around the globe or for the influence of other cultures to enter our homes and to change the way we live or how we see ourselves.

But globalisation has two sides. On the one hand, it makes it possible to get in touch with people who are different from ourselves, which on its turn makes us more open-minded as human beings. Learning about other cultures and having unlimited access to such diverse information from around the world is a privilege and it helps us explore our horizons and sometimes even cross them. However, globalization also has a negative side to it. Although it brings people closer together, it also emphasizes the differences between them. The scholar Allen Chun has mentioned that globalization can lead to the dissolution of national cultures and identities, as mass migration, diasporic identification, and deterritorialization have become daily phenomena to our current society. However, these migrations and globalizing forces might also have the contrary effect and harden existing boundaries, putting up even more fences between what is considered Self and national, and what is considered the Other and foreign.⁵⁸

Although globalization can lead to the dissolution of boundaries, in the art world a strict “East-West” separation seems to be maintained, as has been explained in the previous paragraphs.⁵⁹ Chinese artists are regularly seen and classified as “foreign” artists and are often invited because of their ethnic background. Those artists who want to take part in the international but Euroamerican-dominated art scene, will have to adapt to this hegemony and play by its rules.⁶⁰ This often puts them in the role of the Other, as a non-equal. In the previous paragraph it has been alleged that one of the important roles of the artists is to change colonial models of “East” and “West” separation, and systems based on superiority and inferiority however, within a Euroamerican-dominated domain, can their

⁵⁸ CHUN Allen, *Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity*, boundary 2, vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), p. 111-138, Duke University Press, p. 137.

⁵⁹ See also Block II in which some of the exhibitions on Chinese experimental art are analyzed.

⁶⁰ See paragraph 3.3 titled *Chineseness*.

voice be heard? Is there a real possibility of establishing a dialogue that might lead to changes and shifts within the power structure?

For the Chinese experimental artists to have a say within the international art world and for their works to become influential, first a change must occur in the way Chinese (experimental) art is perceived within Euroamerica.⁶¹ As shall become clear in the analyses of Block II of this dissertation and as has been explained in the introduction, in most cases, Chinese experimental art is not valued within its own terms but is understood from a Euroamerican perspective. Therefore, the question that should be asked is: can Chinese experimental art, being part of the international art world, be understood on its own terms, i.e. in a non-global way? The question is contradictory because were it not for globalization, Chinese experimental art might not have become as fashionable and as successful as it is now. So it seems that Chinese experimental art and globalization are inseparable. However, we cannot understand this art current from a “western”, “global” point of view as its characteristics are particular and should be comprehended and interpreted from a different viewpoint, be it Chinese or from an in-between, hybrid space that lies between “East” and “West”. Wu Hung comments on this contradiction:

We cannot simply expand the domestic context of contemporary Chinese art into a global one, because these two spheres are governed by different forces and present different problems. Neither can contemporary Chinese art be studied in complete isolation when we are living in a global world and time. It must be studied in the way it negotiates with these two areas and how it changes in response to different spaces and audiences, creating micronarratives in a global context.⁶²

Chinese experimental art is not, as is sometimes (unconsciously) assumed in the “West”, a continuation of “western” art history, as has been explained in the introduction. Living in a global world sometimes makes one think that everything is interconnected, even our national histories. It is almost impossible to interpret different cultures and artistic currents without resorting to one’s own point of view and cultural background. Trying to find familiarity or recognizable elements within the Other is an automatic reaction, as it makes it easier to identify and define the Other by moulding it into something more similar to what we are used to. The same occurs with Chinese experimental art. Especially Euroamerican art critics have a double perspective on Chinese (experimental) art. On the one hand, it is clearly seen as a non-Euroamerican art current when its elements of “Chineseness”⁶³ or

⁶¹ This topic will be addressed in chapter 3 of this theoretic part (Block I).

⁶² WU Hung, *Making History- Wu Hung on contemporary art*, Timezone 8, China, 2008, p. 20.

⁶³ See paragraph 3.3 titled *Chineseness*.

exoticism are underlined. On the other hand, critics often resort to Euroamerican art history, Greek mythology or European (religious) icons in order to interpret Chinese experimental art.⁶⁴

But Chinese experimental art has undergone a different evolution and comes from distinct roots. Euroamerican art history and Chinese art history, until recently, had not much in common and were not in constant contact with each other. Moreover, they have developed at different speeds and have manifested different artistic reactions to historical events that are unique to their nation. To use the words of art curator and professor Wu Hung,

Instead of assuming that contemporary art is linked with modern (and postmodern) art in a linear, temporal fashion and within a self-sustaining cultural system, it should emphasize heterogeneity and multiplicity in art production, as well as the creativity of a new kind of artist. This new artist creates contemporary art through simultaneously constructing his or her local identity and serving a global audience.⁶⁵

So again one is confronted between interpreting Chinese experimental art through a global, international perspective or by perceiving this art current as a local, individual art. Because, within a global context, what do we understand when we speak of “local”? Can the local continue to exist within the global, often homogenizing context? Can art be local and global at the same time, a phenomenon also known as glocal?

When it comes to the artists that are studied in this thesis, but also so many artists from all over the world, it can be observed that many of them try to “fight” homogenization by resorting to more local aspects of their art. This “local element” within their works makes it different, heterogenic. According to art professor Anna Maria Guasch,⁶⁶ a strategy that is often used by these artists is modesty. Modesty, in the sense of working from simplicity, is often employed as an effective tool against the homogenizing forces of globalization. Good examples of this modesty can be observed in, for example, *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (fig. 30 and 45) by Xu Bing. This particular installation took the artists more

⁶⁴ See chapter 3 of the theoretic part and especially Block II in which various art reviews of different exhibitions are analysed.

⁶⁵ WU Hung, *Making History- Wu Hung on contemporary art*, Timezone 8, China, 2008, p. 12.

⁶⁶ “La paradoja de este mundo globalizado en el que estamos sumergidos es que muchos artistas (...) intentan más que nunca ‘reinventar’ o establecer su ‘diferencia’ dentro de los galopantes procesos de homogeneización. De ahí la necesidad por parte de los artistas de ‘relocalizar’ prácticas más allá del modelo dominante, hacia un ‘inversión estética’ de lo modesto y lo frágil así como la noción del día a día de lo cotidiano. Esta idea de ‘modestia’ (...) formaliza desde la periferia una actitud de oposición a los trabajos de ‘altos valores’. GUASCH Anna Maria, *Nuevos episodios en la definición de la identidad. La interculturalidad entre lo global y lo local*, Revista Occidente, nº 333, febrero 2009, p. 63-74, p. 68

than six years to make, patiently and humbly engraving more than three thousand woodblocks with made-up characters. Another example could be the work of Shen Yuan titled *Un Matin du Monde* (1999) (Fig. 47) in which she created a replica of a Chinese traditional style rooftop, and placed herbs and duck on it to dry as was done customarily in the villages. *Un Matin du Monde* is an installation of a local, traditional Chinese rooftop which is then placed into the global, sometimes Euroamerican context of the museum. This on its turn transforms this work into a unique mixture of local and global. On a smaller scale, another good illustration of the modesty of these artists in order to resist homogenizing globalization is Song Dong's *Breathing* (1996) in which the artists melted the frost on the pavement of Tiananmen Square by breathing on it for a period of time, or the artist Lin Yilin who patiently "transports" a wall across a street, brick by brick (*Safely Maneuvering Across Lin He Road*, 1995). These are all examples of (little) actions that cause an impact and that in a very modest, local and personal way, even if just for an instant, cause an effect on the powerful, unstoppable globalizing forces. Or at least give the impression of doing so.

Coming back to Wu Hung's previous quote, global fluxes have engendered a new generation of artists that sometimes find themselves in between cultures and national identities, these "new kind of artists" of which Wu Hung speaks are far from being acknowledged in the "West". As mentioned before, Chinese experimental art is often compared to Euroamerican art in search of familiarity and recognizable elements that help the audience understand this different art current. This is a normal process however it should always be kept in mind that one is dealing with a different artistic expression with its own particular historical and cultural background. Chinese experimental artists are not usually seen as a "new kind of artists" making a new kind of art that is equal to (or as "good" as) Euroamerican art. This shall become clear in the analytical part of this thesis. Also, accepting and acknowledging that in some cases they work from an alternative space, for example a hybrid space between "East" and "West" also becomes very difficult and is usually not admitted.⁶⁷ And if mentioned, it is usually by non-Euroamerican theorists and art experts. Ironically, Chinese experimental artists interact in a global art scene but they are usually not considered global artists. An emphasis is put on the fact that they are Chinese, in a desperate attempt to identify who the Other is. As Wu Hung explains, exhibitions and publications on Chinese experimental art helped globalize this art and strongly contributed to its popularity however, these exhibitions were often held based on

⁶⁷ See paragraph 2.4 titled *New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-Ground and the In-between*.

the limited knowledge of the Euroamerican art curators and collectors and were often the result of their tastes and biases.⁶⁸ It is for this reason that, especially in the beginning, Chinese experimental art entered the global art scene but was not portrayed as an international, global art current but as a Chinese, and rather exotic art. And here is maybe where the main challenge of these artists lies. In this stage, they are not so much “fighting” for the acknowledgement of their hybrid identities or for Chinese experimental art to be seen as an autonomous art current, but they still seem to be stuck in a previous phase in which they are making enormous efforts for their art not to be considered exotic or “Chinese”. As long as their art is perceived within the international art scene as Chinese, the Other, and exotic, the second step towards the acknowledgement of hybrid identities and alternative models such as the in-between or the third space cannot take place.

Chinese experimental art is a heterogeneous art form and should be perceived and valued independently from Euroamerican art currents, artists, and art history. However, due to the fact that the international art world is still often ruled by Euroamerican hegemony, in some cases it is forced to adopt, or is simply pigeonholed into a stereotypical, homogeneous identity of “Chineseness”.⁶⁹ As Euroamerican art vocabulary is generally perceived as universal, all non-Euroamerican arts and artists are being valued and described according to this one and only language, as up to date there are hardly any alternatives.⁷⁰ Therefore, Chinese experimental art is often perceived as part or as a continuation of Euroamerican post-modern or contemporary art. It is as the critic and curator Lin Leng questions: maybe it is less relevant to know “what” it is that we are creating than focus on “what” it is that is creating us.⁷¹ In some cases, the Chinese experimental artists have no choice but to adapt to the forces, fears and necessities of the international art world. Non-Euroamerican artists acting in a global art scene will have to choose between succumbing to the hegemonic rules or not. Those who decide not to are the ones generating a shift in the power balance by creating alternative narratives and new (hybrid) spaces. They are in the process of implementing a new internationalism.

⁶⁸ WU Hung, *Making History- Wu Hung on contemporary art*, Timezone 8, China, 2008, p. 29.

⁶⁹ See paragraph 3.3 titled *Chineseness*.

⁷⁰ See paragraph 3.1 titled *Euroamerican art theory as universal art language*.

⁷¹ LIN Leng, “*The China Dream*”, *Chinese Type Contemporary art* – online magazine, vol. 1, issue 1, 1997. For the full article see: www.chinese-art.com/volume1issue1/feature.htm. Date of last consultation: 09/06/2014

These artists are creating a new model in which the nation-state culture is questioned. This happens by de-identifying, de-territorializing and especially de-centralizing. In the previous paragraphs, this study has extensively spoken of traditional binary models such as the “East-West” dichotomy or the centre-periphery system and it is here alleged that these models are out of date. In the academic world, this has been widely accepted and acknowledged however in the media and the arts these models seem to still linger. These artists that live and work in the in-between spaces and who no longer identify with a single nation-state culture are the ones who are changing the status quo. By questioning their own identity, they question the validity of the nation-state culture and the necessity of the centre within the centre-periphery model. Instead, they propose a de-centralizing and de-territorializing model that questions nation-state culture by opposing it with hybridity. In our global and hybrid world, a new generation of people are on the rise that is transnational. They might have been born in a multiracial family or maybe they will travel and work abroad for long periods of time. All these experiences affect their identity and the way they perceive the world. These transnational people also have the force to change the rigid, binary status quo that is still noticeable in society and within the art world.

But transnationality, like globalization, can lead to a homogenizing effect. If everybody is transnational, in the end we all become rather the same. Or not? In her article, art professor Anna Maria Guasch refers to Arjan Appadurai and mentions that the tension caused by globalization cannot be combatted by resistance but by interaction.⁷² As mentioned Chen Zhen at the beginning of paragraph 1.3 of this chapter, the solution does not lie in putting the periphery in a central position. This would only create a new centre and in the end, would maintain the centre-periphery system. The answer lies in an interaction, based on equality, between cultures. This way, one culture shall no longer be considered superior to another, and centre and periphery will cease to exist. The key is not to protect what is considered ours and to cling to the necessity of being able to identify the Other at all cost and all times. Because, rather than speaking of multicultural societies, maybe the time has come to speak of intercultural civilizations. The twenty-first century is a time of interculturality, of hybridity and of in-between “no-spaces”.⁷³ Multiculturalism, as

⁷² “Appadurai habla de una constante tensión entre lo local y lo global, tensión que no se resuelve ‘desde la resistencia’, sino desde la ‘interacción’ entre por un lado las tendencias que buscan la homogeización y las tendencias a interpretar de acuerdo con la tradición y cultura de cada lugar.” GUASCH Anna Maria, *Nuevos episodios en la definición de la identidad. La interculturalidad entre lo global y lo local*, Revista Occidente, nº 333, febrero 2009, p. 63-74, p. 69

⁷³ See paragraph 2.4 of this Block I.

has mentioned Anna Maria Guasch,⁷⁴ stands for multiple cultures that live together within society. There is not necessarily an interaction among these cultures. Multiculturalism can be seen as a system of tolerance and, as has mentioned Jimmie Durham in Anna Maria Guasch, it can also be a mere strategy of the “West” to, once again, take possession of the minority cultures.⁷⁵

However, interculturalism implies interaction among cultures, and mutual influences. It means *exchanging* values, traditions, and ideas among equals. And it is most probably within this intercultural context that the overseas artists that are here studied act, live and work. Yet interaction is a two-way road. In order for their works and ideas to change the binary status quo that sometimes can still be noticed within the global art scene, it is necessary that there is a response from the audience, be it the curator, the art critic or the spectator. Without the opening-up of the audience, interculturality cannot take place and the result is a multicultural society in which cultures coexist and are tolerated more than appreciated as partners.

⁷⁴ GUASCH Anna Maria, *Nuevos episodios en la definición de la identidad. La interculturalidad entre lo global y lo local*, Revista Occidente, nº 333, febrero 2009, p. 63-74, p. 67

⁷⁵ Jimmie Durham in Anna Maria Guasch: “multiculturalismo (...) como un mero eslogan, una estrategia de Occidente para apropiarse de las culturas minoritarias.” GUASCH Anna Maria, *El espectáculo del Mercado. Entre dos caídas. Del multicultural a la mundialización del arte*, Revista Occidente nº 309, febrero 2007, p. 33-44, p. 39. Original quote from Jimmie Durham, *A Certain Lack of Coherence*, y Carlos Vidal, *El multiculturalismo por inversión*, Lápiz, 118-119, enero-febrero 1996, p. 128-135

Conclusion

This first section of the dissertation has tried to address certain aspects that should be taken into account when dealing with non-Euroamerican art, in this case Chinese experimental art overseas. The international art world moves and acts within a global context, yet contradictorily, it still sometimes seems to cling to out-dated models such as the “East-West” dichotomy, exoticism and orientalism. Also the hegemonic, dominant position of Euroamerica within the art scene is clearly noticeable. As explained in paragraph 1.1, the fact that Chinese experimental art is often referred to as the Chinese avant-garde or Chinese contemporary art is a sign of the universal application of Euroamerican artistic language within the global art world.

The globalizing forces that permeate into the international art scene bring different cultures and artistic currents together on a global scale. This has various consequences. Firstly, it can homogenize all currents, especially when the (non-Euroamerican) artists decide to succumb to the Euroamerican necessity of identifying the Other in order to preserve the Self. When this happens, Chinese artists fulfil the Euroamerican need to see Chinese art that can be easily identified as Other and exotic. On the other hand, some artists try to maintain their own identity, be it “Chinese” or hybrid, by resorting to local elements hereby underlining differences among cultures or creating alternative, in-between spaces. Yet, as mentioned in paragraph 1.4, homogenization is more effectively “combated” by interaction than resistance. Yet, in the twenty-first century that we are currently living in, can we truly speak of an intercultural society or world? It could be alleged that we have not yet arrived at this rather advanced stage of civilization and that we are still lingering in times of multiculturalism. Difference is tolerated yet the step that goes beyond this initial phase has not yet been made. True interculturalism implies interaction, it implies open-mindedness, it implies the lowering of one’s own boundaries and the walls that protect the Self and what is falsely considered the nation-state culture.

In the next part of this theoretic Block, in Section II, a closer look shall be taken at the overseas artists and the concepts that are essential in order to “correctly” understand and interpret their artworks. The last part of Section II will continue where it has been left off here, and shall dig deeper into the creation of these alternative spaces such as the New Internationalism, the third space, the in-between and the Mid-Ground.

SECTION II: CHINESE ARTISTS OVERSEAS

Introduction

Concepts such as diaspora, transexperiences and the unhomely are vital in the world of the overseas (Chinese) artists as it often explains the reasons for their work and the way they express themselves. This chapter is divided into four paragraphs that explain what these concepts mean and how they influence the lives of the overseas artists. These paragraphs can be seen as a cycle that starts from the Chinese experimental artists overseas being labelled as “exile” or “diaspora”, then explains the process of transexperiences that often leads to a feeling of displacement and disorientation (“unhomely”), to end the cycle on the other side by the artists identifying with new and alternatives spaces like the third space.

2.1 Diaspora & Exile

2.2 The dynamics of transexperiences

2.3 The Unhomely

2.4 New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-Ground, and the In-between

Nowadays, in the global society we live in, it is not strange anymore for one to feel displaced or to feel like living in two, three, or more places at the same time. Travelling around the world, working in a foreign country, studying abroad or emigrating to somewhere else are all events that are nothing out of the extraordinary in our current society. What separates the “normal” traveler or migrator from the overseas artist is that the latter has the gift of expressing the experience of moving away and leaving behind one’s homeland through art. This, on its turn, helps us understand the experience as well, or, if we have indeed lived through it, to give a voice to that what we are not capable of putting into words or images.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that one should always be careful when categorizing persons into (specific) groups, as it does no justice to the uniqueness of every individual. Nevertheless, for the benefit of achieving a better understanding of the works and lives of the overseas artists, here it has been considered a necessary and unavoidable procedure.

2.1 Diaspora & Exile

“A culture is always a palace and a prison.
I – the migrant – must deal with questions of being inside or out.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ TAN Fiona, *May you live in interesting times*, video in colour, 60 minutes, 1997

Chinese overseas artists are often referred to as “diaspora” artists or, especially in Euroamerica, as “exile” artists. As shall become clear in this paragraph these two terms should be used with precaution or maybe should not be applied at all to the overseas Chinese artists.

To start, the word exile should be defined. Exiles are those who are involuntarily placed out of their home country. It is as the post-colonialist theorist Edward Said explains: “Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, (...). Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider.”⁷⁷ In the case of the Chinese experimental artists that *decided* to leave China and to settle in other countries, their choice was made voluntarily, although in some cases the decision was motivated by a lack of freedom and opportunities within China. However, in no case were they banned by an external entity.

As the definition seems clear, why is it that there seems to be confusion about the term exile? Why are the Chinese overseas artists sometimes defined as such when it is clearly not the case? There are different reasons for this. One of them is that some artists have described themselves as exiles. The other comes from the fact that the “West” uses the term “exile” as a label to make the Chinese experimental artists and their art more interesting, giving the impression that the overseas artists are being suppressed in their home country. According to Hou Hanru, portraying the Chinese artists as exile artists is yet another strategy of defining the Other which is, as has been explained in the previous section, one of the necessities of “western” society. These artists are labelled “exile” to satisfy this need for othering and are also often encouraged to invent a kind of “exile art” which places the emphasis on their own cultural identities and personal experiences. Being an “exile” also puts political emphasis on these artists and satisfies the Euroamerican image of China as being a nation of suppression and lack of freedom. According to Hou, exile hereby becomes a way to participate within the international art market and to gain commercial power.⁷⁸ Playing the “exile card” might be beneficial for a lot of these artists, but on the other hand, most of the Chinese artists would prefer to express themselves freely, without being stereotyped or having to pretend to be exiles,

⁷⁷ SAID Edward, *Reflections on Exile*, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Convergences: Inventories of the Present), Harvard University Press, October 8 2002, p. 137-149, p. 144.

⁷⁸ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 117.

which they are not. In a way, the label “exile” that is put on the overseas artists then becomes a limitation to them, forcing them into the box of the Other.

The fact that Chinese artists overseas are compelled to adopt the role of the Other within the international art world is a recurrent phenomenon.⁷⁹ The term exile is an example of this and has been used, sometimes by the artists themselves, to define Chinese experimental artists in Euroamerica although the strict definition of the word exile cannot be applied to them. In an interview by the art curator Marianne Brouwer, Ni Haifeng, a Chinese artist living in Amsterdam, stated:

Today, so many people want to hold on to an identity to prove their ‘being’. The notion of ‘exile’ functions the same way. That is a trap. It presumes a defined tradition maybe even homesickness. I’m not homesick but I always think of an ‘elsewhere’ an invented or an imaginary home. I regard exile as a voluntary escape from a fixed place and a process of becoming something new. Creating a zero moment in your life.⁸⁰

Ni Haifeng considers the fact of being displaced, or the desire to always be somewhere else as “exile”. Actually, what he says is quite the contrary of what exile originally meant: “I regard exile as a *voluntary* escape from a fixed place (...)” [author’s emphasis]. Strictly speaking, he cannot apply the concept of exile to these particular feelings as it implies the word “voluntary”.

What seems to be the case is that in the context of the twenty-first century the meaning of exile has changed. Its original denotation might have become obsolete and have been substituted for a more up-dated definition, adapted to the current times. This hypothesis has been confirmed by Hou Hanru as he himself mentions that exile has transformed into a term that indicates to “transgress all established borders and legal systems, and to live a kind of in-between life”.⁸¹ Therefore, the term exile has lost its original meaning of being banished and as has become, as described by Ni Haifeng, a synonym for living a global life, of feeling at home everywhere and nowhere, and to have the desire to always be somewhere else. It seems thus that the word exile has been transformed into a concept which can be applied to the twenty-first century traveller or émigré: a somewhat positive term to describe the modern individual who is constantly on the move. It might even relate

⁷⁹ See chapter 3.4 of Block I.

⁸⁰ BROUWER Marianne, *A Zero Degree of Writing and Other Subversive Moments – An interview with Ni Haifeng*, n.d. See Ni Haifeng’s homepage: <http://haifeng.home.xs4all.nl/h-text-1.htm>. Date of last consultation: 11/06/2014.

⁸¹ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 117.

to the description which is sometimes given by people who define themselves as “citizens of the world”: belonging to no place in particular and all places in general.

This positive twist in the definition of exile is also described by the literary theorist Edward Said who has spoken of the “pleasure of exile” and defined it as “seeing the entire world as a foreign land”.⁸² He also comments on the fact that being an exile is in fact a privilege as it permits to become familiar with more than one culture, which leads to a plurality and originality of vision.⁸³ This in-between and privileged position of seeing the world from multiple perspectives is very characteristic for the overseas artists who often integrate these plural perspectives within their work. However, when their art is described as “exile art” in the “West”, it is mostly the old definition of exile that is intended, not the updated version. Chinese experimental art is more likely to be seen from the political definition of exile, than the global up-dated one.

As to diaspora, although the terms diaspora and exile are often used indistinctly to describe the overseas Chinese artists, there is a difference between the two. According to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary,⁸⁴ the word diaspora refers to “the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries” and also “the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country”. The difference thus seems to be that in the case of diaspora, the decision to move is made voluntarily. But there are more differences between exile and diaspora.

In an essay titled *Diasporas in Modern societies; Myths of Homeland and Return*, William Safran, professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado describes the concept of diaspora as:

- “People who as individuals or in community:
- Have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to ‘peripheral’ places to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign regions.
 - They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location history and achievements.
 - They believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
 - They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate.
 - They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity.

⁸² SAID Edward, *Reflections on Exile*, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Convergences: Inventories of the Present), Harvard University Press, October 8 2002, p. 137-149, p. 148.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ <http://oaadonline.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>. Date of last consultation: 29/5/2014.

- They continue to relate personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship."⁸⁵

Some of the points that are stated in the above-mentioned fragment can be applied to the overseas Chinese artists, such as the relationship with the homeland while being abroad.⁸⁶ However, there is a clear reason why the term diaspora cannot be applied to the Chinese overseas artists. This reason is explicitly mentioned by the art critic Melissa Chiu: "In Safran's view the homeland is a static entity: an imagined place in the past to which one hopes to return."⁸⁷ And this is precisely the essential differential element and the main reason why the word diaspora cannot be applied to the situation of the overseas Chinese artists, as they do not perceive their homeland, China, as a static entity in the past. Quite the contrary, the homeland has a big influence on their identity and their artwork in a dynamic way, and in the present time.⁸⁸ It is not the desired homeland to which they will never return, leaving an unbearable nostalgic feeling in their hearts. Most of the Chinese overseas artists have frequent contact with China and often return for expositions, or for other work or family related reasons. Some artists, like Xu Bing for example, work between China and the United States, having studios in both countries.⁸⁹ Others have moved back completely, like the artists Zhang Huan although he is invited for exhibitions abroad regularly. The relationship between artist and homeland is dynamic and can be defined by a constant interaction. The homeland is not, as in Safran's definition, a static entity or the unfulfilled wish of ever going back. Seen from the latter perspective, diaspora coincides with exile in the way that both contemplate the homeland as an unreachable destination: there is no way of ever returning home. Exile, in the words of the poet Wallace Stevens, "is 'a mind of winter' in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable."⁹⁰

If the terms exile and diaspora cannot be applied to the overseas Chinese artists as both indicate a static relationship with the homeland, what term better defines the in-between, dynamic situation of these artists who often find themselves amid China and their new

⁸⁵ SAFRAN William in CHIU, Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 45-46.

⁸⁶ See chapter 2.2 of Block I titled *The dynamics of transexperiences*.

⁸⁷ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 46.

⁸⁸ See again paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁸⁹ It should be stated that Xu Bing currently has returned to China.

⁹⁰ SAID Edward, *Reflections on Exile*, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Convergences: Inventories of the Present), Harvard University Press, October 8 2002, p. 137-149, p. 149.

adopted nation(s)? The answer is transexperiences, a concept not yet widely used that was coined by the overseas Chinese artist Chen Zhen. In the next paragraph this concept will be further explained.

2.2 The dynamics of transexperiences

“I left China to embrace the entire world.”⁹¹

⁹¹ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

As the previous paragraph has tried to make clear, the terms exile and diaspora can only partly be applied to the situation of the overseas artists. This brings us to the concept of transexperiences which was coined by the overseas Chinese artist Chen Zhen who moved to France in the 1980s, and who past away in Paris in the year 2000. Transexperiences might be the term *par excellence* when referring to overseas (Chinese) artists, as it implies a dynamic relation between the artists and the homeland “left behind”.

Transexperiences, as can be deduced from the word itself, consists of two parts: “trans” which is a prefix that stands for “across” or “beyond” (as in transition, transformation, translation: going from one state to another), and the word “experience”. Roughly speaking, transexperience could be defined as the experience that one gains or the transformation that one undergoes when moving from one place to the other. It is as the artist Chen Zhen mentions in his book: transexperiences “summarizes vividly and profoundly the complex life experience of leaving one’s native place and going from one place to another in one’s life.”⁹² In a way, transexperiences could be seen as quite similar to the updated version of exile explained in the previous paragraph: it leads to a privileged view and perspective on the world by becoming a “global citizen”. Transexperiences, like exile, implies adapting to new situations and becoming more open-minded towards other cultures and the Other, hereby stimulating the understanding of other societies and values that are not one’s own. It is as the art critic and curator Melissa Chiu explains: transexperience “is, to immerse oneself in life, to blend and identify oneself with others.”⁹³

Another dynamic aspect of transexperience is its capacity of connecting the past with the present, that is, connecting the homeland (the past) with the current situation of living abroad (present). This is where transexperiences differentiates itself from diaspora and exile as it allows and propagates an interaction which is dynamic. This *dynamic* relationship manifests itself in the artworks of the overseas Chinese artists which often results in a mix of elements from the homeland and from the adopted country. The homeland is not perceived as a distant, unobtainable dream but rather as a present influence that is in constant interaction with the current situation and environment of the artist. Especially in the case of the Chinese artists who live abroad, this mix of elements can be clearly seen in their works and it is sometimes what differentiates them from the mainland Chinese artists.

⁹² ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

⁹³ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 36.

This integration of past and present takes place under a different form according to the host country of the artists although it must be emphasized that this subdivision is rather generalizing. Melissa Chiu, in her book *Breakout- Chinese art outside China* (2006), takes an in-depth look at Chinese overseas artists living in France, the United States and Australia.⁹⁴ According to the author, Chinese artists living in these different continents not only differ from their counterparts on the mainland but differ from each other as well. According to Melissa Chiu, the works from artists residing in the United States seem to fuse Chinese and the new cultural references in search of a renewed, more international language,⁹⁵ whereas the overseas artists living in France tend to revive and explore the historical interaction between China and the “West”.⁹⁶ The reason for this difference might reside in the fact that France has had a long history of interaction with China and the “East”, a link that goes back many centuries. The United States, being a relatively “young country” has not had much relation with Asia up until quite recently. Chinese artists living in France, therefore, observe more of the historical interaction between the two nations in their daily life and the influences this interaction has on their environment. Consequently, they express this within their artworks. According to Melissa Chiu, the artists living in France also have a stronger bond with the host country, trying to integrate their “Chineseness” into their new, in this case French environment. However, the Chinese artists residing in the United States are more focused on giving an international perspective to their creations and are less engaged with integrating their new adopted environment within their work. This could be due to the fact that the United States, again as a young nation, has a more international outlook on the world and lacks a history of trade and colonialism that goes back centuries, as has been the case with most of the European countries. However, no matter whether the artists live in Europe, Australia or the United States, their works are examples of transexperience as they show the mutual interaction of a Chinese past and the present situation of living abroad.

Melissa Chiu has observed that this connection of past and present takes place in three steps:

Firstly, the recovery of Chinese iconography as a way of remembering the past at a geographical and psychological distance from China.

Secondly, the juxtaposition of memories of China with its current reality.

⁹⁴ As explained in the introduction, this dissertation focuses only on the artists that moved to the United States and Europe.

⁹⁵ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2006, p. 58-59.

⁹⁶ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2006, p. 119-120.

Lastly, the modification of Chinese signifiers, such as Chinese characters to make them accessible to non-Chinese audiences.⁹⁷

An excellent example of Melissa Chiu's "three-step process" is Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy* (1994) (Fig. 2 and 3).



Figure 2: Xu Bing's name written in *Square Word Calligraphy*.

First of all, Xu recuperates and integrates Chinese calligraphy into his work; calligraphy being one of the main and most important and appreciated pillars of Chinese art and culture. Then, he juxtaposes the Chinese writing with his current situation, that is, an artists living in New York.⁹⁸ As a result, he then modifies Chinese calligraphy and makes it accessible to an English-speaking audience. The result of this is an artwork that integrates past and present, China and the "West".

On the website of Xu Bing there is a very interesting text with further details on this work. The following fragment shall be highlighted:

Xu Bing's contribution, *Square Word Calligraphy*, highlighted Hong Kong's role as a meeting ground for East and West. It proclaimed the possibility of unexpected rewards for those making the effort to communicate across cultures. *Square Word Calligraphy* had been exhibited previously in Europe, to great acclaim, but only achieved its full potential as a poignant message of hope for the future at its Hong Kong venue.

Square Word Calligraphy is a new kind of writing, almost a code, designed by Xu Bing. At first glance it appears to be Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read it but cannot. Western viewers, however, are surprised to find that they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed.

The idea of inventing this new form of writing came to Xu Bing when he observed the attitude of awe

⁹⁷ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2006, p. 38.

⁹⁸ It should be mentioned that Xu Bing has moved back to China and is currently residing in Beijing.

and respect with which non-Asians regard Chinese calligraphy. Intrigued, he sought to create a work that would demystify calligraphy, and reward the Westerner's engagement.⁹⁹

Although it is not mentioned within the catalogue or in this text from Xu Bing's website, *Square Word Calligraphy* (1996) (Fig. 2 and 3) could also be related to the third space concept. It is an example of a hybrid creation that combines elements of the "East", in this case Chinese calligraphy, with elements of the "West", in this case the Roman alphabet, creating a new language which is neither "western" nor "eastern" but which lies in the in-between, as a meeting ground between the two. But it also can be interpreted as a creation quite contrary to the third space as it excludes the Chinese from their own written calligraphy, one of the main pillars of their culture. In a way, the artist has inverted the roles: English-speakers are now able to read "Chinese" calligraphy while the Chinese-speaking audience who does not read English is unable to decipher the "characters". In *Square Word Calligraphy* (1996) (Fig. 2 and 3) English-speakers are granted access to the privileged world of Chinese calligraphy, which is usually only accessible to those capable of reading Chinese characters. In a way, Xu Bing questions the role of language and communication and turns Chinese calligraphy, one of the main pillars of "Chinese" tradition and culture into English, breaking down the barriers for the non-Chinese speaking audience, while at the same time putting up barriers for the Chinese speaking audience.



Figure 3: Practicing Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy*

⁹⁹ Britta Erickson, *Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy*, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/xu_bings_square_work_calligraphy/, n.d., date of last consultation: 12/09/2012.

Here, it is interesting to note that when the overseas Chinese artists integrate elements of their past into their works, they often resort to elements from the traditional Chinese culture such as the I Ching, ancient Chinese symbolism, Chinese medicine, Daoism, or, as in the case of Xu Bing, Chinese calligraphy. It seems as if for them, their Chinese roots are settled more in Chinese tradition and not so much in the contemporary times of China, even though it must be stated that this is a very generalizing observation and that exceptions must be made.¹⁰⁰ It is quite recurrent that overseas artists resort to these traditional elements in order to “update” them to our present times. A very good example are the “invented” words and characters by artists such as Gu Wenda and Xu Bing. Both are inspired by a traditional element of Chinese culture, i.e. Chinese calligraphy, but update these traditions to meet the challenges implied by interculturalism and intercultural dialogue so characteristic of the current century.

Why is it that the overseas Chinese artists often resort to or are inspired by Chinese traditional culture? One of the answers to this question might be the fact that many overseas artists feel as a foreigner in China when they go back for work or personal reasons. They have become tourists in their own “homeland”, coming back to a China they no longer recognize due to the incredibly rapid changes it has undergone. Living overseas has distanced these artists from their homeland and all that was familiar to them. In a way, their new reality of China as artists living abroad seems to be sometimes based on an older version of China. And here a rather contradictory situation appears: their view on China has become more critical and maybe even more objective by the distance created between themselves and the homeland, yet at the same time, this same image has been coloured by the pass of time and sometimes seems to be disconnected from the current reality of China. This might be one of the reasons why traditional Chinese culture is often used, because for them it represents the homeland they left behind; the China before the modernizations.

According to Melissa Chiu, the incorporation of Chinese traditional elements is also a way for these artists to deal with their displacement of living abroad:

This incorporation of identifiable signifiers of Chineseness, not so apparent or important in their work prior to leaving China suggests:

¹⁰⁰ This statement should be nuanced as some artists have been inspired by the current situation of China. Examples of this is Ai Wei Wei’s work that resulted from the 2008 earthquake of Sichuan, and the various works inspired by the Three Gorges Dam, among many others.

- A sense of displacement and identification with a distant homeland.
- An acknowledgment of their Chineseness within a foreign context and an attempt to explore their identity through recognizable symbols of cultural affiliation.
- Critical commentary on the way that China is perceived within Western countries.
- An undermining of long-held cultural assumptions of a strict binary division between the East and the West, carried out through combining recognizable icons from Eastern and Western cultures as well as an exploration of personal and historical moments of interaction between China and the West.

Some of these moments of interaction are real, and some are staged, but all of them are concerned with the creative possibilities of cultural transgressions – moments where people, things and images come together yet can be classed as neither belonging to one culture or another.¹⁰¹

Chiu's statement seems contradictory. On the one hand she states that the overseas artists incorporate "Chineseness" into their current artworks because they continue to identify with a distant homeland, while on the other hand she mentions that these artists can neither be classed as belonging to one culture or the other. This might indicate a double feeling or a certain confusion that overseas artists have towards "Chineseness". Their works clearly integrate elements of Chinese culture and tradition, yet they themselves, in some cases, do not want to be identified or considered as Chinese artists anymore. The fact of living in a foreign environment has created the necessity to hold on to something familiar, their "Chineseness", while at the same time they feel distanced from China as they no longer recognize it.

Various artists living abroad have expressed this double feeling. Yang Jiechang, who lives between Germany and France has mentioned that living in Europe while coming from a Chinese background has made him see things from a more nuanced, hybrid perspective which he refers to as "the grey area" that somewhat reminds of the in-between situation of the artists living abroad.¹⁰² The artist Shen Yuan, who moved to Paris, seems to have a different experience from living abroad and mentions that when she now returns to China, she feels like a tourist.¹⁰³ Chen Zhen writes that he felt "a certain sense of distance from Asia (...) which was strange yet intriguing, and seemingly close yet far away".¹⁰⁴ Ai Wei Wei mentions that the China he left behind when moving to America and the China he returned to a decade later were two different Chinas, and describes his return to China as

¹⁰¹ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2006, p. 119-120.

¹⁰² YANG Jiechang in ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

¹⁰³ HOU Hanru, *Global multitude*, exhibition catalogue, Rotonde 1 Luxembourg, Books on the Move publishers, 2008, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ CHEN Zhen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

“a dream”.¹⁰⁵ What seems to be the common factor in all these artists who decided to live abroad is that they become outsiders to their own culture. The fact of moving abroad has not only created a physical distance between their current situation and the homeland they left behind but also an emotional one.

Another factor that might have contributed to this estrangement from their homeland is that they have become hybrid, what was previously referred to by Yang Jiechang as the “grey area”. They have entered the in-between space that lies between the “East” and the “West”: a hybrid space in which they no longer identify with their homeland nor with their adopted land. Living and creating within the in-between is characteristic of the overseas artists and again sets them apart from their mainland counterparts. The overseas artists have the privilege of being able to see from two different points of view. Moving to another country permits them to critically look upon Chinese as well as “western” culture and gives them a privileged yet distanced view of both cultures: that of their homeland and that of their host land. This makes it easier to see both cultures as they are, to observe what the insider no longer appreciates, and to be able to mix the two cultures from an outsider’s point of view. Cai Guoqiang, an overseas artist himself, explains it very well: “(...) but since coming to America and living in the West I have more of a perspective on the differences between East and West, which in turn made me much more interested in conflicts between cultures.”¹⁰⁶

Being in a position between two cultures allows the overseas artists to detect the main problems between “East” and “West”, as they have a good understanding of the cultural symbols and backgrounds of both. Often, these “problems” are no longer visible to the “insiders” which makes the outsiders, such as the overseas artists, essential elements in the questioning of many ready-made assumptions within society. Hou Hanru has described these outsiders as individuals with a “sharpened eye”, switching between being an insider and an outsider: a position that permits them to play both the role of mediator and interpreter. The overseas artists, no longer bound to only one cultural background or identity, moves through the world as a storyteller, traveller and image-intaker, who is no longer limited by unquestioned yet generally accepted standpoints but is only lead by total observation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ SANS Jérôme, *China Talks- 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009 p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ CAI Guoqiang 2000a, in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2006, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ HOU Hanru, *Global multitude*, exhibition catalogue, Rotonde 1 Luxembourg, Books on the Move publishers, 2008, p. 82.

However, transexperiences does not only manifest itself in the form of an estrangement towards the home country or the privileged position of being in the in-between. Transexperiences is also patent in the way the overseas artists often feel estranged from their host country. This alienation from the host country can often be found in the overseas artists' fascination (and struggle) with language that are recurrent topics in the works of the overseas artists as they are often the cause of their feelings of estrangement while in the host country.

This alienation becomes evident in the work *Perdre Sa Salive* (1994) (Fig. 4) by the artist Shen Yuan who with her husband, the artist Huang Yong Ping, moved to Paris and has been living there since 1989. The work consists of ice sculptures in the form of tongues. Under the tongues, the artist placed pots that are similar to Chinese spittoons. As the sculptures slowly melt, drops of water dripping into the pots, the knives that are hidden within the ice tongues slowly appear. This work can be interpreted in various ways. One of these interpretations could be the expression of the difficulty of learning a new language when moving abroad. Or the fact that a language (a tongue) can be used as a knife: metaphorically "cutting off" outsiders from society who do not speak the language.



Figure 4: Shen Yuan, *Perdre Sa Salive*, 1994

Shen Yuan has commented on the experience of leaving China and moving to a foreign country. This comment shines a light on the work of *Perdre Sa Salive* (1994) (Fig. 4):

Leaving China was quite a shock to my system. I remember it vividly, the sixteen hour flight, landing somewhere completely changed. People my generation grew up in a completely closed environment, knowing absolutely nothing of the world beyond. I was shocked because I was not prepared, but only shock brings knowledge. This utter shift of cultural background forced me to spend three or four years

just trying to understand my own position. This shift of background brought some new questions to the fore: 'the other', 'identity', 'language'. Facing new questions had quite an impact on my way of thinking.

When language proved an obstacle, art helped me to jump this boundary, so in my earliest works from France the form of the human tongue appears repeatedly, a symbol for language. The first work I made in Paris, *Perdre Sa Salive*, I did in a private basement. I made nine tongues out of ice, reaching outward from the columns and the ceiling. They were supported by knives, so when the ice melted, the knives shone through, a transposition of form.¹⁰⁸

Here it has been chosen to illustrate this aspect with a work of Shen Yuan but many other artists, such as Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Huang Yongping, Yang Jiechang, Chen Zhen, etc. have also been inspired by miscommunication and misunderstanding. Some of these artists, like the overseas artist Chen Zhen, believe that misunderstanding is in fact a logical consequence of the multicultural world we are currently living in and sees misunderstanding from a positive perspective. According to the artist, misunderstanding only occurs when there is a genuine interest and a will to understand the Other on a deeper level. Misunderstanding then becomes a necessary phase in this quest of knowing the Other, at the same time achieving a better understanding of the Self. Misunderstanding is a logical consequence that occurs when one opens oneself up to the Other, in an intent of establishing true dialogue. Therefore, according to Chen Zhen, one should purposely try to create misunderstanding¹⁰⁹ as the lack of understanding and the creation of misunderstanding is in fact what we call art.¹¹⁰ Also the artist Chen Zhen takes advantage of misunderstanding and uses it. According to him, misunderstanding among cultures is inevitable and a full understanding of the art (of the Other) might never be achieved. However, this is not the objective as misunderstanding is an indication of the willingness to communicate and to understand among different cultures. Misunderstanding then becomes one of the main aims of Chen Zhen's work.

The reason that these overseas artists have become experts in topics such as misunderstanding and communication between cultures, etc. lies in the fact that they have personally experienced it many times, being outsiders to the host country. Therefore, language is often used as a metaphor for the difficulties they frequently experience when trying to adapt to their new environment. This differentiates them from the mainland artists who do not dispose of these insights and experiences and consequently focus more on

¹⁰⁸ SANS Jérôme, *China Talks – 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009, p.61.

¹⁰⁹ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

internal, local “issues” of China, sometimes dealing with the present times, sometimes dealing with the past, which is often represented by the Cultural Revolution period. The rapid changes that have occurred in China in the last few years have been very impacting for the mainland artists and they too have raised questions about their belonging amidst of all these modernizations. Mainland artists try to cope with a feeling of displacement as well, as they see how China as they knew it is slowly disappearing, making way for a more “westernized” nation. However, the feeling is different from the dislocation that overseas artists undergo when moving abroad. Said in a different way, mainland artists feel like foreigners in their own country, while overseas artists feel foreign on the mainland as well as abroad.

Even though these artists find themselves estranged from their homeland as well as from their host country, in the case of the Chinese overseas artists, China is still very present in their creations. The result of this is that their works become hybrid, like Shen Yuan’s *Perdre Sa Salive* (1994) (Fig. 4). The dynamic relationship between past and present, characteristic of the concept of transexperiences, manifests itself in the combination of elements from Chinese traditional culture and their current situation of living in the “West”. In this particular work of Shen Yuan, the homeland and the past are represented by the use of spittoons (and the act of spitting in itself) that point to Chinese culture. However, her work has been titled in French (and not in Chinese), which refers to her current situation as an artist within a francophone environment. This is also represented by the ice sculptures in the form of tongues that symbolize her difficulties of adapting to her new surroundings.

What becomes clear is that diaspora and exile indicate a separation between “here” (the new adopted environment of the artist) and “there” (China, or the homeland that has been left behind) while transexperiences indicates a dynamic and highly complex connection between “here” and “there”: both homeland and the new environment are interacting and influencing the work of the artists simultaneously in the present. Or, as the art critic Melissa Chiu mentions, transexperience is “an attempt by Chinese artists to come to terms with Chinese culture in a foreign context.”¹¹¹ For many overseas artists, the situation of living abroad creates a distance from the homeland and the own cultural background that permits them to look towards their past from a more critical, yet renewed perspective. The incorporation of Chinese, often traditional, elements within their works is an indication

¹¹¹ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 211.

of this renewed appreciation, or maybe even understanding, for their own roots. Transexperiences therefore becomes a unique phenomenon of “revitalizing the past and enlivening the present”¹¹² to use the words of the artist Chen Zhen.

Chinese artists are intimately intertwined with the concept of transexperience and their work cannot be fully understood without taking it into consideration. Yet, transexperience is hardly ever mentioned in the exhibition catalogues or in the art reviews, which is one of the main factors contributing to its misinterpretation. Chinese experimental art overseas is often not distinguished from Chinese experimental art that is being developed on the mainland even though it becomes evident that transexperience sets the artists living abroad apart from their mainland counterparts, as well as from all other artists who have not undergone the experience of leaving one’s homeland and settling elsewhere.

The representation of traditional Chinese elements as a sense of belonging is often not captured by the Euroamerican art critics and is repeatedly misunderstood as the display of “Chineseness” within experimental Chinese art.¹¹³ However, this need to belong becomes an essential part of the meaning of these works as it implies such complex feelings as estrangement, disconnection, nostalgia and identity. As the artists slowly distance themselves from their homeland, they will progressively move towards an in-between situation that can cause a sense of confusion and displacement, as they find themselves between past and present, “East” and “West”, inside and outside. Chinese artists living overseas often find that they no longer identify with their homeland, and have become estranged from China, yet they do not have a sense of belonging or “home” in their host country either. This leaves them with a feeling of homelessness, a concept that shall be explained in the following paragraph.

¹¹² CHEN Zhen in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 150.

¹¹³ See Block II.

2.3 The Unhomely

“You do not belong to anybody, yet you are in possession of everything.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

Transexperiences can be considered an “in-between” space between past (the homeland) and present (the adopted host land). Therefore it becomes somewhat of a “no space” or, as the post-colonialism theorist Homi K. Bhabha has coined, homelessness.¹¹⁵ If diaspora and exile indicate a static separation between “here” (present/ host land)) and “there” (past/ homeland); transexperiences a dynamic interaction between “here” (present/ host land) and “there” (past/ homeland); homelessness means neither “here” nor “there”.

Homelessness is the feeling of not belonging anywhere: a constant sense of unfamiliarity and of being the outsider no matter where one tries to settle down. According to the Australian-Asian cinema expert Belinda Smaill, the unhomely experience is “therefore, profoundly *disorienting*.”¹¹⁶ As has been explained in the previous paragraph, transexperiences leads to an in-between position in which an individual becomes an insider as well as an outsider to society. It is when one becomes a stranger to the homeland as well as to the adopted land and lingers in-between both nations which is highly disorienting but which has also been described as privileged as it offers insights only available to those in this position. Chen Zhen has described this feeling as an “internal ‘loneliness of spirituality’”,¹¹⁷ “a type of ‘cultural homelessness’, namely, you do not belong to anybody, yet you are in possession of everything.”¹¹⁸

The unhomely experience might have become a trait of our current times. In a globalized world in which people are accustomed to move constantly, identity is no longer defined by the country where one is born, the place where one lives or where one’s home is or used to be. The same occurs with the Chinese artists living abroad. China still is an influence in their life and work however, to them, the mainland might not be considered home anymore. Yet, the new adopted country in which they live presently might not be considered home either. This leaves them in a state of living in an “in-between” space: they have become unhomely.

¹¹⁵ BHABHA Homi K., *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1994.

¹¹⁶ SMAILL Belinda, *Disorientations: Sadness, mourning and the unhomely*, *Journal of Australian Studies* 26:73, 18 May 2009, p. 161-169.

¹¹⁷ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

The artists Huang Yongping, husband of Shen Yuan, who has been living in Paris for over two decades, has commented on the concept of transexperience and its relation to homelessness:

When you have a home, a stable home somewhere, you don't have to move. The question of location doesn't arise. But when you start moving around, become displaced or a migrant, the question of home is raised. Then you have to consider what is your earth, what is your water. So actually when you travel you don't have a home but you need a home.¹¹⁹

Homelessness could be considered a non-physical "space", although in reality it is actually a "nowhere". Transexperience is related to it but could be considered as a life experience that transforms one's identity and might even make one lose the sense of feeling at home or having a homeland. It is not a space.

Maybe it could be said that transexperience leads to homelessness. When one has moved around and incorporated elements from more than one culture into one's own identity, it gets harder to identify with one specific homeland, or a single home. When transexperience has changed your identity, you become homeless, you have started the unhomey life.

As mentioned in the introduction to section II, the experience of leaving one's homeland and settling elsewhere, and undergoing transexperience is like a cycle of transformation. Within this cycle, the feeling of homelessness or not belonging anywhere will result in the search for a new definition, nation, culture or identity that can provide this sense of "home" once again. For the overseas artists, this new space with which they can identify as hybrid individuals in an in-between position is what has been called the New Internationalism, third space, Mid-Ground or the in-between. In the following paragraph, an in-depth look shall be taken at these particular concepts.

¹¹⁹ HUANG Yongping in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 123

2.4 New Internationalism, Third Space, Mid-Ground, and the In-between

Zhu: Is your world China or the West?
Zhen: Somewhere in between

Zhu: You just spoke half in Chinese and half in a western language
Zhen: This has become a natural state of mind, a second nature.¹²⁰

Jérôme Sans: You are mixing two cultures
Yang Jiechang: I live in between both (...)¹²¹

¹²⁰ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

¹²¹ SANS Jérôme, *China Talks – 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009, p. 153.

Some art critics, like Hou Hanru, are speaking of a new international scene in which “western” hegemonic dominance shall “collapse” and “face its fatal destruction”,¹²² making way for a truly international and new worldview. On a smaller scale, these insights can be applied to the art world: if the “East-West” dichotomy were to cease to exist and Euroamerican dominance within the art world were to be abolished, an international art scene in which “eastern” and “western” artists are interpreted from a unique heterogeneous point of view (not from a limiting Euroamerican perspective), and as equals could become the new norm(al). This new space would allow for true dialogue and would question the Euroamerican hegemonic power on a global scale. This New Internationalism, as Hou Hanru mentions, would take the place of the “West”-centric “Internationalism” or “Universalism”,¹²³ and it has become one of the main challenges for the current non-Euroamerican artists. Its establishment is essential and will not only change the way their art is received and understood within the international art world, but it will also give them, as individual artists, the right to be considered and acknowledged as artists without a limiting identity based on stereotypes or ethnic background. The Chinese experimental artists that are living abroad are pioneers in the creation of this new internationalism or global art. The fact that they are living outside of their homeland and are familiar with two or more cultures makes them the ideal mediator between nations, and the personification of a new global reality in which one no longer needs to be identified by a single cultural background.

Global art interacts in an in-between space and cannot be attributed to one particular culture. It cannot be ascribed to a certain nationality and does not necessarily coincide with the nationality of the artist. The artwork speaks to a global public and can be understood by viewers from different cultures and backgrounds, as it is not linked to any national symbolism. It acts in a completely hybrid space in which the “East” no longer is differentiated from the “West”, or at least, the differentiation is no longer considered necessary. These are new tendencies that fit into a postcolonial framework as it questions static and strictly demarcated identities. It is as the cultural historian Joep Leerssen has said, “mixtures and transgressions are emphasized and the borders between the domestic and the exotic, between self and other, are deconstructed.”¹²⁴

¹²² HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 128.

¹²³ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 61.

¹²⁴ LEERSSEN Joep; BELLER Manfred (ed.) *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey*, Rodopi, the Netherlands, 2007, p. 401.

A good example of this new internationalism could be illustrated by Xu Bing's *Book from the Ground* (2003-2012) (Fig.5). This work cannot be attributed to a particular identity, nation or culture as it searches for a universal language, accessible to all, that transcends the illusory borders of nations, centre, periphery, "East" and "West".

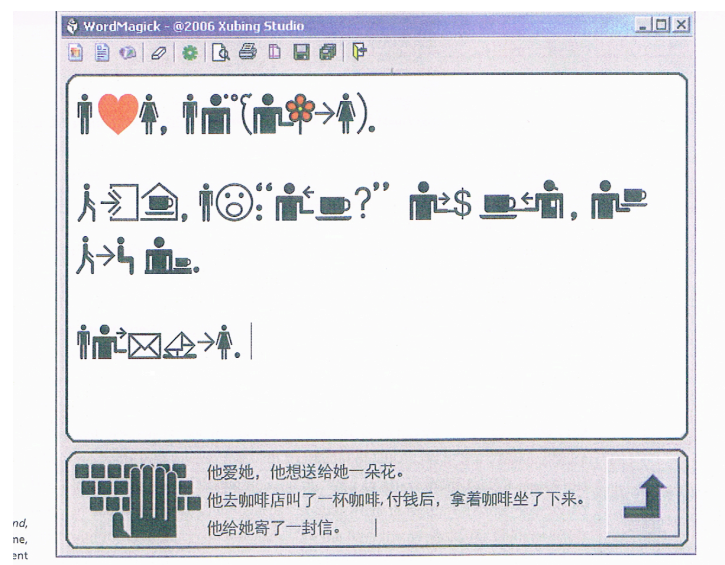


Figure 5: Example of *Book from the Ground* (2003-2012)

Xu Bing's *Book from the Ground* (2003-2012) (Fig. 5) is a continuing process of collecting symbols that represent "universal language". This language is recognizable for "global" people who on a daily basis use these icons in the communication with others via programs such as MSN and Whatsapp. These symbols have become standardized all over the world and therefore are the ideal resource for the creation of a "universal language". The art critic Karen Smith describes it as the "Esperanto of its day"¹²⁵ that perfectly suits our modern era as it uses the modern technologies as its foundation. *Book from the Ground* (2003-2012) proposes a new artistic language that tries to transcend national boundaries and to go further, to become readable for all people of all backgrounds.

The fact that global language speaks a universal tongue might indicate a new way of communicating and perceiving the world, however it also implies, as mentioned in paragraph 1.4, a standardization (or homogenization) of languages and cultures. To quote

¹²⁵ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: the Birth of Avant-Garde art in New China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2008, p. 367.

the art critic and curator Gou Minglu: “Globalization threatens to turn Chinese artists into residents of a ‘global village’, in which they speak their most intimate secrets in a standardized, international language.”¹²⁶

The search for a new model that no longer is limited to specific identities and nations but that goes further to reach people from all different backgrounds, can be positive (when barriers are being lifted) but it can also be negative (when cultures become more homogeneous, resulting in cultural differences being emphasized in order to maintain the status quo of Self and Other). However, it could be questioned if an international language with the capability of communicating among societies with different backgrounds really is a threat, as Gao Minglu seems to imply. Artists that reside in the in-between spaces and who express themselves through a hybrid language that integrates both the cultural background of their homeland and that of their adopted home have done so naturally, as a consequence of their frequent travelling and migrations. It does not seem to be a process that has been forced upon them. Becoming a global citizen does not necessarily have to be a negative thing, as Gao seems to be saying. “Their most intimate secrets” are expressed in an international language because they no longer feel Chinese and have become hybrid.

The third space is another way to define an alternative space that lies between the “East” and the “West”. It combines characteristics of both and mixes them into a hybrid model that goes beyond the strict separation of “Orient” and “Occident”. It is a counter-current that goes against “western” hegemony and the maintenance of the “west”-centric power balance in a twenty-first century global world. The third space is also an alternative for the centre-periphery model that places hegemonic power into Euroamerican hands. The concept was coined by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* that was published in 1994. Hou Hanru then took over the concept, rephrased it, and applied it to the Chinese artists living overseas: “Homi Bhabha uses the term ‘third space’ to turn what Edward Said considered as the opposition between the East and the West into a kind of interactive ‘in-betweenness’.”¹²⁷

The third space, as Homi K. Bhabha explains, could be a way of surpassing the (mental) barriers between “East” and “West” as he sees this alternative space as a completely new

¹²⁶ GAO Minglu in HOLDEN Kevin, *Chinese museums become global bridges*, China Daily, August 11 2005.

¹²⁷ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 64.

model that proposes alternative structures of authority. The third space is not a hybrid space that resulted from the fusing of “East” and “West”, but it is an independent space that has been generated as a result of our global times of mobility and hybridization.¹²⁸ The third space is “[a] process of cultural hybridity [that] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”¹²⁹ And it should be, to use the words of migration researcher Diana Yeh “consumed and moved through rather than immediately rejected”.¹³⁰ One has to go through the process of letting go of pre-given, traditional and established models (or mind-sets) in order to acknowledge a changing world and the arrival of a new global situation. Because again, space is a man-made construction and does not necessarily reflect reality. It is as the anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson mention: “we need to theorize how space is being *reterritorialized* in the contemporary world.”¹³¹

It should also be mentioned that the third space not only proposes an alternative system to the “East-West” dichotomy, it also introduces the centuries-old Chinese culture to new possibilities. The fact that mainland as well as overseas artists are incorporating elements from different cultures into their works, breaks open Chinese art and makes it part of the third space. China as well as the “West” lose their rigidity and become, as it were, more permeable. The effect is that both will come closer together until the moment they touch and become a hybrid *one*.

The Chinese experimental artists who have moved overseas and have become impregnated with cultures that are not their own, are pioneers in this “fight” for the acknowledgement of this alternative space. By combining elements from their Chinese background with new elements from their “western” environment, as explained in paragraph 2.2, they seek to create a new international, universal or global language that goes beyond the cultural horizons of “East” and “West”. This hybrid art tries to open the Euroamerican-centric hegemonic art mainstream, as well as the Chinese art scene to new

¹²⁸ BHABHA Homi K. in RUTHERFORD, Jonathan, *The Third Space – Interview with Homi Bhabha*, Identity, Community, Culture, Difference, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 207-221, 1990, p. 211.

¹²⁹ BHABHA Homi K. in RUTHERFORD, Jonathan, *The Third Space – Interview with Homi Bhabha*, Identity, Community, Culture, Difference, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 207-221, 1990, p. 209.

¹³⁰ YEH Diana, *Ethnicities on the move: ‘British-Chinese’ art – identity, subjectivity, politics and beyond*, Critical Quarterly, vol. 42, no.2, p. 65-91, July 2000, p. 79.

¹³¹ GUPTA Akhil, FERGUSON James, *Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference*, Cultural Anthropology, vol. 7, February 1992, p. 6-23, p. 20.

possibilities. To quote a fragment by the art curator and expert on Chinese experimental art, Gao Minglu:

Now I think that Chinese artists overseas are becoming objects of a kind of 'post-orientalism'. Homi Bhabha uses the term 'third space' to turn what Edward Said considered as the opposition between the East and the West into a kind of interactive 'in-betweenness'. It can help in understanding the work of the Chinese artists overseas. Although centred in the 1980s, their background also include the whole of the twentieth-century history in China, that is, the antagonism between eastern and western aspects of China's modern and contemporary culture. However, in my opinion, what is crucial for overseas Chinese artists is not the preservation of Chinese characteristics but rather to act effectively in the third space. This causes a kind of metamorphosis: a shift from dichotomous ideas about East and West to the practise of cultural strategies. More concretely, the artists' task is to make their own Chinese cultural experiences into efficient languages to intervene in the new social reality, instead of holding on to a preconceived idea of Chinese culture. It is important to practise these languages in concrete cultural contexts.¹³²

However, the third space is far from being acknowledged. The holding on to "received wisdom", or preconceptions and stereotypes, makes the implementation of the third space and its general acceptance almost impossible even though the twenty-first century reality of hybridization seems undeniable. Nowadays it is very hard to find "pure" races, nations and cultures. Due to globalisation, everything has been influenced by other cultures and our environment has become hybrid in which we encounter "the Other" on a daily basis. We ourselves are the result of centuries of interracial hybridisation and it is maybe only the rare individual who has lived separated from society that can justify pure genetics.

In this aspect, the third space is quite similar to globalization as both bring together different cultures, blending them into this cultural melting pot. However, there is a difference and globalisation is not the same as third space. One could argue that the third space is the result of globalisation. Globalisation is an enormous stimulus that is produced on a world scale. It is undeniable and unstoppable. This force made out of millions of travellers, migrants, internet, media and communication technologies generates a constant interaction between cultures, nations and individuals. The third space is an alternative space that is created as a consequence of these interactions and global movement. It is not a force; it is a non-geographical space of hybridity. What both have in common is that globalisation and the third space are proposing, or maybe even leading to an alternative system that is opposing or might even dissolve the "East-West" separation. Both have as a consequence the blurring of borders, physical and non-physical, and both question the existence of "Orient" and "Occident" (as static elements).

¹³² GAO Minglu in HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 64.

In the case of the third space and globalisation it is the people, Euroamerican and non-Euroamerican, from all over the world who are the engine behind globalisation and the third space. According to the art critic Hou Hanru, the third space is becoming an identity and a cultural strategy, especially for non-Euroamerican artists.¹³³ It is the overseas artists who are in need of a cultural strategy in order to change the status quo of the international art scene that currently does not benefit them at all, as it does not treat them as equals. Euroamerican artists do not have to deal with this inequality and therefore do not have to question or defend their (hybrid) identity or to try to struggle against the misinterpretation of their works. The fact that the overseas artists have been placed in an in-between position that is highly disorienting for them, also motivates them to search for a new space which they can identify with, a place to call “home”. Their artworks therefore become the instrument, their weapon, in order to establish firstly the acknowledgement and secondly the acceptance of this alternative space, and the acceptance of themselves as individual artists who no longer identify with the limiting and stereotypical label “Chinese”.

However, it is true that one speaks lightly of the creation of an alternative and hybrid space that combines “East” and “West”, and that lies beyond its separation. In order to create the third space, a profound knowledge of one’s own culture and also of the culture of the adopted home is required. It is as the art critic Xu Hong mentions: “People speak all the time of mixing Western and Eastern influences, as though it were like mixing red and blue ink to paint pictures in purple. They do not think of what it means to understand these two cultures and to try to incorporate their different ways of thought.”¹³⁴

Individuals who have been acculturated by their experience as migrants create the third space, and it is, like Xu Hong makes clear, not an easy or quick process. Becoming an outsider as well as an insider to two or more cultures entails time, experience and an open mind. It requires acculturation and the broadening of one’s cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle, to quote the words of Asian Studies professor Sean Golden.¹³⁵ In the twenty-first century, more and more people find themselves in a process of acculturation in which they have not yet fully assimilated the culture of the host nation, but have already

¹³³ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, 65.

¹³⁴ HONG Xu in SOLOMON Andrew, *Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China*, The New York Times, December 19, 1993, p. 20.

¹³⁵ GOLDEN Sean, *Orientalisms in East Asia. A Theoretical Model*, Inter Asia Papers, no. 12/2009, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, p. 1-22, p. 20.

stepped outside of their own culture. This process of acculturation is the main trigger of the creation of a third space. In the case of the overseas Chinese artists, they find themselves in a limbo in which they are no longer Chinese, but not “western” either. They are, to use the words of Diana Yeh, researcher of migration, “suspended between two cultures, the ‘notion of displacement as a place of identity’.”¹³⁶

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the reaction to the intent of the Chinese overseas artists to open up the Euroamerican art market to new potentials has been met by a stubborn adhering to the “East-West” binary. At least, in the case of the Euroamerican reception, Chinese artists have continued to be defined and perceived as *Chinese* artists. The main problem seems to be that it has not been possible to interpret, understand and value Chinese experimental art without letting go of the Euroamerican point of view. The fear of the Other that might lead to the questioning of one’s own values and identity seems still to be too overpowering and too resilient to overcome. The international art scene is governed by this mindframe and it hugely affects the way in which Chinese experimental art is presented in auctions, museums and exhibitions.¹³⁷ This is also the reason why so many works of the overseas artists have been misinterpreted: they have been seen through Euroamerican eyes instead of being perceived from its particular point of view. The question then arises: is it even possible to perceive non-Euroamerican art through the eyes of the Other?

In order to fully comprehend non-Euroamerican art, one has to go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy, something that at current times does not seem to have yet occurred, and that might not be possible at all. The perception of the world according to the “East-West” model often leads to the creation of stereotypes, moral values, social rules and preconceived ideas which are not frequently questioned. Art, on the other hand, is often a counter-discourse and frequently examines this socially accepted ideological discourse that is often dictated by a nation-state. The fact that it is a counter-discourse and therefore goes against the mainstream might be one of the reasons why an alternative way of thinking, such as the third space, is not widely accepted or even acknowledged which often leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.¹³⁸ Even though the artists have the

¹³⁶ YEH Diana, *Ethnicities on the move: ‘British-Chinese’ art – identity, subjectivity, politics and beyond*, Critical Quarterly, vol. 42, no.2, p. 65-91, July 2000, p. 80.

¹³⁷ See chapter 3 of Block I.

¹³⁸ This will be extensively elaborated upon in chapter 3 of Block I.

intention of opening up the art market, and our worldview in general to new perspectives that go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy, their works are often not considered hybrid, and maintain their “Chinese” image. Not only are their works perceived as Chinese, the artists are not seen as individual artists either but are lumped together and labelled as Chinese artists.¹³⁹ The fact that they have been living abroad for years does not seem to matter much. This makes the efforts of the overseas artists to create an alternative space, or to open the international art market to new possibilities an impossible task. It is as the Beijing art critic Li Xianting cynically asks the art curator Fei Dawei, who lives in France: “Do you really believe that you yourself have had an impact on the Western art world?”¹⁴⁰

Currently, the third space has not been acknowledged and hybridity is only slowly being accepted. Opinions therefore are divided on whether the overseas artists are creating an alternative model and introducing the international art market to new possibilities. Unlike the scepticism expressed by curator and art critic Li Xianting, other art experts seem to be more positive. Especially Hou Hanru, mentioned on several occasions within this theoretic part, is one of the main advocates of the third space who strongly believes in the role of the overseas artists as the pioneers of change. Through his articles and exhibition,¹⁴¹ he tries to give a voice to this alternative space and generates the questioning of our current status quo of nation-state cultures, pure identities and the “East-West” dichotomy. In his own words:

The relationship between the Self and the Other, between the dominant and the dominated between the centre and the periphery, etc. should be re-negotiated and, eventually transcended. It is in such a process that a new, truly global art – implying the perpetual tension and movements between the global and local – can be imagined and developed. It is a place where the global and local overlap into what is being referred to as ‘glocal’. Envisioning such a Mid-Ground, one can discover new means of re-reading global history as modernity with contributions from different cultures and their mutual interactions, although such relationships are sometimes conflictive, violent and painful. In the meantime, one can also predict a future in which historically dominated cultures and artistic expressions will play as an important role as ‘established’ ones. Such mutual influences, interactions and stimulation will encourage the birth of post-national space. It is a new challenge in our time of globalisation.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ See Block II on the analyses of the exhibitions.

¹⁴⁰ Li Xianting in LU Carol Yinghua, *Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds*, e-flux journal nr. 11, December 2009, p. 1-9, p. 3. Here it should be commented that Li Xianting is a Chinese art curator and critic who has mainly been educated within China. Fei Dawei on the other hand is quite the contrary. He was awarded a Chercheur Libre research grant by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1989 and since then has become a Paris based art curator and critic.

¹⁴¹ See Block II, chapter 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

¹⁴² HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 79.

What becomes clear is that art is no longer merely about the object, about art for art's sake, about aesthetics, but it has converted into a cultural strategy and a non-geographical space where the artists can express their unique and hybrid identity without the necessity of being labelled "western" or "non-western". Living abroad and becoming part of the in-between space changes the perception of art and makes it highly complex, capable of expressing and transmitting a wide array of messages, identities, spaces and ideas. It is as the artist John Young has described so accurately: "art becomes a mapping of memories, sentiments and moods, and moreover converts moments into rites of passage."¹⁴³

¹⁴³ CLARK John, *Dilemmas of (Dis-)attachment in the Chinese Diaspora*, Visual Arts and Culture, vol. 1, p. 14-44, 1999, p. 43.

Conclusion

In the case of the Chinese overseas artists, concepts such as transexperience, homelessness, and the third space are essential in order to understand their artworks. Without these notions, part of the meaning of their creations is missing. However, what will become clear in this thesis, especially in the second part of the dissertation where the exhibitions of the overseas Chinese artists are analysed, is that these concepts are generally omitted, and are hardly ever mentioned. On the contrary, terms such as diaspora and exile seem to be more prevalent in the Euroamerican description of the Chinese experimental artists overseas.

As mentioned before, the main reason why this occurs is that, even in the twenty-first century, Euroamerica has a profound and persistent need to identify the Other and to differentiate itself from the Other. When a Chinese overseas artist is labelled as an exile or a diaspora artist, he or she is being identified as the Other. This then makes the artist more exotic, and therefore more interesting.¹⁴⁴ This need has a negative consequence for the overseas artist, who is then limited to the box in which he or she has been placed. In the case of the overseas Chinese artists, the label of exile, diaspora or “Chinese” places restrictions on their identity, and becomes frustrating and fabricated when the artists describe themselves in terms of hybrid; between past and present, Chinese and “western”. It is for this reason that the creation of this alternative space, for many, has become a priority.

The overseas artists, like many migrants and travellers, are living in the in-between. They have become outsiders to China and cannot be considered insiders to their host country. This puts them in a place which is neither “East” nor “West” and can make them feel lost and frustrated. Hence, the frequent use of language, communication and misunderstanding as topics for their works. On the other hand, it also permits them to look upon both cultures from a distance and from a more objective point of view. It makes them see and question what others have already accepted as true and unquestionable. That, on its turn, then opens our eyes to new perspectives and makes us question ready-made stereotypes that exist between the “East” and the “West”. In a global society characterized by movement and migration it is actually rather strange that concepts such as transexperiences, the unhomely, and the third space have not been integrated into our

¹⁴⁴ See paragraph 3.4 titled *Chinese experimental art as the Other*.

vocabulary. This makes the overseas artists pioneers in the updating of our language to one that corresponds to a twenty-first century reality.

Concepts such as the in-between, the third space, New Internationalism, global art, and universal language point to alternative models that go beyond a narrow-minded “East-West” separation, which has been the ruling model until our present day. In a global twenty-first century the time might have come for a new “organisation” of the world, one which is hybrid and in which frontiers are no longer strictly maintained. A new world view in which the Other and the Self are no longer distinguished or at least, in which being the Other no longer means being non-Euroamerican or inferior. One thing is sure, if a new internationalism becomes a reality, its force will come from the Other, from the people who have come to live outside of the system, in the in-between spaces. For them, a new internationalism is already a reality. It is as Hou Hanru mentioned, “by creating a new ethnoscape, these artists give birth to a veritable global art.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 82.

**SECTION III: EUROAMERICAN RECEPTION OF CHINESE EXPERIMENTAL
ART**

Introduction

This third and last chapter of the theoretic part focuses specifically on Chinese experimental art in the international art world. It has been considered necessary to differentiate and nuance these concepts within this section. Even though they have many aspects in common, it is essential to not generalize these patterns but to individualize them in order to gain a better understanding of the way Chinese experimental art is often received in the Euroamerican context. The four paragraphs within this chapter are titled as follows:

3.1 Euroamerican art theory as universal art language

3.2 Chinese experimental art as political, dissident art

3.3 Chineseness

3.4 Chinese experimental art as the Other

When observing art that is different from one's own culture or cultural background, there are always certain aspects that should be taken into account. Even though it is challenging to leave the "western glasses" to one side and try to see Chinese experimental art on its own terms and to interpret it according to its unique cultural and historic background, it is a necessary procedure that should be exercised always when looking at non-Euroamerican art. Yet, the truth is that art critics, historians, curators, and dealers often do not follow this procedure and interpret Chinese experimental art, or any non-Euroamerican art for that matter, from a mainly Euroamerican perspective.

The problem resides in the fact that alternative art theories or histories in the international art world are scarce. Also, alternative models such as the in-between, the third space or the new internationalism, often promoted by non-"western" artists, critics, and curators, are at present not yet widely acknowledged or accepted. Therefore, an abyss is created when contemplating non-Euroamerican art, an encounter that occurs ever more in our globalized world in which we are constantly in contact with the Other. The tools that would allow for an "accurate" interpretation and a better understanding of non-"western" art seem to be missing.

The interpretation of non-"western" art through Euroamerican art history and theories has led to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, false attributions and the creation of

stereotypes. To quote the art critic Karen Smith¹⁴⁶ “Errors and faulty readings are part of the reception in the West of much ‘art from elsewhere’ without many people seeming to care as long as the artist promises to be hot or famous.”¹⁴⁷

As has been mentioned in chapter two, Chinese artists living abroad are often perceived as “Chinese” and their works are frequently understood from an exotic point of view. This makes Chinese (experimental) art more attractive for the “international” art market yet it also classifies the Chinese (overseas) artists into the box of “the Other” in which they do not always feel comfortable as it sometimes no longer defines who they truly feel they are. More and more artists are battling against being pigeonholed as “Chinese” and have become pioneers in the exploration of different and alternative spaces, such as the in-between, as explained in the previous paragraph 2.4. The Chinese (experimental) artists, like all non-Euroamerican artists, have become pioneers battling different frontlines. First of all, they struggle against being labelled according to Euroamerican stereotypes and images of non-Euroamerican art and cultures. This manifests itself mainly in being perceived as exotic or political. On a second level, they struggle against their art being misinterpreted, although it must be mentioned that some of the artists, like Chen Zhen, take advantage of this aspect.¹⁴⁸ On a third level, they are trying to introduce new possibilities and alternatives to the international as well as the national art scene, trying to break free from the own artistic historical past and to become seen as an independent entity and not as a continuation of Euroamerican post-modern art. But the “West” seems to respond, in most cases, rather reluctantly to these efforts and often ignores the existence of (hybrid) alternatives.¹⁴⁹ This is a consequence of its fear for the Other and the deep rooted necessity of the Self to be able to define the Other. After all, if it is true that Euroamerica defines itself in opposition to the Other, when the Other no longer is definable, then what is the “West”?

But the twenty-first century art world has come to a point in which the interpretation of non-“western” art through an almost exclusively Euroamerican perspective is no longer

¹⁴⁶ It should be mentioned here that Karen Smith is certainly not the only author who has elaborated on this topic. Other authors, like professor John Clark from the University of Sydney or the art critic Barbara Pollack among others, have extensively written on this particular subject. This will also become clear in Block II in which some of the exhibitions will be analysed.

¹⁴⁷ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: the Birth of Avant-Garde art in New China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2008, p. 14.

¹⁴⁸ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I on the *Dynamics of transexperiences*.

¹⁴⁹ See paragraph 2.4 of Block I, and Block II.

sustainable. In our current global world, the upholding of a strict separation between “East” and “West”, “Self” and “Other” is no longer natural and has developed into a model that is artificially sustained by (Euroamerican) force and its fear of losing hegemonic power. The acknowledgement of alternative models and art theories as equally important to Euroamerican art theory and history has become essential and a trope of our times.

To end this introduction, a fragment by the English author Jeanette Winterson:

“Art, all art...is a foreign country,
and we deceive ourselves
when we think it familiar...
We have to recognize
That the language of art, all art
Is not our mother-tongue.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ WINTERSON Jeanette, *Art Objects, Art Objects, Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*, 1996 in FORAGEN Ray, *Whip it up!*, The Art House Newsletter, No. 63, Spring 2013, p. 36-37, p. 37.

3.1 Euroamerican art theory as universal art language

“You cannot look at art apart from reading or recalling the texts that describe it. However much he looks at Chinese art, Elkin fears, ‘I am only seeing myself’.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ ELKINS James in CARRIER David, *Chinese Art: How Different Could It Be From Western Painting?*, History and Theory volume 51, issue 1, p. 116-122, February 2012, Wesleyan University, p. 118.

The reception of Chinese experimental art in the international art world has been immensely determined by a lack of knowledge about Chinese (experimental) art, culture, society, and history. Due to the fact that China had been closed off for so many years during Mao's reign, Euroamerican art experts such as the critics and curators were quite oblivious of what had been going on in China during, roughly said, the 1940s until the 1980s. On the other hand, experts on Chinese history or Chinese linguistics, such as sinologists, did not include Chinese experimental art into their syllabus, and, as the Euroamerican art historians, focused more on traditional Chinese art than experimental Chinese art. Clearly, the international art world was not prepared to adequately interpret Chinese experimental art on its own terms, and as a consequence, "western" reception of this art has been marked principally by stereotypes. As the art and culture writer April Liu explains, this stereotyping can be reduced to four topoi,¹⁵² coined by curator and museum director Bernhard Fibicher: "the topos of the Chinese artist as dissident, the topos of the exotic Chinese artist, the topos of the formerly Chinese, global artist; the topos of the Chinese artist as a threat."¹⁵³ As all stereotypes are, these topoi are immensely generalising and are mainly based on the ethnic identity of the artist (Chinese). It does not consider other modifying factors such as the fact that the artist might be living abroad, the materials he or she uses, the historical or cultural background of the artist, or the sources of inspiration that also hugely differ from one artist to the other.

As April Liu observes, and as has been mentioned in other chapters of this theoretic part, Chinese art is often lumped together and seen as one big, homogeneous group that can be defined by various stereotypes. There seems to be a strong tendency to see and portray China (and its artists and artworks) as a unified whole: one of the inherent characteristics of stereotyping and othering. This then becomes evident in the exhibitions held on Chinese (experimental) art which, especially in the beginning, were mostly held based on the artists' ethnic background. Moreover, the works on display were often a particular kind of work selected (often by Euroamerican curators) to satisfy the Euroamerican image of "Chinese" art or what Chinese experimental art was expected to

¹⁵² LIU April in TSAO Hsyinyuan; AMES Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p. 144.

¹⁵³ These topoi will be further elaborated upon within this present section.

be (like Political Pop and Cynical Realism).¹⁵⁴ It is as the Chinese art expert Wu Hung mentions: “International art exhibitions encourage the tendency to reduce a local tradition into ready-made symbols and citations.”¹⁵⁵ It is true that stereotypes can be a way of approximating the Other, and it is often the first step in the process of getting to know other cultures. Yet, what is important is that these stereotypes are then demystified when one actually comes into contact with the Other, when one discovers that stereotypes are based on false pretences, a lack of knowledge, ignorance, and fear. Art exhibitions could play a major role in this demystification of stereotypes, and they should, but in the case of Chinese experimental art, they have often led to the opposite effect by reinforcing images of “Chineseness”.

The lack of knowledge about non-Euroamerican art, this tendency to resort to stereotypes, the preference for exoticism and sustenance of the Other, and the general dominance of Euroamerica in the global art scene are factors that add up to a monotonous and dominant Euroamerican art language that is currently presiding the international art world. As professor of philosophy David Carrier recently mentioned in 2012: “even if you were born in China and have never visited the West, you will describe this art in Western terms, for at present that is the vocabulary of art history everywhere.”¹⁵⁶ Although this language is presented as universal, applicable to Euroamerican as well as non-Euroamerican art, it is in fact a monologue that shuts out and sometimes even counteracts any possibility for dialogue. Needless to say, it also enormously complicates the non-Euroamerican artists’ efforts of implementing new alternatives within this international art market.

But, Euroamerican art history and its theories can and should only be applied to Euroamerican art. It is not a useful tool in order to gain a full understanding of non-Euroamerican art such as Chinese experimental art. Even so, in many occasions,

¹⁵⁴ The terms of Political Pop and Cynical Realism were coined by the Chinese art expert and curator Li Xianting in the early 1990s. Political Pop and Cynical Realism combine icons that refer to the Chinese communist history (such as images from the Cultural Revolution or portraits of Mao Zedong) with a commercial style, sometimes incorporating “western” logos of commercial brands. A good example are the works of Wang Guangyi. These two styles became highly popular (and lucrative) in the Euroamerican context due to their bright colours and sometimes humoristic images (Yue Minjun is a good example here, see Fig. 6) and were also hugely promoted at the Venice Biennale of 1993. Here, somewhat of a “false” image was created of Chinese experimental art as these two currents were portrayed as the main image of Chinese experimental art within the Euroamerican context. Political Pop and Cynical Realism are often presented as representative of Chinese experimental art, but they are certainly not. See also the following paragraph 3.2, the introduction to Block II, and chapter 4 of Block II.

¹⁵⁵ WU Hung, *Making History- Wu Hung on contemporary art*, Timezone 8, China, 2008, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ CARRIER David, *Chinese Art: How Different Could It Be From Western Painting?*, History and Theory volume 51, issue 1, p. 116-122, February 2012, Wesleyan University, p. 69.

Chinese experimental art has been compared to Euroamerican art styles and artists in order to make them more familiar, and therefore more comprehensible for a Euroamerican audience. This is a natural procedure and is intimately related to the concept of othering: by making the Other more familiar, the fear of the Other then diminishes as it becomes more like the Self. However, the consequences of this strategy of converting Euroamerican art history, art styles, and artists into universal references within the international art world are disastrous. Interpreting non-Euroamerican art according to Euroamerican standards and criteria completely erases the individual qualities of the artists as well as the unique meaning of their creations. To quote the overseas artist Chen Zhen: “If you look at things only through the yardstick of western art history, or speak of things only in a tone consistent with the thinking that ‘contemporary art was invented by the westerners,’ then, not only are you going to lose what you will have, but what you already have will also disappear.”¹⁵⁷

Also the overseas artist Gu Wenda comments on the fact that non-Euroamerican art, in this case Chinese experimental art is often misjudged by the non-Chinese audiences who do not dispose of sufficient knowledge about the particularities of this art. He mentions that some of the overseas artists often use traditional elements within their art¹⁵⁸ and that this is often interpreted as holding on to Chinese tradition, which, according to the artist, is not always the case. He then also comments on the fact that the Chinese intellectuals on the mainland accuse them of “revisionism”¹⁵⁹ or “westernizing” Chinese art, leaving these overseas artists in-between two fronts of criticism and misunderstanding.

Another example is given by the overseas artist Yang Jiechang, who gives an excellent illustration of how one single work has been interpreted and perceived in completely different ways according to the venue where the work was exposed:

In mainland China, [the *100 Layers of Ink* series]¹⁶⁰ was criticized as 'darkening socialism.' In France, people think it is 'Oriental Black' representing Nothingness and Nihilism. While in Japan, some critics

¹⁵⁷ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

¹⁵⁸ See chapter 2.2 of Block I.

¹⁵⁹ GU Wenda in TSAO Hsyinyuan; AMES Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p. 127.

¹⁶⁰ See Fig. 15 and 58.

judge this kind of painting as 'very romantic.' Where my work was showing in the Kunstverein of Heidelberg, Germany, it was attacked as 'full of Fascist violence!'¹⁶¹

This diverse way of interpreting one and the same artwork is natural, as art is precisely about the subjective meanings that can be generated by it. There is generally no single interpretation to an artwork, and the interpretation given by the artist on his or her work is not necessarily the only valid version either. This is one of the aspects that make art so interesting and rich. However, there is a difference between the multiple meanings, feelings or subjective interpretations that art can generate and the misunderstanding that is created as a consequence of the Euroamerican art vocabulary being the one and only accepted language in the international art market, attributing all art with a meaning related to Euroamerican history and culture.

Euroamerican art critics have only slowly started to acknowledge their shortages when it comes to “correctly” interpreting, for example, Chinese experimental art. This thanks to (“western” and “eastern”) art theorists who are slowly putting in evidence this misinterpretation and who are paving the way to a better comprehension of non-Euroamerican art, and also due to the fact that more and more Euroamerican art experts now travel to China to “experience” and learn about Chinese experimental first handed. It is as the author and art expert Barbara Pollack mentions in her book: “My arrogance and American-centrism were continually challenged, and I began to see that all my knowledge of western contemporary art and all my savvy about the art world would not equip me for understanding what was going on in China.”¹⁶²

However, in general it could be stated that Euroamerican art language is still accepted as a universal reference, and is often (unconsciously) used as such when it comes to non-Euroamerican art, this also due to the fact that there is no other widely accepted alternative at present. The dominance of this art theory and history in the international art world is still generally present even though it has been, and still often is, questioned by alternative theories such as post-colonialism, post-modernism or the third space. Only the years to come will tell if the (overseas) artists will be successful in their efforts of

¹⁶¹ Artist statement, Art Beatus website, November 1998. Taken from the Hide literature and catalogue notes of the Sotheby's website. For the full article see: <http://www.sothebys.com/es/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/the-ullens-collection-the-nascence-of-avant-garde-china-hk0373/lot.855.html>. Date of last consultation 15/6/2014.

¹⁶² POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 11.

questioning and challenging the current dominance of Euroamerican art history and theory in the international art scene.

3.2 Chinese experimental art as political, dissident art

Here is a joke: why is it that even now, 35 years after his death, so much 'contemporary' art (especially in the '90s genre called 'Political Pop', which the collector Uli Sigg¹⁶³ helped bring to international prominence around the turn of the century) still depicts the face of Chairman Mao? Answer: because he is the only Chinese political figure that Western buyers can recognize.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Uli Sigg was the former Swiss Ambassador to China and he is one of the leading collectors of Chinese experimental art. He is also the founder of the Contemporary Chinese Art Awards that are biannually given to Chinese artists and art critics to encourage their development and to promote Chinese experimental art among the international audience.

¹⁶⁴ ONG Aihwa, "What Marco Polo Forgot": *Contemporary Chinese Art Reconfigures the Global*, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 53, no. 4, August 2012, p. 471-494, p. 484.

As explained in the introduction to Section I on the context of Chinese experimental art, the Chinese art world differs from the “international” art scene. A Chinese art market interested in experimental (Chinese) art was inexistent until quite recently and it is for this reason that Chinese experimental art first become popular outside of China before it did on the mainland.¹⁶⁵

At the time when Chinese experimental art entered the “international” art scene and became popular, approximately in the 1990s (while booming in the 2000s) it was actually still in its “infant years”. In China, Chinese experimental art was not granted the opportunity to mature and to develop itself before entering the international art world. Not only because of the lack of interest in China for this type of art but also because at that time, China did not have the basic art infrastructures such as art galleries, auction houses, or museums, and there were only a few qualified art professionals such as curators and art critics. Experimental art in China developed purely by the will and force of the artists themselves, as individuals or as self-formed groups, sometimes working and exhibiting in their own homes (a term coined by the art critic Gao Minglu as “Apartment art”). Curators and artists had to often organize exhibitions either underground, or with much effort, in official institutions. These were then often shut down, making the development and diffusion of Chinese experimental art within the mainland a strenuous task.¹⁶⁶

However, the fact that the artists had to struggle for artistic liberty within mainland China and that their shows were often closed down due to political censorship only made Chinese experimental art more interesting for the Euroamerican art world as it reinforced the political and dissident character that was often attributed by the Euroamerican art curators, collectors and critics to this art. As Nixi Cura, director of the Arts of China course at Christie has indicated,¹⁶⁷ these suppressions of artistic freedom had in fact positive effects as it considerably enhanced the popularity and marketability of this art within a politically focused international art market. Ironically, an artist could consider him or herself lucky when a show was shut down.

¹⁶⁵ In the words of art critic Barbara Pollack: “Like Chinese export porcelain made for distribution in the U.S. and Europe in the late 19th century, much of the Chinese contemporary art that appealed to western tastes was an international invention directed at foreign audiences, the sole buyers of this work until well after 2000.” POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ See WU Hung's book *Canceled: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*, David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 2000, which gives an excellent account on the roles that censorship and artistic freedom play in the experimental art scene in China. (It should be kept in mind that the book was written in the year 2000.)

¹⁶⁷ CURA Nixi, *High Art, Luo Art*, Department of Visual Arts, Union College. Asiana.com, n.d., p. 2.

The desire of Euroamerica to see Chinese experimental art from a political and dissident perspective becomes evident in the frequent references to Tiananmen Square in exhibition catalogues and reviews published in the “West”.¹⁶⁸ This reference sets a political tone for the exhibition, the participating artists and the works on display although in most occasions this political aspect is completely out of context. The art critic Hou Hanru considers the mentioning of the Tiananmen Square Events in “western” art reviews and articles as the starting point of the post-orientalist image of China, as it reinforces the communist, repressing image that Euroamerica has of China, and he sees it as a result of purely economical and political interests. Therefore, he concludes that this phenomenon is in fact a “post-orientalist desire to grasp the Other”.¹⁶⁹ Of course, seen in the early 1990s, Euroamerica and China were still submerged in a (post) Cold War context and this can be clearly noticed in the way Chinese experimental art was received and portrayed within Euroamerica. At that time, there was a need to portray China as the communist enemy, repressing the art and the artists within the mainland. It is also for this reason that Chinese experimental artists were so well received and became a “hot item” within the international art market. They were seen as heroes who went against the communist regime and this is also the reason why they were often depicted as dissident artist in search of freedom. It is not a coincidence that Chinese experimental art became popular in the United States and Europe in the 1990s, a period of time immediately following the events of Tiananmen Square that took place in 1989. To quote a fragment by art and culture writer April Liu, in the 1990s the Euroamerican critics welcomed the Chinese experimental artists as they were seen as the “embodiment of the hope that might bring change to China”.¹⁷⁰ They were seen as a kind of “freedom fighters”: dissident artists going against the Chinese political regime of repression and violence. The more the international media focused on the political and social situation of China, the more popular the Chinese experimental artists became within the Euroamerican art circuits. As the art curator and critic Carol Yinghua Lu wrote “In no time, Chinese contemporary art was embraced by the international art market as a hot item – not particularly for its artistic value, but for its

¹⁶⁸ For example, the curator Zhu Qi mentions: “Many articles written by Westerners on the subject of China’s avant garde follow the same ideologically colored and over-simplified mode of discourse. Generally an article begins with a background description of the post-Cold War era. This is then followed by a discussion of the socio-political situation in China. And lastly, an artist is selected as somehow representative of China.” Zhu Qi, *Do Westerners Really Understand Chinese avant-garde Art?* In John Clark (ed.) *Chinese art at the end of the millennium*, Hong Kong, 2000. For the specific article see: <https://www.msu.edu/course/ha/491/zuqi.pdf>. Date of last consultation: 11/11/2014. This phenomenon shall become evident when analysing some of the exhibitions in Block II of this dissertation.

¹⁶⁹ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 66.

¹⁷⁰ LIU April in TSAO Hsyinyuan; AMES Roger T., *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese art – Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2011, p. 3.

ideological and sociological revelations.”¹⁷¹ This popularity of dissident Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica can be illustrated with a quote by one of the most important art curators Harald Szeeman:

Since the last revolution of the arts at the end of the sixties, there has been no subversive art; good artists, yes, but the subcutaneous rebelliousness has disappeared in the west, and that explains my interest in China. Whether work is traditionally painted or sculpted, whether painting is undermined by rolling picture scrolls or by videos, subversiveness is always part of the message. This may be explained by the context: artists who stay in the country want to change things and want to gain freedom of action. However, recognition from outside, from the west is important to them as well.¹⁷²

Yet this statement is then put into another light by the curator Zhu Qi who mentioned:

But, do Westerners really understand Chinese avant-garde art? The answer I believe, is no. (...) I think all too often works with political subject matter or content are perhaps accepted without serious reflection as symbolizing or representing an underlying reality. (...) In fact, any political art produced after the 1993 Venice Biennale would have little broad value or significance in Chinese art. (...) Westerners' taste for Chinese avant garde art can be categorized as follows: generally they prefer works that appear political, fashionable, subversive, psychopathic, mixed in with a little of Chinese traditional art, and sprinkled with a pinch of post-modernism all mixed together. (...) It's something clearly longed for and coveted. You can see it in the faces of Western curators. What they truly love is political repression, poor and backward conditions and rebellious lifestyles.¹⁷³

Keeping this in mind, it then becomes clear that the Chinese experimental art that became popular in Euroamerica was mainly of a specific kind that satisfied this political, dissident image that Euroamerica expected of China. It was a time in which the Cold War had just come to an end but in which China was still seen as the communist enemy, the opposite of the democratic and free “West”. Chinese artists who wanted to sell or to exhibit in the international scene, especially in the beginning, often found themselves in the hands of Euroamerican art dealers and curators who were on the lookout for a certain type of art that would fulfil these expectations and who could maintain the portrayal of China as the communist and oppressive antagonist. According to Wu Hung this heavy dependence on the wishes of the international art market impedes the Chinese artists to demonstrate its real significance and to transmit its true message. Instead they are forced to enrich the

¹⁷¹ LU Carol Yinghua, *Back to Normal: To Learn in the Chaos Arising from the Project of Modernity*, Global Art Museum, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, November 2009.

¹⁷² Harald Szeeman, *What Makes Contemporary Chinese Art So Attractive*, 2002, <http://ccaa-awards.org/archives/2002>. Date of last consultation: 19/3/2012.

¹⁷³ Zhu Qi, *Do Westerners Really Understand Chinese avant-garde Art?* In John Clark (ed.) *Chinese art at the end of the millennium*, Hong Kong, 2000. For the specific article see: <https://www.msu.edu/course/ha/491/zuqi.pdf>. Date of last consultation: 11/11/2014. This phenomenon shall become evident when analysing some of the exhibitions in Block II of this dissertation.

post-cold war and postcolonial discourse so in demand within the Euroamerican art scene.¹⁷⁴

The styles that were coined as Political Pop and Cynical Realism became hugely popular due to the fact that they were “critical” towards the Chinese political situation, frequently making references to the Cultural Revolution. Works in the Political Pop and Cynical Realism style portrayed China as a communist and oppressing nation: the opposite of the superior “West” where liberty, democracy, and freedom of expression are considered one of the core values of “western” culture. In the words of the art curator Hou Hanru “These kinds of cynical games of ‘anti-official propaganda’ satisfy a “western” public’s expectation for their own ideological superiority (...).¹⁷⁵ As the curator then also mentioned, Political Pop and Cynical Realism became the image and the reference of Chinese experimental art and were presented as such for many years. It corresponded and therefore satisfied the political, cultural and exotic clichés that Euroamerica had of China. Chinese experimental art had to be first and foremost “Chinese”, all artists that proposed alternatives were often ignored. This led to a vulgarisation of Chinese experimental art in which the art that became successful due to its easy commercialization did not correspond to the reality of this art.¹⁷⁶

A good example of the Political Pop or Cynical Realism style is Yue Minjun’s painting titled *Execution* (1995) (Fig. 6) that broke all records by becoming the most expensive work of Chinese experimental art to be auctioned ever, selling for 4.2 million euros at London’s Sotheby’s in 2007.¹⁷⁷ The painting depicts an execution at Tiananmen Square displaying Yue Minjun’s characteristic hysterically laughing personages. The fact that the artwork was sold in 2007, almost twenty years after the events of Tiananmen, and twelve years after its making, seem to confirm not only the existence of a “western” thirst for Chinese experimental art containing a strong political appearance but especially its persistence. This, as well as Hou Hanru’s statement mentioned earlier is then reinforced when

¹⁷⁴ WU Hung, *Cancelled: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*, David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 2000, p. 137.

¹⁷⁵ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 57.

¹⁷⁶ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 80.

¹⁷⁷ Author unknown, *Chinese painting sets sales record at London auction*, The Star online, October 13 2007. For the full article see: <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx?file=%2f2007%2f10%2f13%2fapworld%2f20071013203027&sec=apworld>. Date of last consultation: 11/6/2014.

Sotheby's described this work as "among the most historically important paintings of the Chinese avant-garde ever to appear at auction."¹⁷⁸



Figure 6: Yue Minjun, *Execution*, 1994

However, Political Pop and Cynical Realism quickly became styles that were heavily criticized, especially by the mainland artists who started speaking of "staging Chineseness", "catering to the West", and "embassy art". Political Pop and Cynical realism was, and still is, seen as somewhat of an "easy" art. Its message is overtly political and is facile to "read" as it often points to the Cultural Revolution or Tiananmen, the figure of Mao or Euroamerican commercial logos also being a recurrent topic within this art current. It also uses bright and bold colours that are attractive for the general public which add a "non-seriousness" to this art, as if it were all just a joke. Humor is one of its other characteristics, often converting these artworks in rather "ridiculous" or absurd, like the smiling faces of Yue Minjun. To quote the words of Cura Nixi, these art currents "promised instant accessibility and sensory gratification in the manner of commercial art, marked by bold outlines, collages effects, bright colors, and pithy slogans."¹⁷⁹

In a very brief period of time, Political Pop and Cynical Realism became the most successful art current within Chinese experimental art, its painters quickly rising to

¹⁷⁸ YUAN Elizabeth, "Execution" artist rejects Tiananmen label, CNN.com/Asia, October 15 2007, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/10/11/china.artist/index.html#cnSTCText>. Date of last consultation: 11/6/2014.

¹⁷⁹ CURA Nixi, *High Art, Luo Art*, Department of Visual Arts, Union College. Asiana, n.d, p. 2.

stardom and fortune, moving to big mansions in the outskirts of Beijing and Shanghai. As the artists themselves became disconnected from Chinese society, this type of art eventually lost its authentic message also due to the fact that it slowly adapted itself to the commercial demands of the Euroamerican art world. Political Pop and Cynical Realism became styles that lost contact with the reality of China. In the global art scene, by catering to the “West” in order to gain exposure and to become successful, some works within the Chinese experimental art current slowly transformed into purely commercial *products* meant for the “western” art market. This phenomenon, coined as “staging Chineseness”, “image plays” or “going commercial”, has a very grave consequence for Chinese experimental art and that is that it satisfies international needs but not domestic ones: it slowly loses its authenticity, its critical direction, and becomes detached from Chinese reality. It becomes a commercial brand, its only goal to excel on the markets and to make the highest possible profits. This becomes evident in the way this art is presented within the international art scene at glamorous art shows to which the rich and famous are invited. This type of Chinese experimental art converted from being an “event” to see, into an event in which to *be* seen. When the Chinese artists decide to cater to the “West” by making artworks with a political or exotic “Chinese” character to them, Chinese art becomes the representation of what the people outside of China, mainly the “West” imagine China to be, and not what it is in reality. As the art journalist Roberta Lombardi writes: “Countries that lead the artistic world and its market are maybe asking this from Chinese artists: an adulcorated ‘exotic’ taste. A ‘Other’, which has been cleaned up and ‘glamoured’.”¹⁸⁰

What had started out as somewhat of a cathartic way of dealing with the past of China had turned out to be a successful formula in the international art market and a ticket to fast cash, fame, and fortune. In just a few years, some of the Chinese experimental artists like Yue Minjun and Zhang Fanzhi became the highest selling artists within the art market. Nowadays, successful Chinese artists are often measured by the money their works make and not on the message their creations transmit. The dollars that these works generate depend almost entirely on their popularity within the art market and this, on its turn, depends on how well the artworks adjust to the image that is expected. It is as the cultural historian Ivan Gaskell mentions: “we should not underestimate the power of financial

¹⁸⁰ LOMBARDI Roberta, *The Secret Li(f)le of Chinese Contemporary Art*, n.d., n.p. For the full article, see: <http://arthubasia.org/archives/the-secret-life-of-chinese-contemporary-art-by-roberta-lombardi/>Date of last consultation: 05/11/2013.

interest to push the artworld in a globalizing, homogenizing direction, reinforcing stereotypes such as the Chinese staging of imitation and emulation.”¹⁸¹

Catering to the Euroamerican art market has been hugely successful for some of the artists however in general, it has backfired on the artists in several ways. As mentioned previously, some of the artists lost contact with the reality of China. Often producing their works in big studios full of employees as were it a factory manufacturing artworks to be shipped to overseas markets, like the chinoiserie porcelain meant for the European markets in the eighteenth century. Also, the fact that Political Pop and Cynical Realism became the main image of Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica and proved to be such a successful formula, it slowly started to reaffirm the expectations that the “West” has of Chinese experimental art, as not to lose its position as a “hot item” within its markets. The efforts made by the artists to be considered as individual artists, as in-between artists, or as artists trying to find a way to combine their past with the new influences of their present were somewhat lost and overshadowed by the strong popularity and the fast upcoming of Political Pop and Cynical Realism. Also, for the Chinese artists, it was as if battling a double censorship: on the mainland they had to obey the strict rules of the Chinese art scene while in the “West” it was expected of them to show art containing “Chineseness”¹⁸² and political rebellion in order to become successful. What becomes evident is that Chinese experimental art was, and up to a certain point still is, highly dependent on the international market forces, Euroamerican curators and critics, and the desires or needs that it has when it comes to this type of art.¹⁸³ What deceptively seemed like “hitting the jackpot” slowly revealed itself as somewhat of a tourniquet, limiting the artists and reinforcing the stereotypes of Chinese experimental art.

For the (overseas) Chinese artists who do not necessarily make art within the Political Pop or Cynical Realism styles, operating within an art scene with a preference for this kind of dissident, political art can become very frustrating and limiting. This becomes evident

¹⁸¹ GASKELL Ivan, *Spilt Ink: Aesthetic Globalization and Contemporary Chinese Art*, British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 52, nr. 1, January 2012, p. 1-16, p. 15.

¹⁸² See the following paragraph 3.3 titled *Chineseness*.

¹⁸³ On its turn, what seems to rule the “western” art market are above all the important art dealers, followed by the bigger auction houses, then the art curators that organize specific art exhibitions about Chinese experimental art and then, lastly, the art critics. The prominent position of the art dealers and auction houses within the “western” art market hugely determines what types of Chinese experimental art become popular in the “West” and which not. It is for this reason that styles such as Political Pop and Cynical Realism have become “hot items”, mainly based on the fact that they were, and still are, highly marketable and are often guaranteed to sell at high prices.

when their works are erroneously interpreted as political or dissident, or when they are invited to participate in exhibitions purely based on the fact that they were born in China and are therefore expected to make political references to the historical past of China. In the words of the overseas artist Xu Bing: "From the early 1990s many [American] people became interested in China but saw only political problems. I was labelled as Chinese first, and people were less interested in what my art was about than looking at the message they felt I carried from China."¹⁸⁴

Although works in the Political Pop and Cynical Realism style are still highly popular in the markets overseas, and is still somewhat expected, some artists are slowly succeeding in breaking the cycle. As has been mentioned on various occasions in this theoretic part, it is particularly the non-Euroamerican artists that are trying to implement alternative models to break Euroamerican hegemony in the art world. It thus becomes clear that these artists are not only struggling to be considered individual, and not necessarily Chinese artists, but are also dealing with the stereotypes often created by their mainland counterparts who produce Political Pop and Cynical Realism. According to the overseas artist Wang Du who lives in Paris, the artists are slowly achieving a change and are managing to reorient the image of Chinese experimental art to a broader perspective. According to the artist, a factor that hugely benefits these changes is the new and upcoming generation of Chinese artists who are gradually creating a new Chinese art scene. Another factor is the rise in popularity of Chinese experimental art within the mainland, which leads to more specialized art galleries, collectors and museums within China, hereby alleviating the strong dependence of Chinese art on the international markets.¹⁸⁵

Yet, despite the efforts by some of the (overseas) artists, critics and curators, reality reveals that it is still predominantly Euroamerican forces that rule the international art scene and that Chinese experimental art is nevertheless more often than not perceived and valued from this Euroamerican point of view dominated by the need to see China through a political perspective. This manifests itself, for example, in the way Chinese experimental art is portrayed in art exhibitions, the way it is often described in the exhibition catalogues, and the way Euroamerican art critics respond to these exhibitions and describe them in their articles.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: the Birth of Avant-Garde art in New China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2008, p. 352.

¹⁸⁵ SANS Jérôme, *China Talks – 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009, p. 96.

¹⁸⁶ See Block II of this dissertation.

In the end, the non-Euroamerican artists, including the Chinese experimental artists, are left with two options: to succumb to the expectations of the international world or to fight an uphill battle in order to establish an alternative model in which non-Euroamerican art is not considered culturally and socially inferior, but is valued according to its own particular context. It is as the art critic and author Barbara Pollack observed: “if westerners could get beyond their grasping need for Chinese art that looks like throwbacks to the Cultural Revolution, they could discover a new generation of truly talented artists.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 81.

3.3 Chineseness

“Why should we expect a Chinese artist’s work to look Chinese?’ (...) ‘Do we expect an artwork made by a French artist to look French?’”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ MAGGIO Meg in POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 65.

In this paragraph, a closer look shall be taken at the concept of “Chineseness”: what is it and where does it come from? Can one really speak of “China” as a homogeneous nation? If the definition of Chineseness is based on the simple fact that one is born in China, this then becomes quite problematic. China is a vast nation that is the sum of hundreds of different dialects, populations, cultures and traditions, its extent surface reaching from Russia to Japan. There is no such thing as a single homogeneous China. Yet, it is undeniable that a homogeneous image of China based on stereotypes does exist, all its complexity being summed up into a homogeneous mass that can then be labelled “Chinese”. Especially in the “West”, when one speaks of China (and the same thing happens when one speaks of “Africa”, for example) the image is not of diversity but of a generalizing, exotic, faraway land of the Other, or an image of a closed-off, narrow-minded communist China. Where does this image come from? Or as the scholar Allen Chun rightfully questions: who is really speaking here?¹⁸⁹

Chineseness, in fact, is quite an ambiguous concept and it is understood differently by the mainland Chinese, the overseas Chinese and the “West”. In the United States and Europe, Chineseness seems to be closely related to exoticism and chinoiserie. Moreover, the United States and some of the European countries have known a history of Chinese immigration which also contributes to the fact of seeing Chinese as the Other through stereotypical, unquestioned assumptions. These factors have contributed to the creation of a Euroamerican image of China and the Chinese which has resulted in a certain expectation of what Chineseness should be according to Euroamerican eyes. This can be observed in the exhibitions held on Chinese art, the image of the various China towns all over the world, and even becomes evident in the decoration of a Chinese restaurant in Europe or the US.¹⁹⁰ According to the curator Hou Hanru, this expectancy of finding Chineseness in anything “Chinese” and the creation of stereotypes in order to facilitate the distinction between the Other and the Self, is a result of “Western faith in ‘national identity’ that makes Westerners expect Chinese to behave like Chinese people all the time so that they can be ‘understood’ and hence controlled.”¹⁹¹ Yet, the question here arises, do

¹⁸⁹ CHUN Allen, *Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity*, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 111.

¹⁹⁰ In the words of the artist Ai Wei Wei: “It is like a restaurant in Chinatown that sells all the standard dishes, such as kung pao chicken and sweet and sour pork. People will eat it and say it is Chinese, but it is simply a consumerist offering, providing little in the way of a genuine experience of life in China today.” Ai Wei Wei, *China’s art world does not exist*, The Guardian, 10 September 2012.

¹⁹¹ HOU Hanru in LOMBARDI Roberta Lombardi, *The Secret Life of Chinese Contemporary Art*, 2013, n.d. For the full article, see: <http://arthubasia.org/archives/the-secret-life-of-chinese-contemporary-art-by-roberta-lombardi/> Date of last consultation: 05/11/2013.

“national identities” such as Chineseness really exist or are they, like the “East-West” dichotomy or the centre-periphery model, (artificial) man-made constructions in order to maintain a hegemonic power balance? The scholar Allen Chun alleges that national identities rarely come from the people themselves, but that they are produced, systemized and articulated by the state. All elements of this national culture, such as the cultural discourses, symbols, patriotic icons, values, customs, myths, etc. are all man-made constructions¹⁹² made to differentiate one national culture from the other, one ethnicity from the other. It serves to discriminate the Other from the Self and to give a false sense of “belonging” or feeling at “home”.¹⁹³

To believe in the existence of any man-made nation-state culture, like the “East-West” dichotomy or the centre-periphery model, one has to necessarily trust that the definition is rigid and always stays the same: in this case, once a Chinese, always a Chinese. These static definitions and constructed stereotypes that form the foundation of any nation-state culture do not allow for hybridity or dynamism, and points to pure identities without any bi-cultural possibilities nor changes. Yet, in the current global society it is actually very challenging to find “pure” identities, and identifying oneself as belonging to one single nation-state becomes more difficult. It is no longer compulsory for one’s identity to be determined by place of birth. Every time more, identity is formed by life experiences that are the result of migrations and travelling on a global scale. However, as explained in paragraph 1.4, the global twenty-first century has not only lead to a diversification of identities and an enrichment of one’s own identity and culture, it sometimes also leads to the hardening of frontiers and a reinforcement of the illusion of national identities and nation-state cultures. Contact with the Other can either result in curiosity and the opening up of cultures, or it can end up in fear for the Other, the non-familiar, which often results in emphasizing and finding refuge within the own national identity. This fear also reduces the Other to pre-established stereotypes that are the result of unquestioned suppositions.

Even though Chineseness, like any other national identity, seems to be an artificial construction implemented by the state, some Chinese artists have taken advantage of their “Chinese” identity and the need for identification according to nation-state cultures in order to succeed in the Euroamerican art world. In the previous paragraph it has been

¹⁹² CHUN Allen, *Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity*, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 115.

¹⁹³ See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

commented that some Chinese artists have reinforced Chineseness in order to be more attractive for a “western” art market, making works with a political, dissident character or purposely adding an exotic “Chinese” appeal to them. The result is that Chineseness, like Political Pop and Cynical Realism, has become a sum of isolated elements taken out of context. Chineseness, like these art currents, has become a “brand”, implemented as were they strategies of marketing.

Exhibitions in Euroamerica are often organized based on the ethnic background of the artists, and not on the works they make. As a consequence, an expectation is created that the ethnic background of the artist will shine through in the artworks displayed at the survey. In the case of the Chinese experimental artists, this means that their works are expected to show elements of “Chineseness” so that they can be defined as Chinese. It is like a bottle of Coca-Cola or the hamburgers of MacDonald’s: the product has to be faithful to its brand and has to satisfy the consumer’s expectation of how it should taste like (in the case of Chinese art, look like). Deception is often the result when the artwork does not contain these “Chinese” elements: when product and brand become incongruous. As a result, when the expectancy of Chineseness is not being lived up to, confusion arises. Chinese experimental art that does not look “Chinese” can no longer be defined as the Other. In fact, it cannot be defined at all and this goes against the marketing (branding) system, the “East-West” dichotomy, centre-periphery model and all man-made nation-state culture strategies. In practice, this state of confusion leads to the artworks not being “understood” by the audience and the art critics, or for them to desperately attribute Chinese characteristics where they are non-existing.¹⁹⁴

As explained in the previous paragraph, the expectancy of Chineseness can become a frustrating obstacle for the Chinese experimental artists working and residing overseas. Xu Bing has expressed this frustration in his work titled *A Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32) in which the artist imprinted a sow with “nonsense” Chinese characters and a male boar with “nonsense” English words. The floor was covered in books while the two pigs walked over them. After some time, the boar mounted the sow, causing different reactions in the onlookers who were watching the scene. The fact that

¹⁹⁴ An excellent illustration of this situation by the art critic Barbara Pollack: “it is unfair at this juncture in history to expect Chinese artists to make works that look exotic and Asian. But the absence of Chinese embellishments leads many visitors to be confused and disappointed. I bump into a clueless American tourist during the opening. ‘Where are the Chinese artists?’ he asks, indicating that he expected something more in line with brush painting and calligraphy. ‘They are all around you,’ I replied, as if I am an authority.” POLLACK, Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 65.

the boar, with the “western” imprint, mounted the sow, with the “Chinese” imprint, might be a metaphor pointing to “western” superiority over the “East”, or expressed in a stronger way: the “rape” of “Chinese” culture (or the East) by the dominant “West”. It might even suggest how non-Euroamerican artists have to sometimes obey and succumb to the wishes of the international art market.¹⁹⁵



Figure 7: Xu Bing, *Case Study of Transference*, 1994

Euroamerican expectations of Chineseness are one of the main problems that Chinese overseas artists have to deal with when manoeuvring within the “international” art world. Their “Chineseness” is frequently prioritized over their individual creations and ways of thinking which impedes them to grow within an international art scene and to interact as equals with other artists, “western” as well as non-“western”. Moreover, it also obstructs them to actively and effectively participate in the creation of an alternative (in-between) space (mentioned in paragraph 2.4). First of all because they are first and foremost classified as Chinese and not as “in-between” or overseas artists and secondly, because Euroamerica seems resistant to the idea of an alternative space that breaks the rigid separation between “East” and “West” which might lead to the loss of its hegemonic dominance. It is as the art critic and curator Hou Hanru has stated: “Chinese artists as the ‘other’ are purely ‘aestheticized’ an exotic object, rather than an individual whose

¹⁹⁵Britta Erickson, *Evolving Meanings in Xu Bing's Art: A Case Study of Transference*, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/evolving_meanings_in_xu_bings_art_a_case_study_of_transference/, n.d. Date of last consultation: 3/9/2014. See also chapter 5 of Block II.

contribution to international cultural exchanges is approached in an active and most valuable way.”¹⁹⁶

The artists on which this dissertation focuses left China in the 1980s and the 1990s, and have slowly made their way into the “western” art mainstream however, there seems to be a constant struggle for them to be acknowledged as individual artists instead of *Chinese* artists. The art curator and critic Melissa Chiu has stated that Chinese experimental artists living overseas are often not portrayed as such and are not seen any different from their mainland counterparts.¹⁹⁷ Usually they have been selected to participate in exhibitions based on the fact that they were born in China and are seen as Chinese artists, expecting the brand of Chineseness to be traceable within their works. Only on rare occasions is their overseas or in-between position mentioned, let alone emphasized, and when this occurs it is most often in surveys curated by Chinese art curators like Hou Hanru.¹⁹⁸

At this point of the paragraph, it might be insightful to let the artists themselves speak. How do they feel about Chineseness? It is interesting to discover that the opinions on the matter are divided. In some cases, artists identify themselves as being Chinese while others on the other hand speak of “fighting being Chinese” or the desire to be considered an artist instead of a *Chinese* artist. Here, a few quotes by the overseas artists Yan Pei Ming, Cai Guoqiang, Ni Haifeng, Chen Zhen, Yang Jiechang, Ah Xian, and the curators Hou Hanru and Fei Dawei, all of which have lived or are still living overseas.

Yang Pei Ming, who has lived more years outside of China than on the mainland mentions that for him as an artist, nationality is no longer important:

My identity is particular. I was born in Shanghai, then went to France when I was twenty. So I have now lived in France for longer than I ever lived in China. Of course, for an artist, nationality or citizenship is not important, the important thing is your attitude toward art. I do not want to be a Chinese artist, only an artist.¹⁹⁹

The art curator Hou Hanru speaks of the double sides of being considered Chinese while he himself identifies more with the term “global traveler”: “(...) I don’t think I’m a Chinese

¹⁹⁶ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 59.

¹⁹⁷ CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 21.

¹⁹⁸ This will become clear in the analytical part of Block II.

¹⁹⁹ YAN Pei-Ming in SANS Jérôme, *China Talks – 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009, p. 142.

curator. I happened to grow up in China and I work with Chinese contemporary art, but I am a global traveler. Although the Chinese experience gives me strength, I consider myself someone who has continuously struggled against being Chinese.”²⁰⁰

The artist Cai Guoqiang mentions that the usage of Chinese elements within his work comes natural to him, however he is not concerned with the matter of being Chinese or not: “Although I use a lot of materials from Chinese culture, I am most interested in artistic language. I use Chinese symbols and ideas because it is easy for me, it comes naturally. I use them as words to express an idea, but it is the artistic language and contemporary art that I am concerned with.”²⁰¹

The art curator Fei Dawei, who has been living in France for many years, mentions that he focuses on individual artists and that he does not acknowledge the existence of a *Chinese* avant-garde. Fei Dawei, like Hou Hanru is one of the few art curators who distinguish the overseas Chinese artists from their mainland counterparts.

I never organize large-scale Chinese art shows. I always try to focus on the individual works of Chinese artists. And even though I want to show Chinese artists, I will not show the ‘Chinese avant-garde’. For me, the Chinese ‘avant-garde’ does not exist. We can only speak about art by focusing on the work of the artist.²⁰²

The artist Ni Haifeng, who lives in Amsterdam, mentions that the question of identity is especially significant for artists living outside of their homeland:

To Chinese artists living in China, ‘Chineseness’ is not a valid concept. Just as it would be ridiculous and totally unnecessary for a Dutch artist living in Holland to question ‘Dutchness’. But for Chinese artists living in the West it’s almost a daily question, put to them not only from the outside, but which they confront within themselves, within their own inner world. This is the only fundamental difference. All other differences are not important.

I am always being asked how making work in the West is related to my unique (they always say ‘unique’) Chinese identity, as though they are desperately seeking ‘Chineseness’. However, identity is constituted of many things, not just past but also present.²⁰³

On the contrary, some Chinese artists have commented on the fact that being out of China has made them feel *more* Chinese. Seeing China from a distance makes them re-

²⁰⁰ HOU Hanru & STORR Robert, *Not only possible but also necessary: art in the present tense*, Art Asia Pacific, issue 53, May/ June 2007.

²⁰¹ CAI Guoqiang in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2007, p. 113.

²⁰² FEI Dawei in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano 2007, p. 122.

²⁰³ NI Haifeng in BROUWER Marianne, *A Zero Degree of Writing and Other Subversive Moments – An interview with Ni Haifeng*, n.d. <http://haifeng.home.xs4all.nl/h-text-1.htm>. Date of last consultation: 14/10/2013.

evaluate their cultural background in a more critical way. Also, the fact of being displaced in a foreign country and living in a strange environment sometimes reinforces their identity as Chinese and makes them hold on to it. The artist Ah Xian explains: “I believe that even if someone is away from China, they recognize themselves as being Chinese. If you are away from China, you also have a clearer vision of China and Chinese culture.”²⁰⁴

And the overseas artist Chen Zhen: “A person like me who left China at thirty cannot change the genes, even if I change my blood many times. Yellow race will be yellow race. But I could help myself if I want to. Of course, sometimes, I will be unintentionally influenced by my own genes.”²⁰⁵

And the overseas Chinese artist Yang Jiechang: “There are so many possibilities left in tradition. It has not been cut off, it still exists in our blood, in our customs, in our taste. It is in the sky and the ground. You cannot get rid of it, to do so would be truly absurd.”²⁰⁶

These quotes seem to indicate that the visions and feelings on Chineseness are varied and that the term is viewed and experienced on a subjective level which is different for every artist. Cai Guoqiang mentions that the use of Chinese elements in his work “comes naturally”. This somewhat coincides with Hou Hanru who mentioned that his Chinese background gives him strength, or the artist Chen Zhen who stated that his Chinese roots will always be an influence within his work. Ah Xian, who lives in Australia, points to the fact that his feelings towards “Chineseness” have only become stronger after leaving the mainland. The artist Ni Haifeng, who lives in Holland, addresses the fact that Chineseness (or the concept of identity) seems to be an issue that is dealt with by, especially, overseas artists. A mainland Chinese artist, for example, would never have to question his or her Chineseness, nor would there be an expectation for his or her work to appear Chinese within the domestic art scene. However, the artists living abroad who deal with other cultures and operate within the international (Euroamerican) art world are frequently confronted with and limited by their Chineseness, even if they do not feel Chinese anymore. Living abroad, they are constantly reminded of their Chineseness and what is

²⁰⁴ AH Xian in CHIU Melissa, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano 2007, p. 183.

²⁰⁵ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

²⁰⁶ JIECHANG Yang in SANS Jérôme, *China Talks – 32 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2009, p. 153.

expected of them and their works in order to become successful, or maybe even just to be considered within the international arts.

This bond, or battle with the homeland manifests itself in the usage of (often traditional) Chinese elements within the works of the experimental artists. As explained in paragraph 2.2, in the 1990s a shift took place in the mainland as well as in the art created by the Chinese artists living abroad. Chinese artists started to refocus on their Chinese roots by integrating elements of Chinese culture within their works in an intent to reorient Chinese experimental art and to open new doors and possibilities. Does this then make Chineseness an inevitable resource for the Chinese artists?

The key to “correctly” understanding “Chineseness” in Chinese experimental art is to comprehend the reason *why* Chinese elements are used. In most cases, Chinese roots are not employed for emphasizing the Chineseness of a work, as is often assumed by the “western” art critics. The combination of Chinese as well as Euroamerican elements is a way to look for new possibilities within the Chinese as well as the international art scene. It serves to open up the art market to other (non-Euroamerican) options and to achieve an alternative, international language that goes beyond the “East-West” binary and the Euroamerican vocabulary considered universally applicable. Using Chinese elements within the artworks of the experimental artist can serve as a way to question Chinese art and culture, which might result in the creation of Chinese references that can then be used to “correctly” interpret Chinese experimental art on its own terms. If a Chinese artistic vocabulary could be erected as an alternative to the universal Euroamerican art language, this would enormously benefit the interpretation of Chinese experimental art in the international art scene. It would substitute the stereotypes and the Euroamerican gazing towards China as an exotic, yet misunderstood object. Chinese experimental art would no longer be seen as a continuation or a copy of Euroamerican art history, and a time of dialogue would finally become a reality.

What becomes clear is that Chineseness within Chinese experimental art is not to be (mis)understood as mere stereotypical elements aimed at fulfilling the expectations of what is considered Chinese. It becomes essential not to confuse artworks in the Political Pop and Cynical Realism style with Chinese experimental artworks that combine Euroamerican and Chinese elements in order to create hybridity and to offer alternatives to the dominant Euroamerican influence in the international art market. “Borrowing” from

different cultures, as Chen Zhen has called it,²⁰⁷ would lead to a disruption of the current status quo and opens up the art scene to new possibilities. Combining “western” and “eastern” elements leads to hybridity that goes beyond the binary, a phenomenon that one assumes would be more common in the twenty-first century. However, the incorporation of Chinese elements in Chinese experimental art is not always perceived in the “West” as creating hybridity, and is still often seen as a reinforcement of the “Chinese” image of Chinese experimental art, particularly because this is what Euroamerica would like to see. Therefore, according to the critic Hou Hanru the challenge lies in reorienting “Western expectations of the oriental towards the unexpected”.²⁰⁸ The first step is to go beyond expectations based on stereotypes, and to become more open-minded towards hybridity, the in-between spaces, and all the other alternatives models that could and should be implemented. The unexpected resides in accepting that nation-state cultures are based on fabricated images and unquestioned values that create a false sense of identity and belonging. The fear of the Other created by nation-state cultures is nothing more than the fear of losing hegemonic power and the loss of a deceitful sense of Self.

As Hou Hanru alleges, the creation of an alternative model to interpret Chinese experimental art depends partly on how the “West” interprets Chineseness. Will Chineseness continue to be seen as a reinforcement of the stereotypical image of China or will the combination of Chinese and “western” elements contribute to the acceptance of hybridity within the arts, the questioning of the “East-West” binary, and the establishment of a truly global art scene?

To end this chapter, a fragment by the art critic Barbara Pollack:

This encounter left an indelible impression and made me realize that it was ridiculous to ask if Cai Guo-Qiang’s art work was ‘Chinese’ or ‘western’. It was meant to be understood from either direction. This was the essential appeal of much of Chinese contemporary art for European and American audiences: just Chinese enough to be identified with an exotic, faraway locale that had recently emerged from a dire Communist period and just western²⁰⁹ enough to overcome extreme cultural differences.

²⁰⁷ ZHEN Chen, *Transexperiences – A Conversation between Chen Zhen and Xian Zhu*, Korinsha Press, Kyoto, Japan, 1998, n.p.

²⁰⁸ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 66.

²⁰⁹ POLLACK Barbara, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic’s Adventures in China*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 16-17.

3.4 Chinese experimental art as the Other

“It was the typical illusion of space – the belief that whatever is far away is different, and the father away it is, the more different it is.”²¹⁰

²¹⁰ KAPUSCINSKI Ryszard, *The Other*, Verso, London, 2009, p. 15-16.

The concept of the Other is quite characteristic for the relationship that exists between the “West” and non-“western” art, and its origins can be traced back to “western roots”. Like the “East-West” binary explained in paragraph 1.2, the centre-periphery model of paragraph 1.3, and the concept of Chineseness of the previous paragraph, the Other is a man-made construction. When one speaks of China as the Other, it is in fact an image of what the “West” *believes* to be Chinese or China. But the image is an illusion that was created many centuries ago. The Other is formed by stereotypes that do not correspond to reality. Just like chinoiserie in the seventeenth century, the Other is often a reflection, or as the art professor Lin Xiaoping mentions, the *production* of the Other is a “mirror of the Same”,²¹¹ reflecting Euroamerican desires and beliefs.

The Other is always the non-Euroamerican and Euroamerica employs the concept, or better said, needs it, to differentiate itself from the Other (who is usually the minority or the inferior). There is a certain fear for the Other which makes it necessary to create a distance between the Self and the Other in order to maintain “western” values and identity. Exoticism (Chineseness) is one of the instruments used in order for Euroamerica to distinguish the Other from the Self and to create this separation. By exoticizing the artists or art currents that are not Euroamerican, they can be clearly defined as different, hereby separating them from the Self.

But the concepts of the Other and exoticism have two faces. On the one hand, the exotic Other is attractive and awakens curiosity. It is the unknown, the unfamiliar and therefore sometimes, the desired. However, the exotic and the Other are never considered as equals to Euroamerica, which is never referred to as “exotic” or the Other. These concepts are only applied to the “East” or the “oriental”. By exoticizing non-Euroamerican cultures and defining them as the Other, the “East-West” separation, and with it Euroamerican superiority, is sustained.

But, in a twenty-first century multicultural world can one still speak of the Self and the Other? Especially in the globalized society we live in today, the “faraway” no longer exists, as distances can be overbridged virtually in a question of seconds. Due to frequent migrations and travelling, faraway no longer necessarily implies “exotic” or “different”. Therefore, the question of *who* the Other really is becomes more relevant than ever. Is the

²¹¹ LIN Xiaoping, *Globalism or Nationalism? Cai Guoqiang, Zhang Huan, and Xu Bing in New York*, Third text, vol. 18, issue 4, 2004, 279-295, p. 287.

definition of the Other still valid in a twenty-first century context, or has it, like the term exile (paragraph 2.1), lost its original meaning? It might be time to consider the Other a concept of the past, long out-dated in the global world and society of today. Yet, why does it seem to be particularly persistent in the art world?

According to the post-colonialist theorist Homi Bhabha the concept of the Other is maintained because:

A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid.' This is what I [Homi Bhabha] mean by a *creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference.²¹²

However out-dated it might seem, the need to differentiate the Other from the Self and hereby making it possible to define the Self in opposition to the Other, seems to be one of the main pillars of Euroamerican, or the dominant culture. It is as the cultural historian Joep Leerssen states, the necessity of differentiation between Self and Other has been one of the main concerns to guarantee in-group coherence.²¹³ As long as the Chinese artists and their artworks can be identified as the Other, the power balance is maintained and the boundaries of what is considered Euroamerica and non-Euroamerica, Self and Other, are secured. However, when a Chinese artist, or any non-Euroamerican artist for that matter, presents him or herself as an in-between artist with works that can only be partially labelled as "Chinese" or not at all, problems arise. When this occurs, it is no longer possible to define the Self in opposition to the Other, whose identity has become blurred, and the foundation of Euroamerican identity starts to crumble, dragging along with it concepts such as nation-state culture, national identity, "East" and "West". This might be one of the reasons why it is so challenging for concepts such as the third space to be accepted in the art world and why mostly Euroamerican art critics are often reluctant to speak of Chinese experimental art in terms of hybridity and a new internationalism. This in-between position implies a trespassing of boundaries which is problematic as it questions these same frontiers, and challenges Euroamerican hegemony over the "East". This crossing of boundaries is seen as "offensive",²¹⁴ to use the words of professor John

²¹² RUTHERFORD Jonathan, *The Third Space – Interview with Homi Bhabha*, Identity, Community, Culture, Difference, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 207-221, 1990, p. 208.

²¹³ LEERSSEN Joep; BELLER Manfred (ed.) *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*. A critical survey, Rodopi, the Netherlands, 2007, 326.

²¹⁴ CLARK John, *Dilemmas of (Dis-)attachment in the Chinese Diaspora*, Visual Arts and Culture, vol. 1, p. 14-44, 1999, p. 22.

Clark, as it implies that another domain exists, and lies beyond the borders. Identities or cultural discourses that imply transgressing these frontiers are seen as threats as they question the discourse of power that needs the preservation of boundaries in order to survive and thrive.

In occasions, Euroamerica has made an effort to make the international art world more open, global and multicultural. However, these good intentions were not always carried out until the end and often the exhibitions would remain mere expositions on the “art of the Other”²¹⁵ or goodwill intentions of promoting a tolerant Euroamerican attitude towards multiculturalism. Therefore, the effects of these exhibitions have been rather disappointing. These expositions could be seen as a way of portraying Euroamerica as an open-minded, tolerant entity that promotes multiculturalism however, no real changes were implemented and these exhibitions remain a façade²¹⁶ to cover up what in reality is a fear of losing hegemonic power and a superior position over the Other.²¹⁷ Artistic vocabulary in the international art world remains predominantly Euroamerican and non-Euroamerican art is more often than not portrayed as exotic, politically dissident or a follower of Euroamerican art history, artists and currents. This can frequently be observed in the exhibitions on Chinese art that are often organized based on the brand of “Chineseness”, not on the individual qualities of the artists. There is a certain expectation that the art on display will live up to the stereotypical image of China because if not, how can it then still be seen as an exhibition on “Chinese art”?

However, for the overseas artists, a hybrid in-between space, beyond the concepts of “Self” and “Other”, “East” and “West” is a reality. The Chinese experimental artists who

²¹⁵ One of the main criticisms on the emblematic exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989. According to art professor Anna Maria Guasch: “*Magiciens de la Terre* fue juzgada como una operación etnocéntrica y hegemónica, que no pudo desprenderse de considerar a los ‘otros’ como primitivos, y en la que la supuesta connivencia de códigos culturales contrapuestos quedó reducida a una confrontación estética que presupuso en todo momento la superioridad de la cultura occidental por encima de las no occidentales.” GUASCH Anna Maria, *El espectáculo del Mercado. Entre dos caídas. Del multicultural a la mundialización del arte*, Revista Occidente nº 309, febrero 2007, p. 33-44, p. 37

²¹⁶ In the words of art curator and critic Carol Yinghua Lu: “It was a necessity of the so-called ‘cultural multiplicity’ that the West was pursuing for their society to help sustain and glorify their global market activities. Chinese contemporary art was simply a souvenir one had to have to showcase one’s international lifestyle. But the question of how actual contemporary art practice in China is relevant and valuable to that of the Western world remains unanswered.” LU Carol Yinghua, *Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds*, e-flux journal nr. 11, December 2009, p. 1-9, p.4.

²¹⁷ See also the art critic Hou Hanru: “the relation between ‘West’ and ‘Non-West’, between the colonial ‘master’ and ‘slave’ have been increasingly broken down, rather than positively adjusted to building up a new and constructive internationalism. An extreme example of this tendency is (...) that the only good and imaginative art is made in the Western/ Eurocentric cultural arena (...)” HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 61.

have decided to move abroad are living and working in a different “dimension” where concepts such as the Other, Chineseness and exoticism have lost their meaning and are constantly being questioned and challenged. It is as Hou Hanru describes, they live in a process “between identification, non-identification and re-identification”,²¹⁸ which implies that their identity is flexible and constantly adapts itself to the changing environment they are in. This is an alternative system to that of the strict “East-West” binary which essence is rigid and holds on to inflexible, non-changeable concepts such as “us” versus “them”, or post-orientalism which foundations are build on Otherness and “othering”.

At present many Chinese experimental artists have moved abroad or travel frequently for their work. They have realised that playing the role of the Other by catering to the Euroamerican image of China is not only limiting for them as individuals, but especially for them as professionals. Chinese artists are losing interest in maintaining the stereotypical and false image of the Other and the “East-West” binary, and especially the overseas artists have become more concerned and involved with the creation of alternative models such as the in-between, hybridity and new internationalism. This is also due to the fact that they have come to identify themselves with this hybrid, in-between identity. It is as the overseas artist Gu Wenda mentions in an interview with the curator Marianne Brouwer:

Expressing the confrontation between West and East or the relationship between them in an artistic work is absolutely not something I am concerned with (...) I don't see the difference between, for instance, an American artist and a Chinese one, or in general between artists from different contexts (...) I think that it is artificial and superficial to create an intellectual and emotional distinction between artists from different countries and cultures. This would be to force them into a mould so that their work would represent something which might be called exoticism.²¹⁹

Nevertheless, within the international art world, Chinese artists are still frequently seen as the (exotic) Other which seems rather strange and obsolete in a twenty-first global century in which migrations and hybridity have become nothing out of the extraordinary. It is as if the international art scene has become an isolated bubble in which the influences of the global world do not permeate, and in which non-Euroamerican art is perceived through a mindframe that dates from centuries ago. The building up of a new and constructive internationalism will only take place when the Self is no longer considered superior to the Other, and Euroamerican art is no longer seen as the only valid and valued art. In other words, constructive internationalism will become a reality through a shift in the current

²¹⁸ HOU Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground – selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 Ltd, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 61.

²¹⁹ WENDA Gu in a letter to the art curator Julia F. Andrews, published in the exhibition catalogue *Heart of Darkness*, curated by BROUWER Marianne, 1994, p. 118. See also chapter 5 of Block II.

“East-West” power balance: when non-Euroamerican art is seen as an equal and is interpreted and appreciated on its own terms through a specific artistic language, and the expectations of what non-Euroamerican art should be like becomes a phenomenon of the past. If this does not occur, the image of China as the (exotic) Other will continue to linger on in the global twenty-first century art market. As the art historian Hugh Honour rather “poetically” describes:

No one now believes in the historical or geographical reality of the exotic world so beautifully evoked by Watteau, Boucher, Pillement, and countless porcelain modellers and japanners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But the flowery Empire of Cathay survives in the mind – a land of poetry and graciousness, a spacious garden of azaleas, peonies, and chrysanthemums, where the most serious business in life is to drink tea in a latticed pavilion, beside a silent lake, beneath a weeping willow; to listen to the music of piping and tinkling instruments; and to dance, to dance for ever, among the porcelain pagodas.²²⁰

²²⁰ HONOUR Hugh, *Chinoiserie – the vision of Cathay*, John Murray Publisher, London, 1973 (first published in 1961), p. 225.

Conclusion

In the previous paragraphs it has become clear that Chinese experimental art is still frequently seen from a rather stereotypical perspective. The time has not yet come for this art to be interpreted on its own terms, according to its unique historical and cultural background, and through a particular artistic language. Chinese experimental art is not yet widely considered an equal or an art current that creates alternatives and new possibilities within the global art world. The contrary seems to be true: the introduction of Chinese experimental art in the international art world seems to have only emphasized the separation between “East” and “West” and the exotic image that China has in the Euroamerican mind. Chinese experimental art has not yet had the chance to really be valued for the art it is.

The implementation of an alternative model to the “East-West” binary has fallen on deaf ears in the “West” and the Chinese artists acting in the “western” art scene are still often seen as the Other. In general, Chinese artists, whether living abroad or not, are considered “Chinese” and their artworks are often interpreted from an exotic, often political point of view.

Yet, the Other is nothing but an illusion, it is in fact a man-made creation that has been the result of the Euroamerican need to identify all that is not “western”, this way guaranteeing its superiority over the Other. There seems to be an irrational, somewhat unconscious, historic fear of losing the sense of Self, thereby losing the superior position within the “East-West” system. Yet, what the “West” does not realize is that the acknowledgement of the Other as an equal does not necessarily imply negative consequence for its own position. On the contrary, it might even be an enrichment of the Self. As the American art critic Thomas McEvelley stated: “The self fears the other, thinking that otherness will overwhelm it and cause it to cease being itself. Yet it is the other alone that compels the self always to be itself.”²²¹

Non-Euroamerican artists, curators, and some Euroamerican experts are slowly trying to create small fissures in the “East-West” dichotomy in order to broaden the narrow-minded and closed off perception of the (art) world. Although they currently do not seem to be

²²¹ McEVILLEY Thomas, *Art and Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity*, McPherson, New York, 1995, p. 150.

widely successful, these alternative models that go beyond the strict separation between “oriental” and “occidental” are in fact the only models that would reflect a twenty-first century reality and that could put an end to the illusions of the validity of these false stereotypes. Maybe when China truly becomes a leading power in the twenty-first century, alternative models for interpreting (Chinese) art will be created and the power balance will shift. Maybe then, it will no longer be “necessary” (or mandatory) to resort to Euroamerican art history or theory in order to interpret Chinese experimental art.

What seems to be the solution to this situation is what the art historian and expert on Chinese experimental art Francesca Dal Lago calls a “global project of decolonization”²²² in which “western” art experts go beyond “European ideals of esthetics and its history”,²²³ to go beyond one’s own hermeneutical circle, or cultural horizon to use Gadamer’s terminology, in order to get a better understanding of other cultures. A full comprehension of the culture of the Other might be unattainable, however the alternative of staying within one’s own hermeneutical circle is doomed to create distorted images of the Other, as it has until this present moment, and hopelessly fails when it comes to the interpretation of non-Euroamerican art. It seems logical to conclude that the models that have reigned the art world until our present day have become obsolete and are no longer fit for the globalized art scene of today. Yet, against all odds, reality makes it evident that the current Euroamerican hegemonic model is kept firmly in place and that alternative models still remain quite a utopia.

²²² DAL LAGO Francesca, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, 1998, p.86.

²²³ *Ibidem*.

BLOCK II: ANALYSES OF THE EXHIBITIONS

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITIONS

As was explained briefly in the introduction of this dissertation, twelve exhibitions have been selected to be analysed within this study. The inclusion of these particular exhibitions has been for various reasons, as they represent a range of exhibitions that is varied and that can provide answers to the reception of overseas Chinese experimental art in a Euroamerican context from different perspectives. These exhibitions have been chosen first of all because they often represent the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in that specific nation; secondly, they aim to portray Chinese experimental art as a non-exotic, international art current that actively participates and changes the international art scene; thirdly, because they include three or more of the artists studied within this dissertation, which often provides for the opportunity to speak of alternative spaces such as the third space or the in-between; fourthly because they shine a light on the evolution of Chinese experimental art reception within a Euroamerican context, be it by illustrating how Chinese art evolved from sight specific exhibitions in rather peripheral venues (*Chine demain pour hier*, 1990) to major events sponsored privately as well as publically such as *Le moine et le démon* (2004).

Yet, it should also be stated that a huge amount of exhibitions have not been included within this study.²²⁴ Important exhibitions that were not selected are for example the *China's New Art Post-1989* (1993) curated by Chang Tsong-zung and Li Xianting. This was a major exhibition on Chinese experimental art that opened in Hong Kong and then travelled to Australia and the United States. It is not included within the analyses as the catalogue specifically mentions that “most artist living abroad were excluded, exceptions being the few who left China recently and have continued to explore art in a spirit similar to their peers at home”.²²⁵ Considering the fact that this study focuses on the overseas artists who find themselves in an in-between situation, making art which is clearly different from their mainland colleagues, this was the main motive to not include this particular exhibition within this study.

Other important exhibitions are *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989) (even though this exhibition is recurrent within this study well into the 2000s, as it has

²²⁴ This dissertation has located 68 exhibitions on Chinese experimental art that were held from 1990-2011 and in which the artists studied in this dissertation participated. A table of these exhibitions has been included at the end of this dissertation. See p. 706.

²²⁵ *China's New Art Post 1989*, exhibition catalogue, p. II.

become somewhat of a reference when it comes to displaying non-Euroamerican art within a Euroamerican context), *Alors, la Chine?* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2003), *I don't want to play cards with Cézanne* (Pacific Art Museum, Pasadena, USA, 1991), *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (The David and Alfred Smart museum of Art, University of Chicago, USA, 1999), *Power of the Word* (Hanart TZ Gallery and various (small) venues in the USA such as college galleries, 2001), *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese art* (Millennium Art Museum, Beijing; Albert Knox art gallery New York; University at Buffalo Anderson art gallery, New York; University at Buffalo art gallery and center for the arts, New York, 2005), and *Wherever we go* (Spazio Oberdan, Milan, Italy; Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco, 2006-2007) among many others. Yet, again, it was important that the exhibition included the overseas artists and that Chinese experimental art was not only represented by the mainland artists, this as to find out more on the in-between position of these artists and to see how their presence within the exhibition changes, or not, the perception of Chinese experimental art within a Euroamerican context. As mentioned within the introduction, including the monographic exhibitions on the artists studied in this dissertation might have clarified more the results of this analysis, yet this shall have to be explored in future research projects. In this study it has been chosen to focus on group exhibitions as to find out if the artists, as a group, are distinguished from their mainland colleagues and to see how their collective presence makes an impact or not on the Euroamerican reception of their art.

It has been chosen to stop the analyses of the exhibitions in 2004 as it represents a decade after the publication of *The Location of Culture* in which Homi Bhabha coined the concept of third space. Moreover, by focussing on the period of the 1990s and the early 2000s, this study concentrates on a very interesting time in which a lot of shifts can be observed. First of all, the nineties is a period of time still characterized by the aftermaths of the Cold War. It is also a period of time right after the Tiananmen Events that took place in 1989. These influences can be clearly detected and noticed in the exhibition reviews and sometimes in the catalogues that have been written.

The nineties is also representative of the first steps of Chinese experimental art within the international (Euroamerican) art scene. It is also the time of post-colonialism and the representation of (non-Euroamerican) art currents in biennales, which is a topic that shall

also have to be postponed to posterior research.²²⁶ This period marks a moment in time in which there was a starting *genuine* interest in the art of the Other and therefore makes it indispensable for this study that shines a light on the Euroamerican reception of Chinese experimental art. Where the Cold War period of the 1990s is still strongly marked by the need for Euramerica to be the centre and to be able to clearly define “the enemy” (the Other), towards the turn of the century there is a growing awareness towards the non-Euroamerican, this also provoked by the upcoming globalization. It is as the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist mentions in Carolee Thea’s book *On Curating* (2009): The quest for a center of the art world dominated the twentieth century. The twenty-first century has opened to a polyphony of centers.”²²⁷

Moving towards the 2000s, various changes can be clearly distinguished. First of all, the figure of the private art collector becomes more prominent and they become frequent collaborators alongside the art curators. This fact can be seen in the last exhibitions analysed within this study that were all three based on the private collection of the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation. This phenomenon is sign of a bigger change, and that is the upcoming of Chinese experimental art as a hot item within the international art scene. It is also a “symptom” of the shift that took place within the art world in general in which art became somewhat of a commodity, a product, a symbol of wealth. It is as the curator Massimiliano Gioni has mentioned:

[Since 1999], I do see a major change; the price now determines the quality, and this absurdity has the ability to monopolize every conversation. It’s now the issue of the investment bankers, who have made the audience bigger. Money has the power to change everything, and Jeff Koons has made the game even bigger. With rich new audiences, it is all happening through money. (...) But all points to the artist, whose role is the most important. He/She makes the commodities for collectors. The main actor of the 90s was the curator, and now it’s the collector. The new model of the 90s was the biennial, and now it is the art fair.²²⁸

²²⁶ About the the upcoming of biennales and their importance in the global, transcultural world, the author and art critic Carolee Thea has mentioned: “Today, artists in the globalized art scene have been repeating a diverse and politically correct discourse about the disappearance of borders and trans-cultural crossovers. Some have experienced voluntary or forced economic or political migration. A perusal of recent biennial catalogues reveal that many artists in these shows are now settled in countries other than that of their origin. In this context, divisions between center and periphery, high and popular, primitive and contemporary, would hold the same validity. And today, the multiplication of biennials on a worldwide scale is one of the striking examples of this shift toward a supposedly more diverse and open scenario.” THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 13. This quote indicates that biennales are also excellent examples in order to dig deeper into the topic of in-between artists, alternative spaces and the globalization in the artworld. However, as mentioned previously, it shall have to be further explored in posterior research.

²²⁷ THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 4.

²²⁸ GIONI Massimiliano in THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 36-37.

The 2000s also represents a shift in the attitude of the Chinese government towards Chinese experimental art. The third Shanghai Biennale that was held in the year 2000 marked a change as it was the first time China included both Chinese experimental art as well as contemporary art from outside of China within one venue. From that moment on, the Chinese government has significantly changed its opinion on Chinese experimental art and has since then started collaborating in the organization of art events outside of China (*Paris-Pékin* held in 2002, *Le moine et le démon*, held in 2004, and the France/ China year of 2003 which generated the exhibition *Alors, la Chine?* are excellent examples). Yet, the underlying reasons that explain this shift in mindset probably point to the fact that China realised that art is an excellent vehicle of soft power in order to promote one's image outside of the mainland, and it is alleged that these exhibitions often served a propagandistic purpose.

The exhibitions that have been chosen for this study are representative of these times of changes. Here, each selected exhibition shall be briefly highlighted such that it becomes clear the diversity they represent and the value they contain for this particular research.

The exhibitions that shall be analysed in Block II are (in chronological order):

1. *Chine Demain Pour Hier*, Pourrières, France, 1990
2. *Silent Energy*, Oxford MoMA, UK, 1993
3. *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, Ohio USA, 1993
4. *Out of the Centre*, Pori Art Museum, Finland, 1994
5. *Heart of Darkness*, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo, the Netherlands, 1995
6. *Des del pais del centre: avant-gardes artistiques xineses*, Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain, 1995
7. *Cities on the Move*, Wiener Secession, Vienna, Austria, 1997-1999
8. *Inside Out*, Asia Society New York, San Francisco MoMA, USA, 1998
9. *Paris pour Escale*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris, France, 2000
10. *Paris-Pékin*, Espace Cardin, Paris, France, 2002
11. *All under Heaven*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, 2004
12. *Le moine et le démon*, Musée d'art Contemporain (MAC) de Lyon, France, 2004

Chine demain pour hier, 1990

Chine demain pour hier is the first exhibition from the list. As explained in the introduction, expositions on Chinese experimental art were not frequent before the 1990s. An exception is the major exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* that was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989 yet it was not a survey exclusively dedicated to Chinese experimental art but included one hundred artists from all over the world. Therefore, *Chine demain pour hier* is one of the first exhibitions to introduce exclusively Chinese experimental art to Euroamerica, and it was the first to be organized in France. It was a survey held in Pourrières and that was organized and funded by a local association (Association Les Domaines de L'Art). It involved the whole village as the artists were asked to create sight specific works that would be integrated into the local landscape. One of the main objectives of the curator Fei Dawei (1954)²²⁹ was to address the fact that there was no true dialogue among contemporaries: Modern Euroamerica was dialoguing with a traditional China. There was no real acknowledgement or awareness within Euroamerica of the experimental art that was being developed in China. This is a fact that has been extensively commented on in chapter three of Block I in which, among other points, it is alleged that the global contemporary art scene is mainly Euroamerican and that non-Euroamerican art currents are often portrayed as exotic and clearly as the art of the Other. *Chine demain pour hier* has been chosen principally because it marks a beginning of Chinese experimental art exhibitions to be held in a Euroamerican context. Moreover, it also represents one of the first intents of Chinese experimental art to become an equal to Euroamerican contemporary art and to be valued and perceived on its own terms.

Silent Energy, 1993

Three years later, another exhibition took place at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art. According to the exhibition catalogue, *Silent Energy* (1993) was the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in the UK. Also this exhibition was dedicated exclusively to Chinese experimental artists and was curated by two Euroamerican curators: David Elliott (1949) and Lydie Mepham (date of birth unknown), with the collaboration of the Chinese minister of Culture. Again, one of the objectives of this particular survey was to introduce non-“western” art to the “western” public, or as the

²²⁹ *Chine demain pour hier* was curated by two curators: Fei Dawei (1954) and Michèle Cohen (date of birth unknown), founder of Les Domaines de l'Art.

catalogue stated “showing the unknown or neglected art histories of non-western countries”.²³⁰ Moreover, this exhibition is important as it included an essay by the curator Hou Hanru in which he speaks of alternative spaces. For the early years of 1993, this was quite revolutionary and makes him one of the pioneers when it comes to alternative models that go beyond the traditional “East-West” dichotomy. It is even more relevant taking into consideration that Homi Bhabha would not coin the third space concept until the publication of his book *The Location of Culture* in 1994. However, as shall become clear in chapter two of Block II, *Silent Energy* turned out to be a very descriptive title for this exhibition as it was mainly received by the media with silence. Karen Smith within her article *China Rising*²³¹ that would be published almost fourteen years later in 2007 mentioned about this exhibition that it was too early for Chinese experimental art to be “well-received” and to be fully understood in the early years of the 1990s. This explains the silence it met, and on the other hand emphasizes the enormously advanced point of view of Hou Hanru, who is one of the most recurrent figures throughout Block II.

Fragmented Memory, 1993

In the same year, 1993, another exhibition on Chinese experimental art was held in the United States. According to the catalogue, *Fragmented Memory* was the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in the US. The exhibition was curated by Gao Minglu (1949) and the American Chinese art expert Julia F. Andrews (date of birth unknown). This exhibition becomes rather polemic and generated quite some ripples in the water that would expand and influence another exhibition that has also been included within this Block, i.e. *Heart of Darkness* (1995). This exhibition is particularly interesting as it generated somewhat of a dispute between the curator Julia F. Andrews and one of the artists, Gu Wenda. This particular situation puts in evidence the important role and the major influence the art curator has when it comes to exhibitions, the works on display, and especially the way these are explained and displayed within the survey. It also provides an example of the way Chinese experimental art was perceived by Euroamerican art curators and experts in the early 1990s. As shall become clear in chapter three of Block II, Julia F. Andrews is quite illustrative even though it should be mentioned that she is certainly not representative of all the Euroamerican art curators.

²³⁰ *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

²³¹ SMITH Karen, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II.

Fragmented memory (1993) also tried to portray Chinese experimental art as an international art current, and not as “Chinese”. Here, the clear influence and viewpoint of Gao Minglu can be noticed. He is, with Hou Hanru, one of the main promoters and transmitters of the alternative spaces such as the in-between. But, a difference can be perceived between the “Chinese” curator Gao Minglu and the American curator Julia F. Andrews. Where Gao Minglu emphasizes the international aspect of Chinese experimental art, Julia F. Andrews emphasizes its political and dissident character, often remitting to historical events, especially the traumatic ones, of Chinese history. This of course should be placed within a (post) Cold War context in which China and the United States were both involved in the early 90s.

Out of the Centre, 1994

Hou Hanru then carries on with his “mission” one year later after his collaboration with the *Silent Energy* exhibition catalogue and curates *Out of the Centre* (1994) conjointly with the Finnish curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala (date of birth unknown). This exhibition could be seen as the culmination and one of the key exhibitions when it comes to alternative models such as the third space. As mentioned before, Hou Hanru is a recurrent figure in almost all exhibitions analysed in this block and he always transmits the same message: to consider Chinese experimental art a global art, equal to Euroamerican contemporary art that should not be seen from a political, exotic or exclusively “Chinese” perspective. *Out of the Centre* (1994) did precisely this, as its main theme was to question the centre-periphery model. It should be remembered that the year in which this survey was held, 1994, coincides with the publication of Homi Bhabha’s book *The Location of Culture* in which he, like Hou Hanru, extensively speaks of the third space. Also, *Out of the Centre* (1994) could be seen as a counteract to the one-sided image that was created of Chinese experimental art at the 45th Venice Biennale held in the same year that mainly portrayed and represented this art through the Political Pop and Cynical Realism currents. As explained in paragraph 3.2 of Block I, Political Pop and Cynical Realism became warmly welcomed art currents within the international art world as they satisfied the political, dissident image of Chinese experimental art that was somewhat expected within the international art scene. Yet, these art currents were strongly criticized by the mainland as well as the “Chinese” art curators, artists and experts overseas and were seen as a purely commercial product, a brand and a way to cater to the Euroamerican needs and expectations. Even though these currents became highly representative of Chinese experimental art in the

Euroamerican context, they were and still are somewhat loathed by the Chinese experimental art experts. It should be mentioned here that the Venice Biennale is sometimes seen as an event that presents non-Euroamerican art in a rather stereotypical way, as was the case in 1994 with the representation of Chinese experimental art through the Political Pop and Cynical Realism currents. As the curator and artist Rirkrit Tirjavaija (born in Argentina from Thai parents) has stated: “The Venice Biennale is the Olympics of the art world, a Eurocentric colonialist model where in the Giardini, only first-and second-world pavilions are presented.”²³²

Out of the Centre (1994) was the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in Finland. The location was mainly chosen based on the fact that Finland is a rather peripheral country which coincided and was highly illustrative for the main theme of the survey: the questioning of the centre-periphery model. Yet, in order for it to have succeeded in the propagation of alternative models, and to have neutralized the strong image that was generated at the Venice Biennale of Chinese experimental art as Political Pop or Cynical Realism, Finland might have resulted too peripheral.

Heart of Darkness, 1995

One year later, another exhibition that would include Chinese experimental art was held in the Netherlands. *Heart of Darkness* (1995) addressed the colonial past of Europe and the “dark periods” of European history that this encloses. Considered in its context, it perfectly fits into the time of post-colonial studies and the upcoming criticism of (European) scholars towards the European colonial past. The exhibition, curated by the Dutch curator Marianne Brouwer (1942) was not exclusively on Chinese experimental art but included thirty-seven artists from all over the world. This exhibition focused on concepts such as (inner) exile, war, alienation, colonization, the Other and “western” superiority. As almost all exhibitions that have been commented up until this point, also *Heart of Darkness* intended to display non-Euroamerican art not as the Other, but as an international art current in global times, and to make way for the unheard, to use the words of the exhibition catalogue, and especially the unheard of. It is for this reason that some of the art critics stated that *Heart of Darkness* was somewhat of a counter reaction to the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition held at the Centre Pompidou almost six years before.

²³² TIRJAVAIJA Rirkrit in THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 83.

This particular exhibition should also be considered within its own context and it ought to be stated here that in 1995 the Netherlands were fully involved in the war in Bosnia, which would become one of the darkest periods of Dutch history. This most probably influenced the curator Marianne Brouwer to organize an exhibition focused on dark periods, war and exile.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that an essay of Hou Hanru was included within the exhibition catalogue in which he spoke of the illusion of the nation-state culture.

Des del País del Centre, 1995

In the same year, the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art was to be held in Spain. *Des del País del Centre* (1995) was held in Barcelona and was curated by Inma González Puy (1959). Within this exhibition it should be highlighted that it distinguished the overseas Chinese artists from their mainland counterparts, a distinction that is often omitted within exhibitions on Chinese experimental art. This exhibition, like *Heart of Darkness*, addressed the “East-West” dichotomy and the “west”-centric reception of Chinese experimental art within the Euroamerican context, topics that fit into the post-colonial studies. This “west”-centric view of Chinese experimental art is then excellently illustrated by the significant amount of reviews that were generated by the show. What can be clearly denoted is the political and dissident focus that still dominated the Euroamerican critic’s perception of Chinese experimental art. Five years after *Chine demain pour hier* (1990), it seemed as if this perception had not evolved much.

Cities on the Move, 1997-1999

Cities on the Move (1997-1999) was the first exhibition analysed in this study to travel to different venues all over the world. It was a massive exposition curated by Hou Hanru (1963) and Hans Ulrich Obrist (1968) that would be displayed in venues over a period of almost three years. A total of one hundred-three artists from different Asian countries participated in the survey that addressed the urban changes of Asia. In a way, the topic of the exhibition seems to be quite similar to what has been seen in the previous expositions: how is Asia perceived in a Euroamerican context? Especially when it comes to contemporary times, how is Asia seen? As a “westernized” continent or as a combination of tradition, exoticism and (“western”) modernisation?

As shall become clear in chapter seven where the exposition is analysed, the underlying reason that Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist decided to take on this major project was in order to establish an “East-West” dialogue and to counteract the somewhat “west”-centric view generated by, as the curators mentioned, shows like *Magiciens de la Terre*: the survey on non-Euroamerican art curated by the French curator Jean-Hubert Martin (1944).²³³

Inside Out, 1998

Around the same time, another major show, this time exclusively on Chinese experimental art was held in the US titled *Inside Out* (1998). It displayed eighty-eight works from fifty-five Chinese artists and was seen as the first major show on this art current to be held in the United States. The exhibition was curated by Gao Minglu (1949) but the exhibition catalogue included essays by the main experts within the field such as Wu Hung, David Clark, Chang Tsong-zung and, again, Hou Hanru. *Inside Out* is somewhat of a milestone when it comes to the third space, as it is the first (and only) catalogue to extensively elaborate on the concept. It is also the first time the third space is mentioned as such. The exposition focussed mainly on topics such as globalization, identity and the portrayal of Chinese experimental art as a contemporary current belonging to the international community as well as to Chinese culture. In a way it tried to break down, once again, the barriers between Chinese experimental art and its reception within the Euroamerican context.

At the turn of the century, in the year 2000, a change can be noticed within the exhibitions. As the nineties had a certain tendency of incorporating post-colonialist views within the expositions, as can clearly be seen in surveys such as *Heart of Darkness* (1995) and *Des del País del Centre* (1995), within the 2000s this post-colonial view is left somewhat behind and more attention is paid to the global world.²³⁴ Recurrent topics within these exhibitions are frequently related to identity, intercultural dialogue, globalization,

²³³ OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 122.

²³⁴ It might be interesting to note that a similar change was also observed in the biennales held at the turn of the century. As mentions Hans Jochachim Müller in his book on the well-known art curator Harald Szeeman: “if there was one thing that distinguished the 1999 and 2001 Biennale exhibitions from other large-scale surveys, it was that they seemed less interested in a general overview than in generating insight (...)” MÜLLER Hans-Joachim, *Harald Szeeman – Exhibition Maker*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Kemnat, 2006, p. 134. It seems thus that this interest in the global times, and the need to “make sense of it all” instead of looking at the past through overview exhibitions was also present within the biennales of the early 2000s.

alternative spaces, and how China (and the Chinese artists) are now faced with the dilemma of combining their cultural and historical background with the unavoidable “western” modernizations. Also, one can clearly denote the rise of the private collector who becomes a more prominent figure within the exhibition scene at the turn of the millennium. Examples of these collectors are Guy and Myriam Ullens, and Uli Sigg. Yet it should be stated here that the private collector can more often be found within “Asia” and a clear shift can be perceived in the continent where Chinese experimental art is currently being sold.²³⁵ Sotheby’s Hong Kong has become one of the biggest auction houses to sell sometimes entire collections of Chinese experimental art. A good example is the Estella collection²³⁶ that was auctioned at Sotheby’s Hong Kong in 2008 for a total of 51,7 million US dollars, a record sale ever to have been achieved by this auction house in experimental Chinese art. The main buyers at this event were Chinese, Hong Kong and Indonesian collectors and investors.²³⁷

Paris pour Escale, 2000

The first exposition that is analysed within Block II of the new millennium is *Paris pour Escale* (2000). Again curated by Hou Hanru, this time with his wife Evelyne Jouanno (date of birth unknown), this survey addressed the particular situation of overseas artists (not only Chinese artists) residing in Paris: a topic that perfectly fits into this interest for the global times, for hybrid identities, and in-between spaces. Again, Hou Hanru takes advantage of the situation and questions the role of the centre within a twenty-first century context. This exhibition also strongly emphasizes the role of the overseas artists as active participants in the change of society and global art, and focuses on their intents to be considered as equals and not as the Other.

The last three exhibitions could be seen as one single block in which the art collector takes up a prominent role within the Chinese experimental art scene. As the new

²³⁵ See for example the notice that was placed in 2008 by Sotheby’s New York: “the auction totaled \$8.513,288 [auction on Chinese experimental art held in 2008] but less than two-thirds of the offered lots sold. The auction house noted that ‘this was the final dedicated Contemporary Art Asia sale to be held in New York – all future sales will be held in Hong Kong, as previously announced.’” See: Michele Leight, <http://www.thecityreview.com/f08sas1.html>, n.d. date of last consultation: 5/8/2014.

²³⁶ The collection was originally assembled by Michael Goedhuis, an art dealer, who had compiled the collection of Chinese experimental art (200 works) for the directors of the WeightWatchers programme as an investment. The entire collection was then bought by New York art dealer Bill Acquavella and Sotheby’s for its posterior auction at Sotheby’s Hong Kong.

²³⁷ See the article: <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Estella-Collection-pushes-Chinese-contemporary-total-to-US-51-7m%20/8517>. May 2001. Date of last consultation, 11/10/2014.

millennium unfolds, Euroamerican art collectors such as Uli Sigg,²³⁸ and as is the case here, Guy and Myriam Ullens become active figures in the organization of exhibitions. This is illustrative for the period of the early 2000s in which Chinese experimental art was starting to become a “hot item” within the international art scene. Where in the beginning exhibitions on Chinese experimental art mainly included works made especially for the occasion of the survey, as time passes and a new millennium starts, exhibitions are more and more made available due to the wishes and resources of the private collector. As mentioned earlier, this indicates that in the years that followed the 2000s Chinese experimental art became highly lucrative, mainly in the Euroamerican art markets. Its frequent exposure by art collectors such as Guy and Myriam Ullens through exhibitions is in some cases a strategy to increase the value of their collection.²³⁹ This partly explains why so many exhibitions were held based on this particular collection in such a brief period of time.

Paris-Pékin, 2002

As mentioned previously, in this new millennium one can see a shift in the experimental art scene as China becomes another active figure within the organization of art exhibitions within as well as outside of mainland China. First of all, in 2002, the exhibition *Paris-Pékin* is organized as an introduction to the China-France year to be held in 2003. The exhibition is privately sponsored by the Ullens Foundation and all works on display come from this particular collection. The art exhibition is not only based on the private collection of the Ullens, but the two curators who curated the show are both gallery owners and collectors themselves: Chang Tsong-zung (1951) and Marc Decrop (1955). One of the aims, according to the exhibition catalogue was to fully reveal Chinese experimental art to the French audience. This seems somewhat poignant considering the fact that Chinese experimental art was already introduced in France in the year 1990 with the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*. This indicates a certain evolution, or better said stagnation, when it comes to the diffusion and understanding of Chinese experimental art in France. It seems thus that twelve years later Chinese experimental art still has to be “introduced” to the French public.

²³⁸ A good example of an exhibition based on the private collection of Uli Sigg is *Vermell A part* that was held at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona in 2008. It is interesting to mention that a segment of this exhibition was titled “Mao al rerefons” which in catalán means “Mao in the background”. This is highly illustrative of the fact that in 2008 it is still considered necessary to make reference to the figure of Mao and the political (communist) past of China within an exhibition on Chinese experimental art held in a Euroamerican context.

²³⁹ The Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation started to sell significant parts of their collection in 2009, mainly through Sotheby’s Hong Kong.

Another phenomenon that can be perceived within the catalogue of this exhibition is the critical way it looks towards the reception of non-Euroamerican art in a Euroamerican context. This is a phenomenon that can be detected in almost all exhibitions analysed within this Block, and that only becomes stronger as times pass. This seems to indicate a certain stagnation in the evolution (or in this case non-evolution) of the “west”-centric reception of Chinese (or non-Euroamerican) art in Euroamerica. In the early nineties it was mainly “Chinese” curators such as Hou Hanru, Gao Minglu, and Fei Dawei who spoke and questioned established models such as the centre-periphery and the “East-West” dichotomy, or who strongly opposed the exoticized and “Chinese” perception of Chinese experimental art within the international art world but it seems that as time passes, more and more art experts and curators join in and start to criticize the “west”-centric way non-Euroamerican art is often received within the international art scene.

All under Heaven, 2004

Also *All under Heaven*, held in 2004 was based on the Ullens Collection. The exhibition was held in Belgium and again the aim was to renew “western” perception of Chinese society. Fei Dawei (1954), the curator, once again tries to transmit that Chinese experimental art does not have a Chinese message but a universal one. He does this in collaboration with Bart de Baere (date of birth unknown), director of the Museum of Contemporary art in Antwerp. Yet, this is an aim that Fei Dawei already proposed in 1990, almost fourteen years ago, within his exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*. Yet, again, it seems that even after more than a decade, major changes within the reception and perception of Chinese experimental art did not take place.

Le moine et le démon, 2004

The last exhibition of Block II titled *Le moine et le démon* was also based on the collection of Guy and Myriam Ullens. The survey held in the same year (2004) was again curated by Fei Dawei, this time in Paris. For the occasion he collaborated with Thierry Raspail (date of birth unknown), director of the Lyon Contemporary Art Museum and Wang Huangsheng (1956), director of the Guangdong Museum of Art. Also this exhibition was held in the context of the France-China year although it was not publically funded. According to the exhibition catalogue it was the first time a Chinese institution collaborated in the

organization of an exhibition on Chinese experimental art outside of the mainland.²⁴⁰ This points to the more active role of the Chinese government in the promotion of China through its art, a phenomenon that started in the early 2000s.²⁴¹

As mentioned previously, towards the end of the exhibitions analysed within this Block it can be observed that “west”-centric reception and perception of non-Euroamerican art, in this case Chinese experimental art, is harshly criticized. One can clearly denote that also Euroamerican art experts such as Thierry Raspail and Bart de Baere join forces and also start to criticize the Euroamerican context in which non-Euroamerican art is received and evaluated. Coming back to Karen Smith’s article *Rising China*²⁴² that was mentioned earlier on within this introduction, at the change of the century, art curators became more and more prepared, and more aware of the way non-Euroamerican art was often displayed at exhibitions held in Euroamerica. Yet, what about the art critics?

Of all exhibitions analysed in Block II, almost all include an analysis of the exhibition reviews that were generated by the exhibition. In some cases these have been plentiful and in others these have been rather meagre or non-existent. Some of these articles were published by experts within the field, and in other cases not. Some reviews were published within art magazines while others were published in local or national newspapers or on the internet on personal blogs or association’s websites. This study distinguishes the difference among reviews, as a review written by an expert in the field published in a specialized magazine is not the same as a brief text written by an anonymous author in the local *Time Out* magazine. Yet, even though this dissertation is aware of their difference, all reviews that were traced for this study are included, as the amount of reviews is an indication of the impact an exhibition has had on the media and most probably on society. Reviews that were not published in specialized art magazines have been included as they are generally more accessible: a person who is not particularly interested in art or a specific exhibition might still have come across the review and have read it. Therefore, these texts become influential when it comes to the way in which Chinese experimental art is perceived within a non-professional/ specialized public. Also, it has been considered interesting to include art reviews written by experts or

²⁴⁰ Even though *Le moine et le démon* alleges to be the first, this statement should be nuanced as *Silent Energy*, held in 1993 and analysed in chapter 2 of this Block was also organized in collaboration with the Chinese minister of Culture.

²⁴¹ Even though it should be mentioned here that *Silent Energy* (1993), analysed in chapter 2 of Block II was organized in collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Culture.

²⁴² SMITH Karen, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II.

professional art critics as well as those written by non-experts in order to see how their opinions and points of view differ from each other (or not). In some cases, art reviews have been written by art auctioneers, which provides for a different light that is also valuable to this research.

Yet, as the curators have clearly evolved over time, apparently most of the art critics have not.²⁴³ As shall become clear, it seems that in general they appear to cling to rather Eurocentric ways of perceiving non-Euroamerican art. Even in 2004, some critics still place Chinese experimental art in an exclusively political, dissident light. Reinforcing especially the more shocking or sensational works of the Body Art, or Flesh Art current²⁴⁴ of Chinese experimental art. Yet, this is a normal phenomenon which does not only occur in Chinese experimental art. It seems a human tendency to feel attracted or to have a special curiosity for morbidity, and this manifests itself in the arts in general.

As mentioned in the introduction as well as at the beginning of this introduction to Block II, exhibitions should be used as tools for the Other to become less estranged, and for non-Euroamerican artists to be respected and empowered as artists within a truly intercultural and international art scene, and not as artists valued for and understood through their ethnic background. Even though the aim of almost all of the above-mentioned exhibitions was to achieve just that, it seems that the battle is long from being won and that the efforts of curators such as Hou Hanru, Gao Minglu and Fei Dawei, alongside their Euroamerican colleagues, will have to continue incessantly for some more years to come.

²⁴³ There are always exceptions such as Monica Dematte, Barbara Pollack, Karen Smith, John Clark, Francesca Dal Lago, Evelyne Jouanno, and many more that will become known in Block II.

²⁴⁴ In Shock art, artists use their own bodies, animal or human bodies, and/or other corporeal substances to address different topics in performance art, installations, and photograph in a (very) violent or shocking way. It looks to break taboos and to find the limits within the art scene. Shock Art within China was inspired by the exhibition *Sensations* that was curated by the art collector Charles Saatchi at the Royal Academy of Art in London in 1997 that displayed 110 works by 42 different artists among which Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Jake and Dinos Chapman. Even though most of the Chinese artists were unable to read the exhibition catalogue, they were enormously inspired by the images of the works that were published within the *Sensations* exhibition catalogue. What is considered the beginning of Shock Art within China is the exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion* that was curated by Wu Meichun in Beijing in 1999. Other examples have been *Art for Sale* (Shanghai 1999), *Life and Culture* (Beijing 1999), *Food as Art* (Beijing 2000), *Man and Animals* (Nanjing, Chengdu 2000) and *Fuck Off* organized by Ai Wei Wei and Feng Boyi in 2000. According to Marion Bertagna, specialist in contemporary Chinese art and Assistant Vice President at Sotheby's New York, "[on peut] lire dans ce mouvement violent d'anti-esthétisme une réaction contre le système et contre la tradition. De façon brutale et provocante, ces jeunes artistes brisent les tabous qui gouvernent la pratique traditionnelle de l'art. Souvent issues des grandes académies d'art chinoises, ils réagissent de façon quasiment viscérale contre un système éducatif stérile et trop policé". Mariona Bertagna in *Alors, la Chine?* exhibition catalogue, 2003, p. 398

1. CHINE DEMAIN POUR HIER (1990)

1.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Chine demain pour hier is the earliest survey that shall be analysed in this dissertation. It was inaugurated in the month of July in 1990 by the art association *Les Domaines de l'Art* which is situated in Aix-en-Provence, France. This association was founded in 1989 and would remain active until 1994.²⁴⁵ The main objectives of the association were to organize cultural and artistic events outside of the art gallery or museum context. The president of *Les Domaines de l'Art*, Michèle Cohen (date of birth unknown)²⁴⁶ collaborated with Fei Dawei (1954), the art curator of the show, to invite six Chinese artists who were living abroad and to give them free range to create their works in the little town of Pourrières, which is situated in Aix en Provence, France. The survey lasted for a few months and the works that were created for the exhibition were made in situ.

Fei Dawei, the curator of *Chine demain pour hier*, moved to Paris in 1989 and is one of the most important art critics and curators within the Chinese experimental art scene. Together with the art critic Li Xianting (1949), who still resides in China, and Gao Minglu (1949) he played a very important role in the notorious *China/ Avant-Garde* exhibition that was held in Beijing in 1989,²⁴⁷ and was also very active in the 85 New Wave Movement.²⁴⁸ This makes Fei Dawei an expert on experimental Chinese art, as he has been involved in it from the very beginning. In 2002 he became the founding director of the Guy and Miriam Ullens Foundation in Beijing and helped them set up the collection of Chinese experimental art for the centre. He left the foundation in 2008 and is currently living between Beijing and Paris.

As mentioned previously, six Chinese artists participated in *Chine demain pour hier* and all six were, at the time, overseas artists. One of the artists is Yan Pei Ming (1960), he however is not included in the group of artists analysed in this dissertation due to the fact

²⁴⁵ Currently, *Les Domaines de l'Art* no longer exists however its president, Michèle Cohen has continued the association by founding *La non maison* in the year 2000, which is a "micro centre for the arts" as well as an art gallery. *La non maison*, situated in Aix en Provence, organizes various cultural activities, such as conferences and exhibitions, and residencies for artists.

²⁴⁶ Michèle Cohen is an art commissioner as well as an art critic and has obtained her Ph.D. studies in Art History from the Université de Paris-Sorbonne.

²⁴⁷ See the following paragraph.

²⁴⁸ The 85 New Wave Movement was one of the first organized art movements of Chinese experimental art in China that existed between 1985 and 1989.

that he mainly focuses on portrait painting which does not explicitly address concepts such as the third space or hybridity. The artist is well-known for his portraits of Mao but he has also painted other “important” figures in his life such as his father. Some of his portraits are painted in a rather rough style which completely erases the identity of the person as they can no longer be recognized.²⁴⁹ Yan Pei Ming left China earlier than the other artists studied within this dissertation.²⁵⁰

The artworks that were presented by the five remaining artists at *Chine demain pour hier* were:

Cai Guoqiang:	<i>Message de l’Ere Universelle (1990)</i>
Yang Jiechang:	<i>Le Projet pour la Chapelle, Insultes (1990)</i>
Gu Wenda:	<i>DE (1990)</i>
Huang Yongping:	no title given
Chen Zhen:	<i>Un Monde Détaché/ Accroché, Le Passage / Le Circuit (1990)</i>

According to the exhibition catalogue, *Chine demain pour hier* was the first exhibition of Chinese experimental art to be held in the “West”. Even though this statement is true, it should be mentioned that it was not the first time Chinese experimental art was introduced to the French audience. This statement somewhat omits the very important exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*²⁵¹ that was held at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, just the year before in which two Chinese experimental artists participated, among many other non-“western” artists, i.e. Huang Yongping and Yang Jiechang. Yet, nowhere in the catalogue is *Magiciens de la Terre*, as one of the first exhibitions to introduce Chinese experimental art to the French public, mentioned. The art curator of *Chine demain pour hier*, Fei Dawei collaborated extensively with *Magiciens de la Terre*, which makes this statement even more notable.

²⁴⁹ See paragraph 4.3 of Block II in which more is explained about this artist as he participated in the *Out of the Centre* exhibition and is featured extensively in the exhibition catalogue. See also Fig. 25).

²⁵⁰ Yan Pei Ming left China in 1982. More shall be explained about this artist in chapter 4 on the exhibition *Out of the Centre*.

²⁵¹ *Magiciens de la Terre* was an emblematic exhibition that was held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It has been portrayed as first exhibition to be held in Euroamerica about the art of the Other, introducing non-Euroamerican artworks and artists to the Euroamerican audience in a non-exotic way. One hundred artists participated in this large-scale survey of which three were “Chinese” artists. *Magiciens de la Terre* became one of the main references in the history of exhibitions about non-Euroamerican art. However, the exhibition has been severely criticized as it has been accused of presenting non-Euroamerican art as “exotic”, this way reinforcing “west”-centric hegemony within the art world.

Lastly, it is interesting to mention that the town of Pourrières has set up a website that, eighteen years later, is trying to get in touch with people who visited the show back in 1990 and who could provide information and pictures about the exhibition.²⁵² The text that is published on this website is as follows:

Cette année-là, un groupe de jeunes artistes chinois, fuyant leur pays après les événements de la place Tian An Men, se retrouvent à Pourrières, à l'initiative d'une association Aixoise « Les Domaines de l'Art ». Michèle Cohen, sa présidente, convainc la municipalité d'accueillir ces artistes peu connus, et de les laisser, dans le village, donner libre cours à leurs créations. En juillet 1990, « Chine Demain pour Hier » est organisée. Un concert de musique contemporaine est diffusé dans l'Église et retransmis en direct sur France Musique. Pendant quelques mois, un vent de liberté et de création a soufflé sur notre village. Qui se souvient encore de cela, 18 ans après? Si vous faites partie de ces témoins ou si vous possédez des images de cette manifestation, merci de nous contacter en cliquant ici.²⁵³

The quote states that the young artists “fled their country after the events of Tiananmen”, which is not entirely true as most of the participating artists, i.e. Cai Guoqiang, Yan Pei Ming, Chen Zhen and Gu Wenda had in fact already left China prior to the year 1989. Therefore, in fact only two participating artists left China in the year 1989; Yang Jiechang and Huang Yongping. This fragment is an example of the political, dissident emphasis that is often put on Chinese experimental art even though it is not always justified, as is the case here. Also, as shall become clear in this chapter, the works that were presented by these artists at *Chine demain pour hier* were in fact not political and did not make references to the political situation in China. Therefore, it can be concluded that this “strategy” has been employed to make the exhibition more interesting for a European/French audience, especially considering a context in which the Cold War had just recently come to an end.

Lastly, the fact that this website has been set up indicates that not much information has been kept about *Chine demain pour hier* and this has been confirmed by the fact that no reviews could be traced. Therefore, it has not been possible to analyse what the impact was of *Chine demain pour hier* on a Euroamerican audience and how the Euroamerican/French art critics interpreted the works on display.

This is also the reason why no images of the works on display have been included within this chapter, as they simply cannot be found. As all works were in-situ, no photographs of these creations have been included within the exhibition catalogue. This might also

²⁵² It is also for this reason that no illustrations of the artworks on display could be included within this chapter as they have not been able to be traced.

²⁵³ From the website: http://www.pourrieres.fr/site2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=230:une-manifestation-dart-contemporain-chinois-a-pourrieres-qui-sen-souvient-encore-&catid=50:espoirs&Itemid=91. Date of last update November 26 2010. Date of last consultation: 23/6/2014.

indicate one of the main motives for the website mentioned previously: to recuperate images of the exhibition works and the exhibition in general.

It has been tried to contact *Les Domain de l'Art* several times through this website however the site appears to be inactive as no reply has been received. It was possible to establish an initial contact with Michèle Cohen via the internet, however after enquiring for more information about the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition, this request was left unanswered without any further follow-up.

1.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was edited and published by the association *Les Domaines de l'Art* for the occasion of the exhibition. It is quite a long catalogue with a lot of information on different aspects of Chinese experimental art, and counts one hundred and one pages. The catalogue is written entirely in French.



Figure 8: Frontcover of the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue

Taking a look at the frontcover of the exhibition catalogue (Fig. 8), one can observe that with capital letters, and in bold “Art Chinois” is written on the frontcover. The words have been placed prominently on the headline and it is the first thing that catches the eye. Under these bold words, the actual title of the exhibition “Chine demain pour hier” can be read. This is significant as it emphasizes the fact that the art shown in this survey is “Chinese”. However, as mentioned before, all six artists were no longer living in China at that time. By describing the exposition as exhibiting “Chinese” art, it omits the fact that the participating artists are in fact overseas artists and that the art shown at the survey is experimental art, which does not necessarily have to show signs of Chineseness.

It is meaningful that it has been chosen to put so much emphasis on the fact that the art is Chinese. According to the catalogue, *Chine demain pour hier* was the first exhibition of Chinese experimental art to be held in the “West” and mentioning that the exhibition was

about *Chinese* art might have made the survey more appealing to a European/French audience. In 1990, Chinese experimental artists were still quite unknown in Euroamerica and it might have been easier to attract a Euroamerican/French audience by stating the words “Chinese art” instead of “Chinese experimental art (overseas)”. Also, the employment of the word “Chinese” might have made the exhibition more attractive to a Euroamerican audience given the events that took place at Tiananmen just the year before.²⁵⁴

The next element that catches the eye is the “no return” sign that is placed right under the title on the frontcover (Fig.8). This was an image that was also used in the emblematic 1989 *China/Avant Garde* exhibition in Beijing (Fig.9). This “no-return” sign became quite iconic for the *China/Avant Garde* exhibition that was shut down twice during its existence, but that is considered a milestone in Chinese experimental art history.²⁵⁵



Figure 9: The “no-return” sign outside of the 1989 *China Avant-Garde* Exhibition put on at the National Art Gallery in Beijing

²⁵⁴ The mentioning of the Tiananmen Square events are recurrent in art reviews and catalogues about Chinese experimental art. This has not only occurred in the recent years after 1989, such as here in the 1990 exhibition of *Chine demain pour hier*, but also well into the 2000s. See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

²⁵⁵ A group of artists were allowed by the Chinese authorities to exhibit their artworks, performances and happenings at the National Art Museum of China. Many artists who were not included in this group decided to exhibit their works as well, hanging their paintings on the outside walls of the National Museum. In total around 300 artworks, including performances, were displayed by 186 artists. This was a revolutionary act for the times in which Chinese experimental was still somewhat in its initial stage. The 1989 *China/Avant Garde* exhibition has been seen as a predictor of that particular period of time that would eventually lead to the Tiananmen Events that would take place just a few months after.

It is significant that this same sign of “no return” has been placed on the frontcover of the catalogue of *Chine demain pour hier* as it somehow connects the two even though both exhibitions are presumably independent from each other. As mentioned earlier, Fei Dawei, the curator of *Chine demain pour hier* had played an important role in the 1989 *China/Avant Garde* exhibition and it might be for this reason that he chose to place this representative logo onto the frontcover of the *Chine demain pour hier* catalogue as well. Even though the reason for this repetition is not explained anywhere within the catalogue, it could be interpreted as attributing a “protest” character to the exhibition, even though this would be rather out of context. Or, it could be a gesture in remembrance of the *China/Avant Garde* exhibition that took place the year before, which is often seen as the predecessor of the Tiananmen events that would take place just a few months after the show.

It should also be mentioned that *Chine demain pour hier* was partly funded by public entities. As can be read on the second page, the “Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication” is mentioned in the list of collaborators, together with other associations and regional entities such as France Rail and the municipality of Pourrières. It is interesting that public funding has made it possible to organize an exhibition about six overseas Chinese artists who, at the time, were not well-known at all. And also, that the exhibition that was sponsored was about Chinese experimental art, which was quite new at the time, especially for a small town such as Pourrières. The fact that public funding was made available for this unknown art current in a rather peripheral place as is Pourrières might point to a political interest in the survey, i.e. portraying the participating artists as political dissidents who are critical towards the Chinese government, that in the 1990s was still seen as a communist enemy of the democratic Euroamerican world.

Continuing with the analysis of the exhibition catalogue, it then gives a lot of interesting information about the artists and Chinese experimental art in general. The first part of the catalogue is titled “entretiens” even though there is only one interview published in this part of the catalogue which is an interview between Fei Dawei, curator of *Chine demain pour hier*, and Bernard Marcadé, who is an author and an expert on the artist Marcel Duchamp.²⁵⁶ Strangely, all other articles are not interviews but essays written by different authors on various topics. Some authors were from Asia, i.e. Japan, Taiwan and China, and in other cases the authors were French. The topics of these essays were very varied

²⁵⁶ Examples of some of his books are *Yan Pei Ming* (2013), *Andy Warhol* (1989), and *Laisser pisser le marinos. La paresse de Marcel Duchamp* (2006).

and were not limited to art. Some articles were more philosophical or sociological. The essays shall be analysed further on in the following paragraph.

The second part of the exhibition catalogue is dedicated to the participating artists and consists of articles and interviews. In some cases the artists themselves have written one-page descriptions of their works exhibited at *Chine demain pour hier*. The last pages of this second part consist of an interview with the contemporary Chinese music composer Chen Qi Gang.²⁵⁷

The preface of the exhibition catalogue, written by the director of the association *Domaines de l'Art*, Michèle Cohen, shall be analysed first as it contains two interesting fragments. First of all, the author mentions that the exhibition is about Chinese immigrant artists. This fact should be highlighted, as it is not always stated that the participating artists are overseas artists. More often than not the overseas artists are not distinguished from their mainland counterparts. Illustrative of this fact is the comment made previously on the frontcover of the exhibition catalogue.

Then, Michèle Cohen continues her article by writing: "il nous a paru important de démontrer enfin au public, que les oeuvres contemporaines chinoises ne sont pas de simples copies occidentales."²⁵⁸ First of all, considering the fact that the exhibition was held in 1990 and that it was one of the first expositions to be held about Chinese experimental art in a Euroamerican context, this statement seems to be very advanced for its time. In 1990, Euroamerica had only scarcely been in contact with Chinese experimental art. How did Michèle Cohen come to this early, yet justified, conclusion? This does not become clear within her article.

She then continues by explaining why the town of Pourrières has been chosen as the venue for *Chine demain pour hier*. According to the author it was because Pourrières lies out of the traditional circuits and the exhibition could be organised outside of more traditional art venues such as galleries and museums, which is one of the main objectives of *Les Domaines de l'Art*. She then mentions that the artists have made their art in situ, hereby confronting the village and the villagers of Pourrières by changing its landscape through art.

²⁵⁷ The event was accompanied by a concert that was especially composed for the occasion by three composers: Chen Qi Gang, Huang Long Pan and Tzeng. This concert was broadcasted live by the French radio.

²⁵⁸ Michèle Cohen, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 11.

The second article is an interview that was held between Fei Dawei and Bernard Mercadé. The article starts out by an explanation by Fei Dawei about the reasons for this exhibition.

Mon idée essentielle a, depuis longtemps, été de créer un dialogue de type nouveau entre la Chine et l'Occident. Il existe un dialogue essentiellement traditionnel entre ces deux entités culturelles. Le monde contemporain occidental dialogue le plus souvent avec le monde oriental ancien. Il n'y a pas vraiment de dialogue entre les contemporains. C'est avant tout ce déséquilibre qui m'a amené à concevoir cette exposition. La seconde raison, plus objective, vient du fait que depuis 10 ans, il existe un mouvement intellectuel et culturel réel en Chine qui n'est absolument pas connu de l'Occident. On savait qu'il existait des artistes chinois qui avaient suivi un enseignement occidental, mais personne n'avait l'idée qu'il puisse exister un mouvement artistique autonome.²⁵⁹

Fei Dawei mentions that the dialogue between the contemporary “West” and China is mainly with a traditional China. As has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation,²⁶⁰ it is true that the image of China in Euroamerica often seems to be that of a traditional, exotic China. It is interesting that Fei Dawei made this statement in the early year of 1990 when Chinese experimental art was just entering the international art scene. This image is slowly changing but in some cases, this exotic image of China still lingers in the Euroamerican mind. This will become particularly clear in the analyses of other exhibitions, and especially the reviews, in the following chapters of Block II.

Fei Dawei also adds that the “West” was not aware of the existence of an autonomous Chinese cultural and intellectual movement in China (and overseas). In the years following *Chine demain pour hier*, this has slowly changed, especially in the last few years. However, there are still occasions when Chinese experimental art is seen as a continuation of Euroamerican art. This has been explained in the theoretic part of this thesis²⁶¹ and shall become clear in the other exhibitions analysed in Block II.

In the second question asked by Bernard Mercadé, the interviewer refers to the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition that was held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a year prior to *Chine demain pour hier*. *Magiciens de la Terre* is described as the exhibition that made the “West” conscious of a Chinese art movement that was not ancient but contemporary. Fei Dawei responds briefly to this statement by mentioning that “Ma volonté est de

²⁵⁹ Fei Dawei, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

²⁶⁰ See paragraph 3.3 and 3.4 of Block I.

²⁶¹ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

continuer à instaurer ce dialogue inauguré par les *Magiciens de la terre*.²⁶² However, this “dialogue” that was established by the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition was in fact posteriorly heavily criticized of portraying non-“western” art as the Other by exoticizing it. Therefore, it could be questioned if a true “dialogue” was generated as a result of this exposition. Fei Dawei does not make mention of these negative responses that the show generated, and it is a pity that he does not further specify what type of “dialogue” he would have liked to have engendered through the *Chine demain pour hier* survey.

Further on in the interview, Fei Dawei explains why young experimental artists became infatuated with “western” art styles and movements, and why some of them integrated these styles into their works. This aspect of Chinese experimental art has also been elaborated upon within the theoretic part of this thesis.²⁶³

Le discours officiel a toujours privilégié la défense de la tradition, le mépris pour toute forme de ‘décadence bourgeoise’! En substance ce discours proclame: ‘Nous, nous sommes vieux et sages, nous représentons la tradition. Vous, vous êtes jeunes, vous ne pouvez rien comprendre, et, de plus, vous êtes influencés par les occidentaux!...’ Contre ce discours officiel, l’avant garde ne peut dans un premier temps que prendre le contre-pied, c’est-à-dire s’intéresser à ce qui est interdit. En réalité, ce n’est qu’une apparence, liée surtout à une curiosité et à un désir d’ouverture.²⁶⁴

He then continues by stating that “western” art critics have never fully understood the reasons why Chinese experimental art integrates “western” influences into its works: “C’est vrai que les critiques d’art occidentaux ont beaucoup de mal à comprendre cette logique.”²⁶⁵ And that the Chinese experimental artists are in fact looking for a style of their own, that is neither Chinese nor “western”: “La question de beaucoup de jeunes artistes chinois est: comment se différencier de cette idée, de cette logique occidentale de l’avant-garde? Comment éviter un style, une image de marque?”²⁶⁶

Fei Dawei then explains that all participating artists are living abroad and that one of the other aims of the exposition is to show how this has influenced their work: “C’est en effet un des enjeux de cette exposition que de faire apparaître chez des artistes chinois des

²⁶² Fei Dawei, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

²⁶³ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

²⁶⁴ Fei Dawei, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

²⁶⁵ Fei Dawei, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem.

influences extérieurs à la Chine.”²⁶⁷ Although Fei Dawei does not mention the concept of transexperience anywhere within the catalogue, this fragment could be easily related to it.

Fei Dawei then mentions how “western” art experts usually react to the works of the Chinese experimental artists. It is striking to observe how similar this reaction is to the reactions of the reviews written about the other exhibitions that are analysed in Block II of this dissertation.

La plupart des occidentaux se demandent pourquoi les chinois font un art d’avant-garde à la manière de l’Occident. Le problème de l’avant-garde, même pour les français, ne semble pas en l’occurrence tout à fait réglé. Pourquoi, quand je montre des artistes qui font des performances ou des œuvres conceptuelles, en me répond: ‘c’est dépassé, ça a été déjà fait des dizaines de fois depuis les années 60!...’²⁶⁸

Then, Fei Dawei gives an explanation for the “western” misunderstanding (or misinterpretation) of Chinese experimental art and mentions that maybe the “West” is not yet prepared for the art of the Other: “Peut-être les occidentaux ne sont-ils pas suffisamment prêt à regarder les autres?”²⁶⁹ Then Bernard Marcadé confirms this idea by saying:

C’est une situation bloquée, parce que les Occidentaux ont une vision stéréotypé des artistes chinois. Ils attendent que les chinois leur offrent ce qu’ils attendent. C’est une illusion que de croire que les Chinois doivent automatiquement se différencier des Occidentaux. C’est finalement encore une vision exotique des choses.²⁷⁰

This short fragment is a good illustration of what has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation. There seems to be a persistence of the exotic view of China and Chinese (experimental) art, and Euroamerica still sometimes has certain expectations when it comes to this type of art. But the essence of the problem might lie in the fact that Euroamerica in fact might not yet be prepared to interpret and fully understand the art of the Other, in this case Chinese experimental art. As mentioned in the theoretic part, there is a lack of knowledge, especially when it comes to Euroamerican art critics, about how to interpret non-Euroamerican art. Even though this panorama is slowly changing, it is

²⁶⁷ Fei Dawei, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 16.

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁰ Bernard Marcadé, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 16.

sometimes still remarkable how persistent the image of the “exotic China” or the “exotic East” seems to be.²⁷¹

The second article of the exhibition catalogue is written by Marc Le Bot who is an art critic. The article is titled *Le plein et le vide* and contains various interesting statements that shall be analysed here. The author starts out by mentioning that he does not know much about the Chinese avant-garde but that “a little” is not “nothing”. It is rather strange that a “non-expert” on Chinese experimental art is asked to collaborate with an article on a subject about which he actually does not know much. In a way it confirms the statements made by Fei Dawei and Bernard Marcadé in the previous interview in which it was mentioned that there is lack of knowledge in the “West” about non-“western” art.

In his text, Marc Le Bot mentions the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), which he attended, and where he saw the work of Huang Yongping in which he washes *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (1989) in a washing machine. Marc Le Bot writes that he was not at all surprised or shocked by this particular work: “Je suis personnellement convaincu qu’il ne s’agit là de choses remarquables ce sont des symptômes très significatifs de l’état de notre culture, bien que je pense qu’il ne s’agisse en rien d’oeuvres d’art.”²⁷² To *not* consider Huang Yongping’s work as a work of art seems quite a bold statement for an art critic to make. Although the author might be right about the fact that art reflects its social environment and that it is sometimes a mirror of society, it does not take away the fact that this type of art is still artistic creation. It is also rather strange that an artwork of one of the participating artists of *Chine demain pour hier*, in this case Huang Yongping, is described in the exhibition catalogue as non art.

Marc le Bot then explains that he was not shocked by Huang Yongping’s work, as he was already “accustomed” to seeing similar “shocking” works such as Marcel Duchamp’s urinary. The comparison between Chinese art works and Euroamerican art work is a good example of a recurrent technique that Euroamerican art critics often employ in order to understand the art of the Other: they compare it to more “familiar” Euroamerican art works.²⁷³ However, by doing so, one ignores the fact that Chinese art and Euroamerican

²⁷¹ Excellent examples of the exoticism and orientalism of the “East” cannot only be found in the art world but especially in the world of travel and tourism. But this would be a whole different study.

²⁷² Marc Le Bot, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 17.

²⁷³ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I. This strategy is often employed among Euroamerican art critics and is recurrent throughout Block II.

art are different and that they have undergone an entirely distinct artistic evolution. Therefore, merely by comparing Huang Yongping's washing machine project with Marcel Duchamp's urinary does not seem to contribute to a better understanding of Huang Yongping's work, as both works express a different message and come from distinct cultural backgrounds and historic contexts. The fact that Marc Le Bot mentions that Huang Yongping's work was not shocking to him as he already had seen the "shocking" work of Duchamp makes it clear that the author has not understood Huang Yongping's work and has not made an effort to comprehend, on its own terms, what the artist wanted to express through this particular and unique work.

Interestingly, the author then continues by mentioning that art is a vehicle in order to understand the Other: "L'art devrait donc m'ouvrir aux cultures autres que la mienne; réciproquement, ceux qui appartiennent à d'autres cultures devraient trouver un accès à la nôtre grâce à notre art."²⁷⁴ This statement becomes rather contradictory when the author himself, within his essay, does not understand the art of the Other on its own terms but compares it to Euroamerican art in order to comprehend it. By using this "method" it is in fact very difficult for the arts to become a vehicle that foments mutual understanding, as the art of the Other is not interpreted through the eyes of the Other but through one's own cultural and historic background.

The author then continues by addressing the fact that everything is considered art when, in his opinion, this is not always the case.

Je répète donc que, personnellement, je crois que ni l'urinoir, ni la boîte de merde, ni le livre lessivé n'ont aucun sens ni valeur artistiques. Ces objets sont les traces concrètes d'une opération tout idéologique, intéressante du point de vue d'une histoire sociale des idées. Ce sont des événements médiatiques des petites ou grandes ou scandaleuses surprises qui rompent la monotonie du quotidien sans changer rien à rien.²⁷⁵

Again, this fragment seems to contain rather strong opinions on what should be considered art and what not. The fact that these words are written by an art critic makes it even more striking. The article then continues for a few more pages but strangely does not mention anything about the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition, the participating artists nor their works. What can be concluded is that the text is actually a philosophical, sociological, and especially personal reflection on what should be considered art and what not. Like the

²⁷⁴ Marc Le Bot, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 17.

²⁷⁵ Ibidem.

author mentioned at the beginning of his essay, he does not know much about Chinese experimental art and this becomes very clear as he hardly writes about it at all within his article.

The next article is written by Chiba Shigéo, who is an art conservator at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo. The author starts out by mentioning that Europe has been the initiator of contemporary and modern art in the world.

[I]l faut dire que l'art modern et contemporain a été initié par les européens c'est un fait historique que doivent admettre les Asiatiques, les Russes et les Américains. (...) Pourtant, ce sont toujours les Européens qui avec leurs notions propres, continuent d'être initiateurs de l'art dans le monde. (...) [L]es Asiatiques ont été obligés de suivre, pendant le XXe siècle, les évolutions de 'l'art européen', et le sont toujours, bien qu'ils aient leur propre tradition artistique qui a commence depuis beaucoup plus longtemps qu'en Europe.²⁷⁶

Although it is true that the origins of modern and contemporary art lie in Europe, it seems a little too blunt to then conclude that they are therefore the initiators of the art in the world. By stating that contemporary and modern art are European styles, it seems as if the author is saying that all other art styles, such as experimental Chinese art that integrate elements of contemporary Euroamerican art are in fact mere followers and that they are not autonomous art movements actively contributing to the international art world. This statement contradicts what was previously said in the interview with Fei Dawei in which he explains that “western” art elements have been used as a vehicle for Chinese artists to break with the past and to create new possibilities for Chinese experimental art as well as for the international art world.

The author then however confirms that in the “West” there is little knowledge about the contemporary art of Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea by saying “Les Européens ne connaissent pas, en général, l'art contemporain de ces quatre pays.”²⁷⁷ This is a logical statement as Chinese experimental art was just entering the art scene in the 1990s. The author does not further elaborate on the statement but it would have been interesting to know how the author came to this conclusion.

²⁷⁶ Chiba Shigéo, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 21.

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

The author then makes an interesting comment by writing:

Quant à la Chine, avec son système politique et économique différent de celui des pays capitalistes développés elle mène encore une politique artistique qui emprunte le modèle du réalisme socialiste soviétique; pourtant, diverses informations sur l'art vivant européen et américain y parviennent inévitablement.²⁷⁸

This is a very interesting fragment and it seems that the image that the author has of Chinese experimental art in the 1990s seems to be quite out-dated. For example, the works that were shown at *Chine demain pour hier* were not at all examples of the Soviet socialist realist style. Also on the mainland, the art of the Chinese experimental artists in the 90s was already beyond the Soviet realist style that had ruled the Chinese art world for so many years. Obviously, some artists continued in this style as it was what they had learned. Others on the other hand had already started a more “modern” art style that no longer showed these Soviet traits.

Further on in the text the author mentions that “ils [Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan] ont été, et son plus ou moins obligés, de développer leur art modern et contemporain suivant le modèle européen et/ ou américain.”²⁷⁹ In the theoretic part of this dissertation the concept of “embassy art”²⁸⁰ has been mentioned, which describes the Chinese experimental artworks that cater to Euroamerican taste. This quote seems to point to this type of art. The author of this essay does not further elaborate on this statement and therefore it does not become entirely clear what the author means by it.

The last part of the article is dedicated to the artist Xu Bing. Here, the author elaborates on one of his works, *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45).²⁸¹ In a way it seems contradictory that the author chose to write about an artist that did not follow the Soviet Realist Style and who was very experimental from the beginning. It seems to contradict the statements made by the author in the previous pages. It is also noteworthy that the author does not mention anything about the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition or the artists that participated in this survey. Xu Bing was not one of the participating artists and it is therefore strange that the author dedicates almost half of the essay to this artist.

²⁷⁸ Chiba Shigéo, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 21.

²⁷⁹ Ibidem.

²⁸⁰ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

²⁸¹ This particular work shall be further explained in chapter 6 of Block II.

The following essay was written by Yves Michaud, director of the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris*. It should be noted that the author starts out by mentioning that he is not an expert on Chinese art: “Même si je ne suis ni un spécialiste de la Chine ni un spécialiste d’art chinois contemporain (...)”.²⁸² This is the second author who mentions not to be an expert on the matter. The fact that these authors have been invited to write an article for the exhibition catalogue while not being experts on the topic might point to the fact that, at that particular time, there was a lack of experts on Chinese (experimental) art in France (and in Euroamerica in general). This was already stated by Fei Dawei in his previous interview with Bernard Marcadé.

Yves Michaud’s essay is mostly about how political governance influences art and the author explains this by resorting to the URSS and China. The article is also about how Chinese art developed independently from “western” influences during the times of Mao. The author then briefly mentions two Chinese artists, Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi to illustrate the fact that art was satirical and critical towards Chinese politics. Again, in this article the author seems to want to portray Chinese experimental art from a political perspective even though *Chine demain pour hier* did not have this intention. Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi are chosen purely as examples in order to illustrate the author’s political interpretation of Chinese experiment even though both artists did not participate in *Chine demain pour hier*. Artists that did participate in *Chine demain pour hier* are only briefly mentioned within the article, i.e. Yang Jiechang, Huang Yongping and Yan Pei Ming. Not much is said about these artists apart from a very short description of some of their works.

Then the author seems to guess the aim of the Pourrières exhibition by writing:

il me semble que ces artistes, dont certains vont pratiquer à Pourrières des interventions spécifiques, rendent manifestes, entre beaucoup d’autres choses, d’une part la complexité aujourd’hui de la position de l’art par rapport au champ social, d’autre part le caractère inéluctable d’un changement qui es celui-là même qui s’est produit et continue à se produire dans le domaine politique.²⁸³

This political objective that the author insinuates in the above-mentioned quote does not coincide with the objectives that were established and previously mentioned by the curator Fei Dawei in his interview with Bernard Marcadé. Here, the curator mentioned that he, in a way, wanted to establish a relation between a contemporary “West” and a “contemporary

²⁸² Yves Michaud, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 23.

²⁸³ Yves Michaud, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 25.

China” and to continue the dialogue that was generated by the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* the year before. In no way did he mention any political aim for the exhibition. Thus it seems that the author has not fully understood or was not aware of the intentions that Fei Dawei, the curator, had for the exposition. On the one hand, this might be an indication that the exhibition did not successfully transmit this objective onto the audience, or it might be yet another sign of the author’s political view on Chinese experimental art.

The next article titled *Le consensus de l’art Chinois contemporain* was written by Monica Dematte who is mentioned in the article as an art historian. In this article the author seems to questions “western” superiority, and the way Chinese experimental art, as well as other non-“western” art is received in the “Occident”:

Mon impression est que l’occident ne s’est jamais profondément posé le problème de la manière d’informer les autres cultures et de savoir comment elles pourraient recevoir son héritage. Il s’est souvent imposé avec succès. La médecine, le modèle économique, la science...ne s’interprètent pas selon la logique occidentale et ne pourraient pas être davantage bien accueillis partout ailleurs.²⁸⁴

This fragment should be highlighted, as it is not very often (at least not in exhibition catalogues of the early 1990s) that a Euroamerican art historian or art critic criticizes the way in which Euroamerica has received or imposed its culture onto non-Euroamerican cultures. With this fragment the author seems to point to “west” centrism and “western” superiority over non-“western” cultures, which in the case of Chinese experimental art is an important feature of its reception in Euroamerica.²⁸⁵ Then, the author makes a very important statement by mentioning that it takes time and effort to truly understand the art of the Other, in this case Chinese experimental art, and that the “West” is often too hasty in this process: “C’est seulement à travers une recherche approfondie qui demande temps, constance et intérêt réel que l’on peut apprécier les références, les sensations, l’énergie qui imprègnent de telles oeuvres. Souvent l’oeil occidental est trop hâtif pour savoir s’arrêter.”²⁸⁶ Here, the author addresses one of the main problems in the “West” when it comes to “correctly” interpreting and understanding non-“western” art, or the art of the Other. The author then continues by mentioning the necessity of a new international language that makes it possible to fully understand the art of the Other:

²⁸⁴ Monica Dematte, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 26.

²⁸⁵ See section III of the theoretic part (Block I).

²⁸⁶ Monica Dematte, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 26.

Ainsi l'épanouissement de la jouissance artistique aussi bien au niveau national qu'international, nécessite d'un langage qu'il soit aussi universellement reconnaissable et que ce soit la sensibilité elle-même de l'artiste qui possède cette urgence nouvelle et profonde. La situation dans laquelle se trouvent les artistes chinois aujourd'hui leur demande d'être en mesure de recueillir les éléments les plus profonds et les plus significatifs de leur tradition et de les exprimer à travers un langage international.²⁸⁷

It is noteworthy that Monica Dematte speaks of the necessity of an international language for the arts in 1990, when Chinese experimental art was just entering the international art scene. At that time, in 1990, it might still have been too early to speak of such terms as the third space, a new internationalism or the in-between however, it is interesting that she already speaks of models that could offer an alternative to the hegemonic Euroamerican art language in such an early stage of Chinese experimental art. It would have been interesting to know what Monica Dematte would have understood by an international language, and how she would have envisioned this alternative Euroamerican reception of Chinese experimental art. Unfortunately, she does not further elaborate on the topic within her article.

The author then points to the fact that “western” art critics often describe Chinese artworks as “nothing new”. Monica Dematte gives an explanation for this recurrent remark:

Les dangers d'absorption à peu près inconditionnée des stimulations extérieures, considérées nouvelles et comme tels tout à fait valables, intéressantes, quelquefois, n'ont pas été conjurés. Voilà pourquoi certains secteurs de l'exposition – surtout celui de la peinture à l'huile – ont aux yeux de plusieurs, et particulièrement des occidentaux un gout de *déjà-vu* qui peut à la limite se transformer en non-goût.²⁸⁸

It will become evident within this dissertation that the use of oil paint on canvas in Chinese experimental art is sometimes considered Euroamerican. And it has often been mentioned in articles and reviews of Block II that the works on display were nothing new. It is remarkable that Monica Dematte points to these remarks that are often made by “western” art critics, especially considering the fact that *Chine demain pour hier* was one of the first exhibitions of Chinese experimental art to be held in the “West”. The observations that she makes in this article seem to be very advanced for that time, as not many exhibitions had been held prior to *Chine demain pour hier*.

²⁸⁷ Monica Dematte, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 26-27.

²⁸⁸ Monica Dematte, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 27.

The last pages of Dematte's article are dedicated to a more in-depth explanation of Chinese art and the role of calligraphy, rice paper, and ink. The article then ends by mentioning that: "faire et comprendre l'art, n'a nul besoin 'd'en faire un système', mais d'en avoir une intense conscience."²⁸⁹ This last sentence might indicate that the international language of which the author speaks in her article should not be a "system" but rather an awareness of the "west" centric language that is widely, and often unquestionably used within the international art market.

What becomes clear when reading the article is that Monica Dematte is one of the few authors in the exhibition catalogue with a good knowledge of Chinese art. Although the exhibition catalogue merely mentions that she is an art historian, Monica Dematte was in fact a curator specialised in Chinese art at the Singapore Art Museum who wrote her Ph.D. research on Indian and Far Eastern art. She has also been a lecturer on Chinese experimental art at the University of Venice. Also, in the last few years she has been curating a lot of exhibitions, usually about Chinese (experimental art).²⁹⁰ Her professional experience and expertise becomes evident when reading her article that provides a lot of interesting insights and clearly distinguishes itself from the previous articles written by non-experts.

The following article is written by Julien Blaine, who is a well-known artist and poet in France. The article is titled *Avvertissement* and seems to be quite an abstract text consisting of a list of ten short "warnings". In these "warnings" the author mentions that the Chinese artists are looking for a new poetry and relates Chinese experimental art to it. All in all, the text is quite abstract and does not comment on anything about the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition or the artists. Basically, the aim of this short text is to establish a relationship between Chinese experimental art and poetry while it also makes reference to various elements of the historic evolution of Chinese experimental art. No further analysis shall be made on this one-page text, as it does not give any information about the exhibition or the artists in question.

The following text is by Chen Yin Teh who is an art critic. The text is titled *L'art modern en Chine et a Taiwan* and gives an in-depth chronological explanation about the history of Chinese experimental art, starting in the years before 1949 until the Tiananmen Square

²⁸⁹ Monica Dematte, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 29.

²⁹⁰ See Monica Dematte's curriculum vitae on: <http://www.monicedematte.com/en/mo/cv>, n.d., date of last consultation: 2/5/2014.

events. The article then also makes references to the contemporary art scene in Taiwan and its historical evolution. The article does not make any reference to the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition or the participating artists, therefore this article shall not be further analysed in this paragraph.

The next article is titled *Traduire la littérature contemporaine chinoise: le malentendu permanent* and is written by Noël Dutrai, director of the Chinese department of the *Faculté de Lettre et Science Humanes d'Aux-en-Provence*. As the title indicates, the article is about the difficulties of translating Chinese contemporary literature to other languages. The author gives various examples of these difficulties and how they often lead to misunderstandings and erroneous translations. He also gives in-depth information about Chinese language and grammar and compares it to the French language. He also goes further into the works of various Chinese contemporary poets. However, the author does not make any mention of the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition within this essay. Therefore, no fragments shall be highlighted from this text in this dissertation.

The following essay is written by the sociologist Tong Dian and is titled *Aspects de l'art contemporain chinois*. When looking at the article, the first thing that catches the eye are the many hand written graphics and tables within the article: the text is a sociological analysis of the development of Chinese experimental art from 1980 to 1990.

The author starts out by making an interesting statement: “Qu’entend-on par art contemporain chinois? Malgré une influence indiscutable du style et des conceptions occidentales, l’art contemporain chinois ne se réfère pas totalement à l’occident.”²⁹¹

It is true, like Tong Dian mentions here, that Chinese experimental art contains elements of “western” art styles however, like the author writes, the reasons for this is not entirely “western” oriented. In the theoretic part of this dissertation, it has been explained that “western” styles were often adopted by Chinese artists in order to break with their own Chinese art history, and not just to “copy” the “West”.²⁹² Tong Dian however does not further elaborate on his statement within his text, which is a pity as it would have been interesting would he have commented more on this important aspect in the reception of Chinese experimental art in the “West”.

²⁹¹ Tong Dian, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 37.

²⁹² See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

The author then continues by giving a brief introduction to the history of Chinese experimental art and makes reference to, among others, the 85 new Wave Movement. Then, Tong Dian makes a nine-page long sociological analysis of how Chinese experimental art developed over the years and how the interest for this art style evolved. He then also takes a closer look at how the importance of Chinese experimental art grew in the years from 1977 to 1986 by referring to the tables and graphics that he elaborated for this article that highlight the appearances of Chinese experimental art in exhibitions and biennales during this time period. Towards the end of the text, the author concludes: "L'enquête que nous avons effectuée n'est qu'un exposé objectif des faits; les fluctuations de l'art contemporain ne peuvent être expliquées que par l'analyse de la conjoncture sociale et culturelle".²⁹³ As the author concludes, the main aim of his article was to give an objective, factual analysis of the evolution of Chinese experimental art. However, again, in the article there is no mention of the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition or the participating artists.

This article is then followed by a second part of the exhibition catalogue in which the artists and their artworks are further explored. The first article consists of an introductory text written by Jean Arrouye, who is an art historian. The article gives more information on the village of Pourrières and therefore helps the reader to get a better idea of the context of the exhibition, also due to the fact that the article includes four photographs of the town. Jean Arrouye then goes deeper into the history of Pourrières, which provides contextual information for the reader. However, it seems that the author exoticizes the participating artists and the exhibition in general when he writes: "Et maintenant voici que six artistes, cortège double de celui des rois mages venus comme eux de l'Extrême Orient, porteurs comme leurs prédécesseurs de mirifiques offrandes patiemment ouvragées, sont venus s'installer sur cette terre, fille des armes et des arts."²⁹⁴ This comment sets a particular tone for the article and the exhibition that could be described as highly exotic. In a way, it might remind of the title of the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in which the participating artists, who were mostly not Euroamerican were portrayed metaphorically as "magiciens".

The author makes another similar comment in which he describes the hilly crests of Pourrières as a fire spitting and angry dragon. The fact that the author uses this metaphor

²⁹³ Dong Tian, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 45.

²⁹⁴ Jean Arrouye, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 48.

of a dragon, an animal which can be easily related to China, puts an emphasis on China as the faraway exotic nation.

The next texts in this second part of the catalogue are one or two-page descriptions of the works presented by the participating artists. Usually, on the left side there is a brief chronology of the exhibitions in which the artists have participated in the previous years. Other texts consist of interviews with the artists. More about these texts in the following paragraph about the artworks that were displayed at *Chine demain pour hier*.

1.3 The artworks on display

The second half of the exhibition catalogue consists of texts written by the participating artists as well as interviews with them.

Cai Guoqiang

The first text is about the work that was presented by Cai Guoqiang. In this text, Cai Guoqiang writes as if the text were from an extra-terrestrial. In it, the extra-terrestrial criticizes the way human beings are treating the earth:

En attendant le contact dans le 2ème millénaire, nous espérons que l'humanité aura su utiliser les explosions à d'autres fins que de destruction et de massacre." (...) L'évidence selon laquelle la terre est vouée à la mort nous fait méditer de façon nouvelle sur ce que nous devons faire pour la vie de la terre et sur ce que nous sommes en mesure de faire...²⁹⁵

The work that Cai Guoqiang presented at Pourrières was an in situ explosion of fireworks, characteristic for this artist, titled *Message de l'Ere Universelle* (1990) which symbolized a different, non-aggressive way of using explosions by human beings. As the artist mentions:

Et les météorites pourraient devenir les maîtres du monde à la place des être humains. Il convient donc d'avoir conscience d'une crise imminente dans l'avenir de notre planète. Cette oeuvre est une réaction naturelle à ce sentiment. Toutes les étoiles et les planètes naissent et meurent à la suite d'une explosion. Et ce processus de vie et de mort est le même que pour les humains et constitue notre destin inévitable. Que rôle pouvons-nous, les humains, jouer dans la protection de notre planète? C'est difficile à dire dans l'immédiat. (...) Pour prendre soin de sa vie, il faut d'abord comprendre clairement la mort. Ainsi, si nous comprenons clairement que cette Terre est vouée à une mesure de la protéger avec toute notre énergie et notre force.²⁹⁶

The artist's work is a reflection on the role that human beings are playing in the destruction of the planet. It is also a reflection on the fact that humans are mortals and that one day, a meteorite might destroy the earth, leaving it without any form of life.

Yang Jiechang

The next text is about the artist Yang Jiechang. The text provides a brief description of his artistic background in China and how he became fascinated by Buddhism and Zen. The

²⁹⁵ Cai Guoqiang, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 52.

²⁹⁶ Cai Guoqiang, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 53.

text also explains why the works of Yang Jiechang uses traditional materials such as ink, rice paper and other vegetal materials and how his work of art is in fact a form of meditation. However, for *Chine demain pour hier*, Yang Jiechang did not present an ink-on-paper work but two installations. One was destined for the chapel of Pourrières and the other was a performance work titled *Insultes* (1990), in which two people²⁹⁷ take turns in insulting each other during five minutes, while the insulted person has to patiently listen without reacting. No further explanation is given in the exhibition catalogue about these two works, therefore it does not become clear what the installation in the chapel of Pourrières consisted of.

In the art magazine *Art Asia Pacific*, the art critic Britta Erickson has written an article about Yang Jiechang in which she also briefly comments on the two artworks, *Insultes* and *Le Project pour la Chapelle*, that were presented by him in Pourrières. This fragment shall be quoted here:

In 1990, Yang participated in the exhibition, *Chine Demain Pour Hier*. One of the first exhibitions of site-specific Chinese art, it consisted of works installed around the city of Pourrières, France. Yang placed an abstract ink painting in a medieval chapel opposite an earthen pillar that he had constructed from earth taken from nearby graves and containing remnants of human bones. After a week seeds sprouted from the earthen pillar, shading the brown form green: although not explicitly referring to the Tiananmen massacre, the suggestion of rebirth was nevertheless poignant coming so soon after that shattering event.

In addition, Yang proposed an unrealized performance piece, *Trading Insults*, to take place in the contemplative space between the pillar and painting. The performance was to involve one person viciously insulting another for five minutes, while the listener remained unmoved; afterwards, the roles were to be reversed. Originally Yang selected the exhibition's curator Fei Dawei and organizer Michèle Cohen to realize the work because of their strong disagreement over aspects of the exhibition. Unsurprisingly, that proved impossible, so Yang proposed that the Taiwanese performance artist Li Mingsheng perform the piece with him. That also did not work out, due to concerns over possible reactions to such staged animosity between representatives of mainland China and Taiwan. The fact that the work failed twice to be performed underscores the fraught nature of human relationships, at times framed by political tensions.²⁹⁸

It should be stated that this text was written in 2009, nineteen years after the exhibition of *Chine demain pour hier*. It is interesting that Britta Erickson makes reference to this exhibition that was held in this small town of France after so many years. It is also noteworthy that one has to resort to a text written almost nineteen years later by a curator who did not participate in *Chine demain pour hier* to obtain background information on some of the works that were exposed in this survey. This points to a lack of information given by the exhibition catalogue itself.

²⁹⁷ It was Yang Jiechang's intention to act out this performance with Fei Dawei and Michèle Cohen but when that was not possible, he decided to do the performance himself with Li Mingsheng, a Taiwanese performance artist. However, in the end, *Insultes* was not performed at all.

²⁹⁸ Britta Erickson, *Yang Jiechang – The Communist Party Didn't Pay the Bill*, *Art Asia Pacific*, issue 65, Sept/Oct. 2009.

It is also interesting to know that Yang Jiechang's second work, the performance of *Trading Insults* (1990), was eventually not acted out due to its problematic character. In the first case due to the "problems" that Fei Dawei encountered with Michèle Cohen during the exhibition (on which no further elaboration is made) and in the second case due to the political implications that a Taiwan-mainland China relationship implies. Again, these incidents are not mentioned in the catalogue nor is it stated that *Insultes* (1990) was cancelled.

The next few pages are dedicated to the artists Yan Pei Ming. These consist of a very brief summary of the exhibitions in which he participated as well as a one-page long interview between the artist and Bernard Marcadé. These pages of the exhibition catalogue shall not be included within this analysis, as this particular artist is not being studied in this dissertation. This due to the fact that he came to the Europe well before the other artists that are studied here, as he moved to Dijon in 1982, and also due to the fact that his work does not seem to express the third space concept. The artist is mainly known for his portrait paintings of Mao.²⁹⁹

Gu Wenda

The following artist that is commented on in the catalogue is Gu Wenda. The first page is dedicated to a very short description of the work *DE* (1990) that was presented by the artist in Pourrières. The text does not explain very clearly what the installation consisted of and it is difficult for someone who has not seen the work to envision it. According to the text, the work consisted of four rocks, measuring 2m x 1m x 1m, in which inscriptions were made. These rocks were then buried so that, according to the artist, they would become eternal. No explanation is given to why the work has been titled "DE".

Following this short description comes a two-page long text about Gu Wenda written by Peter Selz, who is an art conservator at the National Museum of Modern Art in New York. Various fragments of this text shall be analysed here. It is interesting that right at the beginning of the text, Peter Selz compares Gu Wenda's work to the works of Christo when he mentions: "Comme Christo, que Wenda Gu admire beaucoup, il n'a jamais abandonnée l'idée que l'art est un acte public responsable, pas seulement une expression

²⁹⁹ For more explanations on Yan Pei Ming and his work, see chapter 4 of Block II. See also Fig. 25.

de l'individu."³⁰⁰ Comparing Gu Wenda to Christo in order to illustrate the fact that both artists feel that artwork should be a responsible, public act does not seem very justified as these artists are not exceptions. A feeling of responsibility in the arts is a value which is shared by many artists within the art world. The author does not justify or further explain his comparison which could make one suspect that Peter Selz again uses the "strategy" of comparing Chinese experimental artists to Euroamerican artists in order to make the Chinese experimental artworks more familiar and comprehensible to a Euroamerican audience. The same strategy was used earlier on within the catalogue when Huang Yongping's washing machine project was compared to Duchamp's urinary.

Then the author makes another interesting comment when he writes: "Le jeune artiste qui travaille en Chine est confronté à un dilemme qui est celui de la plupart des artistes du Tiers Monde."³⁰¹ According to the author, the dilemma consists of having to choose between a strong traditional past, and the acceptance of contemporary ideas in order to break with orthodoxy. This dilemma has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation.³⁰² However, the fact that Peter Selz considers China part of the third world is a statement that could be questioned. He himself does not give any explanation on why he thinks China is part of the third world and does not justify his remark within this particular text. Seeing China as a third world country does point to the fact that the author might have a "west"-centric hegemonic point of view of the world, which in the 1990s was quite recurrent.

Then the author continues by commenting on the differences between Chinese art and "western" art:

En Chine, où le plus grand compliment que l'on pouvait faire était souvent de dire qu'un tableau était presque impossible à distinguer de l'oeuvre d'un maître âgé et révééré, l'originalité qui a tant de valeur dans la culture occidentale, n'est pas forcément une qualité. (...)
Mais le fait de rejeter la plus ancienne culture qui soit pour laisser place à de nouveaux concepts dynamiques de l'Etranger peut facilement amener un art nouveau et à la mode, une soumission à l'hégémonie de l'impérialisme occidental.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Peter Selz, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 66.

³⁰¹ Ibidem.

³⁰² See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

³⁰³ Peter Selz, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 66.

This fragment has been highlighted here as Peter Selz assumes that accepting “western” influences in Chinese experimental art could be seen as “submission” towards “western” hegemony and imperialism. This hypothesis should be questioned, as the Chinese artists who do incorporate “western” elements within their art creations do not always do so as a submission to “western” art or culture. They do so for many other reasons, which have been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation.³⁰⁴ Also, within the catalogue Fei Dawei states that one of his objectives for this exhibition is to establish a dialogue between a modern China and Euroamerica (the “West”). A dialogue can only be established between equals, this necessarily implies that the “West” does not submit or imperialise modern China with its Euroamerican hegemonic influence. Again, this comment gives the impression that Peter Selz has a rather “west” centric point of view when looking at or writing about Chinese experimental art and artists.

The author then proceeds by mentioning how “western” artists such as Jackson Pollock, Francis Bacon, and “western” philosophers, and art movements have hugely influenced the work of Gu Wenda. He then also mentions several of Gu Wenda’s works that were presented in New York. It is remarkable that nothing is mentioned about the work that Gu Wenda presented at Pourrières. Therefore, it can be concluded that this text is useful as it gives background information about the artist’s career, however, it does not give any further information about the work that was presented in *Chine demain pour hier*. This probably is an indication that the interview was taken well before the publication of the exhibition catalogue and that, at that particular time, it was not yet known which work Gu Wenda would present at the exhibition, as all the exhibited works were in-situ.

Huang Yongping

The following pages are dedicated to the artist Huang Yongping. On the first page of the article, the artist writes that he consulted the Yi Qing in order to decide what to create for the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition. Then he shortly mentions that he does not believe in the Yi Qing but that he thinks that its consultation can sometimes be a good practice. Then, this page is followed by a two-page interview with the artist by Jérôme Sans who is an art critic. In this interview, Huang Yongping mentions the role of the Yi Qing within his work:

³⁰⁴ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

“En effet, je place souvent le Yi King dans la démarche de mon travail. Tantôt j'utilise l'art divinatoire du Yi King en tant que forme; tantôt pour me débarrasser de la difficulté devant laquelle je me suis trouvé; soit encore pour suivre l'idée que d'autres voient en le 'Yi King'. Autrement dit, cela ne signifie pas que le "Yi King" soit quelque chose de particulièrement signifiant ici dans sa réutilisation. Simplement, je pense que tout peut être réutilisé.”³⁰⁵

Then Jérôme Sans asks about Huang Yongping's works in which he uses a washing machine to turn books into paper pulp (“*A Concise History of Modern Art*” after *Two Minutes in the Washing Machine* (1987)) (Fig. 31). The artist gives an evasive answer and does not really respond to the question on how to interpret these works: “Je crois à l'ouverture infinie de l'interprétation, comme je ne crois à aucune interprétation.”³⁰⁶ It should be mentioned here that Jérôme Sans asks this question to Huang Yongping within the exhibition catalogue when it was not one of the works presented by the artist at *Chine demain pour hier*.

Towards the end of the interview, Huang Yongping makes a very interesting comment and mentions:

Je pense que le même style et des phénomènes apparents unis dans une seule logique sont plutôt une exigence de gens ou du système, de l'art imposée à l'artiste. Ils ne sont pas venus de la propre volonté de l'artiste. Le système a tendance à vouloir qu'on ne possède qu'une face. Ce qui facilite certes le discernement, la reconnaissance. Or, je ne crois pas qu'une être n'ai qu'une face et encore moins que cette seule face soit son image réelle.³⁰⁷

Although the artist does mention it explicitly in this text, it seems as if he is criticizing a phenomenon that is often seen in Euroamerica when a certain type of Chinese experimental art is expected from the Chinese artists, a phenomenon which has been coined as “embassy art”.³⁰⁸ As Huang Yongping mentions in this fragment, the system sometimes imposes or expects a specific image from the Chinese artists that obliges them to create artworks that are easily recognizable as “Chinese”. This is a tendency that shall be recurrent throughout the analyses of the various art exhibitions within this dissertation, and of which has been extensively spoken of in the theoretic part of this thesis.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Huang Yongping, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 70.

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁰⁸ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

³⁰⁹ See section III of Block I on the reception of Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica.

Chen Zhen

The last text of this second part of the exhibition catalogue is dedicated to the artist Chen Zhen. On the first page, the artist gives a short explanation of his ideas for the exhibition. In the first work, *Un Monde Détaché / Accroché* (1990), he explains his intention of hanging ninety-nine objects in the trees and electricity poles of the village. The other part of this work consists of hanging ninety-nine photographic works in the forest (or the town) of Pourrières. The other work, *Le passage / Le Circuit* (1990), consists of placing two twelve-meter long trucks in Pourrières in order to create, as the artist mentions in this text “une autre sorte de ‘musée’”.³¹⁰

This short description by Chen Zhen about his work is then followed by an interview, again by Jérôme Sans. In this interview, Chen Zhen speaks of his experience of coming to France and says: “Lorsque je suis arrivé en France en 1986, je me suis tourné cette fois, sur une réflexion profonde de la culture chinoise et sur les effets de la société de consommation occidentale. Je deviens en fait un homme hybride, un amphibie pourquoi pas.”³¹¹ Here the artist speaks of himself in terms of hybridity. The fact of living between China and France has changed the identity of the artist and he now describes himself as a “hybrid amphibian”. Although the artist does not mention the concept of third space in his text, hybridity does form part of this concept as it implies living in between two different cultures, and consequently becoming hybrid. Considering the fact that the interview was taken in 1990, shortly after Chen Zhen left China, it is quite extraordinary that he already speaks of hybridity.

In the rest of the interview, Chen Zhen elaborates further on the consumer society as a global phenomenon, and how this affects human beings and the environment. He also mentions that he uses the objects of consumer society to give it a second life. He mentions: “L’homme n’est pas le centre. Le centre est le rapport qui lie l’homme, les choses (produits ou société de consommation) et la nature. Pour moi, ce centre est l’art.”³¹²

³¹⁰ Chen Zhen, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 72.

³¹¹ Chen Zhen, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 74.

³¹² Chen Zhen, *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition catalogue, p. 75.

This last article about Chen Zhen is followed by a text about the contemporary composer Chen Qi Gang and a twenty-page long chronology written by Gao Minglu about the historic evolution of Chinese experimental art. No further comments shall be made on either of these texts, as they are not considered relevant for the analysis of the exhibition catalogue.

1.4 Conclusions on *Chine demain pour hier*

The exhibition catalogue of *Chine demain pour hier* is extensive and a lot of information is given about different topics related, and sometimes not, to Chinese experimental art. What should be highlighted is that some of the articles were written by non-experts. This becomes particularly clear as the authors sometimes ascribe an exotic or political emphasis to Chinese experimental art, which in the case of *Chine demain pour hier* cannot be justified.

Another important aspect of the exhibition catalogue is that a lot of articles were about other topics such as the contemporary artists in Taiwan or the difficulties of translating Chinese poetry. It is a bit odd however that these essays were published in this exhibition catalogue as they do not seem to add any valuable information for obtaining a better understanding of the exhibition or the artworks that were on display. Only a few authors who collaborated with this catalogue, particularly Monica Dematte, had a good knowledge of Chinese art and these were then the most insightful essays capable of providing more in-depth information. It is also rather strange that one of the main experts on Chinese experimental art, Gao Minglu, has only collaborated with a chronology of Chinese experimental art and not with an article about the exhibition, the participating artists or Chinese experimental art in general. This is a lost opportunity as Gao Minglu is one of the pioneers in concepts such as hybridity, and he could have added insightful aspects about Chinese artists living overseas, as was the case in *Chine demain pour hier*.

The second part of the exhibition catalogue was dedicated to the participating artists. The interviews by Jérôme Sans provided useful background information about the intentions of the artists, which makes their works more comprehensible. However, it should be mentioned that within the interviews, Jérôme Sans sometimes did not talk about the works that were presented at *Chine demain pour hier* but asked about works that were presented at other venues. Such was the case in the interview with Huang Yongping. Also, not all participating artists were interviewed, and only a short description was written of the artists' works presented at Pourrières. These texts were often rather cryptic and sometimes difficult to understand, as they were too brief. Especially considering the fact that the essays in the first part of the exhibition catalogue do not mention much about the exhibition and the works on display, the information given in the second part is insufficient. Thus, it is quite difficult to get a good understanding of the works that were presented at

Chine demain pour hier just by reading the exhibition catalogue, also due to the fact that colour plates or photographs of the works were not always included within the exhibition catalogue. The fact that the essays do not mention the works that were presented at the show and that some of the authors do not speak about the survey at all within their articles seems to confirm the fact that the exhibition catalogue was prepared in advance when it was not yet known what works the artists would present at *Chine demain pour hier*. It should be remembered that all works were sight-specific. This makes the task of using the exhibition catalogue as a tool in order to achieve a better comprehension of the works on display rather impossible.

Coming back to the objectives of the curator Fei Dawei that were mentioned at the beginning of the exhibition catalogue, it could be said that the curator was partly successful in establishing a dialogue between contemporary China and the contemporary “West”. It is true that the exhibited works were very experimental and that they introduced the Euroamerican audience to an “original” experimental Chinese art, far from what has been considered “embassy art”.³¹³ However, the fact that the show did not have much impact on the press and the media seems to be a sign of “failure” to establish a dialogue between the two. This could maybe have been foreseen, as Pourrières is not one of the main cities of France. Establishing a dialogue between contemporary China and the contemporary “West” might have been more successful were the survey to be held in Paris or one of the other more bigger cities of France.

Fei Dawei also mentioned in his introduction that one of his other objectives was to continue the dialogue that was established by the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989). What Fei Dawei means by this does not become clear as he does not further elaborate on his comment. *Magiciens de la Terre*, which introduced non-Euroamerican art to the Euroamerican public, is then not mentioned much throughout the exhibition catalogue of *Chine demain pour hier*, and therefore seems to have been rather side-lined. If Fei Dawei had the intention of continuing the dialogue between the “West” and non-“western” artists (one of the objectives of *Magiciens de la Terre*), it cannot be said with certainty if he was successful as no reviews about *Chine demain pour hier* could be traced. Also, one should take into account that the show was held in 1990 and that it was, after *Magiciens de la Terre*, the first exhibition introducing Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that the knowledge about this art was

³¹³ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

minimum, especially in the case of the visitors who came to the exhibition. This lack of knowledge also becomes evident in the exhibition catalogue itself where several of the authors have mentioned not to be experts on the topic.

As mentioned previously, there is a lack of images of the works, and the descriptions and essays within the exhibition catalogue are often very brief and not very elaborated. Consequently it is difficult to say if the artworks were successful in establishing a dialogue with the audience and whether they were or were not able to express the concept of the third space. In no place were concepts such as the third space, the in-between or the mid-ground mentioned. Only the artist Chen Zhen commented on the fact that the experience of coming to France had made him a “hybrid amphibian”. All other artists did not mention anything related to hybridity or their personal experience of living in between cultures. This is interesting as all six participating artists were Chinese artists living abroad.

Another fact that should be mentioned are the numerous typing errors within the catalogue. This seems to be a sign of neglect or maybe an indication of a limited time schedule, yet it is something that has not been perceived, on this level, in any other exhibition catalogue analysed within this thesis.³¹⁴

All in all, *Chine demain pour hier* is a pioneer when it comes to exhibitions on Chinese experimental art. However, it does not seem to have had much impact in Euroamerica as no reviews could be traced on the exhibition. The fact that a website has been set up to locate more information, photos, articles, etc., about the show confirms that not much material has been kept about *Chine demain pour hier*. This website does not seem to have had much success as it has not been updated since its creation on the 26th of November 2010, and no further information on the exhibition has been published on this website. One of the reasons for its meagre impact might have been the exhibition catalogue that did not provide sufficient information on the works and the artist that participated in the survey. Another reason could have been the choice of location, which might have been too “peripheral”.

³¹⁴ It might be appropriate to here quote the art critic, curator and art historian Lawrence Alloway who once said: “A symptom of the weakening of curatorial function is the decline of the catalogue, a serious matter inasmuch as the catalogue has a greater duration than an exhibition (...). In addition, despite the complaints of curators at always being rushed, there is usually ample lead time to prepare a decent catalogue, if the curator is capable of doing so.” GREENBERG Reesa, FERGUSON Bruce W., NAIRNE Sandy (ed.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 227.

2. SILENT ENERGY (1993)

2.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Silent Energy was held from June 27th until August 29th 1993 at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art. The MoMA Oxford, as it is sometimes called, was founded in 1965 and focuses mainly on modern and contemporary art. In 1976, David Elliott (1949) became the museum's director and started promoting and organizing shows about art forms that were not so popular at the time such as photography, architecture and graphic design. He was also a director and curator who often introduced upcoming artists from other continents such as Africa and Asia. One of the most successful surveys held at the MoMA Oxford was an exhibition of photographs by Robert Doisneau that was organised by David Elliott himself in 1992. Four years later he would step down to start a new job as the director of the Stockholm Moderna Museet.

David Elliott studied Modern History at the University of Durham and then became an art curator for the Arts Council of Great Britain. He is a gallery and exhibition curator and also writes about modern and contemporary art. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, he was one of the first to become interested in art from other continents and introduced exhibitions from these parts of the world into the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, being quite a pioneer in this aspect. *Silent Energy*, for example, was the first show of Chinese experimental art to be held in the UK. Between 2001 and 2006 David Elliott became the first director of Tokyo's Mori Art Museum, a museum devoted to contemporary, particularly Asian art, architecture and design. Then, in 2007, he became the first director of the Istanbul Modern and in 2008 became the Artistic Director of the Sydney Biennale. He has also been a guest professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin and the Chinese University in Hong Kong.

Lydie Mepham was the second curator of *Silent Energy* together with David Elliott. There seems to be very little information available about this curator and it has not been possible to trace any more background information on her career and activities apart from the fact that she is an independent Arts and Crafts professional and that she has been the co-author of the *Silent Energy* exhibition catalogue.

There were eight Chinese experimental artists who participated in this survey, from which five are artists that are included within this study. The participating artists were: Cai

Guoqiang, Chen Zhen, Gu Wenda, Guan Wei, Huang Yongping, Wang Luyan, Xi Jianjun and Yang Jiechang. The three remaining artists that are not included within the group of artists analysed in this research are Guan Wei, Wang Luyan and Xi Jianjun. Guan Wei moved to Australia in 1989.³¹⁵ Wang Luyan is living in Beijing and Xi Jianjun has been living in London and Paris since 1988, yet his work cannot be included within the third space concept as it does not address topics such as universality or hybridity. A fragment within the exhibition catalogue clarifies this:

The simplicity of composition and imagery of his abstract work is rooted in traditional Chinese thought and other influences which include Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese poetry and literature. He describes his work as “expressing the essence of what I see”. Its underlying themes are reflexive leading to the discovery of an “inner space” and “inner life”.³¹⁶

Most of the works that were displayed at *Silent Energy* were especially made for the occasion and shall be analysed in paragraph 2.3. The works that were presented by the five artists included within this study were:

Cai Guoqiang: *Infusion of Smoke* (1993)
 Silent Volcano (1993)
 Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17 (1993) (Fig. 13)

Chen Zhen: *Terraced Field: Earth Energy* (1993)

Gu Wenda: *Oedipus Refound II: The Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11)
 Red and Black (1986)

Huang Yongping: *Yellow Peril* (1993) (Fig. 14)

Yang Jiechang: *Untitled* (series of six works) (1993)

³¹⁵ As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, in this research Australia is not considered part of the Euroamerican context. This study focuses exclusively on the artists that moved to, and the exhibitions that were held in the United States and Europe. Also, due to its proximity to the Asian continent and to China, Australia has been left out of this research. Artists who have moved to this part of the world have therefore not been included within the group analysed within this dissertation.

³¹⁶ *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 20.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that in the same year and practically at the same time of *Silent Energy*, the 45th Venice Biennale was being held. Within this particular biennale, the Political Pop and Cynical Realism styles³¹⁷ were strongly represented as examples of Chinese experimental art.³¹⁸ This should be taken into account as it enormously contributed to the image of Chinese experimental art as a dissident, political art that, especially in a post Cold War context was gladly embraced by the Euroamerican art market and art critics. This might be one of the reasons why *Silent Energy*, that in fact is titled *Silent Energy: New Art from China*, omits this second part of the title on all occasions within the exhibition catalogue itself as well as on the frontcover of the catalogue (Fig. 10). This decision might have been taken based on the fact that the curators did not want to present this art as *Chinese* and also did not want to create the illusion that the survey would contain Political Pop and Cynical Realism works so strongly associated with the concept of “new art from China” due to the Venice Biennale.

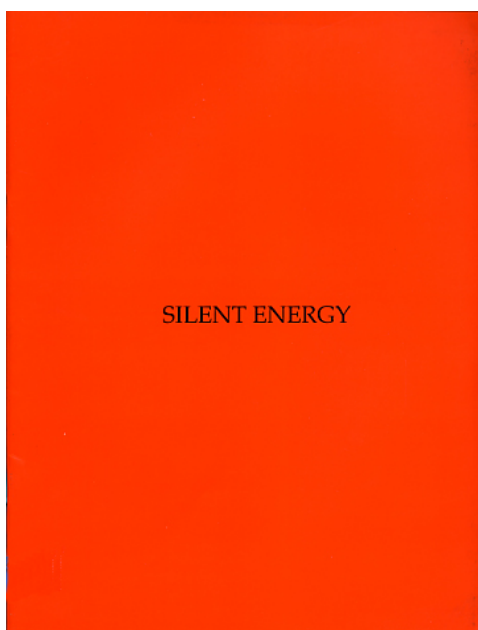


Figure 10: Frontcover of the *Silent Energy* exhibition catalogue, 1993

³¹⁷ For an explanation on these particular currents, see paragraph 3.2 of Block I. See also the introduction to Block II, and chapter 4 on the exhibition *Out of the Centre*.

³¹⁸ See the interview between the art critic and curator Francesca Dal Lago and the artist Zhang Peili. Interview dated June 16th 1999. <http://www.chinese-art.com/Contemporary/volume2issue4/Special/special.htm>. Date of last consultation: 15/9/2014.

2.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was published by Holywell Press in Oxford in 1993. The catalogue is not very extensive and has only twenty-three pages. It starts out with a one-page introduction written by the two curators, David Elliott and Lydie Mephram, which is followed by the only essay within this catalogue written by Hou Hanru.

According to the two curators, the aim of the exposition was to show “the unknown or neglected art histories of non-western countries”. This coincides with the policy of the director David Elliott to introduce non-“western” art to the public within the Oxford MoMA:

The series of exhibitions of contemporary art from China of which this is a part has been a long time in the making. It results from the Museum’s policy of showing the unknown or neglected art histories of non-western countries. *Following Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945-1965* which took place in 1985 we started to work on a similar project in China and agreed with Wang Meng, the Minister of Culture at that time, that we should plan an exhibition which analytically and untendentiously showed the development of Chinese art from 1949, the time of the Communist “Liberation”, to the present.³¹⁹

It should be highlighted that the exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Chinese government, in this case the Chinese Ministry of Culture. This could imply that the artworks that were on display were “approved” by the Chinese government, although this is not mentioned anywhere within the catalogue. However, if it were true, this element should be kept in mind while analysing this exhibition as the image given by the survey might have been previously accorded with the Chinese government.

The word “untendentiously” is also notable. What does it mean? That the exhibition did not want to exhibit “typical” examples of Chinese experimental art such as the artworks made in the Political Pop or Cynical Realism style?³²⁰ Did *Silent Energy* want to introduce the Euroamerican audience to a type of Chinese experimental art that did not follow the fashions or the stereotypical images? This is not further explained within the introduction yet, it should be remembered here that around the same time as *Silent Energy*, the 45th Venice Biennale was being held from June to October 1993. This biennale focussed mainly on painting and especially on the Political Pop and Cynical Realism styles of the

³¹⁹ David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p.3.

³²⁰ As mentioned before, these two styles have become extremely popular in the West and artists who work with these have become very successful. However, these styles are sometimes critical and mocking towards Chinese society and especially Chinese politics, often in order to please a Euroamerican audience. If the survey was organized in collaboration with the Chinese ministry of Culture, it could be one of the reasons for the non-inclusion of these styles in *Silent Energy*, especially in the early years of 1993.

Chinese experimental art current. It might be for this reason that *Silent Energy* aspired to show a different aspect of Chinese experimental art and not to include these “tendencies” so numerous represented in Venice.

What also becomes clear from this fragment is the enormous challenge that the two curators have taken on by wanting to represent almost fifty years of Chinese experimental art development in one single art exhibition. Taking a closer look at the works that were displayed at the survey, it could be questioned if the exhibition truly reflects the development of Chinese art from 1949 until 1993, as most of the works were made especially for the show, or were made in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, seven out of the eight artists that participated in *Silent Energy* were Chinese experimental artists who were living outside of China at the time of the survey. Can they then be considered representative of the evolution of Chinese experimental art between 1949 and 1993? The fact of moving away from China necessarily implies that they have been influenced by the adopted host country, which makes their works different from those of their mainland counterparts. In general, it seems rather challenging to organize an exhibition that would effectively reflect the evolution of Chinese art of a period of almost fifty years. The artists that were chosen to participate in *Silent Energy* were representative of the last period, starting from the 1980s. There were no works illustrative of the period of Mao’s reign and it seems that this period is not dealt within the exhibition, as no artists or works that represented the period of the 1940s to the 1970s were included within the show.

The introduction then dedicates two whole paragraphs to explaining the historical background of Chinese experimental art and the history of China in general. It writes about the May 4th Movement, the Cultural Revolution and the Stars Group.³²¹ Towards the end of the second paragraph, it mentions:

In the visual arts, as soon as the same generation had graduated from the newly re-opened art academies, the Movement of 1985, as it became known, focused aspirations for change by challenging the accepted order. Artists were now able to think and work as individuals and to take the initiative for their own development. The subsequent opening up of a market for modern Chinese art have made such initiatives a necessity for cultural survival.³²²

³²¹ The Stars-group, also known as xingxing (星星), was one of the first groups of experimental to start organizing (clandestine) exhibitions in 1979. They were the pioneers of the Chinese avant-garde art. See also the introduction to paragraph 1.1 of Block I. For more information see <http://www.zeestone.com/article.php?articleID=16>, n.d., date of last consultation 13/8/2014

³²² David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

This extract seems to give a rather positive outlook on the situation in which Chinese modern art was created in the 1980s. However, this statement could be questioned. The 1985 New Wave experienced limited freedom of expression within China. A clear example of this was the shutting down (twice) of the emblematic *China/Avant Garde exhibition* held in Beijing in 1989 which is considered the culmination of this particular movement. It therefore might not be entirely true that the artists were “able to think and work as individuals and to take the initiative for their own development” during the eighties, as the catalogue mentions, at least not publically. Also the fact that the text mentions that there was an opening up of a market for modern Chinese art is questionable. The essay does not mention if this market was domestic or if it was mainly outside of China, which was the case in the late eighties. As explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation, Chinese experimental art became popular outside of the mainland before it did within China.³²³

Then the catalogue mentions: “These artists have had to negotiate the fine line between insularity and a desire to confront the West, between the gravitational pull of an ancient culture – however critical they may be of it – and the necessity to learn and adopt the many languages of modern art.”³²⁴ This dilemma of Chinese experimental art was also mentioned in the previously analysed exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*. It is true that Chinese experimental artists are dealing with a historically and traditionally rich legacy of Chinese art and that they try to combine this feature with “western” features that inevitably influence their works and lives. What is interesting in this fragment is the word “confront”: do Chinese experimental artists *confront* the “West”? The contrary seems to be the case, as the “West”, especially in the 1980s was embraced as a breath of fresh air. “Western” art styles were integrated within Chinese experimental art in order to create new possibilities for international as well as Chinese art, not in order to confront the “West”.³²⁵

Then, the introduction mentions another aim for the show and states:

In this exhibition of specially commissioned work Cai Guoqiang, Chen Zhen, Guan Wei, Gu Wenda, Huang Yongping and Wang Luyan highlight the different perspectives of East and West by making social, political and ecological references. There are formal references also to art history when wax is poured in calligraphic shapes by Gu Wenda and Xi Jianjun, or when traditional ink and wash is used to subvert accepted canons as in the scrolls of Gu Wenda or the paintings of Yang Jiechang.³²⁶

³²³ See the introduction to section I, Block I.

³²⁴ David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

³²⁵ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

³²⁶ David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

It is interesting that this fragment mentions that one of the objectives of the survey is to “highlight the different perspectives of East and West”. It seems that the curators have meant for the exhibition to differentiate “East” from “West”, emphasizing the dissimilar aspects and perspectives of “Occident” and “Orient”. In the case of the works made by the overseas Chinese experimental artists, the concepts of “East” and “West” are often questioned and challenged, which makes this aim of *Silent Energy* rather contradictory. In the last paragraph of the introduction this particular aim is further explained:

All these artists share a reflective conceptual and philosophical approach to art which shows little trace of the dualist or Hegelian divisions which characterise modern Western culture. We tend to think of reality as an accretion of conflicting forces: man-nature; body-spirit; fire-water; hunger-plenty, life-death. While the Chinese artists recognise the same entities, they do not see them as opposites. Such categories are, rather, different states of energy within a greater unity.³²⁷

It might be a risky comment to make at this point of the research, but it might well be that the “Chinese way of thinking” is capable of seeing “East” and “West” as one and not as two separated halves. However, in Euroamerican thinking “East” and “West” are seen as opposites and are separated in almost all occasions for reasons that are related to the survival of “western” hegemony in the world.³²⁸ This might be one of the reasons why the third space concept is not widely accepted by Euroamerican art critics and curators. However, it should also be highlighted that the statement made in the above-mentioned quote is based on a stereotypical and very generalizing description of “Chinese” and “western” thought.

The introduction is followed by an essay written by Hou Hanru titled *A Chinese Energy Plan*. The essay is four pages long and is mainly dedicated to the participating artists of *Silent Energy*. There are short fragments that describe all participating artists and the artworks that were on display at the survey. This makes it easier to understand the meaning of the various creations that were shown in *Silent Energy*. Some fragments shall be highlighted here, other fragments of this essay shall be analysed in the following chapter in which the artworks of *Silent Energy* shall be described.

³²⁷ David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

³²⁸ See paragraph 1.2 of Block I.

At the beginning of the essay, there is an interesting paragraph that says:

The artists shown here have played important roles during the last ten years by the Chinese avant-garde and have made outstanding contributions. One of their most splendid achievements is a redefinition of the identity of Chinese contemporary art which ran parallel to a definition of their own work. Today, almost all of them have emigrated to the West and have succeeded in placing themselves within an international context. In other words, their present work shows the transition between cultural and personal identity. Not only may this be understood as an important example of international artistic and cultural dialogue which has increased communication between different cultures, but also as an accumulation and exertion of an enormous energy to create a new situation in international art.³²⁹

Hou Hanru starts out by writing that the artists shown at the *Silent Energy* exhibition have played an important role in the last ten years of Chinese avant-garde art. Remembering one of the objectives of this survey, it was actually the curators' intention to introduce the Euroamerican audience to the Chinese experimental art scene of the last fifty years. It thus seems as if Hou Hanru undermines this aim.

Taking a closer look at the second half of this fragment, Hou Hanru speaks of a transition between cultural and personal identity, artistic and cultural dialogue, the communication between different cultures and lastly, the creation of a new situation in international art. Could it be that the author is pointing towards the creation of a new space within the international art world? Are the overseas Chinese experimental artists, apart from changing their own identity and expressing this through their artworks, also changing the identity of the world in general? Hou Hanru does not mention this in these exact words, yet this fragment could be interpreted this way. If so, Hou Hanru's explanation could be well advanced for its time as Homi Bhabha coined the third space concept in his book, *The Location of Culture* that was published in 1994. *Silent Energy* was held in 1993, one year before.

After this general introduction to the author's essay, Hou Hanru then moves on to describe the participating artists of the survey. He starts with Gu Wenda and says:

Strongly influenced by Nietzsche, Freud and Wittgenstein, as well as by the Zen way of life, Gu Wenda considers the goal of his art as a subversion of traditional values and their taboos in order to assert a radical and individual freedom. (...) Such a synthesis of traditional elements with modernist iconography and of poetic expression with vulgar slang has provoked a confusion of conventional aesthetics which borders on cultural chaos.

Since he has moved to live in the West, subversion has not only functioned as a deconstructive strategy for breaking down traditional Chinese constraints, but has also become an essential

³²⁹ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p.4.

motivation for his work, a kind of new reality. He has developed his desire for subversion into challenges against Western cultural fetishes and its moral puritanism. If the Oedipus complex, according to Freud, is the most basic taboo in Western civilization, to break it down, as Gu Wenda has done by defying taboos of sexuality and intimacy in the incorporation of used sanitary towels and placenta powder in his work, is an expression of his struggle for total freedom – personal and creative.³³⁰

In the *Silent Energy* exhibition, one of the works that was presented by Gu Wenda was *Oedipus Refound II: The Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig.11). This has been a rather controversial work and it has stirred up quite some discussions on “western” taboos and ethics.³³¹ *Oedipus Refound II: the Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig.11) is an installation work of five wooden cots in which glass boxes are placed. Each glass box contains placenta powder of five different births: two normal births, an abnormal birth, a stillborn and an aborted foetus.



Figure 11: Gu Wenda, *Oedipus Refound #2: The Enigma of Birth*, 1993

This work is a good example of what Hou Hanru is trying to make clear in the above-mentioned fragment. Gu Wenda does not use these materials, such as the placenta powder or the sanitary napkins, in order to be a sensationalist. What he tries to create is, as the author himself writes, a “cultural chaos”, to question “western” values, and to break existing taboos.

³³⁰ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p.4.

³³¹ A good example of this is Gu Wenda’s work that was presented at the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition organized at the Kröller-Müller museum in the Netherlands in 1995 (see chapter 5 of Block II). The work consisted of a correspondence between the artist and the American art critic, curator and Chinese experimental art expert Julia F. Andrews. In this exchange of letters it becomes clear that the curator has politely asked Gu Wenda to reconsider his work *Oedipus Refound II: Enigma of Birth* as she finds it “unsanitary and brutal” and says that the “western” public will only see it as an “example of Asian exoticism”. Gu Wenda then responds to her letter by saying that he is unwilling to reconsider his choice and will proceed to present the work at the exhibition. More on this work in paragraph 2.3 of this present chapter.

Hou Hanru then again talks about a “new reality”. This statement can be related to the third space concept as it breaks with a traditional way of “western” thinking that has ruled the “western” perspective of the world for centuries: the dichotomy between “East” and “West”. The search for total freedom also means the rethinking of one’s own identity and the creation of a new reality that could consist of the creation of an in-between space which would be an alternative way to perceive the world. If Hou Hanru is referring to the third space, or an alternative model to the “East-West” dichotomy, this again points to the fact that his ideas were well advanced for that time.

Then, the author writes about the exhibition in general and states:

Looking at Chinese contemporary art in general, and the eight artists’ work in this exhibition in particular, one can notice that the human body occupies a central position. Gu Wenda’s use of sanitary towels and placenta powder for example suggests an immediate “invasion” of the body. It is both provocative and subversive because it has touched the limits of our moral and personal tolerance.

In this history of Western contemporary art which has served as a primary reference for Chinese artists, we have witnessed a revolt against the body (...) Today, at the beginning of the 1990s, in line with the political and economic crises looming over the West, a new generation of artists has brought back the discourse of the body into focus. (...) In their work, there is the evident intention of presenting the body as a discourse which concerns social repression. Their understanding of the body is often based on Western scientific-psychological narratives of physicality, sexuality and the body’s “daily functions” (...)

Chinese artists, on the other hand, reject scientific conceptions of the body and its immediate social engagement, and prefer to place themselves in a more detached and even transcendent position where they deal with the body as a symbol of the desire of freedom. Rather than putting emphasis on the conflict between the body and its surroundings, they tend to place the body in a state in harmony with its environment. This, of course, is in line with traditional Chinese conceptions of the harmony between man and nature.³³²

There are two elements that shall be highlighted here. First of all, the author mentions in this fragment that “western” contemporary art has served as a “primary reference” for Chinese artists. This comment should be taken into account throughout the whole of this dissertation. It has often been said by the art critics that Chinese experimental art copies or is based on Euroamerican contemporary art.³³³ Hou Hanru confirms this yet he adds a nuance to this statement: Chinese experimental art has referred to “western” contemporary art in the beginning, yet it has later on continued and developed its own style in the 1990s. An example of this is what Hou Hanru mentions about the different perceptions that the Chinese artists have of the human body. According to the author, the

³³² Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 5.

³³³ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

“western” perception of the body concerns “social repression” however, for the Chinese experimental artists, the body is seen as “detached” and in harmony with the environment: the body as an integral part of nature.

The different views that exist between “East” and “West” in relation to the human body is interesting and clearly distinguishes the two. Many of the Chinese experimental artists (overseas) see the human body as a way of expressing identity. For example, Gu Wenda has worked with different “bodily materials” such as blood and human hair to create his installations and to express the concept of identity through the usage of these particular materials. The *United Nations Series* (1993 -) (Fig. 12, 27, 28 and 41) is made out of human hair and is a good example of one of his installations, which are in fact global projects. These “human materials” are used to unite the world and to emphasize the universality of the human race. According to the artist, a single string of human hair contains the entire DNA of a person; it is a universal phenomenon yet, at the same time, extremely personal, as no two strings of hair are the same.³³⁴



Figure 12: Gu Wenda, *United Nations Series*, *Babel of the Millennium*, 1999

³³⁴ See the interview held by Edward Lucie-Smith with Gu Wenda: <http://www.wendagu.com/publications/on-wenda-gu/edward-lucie-smith.html>, August 2002. Date of consultation: 02/03/2013. See also chapter 5 of Block II.

Then Hou Hanru continues by further elaborating on the relationship between man and nature:

The relationship between man and nature, in the context of international cultural-artistic dialogues, cannot be purely confined to metaphysics or to aesthetics. More importantly, it has become part of a broader discussion about the political nature of international cultural exchange, or, in other words, about the politics of the construction of a world multicultural order. The emergence of Chinese artist in the international art scene today is both an expression of the artists' willingness to develop their work in a wider space and of the urgent need to construct a new critical framework in which it can be viewed: in this, the contributions of Chinese artists are as necessary as those from other cultures. Many Chinese artists have consciously worked to this end while re-defining their own identities. The bridging of the Eastern and Western conceptions of the relationship between man and nature is, for example, an important strategy in realising such a form of multiculturalism.³³⁵

This fragment contains certain elements that could point to the third space concept. Hou Hanru speaks of a “new critical framework”, “re-defining” identities and the bridging of “eastern” and “western” conceptions of, in this case, the relationship between man and nature. It should be highlighted that the author puts an emphasis on the role that the Chinese experimental artists play in this process. However, it should also be said that the author does not further elaborate on what he means by a “new critical framework”. Does he mean the creation of the in-between space? The fact that the author speaks of “the bridging of the Eastern and Western conceptions” is actually quite the contrary of the third space concept. If one bridges two elements, it means that there is a separation between the two and that the bridge is closing a gap, an empty space which separates the “East” from the “West”. However, the third space is not quite the same as bridging two separate entities. The third space *blends* “East” and “West”, there is no gap, no empty space to be overcome: the in-between *is* the gap. Instead of a bridge connecting two opposites, the third space is an alternative model which does not contemplate the possibility of separation, but which in itself already forms a hybrid whole.³³⁶ It seems thus that Hou Hanru is speaking of a beginning of a hybrid space that overcomes the strict separation between “East” and “West”. An idea that would find its culmination in Hou Hanru's book *On the Mid-Ground* that would be published in 2002.

Then, the author briefly mentions the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* that was held in Paris in 1989. He writes: “[It was] effectively the beginning of the discourse on multiculturalism in the realm of fine arts. Chinese artists, from both the point of view of

³³⁵ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

³³⁶ See also paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

their changing cultural identities and of their art works, are becoming increasingly significant within this new climate of multiculturalism.”³³⁷

Again, Hou Hanru puts emphasis on the role that the Chinese experimental artists, especially those who live overseas, are playing in this “new climate of multiculturalism”. The author speaks of a “new climate” but he does not further explain what he means by this and if he is pointing towards the third space or an alternative model beyond the “East-West” dichotomy. It is a fact that the world is becoming more and more multicultural and hybrid, yet, in 1993 it seems that the “East-West” dichotomy was still strongly in place. If not, Hou Hanru would not be writing about the Chinese experimental artists as “significant” in the new climate of multiculturalism.

All in all, Hou Hanru’s essay seems well advanced for its time and seems to contain the initial ideas of the third space concept that would later on be coined by Homi K. Bhabha in 1994. The article describes the overseas artists as pioneers in the “new climate of multiculturalism” and portrays them as artists who build bridges between the “East” and the “West”. This aspect of the overseas artists is not often mentioned, especially not by Euroamerican art critics, within exhibition catalogues or reviews. This distinguishes Hou Hanru as one of the writers of reference when it comes to alternative models and hybridity.

After Hou Hanru’s essay, the catalogue dedicates one-page texts to the artists that participated in *Silent Energy* and the works that they displayed at the survey. The works that were presented at the exhibition shall be commented on in the next paragraph.

³³⁷ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

2.3 The artworks on display

Cai Guoqiang

The first works that shall be analysed here are those by Cai Guoqiang. There was a total of three works presented by Cai Guoqiang in the *Silent Energy* exposition: *Infusion of Smoke* (1993), *Silent Volcano* (1993) and *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17: The Oxford Comet* (1993) (Fig. 13).

About this particular artist, Hou Hanru writes in his essay:

Cai Guoqiang, after hesitating between traditional painting and Western modern art, decided to concentrate on exploring the “beauty of violence”. He has developed a personal language by making drawings out of burned gun powder and explosion events which, according to him, are literal simulations of the origin of the universe: the Big Bang. Through his work, he says, he hopes to communicate with outer space, with extraterrestrials.³³⁸



Figure 13: Cai Guoqiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17: The Oxford Comet*, 1993

³³⁸ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p.5.

In all three projects gunpowder was involved and these works are good examples of the creations of Cai Guoqiang. *Infusion of Smoke* (1993) was an installation which was made with Chinese herbal medicines, a material which is frequently used by this particular artist, and also contained a drawing showing the acupuncture points of the body. *Silent Volcano* (1993) included the use of gunpowder, which was invented in China, and so did the third project *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17: The Oxford Comet* (1993) (Fig.13). Gunpowder is a statement material of this artist and he sees it as a very important part of Chinese tradition.³³⁹ By combining traditional Chinese elements such as Chinese herbal medicines and gunpowder into his installation works which are about more general topics, such as the extraterrestrials and the destruction of our planet, Cai Guoqiang combines elements of his homeland with aspects that represent the present situation in which the artists lives and works. This is an example of transexperiences.³⁴⁰

The exhibition catalogue also includes a text that was written by the artist himself in which he explains the reason for *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17* (1993) (Fig. 13):

This work draws on the past history and people of Oxford and relates to the specific location of Angel Meadow. The work attaches importance to our view of the universe as well as to that of the universe of us.

It also embodies the cosmic principle of the reincarnation of ten billion souls.

(...) In modern times, some scientists have suggested that the origins of life are derived from the collisions of comets with the earth when organic substances were released. It is also possible that the enormous explosion caused by a collision may trigger a holocaust which will destroy the whole planet.³⁴¹

This work is an example of one of the aims that the *Silent Energy* wanted to achieve: to highlight the different perspectives of “East” and “West” by making social, political and ecological references. Yet, the installation seems more like an example of personal interests of the artists than a concern with “East” and “West”. The works of this particular artist cannot be characterized as typically “Chinese” nor can they be seen as “western”. Cai Guoqiang’s works are a good example of hybridity in which Chinese traditional

³³⁹ For more information on Cai Guoqiang and his relationship with fireworks and gunpowder, see the interview from the Wall Street Journal magazine: <http://magazine.wsj.com/hunter/drawing-fire>. October 21 2010. Date of consultation: 03/03/2013.

³⁴⁰ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

³⁴¹ Cai Guoqiang, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 9.

elements are combined with “universal” or global topics in order to create artworks that cannot be pigeonholed.

Chen Zhen

The next artist that shall be commented on is Chen Zhen. The work that he presented at *Silent Energy* was titled *Terraced Field: Earth Energy* and was especially created for the survey in 1993. About this artist, the catalogue mentions:

Avoiding the stereotypes of calligrapher or political dissident which often are attached to Chinese artists, Chen Zhen is determined not to make a contemporary version of ancient art. His work in Oxford is based on the traditional rice terraces of China covered by the ashes of lost learning, knowledge, hope and communication.³⁴²

This fragment confirms that Chinese artists, already in the early years of 1993, are often seen in a stereotypical way as traditional or politically dissident artists, a topic that has been elaborated upon in the theoretic part of this dissertation.³⁴³ It is often the Euroamerican art critics who see and portray Chinese experimental art and its artists from a “western” perspective which is frequently based on prejudices and stereotypes. This will become evident in the exhibitions that shall be analysed within Block II as well as in some of the reviews of *Silent Energy*.³⁴⁴

About the work, Chen Zhen himself explains in the exhibition catalogue:

My work is a piece of the land which may be looked at in two ways:

Cultivation: agricultural and cultural. The erosion of the cultural traces which enrich the earth and the purification of the spirit of the earth which sublimates culture.

It is an energy field. Energy which presents a bounty after “the destruction of the past”.

And the void of destruction is the basis for a future revival.

It is black energy – silent and luminous.³⁴⁵

This work seems to illustrate what was said about the artist in Hou Hanru’s catalogue essay about Chen Zhen’s effort of “confronting consumer society with all its ecological

³⁴² *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 10.

³⁴³ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

³⁴⁴ See paragraph 2.4 of Block II.

³⁴⁵ Chen Zhen, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 11.

crises". The installation consists of a big pile of black earth, which is made out of burnt newspapers and wood that reaches from the floor to the ceiling. It is a work of destruction, a process which is often required in order to build something new. In China, as well as in "western" agriculture, pieces of land used to be burned in order for the earth to become fertile again. Symbolically, it is as the artists mentions "the void of destruction is the basis for a future revival". Could it be that he is talking about a new world order, or a new relationship between man and nature? The answer to this question is left open, as the artist does not give any further explanation on his work.

Gu Wenda

The next works that shall be commented on are the creations of Gu Wenda. In the catalogue, Hou Hanru has already mentioned that Gu Wenda often searches for ways to break ("western") taboos, this in order to achieve radical and individual freedom. Later on in the exhibition catalogue, the one-page explanation that is dedicated to the artist mentions, "Gu had succeeded in the avant-garde strategy of shock and displacement".³⁴⁶

Only one of Gu Wenda's works, *Oedipus Refound II: The Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig.11), is explained within the exhibition catalogue while the artist presented two creations at *Silent Energy*. Also the artists himself only comments on this particular work within the exhibition catalogue. There is no comment or further explanation on the other work that was presented by the artist which was titled *Red and Black* (1986), and which consisted of four scrolls of ink and wash on paper. Why this has been done is not explained anywhere.

About *Oedipus Refound II: the Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11), the artist writes:

This series of works has been dedicated to her, to him, to us and to our times. The Oedipus myth is one of the most representative ancient allegories about our being, nature and knowledge. This work is intended to define us: we are the modern Oedipus, caught in a modern enigma. From our blind indulgence since ancient "Oedipal times" we are still looking, our knowledge is still extending, and the chaotic enigma of the modern Oedipus still continues...

The idea of "material-analysis" has been at the root of my researches into the deconstruction of the human body since 1989; it has developed into the series of works called "Oedipus Refound".

The art objects I make include human materials and have no element of illusion in them; they are as real as the people who look at them. The materials I use reject the idea of the body as an object and penetrate through a sense of spiritual presence.

³⁴⁶ *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

The idea of “the thinking body” as opposed to the “thinking mind” deconstructs and abstracts each particular organ from the normal system of the body. This has a profound [sic] effect on any idea of the “essence of the body” and challenges human values relating to birth and death. My working methods invade and transcend the self beyond convention, mortality, morality and civilization.³⁴⁷

The above-mentioned fragment does not clarify why the Oedipus myth inspired Gu Wenda’s work and not much is said about the myth itself. The myth of Oedipus is, briefly explained, the story of the mythological figure of Oedipus who killed his father and, unknowingly, married his mother. The Oedipus complex is a very important theory in Freudian psychoanalysis and explains, again very briefly described, the unconscious desire of a child to sexually possess the mother or father and to want to eliminate the parent of the opposite sex. The reason why Gu Wenda chose this topic for one of his works is that it addresses a taboo topic in (Euroamerican) culture. The origins of Oedipus lie in Greek mythology, which is one of the pillars of European culture, even though the Oedipus complex is universal and does not limit itself to only the “western” hemisphere of the world. Knowing that one of Gu Wenda’s aims is to break (“western”) taboos, or at least, address them publically, this could have been one of his main motives for this work to have been inspired by the Oedipus myth.

On the other hand, according to the above-mentioned fragment, the artist speaks of challenging “human values relating to birth and death” and to “invade and transcend the self beyond convention, mortality, morality and civilization”. What the artist means exactly by this does not become clear as he does not further elaborate on these statements within the catalogue. According to the artist himself, said in an interview with Radio Television Hong Kong, “my work always has questions, issues. So it challenges the tradition, challenges the convention.”³⁴⁸ It seems that this particular work does exactly this, and that the main aim of the work is to question and challenge convention. *Oedipus Refound II: the Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11) was created especially for the *Silent Energy* exhibition and has, since then, stirred up quite some debates and discussion, often due to the “controversial” materials that the artists in occasions has chosen for his works such as placenta powder, human hair and menstrual blood.³⁴⁹ In this way, *Oedipus Refound II: the*

³⁴⁷ Gu Wenda, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

³⁴⁸ See the full youtube documentary on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhZp9J7QbJI>, published on 13/3/2012. Date of consultation: 05/03/2013.

³⁴⁹ The use of organic, or human materials in Chinese experimental art is not limited to Gu Wenda. Other artists such as Zhang Huan, Gu Dexin, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, and Ai Wei Wei have also employed their own bodies or human/ animal materials within their work. As explained in the introduction to Block II, these works can be included in the art phenomenon called Shock Art. See the introduction to Block II.

Enigma of Birth (1993) (Fig. 11) did effectively question certain taboos about life and death and therefore could be considered achieving its goals of challenging human values and conventions.

Huang Yongping

The next work was made by Huang Yongping and was titled *Yellow Peril* (1993) (Fig. 14). Within his essay, Hou Hanru writes about this particular work:

(...) He probes problems concerning controls on knowledge, the dilemma of culture and counter-culture, the rational and irrational, the meaningful and meaningless, the possible and impossible, necessity and chance...In reality, these issues are political because they are effectively related to the question: who has the right to decide and control knowledge and our ways of living and thinking? (...) To strive for real freedom, he “transplanted” Western influences into his art when he was living in China and today in the West he uses the Chinese “I Ching” and other systems of divination which have nothing to do with Western art and reality. (...) His work, which is often “materialised” in games of chance, in installations which use unconventional materials like the pulp of washed books, is realistic rather than exotic. In the context of today’s crisis of cultural identity, it is also political. Huang Yongping has a deep insight into this crisis. He investigates the paradoxes in existing political and social orders alongside the necessity for real multi-culturalism. This is why, recently, he has changed the direction of his work into a confrontation with the social and political events in the daily and intellectual life of the West where he now lives. (...) Huang Yongping presents here a project entitled “Yellow Peril”. This work protests against the retardataire and even prejudiced reception of the East by the West. Live locusts and scorpions provide theatrical and emphatic elements. They remind us that even now, when pronouncing the word “yellow”, an image of the notorious “Yellow Peril” first formed by the colonialist two centuries ago, still “naturally” emerges in our vision. The word “locust” in Chinese language is phonetically similar to the word “yellow”. However, looking at a reduced “locust peril” in this installation, should we really connect it with the idea of “Yellow Peril” and react like the deadly scorpions that scuttle around the bottom of the cage?³⁵⁰

It seems that Hou Hanru wishes to emphasize Huang Yongping’s questioning of the values of society and social order. It is as he mentions, the artist reacts against the “prejudiced reception of the East by the West”. In this particular work he seems to question the image that appears when the concept “Yellow Peril” is mentioned. The artists himself clarifies this in the catalogue:

The title of my work “Yellow Peril” comes from a late 19th century European drawing which depicts in a racist manner the contradictions between Buddhism and Christianity, between Eastern and Western culture...between civilisation and imagination. The different Chinese characters for “yellow” and “locust” have the same pronunciation [sic], huang. Throughout Chinese history there have been numerous times when huge swarms of locusts have descended causing devastation to large areas: “yellow peril”. Now the term “yellow peril” means something very different to westerners. For this exhibition I have put together locusts with scorpions in conflict, like the one represented in the picture by Knackfuss.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 6-7.

³⁵¹ Huang Yongping, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 17.



Figure 14: Huang Yongping, *Yellow Peril*, 1993

According to the artist, his work is based on a picture that was drawn in 1895 by H. Knackfuss. It is said that the picture was in fact made by Kaiser Wilhelm the II who was warning the Germans (and the “westerners”) of the Yellow Peril, which at that time was the rising force of Japan. The picture by Knackfuss however warns against the rising force of China and shows several Chinese men working hard and being very busy doing various kinds of labour.³⁵² In Huang Yongping’s work, the locust and scorpions ended up fighting and eating each other. This could represent the image of the “Yellow Peril”, the danger of the Chinese “eating up” the world (and especially taking control of the world economy). An image that is especially valid in the twenty-first century which is seen as the century of the “eastern” countries: India and especially China. Therefore, the concept of “Yellow Peril” is still very much alive.³⁵³ The work reflects on the Euroamerican image of China, which consists of a (negative) stereotype that exists about Chinese culture and the way the Chinese dedicate themselves to hard work and the increase of their economic power, often at the cost of the local population.

³⁵² The picture can be seen at: <http://archive.org/stream/newfareast00diuoft#page/336/mode/2up>, n.d., date of last consultation 15/09/2014.

³⁵³ A good example of the interest for Yellow Peril and Chinese immigration in the United States is the exhibition *Chinese American: Exclusion/Inclusion* organized at the New York Historical Society that is currently on display from September 26 2014 until the 19th of April 2015. See the article by the New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/arts/design/chinese-american-exclusion-inclusion-exhibition-opens.html?_r=0, 2/10/2014. Date of last consultation 17/10/2014.

Yang Jiechang

The next artist that participated in *Silent Energy* is Yang Jiechang. About this artist, Hou Hanru mentions:

Yang Jiechang is another artist who penetrates the traditions of ink and wash painting and calligraphy in order to subvert traditional paradigms and values. (...) What remains as the result of his repetitive and obsessive labour is simply a massive blackness: a black hole. It is a nihilism which refuses any kind of sensory interpretation; it is a refusal of the semiological and sociological conventions of traditional Chinese painting and within the field of contemporary art, a rejection of the moral and political discourses of official ideology. His nihilism leads eventually to enlightenment; it is exactly at the moment when we empty our minds that we encounter the fullness of truth. Radical subversion is the greatest freedom.³⁵⁴

Yang Jiechang, for many years, studied Daoism. The phrase “it is exactly when we empty our minds that we encounter the fullness of truth” could point to the artist’s background. The work that was presented by the artist at the survey was titled *Untitled* and consisted of six enormous canvasses which showed massive black squares made out of ink on rice paper. Within the catalogue, the artist makes a statement about his creation and writes:

A child once put his sheep out to pasture on the hill. The child looked down from the hill and saw all the people working on the fields.

The child cried out loudly: “The wolf is coming, the wolf is coming!” The people cried out, left their work and rushed up the hill. They looked around and saw that there was no wolf and returned to their work in the fields.

After a short while, the child again cried out loudly “The wolf is coming!”

On hearing this the people shouted and rushed again up the hill. They looked around and still there was no wolf. They went back down the hill. After another short while the child again shouted “The wolf is coming! The wolf is going to eat the sheep! The wolf is coming!” On hearing this the people again rushed up the hill.

There was no wolf. The child, seeing the people’s excitement each time, continued to cry out loudly: “The wolf is coming!”. On hearing this the people again rushed up the hill.³⁵⁵

This fragment indirectly explains different aspects of Yang Jiechang’s works of black ink squares (see for example Fig. 15 and 58). In this story, there is a strong sense of repetition, just as his continuous and repetitive strokes of black ink on rice paper end up making, to use Hou Hanru’s words, a “massive blackness”, a “black hole”.

³⁵⁴ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 4.

³⁵⁵ Yang Jiechang, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 23.

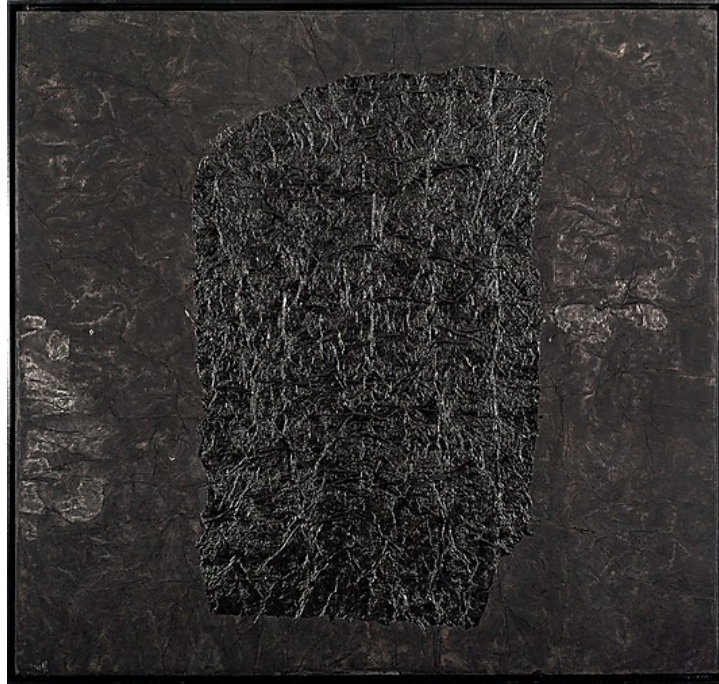


Figure 15: Yang Jiechang, *100 Layers of Ink 1 no. 2*, 1994

The story could also refer to nihilism, as the behaviour of the child and the people is completely nonsensical and reduces human life to a simple repetition of one action. The reiteration of going up and down a hill for no reason at all makes the action absurd and leaves it without meaning or aim. It could be seen as reducing the individual to a repetitive act, without questioning it, as if a machine and not human. This could be a reflection on modern society in which human beings are sometimes turned into human robots in order to continue economical growth and for one to take part in the consumer society. It reduces the human existence to a mere life of working and actions without any (spiritual) purpose.

Yang Jiechang, in the exhibition catalogue of *Stranger than Paradise*, a survey that was dedicated to him in la Criée (2011), a contemporary art centre in Rennes, France, the artist talks about his “black square” paintings and says:

(...) the process of applying ink, water, ink and paper itself; thus the Hundred Layers of Ink, a monochrome black square, on which layers and layers of ink were applied, appeared. I applied the ink on the same square day by day, as if I was writing my diary. This was in April and May 1989. So many things did happen at that time: The student movement in Beijing became a focus of world interest. (...) In my personal life also many things happened: I married, I received a residence permit for Germany, a visa for France, etc. Nevertheless, in my work I used a very simple approach and concept. The painting process itself became a kind of reflection on my personal life and history, as well as a part of my self-cultivation. When I installed the works in the museum after one month of painting, I felt that these were not flat two-dimensional paintings but actual three-dimensional spaces. I therefore asked to hang the paintings in a distance to the wall. I wished that the spectator and I could enter and participate into this space, which was a realm of memory and history, personal

memory and history, but also of the history of my country (...). Still today, I am moved by these works, and not only I, but also the public is still touched by them. The paintings are extremely spiritual, a spiritual space of participation.³⁵⁶

This fragment appears to give a different explanation of the work that was presented at *Silent Energy* and it only partly coincides with the story of the wolf that was given as a statement by the artist himself within the catalogue. In both cases there is a strong emphasis on the repetition of actions, being by going up and down a hill or by repetitively applying layers of ink on paper. It could be that the black squares of Yang Jiechang change their meaning as time passes, and react to the life experiences that the artist has during his life. This however is not clarified in the exhibition catalogue.

³⁵⁶ Yang Jiechang in *Stranger than Paradise*, exhibition catalogue, p. 11. The original text comes from Fritz Hansel / Yang Jiechang, "Republic of Fritz Hansel – A dialogue", in cat Yang Jiechang - *No Shadow Kick*, Shanghai : Tang Contemporary, 2008, p. 217-219. The full catalogue of *Stranger than Paradise* that was held at La Criée in 2011 can be consulted at: http://www.criee.org/IMG/pdf/PressPack_Yang_Jiechang_web-2.pdf, n.d., date of last consultation: 06/09/2014.

2.4 The exhibition reviews

In this paragraph, the following reviews that were published in specialized magazines shall be analysed:

- Tim Martin, *Silent Energy: New art from China*, Third text, 7:25, p. 91-94, 1993
- Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*, Frieze Magazine, Issue 12, September-October 1993³⁵⁷
- Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II³⁵⁸

2.4.1 Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*

The first review comes from Frieze magazine and was written by Iain Robertson.³⁵⁹ The author of the article is Head of Business Studies at the Sotheby's Institute of Art and is a specialist on the emerging markets of China. He is also the editor for Art Market Report and has written various books about the art business, art markets, and management of the arts. He is also an advisor to the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong and visiting professor at Tsinghua University, Beijing and the Sichuan Art Academy in Chengdu, among many other activities and achievements.

The review does not seem all too impressed or enthusiastic about the survey. Iain Robertson starts by mentioning that "it becomes apparent that the new breed of Chinese artists has decided to use the Western vocabulary as a means of expression" to which he adds "the idea of an avant-garde is a Western concept".³⁶⁰ The comparison of Chinese experimental art to Euroamerican art, or to see this current as a continuation of Euroamerican art is common among the Euroamerican art critics and shall be recurrent throughout the exhibition reviews analysed within this dissertation.³⁶¹ It is rather poignant though that an expert of his level perceived Chinese experimental art from this

³⁵⁷ www.frieze.com/issue/review/silent_energy_September/ October 1993. Date of last consultation: 15/03/2012.

³⁵⁸ For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html, n.d., date of last consultation: 15/09/2014.

³⁵⁹ Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*, Frieze Magazine, Issue 12, September-October 1993.

³⁶⁰ Ibidem.

³⁶¹ This topic has been extensively dealt with in chapter 3 of the theoretic part (Block I).

perspective. Also the fact that he refers to the Chinese artists as a “new breed” seems very disrespectful and a rather unprofessional vocabulary for an experts to be using within a review.

The author of the article then attributes a political context to the exposition and describes the participating artists as “dissident artists”. This idea is later explained when the author writes:

It was the Yen-an Forum of 1942 which set China on the path of Soviet-style Realism, and since that point it has been ideologically and practically impossible to survive as an outsider within a revolutionary proletariat state which regarded itself as the cutting edge of modernism. The artists in this exhibition are therefore necessarily émigrés or dissidents using in their work rather more occidental than oriental vocabulary.³⁶²

It seems out of context that the artists that participated in *Silent Energy* are described as émigrés and dissidents as a consequence of the Yen-an Forum that was held almost fifty years earlier. It seems as if the author is placing the participating artists within a political framework, which cannot be entirely justified. First of all, many of the artists that participated in *Silent Energy* were not even born in 1943. Secondly, not all participating artists left their homeland to become overseas artists. Wang Luyan remained in mainland China and has not moved abroad. Thirdly, not all of the artists left China because of the restricted freedom that resulted from the Yen-an Forum of 1942. Fourthly, the artworks that were on display addressed political, social and ecological aspects of society. It was not one of the aims of the survey to address any political issues of mainland China. Therefore, the author’s allegation that the Yen-an Forum is the cause for Chinese experimental artists to have become dissident artists seems rather far-fetched and out of context.³⁶³ It appears to have been used to strengthen the political perspective that the author, unjustifiably, wants to attribute to this exhibition.

Also the fact that the author mentions that the works on display used more “occidental than oriental vocabulary” seems to reflect this west-centric vision that Iain Robertson wants to project onto Chinese experimental art. The author himself does not give any further explanation nor does he give any examples that could sustain his statement. But as becomes clear when analysing the works that were on display at *Silent Energy*, these

³⁶² Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*, Frieze Magazine, Issue 12, September-October 1993.

³⁶³ It could be that the author knew and therefore was influenced by the fact that *Silent Energy* was partially financed by the Ministry of Culture of China. This could have erroneously made him believe that the exhibition had to be “politically correct” and therefore could not show the oppressive character that the author attributes to the participating artists.

cannot be classified as “Chinese” or “western” but are in fact very good examples of hybrid creations that combine elements of both cultures. A good illustration of this was the work of Cai Guoqiang that combined Chinese traditional medicine and fireworks to make a statement about global issues such as the destruction of our planet. Or the work of Huang Yongping that reflected on the stereotypical images that China has in the Euroamerican mind.

Then, the author again emphasizes the fact that Chinese experimental art is basically “western” and illustrates this by comparing Gu Wenda’s *Oedipus Refound II: the Enigma of Birth* (Fig.11) with a work that was made by Anselm Kiefer: “Gu Wenda’s *Oedipus Refound II: The Enigma of Birth* is a version of Kiefer’s iron beds and wilting flowers.”³⁶⁴ As seen previously in the exhibition of *Chine demain pour hier*, and as shall be seen also in other exhibitions analysed within Block II, this method of comparing Chinese experimental artworks with Euroamerican creations is a recurrent practice employed by especially the Euroamerican art critics. However, as has been explained in paragraph 1.1 of Block I, this technique does not always do justice to the artworks as they are often incomparable, coming from different historical and cultural backgrounds. In some cases, resorting to Euroamerican artworks can make the experimental Chinese artwork more familiar and therefore more comprehensible for a Euroamerican viewer, however, it should always be taken into account that not all artworks can be compared as they are always the result of a particular time and historical and cultural background. In the case of China, the cultural and historical background has been quite different from that of Euroamerican art history and the situation in which Euroamerican artists have evolved.³⁶⁵

Taking a closer look at this comparison, Anselm Kiefer is a German painter and sculptor who was born in 1945. According to the website of the Gagosian Gallery³⁶⁶ who represents some of his work: “Kiefer reflects upon and critiques the myths and chauvinism which eventually propelled the German Third Reich to power. His paintings depict his generation's ambivalence toward the grandiose impulse of German nationalism and its impact on history.” It seems thus that the objectives of Kiefer’s work is entirely different from the aims that the works of Gu Wenda represent, especially the work of *Oedipus Refound* (1993-) which is meant to address “western” taboos. Therefore, the only common

³⁶⁴ Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*, Frieze Magazine, Issue 12, September-October 1993.

³⁶⁵ See also paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

³⁶⁶ <http://www.gagosian.com/artists/anselm-kiefer>, n.d., date of consultation: 09/03/2013.

factor that these two works have is the employment of beds. However, to describe Gu Wenda's *Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11) a *version* of Anselm Kiefer's Iron Bed, by which the author most probably refers to Kiefer's work *The Women of the Revolution* (1992) (Fig.16) seems to be a very bold statement to make if the only foundation for this assertion is based on the mere fact that both works use beds. The statement made by Iain Robertson seems thus unfounded and only appears to have been made, again, to illustrate the author's "west"-centric vision of Chinese experimental art being a continuation or a copy of Euroamerican art (works).

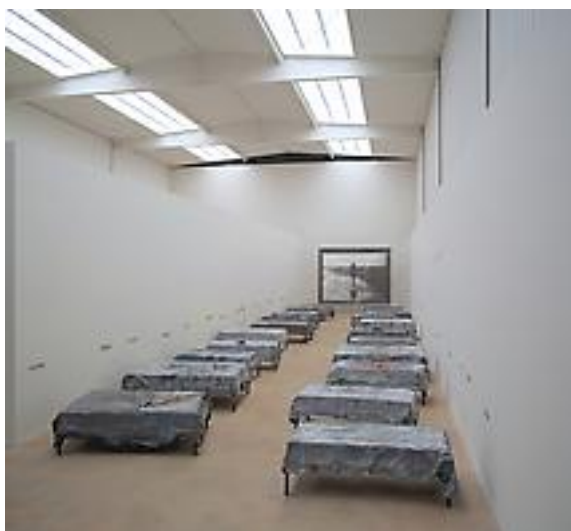


Figure 16: Anselm Kiefer, *The Women of the Revolution*, 1992

Iain Robertson then insists on the dissident character of Chinese experimental art and gives various examples to support this opinion. He mentions the artist Ai Wei Wei and his work *Safe Sex* (1986) that consisted of a coat made out of condoms, and then also mentions the fact that in 1989 the artist Xiao Lu fired a gun at her work *Dialogue* (Fig. 34) at the 1989 *China/Avant Garde* exhibition that was held in Beijing.³⁶⁷ Again, it seems as if the author's portrayal of the Chinese experimental artists is based on a very small part, if not to say specific events, of the history of Chinese experimental art. It could be considered risky to describe all Chinese experimental artists and the whole Chinese avant-garde movement as political (dissident) merely based on a few sensationalist

³⁶⁷ This particular work, *Dialogue* (1989) (Fig.34) by Xiao Lu shall be mentioned on two occasions more within this dissertation. Once by art curator Julia F. Andrews (see chapter 3 on the exhibition *Framged Memory*) and then in chapter 6 by the art critic Montse Friscah (see point 6.3.2.1). It is thought-provoking that this work, executed in 1989 is repeated on three occasions when the work was not exposed at the survey in question. This might be an indication of the way this installation work by Xiao Lu is used in order to emphasize the political, dissident and sensational characterization often attributed by Euroamerican art critics and curators to Chinese experimental art. For an explanation on this work, see chapter 3 and 6 of Block II.

happenings. It is true that Ai Wei Wei, Gu Wenda and Xiao Lu are artists who have stirred up quite some discussion and sensation yet, they are not the only artists representative of Chinese experimental art, and they can certainly not be considered a justification for stating that all Chinese artists are dissident, rebellious and provocative.

According to the author, *Yellow Peril* (1993) (Fig.14) was “the most startling piece in the show”. About this work, the writer says that the I Ching that was used by Huang Yongping for this work takes “a political form” and then mentions that “today’s young Chinese visionary artists, many of whom were Red guards during the Cultural Revolution, have lost the reverence for and understanding of nature that was once central to any form of expression in ‘The Kingdom at the Centre of the World’”.³⁶⁸ What is the author implying here? That Chinese experimental art should be loyal to Chinese history and continue representing art that is in harmony with nature, as was done in the times of the Chinese dynasties? The fact that the author speaks of China as the “Kingdom at the Centre of the World” is an indicator that the author, when he speaks of China, seems to refer to the China of several centuries ago. Clearly, he is not speaking of the China of the year 1993, but seems to evoke a more exotic image of the nation.

Adding to this, the political perspective that the author wants to attribute to Chinese experimental art is emphasized again within this review when he mentions that many of the experimental artists were Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The political, communist past of China is again brought to the forefront in order to reaffirm the author’s political vision of Chinese experimental art even though in 1993, most of the participating artists had already long surpassed their “political past” and were creating works from a entirely different perspective. This new perspective and the influence that living in Euroamerica has had on the works of the participating artists is not mentioned at all within Iain Robertson’s article. On the contrary, the article seems to firmly hold on to events that happened in China almost fifty years prior to the exhibition.

2.4.2 Karen Smith, *China Rising*

The next review that shall be analysed confirms what has been observed in the previous review by Iain Robertson. The article is titled *China Rising* and was written by author and

³⁶⁸ Iain Robertson, *Silent Energy*, Frieze Magazine, Issue 12, September-October 1993.

art expert Karen Smith for Art India Magazine in 2007.³⁶⁹ The fact that her article was written so many years after the *Silent Energy* exhibition of 1993 hugely influences the viewpoint of the author, who has the privilege of looking back at the exhibition in a retrospective way, taking into account how Chinese experimental art and its reception in the Euroamerican context has evolved in the years from 1993 until 2007. It also allows the author to put the exhibition within its historical context, seen from a twenty-first century position.

Karen Smith, who lives in Beijing, was born in the UK and is an art historian and critic. She is the author of *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde in New China* which was published in 2008 but is nevertheless described as the first systematic study of Chinese avant-garde art by a foreign critic.³⁷⁰ She was also the managing editor of the Hong Kong art magazine *Artention*. Karen Smith has collaborated with various exhibitions such as *Inside Out* (1998) and *Contemporary Chinese art and the Diaspora*, which was held at the British Museum in 2001. She is currently the director of the Contemporary Art Museum in Xi'an.

The article that shall be commented on here was not about *Silent Energy* but about another exhibition on Chinese experimental art titled *Revolutionary Capitals: Beijing in London* that was held in 1999 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The article is mentioned here because it widely comments on the *Silent Energy* exhibition:

Most people who saw *Revolutionary Capitals* were unaware that this was the second major showing of new Chinese art in the U.K. The first was *Silent Energy*, curated by David Elliott, which was presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in 1993. In retrospect, *Silent Energy* was well ahead of its time: too far ahead, one might say, for "Silent" also described the reception it received from both the general public and the international art world. In 1993, "China" and "Contemporary Art Practices" were, in the Western mind, very separate coins, for which there were no known rates of exchange.³⁷¹

Iain Robertson's article that has been previously analysed seems to fit the description that Karen Smith here mentions: "China" and "Contemporary Art Practices" in 1993 were two concepts that could not yet be related to each other by most Euroamerican art critics. This

³⁶⁹ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Lead Essay, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html. Date of consultation 15/09/2014.

³⁷⁰ See for example the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong that described the book as "one of the first publications in English to attempt to map out a comprehensive art history from Mao's death to today." <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Programme/Details/93>. Last updated June 5 2012. Date of last consultation 10/9/2014.

³⁷¹ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Lead Essay, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html. Date of consultation 15/09/2014.

can be clearly detected in the article by Iain Robertson in which it becomes evident that his image of Chinese experimental art is still strongly politically focused, and in some cases, points to the ancient times of China. This political aspect that is highlighted by art experts such as Iain Robertson might also be a consequence of the 45th Venice Biennale that was held around the same time in which especially Political Pop and Cynical Realism took a prominent place in the representation of Chinese experimental art at this particular event. Yet, there seems to be a disconnection when these experts are not capable, as mentions Karen Smith, to connect Chinese experimental art with its current time. In no place did Iain Robertson see Chinese experimental art as a twentieth century art current that actively takes part in the international contemporary art scene. Karen Smith mentions that *Silent Energy* was too far ahead of its time, and she might have been right to suspect that the Euroamerican image of Chinese experimental art was still too stereotyped in order to appreciate the exhibition and see the artworks as Chinese new art and not as copies of Euroamerican contemporary art. Or for the Euroamerican art critics, such as Iain Robertson, to see the participating artists as (overseas) *artists* and not only as political dissidents.

It should also be highlighted that Karen Smith mentions that *Silent Energy* did not have a big impact on the general public and the international art world, especially when considering that *Silent Energy* was, according to the author, the first major showing of Chinese New Art in the UK. This has been confirmed by the fact that not many reviews could be traced about the survey. It is also interesting that she mentions that most people were unaware that *Silent Energy* had been the first exhibition to introduce Chinese experimental art to the UK. This unawareness becomes evident in many of the exhibitions that are analysed within this study as almost all exhibitions claimed to be the first survey on Chinese experimental art to be held in the particular nation, even if they were not.³⁷²

Towards the end of the article, the author mentions that there existed “apathy” towards *Silent Energy*: “There was a lot at stake in the “game” that pitted Chinese artists against an international audience that had yet to acquire a broad interest in China (as could be seen in its apathy towards *Silent Energy*, for example). In the Western world, Cold War attitude did not dissolve as fast as expected.”³⁷³ According to Karen Smith one of the reasons for the “silence” towards the exhibition might have been the aftermaths of the

³⁷² This point shall be further elaborated upon in Section III of the conclusions.

³⁷³ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Lead Essay, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II.

Cold War. During the 1990s, China was still often seen as the political enemy of Euroamerica. In many cases this has contributed to the popularity of Chinese experimental art in Europe and the United States. A good example of this was the success of the Political Pop and Cynical Realism styles at the Venice Biennale of 1993. Karen Smith does not further elaborate on her statement but the Cold War aftermaths might have surely influenced the “cold” reception of *Silent Energy*.

2.4.3 Tim Martin, *Silent Energy: New art from China*

The last review that shall be commented on in this chapter is titled *Silent Energy: New art from China* and was written by Tim Martin.³⁷⁴ The author of the article is an art critic and art historian who currently is researching and specializing in the psychoanalytic interpretations of sculpture. He has also written articles for *Art Monthly*, *Frieze*, and *Third Text*, as is the case here.

This review seems to contain some errors, and it is as if Tim Martin were talking about another exhibition which was not *Silent Energy*. He speaks of the survey as a “two part show” the second part being about paintings. He also mentions the exhibition catalogue within the review and writes that it is “comprehensive” with “20 articles”. Unless Tim Martin read another catalogue about the *Silent Energy* exhibition, there are no twenty articles in the catalogue, only two. Then he comments on Gu Wenda’s installation work and titles it “Refound Oedipus Complex”, which is not correct as the work is titled *Oedipus Refound II: The Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11). In general, the text is rather strange and seems to contain a lot of erroneous information.

About the exhibition, the author seems to agree with Karen Smith when saying that:

Not unsurprisingly, there have been observations to the effect that much of the avant-garde work which this show presents is a maladroit imitation of Western art. Formal, representational and theoretical similarities certainly can be drawn, but ruptures also abound in this show as much with the West as with “traditional” Chinese art. (...) With this in mind, it may very well be that searching for work which is formally derivative of Western art is to miss its vitality in a new cultural context.³⁷⁵

Tim Martin here confirms that some art critics, such as Iain Robertson, and many other Euroamerican art critics see Chinese experimental art as copies or followers of “western” art styles. This is, as says Tim Martin, true in some cases, yet, in many others Chinese

³⁷⁴ Tim Martin, *Silent energy: New art from China*, *Third Text*, 1993, p. 91-94.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

experimental art in fact breaks free from the “West” as well as from Chinese tradition in search of alternative ways and new possibilities. The technique that is common among Euroamerican art critics to compare Chinese experimental artworks with Euroamerican artworks is, as Tim Martin states in his article, to miss the vitality of Chinese experimental art.

Then, the author comments on Gu Wenda’s installation, which he erroneously titles “Refound Oedipus Complex”, and writes:

Social behaviour and taboo are again examined in Gu Wenda’s installation entitled *Refound Oedipus Complex*. Initially the artist was recognised for his invention of new and confusing Chinese calligraphic characters as a means of deconstructing language. Interest in the rules of language then led to an examination, on a very material level, of bodily rules. (...) In search of greater taboos, Gu Wenda, in his current piece, now frames his approach in semi-Freudian terms. (...) For him, therefore, the Oedipus taboo is not addressed as a rule for patriarchal inheritance, but as a genetic rule to avoid malformation.³⁷⁶

This fragment should be read in combination with this next quote taken from an interview with Gu Wenda in which he personally speaks about this work and elaborates on its meaning. A fragment of this interview shall be mentioned here. The mistakes within Gu Wenda’s reply have been left uncorrected:

David Cateforis:³⁷⁷ In your installation *Oedipus Refound #2: The Enigma of Birth*, shown at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1993, you presented five cribs. Four were sprinkled with placenta powder from pregnancies labelled "normal," "abnormal," "aborted," and "still-born." The fifth crib appears to have been empty. If so, why? Might this be an allusion to infertility - to a woman who cannot become pregnant?

Wenda Gu: the empty crib to me one meaning is as you said human is less and less capable of fertility. but modern genetic research and biological discovery will allow man to have fertility in many artificial ways. for example, a leading Australian biologist is researching on a mouse sperm to let a woman to be pregnant to deliver a human baby etc. the empty bed means a myth an unpredictable possibility; the other meaning to suggest that the empty crib is the end, and the beginning of transformation of human substance.³⁷⁸

First of all, in Gu Wenda’s description of the work, the fifth crib of the *Oedipus Refound II* is empty. According to the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy*, there were two cribs that contained the placenta powder of a “normal” baby. It is not clear which of the two versions is correct.

³⁷⁶ Tim Martin, *Silent energy: New art from China*, Third Text, 1993, p. 91-94.

³⁷⁷ David Cateforis is an art history teacher at the University of Kansas. He is also the author of various books on different topics, of which some are on Chinese experimental art.

³⁷⁸ For the full interview see: http://www.wendagu.com/publications/wenda-gu-interviews/david-cateforis_3.html March 17 2004, Date of last consultation 20/10/2014.

What becomes clear is that Gu Wenda's intention for the work was to comment on the unpredictable future possibilities for a woman to become fertile and to give birth, as he points to the fact that human reproduction probably will change and will transform beyond imagination in the future. The empty crib points to the end of human existence and the transformation of human substance. Gu Wenda's explanation given in this fragment does not coincide with the statements made by Tim Martin, who described *Oedipus Refound No. 3: The Enigma of Birth* (1993)(Fig. 11) as addressing the genetic rule of malformation.

All in all, Tim Martin's review seems to contain erroneous and confusing data. This might point to the fact that Tim Martin did not personally visit the exhibition and based his article on second-hand sources of information.

2.5 Conclusions on *Silent Energy*

The aims of *Silent Energy* were, according to the two curators, to “highlight the different perspectives of East and West by making social, political and ecological references”.³⁷⁹ After commenting on the works of the overseas artists, it could be confirmed that these objectives have largely been met. The works that were on display reflect on social, political and ecological phenomena of the world that surrounds us. Huang Yongping addresses the social aspect and points to a stereotype that exists about the Chinese, emphasizing the fact that this image has been around for almost two hundred years and still persists in our current society. Gu Wenda addresses the social as well as political aspects of Euroamerican culture and tries to break certain taboos that subsist in “western” culture, hereby searching for complete liberty and personal freedom.

In the essay written by Hou Hanru within the exhibition catalogue, the curator emphasizes the fact that the overseas Chinese artists have played an important role within the international art world and have contributed to redefine the identity of Chinese experimental art. Their “in-between” position between China and Euroamerica has, according to Hou Hanru, increased communication between different cultures and generated the creation of an alternative model for the international art scene.³⁸⁰ But, is it true that the artworks displayed at *Silent Energy* created a new situation in international art? Was there really an increase in communication between different cultures due to this survey? These statements could be questioned, also because the artists themselves do not really address these aims within their works, nor do they mention them in their explanations within the catalogue. It seems that the artists as well as the works they created for the exhibition were directed more to the first objective, established by the two curators of the show: to address social, political and ecological issues. It does not seem that they were trying to establish a new situation in international art, at least not in *Silent Energy*.

Only Hou Hanru addresses the idea of creating a new situation in international art and an increased communication between different cultures. The artists, who had been living overseas for quite some years, and the introduction written by the two curators do not mention any of these concepts. This makes Hou Hanru a pioneer in this field and his

³⁷⁹ David Elliot, Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 3.

³⁸⁰ For the original quote see Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 4.

essay in *Silent Energy* could be seen as an introduction to the concept of third space that he would elaborate extensively on in his book *On the Mid-Ground* (2002) which would come out almost ten years later.

In general, the exhibition catalogue is rather short and does not provide the necessary information in order to obtain a full understanding of the survey and the works on display. The challenge to portray fifty years of Chinese experimental art history in one single exhibition have not been met, which is rather logical considering the artists and the artworks that were chosen for the exhibition. One of the main objectives of *Silent Energy* was to introduce the Euroamerican public to Chinese experimental art. This aim might have been met and has most probably succeeded in giving the Euroamerican public a glimpse of Chinese experimental art. However, the exhibition catalogue has not provided enough information to obtain a good understanding of this art current, which was highly necessary in the year of 1993 when it was still rather unknown in Euroamerica.

The reviews that were analysed within this paragraph were not only scarce, but often of poor information. Tim Martin's review seems to contain quite a few errors and it should be mentioned again that the information given seems to be about a whole different exhibition catalogue. On the other hand, Iain Robertson's review emphasized the political aspects of Chinese experimental art and placed the exhibition within a context of Cultural Revolution, Red Guards and communism, which was not justifiable and was completely out of context as *Silent Energy* did not address these topics. The overseas Chinese artists, according to this art critic, were described as émigrés and dissidents, a description that was not entirely correct, as not all participating artists had in fact left China. Again, these terms seemed to have been used to emphasize the political character that the author desired to project onto Chinese experimental art. This political stereotyping can then also be detected in the review by Iain Robertson in which he mentions the installation *Dialogue* (1989) (Fig. 34) by Xiao Lu while this work, in fact, was not on display at *Silent Energy*.

Only the review by Karen Smith, written in 2007, which was in fact not about *Silent Energy* but about another exhibition that was held six years later, contained thought-provoking information and commented on the often erroneous ways that Chinese experimental art is received within Euroamerica. Within her article, the author mentions that *Silent Energy* might have been ahead of its time and she seems to be right. In 1993, the Euroamerican public was not yet prepared to perceive Chinese experimental art as a modern, innovative

and experimental art current within the international art market. This has been put in evidence by the reviews that have been analysed within this paragraph. At that time, Chinese experimental art was still seen as mainly political, as copying the “West”, or as an art style that did not honour its rich cultural and historical background, in other words, art that could not be identified as “Chinese”. Taking into consideration the post Cold War context of the year 1993 and also the highly represented Political Pop and Cynical Realism style at the Venice Biennale of the same year, these ways of interpreting Chinese experimental artwork are partly explained.

What seems to become clear by analysing the reviews is that *Silent Energy* did not have a great impact on the media, or on the general public and the Euroamerican art critics. This has been confirmed by the fact that only three art reviews could be traced about this exhibition. Considering the fact that this was the first major showing of experimental Chinese art in the UK, this is quite surprising. How is it that a new type of art which is shown for the first time in the UK has no repercussion in their media? Reasons for this could be the aftermaths of the Cold War, the lack of information within the exhibition catalogue which made it difficult to “correctly” interpret the exposition, or a general disinterest from the Euroamerican audience towards the art of the Other at the beginnings of the 1990s.

As it turns out, *Silent Energy* was quite an adequate name for the survey. It is as Karen Smith says in her review: for “Silent” also described the reception it received from both the general public and the international art world.”³⁸¹

³⁸¹ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, Volume XII, issue II, quarter II, 2007. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html Date of last consultation: 15/09/2014.

3. FRAGMENTED MEMORY: THE CHINESE AVANT-GARDE IN EXILE (1993)

3.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Fragmented Memory was organized at the Wexner Centre for the Arts in Ohio, Ohio State University, in 1993 by Julia F. Andrews and Gao Minglu. The exhibition was considered one of the first surveys on experimental Chinese art to be shown in the United States although it has not become very well-known. *Inside Out: New Chinese New Art*,³⁸² also curated by Gao Minglu, that was held at the Asia Society in New York in 1998 and then travelled to other venues such as the San Francisco MoMA, is one of the better known exhibitions that were organized in the United States and is often mentioned as one of the first major exhibitions to be held in the US, however this survey was organized almost five years after *Fragmented Memory*.

The Wexner Centre for the Arts opened its doors for the first time in 1989 and, using their own words, was “conceived as a research laboratory for all the arts”.³⁸³ The centre is a place for creation and they often welcome artists into their residency program or commission for artists to exhibit new works, made especially for the centre. This was the case with *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile* in which the four participating artists exhibited works that were especially made for the survey. More shall be written about the participating artists and their works in paragraph 3.3.

The Wexner Centre for the Arts can therefore not really be considered an art gallery or a museum. It is more of a “motor” to impulse new creation in the performing arts, to organize exhibitions, and to promote the media arts like film and video. As mentioned before, works are often specially commissioned for the occasion and these are then exposed in other venues around the world. In general, the Wexner Centre for the Arts, in collaboration with Ohio State University, gives financial and infrastructural support to artists around the globe. These artists and their works are then exposed in national and international venues and are sometimes posteriorly granted with awards or other financial support. From this point of view, the Wexner Centre serves as a springboard for the artists to get a good start in the art market.

³⁸² *Inside Out* shall be analysed in chapter 8 of Block II.

³⁸³ <http://wexarts.org/about/history>, n.d., date of consultation 18/03/2014.

As mentioned before, the two curators who collaborated in order to organize this survey were Gao Minglu (1949) and Julia F. Andrews (date of birth unknown). Both are well-known experts in the world of Chinese experimental art. Julia F. Andrews is currently professor of Chinese and Japanese art at Ohio State University and a distinguished university scholar at the History of Art department. According to her university website profile she is “a specialist in Chinese art, [and] was the first American art historian to conduct dissertation research in China after formal establishment of US-China relations in 1979.”³⁸⁴ She is an award-winning author on various books about (modern) art in China and also has curated various exhibitions such as the exhibition, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China* (1998) that was held at the Guggenheim Museum Soho (now closed).³⁸⁵ She is also often a collaborator in exhibition catalogues and magazine’s articles, and in 2013 won the ICAS (Internacional Convention Asia Scholars) Bookprize in the Humanities together with Kuiyi Shen for their book *The Art of Modern China* (2012).

Gao Minglu is one of the most well known experts in Chinese experimental art. He is currently a professor at the Department of History of Art & Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. He is also known as one of the main (Chinese) curators to have brought Chinese experimental art into the spotlights in China as well as the United States: Gao Minglu was one of the curators for the emblematic *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition that was held in Beijing in 1989. Other huge shows were the *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* that was held in New York and San Francisco in 1998,³⁸⁶ and the exhibition *The Wall* organized by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the China Millennium Monument Museum in Beijing (CMMM) and the University at Buffalo Art Galleries in 2005. He has also been a scholar and researcher in the area of Chinese experimental art and is a frequent author for exhibition catalogues, magazine articles and research papers. He was also the founder of China’s art publication *Meishu* (Art Monthly) that starting publishing in the 1980s. Gao Minglu can therefore be considered one of the key figures of Chinese experimental art, as he was already present when this current took its first steps in the early 1980s. It was Gao Minglu, for example, who coined the concept of the “85 Movement”, which is a milestone in the history of Chinese experimental art. After the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition in 1989

³⁸⁴ <https://history-of-art.osu.edu/people/andrews>, n.d, date of consultation: 18/03/2014.

³⁸⁵ It might be interesting to note that in the same year, 1998, the show *5000 years: innovation and transformation in the arts* was held at the Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum and then travelled to the Guggenheim Bilbao. This exposition was curated by Sherman Lee, retired director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, with Howard Rogers, who is an artist, acting as consulting curator.

³⁸⁶ See chapter 8 of Block II.

that was shut down twice by the authorities, Gao Minglu was dismissed from his job by the Chinese government and in 1991 left China for the United States. He obtained his Ph.D. in Art History from Harvard University in the year 2000. While in the United States, he curated the 1998 *Inside Out* exhibition and also, in this case, the 1993 *Fragmented Memory* exhibition in collaboration with Julia F. Andrews. As mentioned in the introduction to Block II, Gao Minglu is also one of the key figures when it comes to the transmission of alternative models of hybridity that go beyond the “East-West” binary. An excellent example of this is his conversation with Hou Hanru on the third space concept which was included in the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue and that shall be analysed in chapter 8 of this Block.

Four Chinese artists participated in *Fragmented Memory* and all four were, at the time, overseas artists. The participating artists were Gu Wenda, residing in the United States; Huang Yongping, residing in France; Xu Bing, at that time residing in the United States; and Wu Shanzhuan who then lived in Germany. All four artists presented artworks commissioned by the Wexner Centre for the Arts. These works were:

Gu Wenda:	<i>Oedipus Refound #3: Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin</i> (1993) (Fig. 18)
Huang Yong Ping:	<i>Human-Snake Plan</i> (1993) (Fig. 19)
Xu Bing:	<i>Cultural Negotiation</i> (1993) (Fig. 20)
Wu Shanzhuan:	<i>Missing Bamboo</i> (1993) (Fig. 17)

These works shall be extensively commented on in paragraph 3.3 of this chapter.

In the case of *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, it has not been possible to trace any reviews written about the survey. Contact has been made with the Wexner Centre for the arts, as well as with Gao Minglu and Julia F. Andrews however no information about the exhibition has been kept in the archives. This hugely complicates the analysis of the exhibition and makes it almost impossible to find out how the exhibition has been received by the public and the (Euro)american art critics.

On the other hand, the fact that no information or reviews were kept by any of the institutions or by the curators does indicate a certain lack of interest or a lack of importance attributed to this survey. It might also indicate that no reviews were written

about the show, although this seems highly improbably as exhibitions are usually mentioned in (local) papers and magazines. *Fragmented Memory* was one of the early shows of experimental Chinese art to be shown in the United States. Therefore, it should have caused *some* effect on the art critics and the public but it seems that it has not, maybe due to the fact that it was still too early for this type of exposition. In a certain way it reminds of the *Silent Energy* exhibition, analysed in the previous chapter, that was held at the Oxford MoMA in the same year (1993) and of which the art critic Karen Smith mentioned in her article *Rising China* that it was still too early for a “western” audience to appreciate the value of Chinese experimental art within the international contemporary art market.³⁸⁷ Another factor that might have contributed to its lack of impact was the fact that the survey was held in a relatively small venue in Ohio. Maybe it would have caused more stir were it organized in a famous gallery or museum in New York or San Francisco. This lack of attention for *Fragmented Memory* also reaffirms the fact that the *Inside Out* exhibition, held five years later, would be considered the first major show of Chinese experimental art to be held in the US.

Therefore, only one text shall be analysed in which the work of Wu Shanzhuan, *Missing Bamboo* (1993), is mentioned and explained:

- Nate Harrison, *Wu Shanzhuan: Institutional Critique and the Efficacy and the Relational, Political Art Practices*³⁸⁸

Due to the lack of reviews about the exhibition, only the exhibition catalogue shall be analysed. Also, the artworks of the four participating artists shall be commented on extensively. Concepts that point towards the third space concept within the artworks or the catalogue shall be emphasized whenever the case.

³⁸⁷ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Volume XII , issue II, quarter II, 2007. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html Date of last consultation: 15/09/2014.

³⁸⁸ Nate Harrison, *Wu Shanzhuan: Institutional Critique and the Efficacy and the Relational, Political Art Practices*, June 2007. For the full article see: http://nkhstudio.com/assets/Wu_Shanzuan.pdf. Date of last consultation: 18/03/2014.

3.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was edited by the Ohio State University Press and was published for the occasion of the survey in 1993. The catalogue is not very extensive and is only thirty-seven pages long. It contains a foreword by Sarah J. Roger, in that time Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions at the Wexner Centre for the Arts; an essay by Gao Minglu, and another by Julia F. Andrews; a chronology about the Chinese Avant-Garde by Gao Minglu; an essay about Gu Wenda's *Oedipus Refound* (1993) (Fig. 11 and 18) by curator and art critic Zhou Yan; an article about Huang Yongping's installation *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig.19) by Julia F. Andrews; an article about Xu Bing's art by Gao Minglu; and lastly, a shared article by Julia F. Andrews and Gao Minglu about the meaning of Wu Shanzhuan's work. The catalogue includes small illustrations of the works that were on display at the show and also images of other works of the artists that were previously presented in other venues.

The first element that shall be highlighted in this analysis is the illustration that has been chosen for the frontcover of the exhibition catalogue. It shows one of Wu Shanzhuan's pandas from his work *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig.17). Even though the exhibition catalogue does not give any further explanation for choosing this image for the frontcover, the fact that a panda has been selected to illustrate the frontcover of the catalogue is meaningful.

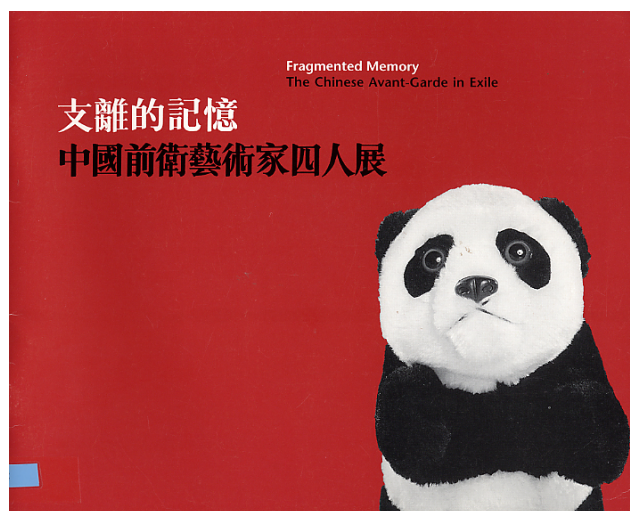


Figure 17: Frontcover of the *Fragmented Memory* exhibition catalogue (1993)

First of all, the panda is a national symbol for China and is in fact quite a stereotypical image of the nation. Secondly, the panda is also an animal that is protected due to the fact that it is threatened by extinction. From this point of view, maybe the panda is here insinuated as a metaphor for the Chinese avant-garde which should be protected from a too controlling Chinese government or the claws of the international art market? Thirdly, the panda is a very cute animal and the image of this animal on the front of an exhibition catalogue is original but also has the power of capturing the readers' attention in a very primary way. All people, young and old can "connect" with pandas and will find them adorable. This makes the exhibition catalogue interesting and might attract a possible reader to discover what its contents are. Yet, of all the works that were on display, it has been Wu Shanzhuan's panda that has been selected. Whether or not this work can be considered representative for the show and the artists that participated might be questioned, as it seems that the image has been chosen as an easy way to attract the Euroamerican audience. More about the image of the panda and its relation to China in paragraph 3.3 where Wu Shanzhuan's work is analysed.

Another fact that should be highlighted here is the title that was chosen for the exhibition: "Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile". In Block I of the theoretic part concepts such as "Chinese", "Avant-Garde" and "Exile" have been extensively commented on. Here we find all three of these quite "problematic" terms grouped together within one single title. Interestingly, not much is said about the title within the exhibition catalogue and no further explanation is given about the terms that are employed here. It might have been justified to have given more information about these concepts which are fundamental to Chinese experimental art and which are often employed in order to describe it, however, as explained in the theoretic part of this thesis, one should be aware that its use is not without complications.

As has been said in the theoretic Block of this dissertation, the fact that the four participating artists of *Fragmented Memory* are titled as "exile" might not be entirely correct and justifiable. The fact that they left China for different Euroamerican countries does not make them exiles. Exiles, literally, are people who have been forced to leave their homeland, those who have been banned. It indicates a static relation between the homeland and the present situation of living abroad. In the case of all four artists, they left voluntarily in search of a better future and more opportunities to advance further within the art world. They were not banned from China, and their relation to the mainland is dynamic

as some of them often go back for professional and personal reasons. But, the use of the word “exile” within the exhibition title gives a political flavour to the exhibition, as it suggests that the four participating artists were banned from their homeland to never return. It insinuates a slight “dissident” character to the survey as well as to the artists. The fact that they are also portrayed as “Avant-Garde”, understood from a Euroamerican point of view as pioneers living on the edge of society, makes the term “exile” even more “exciting”. As occurred with the *Silent Energy* survey analysed in the previous chapter, this dissident character was readily accepted (and often promoted) in the United States as well as the Europe of the post Cold War period that wanted to perceive these artists as a kind of “freedom fighters” going against the communist regime. However, the reality is that the four artists had left China out of free will for different reasons. It is true that some left due to a lack of liberty within their home country however, they were not banned, and therefore cannot be considered “exiles” in the strict sense of the word.

About the title *Fragmented Memory*, Julia F. Andrews explains in her essay:

The *Fragmented Memory* exhibition brings together four survivors of the Chinese avant-garde, a movement shattered by political and cultural purges, and for me, the title evokes the historical circumstances of the movement’s repression. As the new work for the exhibition has evolved, however, the title has turned out to be relevant in a more descriptive way, for an unsettling, somewhat disjunctive feeling, burned by a slight melancholy, cuts into the viewer’s consciousness from odd corners of the galleries.³⁸⁹

As shall become clear later on in this chapter when the opening essay of Julia F. Andrews is analysed, the author puts a strong political emphasis on the Avant-Garde movement and often reiterates the lack of liberty that the artists had to endure during that period of time. This political focus becomes evident in the choice of the title and also in this fragment in which she explains why this specific title was chosen for the exhibition. According to Julia F. Andrews, the title *Fragmented Memory* points to the historical circumstances of repression and also turns out to be an adequate, according to the author, description of the atmosphere that the exhibition had: unsettling, somewhat disjunctive and slightly melancholic. It should be mentioned here however that this political character that is attributed to the survey by the curator Julia F. Andrews was not one of the main objectives of the show. In no case was the exhibition meant to illustrate the political background of the “Chinese avant-garde”.

³⁸⁹ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 11.

According to the foreword by Sarah J. Rogers, then Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions of the Wexner Centre for the Arts:

Our goals were several-fold: to bring together four of the leaders of the avant-garde movement in China during the 1980s, to support their creation of new work, to provide a context for understanding the events and history surrounding and affecting their artistic development, and to provoke a discussion regarding the implications of defining an international aesthetic as either an expatriate view or an ideological hybrid.³⁹⁰

As can be read in this fragment, one of the goals was to “provoke a discussion regarding the implications of defining an international aesthetic as either an expatriate view or an ideological hybrid”. The fact that the four artists were living abroad hugely influences the exhibition and also the works that they created for the show. If one of the goals were to start a discussion regarding international aesthetic and to see the art from an expatriate point of view, the strong political emphasis that Julia F. Andrews puts on the show within her catalogue essay seems rather misplaced. However, as has been mentioned in the theoretic part of this dissertation, putting a political emphasis onto the Chinese experimental art movement is quite common among Euroamerican art critics and curators, as it creates a “dissident” character which is tremendously attractive for the Euroamerican public (especially in a post Cold War context). This might have been one of the reasons why Julia F. Andrews has chosen to follow the same strategy when describing the exhibition and the participating artists within her introduction.

To continue with the foreword of Sarah J. Rogers, the author then mentions: “The art and experiences of these four artists challenge American viewers’ assumptions regarding Chinese culture and our expectations of what constitutes, formally and conceptually, an international rather than a national art.”³⁹¹ Sarah J. Rogers hits the nail on the head with this statement and her writing seems to be ahead of its time considering the fact that Chinese experimental art is still sometimes seen in a very exotic, “Chinese” way, sometimes even in our current day. However, here the author mentions the fact that the exhibition should challenge the “western” expectations of Chinese art and culture and the preconceived image that the “occident” has on China. She also mentions that the exhibition wants to challenge the American viewers’ assumptions regarding what constitutes international rather than a national art. It appears as if the author is saying that the American public should not perceive the survey and the artworks on display as

³⁹⁰ Sarah J. Rogers, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 3.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

national, Chinese art, but as part of a new international art scene, in which Chinese art does not have to necessarily show elements of “Chineseness”³⁹² in order to be appreciated by a Euroamerican audience.

She then moves on by saying:

The late 1970s and 1980s, the formative years for these artists, witnessed a succession of political shifts in which periods of tolerance and even encouragement of intellectual and artistic individuality alternated with and eventually ended in repression of any ideas outside the “official” language. This schizophrenic environment – caught between East and West, innovation and convention – is very much at the heart of the artists’ developing visions. More than a mere hybrid of East and West, of tradition and the avant-garde, this art shows a clashing of forms and ideologies in interpretations that are inextricably tied to the many fragments that compose each artistic self.³⁹³

It is interesting that the author mentions that the fact of being caught between “East” and “West”, innovation and convention is “schizophrenic” and causes “clashing of forms and ideologies”. It might not be true for all artists that the fact of living between cultures has been experienced as schizophrenic or as a struggle. Many artists that live abroad have commented on the fact that it is a privilege to be able to live in between cultures and that it makes them more critical towards their home country as well as their host countries. As a consequence, they become true observers of both cultures and obtain a better understanding of China and the “West”.³⁹⁴

This particular situation of the overseas artists has also been described in the previous two exhibitions, *Chine demain pour hier* (1990) and *Silent Energy* (1993). It is significant that it seems to be such a recurrent topic in the early 1990s among the Euroamerican art curators and critics and that the situation is often described as problematic, a dilemma, or in this case, as a clash. The Chinese art curators, however, often seem to have a more positive and constructive view towards this particular situation of the overseas artists. An example is Hou Hanru’s essay in *Silent Energy* in which this “in-between” situation is positively portrayed as a way of overcoming the differences between “East” and “West”. Hou Hanru described these artists as being bridges, connecting both parts of the dichotomy.³⁹⁵

³⁹² See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

³⁹³ Sarah J. Rogers, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ See chapter 2.2 and 3.3 of Block I.

³⁹⁵ Hou Hanru, *Silent Energy*, exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

The foreword by Sarah J. Rogers is followed by a short, two-page long article by Gao Minglu titled *What is the Chinese Avant-Garde?* In this essay, Gao Minglu gives a short explanation of what he considered to be the Chinese avant-garde and how it developed until 1989. Within this article, various interesting statements are made by Gao Minglu that shall here be highlighted.

First of all the author mentions that “[the Chinese avant-garde artists] revive the original meaning of the avant-garde”³⁹⁶ by which he means that the Chinese avant-garde revived the “western” movement of avant-garde by becoming not only pioneers in the art but also and especially in Chinese society. He later on elaborates further on this statement by saying: “avant-garde artists often attempted to bring forth new art with new social values. In their works they particularly sought to emphasize the value of the individual in Chinese society. (...) Many of the artists believed that freedom for the individual must be the future of their society.”³⁹⁷

He then mentions, “Western styles of art were adopted as a means of destroying China’s pre-existing artistic structures (...)”.³⁹⁸ This fragment is highlighted due to the fact that the adoption of “western” styles by the avant-garde artists in China is often described in Euroamerica as “copying western styles or artworks” or following “western” art currents. Here however, Gao Minglu explains that this strategy is employed for a whole different reason: in order to destroy Chinese pre-existing artistic structures. Here, it is again a “Chinese” art critic/curator who explains this aspect of Chinese experimental art. Hou Hanru did the same in the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy* that was analysed in the previous chapter. It is as if the “Chinese” art critics feel the need to clarify the reasons why Chinese experimental art integrates Euroamerican elements within their artworks, and to defend this aspect of Chinese experimental art against the erroneous interpretations of Euroamerican art critics. Gao Minglu then continues by saying that “artists found Western forms of art more appropriate for expressing their own psychological states”. Again the author mentions a different reason for the Chinese avant-garde artists to have used Euroamerican art styles.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 4.

³⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁹ See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

Towards the end of his article the author makes a reference to the overseas artists by saying that they are different from the mainland artists:

Many of the artists who remained in China began making cynical images based on political propaganda of the Maoist period, in a trend known as Political Pop. Artists who left China, including the four men in this exhibition, carried on avant-garde principles, often continuing to make statements about larger social or cultural issues. Since going abroad, however, their concerns have gradually sifted away from purely Chinese socio-political issues to cross-cultural artistic and social questions.⁴⁰⁰

This is an interesting fragment as the author mentions that the overseas Chinese artists are concerned with cross-cultural, artistic, and social questions. The fact that he mentions the word “cross-cultural” might point to a space between “East” and “West”, or maybe even the beginning of a third space, although Gao Minglu does not mention this explicitly within his text. Also by portraying the artworks of the overseas artists as cross-cultural, it takes away the political emphasis and focus that is often attributed to these artists by the Euroamerican art critics and curators. By describing these artists as “cross-cultural”, it nuances the fact that the artists are “Chinese” and takes away the focus and the expectations of “Chineseness”⁴⁰¹ within their works, this way pointing to an alternative perspective from which to understand and interpret the works of these artists.

The second essay that shall be analysed here is written by the curator of the exhibition Julia F. Andrews. It is quite a long essay of seven pages and is titled *Fragmented Memory: An introduction*. In general, one could conclude that almost the entire text is dedicated to giving a very detailed chronology of the events that happened in the (avant-garde) art scene in China starting from 1981 until 1989. The author goes into great detail and mentions events such as the meeting of the Film Association and comments on other happenings such as the Yanan Talks on Art and Literature that were held by Mao Zedong in 1942. One can question if it were really necessary to include this extensive chronology within the exhibition catalogue, as it does not give a lot of insightful information on the exposition, the artists that participated, or the artworks that were on display. Also, the character of the entire text is very political and it is filled with words that clearly point to this political or maybe even “dissident” focus that the author wants to attribute to Chinese experimental art. Some examples of the words used within Julia F. Andrew’s essay have been for example, “hidden”, “prohibited by the higher authorities”, “good deal of trouble”, “suppression of cultural freedom”, “the young rebelled”, “banned styles”, “shattered by

⁴⁰⁰ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 5.

⁴⁰¹ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

political and cultural purges”, “supressed”, and so forth. A fragment that might illustrate the “sensational” air the author wants to attribute to the avant-garde artists is when she mentions that Xiao Lu, the artist who fired a bullet at her own installation *Dialogue* (Fig. 34) in the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde exhibition*, used an “illegal firearm”.⁴⁰² What becomes evident is the enormous difference in point of view between the text written by Julia F. Andrews and the previous text by Gao Minglu. Both answer the question: What is the Avant-Garde? Yet the tone in which they do so and the way in which Chinese experimental art is portrayed within their essays is completely unlike.

Julia F. Andrews mentions twice in her text, “The movement [avant-garde] (...) was aimed at bringing Chinese art into the contemporary international art world.”⁴⁰³ And on the next page: “The artistic language employed by the young artists aimed to be international; the themes they chose often stemmed from long-suppressed individualistic values.”⁴⁰⁴ This statement might not be entirely true. The main objective of the avant-garde movement in the early eighties was not to enter the international art market. Gao Minglu mentions in his previous text that the avant-garde used “western” styles in order to “destroy China’s pre-existing artistic structures”. This seemed the main goal of the avant-garde at that particular time: to deal with internal Chinese issues and to break free from traditional and politically accepted styles that had ruled the Chinese art scene for years, such as the Soviet Social Realism style. At the time, Chinese avant-garde artists were mainly focused on finding their own style and creating new possibilities for Chinese experimental art, integrating Euroamerican as well as Chinese elements into their works. This is entirely different from the aim of entering the international art market, an objective that appeared later.

Julia F. Andrews then contradicts her own statement in the following paragraph when she mentions that “The best works of the period operated at the intersection of Western and

⁴⁰² *Dialogue* (1989) (Fig. 34) became quite an emblematic work of the *China/ Avant Garde* exhibition that was held in Beijing in 1989. Within this installation, the female artist Xiao Lu fired a gun at her own installation which consisted of two “people” standing within telephone cells, communicating on the public telephone. The firearm that the artist used for this occasion was actually not illegal and Xiao Lu was released from the police when the authorities found out that the gun she had used was registered to a high ranking official and that Xiao Lu herself was in fact the daughter of a high ranking official. The story behind this work is quite complex and for further references see the interview with Xiao Lu in which she clarifies on this particular work: Laia Manonelles, *Arte Experimental en China*, edicions bellaterra, 2011, p. 190. See also paragraph 6.3.1.2 of Block II.

⁴⁰³ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 7.

Chinese cultures, adopting forms of Western conceptual art for *Chinese* purposes.”⁴⁰⁵ (Author’s emphasis) This is quite different from her previous statement in which she writes that the avant-garde movement was aimed at the international art scene.

A few pages later Julia F. Andrews mentions: “Thus, the ideals of the avant-garde movement, especially the stress on creative freedom, individualism, and cosmopolitanism, permeated the entire Chinese art world.”⁴⁰⁶ This is quite a strong statement to make and it is not sure if it could be considered entirely correct. Especially at the beginning of the avant-garde movement, Chinese experimental artists were not focussed at all on individualism but often worked in groups in order to advance in the arts. A good example of this is the 85 New Wave. Also, cosmopolitanism (i.e. the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared morality) might not have been one of the main priorities for the “entire Chinese art world” at that particular time.

It might be questioned if this very detailed text about the development of the avant-garde and the list of chronological events from 1981-1989 are really that important in order to illustrate and make the exhibition *Fragmented Memory* more comprehensible for a Euroamerican viewer. This particular text seems to leave the reader with a strong political image of Chinese experimental art resulting from a period that is described by Julia F. Andrews as overwhelming and repressing. It portrays the avant-garde artists as individuals who were constantly on the move in search of liberty, and to escape the controlling claws of the Chinese authorities. This becomes evident towards the before last paragraph in which Julia F. Andrews mentions: “The *Fragmented Memory* exhibition brings together four *survivors* of the Chinese avant-garde, a movement shattered by political and cultural purges.”⁴⁰⁷ (Author’s emphasis)

To conclude, it should be mentioned that only the last paragraph of the seven page long text is dedicated to a very brief explanation of the four artists that participated in the survey and the works that they presented at the show. It should be said that the works that were presented at the survey did not refer to the political past of China and that in the majority of cases the works addressed topics of a more global level. For example, Gu Wenda’s *Oedipus Refound no. 3* (1993) (Fig. 18) addressed, very bluntly summarized, the

⁴⁰⁵ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 11.

question of life and death.⁴⁰⁸ It seems thus that the article written by Julia F. Andrews has a strong political character to it which is not reinforced or justified by the artworks that were on display at *Fragmented Memory*.

The essay by Julia Andrews is then followed by another five page long chronology, this time written by Gao Minglu. In this text he gives an almost year-to-year explanation of how Chinese avant-garde art developed from 1979 until 1993. One could wonder why it has been decided to include two chronologies about the developments of Chinese avant-garde art in China within one single exhibition catalogue and moreover, placing them one after the other. It gives the impression of providing duplicated information. It might have been more “useful” to have commented more on the exhibition, its goals, the participating artists and the experience of being a Chinese artist abroad. This would probably have been more useful for the audience of the exhibition than placing two chronological and rather encyclopaedic texts into the catalogue. Evidently, it is important to provide background information on how Chinese avant-garde differs from the Euroamerican avant-garde and how it historically developed over time, however, it seems that the exhibition catalogue, and especially these two articles, were focused entirely on this aspect and left aside all other information that could have been given to have made the survey more comprehensible.

Following Gao Minglu’s chronology come four texts, each one dedicated to one of the participating artists and the work they presented at the survey. The first text is written by Zhou Yan who is a scholar, art critic, and curator who obtained his Ph.D. in Art History from the Ohio State University. Zhou Yan was also one of the main art critics at the time of the ’85 New Wave Movement, as well as one of the co-curators of the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition that was organized in Beijing and in which Gao Minglu also played a very important role.

In this text titled *Gu Wenda’s Oedipus*, Zhou Yan writes about the works of Gu Wenda and especially about the *Oedipus Refound Series* that he started in 1990. The article is three pages long and goes into detail on the different versions of the *Oedipus Series* (1990-1993). At *Fragmented Memory*, Gu Wenda made and exhibited *Oedipus Refound #3: The Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin* (1993) (Fig.18). More shall be explained about this particular work, and all the works that were presented at the show in the following

⁴⁰⁸ In paragraph 3.3, the artworks will be extensively commented on.

paragraph. However, Zhou Yan explains a lot of insightful details in his article that shall be highlighted here.

Firstly, the author writes a short fragment about the artists, Gu Wenda:

Gu has often cast himself in the role of troublemaker, whether working in his own country or in the West, and a kind of iconoclastic provocation certainly continues in *The Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin*. But this is not his only goal; his aim is to show us the eternal enigmas of life and death, existence and propagation.⁴⁰⁹

The author comments on the fact that Gu “has often cast himself in the role of troublemaker”. It might be interesting to mention here that Julia F. Andrews had initially asked Gu to withdraw his work of *Oedipus Refound #2: The Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11) that was a sight-specific installation work for the *Silent Energy* exhibition held in the same year (1993) as the *Fragmented Memory* exhibition. This becomes clear in the exhibition catalogue of *Heart of Darkness* that was curated by Marianne Brouwer at the Kröller-Müller museum in Holland in 1994-1995,⁴¹⁰ the year after *Fragmented Memory*. In this catalogue, Gu Wenda presented a work that consisted of a written correspondence between himself and Julia F. Andrews. The catalogue mentions:

As one of the curators of an exhibition [*Fragmented Memory*] in which Gu Wenda had been invited to participate, she [Julia F. Andrews] had advised him to consider withdrawing his installation, *The Enigma of Birth* that includes placenta powder from deformed children, suggesting instead that he show a preliminary version of a bronze ‘stele’ piece. While not in a position to reject his piece outright, her arguments were sufficiently strongly stated to have the effect of a rejection. Apart from the purely formal point that the exhibition was to consist of new work and not work that had previously been shown, her principal argument was a subjective dislike of the use of placenta powder which she found needlessly shocking and sensationalist. Aside from the fact that the work could be interpreted as displaying cruelty, she warns Gu Wenda that the use of placenta powder will be seen by western viewers as being ‘both brutal and unsanitary’. At best they will see this work as an example of Asian exoticism, a category he wants to avoid.⁴¹¹

However, in *Fragmented Memory* Gu did not display this particular work of *Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11) but decided to make another one especially for the survey, *Enigma beyond Joy and Sin* (1993) (Fig.18), that was equally, if not more “problematic”. In this installation, Gu scattered placenta powder onto five mattresses, leaving one bed empty as a symbol for abortion. Hanging above the bed he installed a canopy which was stained with sperm and blood as a result of a first time intercourse.

⁴⁰⁹ Zhou Yan, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 23.

⁴¹⁰ This exhibition will be analysed in chapter 5 of Block II.

⁴¹¹ *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, 1994, p. 116.

It is not known what Julia F. Andrews thought of this work, as she does not comment on it within her catalogue articles, which on its turn might be a good indication of how she felt about it.



Figure 18: Gu Wenda, *Oedipus Refound #3: Beyond Joy and Sin*, 1993

All in all, it is significant that a Euroamerican art curator interpreted the usage of placenta powder as unsanitary and needlessly shocking. This indicates that she has interpreted placenta powder from a Euroamerican point of view and not from the point of view of the artist. Had she considered it from a “Chinese” perspective, she might have discovered that placenta powder is not considered shocking at all in China as it is often used in Chinese traditional medicine.

The fact that she mentions that an audience would see the work as an example of Asian exoticism is also thought provoking. It is as if the author attributes the usage of placenta powder or body fluids as characteristics of Asian exoticism. However, if the work is well explained, there is no need for an audience to see Gu’s work as Asian exoticism.

Zhou Yan explains why Gu Wenda uses these materials within his work, and comments that they are not meant to shock or to cause sensation, as has insinuated Julia F. Andrews. Zhou mentions:

The viewer can identify with them [the material used] more quickly and deeply, because of the universal associations of the materials and their applicability to conscious and unconscious physical and spiritual, experiences and perceptions. The intensity of both subject matter and morphology are so powerful that the viewer reacts physically, with palpitation or nausea. (...)

The conflicts aroused by Gu's work are likely to be not only empirical or psychological but also, and more significantly cultural. This is particularly true for *The Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin*. (...) To this artist, tension-making could be seen as an alternative strategy of art-making, as well as a mode of transcendence.⁴¹²

As becomes clear from this fragment, the intention of Gu Wenda is to use materials that are universal to all humans and to which one can easily relate to. This he does in order to create a direct connection with the onlooker and to make the viewer question certain aspects about life and preconceived (cultural) ideas. This becomes even clearer in the exhibition catalogue of *Heart of Darkness* (1994-1995)⁴¹³ in which Gu Wenda publishes the letter that he sent to Julia F. Andrews as a response to her unwillingness towards *Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11). The letter is extensive and only one short fragment shall be quoted here:

My goal is not to create and offer a visual and sensory experience of something 'beautiful'; my main effort over all these years has been and continues to be to create art works that raise questions and that in a positive sense are disquieting for people, enabling them to live without the illusionistic support of ready-made values or faiths.⁴¹⁴

Within this letter Gu Wenda is rather harsh towards the curator Julia F. Andrews and writes "I consider your suggestion that I should make a preliminary version of *Steles, Forest of Wordlessness* absolutely unprofessional; it is not a notion that an artists could possibly accept."⁴¹⁵ And "I think part of your confusion may be caused by your concern with the confrontation between West and East, and the problems that arise when one's information about contemporary art is limited."⁴¹⁶ This last comment is interesting as one of the goals of *Fragmented Memory* was "to provoke a discussion regarding the implications of defining an international aesthetic as either an expatriate view or an ideological hybrid."⁴¹⁷ However, one of the reasons for Julia F. Andrews to have questioned Gu's work was that it would have been interpreted as Asian exoticism, a topic that Gu is not in the least interested in. All in all, Gu's *Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig.11) is a good example of the interaction that sometimes occurs between Euroamerican art curators and a non-

⁴¹² Zhou Yan, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 23.

⁴¹³ See chapter 5 of Block II.

⁴¹⁴ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibiton catalogue, 1994, p. 118.

⁴¹⁵ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibiton catalogue, 1994, p. 116.

⁴¹⁶ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibiton catalogue, 1994, p. 118.

⁴¹⁷ Sarah J. Rogers, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 3.

Euroamerican, in this case “Chinese”, artist. It is also a good example of how difficult it sometimes is, even for experts in Chinese art such as Julia F. Andrews to put themselves in the place of the Other and to interpret their work from a non-Euroamerican point of view.

The following article of the exhibition catalogue is written by Julia F. Andrews and is titled *Art in its Environment: Huang Yongping's Installations*. It is quite a short article of three pages in which the curator mentions and comments on various works of Huang Yongping such as *Yellow Peril* (Fig. 14), that was presented at the *Silent Energy* exhibition in 1993, and *A History of Chinese Art and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987) (Fig. 31). She also comments on his work *Human Snake-Plan* (1993) (Fig.19)⁴¹⁸ that was specifically made for and exhibited at *Fragmented Memory*. Two fragments of this text shall be highlighted here. First of all, Julia F. Andrews mentions in her text: “This installation [*Human Snake-Plan*] is far more immediately engaged with social and political issues than most of Huang’s earlier work. Two other 1993 installations, however, similarly deal with questions of immigration, national boundaries, and otherness.”⁴¹⁹

This fragment has been chosen as it explains some of the topics that Huang Yongping addresses within his works. Issues dealing with immigration, national boundaries and otherness can often be found in the works of the overseas artists. This is quite logical as they encounter and undergo these topics personally when moving away from their homeland. What is also interesting is that Julia F. Andrews mentions that *Human Snake-Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19) is far more socially and politically engaged than his other previous works. As shall become clear in the following paragraph, *Human Snake-Plan* stands for the illegal smuggling of Chinese people to the “West”.

It should be mentioned that Huang Yongping could also be considered, as Gu Wenda, a “troublemaker” and that he is an artists who questions social and political issues within almost all his work. A good example of this is, for example, *Yellow Peril* (1993) (Fig. 14)⁴²⁰ in which different insects were put together within a glass cage which started eating each other in order to survive. This could be seen as a metaphor for life in which the strongest

⁴¹⁸ For an extensive description of this work, see paragraph 3.3 of Block II.

⁴¹⁹ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 24.

⁴²⁰ *Yellow Peril* was a sight specific work presented at *Silent Energy* in 1993. See paragraph 2.3 of Block II.

shall survive. Moreover, the title of the installation clearly pointed to the yellow race, e.g. the Chinese, and the (economic) invasion they represented in the early 20th century.⁴²¹

The second fragment that shall be highlighted here is the following: “To Huang, however, there is no dramatic change in his work; he points out that his installations have always been extremely closely tied to the local environment and that the social situation is part of this environment.”⁴²² In a way, this fragment seems to contradict the previous fragment in which Julia F. Andrews mentions “This installation [*Human Snake-Plan*] is far more immediately engaged with social and political issues than most of Huang’s earlier work.” It could be stated that Huang’s work has always been socially and politically engaged and questions certain preconceived ideas about boundaries, freedom, Otherness and dealing with the fact of living in another country than one’s home country. Considering *Human Snake-Plan* (1993) (Fig.19)⁴²³ as a different, more political work, as suggests Julia F. Andrews might not be entirely justified. Maybe Julia F. Andrews has portrayed this work as “more political” than other works of the artist in order to strengthen the political view of Chinese experimental art that she so extensively elaborates upon within her exhibition articles.

The next article was written by Gao Minglu and is titled *Meaninglessness and Confrontation in Xu Bing’s Art*. It is also quite a short text that counts three pages. In this text, Gao Minglu comments on the artist as well as on some of his works such as *Ghost Pounding the Wall* (1990-1991) and *Book of Heaven*, also known as *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45). He also comments on Xu Bing’s work that was exhibited at *Fragmented Memory, Cultural Negotiation* (1993) (Fig. 20), of which more shall be said in the following paragraph. About the artist, Gao Minglu writes:

Meaninglessness and confrontation, the most important presuppositions of Xu Bing’s art, are both exemplified in *Cultural Negotiation* (...). Xu claims meaninglessness as the goal of his art (...). When he establishes a space without meaning in his work, Xu believes, viewers will fill it with their own readings of the confrontations that occur between different cultures and eras.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ See chapter 2 of Block II on the exhibition *Silent Energy*.

⁴²² Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 25.

⁴²³ In paragraph 3.3 of Block II this work shall be further clarified.

⁴²⁴ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 28.

Gao Minglu then elaborates further on this concept of space, or emptiness:

By his complete avoidance of legibility in the text, Xu removed all semantic significance from the work itself, and thus erased all traces of his own ego as the creator of the work. The viewer is free to invest the piece with meaning and to create a new mental space in the space of the installation. (...) That is to say, the explanation of a work should not be sought in the artist who produced it, but in the reader.⁴²⁵

This is a very insightful fragment and helps the viewer understand the work of Xu Bing and the installation that was exhibited at *Fragmented Memory*. It gives meaning to the “meaninglessness” of Xu Bing’s creation and explains why his works sometimes contain, as some Euroamerican art critics have mentioned, “nonsense characters”. After reading this fragment of Gao Minglu’s text, one discovers that the meaninglessness is actually very important and that it creates a space or emptiness which has to be filled by the viewer. The intentions of the artist are not important; it is the individual interpretation that each viewer gives to the work that counts.

Then Gao Minglu explains that the work of Xu Bing changed after he moved to the United States in 1991: “After Xu Bing emigrated to the United States in 1991, he began to respond to new cultural confrontations, shifting his concern away from the conflicts internal to China and examining instead those between Chinese and Western cultures and identities.”⁴²⁶ This shift from engaging in Chinese issues to engaging in issues dealing with interculturality, with a critical view towards China as well as to the “West” is quite frequent among the Chinese overseas artists. Xu Bing is a good example of this, and so is Huang Yongping or Gu Wenda. Almost all Chinese artists who have moved abroad have been clearly influenced by this change, which can be related to Chen Zhen’s concept of transexperiences,⁴²⁷ and have started to express these changes and observations within their creations. It is a characteristic that distinguishes them from the mainland artists.

The last article of the exhibition catalogue is written by Gao Minglu and Julia F. Andrews and is titled *The Context in the Text: Meaning in Wu Shanzhuan’s Work*. Following the same structure as the previous texts, the article is three pages long and explains various aspects of the artist as well as previous works that he made such as *Red Characters* (1986) and *Selling Shrimps*, also known as *Big Business* that was performed at the *China/*

⁴²⁵ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 28.

⁴²⁶ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 29.

⁴²⁷ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

Avant Garde exhibition in Beijing in 1989. The text also extensively elaborates on the work *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17) that was a sight specific work at *Fragmented Memory* and gives different interpretations of this particular creation. A fragment of the text that shall be quoted here is when the authors make reference to the time when Wu Shanzhuan left China and the effects this had on his work: “After leaving China for Europe in 1990, Wu’s writing and art began to demonstrate more explicit concern for his personal situation, his racial and sexual identity, his social and economic position, and his role as an artist.”⁴²⁸

It is interesting that it seems that the effect of moving abroad was that the artist started to put more emphasis on his identity as an individual. This might point to the difference that exists in China when it comes to the role of the individual within Chinese society. It should be highlighted that Wu Shanzhuan started to think about his role as an artist after he moved abroad to Europe. Again, this might point to the fact that art and the role of the artists within China is completely different from the role of the artist within Europe or America.

The text provides a lot of useful information in order to interpret *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17), however, more shall be said about the work in the following paragraph.

⁴²⁸ Gao Minglu and Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 33.

3.3 The artworks on display

In this paragraph, the artworks of the four participating overseas artists shall be commented on in further detail. As mentioned before, the works that were displayed at *Fragmented Memory* were especially commissioned for the survey and were not previously shown in other venues.

In *Fragmented Memory*, the following in-situ artworks were displayed:

Gu Wenda:	<i>Oedipus Refound #3: Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin</i> (1993) (Fig. 18)
Huang Yong Ping:	<i>Human-Snake Plan</i> (1993) (Fig. 19)
Xu Bing:	<i>Cultural Negotiation</i> (1993) (Fig. 20)
Wu Shanzhuan:	<i>Missing Bamboo</i> (1993) (Fig. 17)

Gu Wenda

As explained earlier, Gu Wenda's *Oedipus Refound #3: Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin* (1993) consisted of five very elongated metal beds. On the beds, four white sheets were placed on which placenta powder of different births had been scattered: normal, abnormal, aborted and stillborn. One bed was left empty as a metaphor for an abortion. Hanging from the ceiling was placed a white sheet that was stained with virgin blood and sperm, symbolizing a first time intercourse.

Within the exhibition catalogue the art critic Zhou Yan explains:

A facet of the Oedipus story that has particular significance for these works is the theme of tragic birth, the idea that Oedipus was born to his tragic fate, that the unrecognized seeds of his downfall were present at the very moment of his birth, even at the moment of his conception. The 'enigma' explored in Gu's projects involves the uncertainty that accompanies any pregnancy, that can change the happy event of birth into tragedy. And, as in the Oedipus story, there is also an underlying question of culpability: whether the human tragedies recorded in the artist's material have traceable causes or are simply a matter of fate.⁴²⁹

In this fragment, Zhou Yan explains the choice for the title of the work and interprets the installation by pointing to the Oedipus story of Greek mythology. He also clarifies the meaning of the word "enigma" within the title. This makes the work more understandable for the viewer. Within this text, Zhou Yan also explains about the concept of the "Silent

⁴²⁹ Zhou Yan, *Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 23.

Self” that is very characteristic of the works of Gu Wenda and which is essential in order to understand his oeuvre. Gu Wenda coined the concept of the Silent Self to describe the human materials he often uses within his works. According to Gu, by using human substances, he makes the work become universal as all people can relate to them. Human material that he has used in other works such as menstruation blood, sperm, placenta powder and hair are all substances that are universal as all humans have them. By using these materials in art, Gu tries to reduce the distance between the viewer and the object. Viewer and object become one (subject and object melt into one) and there is no longer a separation or opposition between them. Also, by using human materials, people are immediately connecting with or reacting to the work. Be it by being repulsed by it or attracted to it: in all cases there is a direct human reaction (or interaction) towards the work.

There is an interesting interview with Gu Wenda in which he comments on this particular installation:

Since 1988, I turned my artistic focus on the human body and its primal substance. The first series of art work is under the title of “Oedipus Refound”. Within this series, I’ve chosen particular human body materials with highly charged cultural and political taboos. While I understand that any kind of artistic medium has no unique identity today, by elevating the human body material, it has been my intent to transcend it to an extreme global level. (...)

Using whole human placentae as well as the placenta ground as a powder (collected through a friend working in a maternity hospital in China), I categorized them into normal, abnormal, aborted and still born placentae and pure placenta powders. These pieces narrate a polarized multicultural concern; the use of this material addresses highly charged issues in the West, but in China, its significance becomes elevated as the placenta is a precious, medicinal tonic. “Unlike the use of other impersonal materials, human substance in itself is rich cultural and symbolic connotations. As such, not only does it refer to the work as signifier but is itself the signified.”⁴³⁰

The first paragraph of this fragment reaffirms Gu’s intention to use human materials in order to transcend the individual or the artwork, and to create work on a universal (or extreme global) level. In the second paragraph he comments on the fact that the use of placenta powder is highly controversial in the West. Example of this was that the curator Julia F. Andrews at first tried to persuade Gu to present another work instead of *Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin* (1993) (Fig. 18). However, the fact that the material would be considered highly provocative in the “West” was exactly the reason why Gu chose this material for his installation. As an artist, he wants to question why placenta powder is a taboo topic in the “West” while in China it is a “precious” ingredient in Chinese traditional

⁴³⁰ For the full article, see Wenda Gu’s webpage: <http://www.wendagu.com/publications/wenda-gu-interviews/south-china-morning-post.html>. The interview was taken in 2002. Last date of consultation: 20/03/2014.

medicine. Indirectly, even though he says he is not concerned with the opposition between “East” and “West”, Gu Wenda is putting into evidence the cultural differences between “East” and “West”.⁴³¹

Oedipus Refound #3: Enigma Beyond Joy and Sin (1993) (Fig. 18) is a good example of an installation work that has been influenced by the culture of the host country as well as the homeland left behind. It has an oriental air to it however, the message it contains is aimed at Euroamerican values. The fact that Gu Wenda moved to the United States made him question certain taboos and cultural values that have remained unquestioned in the “West”. Living outside of his homeland has made him more critical towards China and also towards the “West”. He has become more sensitive towards cultural issues and differences than others, and addresses these within his works. It is as if he were more aware of cultural taboos and preconceived ideas within a culture due to the fact that he has become an outsider to the Chinese as well as the American society. The fact of living in between these two cultures has made him more conscious of the unconscious aspects of society and culture, and he has taken it upon him to make these obvious to the audience.

Huang Yongping

The next work which shall be commented on is Huang Yongping’s *Human Snake-Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19). According to the exhibition catalogue, the work was inspired by the Chinese national registration card which features a spider-like network on the map of China. Huang Yongping, for this present work, translated that image into reality and replaced the map of China for an illuminated map of the United States. He then placed this map of the USA at the end of a very long “tunnel” made out of netting. It is as if the visitor is mesmerized by the image of the United States’ map, and is hypnotically sucked into it. The map of the USA is like a treasure, or the spider in the centre of its web that looms at the end of the tunnel. The fact that it is illuminated might also be a metaphor for the expression of finding or finally seeing “light at the end of the tunnel”.

According to the catalogue, *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19) comes from the Chinese term *renshe jihua*, which is used to describe the illegal human smuggling of Chinese people towards the “West”. Huang Yongping, in this installation work addresses the topic

⁴³¹ The well-known curator Harald Szeeman has mentioned about these “taboo materials” used in Chinese experimental art: “[The art scene in China is] also refreshing. As well as the fact that their taboos are so very different from ours. The human body is sacred to us; in China its every part is available for experimentation.” Harald Szeeman, *What Makes Contemporary Chinese Art So Attractive*, 2002, <http://ccaa.awards.org/archives/2002>. Date of last consultation 19/3/2002.

of free borders and free mobility of people in the world. To quote the catalogue: “The image of a net extending from the contours of a map inspired the artist to contemplate the nature of national borders: in particular, their functions as barriers to those wishing to enter and to leave, and at the same time, their inevitable semi-permeability.”⁴³²



Figure 19: Huang Yongping, *Human Snake Plan*, 1993

This is a topic which is highly personal to the artist as he himself is an immigrant artist in Europe. Julia F. Andrews, within her exhibition article about Huang Yongping then relates *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19) to the title of the exhibition and mentions: “Conceptually, his focus on the dangers of immigration is directly relevant to the position of any Chinese artist abroad and so to the gathering of expatriate artists described by this exhibition subtitle: *The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*.”⁴³³ Although Huang Yongping decided to leave China for France, the circumstances in which he emigrated were completely different from the circumstances in which illegal immigrants from China are sometimes brought to the “West”. In no way was the immigration of Huang Yongping illegal. To consider this work an illustration of the “dangers” of the exile or expatriate artists is maybe not entirely justifiable. Yet it is again an illustration of the sensational, politically dissident characterization that Julia F. Andrews tries to attribute to the show and the participating artists.

⁴³² Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 24.

⁴³³ Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 25.

An article on the webpage of visualarts, which gives a short comment on *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19), provides insightful information on this particular work. The article is written by Hou Hanru and is titled *Change is the rule*.⁴³⁴ It mentions:

Huang Yong Ping's project *Human Snake* refers directly to an event that took place when he was visiting the site to prepare the work. A boat with more than six hundred Chinese refugees bound for the United States was stopped by the U.S. Coast Guard in international waters. After several days of diplomatic negotiations as well as more public debate between the authorities and defenders of human rights, while the fate of the boat people remained in suspense, the Mexican government agreed to accept the refugees and immediately deported them back to China. This allowed the United States to avoid giving each refugee a political asylum hearing, which would have been required had they landed on U.S. soil. Understanding such an event as a typical example of the destiny of those who are trapped by the "American Dream" and other illusory projections of life in the West, Huang Yong Ping raised questions about the real significance of the "ideal way of living" propagated by the West as a sign of its superiority. In a very realistic manner, he set up a scene of the sinking boat carrying the Chinese refugees, or "human snakes" (Chinese slang for people who are smuggled), facing a long net with a light box in the shape of the map of the United States at the end. This piece was shown at a time when there was fervent debate on the issues of illegal immigration and human rights.

This fragment, written almost twelve years after *Fragmented Memory* (1993), comments on the work from a different perspective that is not explained within the exhibition catalogue. Hou Hanru introduces a new element of background information that was not mentioned in the exhibition catalogue and writes that the work was inspired by an event of illegal smuggling of Chinese immigrants that took place at the time of the exhibition. This is a different explanation than the one given in the catalogue in which Julia F. Andrews mentions that the work was inspired by Huang Yongping's Chinese identity card. However, what is more important here is that Hou Hanru mentions that the work makes reference to the "illusory projections of life in the West" and that the artist wants to raise questions "about the real significance of the 'ideal way of living' propagated by the West as a sign of superiority." At the same time addressing topics related to illegal immigration and human smuggling, both hot topics at the time of the exhibition.

The fact that the artist also placed items of laundry in the work, might point to the fact that many Chinese immigrants end up working in laundries in the United States, washing clothes of other people in order to survive. This is obviously not what they had imagined and shatters their illusions of living the American Dream. After these explanations, the metaphor of a spider in the centre of the web, waiting for its bait to be caught up within its sticky nets seems to be even more descriptive. Huang Yongping might be projecting the United States as the spider: capturing immigrants in its nets and slowly killing them (and

⁴³⁴ For the full article, see: <http://visualarts.walkerart.org/oracles/details.wac?id=2232&title=Writings>, 2005. Date of last consultation: 15/09/2014.

their American Dreams). The flashy image of the United States' map seems so attractive and lures the viewer towards it, like a bee to a flower, however, what awaits might not be what one had hoped for.

Xu Bing

The next work that shall be explained here is by Xu Bing and is titled *Cultural Negotiations* (1993) (Fig. 20). According to the article written by Gao Minglu about the artist and his work within the exhibition catalogue, the work addresses “Meaninglessness and confrontation, the most important presuppositions of Xu Bing’s art”.⁴³⁵ The article then gives a very good description of the work that shall be copied here:

The work consists of a huge conference table, ten oversize chairs, and some four hundred large volumes from two sets of books. The first set consists of about 290 identical copies of an English-language text, *Post Testament*, which was hand-printed using lead type and then bound in leather like an antique European tome. The second set comprises over 100 Chinese-style books from the *Book of Heaven*. Like the volumes from *Book of Heaven*, *Post Testament*, which was specifically prepared for this exhibition, initially seems conventional and readable. On closer examination, however, it is not. Xu merged two pre-existing texts, the King James version of the *New Testament* and a contemporary pulp novel, alternating words so that nothing can really be read. The nonsense text that resulted has a bizarre effect on the reader, for as one’s eyes move across each line of type, elegant Biblical phrases confront coarse fragments of erotic or violent language. (...) Copies of both could be perused by viewers as they walked the fifty foot length of the black table, but in the work’s inaccessible center, the heavy leather-bound English books seems to crush the *Book of Heaven*. Over the scene looms a large ‘quiet’ sign, a feature of many public settings in China⁴³⁶



Figure 20: Xu Bing, *Cultural Negotiations*, 1993

⁴³⁵ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 28.

⁴³⁶ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 30-31.

According to Gao Minglu, misunderstanding is an essential part of Xu Bing's work and thinking. The message that this work wants to transmit is misunderstanding or miscommunication, which is often characteristic for the artists who have moved overseas.⁴³⁷ The fact that the scene seems real, with carefully bounded books and the atmosphere of the silent reading room in which the table, chairs and books are placed makes it all the more impacting when one realizes that the books are made out of texts that make no sense at all. This might indicate the experience of moving abroad and, especially in the beginning, feeling like a complete outsider who does not understand the language of the local customs and traditions, a situation that often leads to confusion and miscommunication.

Also the fact that Gao Minglu writes that the heavy English books seem to crush the books of *Book of Heaven*⁴³⁸ strongly reminds of Xu Bing's other work, *Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32)) in which Xu Bing criticizes "western" hegemony and dominance over the "East".⁴³⁹

According to Gao Minglu, the work also is symbolic for the confrontation between different cultural, social, moral, religious, and political standards. Later on in the text he mentions: "Xu's juxtaposition of *Post Testament* with *Book of Heaven* symbolizes the confrontation of Eastern and Western culture."⁴⁴⁰ This is an interesting comment which is not mentioned in the explanation of the work that is given on Xu Bing's website. Here the work is described as "An investigation of the cultural function and meaning of language".⁴⁴¹ This description is then followed by a rather mysterious comment "The contrast of the ordered public reading space, presided over by the warning of QUIET, with the chaos of the information-less books laid on the table in a scattered and turbulent fashion evokes strong cultural implications."⁴⁴² It is difficult to understand what these strong cultural implications are, as no further explanation is given on this comment. Could the fragment be remitting to what Gao previously stated about the English books crushing the *Book of Heaven*?

⁴³⁷ Other examples of artists that also work with words and miscommunication are Gu Wenda, Chen Zhen, and Wu Shanzhuan. See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁴³⁸ Also known as *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991). (Fig. 30 and 45)

⁴³⁹ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁴⁴⁰ Gao Minglu, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p.31.

⁴⁴¹ http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/1992/cultural_negotiations, n.d. Date of last consultation: 21/3/2014.

⁴⁴² *Ibidem*.

However, coming back to the title of the work, *Cultural Negotiations* (1993) (Fig. 20), the fact that the “western” book, *Post-Testament*, and the “eastern” book represented by the *Book of Heaven* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), both become unreadable and make no sense might indicate that the artist is trying to point to the impossibility of “East” and “West” to negotiate and to communicate with each other. The fact that the books are scattered chaotically on top of a huge table that is placed in a meticulously ordered space that breathes an air of formality, and the sign of QUIET that can be read in big, black letters on the wall, makes the whole scene even more nonsensical and absurd. The work might be a metaphor for the official, diplomatic, intents of “East” and “West” to negotiate or to communicate with one another, however, the “language” that is used for the negotiations merely creates misunderstanding and is completely incomprehensible (nonsensical) to the other. In this case, this interpretation of the work coincides with Gao Minglu’s comment on the fact that *Cultural Negotiation* (1993) (Fig. 20) addresses the confrontation of “eastern” and “western” culture; something that Xu Bing most probably has experienced or observed being an artists living between China and the United States.

Wu Shanzhuan

The fourth and last work that shall be commented on in this chapter is Wu Shanzhuan’s work *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17). According to the exhibition catalogue, Wu Shanzhuan did not give much explanation about his work besides mentioning that “The panda is just a panda”.⁴⁴³ However, as shall become clear, there is much more to the symbol of the panda than Wu Shanzhuan wants to make believe. The article of the exhibition catalogue that was dedicated to the artist and his works was written by the two curators of the survey, Gao Minglu and Julia F. Andrews. The text gives a good description of the installation work:

Missing Bamboo, (...), resembles a toy store in which 1000 identical battery-operated stuffed pandas were put on display for purchase by viewers (with a sign announcing, ‘Sale! \$5 each, 2 for \$8; dual-function, batteries not included’). During the opening reception, the artist demonstrated and sold these walking toy pandas. (...). The mural at the back of the gallery space depicts a Chinese political convention at which a resolution is being passed by hand vote; the national seal above the stage has been replaced by a portrait of a genial panda. On the soundtrack, computer music by Julian Boyd accompanies Wu, who sings, in a slightly melancholy voice, well-known Chinese songs, including those from his childhood during the Cultural Revolution, and Western cocktail lounge standards such as ‘Feelings’.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Gao Minglu, Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 32.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibidem.

Further on in the article, the artist comments on the work and says: “He [Wu Shanzhuan] mentions that his only interest is in doing business, bringing exotic goods for sale to the citizens of Columbus, Ohio, just as Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald’s have brought exotic cuisine to Beijing.”⁴⁴⁵ This is a rather ironic quote as the artist describes typical American fast food chains as “exotic cuisine”. However, the fact that Wu refers to his work as purely doing business is significant, especially when considering the current image of China as the main producer, economic power, and business partner in the world. It is also meaningful that the artist refers to the toy pandas as “exotic goods”, which might ironically refer to the way in which Chinese (experimental) art and artists are sometimes seen, portrayed or promoted as exotic goods in Euroamerica when in fact they are not.

Then, the artist mentions, “the Chinese artist is a panda”.⁴⁴⁶ On which the exhibition catalogue comments: “Such a self-identity is made explicit in this piece by his panda costume. Indeed, if the toy panda is only a kind of goods, perhaps so is the artist, or even the viewer. All are equal, in this view. *Missing Bamboo* might refer to the status of the Chinese artist abroad (...)”⁴⁴⁷

The panda is an animal which represents more than just a toy that runs on batteries. On many occasions, China has used the panda in order to practice what has been coined as “panda diplomacy”. China has used giant pandas, which originally could only be found in China and that have become a national symbol of the nation, as diplomatic gifts to other countries for centuries in order to build strategic friendships. The panda has become a diplomatic symbol for friendly gestures towards other nations in order to build *guanxi*⁴⁴⁸ and to pave the way for economic treaties. Seen from this perspective, when Wu mentions that the artist is a panda, he might be pointing to the fact that some artist have been practicing what has been coined “embassy art”⁴⁴⁹ and which implies creating artworks that caters to the Euroamerican art market. He might also point to the fact that artists and their works are sometimes very politically and diplomatically “charged”, as is the panda (that runs on batteries). They can be “used” to promote intercultural dialogue and exchange

⁴⁴⁵ Gao Minglu, Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 34.

⁴⁴⁶ Wu Shanzhuan, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Gao Minglu, Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 34.

⁴⁴⁸ *Guanxi* (关系) could be translated as “creating good contacts (and relationships for the future)” and is highly important within Chinese (business) society.

⁴⁴⁹ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

between countries, and to improve the relationship (*guanxi*) between nations, just as panda diplomacy does.

Also, the panda is strongly related to Deng Xiaoping who has made famous the so called “panda cigarettes” and which are sold since 1959. All in all, what becomes clear is that the panda has not been randomly chosen by the artist and that, in fact, it is a heavily symbolically charged animal. The fact that the artist has replaced the portrait of Mao Zedong for a portrait of a panda might indicate, according to the catalogue that “Wu laughs, bitterly, at Chinese politics. If all Chinese are part of these politics, perhaps everyone in China is a panda.”⁴⁵⁰ It has been said of the overseas artists that they become more critical towards Chinese and “western” politics and culture due to their position as outsiders, or artists who live “in-between” cultures.⁴⁵¹ The fact that Wu, in his work, bitterly laughs at Chinese politics might reinforce this point of view.

Another text that might provide more insight into this particular work comes from Marie Clair Huot’s *China’s New Cultural Scene: A Handbook of Changes*.⁴⁵²

Wu also said that the Chinese artist is a panda. Spoken from the context of exile, what do these words mean? That the Chinese artists are taken as exotic (and dumb) creatures, on the brink of extinction? The panda is one of China’s more recent symbols, associated with Deng Xiaoping and his regime. It stands alongside Chinese writing as a national cipher, inside and outside of China. Wu therefore sold at the Wexner an idea of China, sold himself, along with the stuffed animals (without the batteries though).

This fragment is interesting and links Wu Shanzhuan’s position as an overseas artist to the work of *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17). Also, in a way, it reinforces the idea of “embassy art” when Huot mentions that Wu “sold himself” to the “western” audience.

Taking a look at the title “Missing Bamboo”, one could question what the title stands for. Does it mean that the artist misses his homeland? That the pandas do not feed on bamboo, but on batteries? That bamboo, symbolizing flexibility and orientalism, is missing? In no place is there any explanation given about the title, yet what becomes

⁴⁵⁰ Gao Minglu, Julia F. Andrews, *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, p. 34.

⁴⁵¹ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁴⁵² Marie Claire Huot, *China’s New Cultural Scene: A Handbook of Changes*, 2000, p. 144. The book can be consulted online: http://books.google.es/books?id=EG76bw3y1FsC&pg=PA144&ipg=PA144&dq=missing+bamboo+wu+shanzhuan&source=bl&ots=k7f0Q_7_6l&sig=9QdUiYigOEIBk9qOnUiNdjTR22o&hl=ca&sa=X&ei=T0IsU_rDH07n7AaTqoCgDg&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=missing%20bamboo%20wu%20shanzhuan&f=false. Date of last consultation: 21/03/2014.

evident is that the installation work of Wu Shanzhuan is not as innocent as it seems and that a panda is not just a panda.

3.4 The exhibition reviews

A lot has been written about the artworks that were on display and different ways of interpreting them have been mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, the texts do not give any explanation on how the works were received by the public and what the impact of *Fragmented Memory* has been on the general public and the Euroamerican art critics. This is a pity as the works that were on display were good examples of hybrid, “in-between” creations that could not be described as Chinese or as Euroamerican. It would have been interesting to have read about the reactions of the audience towards these installations and if they had been perceived as hybrid works by overseas Chinese artists or as “Chinese” works. This would also have helped to discover if the goals that were set by the Wexner art centre as well as the art curators were met.

There is however one article that comments on two works by Wu Shanzhuan: *Selling Shrimp* (1989) and *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17). The article is titled *Wu Shanzhuan, Institutional Critique and the Efficacy of Relational, Political art Practices*⁴⁵³ and was written by Nate Harrison, an artist who currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. The article, written in 2007, comments on these two works made by Wu Shanzhuan and then makes an interesting comment about *Missing Bamboo* (1993) (Fig. 17):

Missing Bamboo can be read then as calling attention to the often-difficult position in which arts institutions place themselves when they assume the role of cultural ambassador for a foreign group whose concerns are mostly unknown to the institutions’ constituents. They provide a platform for expression via the gallery space, but also often reduce that expression to innocuous material via the ubiquitous gift-shopping experience. In short, they promote but also exotize.⁴⁵⁴

Later on the author adds: “*Missing Bamboo* calls into question the institutional contingencies that frame art and its reception.”⁴⁵⁵ This is an interesting comment, and in a way questions the role of the art institution when exhibiting artworks from non-Euroamerican artists. The fact that the article was written in 2007 is important as it indicates that this reception and exposition of non-Euroamerican art has probably not changed much since the early 1990s. According to Nate Harrison, the institutions promote

⁴⁵³ For the full article, see: http://nkhstudio.com/assets/Wu_Shanzhuan.pdf, 2007. Date of last consultation: 24/03/2014.

⁴⁵⁴ Nate Harrison, *Wu Shanzhuan: Institutional Critique and the Efficacy and the Relational, Political Art Practices*, June 2007. For the full article see: http://nkhstudio.com/assets/Wu_Shanzhuan.pdf. Date of last consultation: 18/03/2014. p. 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Nate Harrison, *Wu Shanzhuan: Institutional Critique and the Efficacy and the Relational, Political Art Practices*, June 2007. For the full article see: http://nkhstudio.com/assets/Wu_Shanzhuan.pdf. Date of last consultation: 18/03/2014. p. 12.

the art and the artists but they also exoticize them, often to improve visits and sales. It is not sure if this has been the case with *Fragmented Memory* as no reviews can shine a light on this aspect. However, it is definitely sure that exoticism was not part of the vocabulary of the Wexner Centre for the arts or the two curators. It should be remembered that Julia F. Andrews was worried that Gu Wenda's work would be seen as an example of Asian exoticism and that she therefore requested him to reconsider his work. It seems as if the curator wanted to avoid the show being perceived as exotic or exhibiting exotic artists and artworks.

It should also be stated that Nate Harrison refers to the artists on display as a "foreign group". Most probably he sees these artists as "Chinese" and not as in-between artists who were in fact living outside of China at that time. The fact that they had been living in Europe and the United States for some years is not taken into account by the author and he continues to perceive them as "foreign artists". This is again an example of how Euroamerican art critics often place all "Chinese" artists within one single group in which the overseas artists are not distinguished from their mainland colleagues.

However, what becomes clear is that the author of this article wants to question the role that any museum, art gallery or art institution plays when exhibiting art that is non-"western". One of the consequences usually is that the art is exoticized or put under the light of exoticism. If this has been the case with the Wexner Centre for the Arts will have to remain a question unanswered.

3.5 Conclusions on *Fragmented Memory*

As a conclusion to the analysis of the exhibition catalogue, one has to mention that not a lot of references are made to the fact that the four artists are overseas artists. It is mentioned in various places within the exhibition catalogue and some articles shortly state what effects these migrations have had on the artists, however, it is not strongly emphasized. A lot of attention is put on the historical development of the Chinese avant-garde in China and the majority of the exhibition catalogue is dedicated to chronologically explaining its evolution. Logically, it is useful for the viewer of the exhibition to read about the background of Chinese avant-garde however, maybe more stress should have been put on the fact that these four artists were no longer living in China. It would have been interesting if the catalogue had elaborated more on the consequences of living outside of one's homeland and the influences that it has on the artworks of the artists. It might also have been insightful to have included interviews with the artists, for example, and how they personally experience the changes of living overseas.

A good thing about the exhibition catalogue is that it provides useful information in order for the viewer to achieve a better understanding of the artworks that were on display. The last four texts that are dedicated to the participating artists and their creations are very valuable elements within the catalogue. However the publication of two extensive texts about the chronological evolution of the avant-garde movement within China could be considered unnecessary.

An element that is missing within the catalogue is that in no place the concept of "exile" is explained and why it is applied to the overseas artists. As mentioned before, in the strict sense of the word, "exile" might not be the most correct term to describe the Chinese artists living abroad. However, no attention is paid to the definition within the catalogue.

As to the four works that were on display at *Fragmented Memory*, what could be said is that all four works addressed issues that went beyond Chinese and Euroamerican topics. Gu Wenda addressed the fact that some materials, in this case placenta powder, are viewed differently from both continents. In China, it is a frequent component in Chinese traditional medicine, however in Euroamerica it is a highly charged substance that has been a taboo for years.

Huang Yongping on his turn addresses the issues of immigration and the concept of the American Dream. Indirectly he also points to the deceptive idea that one has about liberty and the free mobility of people within Euroamerica. Xu Bing, in his installation *Cultural Negotiations* (1993), comments on the misunderstanding and miscommunication that occurs when people from different cultures communicate with each other. According to the exhibition catalogue, he also points to Euroamerican superiority and the confrontation that exists between the “East” and the “West”. Wu Shanzhuan uses the panda, a heavily symbolic animal, to address the way China is interacting with the “West” and how artists are sometimes being used as “pandas” in what has been coined panda diplomacy.

What becomes clear is that all works no longer address Chinese issues and that the works cannot be characterized as Chinese. They also do not provide a better understanding into the issues that are going on in China or its current situation. All works carry a message that goes beyond that and address more global topics such as intercultural dialogue, misunderstanding, immigration and the relations between nations. Coming back to the initial goals that were set for the exhibition, one of the aims was to “provide a context for understanding the events and history surrounding and affecting their artistic development”. It should be mentioned here that the works that were displayed at the survey did not provide this insight. This understanding basically came only from the exhibition catalogue that devoted various pages to the explanation of the development of the Avant-Garde movement in China but that did not address, at least not extensively, the situation of the overseas artists and how they experienced the fact of living abroad.

It could also be questioned if the second goal of the survey to “provoke a discussion regarding the implications of defining an international aesthetic as either an expatriate view or an ideological hybrid” is achieved. The works that were exhibited at *Fragmented Memory* do address issues that are intercultural and hybrid however, they might not exactly provoke a discussion on the definition of an international aesthetic. This topic is not commented on in the exhibition catalogue either. The works are useful in order to understand the expatriate view of the artists on various topics such as immigration, taboos and (cultural) misunderstanding and miscommunication however whether they provoke a discussion on international aesthetics could be questioned.

Another important aspect that should be highlighted from this exhibition was the dispute between Julia F. Andrews and Gu Wenda about the *Oedipus Refound* (1993) (Fig. 18)

installation. This discussion is not mentioned within the exhibition catalogue of *Fragmented Memory* but became posteriorly public in the exhibition catalogue of the *Heart of Darkness* survey that was held in the following year in Holland. What becomes clear from this situation is the role of the Euroamerican art critic and curator, in this case Julia F. Andrews and the enormous influence these curators sometimes have when it comes to the selection of the artworks for a specific show. In a way, they become authorities that decide what is considered appropriate for the audience, and what not. Therefore, it is even more important that these curators are capable of putting themselves in the position of the Other and to evaluate and interpret non-Euroamerican art from the viewpoint of the Other. Julia F. Andrews was not capable of doing so in 1993 and nearly “censured” one of the works from being displayed. This brings us to the article of Nate Harrison in which the author questions the role of the (Euroamerican) art institutions and museums. The way non-Euroamerican art is displayed and interpreted within a Euroamerican context is highly dependent on the museum and the curator.

As explained in the introduction of this dissertation, exhibitions could become very effective tools when it comes to bringing different cultures closer together, the eradication of the fear of the Other and certain stereotypes or unquestioned beliefs. Yet, the curator plays a key role within this process as it is he or she who eventually chooses which works shall be displayed and how these works shall be explained, or not, within the exhibition catalogue. *Fragmented Memory*, according to the catalogue was the first show on Chinese experimental art to be held in the United States and therefore becomes an example of how some of the Euroamerican art critics were, at that particular time, still adapting to a globalizing world within a post Cold War context.

4. OUT OF THE CENTRE (1994)

4.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Out of the Centre was held at the Pori Art Museum from the 19th of July until the 28th of August 1994. Pori is a Finnish city and lies in the South-West of the country, alongside the coast. Traditionally it was a city which main activity depended on the port and the industry. Nowadays it has changed into one of the main student cities of Finland. It has a population of about 80.000 people, the majority being under sixty-five years old.⁴⁵⁶

The Pori Art Museum is situated within an old warehouse which was converted to art museum by Maire Gullichsen in 1981. Maire Gullichsen (1907-1990) was an art lover and expert who greatly contributed to the breakthrough of modern and abstract art in Finland. She was also the founder of the Free Art School in Helsinki and the Finnish furniture company Artek (Art and Technology) which brought Finnish design to the world. She came from a very wealthy family, her father being one of the richest persons in Finland and later would marry the Finnish millionaire Hary Gullichsen. Maire Gullichsen had a passion for art and set up various art galleries in the United States as well as in France, promoting Finnish art and design. She also was an art critic and has written various articles about design and art.

The Pori Art Museum has two permanent collections that sum up to almost 2,800 pieces. The main focus of the museum is on international and Finnish modern and contemporary art. Part of the collection consists of the artworks that belong to the Maire Gullichsen art foundation. These are mainly works dating from the late 19th and 20th century. The works of the teachers and students of the Free Art School in Helsinki take up another major part of the collection, as well as the creations of other local artists from the region. The collection also contains international contemporary art from artists such as Yan Pei Ming, and Yoko Ono, among many others. The collection is constantly expanded with new acquisitions and donations. For example, the works that were displayed at *Out of the Centre* were especially created for the occasion. Some of the works, due to their perishable characteristics or size, have not been able to be kept at the museum; others however have been incorporated into the permanent collection, like the portraits of Yang

⁴⁵⁶ <http://www2.pori.fi/english/statis.html#POPULATION>, n.d., date of last consultation 03/05/2013.

Pei Ming. The Museum also has a very extent art deposit which is frequently displayed for the public at temporary exhibitions.

Out of the Centre was held at the Pori Art Museum and was curated by Hou Hanru (1963) and Jari-Pekka Vanhala (date of birth unknown). Hou Hanru has been mentioned on various occasions within this dissertation and as stated before, he belongs to the most well known art critics, curators and experts on Chinese experimental art. He is himself an overseas Chinese and currently lives between France and the United States. He curated numerous expositions such as *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) that shall be analysed in chapter seven as well as various Biennales, such as the Shanghai (2000) and the Venice Biennale (1999, 2003, 2007), and the Lyon Biennale (2009). He is a regular writer for art magazines such as Flash Art International and Art Asia Pacific, and is also the author of the book *On The Mid-Ground* (2002), which is one of the key books of this dissertation and which main theme is the third space (the in-between).

It should also be mentioned here that Hou Hanru is one of the pioneers and key figures when it comes to the promotion and diffusion of concepts related to hybridity, in-between spaces, and eventually the third space. Already in 1993, his essay within the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy*⁴⁵⁷ clearly shows his interest in the promulgation of these alternative spaces that are especially characteristic for overseas artists and curators like himself. Here, in *Out of the Centre*, this mindframe is reinforced throughout the whole survey and ideas such as centre, periphery, eurocentrism, and the Other will be addressed extensively in the exposition and especially within the exhibition catalogue.

Another factor that should also be kept in mind while analysing this exhibition is that in the same year, in 1994, Homi Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* in which he coins the concept of third space, would come out. This seems to have hugely influenced Hou Hanru as he mentions Homi Bhabha on various occasions within the exhibition catalogue. It cannot be verified but various incentives might have lead to the organization of the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. First of all, the interest of Hou Hanru in alternative spaces, secondly the coining of the third space by Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* that came out the same year as the survey, and thirdly the Venice Biennale that was held in 1993, the year before *Out of the Centre*, that portrayed Chinese experimental art as a political, dissident, and especially *Chinese* art. Hou Hanru and Jari Pekka-Vanhala (as

⁴⁵⁷ See paragraph 2.2 of Block II on the exhibition of *Silent Energy*.

shall become clear in the following paragraph) intended through *Out of the Centre* to counteract this portrayal of Chinese experimental art and to depict it in a more hybrid, autonomous, less stereotypical, and more international way.

Jari-Pekka Vanhalla is a Finnish art curator who is currently the curator for the Contemporary Art Museum Kiasma, which is situated in Helsinki, Finland. He co-wrote two books on contemporary art, the first one being *Animal. Anima. Animus* (1998) in which fifteen contemporary artists are asked to comment on the relationship between animal and human, and issues of animality. The other book is titled *Time of the Storytellers: Narrative and Distant Gaze in Post-Soviet Art* (2005), which was published by the Kiasma Contemporary Art Museum. He has a MA in Art History from the Jyväskylä University and attended the International School for Curators at the Museo d'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato, Italy. He is also a frequent writer for the magazines Exit Express, Studio K, and FRAME.

Five Chinese experimental artists participated in *Out of the Centre*, four of them being overseas Chinese artists: Yan Pei Ming, Chen Zhen, Huang Yongping and Yang Jiechang. Zhang Peili, the fifth artist, lives and works in Hangzhou. He has however spent a short period of time in the United States when studying in Boston in 2008 at the Isabell Stewart Gardner Museum as a resident-artist. However, in 1994, he had not yet left mainland China. Zhang Peili is well known for his video art and is in fact one of the pioneers in this art form, as well as being a curator.

Although Yan Pei Ming is living and working in Dijon, France, since 1982, he has not been included in this dissertation as one of the overseas Chinese experimental artists subject of this research. Yan Pei Ming is famous for his portraits, often painted in a very rough style and is well known for his portraits of Mao Zedong. As explained in chapter one about the *Chine demain pour hier* (1990) exhibition in which he also participated, he does not address third space concepts such as universality, the mixing of “East” and “West”, etc. in his creations and therefore has not been included in the group of selected artists within this thesis. This will become clearer in paragraph 4.3 in which a short fragment of the exhibition catalogue that elaborates on his work shall be studied.

Out of the Centre was the first time Chinese experimental art was being displayed in Finland. All the works that were included in the survey were especially made for the occasion with local materials from the area. The works that were presented by the third-space artists at this exposition were:

- Huang Yong Ping: *Out of the Centre: What should we prepare before going out of the centre?* (1994) (Fig. 21)
- Yang Jiechang: *Brutstätte* (1994) (Fig. 22)
- Chen Zhen: *37°C, Human Body's Temperature* (1994) (Fig. 24)

The works of all five participating artists were showed in one single space of 800 m². This has been done for a reason. Hou Hanru, one of the exhibition curators explains in the catalogue:

All the artists share a single room, however large it may be (800 m²), and work consciously towards building up the whole organic texture of the exhibition with diverse ideas, approaches, materials and, of course, issues. However, in such a context, the place or the role of an art work has become most interestingly dialectic: to a great extent, works are losing their autonomous "identity" and entering mutual, multidirectionally [sic.] dialogues with one another. The centralized, independent "identity" of a unique art object has lost its *raison d'être*, art is thereby given an opportunity to open itself to life, to a veritable contemporaneity, to rediscover its new *raison d'être*.⁴⁵⁸

This might seem quite a vague fragment yet, after reading the whole essay of Hou Hanru, it makes perfect sense. His essay shall be analysed in the following paragraph.

The main theme of the exhibition was the relationship between centre and periphery and it is for this reason that Finland was chosen as the host country of the survey due to its peripheral situation. Finland is considered a member state of the European Union⁴⁵⁹ and it is also considered a European, "western" country. However, within these two categories, it takes up a rather peripheral position. It is as Hou Hanru mentions in his essay published in the *Out of the Centre* catalogue:

In this sense, Finland, China and most of the 'Third World' countries share a certain destiny, a certain historical 'mission': to face and to react against political, economic and cultural marginalisations by the dominant West, to extricate themselves from the constraints of being the 'periphery'.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 27.

⁴⁵⁹ At the time of the exhibition, in 1994, Finland had not yet joined the European Union. They joined the next year, in 1995.

⁴⁶⁰ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

(...) Finland, which has been too often seen as a peripheric 'Western' country, somewhere out of the centre, created by the Western metropolitan system of discourse and representation, which considers itself as the centre.⁴⁶¹

More shall be said about the "peripheric" situation of Finland within the following paragraphs.

In order to further analyse the exposition, other texts shall be employed to interpret the artworks that were on display at *Out of the Centre*, and to clarify other aspects of the survey. Examples of these documents are, for example, Hou Hanru's book *On The Mid-Ground* (2002)⁴⁶² which has various references to the exposition, and articles that refer to the artists that participated in the exposition or the works that were on display at the survey. Some of these articles come from the personal webpage of the artists.

⁴⁶¹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 9.

⁴⁶² Yu Hsiao-Hwei, Hou Hanru, *On The Mid-Ground– selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8, 2002.

4.2 The analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was published in 1994 by the Pori Art Museum in occasion of the exhibition and has an extension of sixty-four pages. The catalogue includes various (colour) plates of the works that were on display, and also includes (colour) plates of other works of the participating artists that were not on display at the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. These were included to illustrate the only two essays that were published within the catalogue: one by Jari-Pekka Vanhala and the other written by Hou Hanru, the two curators of the survey. The catalogue does not include any interviews with the participating artists or any other essays, and is published in a bilingual version of English and Finnish. The references to centre, periphery, and the in-between are plentiful and shall be highlighted and extensively commented on in this paragraph.

The catalogue starts out with an essay written by the curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala. It is very brief and has an extension of approximately two pages. According to the author: “The exhibition *Out of the Centre* presents installations and paintings by five Chinese-born artists who offer five unique viewpoints to reality and to those universal human themes that are independent of nationality, language or culture.”⁴⁶³ It is interesting that the curator refers to the artworks of the artists as addressing universal human themes. Although he does not mention it as such, this does seem to point to the third-space and could be included within the concept.

The curator then seems to criticize previous surveys that were held on Chinese experimental art. He does not mention any specific expositions and just writes that these surveys toured Central Europe, presented themselves at the Venice Biennale and that some shows travelled to Sydney and Hong Kong. The curator is probably, among other exhibitions and events, addressing the 45th Venice Biennale that was held the previous year in which Political Pop and Cynical Realism became the image of Chinese experimental art. About these exhibitions, he mentions that the works that were displayed showed: “a number of styles current in Chinese contemporary art, from cynical realism to abstract expression. The best-expected and the most obvious, however, must have been the colourfully illustrated political satire in the spirit of pop-art.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 5-6.

This short statement shines a light on the Euroamerican perception of Chinese experimental art. In the theoretic part of this dissertation it has been said that various artists have commented on the fact that they create pop art-like works or works in the cynical realism style in order to find their place within the Euroamerican art market and art world, a phenomenon that has been coined “embassy art” or “catering to the West”.⁴⁶⁵ Jari-Pekka Vanhala seems to confirm this within the above-mentioned quote and says that in various occasions, Euroamerican art events have portrayed these styles as representative art currents of the experimental Chinese art scene, even though they are only a small part of the whole avant-garde movement. Displaying Political Pop and Cynical Realism shows only a small (and more commercial) part of Chinese experimental art, however it will probably guarantee popularity among the Euroamerican public, as it did at the 45th Venice Biennale.

Within his essay, Jari-Pekka Vanhala mentions that *Out of the Centre* has a different objective:

The most interesting viewpoint to Chinese contemporary art may, however, be gained by replacing the cavalcade approach of these exhibitions with an emphasis on a few well-chosen artists with consistent and individual modes of expression. This is what the *Out of the Centre* exhibition at the Pori Art Museum is aiming at.⁴⁶⁶

First of all, what is remarkable is the word “cavalcade” which he uses to describe these exhibitions that were held in the “West” and which were portrayed as being representative of Chinese experimental art. It is not sure if he is referring to the 45th Venice Biennale, but it is quite probable that he is. The second interesting comment that the author makes is that he writes that the curators of the *Out of the Centre* exhibition have put emphasis on a few “well-chosen artists”. It appears that he is, in a rather indirect way, criticizing these previous exhibitions that were held in the “West” and the curators who were in charge of organizing them. Could it be that he is saying that the artists that were invited to these events were not well chosen but simply selected based on their popularity and their works which catered to the Euroamerican taste; works in the styles of cynical realism or political pop? This supposition can probably be confirmed by a quote of Fei Dawei made during an interview with Olivia Sand in 2004.

⁴⁶⁵ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

⁴⁶⁶ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

Here the curator mentioned:

In my opinion, the exhibitions I have curated were very different from the other Chinese contemporary art exhibitions. Most exhibitions on contemporary art from China display the art as a consequence of China's social or cultural changes. I believe that most exhibitions built around this assumption are either very political and tend to be too superficial or are solely based on quantity. (...)

I have rarely seen an exhibition providing thorough information on the works themselves. Perhaps it is because these exhibitions were often organised by Western curators, who have put the exhibition together from their first trip to China. In this context, I believe that the artists and their work have been somehow neglected.⁴⁶⁷

It seems thus that *Out of the Centre* is also somewhat of a counter reaction to these "cavalcades" (probably the Venice Biennale held in 1993, the year before *Out of the Centre* but also other exhibition on Chinese experimental art curated by "western" curators) that promulgated Political Pop and Cynical Realism as the image of Chinese experimental art: styles that were guaranteed to be warmly received by the Euroamerican art critics, curators and the audience.

A second objective is mentioned right after this last fragment: "The exhibition is a meeting of two 'periferic' cultures, outside the metropolis of contemporary art – in a place which creates a centre of its own, 'the centre of periphery'."⁴⁶⁸ By "two periferic cultures", the author is referring to Finland and China. All in all, it seems that the exhibition had quite ground-breaking intentions: trying to question the centre position of the "West", questioning Eurocentric and "west"-centric ideas and the idea of centre and periphery in general, and moreover counteract the image of Political Pop and Cynical Realism as representative of the Chinese experimental art current. This becomes particularly clear in the last sentence of Jari-Pekka Vanhala's essay in which he writes: "We sincerely hope that the connections made during the preparation of the exhibition contribute to a continuing dialogue and the demolition of geographical and psychological barriers."⁴⁶⁹ It can thus be said that another aim of the survey was to question the frontiers that separate centre from periphery. The breaking of geographical and psychological barriers can perfectly be included within the third-space concept, although the author of the essay does not mention it at any occasion within his text, for it might have been too early to speak of the third space concept in 1994. Yet, the third-space is exactly what the author elaborates

⁴⁶⁷ Fei Dawei in Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004. This quote shall further be commented on in chapter 12 on the survey of *Le moine et le démon* (2004).

⁴⁶⁸ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

upon within his essay: the elimination of the barriers that separate and oppose “East” with “West”, combining the two into one new space that includes both cultures without any separation or distinction. Including elements of both cultures to form a third space that goes beyond the dichotomy.

Moving on to Hou Hanru’s extensive essay that was published in the exhibition catalogue, it is clear that the main theme of his writing is the relationship between centre and periphery and if these two concepts are still valid. Hou Hanru starts out by asking a question: “How is it possible that the periphery has an Avantgarde?” and ‘Can one call this Avantgarde at all?’⁴⁷⁰ What the author is trying to make clear is that the centre, which is Euroamerica, is the core of the world. Therefore, avant-garde art coming from “peripheral” countries such as Finland or China are sometimes not considered as such by Euroamerica, and are questioned as autonomous styles. For the centre, in this case “west-centric” Euroamerica, it is an inconceivable idea that the periphery or non-Euroamerican areas could generate avant-garde art currents. Acknowledging this means to undermine their hegemonic position as the “advanced” part of the world, which is one of the pillars that sustain their position as “centre”. This is why art reviews written by Euroamerican art critics often interpret experimental art from non-Euroamerican countries through “western” eyes, comparing it to Euroamerican art and contemporary art movements. Therefore, their conclusions have sometimes been that these peripheral avant-garde art currents are copying Euroamerican styles and artworks. This maintains the status quo of Euroamerica as the main reference, as the superior and hegemonic centre. When Euroamerica considers itself the centre of the world, it becomes quite impossible for it to go beyond its narrow vision of the world and to consider non-Euroamerican art currents as autonomous, independent art styles. It is as Hou Hanru concludes: “According to this system [the centre-periphery system created by Euroamerica] which historically dominates international culture and everyday life, there should not be any Avantgarde.”⁴⁷¹

Hou Hanru then takes the centre-periphery concept to another level and describes it as the dominant and the dominated and questions where the centre lies and who decides what centre and periphery should be. He then answers his own question by saying:

⁴⁷⁰ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 9.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

Indeed, in the modern history of the West, which is connected to a colonialist history, there exists a strong willingness to establish itself as the centre, as the real embodiment of Humanity, or as the destiny of History itself, and hence to claim for itself master of the world, endowed with the honourable task of dominating others in the world. This centre is a hegemony (...). However, such a domination of the centre has been seriously protested, challenged and, to a great extent, subverted, especially by the decolonisation movement after the World War II. From Frantz Fanon to Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha, among many others, several generations of politico-cultural activists, theoreticians, have successfully attacked this Eurocentric domination and encouraged the international decolonisation movement. What is important to note is that such a decolonisation movement has not only brought the colonized “Third World” towards national independence, but also decisively influenced the whole contemporary international situation and radically changed our vision of the world.⁴⁷²

First of all, Hou Hanru’s vision of “western” hegemony is quite radical, especially when he speaks of the “West” as the master of the world. However, this statement has a lot of truth to it. As has been seen in the art reviews and also by the interviews that have been taken with some of the Chinese experimental artists, it is Euroamerica that dominates the art world.⁴⁷³ The more important exhibitions and art auction houses were at that time almost all concentrated in the United States and a few European countries such as London and Paris.

A debatable comment that Hou Hanru makes is that these authors, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, have successfully “attacked” this Eurocentric domination. One could question if this is really true and if the centre-periphery system has been successfully abolished. If this were true, then why does Hou Hanru write a whole essay on the topic? It could be affirmed that these authors have started a debate on the role of the centre, and that they have also initiated the questioning of Euroamerican hegemony in the world. These initiatives have led to post-colonial studies, and have also created awareness about west-centrism in the world. However, it might not be entirely agreeable that these authors have *successfully* “attacked” the Eurocentric domination, as in some cases the centre-periphery model can still be considered valid. An example of its existence is that currently a distinction is still made between what is considered the first world and what is considered the so-called third world. One should take into account that the *Out of the Centre* exhibition was held in 1994. This dissertation was written between 2011-2014 and the Eurocentric or west-centric view of the world cannot yet be considered a model of the past. It thus seems rather precipitated for Hou Hanru to conclude that these scholars have been successful in “radically changing our vision of the world”.

⁴⁷² Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 10-11.

⁴⁷³ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

Hou Hanru then speaks of China as a peripheral country and says: “Being aware of the rise and domination of the West, China must choose between tradition and modernisation, between conserving a ‘Chinese’ identity and opening itself to influences from the outside, especially those from the dominant West.”⁴⁷⁴ This is a topic which has also been addressed in the previous exhibition catalogues and seems to be a rather recurrent theme in the exhibition catalogues and essays written about Chinese experimental art. It is true that this aspect is unique to Chinese experimental art and that Euroamerican artists, for example, do not have to deal with this as explicitly as the Chinese artists. A lot of Chinese experimental artists have been confronted with this topic: the choice between modernization and Chinese tradition. In their works, especially the works of the mainland artists, they reflect on the rapid changes that are occurring in China at the moment, which seem to indicate a “westernization” of the nation, economically as well as culturally. Many of the artists, also the overseas Chinese artists, work with both cultures in their artworks.⁴⁷⁵ A good example is Huang Yongping who makes experimental art yet uses the Yi Ching to make decisions about his creations, this way trying to eliminate the subjective influence of the artist himself within his works. Another example of the mixing of “West” and “East” is Gu Wenda and Xu Bing who base some of their works on Chinese calligraphy and the traditional book binding methods, yet completely change the calligraphy and adapt it to a Euroamerican, sometimes English speaking public.

What is also interesting is that the author, Hou Hanru, speaks of having to choose between conserving a Chinese identity and opening oneself up to influences from the outside. This is exactly the dilemma with which the Chinese overseas artists are often confronted with. The fact of living outside of China and being in constant contact with an often Euroamerican environment makes them rethink their identity. However, they do not choose to maintain their Chinese identity nor do they decide to adopt an “occidental” one. They prefer to live in between the two, accepting and letting go elements of both cultures and thus creating a hybrid new identity that can no longer be fully characterized by neither of them.⁴⁷⁶

Hou Hanru then speaks of a possible solution for the centre-periphery model and writes: “What is the solution? Should one resist eurocentric domination through claiming oneself

⁴⁷⁴ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

⁴⁷⁵ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁴⁷⁶ See paragraph 2.2 and 2.4 of Block I.

as a new centre, which means to involve oneself in the game of the eurocentric domination logic, and to become an opposite, another side of the same thing?”⁴⁷⁷

Hou Hanru is in favour of abolishing the centre-periphery system, or to at least, as he shall later on say “put the centre in exile”. However, it makes sense that the solution is not for the periphery to proclaim itself as the new centre. This would maintain the system and the only thing that would change would be a shift in what is considered the centre, making the periphery the new centre. This comment reminds strongly of the fragment quoted in paragraph 1.3 of Block I by the artist Chen Zhen. Both do not see the replacement of the centre by the periphery as a solution. The alternative is to replace the centre-periphery model by a completely new system: the third space. The third-space is not about centre and periphery and does not separate the two. It combines the two and hereby creates a completely new space, a third space which is independent of the centre-periphery model. It could be an effective way of eliminating out-dated points of view and perceptions of the world. “East” and “West”, centre and periphery, shall no longer be seen as separate poles, as opposites, as different. They will become a unique and autonomous space, a new dynamic hybrid centre, which would radically change the way we see the world. It is as Hou Hanru mentions:

Can we envisage, expect and desire a future in which the competition for the central place would become the dominant human effort? In a word, should we now, from both the East and the West, the “First World” and the “Third World”, claim to establish new centres, new authorities and new domination?⁴⁷⁸

Hou Hanru then quotes Homi Bhabha⁴⁷⁹ to reinforce his statement:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “*in-between*” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate *new signs of identity*, and innovate sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. [Author’s emphasis]

Homi Bhabha speaks of the in-between spaces and new signs of identity. These two concepts are essential elements of the third space. It is interesting that Hou Hanru does not mention the third-space concept anywhere in his essay even though he is writing and pointing towards it constantly in an indirect way. However, it does become evident that

⁴⁷⁷ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

⁴⁷⁸ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

⁴⁷⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, London, New York, p. 1-2.

some first steps towards these alternative models are being made within this exhibition catalogue.

Then, Hou Hanru mentions:

out of the centre is actually the real solution to the problem of centre. One must change one's point of view and place one's starting point *beyond* the problem itself. In other words, what we must do now is to "force" the centre to go out of itself, to be situated permanently on the border between the "centre" and the "periphery", while these latter two are fading away gradually, to create an exile of the centre, so as to open up possibilities for culture and art to confront and embrace the future. In other words, the out of the centre, or exile of the centre, creates the "in-between" spaces that Bhabha underlines.⁴⁸⁰

The third space is a new place that lies beyond the centre and the centre-periphery constellation. This way, it does provide a solution to the centre-periphery "problem". In order to create the third-space it might not be necessary for the centre to go into exile or to be pushed away towards the limits of its territory. If more and more people feel they no longer are "eastern" or "western", that they no longer identify with the centre or the periphery and start responding to a hybrid identity made out of a mix of different "opposed" poles, the consequence will be that, as Hou Hanru writes, these poles shall eventually fade away by itself. The in-between, the Mid-Ground or the third-space are all theoretical concepts, yet in practice what they are made out of are people: people who feel hybrid and who would characterize themselves as a mix of different cultures, "East" and "West", periphery and centre. If eurocentrism, "west" centrism, and the hegemony of the centre are kept in power and continue to rein the general perception of the world we live in, it is because people still identify with being "eastern" or "western", belonging to the centre or the periphery. When this ceases to be, the in-between spaces will grow and eventually become the new system. It is as Hou Hanru will later mention: "To locate the question of identity in one's living context, which, today, is culturally hybrid and existentially "unhomely", implies, in the first place, to deconstruct the established discursive system of the centre from inside out, in order to break down the "centroperipheric" binary boundary."⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

⁴⁸¹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 19.

Hou Hanru then writes about the role the artists play in this process of creating this new space: “What is absolutely interesting is to see that, in fact, such a sense of the “beyond”, of “out of the centre”, has already been explored by generations of contemporary artists. Those who are often located in “peripheric” positions, even those who are in the heart of the dominant West (...).”⁴⁸²

It is very important that Hou Hanru mentions the experimental artists as the pioneers in the creation of the in-between. The Chinese experimental artists that are the focus of this dissertation are all examples of overseas Chinese who find themselves living in Euroamerica, sometimes in countries considered as the “centre”, sometimes in the “periphery”, who are exploring and experiencing the questioning of the stability of identity. They are constantly interrogating themselves about their identity and trying to find out where they belong. As a consequence, they discover that they are in fact lost.⁴⁸³ Their identities have changed in such a way that they no longer belong anywhere. It is then that the necessity arises to create a new space with which they can identify: the third space, or the in-between. Again Hou Hanru:

Some of the first drastic shifts of perspective have been introduced into contemporary art (...) questions of “centre”, “order”, “identity”, and “authority”, etc., have to be reconsidered in relation to “periphery”, “disorder”, “de-identity”, and “minority”, and finally led to the “in-between” spaces, the “beyond”, to face its own deconstruction.⁴⁸⁴

A concept that should be highlighted here is “de-identity”. The third-space implies a process of de-identification. The ruling factors that determine one’s identity are currently not often hybrid. It is therefore essential that hybridity becomes more commonly accepted as an identity. The process that the overseas Chinese artists are going through, in fact, is one of de-identification. The loss of stability in their identity (the loss of being “Chinese”) has as a natural consequence that their identity is put into question; it de-identifies itself. The result of this is the creation of a new identity, a hybrid one that incorporates the two poles of the “East-West” dichotomy. One cannot go to the beyond or the in-between without deconstructing one’s own identity if it is still ruled according to the “East-West” separation.

⁴⁸² Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 15-16.

⁴⁸³ See paragraph 2.3 of Block I.

⁴⁸⁴ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 16.

Hou Hanru then specifically writes about the Chinese experimental artists:

Many contemporary Chinese artists have a particular and open-minded insight into these questions, especially that of the centre and periphery. Instead of attempting to reconstruct a “New Empire of the Centre”, they have chosen to locate their cultural task in constant defiances of and challenges to the established values which have eventually lost their relevance in contemporary reality, along with the waning of the central position. (...)

[A]n avantgarde movement has unfolded along an axis situated between the centralized, established tradition and the total rupture with the past, between the national identity and international differences. In other words, the “in-between” space. Rather than a “re-centralization” of the split “national identity” in art, artists prefer to expose their inert and inevitable contradictions, and conflicts, to shake the established conception and values of art, and reality, so as to tell the truth: now, we must learn to live in permanent and paradoxical transitions of cultural identities and differences.⁴⁸⁵

The comment about the defiance and the challenges to the established values is particularly significant. Some of the works that were created by the Chinese experimental artists have been considered provocative and even unacceptable from Euroamerican point of view. An example of this could be Gu Wenda who often uses “taboo” materials within his works such as placenta powder and sanitary napkins, which sometimes leads to confrontations as was the case in *Fragmented Memory*.⁴⁸⁶ This could be seen as an attempt to defy the “West” and the standards that rule it. It challenges its values, as Hou Hanru mentions. The third space is also a defiance of the “East-West” and the centre-periphery systems. It goes against the ruling values and world perception of current times.

Then, Hou Hanru indirectly addresses the fact that the third space or these “in-between” spaces are not captured by Euroamerica. As a consequence, the centre-periphery system stays intact. In his essay he quotes the Chinese overseas artist Chen Zhen to comment on this phenomenon:

(...) it is interesting to withdraw from one’s usual context and meet a new world, especially today, when cultural and ideological hybridisation has become an irreversible evidence. The problem is not just that of understanding the work of art superficially, but also to try to effectively understand it with maximum clues. A quote from Chinese army strategy techniques and symptomatic of my attitude is often used in different contexts: “The winner is the one who masters the two sides of the battlefield”.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 17

⁴⁸⁶ See the previous chapter.

⁴⁸⁷ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 19. The fragment comes from *Objects of Nature*, an interview by Jérôme Sans with Chen zhen in Chen Zhen’s catalogue of his one man show, Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble, Le Magasin, 1993, p. 56.

This is a very illustrative comment and should be taken into consideration. Many of the previous reviews that have been analysed in the different chapters seem to demonstrate the superficial knowledge of the art critics. Be it about Chinese society, about the in-between spaces, or about Chinese experimental art. According to Chen Zhen, the problem is this superficial understanding of the artworks. It is true, in some cases, that the art critics “misinterpret” the artworks on display, or have a very subjective image of them because they do not have all the information. They are not well informed and therefore necessarily limit their views to Euroamerican perspectives, stereotypes of Chinese society and references to Euroamerican art when commenting on Chinese experimental art expositions within their reviews. It seems that the avant-garde artists are willing to question the concept of identity and the “west”-centric vision of the world. Yet, especially the Euroamerican art critics and curators seem to hold on to the “East-West”, centre-periphery dichotomy and are not willing to look beyond it, accepting or introducing new concepts such as the in-between spaces or the third-space concept. Chen Zhen might have been one of the overseas artists who fought the most for the in-between space, coining the concept transexperiences⁴⁸⁸ and addressing topics such as universality, global humanity and de-identification in his artworks. He was an artist who “attempts to propose new ‘solutions’ for the present and future society of hybridities.”⁴⁸⁹

Then, to conclude, Hou Hanru mentions Huang Yongping within his essay as another pioneer in the questioning of fixed identities and quotes the artist: “‘West’, ‘East’, ‘I’, ‘Other’, are not fixed concepts; they can shift.”⁴⁹⁰In general, Hou Hanru writes: “(...) especially those originally from the “periphery”, like contemporary Chinese artists, can imagine and project in their work a “new world” where categories of centre and periphery will lose their validity; where spaces of “in-between” or “beyond”, the world of “out of centre” can be given life.”⁴⁹¹Yet, it should be mentioned that some of the overseas Chinese artists do their best to counteract the strong, rigid and ruling values of “west”-centrism yet, in order to be successful and to really put in evidence the closed-mindedness of this current system, it is essential that art critics, curators, museum directors and all people who are related to the art world become conscious of these ideas

⁴⁸⁸ Transexperience could be described as the experiences of leaving one’s native place and going from one place to another in one’s life. See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁴⁸⁹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 20.

⁴⁹⁰ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 17. This specific fragment comes from Hou Hanru’s article *Le Plaisir du Texte – Zen and the art of contemporary China*, Flash Art international, Nov-Dec. 1993.

⁴⁹¹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 20.

and transmit them as well. In reality, in most cases, this is not a priority. Quite the contrary, “west”-centric views and perceptions are sometimes the rule rather than the exception. Remembering the 45th Venice Biennale held the year before, Chinese experimental art might have adapted to these “western” necessities, rules and regulations by promoting Political Pop and Cynical Realism as the main image of this art. Portraying Chinese experimental art as political and dissident was an easy way to enter the international art scene, and to become successful at the Biennale but it was also catering to the west-centric expectations of non-Euroamerican art, and an example of auto-exoticizing. Hou Hanru was well aware of this and knows that eventually this submissive attitude will backfire on the artists. *Out of the Centre* and his essay published within the exhibition catalogue might have been his (indirect) answer to this phenomenon.

Towards the end of Hou Hanru’s essay, the author addresses the exposition *Out of the Centre* and writes: “Although all the artists are Chinese, the exhibition itself represents a situation in contemporary art which is much larger and more open than a national identity. Indeed, as we have tried to show, such a national identity does not exist.”⁴⁹² According to Hou Hanru, “hybridisation of different cultures and confrontations of difference” becomes more and more part of our global network. The question is when Euroamerica is going to give in and admit that the situation has changed and that the old system of separating “East” from “West” is no longer valid, and that hybrid identities are becoming more and more a reality.

⁴⁹² Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 26.

4.3 The artworks on display

This chapter shall analyse the three different artworks made by the overseas artists Huang Yongping, Chen Zhen, and Yang Jiechang for the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. Yan Pei Ming's works shall also be briefly commented on as he is also an overseas Chinese artist living in France. However, the artist has not been included within the group of third-space artists for reasons that were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Huang Yongping

The first work that shall be commented on is Huang Yongping's *What should we prepare before going out of the centre?*⁴⁹³ (1994) (Fig. 21) The work was made especially for the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. It is rather strange that the exhibition catalogue does not mention anything about this particular work. It seems that Huang Yongping's most emblematic works are others such as the *Bat Project* (2004) (Fig. 60)⁴⁹⁴ and his "A Concise History of Modern Art" after *Two Minutes in the Washing Machine* (1987) (Fig. 31), among other works. Therefore, in order to comment on this installation, it has been necessary to consult other sources. In this case, Hou Hanru's book *On the Mid-Ground* (2002), in which he talks quite extensively about this particular work:⁴⁹⁵

The Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping who has lived in Paris since 1989 has also explored the wall as a metaphor of cultural confrontations and oppression. In the exhibition *Out of the Centre* (1994) in Pori, Finland which aims to propose a project to transcend the division of centre and periphery in Chinese artists' works, Huang Yong Ping's installation consisted of a huge network of metal displayed at the end of the space. Eight big ropes attached to this network were spread over the whole space and other works in the exhibition. They were bound together above the entrance and beyond the wall through a specially dug hole. One could eventually draw the ropes from outside in order to 'absorb' the whole exhibition into the network and set it into a kind of exile or nomad. In this work, Huang Yong Ping has responded to the question raised by the project itself, how to go out of the centre? But his answer itself is, like the title of the work, a question: Out of the Centre? What should we do after going out of the centre?

There is actually a paradox here. (...), as it is embodied in the concept of entropy which makes us look at the other side of the world, the side hidden behind the wall of the rationalist and historicist vision of universal order and progress. In a more specific context Huang Yong Ping, at a time when cultural globalisation makes the transcendence of confrontations between different cultures necessary and urgent, proposes an alternative regard vis-à-vis reality and the future. Are we really progressing to a better world after breaking the wall?

⁴⁹³ Also known as *Out of the Centre?*.

⁴⁹⁴ Exhibited in *All under Heaven*, see chapter 11 of Block II.

⁴⁹⁵ Hou Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground, Selected texts Edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, p. 99-100.

Here, Huang Yong Ping has actually evoked the destiny of the progressive process of culture and history in general. While one tends to believe that tomorrow should be a better day, he teaches us not to rely on such an aspiration. Rather, one should learn how to look at the world and, of course, the future, in a more dialectic way and 'accept' the destiny of things. It is the only way to negotiate with reality.

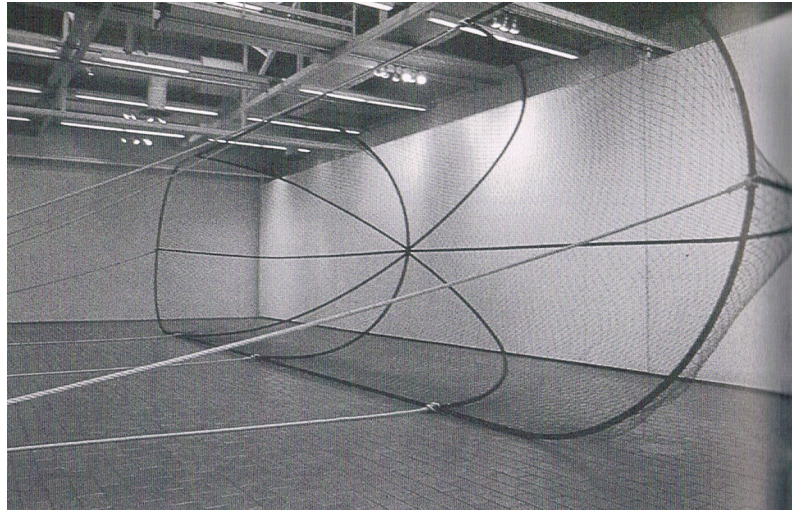


Figure 21: Huang Yongping, *What should we prepare before going out of the centre?* (Also known as *Out of the Centre*), 1994

First of all, it could be said that this work is quite representative of Huang Yongping's style, as it is an example of how his creations often overtake the whole museum and some of the other works on display. Huang Yongping is a polemic artist and stirs up quite a discussion, sometimes among his fellow artists as well. The ropes that created the network included (invaded) the creations of the other artists, giving the feeling that by one single pull, all works could be dragged out of the museum; out of the centre. In a way, even though the message of the work is different, *Out of the Centre* (1994) (Fig.21) does show some resemblance with the artist's previous work *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19) that was displayed at *Fragmented Memory* the year before.

This fragment by Hou Hanru seems rather pessimistic and insinuates that whatever lies beyond or out of the centre is not necessarily "a better day". The author does not explicitly say on what his opinions are based, and why he appears to have such a negative image of that what lies outside of the centre. Nor does he explain how he then envisions the world when the centre-periphery has been made redundant. Yet, the question that the author and the artist Huang Yongping pose as a result of this particular installation work is essential: what will happen after the centre has been put in exile?

Yang Jiechang

The next work is Yang Jiechang's *Brustätte* (1994) (Fig. 22) which does not seem to mean anything in German nor in Finnish. The remarkable and rather strange thing is that the work is called differently by Hou Hanru and by the curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala. In the essay of Hou Hanru, the work is titled "Brustätte" which does not mean anything at all. However, by Jari-Pekka Vanhala, the work is called "Brutstätte" which in German means "hotbed". It is rather odd that this particular work does not figure in the artist's own webpage,⁴⁹⁶ therefore the correct name cannot be verified.



Figure 22: Yang Jiechang, *Brutstätte*, 1994

According to a description by Jari-Pekka Vanhala, Yang Jiechang's work is described as follows:

Yang Jie Chang's installation *Brutstätte* spreads across the floor, black and wet, challenging the viewer to cross it on foot. Photographs of different kinds of stinging insects and injection and acupuncture needles drift over a black "seal of infection" referring to cure.⁴⁹⁷

No other descriptions of the work are given apart from this rather vague one. It is also rather unfortunate that no pictures have been included of the work within the exhibition catalogue that could clarify how it looked like. This might probably be due to the fact that

⁴⁹⁶ www.yangjiechang.com, n.d., date of consultation: 18/2/2013.

⁴⁹⁷ Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 5-6.

the catalogue was printed before the installation took place. However, a picture of *Brutstätte* (1994) (Fig. 22) has been published on the website of the Asia Art Archive.⁴⁹⁸

The short description about the artist published in the essay by Hou Hanru in the *Out of the Centre* catalogue does not shine any light on the installation work either, however it does speak of the artist's style and some of his other works:

[I]n the specific context of deconstructing the central authority of Western knowledge, it is absolutely relevant to practice the strategy of decentralization and deconstruction of the ego, of the self, in the established eurocentric discursive system of the body and selfhood, through appropriating alternative concepts of the body, the subject, and even different understanding and devaluations of life and death, of effects on the body, including violence on the body itself. Yang Jie Chang's work can be exemplary in this instance. (...) In other works he uses dangerous materials like needles, naked electric wires and fire, to exert affective and violent effects on bodies, including his own. Here, through emphasizing the indifference of the opposite – differences between violence and gentleness, life and death – he has suggested a connection in art with the Chinese Zen Buddhist spirit and comprehension of life, man and world, which is essentially different from "ego-centric" Western humanist ideas.⁴⁹⁹

In order to better understand this fragment, an interview that was held by Hou Hanru with Yang Jiechang might help.⁵⁰⁰

Hou Hanru: You also practice some "violent" actions, such as absorbing blood from your own veins, using the skins of freshly killed animals. Are these examples of the indifference to contradiction and violence in Buddhist and Zen thought?

Yang Jiechang: I live and work with a "realistic" view of the world. Westerners just don't know who Buddha is, who your God is – but they can understand absorbing your own blood, getting electric shocks, etc. I start from there.

Another fragment from a different text might also help understand this quite "mysterious" work. It is not clear if the text is talking about *Brutstätte* (1994) (Fig. 22), as it does not specifically mention it. The fragment comes from a press pack that was published for the occasion of the exhibition *Stranger Than Paradise* that was held in 2011 at La Criée, centre for contemporary arts in Rennes:⁵⁰¹ "In another project, he installed a corridor in which the audience was forced to receive (low-voltage) electric shocks in order to be

⁴⁹⁸ Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong. <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/Details/27903>, last updated 5/6/2012. Date of last consultation: 17/9/2014.

⁴⁹⁹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 23.

⁵⁰⁰ Hou Hanru, *Le Plaisir du Texte – Zen and the art of contemporary China*, Flash Art International, November-December 1993.

⁵⁰¹ The exhibition was entirely dedicated to Yang Jiechang. Curator of the show was Larys Frogier. The entire press pack is downloadable at: <http://www.criee.org/Press-pack-Stranger-than-Paradise?mot=255&artiste=Yang%20Jiechang>. Date of consultation: 10/2/2013.

‘enlightened’.” It is not sure if this description depicts the installation of Yang Jiechang that was shown at the Pori Art Museum in 1994, however it does seem to coincide with the description that was given by Jari-Pekka Vanhala. All in all, the work remains quite vague and without having visited the exhibition one does not get a clear image of this installation by reading the exhibition catalogue.

It is surprising that Hou Hanru’s essay published in the exhibition catalogue does not speak of Yang Jiechang’s work that was displayed at the *Out of the Centre* survey. This might point to the fact that Hou Hanru did not yet know which work Yang Jiechang would make for the *Out of the Centre* exhibition when he wrote his catalogue essay, as all the works were sight specific. There is however a description with a full one page colour plate of one of his other works, *Testament* (1991) (Fig. 23) that was exposed in the City Museum of Fukuoka, Japan in 1991 but that was not displayed at *Out of the Centre*. *Testament* (Fig. 23) consists of a ceramic pot placed in front of a wall on which is written, in Japanese and English:

TESTAMENT

ONE DAY I DIE AN UNNATURAL DEATH,
THEN ONE SHOULD FEED ME TO A TIGER
AND KEEP ITS EXCREMENTS.

YANG JIE-CHANG

The decision to include it in the exhibition catalogue of this survey might have been because it illustrates Hou Hanru’s fragment, mentioned previously, in which he speaks about “a connection in art with the Chinese Zen Buddhist spirit and comprehension of life”. The essay itself does not further elaborate on this statement and therefore makes it hard to fully grasp its meaning.

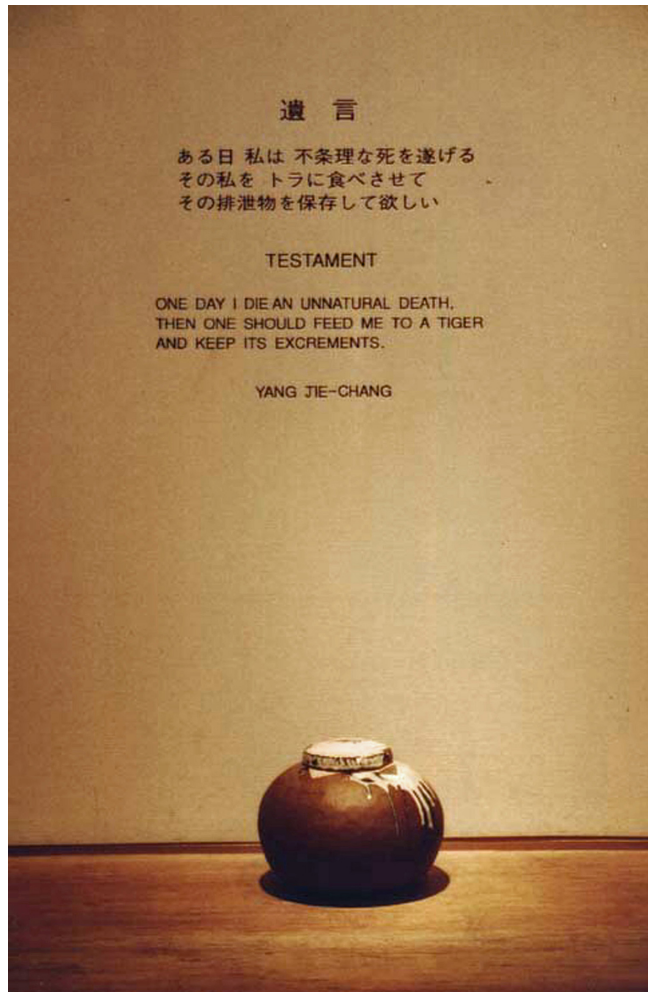


Figure 23: Yang Jiechang, *Testament*, 1991

However, a clarification might come from the following fragment from the article *The Communist Party Didn't Pay the Bill*,⁵⁰² by Britta Erickson who is a curator and an expert on Chinese experimental art. The article talks about this specific creation and links it to Zen Buddhism, as Hou Hanru insinuates in his essay:

Yang responded to the slaughter at Tiananmen Square in both overt and sublimated ways in his works, building on a theme of mortality – the fleeting nature of existence – that has been a recurring theme in his oeuvre since *Massacre*. His approaches to it range from the specific to the general, from the historical to the personal. *Testament*, created for the 1991 exhibition, “Exceptional Passage” at the Museum City Project in Fukuoka, Japan, refers to the *Vyaghri Jataka*– the story of one of the early incarnations of Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha), in which he throws himself off a cliff and offers his flesh to a tigress so hungry she is contemplating eating her cubs. *Testament* consists of a sealed pottery urn placed below English and Chinese⁵⁰³ text printed onto the wall, reading “One day I die an unnatural death, then one should feed me to a tiger and keep its excrements [*sic*].” The works suggests a continuation of existence through transformation of matter. It also brings to mind the sacrifice of the innocent in the context of the Tiananmen massacre, catalysed by the self-preservationist willingness of the Chinese state to devour its young.

⁵⁰² Britta Erickson, *The Communist Party Didn't Pay the Bill*, *Artasiapacific*, Issue 65, September/ October 2009, p. 119-120.

⁵⁰³ Britta Erickson mentions that the text was written in English and Chinese. This seems to be erroneous as the characters were Japanese.

Britta Erickson relates *Testament* (1991) (Fig. 23) to the events at Tiananmen Square, adding a political context to the work. It is not clear if this opinion or interpretation is based on a description of the artist himself or if it is based on the personal opinion of the art critic. However, considering the fact that this particular work was presented in 1991, just two years after the events of 1989, the connection between Chinese experimental art and the Tiananmen Events are more easily made. It should also be mentioned that Yang Jiechang posteriorly decided to make a work every five years in commemoration of Tiananmen. An example of one of these works was the sight specific installation for the exhibition *Le moine et le démon* held at the Musée d'art Moderne de Lyon in 2004 titled *Scroll of Secret Merits* (Fig. 62)⁵⁰⁴ Yet, without this explanation it would impossible to understand *Testament* (1991) (Fig. 23). It is in fact rather incomprehensible that the exhibition catalogue includes this particular work yet it does not further elaborate on the installation anywhere within the catalogue.

All in all, the information given about Yang Jiechang's *Brutstätte* (1994) (Fig. 22) remains rather mysterious and dubious. It does not become clear what the artists wanted to express through this particular installation. Somehow it seems related to Zen and Buddhism, two topics which are recurrent in this artist's works, and that "putting the centre in exile" starts by putting one's own ego into exile (by using electric shocks that are painful to all humans?). This is not confirmed anywhere within the exhibition catalogue, or on the artist's personal websites or in the articles cited here about the artist's works.

Chen Zhen

The third work that was shown by an overseas artist at the *Out of the Centre* exhibition was Chen Zhen's *37°C, Human Body's Temperature* (1994) (Fig. 24). Different comments are made about this work, first of all the explanation by curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala:

In the twilight within Chen Zhen's glass house, the temperature of the human body is presented as the common denominator and physical space that all people share, regardless of nationality, race or culture. The work also draws an analogy between the museum – a place where temperature and ventilation are carefully controlled – and the bodily functions of man: the glass house is joined into the museum's ventilation shafts with tubes. "Breathing" through them, the installation becomes an organic part of the building and its "life-supporting" functions.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ See chapter 12 of Block II.

⁵⁰⁵ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

Hou Hanru does not speak about the work itself but does mention Chen Zhen briefly in his essay.⁵⁰⁶

Chen Zhen, one of the most active Chinese artists in the international art scene, has stated: "...it is interesting to withdraw from one's usual context and meet a new world, especially today, when cultural and ideological hybridisation has become an irreversible evidence. The problem is not just that of understanding the work of art superficially, but also to try to effectively understand it with maximum clues. A quote from Chinese army strategy techniques and symptomatic of my attitude is often used in different contexts: 'The winner is the one who masters the two sides of the battlefield.'"

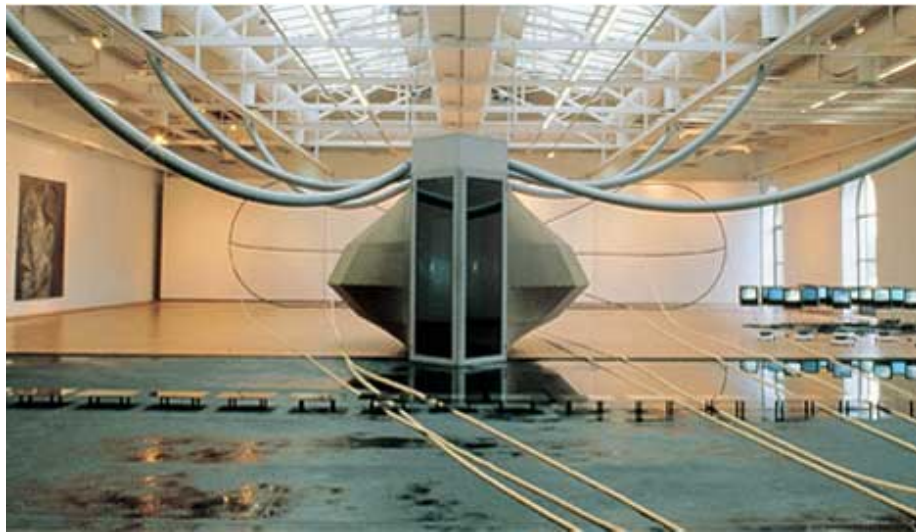


Figure 24: Chen Zhen, *37°C, Human Body's Temperature*, 1994

Again, not much is said about this particular installation, neither by Jari-Pekka Vanhala nor by Hou Hanru. In order to understand this artwork, one could refer to an article that is published on Chen Zhen's webpage. The article consists of a conversation between Chen Zhen and the artist Zhu Xian. In this conversation, Chen Zhen briefly mentions his work *37°C Human Body's Temperature* (1994) (Fig. 24):

Zhu: You once said that when you were doing your project, you didn't need any studio. Then, isn't it fair to say that your heavy reliance on the site is in fact using the site as a kind of studio?

Zhen: To many artists, it is fair to say that. But to me, it is not. What I mean by leaving your studio is going to the real world, plunging deep into the inner layers of life. A site is not simply a space to work in, but it is a type of life. If the site is the contextual factors for the work, then what are the contextual factors of the site? We should look into this question.

Zhu: The contextual factors of the site?

⁵⁰⁶ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 19.

Zhen: Yes! All the invisible things. For example, the history of the site, the background of the city where the site is located: its geographical, social, cultural, and ethnic context, etc. The theme of the exhibition and the intention of the curator are often part of the "contextual factors" also. Any major historical events and any particular events at the site of the exhibition would also be "contextual factors." Sometimes, even conditions of natural elements and the difference of seasons can also be considered as contextual elements. The characteristics of the climate and temperature, and rainy seasons or droughts can all be regarded as contextual factors. The work I created in Finland in 1994, 37°C -The Human Body's Temperature, is a good example of this kind. For contexts, we should be able to create something out of nothing, and to find pretexts for them.

Zhu: But in final analysis, paying attention to the context itself is a western influence. Don't you think it is in fact a constraint to you?

Zhen: If you look at things only through the yardstick of western art history, or speak of things only in a tone consistent with the thinking that "contemporary art was invented by the westerners," then not only are you going to lose what you will have, but what you already have will also disappear. How do Chinese build their houses? The orientation of the roof beam, the positioning of doors and windows, the width of the eaves, the arrangements of furniture inside the house, and the positioning of the beds--all of these have to do with the surrounding environment.

Zhu: Now you are talking about Chinese Feng Sui.⁵⁰⁷

The interview is much longer and only this fragment has been quoted here. It seems that, according to Chen Zhen, his work is an example of how he creates his art: by taking into consideration the environment and the "contextual factors" of the specific place where the creation shall be displayed. This does not completely coincide with the explanation given by the curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala in his introduction of the exhibition catalogue in which he presents the work as a "universal creation", as 37°C is the body temperature of all human beings, no matter what race or cultural background.

What is interesting about the conversation between Chen Zhen and Zhu Xian is the last part in which Zhu Xian considers that paying attention to context is a "western" influence. This is a rather remarkable comment and it is not clear what it is based on, as Chinese art also takes into account the context of an artwork, especially when it is sight specific such as this particular work. Chen Zhen disagrees and says that if one believes that "contemporary art was invented by westerners", one loses the essence of it. He does not comment on the fact if Chinese experimental art is "western" or not, he is only trying to say that the Chinese experimental art has its own roots, just as the way houses were built according to Chinese tradition. Here, one would not say that a house is a "western" invention and therefore Chinese houses are built according to "western" tradition or standards.

⁵⁰⁷ For the complete article see: <http://www.chenzhen.org/francaise/page.php?id=32&PHPSESSID=b54c291eadfb7840c13039cc28bcce27>, n.d. Date of consultation: 19/2/2013.

The interpretations of 37°- *The Human Body's Temperature* (1994) (Fig. 24) remain an open door and there is not a good explanation of this work to be found anywhere. Could the artist have meant for his work to represent the universal phenomenon of a human body's temperature: whether one is in the centre or the periphery, the human body's temperature will always be 37°C. Therefore, is centre and periphery really that different? What is the separation of centre and periphery really founded on?

Yan Pei Ming

Lastly, the works of the artist Yan Pei Ming shall be briefly commented on. Yan Pei Ming is an overseas artist who lives and works in France. However, he cannot be regarded as a third-space artist as his work does not seem to address concepts such as the in-between and the Mid-Ground. This shall become clear after these fragments. About the works of Yan Pei Ming, Jari-Pekka Vanhala writes:

In the paintings by Yan Pei Ming, chairman Mao is accompanied by the artist's father and grandfather, as well as a number of imaginary portraits. The black-and-white faces, presented in a manner somewhere between the abstract and the figurative, seem to observe the space. The artist's aggressive brush has penetrated their skins and destroyed the unnecessary features, all the better to register the painting process.⁵⁰⁸

About the artist, Hou Hanru mentions:

He insists on making only oil paintings, which is indeed the "purest invention" of Western art and still remains one of the essential mediums of Western ideology. Even further, he concentrates his work systematically on the portrait, which is perfect embodiment of the Western obsession with subjectivity. However, his approach to painting, to portraits, is deconstructive: in the first place, he never considers his painting as the research of construction or textualization of a specific formal structure, which reflects the interests of rationalist methodological and ontological approaches to the world; instead, he underlines the process of painting as a moment of life itself through "aggressive" attacks with brushes onto the canvas. Secondly, he expresses an indifferent attitude vis-à-vis the conventional understanding and definition of the portraits as an instrument to represent and reconstruct human identity, or more exactly, the self-identity of a human being. Instead, he mostly paints "anonymous portraits", which can hardly be called "portraits" according to the established definition of "portrait" proper. It is here that his work becomes irritating. In the meantime, one cannot ignore that Yan Pei Ming also paints "real portraits" of his personalities who have influenced on his own life, such as Mao, his father, neighbours, as well as those imaginary figures which can be traced back to his memory. But, what is important is to read these two aspects as parallel representations of his anonymous images; together, they provoke a confusion, a chaos of a rational self-identification. To the mind of "portraitist", they seem ambivalent, contradictory and lack loyalty to each other, and to the presupposed norm of the "correct" portrait as well as including painting itself, which is centralized on the task of the identification of subjectivity. It is through such an indifferentiation of the role of self and other subjectivities that Yan Pei Ming has proposed a challenging "model", or "state", of a de-centralized art.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Hou Hanru, *Out of the Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 24-25.

As is described in this fragment, the main subjects for Yan Pei Ming are not third-space topics. His paintings reflect important persons that have had an influence in his life, others are roughly painted “portraits” that become anonymous as the faces can no longer be recognized (Fig. 25). It is for this reason that, although being an overseas artist, Yan Pei Ming is not included in the group of overseas Chinese artists of the third-space. This is also the reason why he is not being studied in this dissertation.



Figure 25: Yan Pei Ming, *Invisible Man*, 1998

4.4 The exhibition reviews

Only two reviews have been found about the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. To the great surprise of the Pori Art Museum, only one review has been kept of the exhibition in their archives. It was published in a local paper and is written in Finnish. It is remarkable that no further reviews and articles have been saved and it is not clear if they were actually published at the time. This could be sign of a lack of interest or a very low impact caused by the *Out of the Centre* exhibition.

The following reviews shall be analysed:

- Author unknown, *Socialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille*⁵¹⁰, Satakunnan Työ, June 17 1994.
- Evelyne Jouanno, *Out of the centre: or Without the centre*, Third Text, 1994, p. 196-198

4.4.1 Evelyne Jouanno, *Out of the centre: or Without the centre*

The first review that shall be analysed is the article written by Evelyne Jouanno,⁵¹¹ wife of the curator Hou Hanru, titled *Out of the centre: Or Without the centre*. Evelyne Jouanno is an independent curator based in Paris and San Francisco. She has curated and co-curated multiple exhibitions concerning art and its relationship to geopolitics. One of the exhibitions that she curated, together with Hou Hanru, was *Paris pour Escale* (2000)⁵¹² that is analysed in this dissertation.⁵¹³ Evelyne Jouanno is also a frequent writer for various catalogues and specialized magazines including Third Text, Flash Art International and Critique d'Art. She has an MA in Art History from the University Paris-Sorbonne.

The article is very interesting and speaks extensively of the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. Evelyne Jouanno is enthusiastic about the survey and mentions in her text: "The success of the exhibition matched its ambition. (...) In this sense the exhibition was another step

⁵¹⁰ "From socialist realism to the twilight zone".

⁵¹¹ Evelyne Jouanno, *Out of the centre: or Without the centre*, Third Text, 8:29-29, p. 196-198, 1994.

⁵¹² Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2000.

⁵¹³ See chapter 9 of Block II.

towards 'de-centralisation' and the transgression of a binary authoritarian discourse which distinguishes the 'centre' from the 'periphery'."⁵¹⁴

It becomes clear that the author has captured the aim of the exhibition to transgress and go beyond the centre-periphery dichotomy and she even writes that the survey was "successful" in reaching its goals. The author also mentions the concept of "new spaces" in her review, although she does not mention the third-space concept anywhere in her text. She writes: "In fact the curatorial approach enabled the juxtaposition of two "peripheral" cultures outside the limits set by western paternalism and was intended to broaden the potential field of investigation in contemporary culture while at the same time creating new spaces, new 'centres'."

About the artists that participated in the exhibition, she mentions:

These artists subvert the historically dominant Eurocentric ideas as well as question the traditional modes of artistic expression, while also proposing new possibilities of human expression and existence in a "globalised" potential future, when any notion of "centre" and "periphery", of "national" and "international" identity, of "difference" in the context of a search for an authentic "Other", will be redundant.

This search for the Other and to make all these concepts such as centre and periphery unneeded is exactly what the third-space concept is about, even though the author does not mention the concept anywhere within her review. This might be due to the fact that the curators did not mention the concept either anywhere within the exhibition catalogue.

Then, Evelyne Jouanne writes: "The recent interest shown towards Chinese artists by the arbiters of western cultural institutions- not without political and commercial interests – is seen all too often as the search for a new exoticism." This is quite a bold statement to make and it is interesting that a Euroamerican curator is the one to make it. According to the author, the interest for Chinese experimental art and the artists of this movement sometimes lies in political and commercial interest. This has been observed in some of the reviews and catalogues that have been analysed in past chapters and shall become evident in the analyses of the following chapters: a strong emphasis is put on the political aspect of Chinese experimental art, even though it is not always justified to do so. The other interesting fact is that the author mentions that these exhibitions and the "western arbiters" are sometimes aimed at showing the "exotic" aspect of Chinese art. Here, as Jari

⁵¹⁴ Evelyne Jouanno, *Out of the centre: or Without the centre*, Third Text, 8:29-29, 1994, p. 198.

Pekka-Vanhala indirectly commented in his catalogue essay, Evelyne Jouanno might also be referring to the Venice Biennale of 1993 in which Chinese experimental art was not only politicized, but also highly “commercialized” and exoticized by focussing mainly on the Political Pop and Cynical Realism currents that would be easily accepted by the Euroamerican art critics and collectors.

Lastly, Evelyne Jouanno makes a comment on the overseas Chinese artists that participated in the *Out of the Centre* survey and writes:

So they [the overseas Chinese artists] try to deconstruct a system which tries to redefine new margins, and are willing to criticise their “own” culture and exile themselves from a “centre” in search of a space “in-between”, a space of permanent transition where the hybridisation of different cultures will not only be possible but necessary.⁵¹⁵

All in all, it seems that Evelyne Jouanno has captured the aim of the exhibition as well as the concepts such as the in-between and the centre-periphery system. The author makes some statements within her essay that are quite unusual for a Euroamerican art critic, such as putting in evidence the exotic, political or commercial ways in which Euroamerica sometimes receives the art of the Other. However, it should be taken into account that the author is the wife of the curator, Hou Hanru, and that he is one of the pioneers when it comes to the in-between concept and the questioning of “west”-centric hegemony.

4.4.2 Author unknown, *Sosialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille*⁵¹⁶

The next review comes from the Finnish local newspaper Satakunnan työ whose author is unknown.⁵¹⁷ The title of the article is *Sosialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille* which in English translates to *From socialist realism to the twilight zone*.⁵¹⁸

The review adds quite a political context to the exhibition and starts out by relating the Chinese socialist realism style to Russian socialist realism calling it a “model from a Russian Brotherhood”.⁵¹⁹ Then the author comments that the Chinese artists “prefer to

⁵¹⁵ Evelyne Jouanno, *Out of the centre: or Without the centre*, Third Text, 8:29-29, 1994, p. 197.

⁵¹⁶ “From socialist realism to the twilight zone”.

⁵¹⁷ Author unknown, *Sosialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille*, Satakunnan työ, June 17 1994.

⁵¹⁸ Article translated from Finnish to English by Yvonne Ström.

⁵¹⁹ Author unknown, *Sosialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille*, Satakunnan työ, June 17 1994.

work with ideals that are officially approved”,⁵²⁰ which is, according to the author, the socialist realism style. What is insinuated is that the Chinese government makes it hard for the artists to express themselves freely and to follow their own path. Therefore, according to the article, the artists often choose the easy way out by expressing themselves through the officially approved socialist realist style. This however does not seem to be completely true, especially in the case of the overseas artists that participated in *Out of the Centre*.

The author then writes that the artists have become Chinese avant-garde artists because the Chinese socialist realism style is like a “pack of wolfs, growing all the time in China and outside of it”.⁵²¹ According to the writer, the way of the avant-garde is “easier”, i.e., less competitive. This is quite questionable and is a risky statement to make. Many Chinese avant-garde artists have chosen this style, not because the socialist realism style is too “overcrowded” or because there is too much competition, but in order to express what they believe in and because the avant-garde represents a movement which searches for new possibilities within Euroamerican as well as Chinese art.

According to the article, the goal of the artists that participated in the *Out of the Centre* exhibition was to “totally renew the art and update it as part of the international contemporary art development.”⁵²² In a way, it seems that the author has here partly comprehended the message of the exhibition: to portray Chinese experimental art as part of the international art scene, and not as the exotic *Chinese* artists within a Euroamerican context.

What is particularly illustrative is the last paragraph of the article in which is written: “[The artworks at the Pori Art Museum] are not representative of the colour-rich and exotic ornaments, or even pop-art set out in the spirit of social criticism. The artworks of the five artists revolve around a sad, dark and grey scenery- scenery where the repressed rage is smouldering under the surface.”⁵²³ First of all, the impression that the author has of Chinese experimental art as being colourful and exotic (he even mentions the “pop-art set out”) might be a consequence of the impression that he obtained from the Venice

⁵²⁰ Author unknown, *Sosialistisesta realismista hämärän rajamaille*, Satakunnan työ, June 17 1994.

⁵²¹ Ibidem.

⁵²² Ibidem.

⁵²³ Ibidem.

Biennale of 1993. This is an illustration of how the Political Pop and Cynical Realism styles that were there displayed seems to have hugely influenced the Euroamerican art critics' image of Chinese experimental art. This becomes particularly clear in this fragment. It seems as if the author is insinuating that Chinese experimental art *should* be colourful and "pop". When this was not the case, the author then describes the artworks on display as "sad, dark and grey". Then, the author attributes a political, dissident character to the artworks on display by mentioning that they are "smouldering under the surface", a consequence of the "repressed rage" of the artists. Yet, this is not at all the message that these works tried to transmit. It appears that the author has not understood at all what the main message of the exposition was: to question centre and periphery and to elaborate further on the in-between concept. The article is entirely focused on Chinese art as a political way of expressing discontentment with the socialist communist regime. Especially this last phrase is very representative of the tone that is set in the review. What this smouldering rage consists of is not clear and is not explained by the author. However, the exhibition was not about rage, the contrary, it was about the search for new spaces, about hybridity and the acceptance of an alternative system which is not the centre-periphery model.

Yet the question remains, why has the author not captured the concepts of the in-between and the aim of the exhibition to question centre and periphery when the exhibition catalogue speaks about it so extensively? No answer is given within his review, however the fact that the in-between space and the aim of the exhibition are omitted by the reviewer could be a sign of the Eurocentric or "west"-centric vision that still seemed to dominate Euroamerican art critics in the early 1990s. Again, remembering Karen Smith's comment made in her article *China Rising*⁵²⁴ that was published in 2007, in the early 1990s it was still too early for a "western" audience to appreciate the value of Chinese experimental art within the international contemporary art market.

⁵²⁴ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, Volume XII, issue II, quarter II. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html Date of last consultation: 03/07/2014.

4.4 Conclusions on *Out of the Centre*

Even though the exhibition catalogue does not mention these factors, *Out of the Centre* should be seen in its context. 1994 was the year after the 45th Venice Biennale which hugely influenced the image of Chinese experimental art by portraying Political Pop and Cynical Realism as references of this art current. The fact that these styles then became so successful within the international art scene only “made things worse” and hugely compromised Chinese experimental art that had to then start to live up to the Euroamerican expectations. An example of this was the review analysed in paragraph 4.4 in which the works on display were described as “sad and grey”, as they did not live up to the “colour rich” works of the Political Pop Style.

Moreover, it should be taken into account that 1994 was also the year in which Homi Bhabha’s book *The Location of Culture* was published. Within this book, the author addresses the alternative, hybrid spaces and coins the concept of third space. Hou Hanru, who was already interested in these alternative spaces (as becomes clear in his essay within the *Silent Energy* catalogue of 1993),⁵²⁵ most probably was influenced by this book as he mentions Homi Bhabha several times within the catalogue. Maybe also as a consequence of the Venice Biennale the year before, Hou Hanru and Jari Pekka-Vanhala wanted to offer a different image of Chinese experimental art that goes beyond the stereotypical Political Pop and Cynical Realism styles. They tried to show that Chinese experimental art is an international, independent art and that Political Pop and Cynical Realism are not the main references for this art current.

Out of the Centre is the first exhibition of this dissertation which extensively addresses the in-between. A lot of concepts related to the third-space are mentioned, such as the in-between, the beyond, new spaces, de-identification, etc. Yet the third-space concept is not mentioned anywhere in the catalogue, which in fact is rather strange as Hou Hanru does mention Homi Bhabha on several occasions within his essay. Yet, it could be stated that this catalogue clearly shows the first signs of the commencement of an alternative model to the “East-West” dichotomy. It is one of the first exhibitions that openly questioned the validity of the centre-periphery model, and it is also one of the first exhibitions to portray the overseas artists as active figures within the establishment of these alternative spaces.

⁵²⁵ See chapter 2 of Block II.

In general, the essays of both curators that were included in the exhibition catalogue are very interesting and give new insights into the “East-West” dichotomy and the concepts of centre and periphery. However, certain aspects are, remarkably, not mentioned in these texts. It is rather strange that the artworks that were on display at the *Out of the Centre* survey are not commented on by Hou Hanru’s essay. Instead, other works of the artists are described and colour plates of these are included within the catalogue. Could it have been due to the fact that the curators did not yet know the artworks when they wrote their catalogue essays? As mentioned before, the works were especially made for the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. The texts of the catalogue might have been prepared well before the curators knew what the creations of the artists would be.

It should be said that the artworks on display made by Chen Zhen, Huang Yongping and Yang Jiechang all reflect upon the main theme of the exhibition: the centre-periphery model. In this sense, they are “well-chosen”, to use the words of the curator Jari-Pekka Vanhala. However, it is not very clear why the portraits of Yan Pei Ming have been included in this exposition, as they do not really address these topics.

The exhibition’s intention seems rather ambitious and counter-current: trying to question and “put the centre in exile”. Yet, the fact that “East-West”, centre-periphery dichotomies are questioned and analysed in this survey is highly appropriate for its time. The survey was held in 1994, this was already a time of globalization and mobilization of people. The Chinese overseas artists that moved to Euroamerica mainly did so in the late 1980s, early 1990s. Therefore, most of them had been living in the United States or Europe for several years when the exhibition was held. Chen Zhen, Huang Yongping, Yang Jiechang and Hou Hanru all lived in France at that time. Why it has been decided to exclude other Chinese overseas artists such as Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, who live in the United States, is not known. Also, it should also not be forgotten that the fifth participating artist was Zhang Peili. He was not an overseas artist at the time *Out of the Centre* was organized. Why was he included within a survey centred on the overseas artists and the in-between?

It is also disappointing, yet significant, that it has not been possible to find more than two reviews about the exhibition. As mentioned previously, *Out of the Centre* is one of the first exhibitions to extensively address the in-between and other concepts that can easily be related to the third-space concept. It would have been interesting to find out if other reviews *did* talk about the concept or mentioned it in their articles.

The reason for the lack of reviews and articles about the survey is unknown. It does however remind of other exhibitions such as *Chine demain pour hier*⁵²⁶ and *Fragmented Memory*⁵²⁷ that were also held in rather peripheral locations and that did not have a lot of impact on the media. Maybe due to the fact that the exposition was held in Finland, it remained rather unknown and not much has been said about it. This is rather ironic, as the main subject of *Out of the Centre* was the centre-periphery dichotomy. Could it be that the exposition was “silenced” as it was held in a peripheral country? This would be the confirmation that Euroamerica, the centre, and the dichotomy between “East and West”, centre and periphery is kept in place and is still valid, at least at the time of the exposition in 1994. It is significant though that the Pori Art Museum had kept only one review of the survey in their archives. This seems to point to the fact that no more reviews were written about the survey.

Coming back to the reviews that could be traced on this survey, in general, it could be said that Evelyne Jouanno has understood the aims of the exposition and has been able to transmit its main message within her article. This most probably was due to the fact that she is the wife of Hou Hanru and therefore might have had “inside information” on the exhibition. Being a curator as well, it would be assumable that she shared ideas on the *Out of the Centre* exhibition with her husband Hou Hanru and that he personally explained what his aims and initiatives were for the exhibition. Evelyne Jouanno might have been biased by her position when she called the exposition successful, a statement that could be strongly questioned. Maybe the goals of the curators have been met, but if there is no impact, how can an exposition be considered successful?

The review written for the Finnish local newspaper is completely different and attributes a strong political character to the *Out of the Centre* exhibition. This is completely out of context, as the exhibition does not address political topics. The author of the article did not capture at all what the exposition was about and does not mention the centre-periphery dichotomy anywhere in the article. The tekst speaks of the Chinese experimental artists as artists who have chosen the path of the avant-garde art due to the high competition that exists within the socialist realism style: a style which was very common in the times of Mao, but which had become quite out-dated in the 1990s. In 1994, the socialist realism style was no longer the main style of the Chinese artists. It is as if the author bases the

⁵²⁶ See chapter 1 of Block II.

⁵²⁷ See chapter 3 of Block II.

information on the times of Mao and the art currents that were valid at that time. Then the artworks on display are put within a political frame by mentioning that they are smouldering under the surface due to the repressed rage of the artists. The review then also mentions that the works on display were sad and grey, quite the contrary of the colourful Political Pop works with which the author seemed more familiar with, like so many other Euroamerican art critics.

In conclusion, only two reviews could be traced for this analysis. Considering the fact that one of them was of rather poor quality and gives an erroneous image of the exhibition as well as Chinese experimental art, the results are even more poignant. This is a pity as *Out of the Centre* was a revolutionary exhibition that was one of the first to question “west-centric” hegemony and the centre-periphery model. The fact that it did not generate repercussions in the art world is disappointing however it could also be a sign of the Euroamerican necessity to maintain its hegemonic power and to ignore all proposals of alternative models. *Out of the Centre* could be seen as a counter act of the Venice Biennale of 1993 that presented Chinese experimental art in its most stereotypical way. The artists selected for this survey were all well-known, and the aim of the survey was ambitious but also highly necessary within a global context. Yet, for this show to have effectively neutralized the Venice Biennale, Pori might have been a little too much out of the centre.

5. HEART OF DARKNESS (1995)

5.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Heart of Darkness was held at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterloo, Holland from December 18th 1994 until March 27th 1995. The museum is well known and can be added to the list of the main museums of the Netherlands. In 2011 it received approximately three hundred thousand national as well as international visitors.⁵²⁸ The museum focuses mainly on art from the 19th and 20th century and is famous for its extensive collection of Vincent van Gogh paintings, this artist being the favorite painter of Helene Kröller, founder of the museum. In her lifetime, she purchased ninety-one paintings of the artist and one hundred seventy-five works on paper. Her dream was to build a museum, the “Great Museum” as she called it, for her collection and in 1920, the Belgian architect Henry van de Velde started the construction that would become the museum on the Veluwe.⁵²⁹ The construction lasted for six years until the economic recession of the 1930s called the whole process to a stop.

Helene Kröller-Müller was the wife of Anton Müller who established a trading company, the WM. H. Müller shipping corporation in Rotterdam in 1878, which grew out to be one of the biggest in Holland.⁵³⁰ In 1935, the economic recess hit hard on the business of the Müllers and the collection of Helene Kröller was in danger. She offered her collection to the Dutch State, the condition being that it should be displayed in a building specially built for the purpose of showing the works to the public. The project of the Great Museum that was initiated in 1920 was never finished. Instead, the construction of a smaller museum was started in 1935, with help from the Dutch government. This museum was initially called the “Transition Museum” as the idea was to finish the “Great Museum” over time, which never happened. In 1938 the museum was opened to display the enormous private collection of Helene Kröller-Müller, which consisted of over 11,500 works. Helene Kröller became the first director of the Kröller-Müller museum until her demise, one year after the opening, in 1939.

⁵²⁸ See the article from the newspaper *Trouw*, one of the main newspapers of the Netherlands. The article is in Dutch: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/3098909/2011/12/30/Ook-Kroller-Muller-trekt-meer-bezoekers.dhtml>. Date of consultation: 12/10/2012.

⁵²⁹ A natural park which lies in the centre-east of the Netherlands.

⁵³⁰ The Müller Shipping Company currently still exists but has been taken over and is no longer in the hands of the Müller family.

The museum has undergone various expansions since its inauguration. In 1961 a large sculpture garden was opened with works from, among many others, Rodin and posteriorly Christo. The sculpture garden, as has happened with the museum, has continued expanding over the years and is now one of the biggest in Europe. From 1970 until 1977 a new wing was attached to the building as the original space was lacking in technical facilities as well as surface. An enormously big sculpture gallery that can absorb extremely large sculptures characterizes this new area, as well as the long corridors of glass windows which permit the building to become one with its woodland surroundings. The museum is located within a natural park called the Veluwe, which lies more or less in the centre of Holland. The museum can only be reached by foot or by any of the “white bicycles” that are put at the disposition of the visitors free of charge. These are not only meant for the visitors of the museum but also for those who wish to visit the natural park.

Helene Kröller-Müller, herself a fervent art lover, expressed her opinion on modern art in the book *Observations on Issues in the Development of Modern Painting*⁵³¹ that was published privately in 1925. A significant quote is the following in which she writes: “Part of the intention of forming this collection was to show - to prove - that abstract art is not something insurmountable but that it has always existed. That is why you find new and older works here side by side. I meant to use the old to support the right of the new to exist.”⁵³² This is an interesting fragment as it demonstrates the receptivity towards modern art and Helene’s open-mindedness towards abstract art. Although the exposition of *Heart of Darkness* was held sixty-one years later, it does seem like the Kröller-Müller museum was an appropriate museum for this survey and that the legacy of Helene Kröller and her disposition towards “new art” has been honoured during all these years after her passing. This is a fragment worth keeping in mind as the artworks that were displayed at the exhibition were put side by side with the permanent collection of the museum, which consists of older works.

Marianne Brouwer (1942), the curator of *Heart of Darkness*, is a Dutch curator and an art critic. In 2010 she became the director of the Stedelijk Museum Zwolle⁵³³ where she also

⁵³¹ *Beschouwingen over de problemen in de ontwikkeling der moderne kunst*. Privately published by Helene Kröller-Müller.

⁵³² See the Kröller-Müller webpage: <http://www.kmm.nl/page/52/The-dream-a-museum>, n.d., date of last consultation 11/11/2012.

⁵³³ The Stedelijk Museum Zwolle received around 36,000 visitors in 2011. See the annual report at: http://www.google.es/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCUQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.stedelijkmuseumzwolle.nl%2Fcms%2Fimages%2Fstories%2Factiviteiten%2Fjaarverslag_van_2011_april_2012_klein.pdf&ei=90d4

worked as a curator. She also teaches modern history at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Together with Chris Driessen,⁵³⁴ she organized the survey on Chinese experimental art titled *Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties* that was held in 1997 in the exhibition hall Chassé Kazerne⁵³⁵ in Breda.

In the introduction of the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, Marianne Brouwer, the curator of the survey, gives a brief description of the museum:

The Kröller-Müller Museum is a national museum of modern art situated in a natural park. Its whole ideology, its collections, its grounds and its architecture are rooted in a philosophy of a contrasting harmony of Art and Nature. Art, you are made to feel, is timeless and universal here and every visitor is a pilgrim. Not so widely known is the presence here of a third party: the Dutch army. All around the park is army territory. On most days of the week you hear the sounds of heavy and lighter artillery from the shooting range two villages away. Platoons of soldiers wearing camouflage march along the country roads; there are sudden concentrated movements of tanks and jeeps, making you feel that you are caught in the middle of a never-ceasing spooky war.⁵³⁶

Thirty-seven artists from all over the world participated in the exhibition of *Heart of Darkness*, of which four were overseas Chinese artists. These were: Cai Guoqiang, Gu Wenda, Huang Yongping and Chen Zhen. The works that they presented at the exhibition were all sight specific:

- Cai Guo-Qiang: *Project for extra-terrestrials no. 23: Myth – Shooting the Suns*, (1994)
 Internal and External Universe: Water Wood Metal Firth Earth (1994)
 Internal and External Universe: Poison and Antidote (1994)
 Internal and External Universe: Fire (1994)
- Chen Zhen: *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26)
- Gu Wenda: *United Nations, Dutch Monument: V.O.C. – W.I.C.* (1994)
 (Fig. 27)

[UPWDOc-Thgf4z4DAAg&usg=AFQjCNFr42U8Gj5wwuT11-be2x67z4SsOA](https://www.km.nl/en/annual-report-2011-2012). Annual report of 2011-2012. Date of consultation: 12/10/2012.

⁵³⁴ Chris Driessen edited the exhibition catalogue of *Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties* which was published with Fundament Foundation.

⁵³⁵ A gallery which is situated within old military barracks.

⁵³⁶ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of darkness*, p. 14. Translations by the author of this dissertation.

Huang Yongping: *Preliminary drawing for The Overturned Tomb* (1994)
The Overturned Tomb (1994) (Fig. 29)

The thirty-seven artists that took part in the exposition were all foreigners, coming from various countries such as Switzerland, Lebanon, and the United States among many others. The works on display were mostly installations of a rather ephemeral character, which were especially made for the survey. One of these ephemeral works, for example, was the “upside down” trees of Cai Guoqiang’s firework creation titled *Shooting the Suns* (1994). Other works with a more permanent character were included within the museum’s collection after the exhibition was completed, as happened with Chen Zhen’s *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26). The Kröller-Müller museum is always looking to update its collection in order to keep up with the dynamics of contemporary culture. This is sometimes conflictive as it is also the museum’s aim to preserve older artworks of their permanent collection. This is one of the reasons why the permanent collection is often displayed together with the works of temporal exhibitions, as was the case with *Heart of Darkness*.

The works that were displayed at *Heart of Darkness* were often created with help and (financial support) of sponsors that came from the private sector as well as individual art lovers. Every artist’s work counted on its own list of supporters, which can be consulted within the exhibition catalogue. For example, for Gu Wenda’s *United Nations Series: Dutch Monument: V.O.C. – W.I.C.* (1994) (Fig. 27), thirteen Dutch hair salons collaborated to collect human hair in order to make this creation possible. Other institutions sponsored the publishing of the exhibition catalogue or other (technical) aspects of the exposition.

Lastly, *Heart of Darkness* coincides with the title of one of Joseph Conrad’s most famous novellas that was published for the first time in 1899. The short story is about a trip up the Congo River and exposes the dark sides of colonialism, in this case the Belgian colonisation of Congo and the search for ivory. Joseph Conrad was born in Poland but adopted the English language for his writing. He himself was a sailor and in 1890 was sent to Congo, which experience served for the book that he would write nine years later. It is important to highlight the fact that the exposition was named after the book. The reason for this appears in the introduction written by Marianne Brouwer in which she mentions: “As the title to this exhibition *Heart of Darkness* is a question mark in space, representing a territory in Western thought from which, were we to enter it, we might, like

Kurtz⁵³⁷ at the end of his life, recoil in horror.”⁵³⁸ Marianne Brouwer does not clarify what she means by “horror” yet it could point to the various dark periods of Euroamerican history, such as the First and Second World War, the colonial times, etc. The title of the exhibition, which coincides with Joseph Conrad’s novella in which he speaks honestly and critically of the Belgian colonisation of Congo seems to symbolize the “horrors” of the European colonial past that has also taken place in many other nations. This might have been what Marianne Brouwer was referring to within the above-mentioned fragment. Also, as explained in the introduction to Block II, it should also be remembered that at the time of *Heart of Darkness* the Netherlands were completely involved in the war in Bosnia. This particular period would eventually become one of the darkest episodes of Dutch history.

⁵³⁷ Kurtz is the name of the protagonist of the novel *Heart of Darkness*.

⁵³⁸ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

5.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was published by the Kröller-Müller museum for the occasion in 1994 and is written entirely in English. It is an extensive catalogue of two hundred two pages that includes texts as well as colour plates of the works on display.

In total, there are seven essays published within the catalogue whose authors come from different cultural and professional backgrounds: Marianne Brouwer, the curator of the show; Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literature theorist who became well-known for his book *Orientalism* published in 1978 in which he explores the “western” image of the “Orient”; Hou Hanru,⁵³⁹ a well-known Chinese experimental art expert, curator and critic; Youssef Ishaghpour, an Iranian-French author who wrote essays about painting, literature, philosophy and cinema; David Elliott,⁵⁴⁰ a British-born art curator and expert on modern and contemporary art; Remo Guidieri, teacher of anthropology and aesthetics at the University of Sorbonne, Paris, curator and author of various books related to art and anthropology; Corinne Diserens, curator at IVAM⁵⁴¹ Valencia, freelance curator and founder of the editorial Carta Blanca Editions, Director of the Museum of Marseille, then of the Fine Arts Museum of Nantes, and also Director of the museum Museion in Bolzano.⁵⁴² The catalogue also includes biographies of the artists that participated in the survey.

The first text that appears in the exhibition catalogue is the introduction written by the curator of the exhibition Marianne Brouwer. The introduction starts out with a quote: “As long as I have not gained this freedom of spirit then my home is on the street. For anyone who deliberately takes the road of exile there is no end.”⁵⁴³

The word that should be highlighted here is “exile”, which, as shall become clear, is one of the main themes of Marianne Brouwer’s essay, as well as one of the central topics of the

⁵³⁹ Hou Hanru was also the curator of *Out of the Centre* (see chapter 4 of Block II), *Cities on the Move* (chapter 7 of Block II), and *Paris pour Escal* (chapter 9 of Block II). He also wrote an essay for the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy* (see chapter 2 of Block II) and *Paris-Pékin* (chapter 10 of Block II)

⁵⁴⁰ David Elliott was the curator of the exhibition *Silent Energy* (see chapter 2 of Block II).

⁵⁴¹ Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (Valencian Institute of Modern Art).

⁵⁴² In 2008 Diserens was dismissed as the head of the Museion museum because, as is suspected, she defied the Pope by refusing to remove a painting made by the German artist Martin Kippenberger. The painting was considered blasphemous as it consisted of an enormous wooden sculpture of a green frog nailed to a cross, in one hand holding a mug of beer and in the other an egg.

⁵⁴³ Quote taken from Duo Duo, “*Thuis*” (Home), NRC Handelsblad, Cultureel Supplement, December 30, 1994, p. 4. The NRC Handelsblad is one of the main newspapers in Holland.

exhibition catalogue. It is as the curator mentions: “the issues today are alienation, war, exiles within exile. It therefore seemed vital to raise the issue of these two forms of exile - the literal one and that of ‘inner exile’ in a single exhibition.”⁵⁴⁴ The concept of “inner exile” could point to a loss of identity within oneself due to the situation of being in exile. As mentioned in paragraph 2.1 of the theoretic part, the strict sense of the word “exile” is when one is forced to leave one’s (home) country due to circumstances that are often provoked outside of one’s own will. Yet, this is “outer” exile and implies, basically, a geographical move. Here, Marianne Brouwer speaks of “inner exile”: the feeling when one has become estranged from oneself. This feeling can be the result of “external” exile yet a geographical move is not necessarily essential. An example of inner exile could be the Chinese artists of this study: they no longer feel Chinese nor do they feel European or American, their identity is no longer clear (due to their “exile”). They have become, as it were, inner exiles: they do not feel like they belong geographically, which makes them feel estranged towards themselves as they have lost the sense of identity. They have become, as Homi Bhabha has coined the “unhomely”.⁵⁴⁵ By the concept “exile within exile”, the curator is referring to the feeling of being a stranger to oneself.

Coming back to the meaning of the title of *Heart of Darkness*, as mentioned in paragraph 5.1, Marianne Brouwer explains: “As the title to this exhibition Heart of Darkness is a question mark in space, representing a territory in Western thought from which, were we to enter it, we might, like Kurtz at the end of his life, recoil in horror.” Which territory in “western” thought is it that makes us recoil in horror? The following quote might shine a light on this statement. According to Brouwer, the “western” Enlightenment “radiates disaster triumphant” and is “totalitarian”. It is as she says:

Since the aim of Enlightenment is the domination over all that is considered nature, our society is based on the paranoia of the split subject. For we are both civilized and barbaric as we watch ourselves as though from the outside; moral and ethical values have to be created through taming the savage within a process which we identify with the history of progress and modernity. At the same time, we must fear our own minds; madness and murder may be the final consequences of every initiative of the unrestrained or unrestricted free will.⁵⁴⁶

In this section of her introduction, Brouwer quotes Adorno and Horkheimer who wrote the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which was published in 1944. They wrote this text from their exile in the United States. Their theory is of course much more elaborated but to

⁵⁴⁴ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 16.

⁵⁴⁵ See paragraph 2.4 of the theoretic part.

⁵⁴⁶ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

make a brief and very over-simplified summary, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the Enlightenment as the desire to dominate nature and the Other. This might result in totalitarian ideologies, which then are employed as instruments of control. An example of this is the concept of race, which was used especially in the Nazi period as an instrument for separation and to create hierarchically subdivided societies. According to Horkheim and Adorno, totalitarianism finds its origin in modern society and is one of the main reasons for the appearance of fascism. It seems thus that Marianne Brouwer, within her essay, is pointing to the darker sides of European and American history.

Again, it should also be mentioned here that in 1995 the Netherlands were involved within the war in Bosnia which lasted from 1991 until 1995. The implication in this war has become one of the darkest periods of Dutch history, as the Dutch UN soldiers did not intervene in what would later be called the Srebrenica massacre, also known as the Srebrenica genocide. In July 1995 more than eight thousand Muslim Bosniaks, mainly men and boys from the town of Srebrenica who were supposedly protected by the Dutch UN soldiers were deported by the units of the Serbian army under the command of General Ratko Mladić to never come back. The Secretary-General of the United Nations posteriorly described this genocide as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War. Even though the genocide did not take place when *Heart of Darkness* was on display, the war in Bosnia did affect the Dutch population due to its involvement. In a certain way, this dark totalitarianism of which Marianne Browuer speaks within her essay could be seen as somewhat of a premonition of the events that would take place four months later.

Brouwer then moves on to “western” imperialism and colonization and applies these concepts to the arts:

In every epoch Western art has assimilated “outside” influences. Not only that, but art in the West as a whole has come to be seen as a manifestation of “otherness”, at best serving as a reflection of our alienated consciousness. From this perspective a modern art emerging in a “Third World” or “primitive” context comprises a double “otherness”. How then – given this state of alienation – can we possibly see the “other” except as a projection of our lost selves, whether good or bad? Primitivism is a Western invention, which we celebrate in the art of the colonized, the savage, the other.⁵⁴⁷

This fragment mentions that “western” art has assimilated “outside” influences in every epoch. It is a recurrent topic within this dissertation that Chinese experimental art has been compared to Euroamerican art currents and artworks. In many reviews, Chinese

⁵⁴⁷ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

experimental artworks have been interpreted and understood from a Euroamerican point of view.⁵⁴⁸ Here, however, the opposite is said and Marianne Brouwer addresses the fact that Euroamerican art has always been influenced by outside influences however, she also mentions that the “West” has always seen non-Euroamerican art as the Other and has treated it as such.

Another significant comment is that, according to Brouwer, Primitivism is a “western” invention. This reminds strongly of Edward Said’s theory, in which he states that Orientalism and the Orient are “western” inventions and consist of a certain image that the “Occident” has about the “East”, which is based on a romanticized, exotic depiction of the “Orient”. Chinese experimental artists have on occasions addressed the fact that Euroamerica, and specifically the Euroamerican art market, sometimes perceives and promotes Chinese experimental art as exotic; this in order to make it more interesting or more attractive for the audience and the art collector.⁵⁴⁹ An example of this exoticism is the dissident character or the political context that has been attributed to this type of art in certain reviews analysed in this thesis. Marianne Brouwer mentions “how can we possibly see the other except as a projection of our lost selves”. Maybe this is why “foreign” (non-Euroamerican art) is often perceived as exotic or primitive: the lost self as a romantic idea, an unachievable and far away desire.

The curator then talks about the aim of the exhibition *Heart of Darkness* and writes:

Heart of Darkness was not intended to be incorporated within a Western system of representation that would reveal it as Other. It was designed to take over the museum and make visible what the current debate about global art and cultural identities carefully conceals a priori. Enter this exhibition by way of Modernism. Not from the ethnic perspective, nor from that of the incomprehensible Other, but from that of contemporary politics and economics.⁵⁵⁰

A page later she adds: “Enter this exhibition from another route. The part of treason. The compelling need to get under their skin. To unstring that lyre and make it sound like screams of pain, because that is what I hear in my inner ear. To make a space for the unheard, the unheard of.”⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁸ See also paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

⁵⁴⁹ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

⁵⁵⁰ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

⁵⁵¹ Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

Marianne Brouwer does not mention what it is that the current debate about global art and cultural identities carefully conceals. Does she mean Euroamerican hegemony? Does she mean the Euroamerican desire to portray the Other as exotic? The second fragment, which adds new information to the first part about the intentions of the survey, does clarify somewhat the opinion of the curator. It seems that she herself feels that there is no space for the Other, that non-Euroamerican art is being silenced or ignored. They are, as she says, the unheard. This thought fits perfectly in the time of the 1990s in which post-colonial studies that indicated an interest in the Other as an equal were in the upcoming. It seems thus that one of the objectives of the curator is to portray these “unheard” artists, not as ethnic Others, but as artists who illustrate and provide new insights in contemporary economics and politics through their art.

Later on in her introduction, Brouwer returns to the subject of “western” hegemony and now clearly states her opinion:

Perhaps the choice to locate the subject of fear right here, right inside the museum might alleviate something; the colonization of history, of artistic creation, the cultural hegemony of the nation-state, through a certain perversion of that image. The museum itself provides the precise mapping of that hegemony.

When the curator speaks about “the subject of fear”, it might be that she is talking about the fear of the Other, although she does not specifically mention this in her introduction. The curator states that by putting the “subject of fear”, that may well be the Other, right in the museum, this might alleviate something. It is not clear what she means by this statement but maybe she implies that it will tear down the stereotypes created by, for example, the cultural hegemony of the nation-state. This again seems to coincide with Edward Said’s essay, which shall be analysed further on in this paragraph. In this essay, Edward Said mentions that nations feel “safe” and protected when there is a strong sense of nationalism, or national identity. Anything or anybody who does not share this national identity or feeling of nationalism is then characterized as the Other, and can also be seen as “wrong”, “different” and even as a threat. This seems to be quite similar to what Marianne Brouwer writes when she speaks about the “subject of fear”. Museums sometimes function in a similar way and often define what is “own” and what is the Other. Euroamerican art is often seen as national, as own, whereas artists and art styles that come from non-Euroamerican nations are often seen as exotic or sometimes, primitive. In some cases this results in the consideration that “foreign” art, or the art of the Other is

inferior, which manifests itself in the Euroamerican hegemony of which the curator speaks in this above mentioned fragment.

In the last part of her text, Marianne Brouwer comments on the works of some of the participating artists. Three of the artists on which she elaborates within her essay are overseas artists, respectively Chen Zhen, Cai Guoqiang and Huang Yongping. About Cai Guo Qiang she mentions: “Cai Guo Qiang’s installations and gunpowder projects, initially inspired by the fact that as a child he lived close to an army shooting range, presented Taoist recipes for healing a time that is out of joint.”⁵⁵²

About Chen Zhen, she mentions:

To a Western audience the significance of the megaphones which Chen Zen attached to the Chinese bell is almost unimaginable. Formerly omnipresent in socialist countries, megaphones like these broadcasted the latest party speeches, the most recent doctrines nonstop, dictating the behaviours of every inhabitant, terrorizing even his subconscious. The bell stood in the silent dark of the former auditorium, partly hidden from sight by curtains, as if only waiting for someone to strike it so that its megaphones could start booming again.⁵⁵³

About Huang Yongping’s work:

Huang Yong Ping forced the museum to repeat an act that had been perpetrated countless times by Western colonizers: that of desecrating a Chinese tomb in order to rob it of its treasures. This was one of the most unforgettable moments of *Heart of Darkness*: the Tang tomb unveiled for the first time lying silent and majestic, barely visible in the blue light of the hour before dawn. Through the winter night the cranes came rolling in from the forest with a ferocious rumble, their headlights blazing, and as the tomb was turned over and the burial chambers were exposed, we witnessed its violation.⁵⁵⁴

More shall be said about these works in the following paragraph in which the artworks that were on display shall be analysed.

Although Marianne Brouwer does not mention the third space, she does mention the overseas artists as well as certain concepts that are narrowly related to the third space such as exile and lingua franca. At the end of her introduction she concludes:

A contemporary art is being born everywhere, one that uses radical modern art forms: video, performance and installation as its lingua franca. An art that teaches itself to be bi- or even trilingual and where the notion of any homecoming has been abandoned. (...) [T]he issues today are alienation, war, exiles within exile. It therefore seemed vital to raise the issue of these two forms of

⁵⁵² Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

⁵⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

exile – the literal one and that of ‘inner exile’ in a single exhibition. Seen from this perspective, the self-serving ‘deconstructionist’ theories of the postmodern age are nothing but a promotional manoeuvre. All they do is further a cliché of multiculturalism which is rapidly becoming part of the expanding art market. In Robert Smithson’s word: “art has been deprived of its time.” It continues to be deprived of its time by being condemned to more or less exotic objecthood.

The first concept that shall be commented on is “lingua franca”, which could be related to the third space. A lingua franca, sometimes also called vehicular language or bridge language, is a language employed to communicate between people who do not share the same mother tongue. Chinese experimental artists who live in the “West” are trying to get their message across in a “western” environment; to a Euroamerican audience or art world. In order to do so, they cannot use their mother tongue, which in this case would be Chinese, but have to adopt a lingua franca, which often is English or a symbolic language that manifests itself as a certain style, for example, the adoption of Euroamerican art styles or certain symbols that are familiar to the Euroamerican audience. An example of lingua franca might be the works of Gu Wenda who often uses “universal” materials within his installation works such as human hair, placenta powder and (menstrual) blood. He does so in order to connect directly with the audience, as all people can relate to this “universal” material.⁵⁵⁵ In this case, the material used within the artwork becomes the lingua franca. Another good example is Xu Bing’s *Book from the Ground* (2003-2012) (Fig. 5) in which he constructs a digital lingua franca, made out of symbols that are “universally” understood that permits individuals with different mother tongues to communicate with each other via a computer program.⁵⁵⁶

The second comment that shall be highlighted here is “the notion of any homecoming has been abandoned”. This reminds strongly of Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “unhomely”⁵⁵⁷ or “unhomeliness”, which is an individual who has been un-homed, which is not the same as being homeless. An example of the un-homed are the Chinese overseas artists who have chosen to leave their home country in order to have a better (or sometimes just different) life outside of the mainland.

⁵⁵⁵ See also chapter 2 and 3 of Block II.

⁵⁵⁶ See paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

The last remark that shall be commented on from this fragment is the phrase of Robert Smithson.⁵⁵⁸ Actually, the quote that is featured within Marianne Brouwer's essay is not entirely identical to the original. Robert Smithson mentioned: "For too long the artist has been estranged from his own 'time'. Critics, by focusing on the 'art object', deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter."⁵⁵⁹ Brouwer uses the quote in order to make her point that *art*, and not the artist, is being deprived of its time as it is turned into an exotic objecthood. What the curator seems to want to make clear is that by exoticizing the art of the Other, in this case non-Euroamerican art, the artwork is objectified and not understood and valued from within its own context. It is taken out of context and placed, as it were, outside of its own time.

The next essay is by Edward Said and is titled *Reflections on Exile*.⁵⁶⁰ It is an essay that has been written previous to the exhibition, in 1984, and that has been chosen by the curator Marianne Brouwer to be included within the exhibition catalogue. As the title indicates, the essay is entirely dedicated to the concept of exile and the artists who find themselves in exile, especially writers and poets. Said starts by writing:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever.⁵⁶¹

Within this same essay Said asks himself: "But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?"⁵⁶² Maybe, in modern culture, all people suffer from "exile". It is not necessary to be banned from one's own country to feel estranged from oneself. It is not unheard of anymore for one to feel lost, which can be caused by many reasons, not necessarily by moving to another country. Moreover, our times are characterized by mobility. Moving away to find happiness, or a job in another country other than our own is very frequent

⁵⁵⁸ Robert Smithson (1938) was an American artist who died at the age of 35. He coined the concepts of Land Art, also known as Earth Works, which employs natural materials and nature itself in artistic creations. The works are often placed within a landscape and left outside, this way exposed to natural erosion.

⁵⁵⁹ Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: the collected writings*, edited by Jack Flam, University of California Press, 1996, p. 111.

⁵⁶⁰ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*, first printed in *Granta*, vol. 13. 1984, p. 159-172.

⁵⁶¹ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 17.

⁵⁶² *Ibidem*.

nowadays. It is therefore easy to relate to the feeling of “exile”, which makes it a “potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture.”

Said then answers his own question by saying: “Exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism. On the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible.”⁵⁶³ The author mentions that the modern period is a time that has been “spiritually orphaned” and alienated. The exiles are a result of modern warfare, imperialism and quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers. How is it then, that the exiles are sometimes seen as an enrichment to culture, especially exiled artists? It seems that the author answers his question by saying that exile can never be enriching because it is caused by “inhumane” actions such as warfare. As Said continues:

Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelist, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals. Each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill. The exile’s new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction.⁵⁶⁴

And towards the end of the essay, he adds:

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.⁵⁶⁵

Although Said does not talk about the third space or the in-between, certain fragments of his essay can be related to these concepts and the overseas Chinese artists. When Said speaks of the exiles in terms of crossing borders and breaking barriers, this strongly reminds of the overseas artists that are trying to introduce alternative models and perceptions to the world. They are exiles that have become, to use Marianne Brouwer’s expression “inner exiles” as they have become hybrid and therefore can no longer identify with the strict separation of the “East-West” dichotomy. It is as Said mentions: “And just beyond the frontier between ‘us’ and the ‘outsider’ is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons.”⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 18.

⁵⁶⁴ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 24.

⁵⁶⁵ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 27.

⁵⁶⁶ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 20.

The author of the essay then continues by explaining certain characteristics of the exiles.

(...) the novel, a literary form created out of the unreality of ambition and fantasy, is *the* form of “transcendental homelessness”. Classical epics (...) emanate from settled cultures in which values are clear, identities stable, life unchanging. The European novel is grounded in precisely the opposite experience, that of a changing society in which an itinerant and disinherited middle-class hero or heroine seeks to construct a new world that somewhat resembles an old one left behind forever.⁵⁶⁷

This above-mentioned fragment by Edward Said is illustrative for the Chinese experimental artists, especially the overseas ones, as they often incorporate traditional elements of Chinese culture within their modern art creations. An example of this was the work *Internal and External Universe: Water Wood Metal Fire Earth* (1994), of Cai Guoqiang, which was on display at the *Heart of Darkness* survey. It consisted of a modern vending machine, but instead of selling the usual products such as cans of Coca-Cola or little bags of chips, it sold bottles filled with Chinese medicinal tonics meant for treating different kinds of illnesses. These could be bought by the visitors, as if it were a real vending machine. This is a good example of how the Chinese overseas artists, in some cases, try to incorporate elements of the “old world” that they left behind with their current situation.⁵⁶⁸

Another characteristic that Said mentions is:

No matter how well they may do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood. Anyone who is really homeless regards the habit of seeing estrangement in everything modern as an affection, a display of modish attitudes. Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong.

This usually translates into an intransigence that is not easily ignored. Wilfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision – which you make more unacceptable because you are in fact unwilling to have it accepted.⁵⁶⁹

This part of the essay can be related to the “dissident” or protest character that some Chinese experimental artworks display. The fact that Chinese experimental art is also seen as a suppressed art has become clear in various reviews analysed in the previous chapters. An example that could illustrate the above fragment is the overseas Chinese artist Huang Yongping. He is often “feared” among curators as well as colleague artists who expose in the same surveys as he, due to his artistic ideas and installations which

⁵⁶⁷ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 24.

⁵⁶⁸ See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁵⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 24-25

often occupy a lot of space and more than once affect and invade the (space) of the other works on display.⁵⁷⁰ Another example is the enormous panels of Gu Wenda with big characters made out of human hair. Or his other works that employ human blood, placenta or used tampons, clearly meant to break “western” taboos and that could be seen, as for example by the curator Julia F. Andrews, as shocking.⁵⁷¹

On the last page of his essay, Said mentions some positive aspects about being an exile:

While it perhaps seems peculiar to speak of the pleasures of exile, there are some positive things to be said for a few of its conditions. Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music- is contrapuntal.

For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring tighter contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be.

Although the third space is not mentioned at all in this quote, it does describe one of the characteristics that overseas artists who find themselves in the third space have: the double vision, or in-between position of their own background and their new environment. They dispose, to use the words of Edward Said, of “contrapuntal” vision. This contrapuntal position can often be found within their artworks in which they combine “East” with “West”, Chinese elements with Euroamerican aspects, although this is not always understood as such as has been seen in the reviews of the previous chapters.⁵⁷²

Although Said’s essay is about exiles, it is important to say that the Chinese overseas artists cannot be considered exiles⁵⁷³ in the strict sense of the word although many have described these artists as such.⁵⁷⁴ It is as Said comments in his essay:

⁵⁷⁰ See, for example, his work “Chinese Hand Laundry” that was specially made for the New York Museum in 1994. This work made it mandatory for all visitors to “get clean” by passing through a car wash tunnel in order to continue the visit and to see the other works that were also on display. Another example is his work *What should we prepare before going out of the centre?* that was shown in the exhibition *Out of the Centre* (see chapter 4 of Block II), at the Pori Art Museum. Here he created a network of ropes that bound all artworks on display (not necessarily his own) together, giving the impression that by pulling one end, all works could be hauled out of the museum by a single effort. Another example is *Imported Articles* (see chapter 6 of Block II) that was eventually cancelled due to its technical problems. It was Huang Yongping’s intention to “crash” into the roof of the Arts Santa Mònica building with a wooden ship, spilling wooden boxes all over the exhibition floor where the works of the other participating artists were also displayed.

⁵⁷¹ See chapter 3 of Block II.

⁵⁷² See paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

⁵⁷³ See paragraph 2.1 of Block I.

⁵⁷⁴ As has Hou Hanru in his book, *On the Mid-Ground*, Timezone 8, 2002.

Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, some distinctions can be made between exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word 'refugee' has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas 'exile' carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality.

Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. (...) Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions. Émigrés enjoy an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility.⁵⁷⁵

It should be added that not all Chinese overseas artists have left because they were exiled and most of them are not banned from their homeland forever but regularly go back to China. Many of the artists have returned to China in recent years or live in two places at the same time, in the "West" as well as in China, going back and forth on a regular basis. Therefore, maybe a more correct term to describe the overseas Chinese artists is not to "label" them as exiles, which does sound more interesting, but as émigré artists or expatriates. Or, as has been explained in chapter 2.2 of the theoretic part, to use the term transexperiences coined by the Chinese overseas artist Chen Zhen.

The next essay is written by Hou Hanru and could be seen as somewhat of a continuation of his exhibition *Out of the Centre* in which he emphasized concepts and ideas related to identity, de-identification, and the in-between spaces. Hou Hanru has appeared several times within previous chapters, therefore there shall be no further explanation on his background.⁵⁷⁶

The article is titled *A certain necessary perversion* and was written especially for the exhibition catalogue. The essay is about the concept of exile and the title remits to the fact that "feeling at home" is a way to feel secure, yet this is a necessary perversion because a stable (static) identity or a fixed home is, according to the author, quite an illusion.

Such a thing as a stable "identity" doesn't exist. If "identity" and identification with this "identity" are presumed to represent "home" in terms of human survival – which is where humanism that is an idealistic credo places all its hope – then this "home" does not actually exist in reality: we are condemned to exile from the very beginning of our lives.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 23-24.

⁵⁷⁶ See chapter 4 of Block II, and also the essay published by Hou Hanru in *Silent Energy*, chapter 2 of Block II.

⁵⁷⁷ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 30.

The author mentions that a stable identity and “home” does not exist. It is not clear where he gets this idea from: whether from Chinese tradition or Euroamerican culture. Hou Hanru starts his essay by commenting on his own experience as an exile. He was born in China but has been living as an “émigré”, as he himself writes, in the “West” for many years.⁵⁷⁸ According to him, this has obliged him “to deal with all kinds of pressures in everyday life”.⁵⁷⁹ Within his article, he explains how he tries to memorize his past and how it was to feel “at home” yet he cannot. As Hou says, a memory can be used in order to return “home” yet this memory is an illusion and it is not reality. The exile continues outside of his homeland and in some cases will never get the opportunity to ever go home: “Today, like many other “Chinese” people, I and all the other artists in this exhibition exist in a condition of genuine exile: we no longer live in our “Motherlands” but have scattered to every corner of the world – from the USA to Japan and from France to Australia...”⁵⁸⁰

Hou Hanru calls himself and the other artists of the exhibition “genuine exiles”. This does not coincide with the previous essay of Edward Said in which he comments on the distinction between exiles and, for example, expatriates or émigrés. Hou Hanru has gone back to China, for example when he curated *Shanghai Spirit* in 2000 at the Shanghai Biennale, and therefore cannot be considered, in the strict sense of the word, a “genuine” exile.

Hou Hanru then speaks of the time when he was still living in China. He refers to the period of the Cultural Revolution and speaks of an experience that he had one day in the cinema. Pictures of Deng Xiaoping visiting New York were shown on the big screen and he describes the amazement of the audience who were all in awe of the big skyscrapers of New York, which they had never seen before. Hou concludes this fragment by saying that “Freedom is condemned to be shouted out only in darkness”.⁵⁸¹ This comment shines a new light on the title of the exhibition: maybe the word “darkness” within the exhibition title refers to freedom? Is darkness the only place, for some people or nations, where freedom (of expression) can be articulated? This statement also seems to point to a sentiment of repression, or lack of freedom that the author of the essay experienced while

⁵⁷⁸ Hou Hanru left China in 1990 and has been living in France for 16 years. In 2006 he moved to the United States and in 2013 he has been appointed as the new artistic director of the MAXXI museum in Rome, Italy.

⁵⁷⁹ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 29.

⁵⁸⁰ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 30.

⁵⁸¹ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 32.

in China. This repression of freedom is also described by the curator Marianne Brouwer when she speaks about the “western” colonization and the effect that it had on the colonized nations and especially their people.

Hou Hanru then continues his essay by describing nationalism and nation–state ideologies. He says:

We continue to cherish the hope that by scrutinizing history and memory we will rediscover the “national spirit” and so find a way of “going home”. We pay a price here however, because in doing so we subordinate our imagination and creativity to the dictatorship of “a monolithic cultural image” as defined by the authorities. Is this price worth paying? The price we pay for going back “home” is that we give up our artistic freedom and in doing so we sanction a situation where everyone else loses their freedom too. Is “memory” still so desirable? Isn’t “exile” a more worthwhile way of life?⁵⁸²

Hou Hanru tries to demonstrate that a national spirit, or the feeling of belonging to a nation or national culture is induced in order for people to feel at home, to feel safe, yet this is a false feeling which is based on a “monolithic cultural image”. The cost of believing in nationalism or belonging to a nation-state is the loss of one’s own creativity and a submission to this “monolithic cultural image”. Again, this statement can be applied to the third space concept or the in-between. Nationalism has been widely accepted and a lot of people participate in nationalism, feeling proud of their own roots and feeling “at home” in their nation, identifying with their country and culture. The overseas artists, however, do not feel at home anywhere and do not have nationalistic feelings toward their homeland or to their new environment. What they are *searching* for is a new space, beyond the nation-state and beyond the separation of “East” and “West”: a place which lies in the in-between. Is it as Hou Hanru writes in the above-mentioned fragment: “Isn’t “exile” a more worthwhile way of life?”

Then, Hou Hanru elaborates more on the free choice of becoming an exile and not to succumb to the nation-state pressure but to go beyond it:

There is however another possibility: the pressure of an increasingly dominant “terrorism of the nation-state” makes us aware that we have to look for another way out if our lives are not to be subjected to this terror; we can in fact choose to distance ourselves from every “state culture” or “national culture”, finally going beyond their constraints both intellectually and physically. In a word, we can become “exiles”. (...)

It is more challenging however to think of “exile” in a different way. Many exiles no matter how different the level of freedom may be in their countries, are clearly conscious that “exile” is a choice for going beyond “culture of the nation-state” and is an ideal way of redefining their lives, thought and

⁵⁸² Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 33.

work. Their cultural, artistic and even political activities, while revealing their own cultural subjectivity, are not only objective critiques but also form the basis of proposals and projects for “alternative cultures”. (...) [T]he end result of this process is that they de-identify the established “identity”. Obviously, it is highly improbable that their actions will be tolerated by institutions and systems of discourse that are based on the legitimacy of “culture of the nation-state”, whether in a “free” society or in a totalitarian one.⁵⁸³

Again, although the author does not specifically mention that he is referring to the third space or the in-between, this fragment could be related to it quite easily, for example when Hou speaks about “alternative cultures” which are created by exiles who want to go beyond the culture of the nation-state. The fact that he believes that these alternative cultures are seen as a threat to the nation-state and therefore are not tolerated by institutions could be one of the reasons why the third space is not widely accepted and transmitted. Hou Hanru also mentions the concept of de-identifying, a concept which he also elaborated upon in the exhibition catalogue of *Out of the Centre* which he curated together with Jari-Pekka Vanhala.⁵⁸⁴ The process of de-identification seems to be part of the in-between or the third space. The Chinese experimental artists who decide to live outside of their homeland, at a certain point, will de-identify with feeling Chinese and will re-identify with the hybrid space that lies in between their past and present, between China and the “West”. Without de-identification, it is not possible to go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy. For it to become a reality, one has to first de-identify with belonging strictly to the “East” or the “West”: de-identification will lead to hybridity.

Hou then mentions the in-between:

The most challenging thing here is that the languages engendered by “de-identification” distinguish and distance themselves from the established “language of the “culture of the nation-state” by being impure, hybrid and fragmentary; they shift constantly and cannot be grasped or defined by the established cultural discourses that aim to achieve the utmost purity and to reveal the “universal truth” and which essentially are informed by the reason of the state. By developing such a language a new cultural context is created that forms an alternative to that of “culture of the nation-state”. It is, in Homi K. Bhabha’s terms, “the beyond or the “in-between”. (...)

In this new context, the “beyond/in-between” space, we are destined to live a kind of “unhomely” life, to use another term of Homi K. Bhabha.⁵⁸⁵ This expression is not the same as “homeless”; rather it means “the relocation of the home and the world”; it is also “the condition of extra-territorial and crosscultural initiations”. (...)

Opening up this “beyond/ in-between” space will promote cultural confrontations, contacts and crossings, facilitating the co-existence of cultural differences; this is indeed the final goal of many people’s decision to leave their “home” and to live in “exile”.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 35.

⁵⁸⁴ See chapter chapter 4 of Block II.

⁵⁸⁵ See chapter 2.4 of Block I.

⁵⁸⁶ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 35-36.

According to Hou, it is the goal of the exiles to open up these in-between spaces. This thought seems to be somewhat of a prolongation of what Hou Hanru tries to transmit in *Out of the Centre*.⁵⁸⁷ This is why certain overseas Chinese experimental artists have become pioneers in the creation of the third space by generating confrontation and cultural crossings through their work. One could think, for example, of the work of Gu Wenda which in some cases has addressed Euroamerican “taboo topics” such as his *Oedipus Refound Series* (1990-1993) (Fig. 11 and 18)⁵⁸⁸ or the work of Xu Bing that address “East-West” relations, such as *A Case Study of Transference*⁵⁸⁹ (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32). Hou also mentions why the works of the “exiles” sometimes lead to confrontation: there exists a certain resistance to the de-identification of the nation-state culture, as it is perceived as a threat that might undermine the (monolithic image of the) nation-state identity hereby destroying one’s illusion of feeling at “home”.

Hou then explains the situation of the Chinese experimental artists who have decided to become “exiles”:

No doubt many Chinese artists and intellectuals have chosen for “exile” fundamentally because the “culture of the nation-state” has gained absolute power in China (...). The only alternative, then, is probably to deconstruct this system of power and its cultural consciousness through going into “exile”, exterior or interior, and to turn this “exile” into a permanent critique of reality, proposing alternative ideas about cultural values. (...)

Certainly, in deciding to “leave home”, we have more or less assumed that “exile” to other countries, especially western countries which are relatively freer, would give us the possibility of a real “detachment” from the unsustainable “culture of the nation-state”. Today however having settled in these “foreign” countries (...) we begin to see the whole thing in a less optimistic but more realistic way. The “culture of the nation-state” in fact, exists everywhere in the West and the rationale of “national identity” and its maintenance by political power are largely taken for granted by most Westerners.

Let’s take an example. As “exiles” living in “other” countries, we are often obliged to be categorized as artists of “our” country in order to survive. Even though we would rather be “independent individuals”, most of us put up with the label “Chinese artists and critics” so as not to lose such limited possibilities as we have of working and exhibiting our work. This even becomes the condition of our daily life. Unconsciously, this sometimes makes us feel, pervertedly, “proud” of “our identity”; or, more exactly, it forces us to pretend that Chinese art is “first grade” although nobody can really say what “first grade” means in art.⁵⁹⁰

In paragraph 2.2 of the theoretic part, it has been explained that the overseas Chinese artists sometimes mix elements of China, which represents the past and the left behind homeland with “western” elements that represent their current situation of living outside of

⁵⁸⁷ Analysed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁸⁸ See chapter 2 on the exhibition of *Silent Energy*.

⁵⁸⁹ See chapter 6 on *Des del País del Centre* and chapter 3.3 of Block I.

⁵⁹⁰ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 37.

the mainland. This is an aspect of transexperience which is employed by these artists in order to get a sense of identity and belonging: it is a representation of their in-between situation in the midst of two cultures. In the previous essay by Edward Said, another explanation of this characteristic is given. According to the author, some artists incorporate elements of their “Motherland” in order to create a new world which resembles the one that they have left behind. Here, Hou Hanru points to the fact that Chinese elements are integrated within artworks in order to “survive” in the Euroamerican art market. Paragraph 3.3 of Block I of this dissertation has spoken about the term Chineseness and how some of the overseas experimental artists are sometimes “obliged” to adopt the identity of “Chinese” in order to gain exposure in the Euroamerican art world. Hou Hanru then explains that, as a result, some of the Chinese overseas artists then re-identify with being Chinese and even feel proud of it.⁵⁹¹ But this proudness, the identification with the Chinese nation-state is false and might come, again, from Euroamerica’s belief in the (importance of the) nation-state culture. Hou explains on the next page:

[I]t is actually the legacy of western culture and their faith in “national identity” that make Westerners expect the Chinese to behave like Chinese people all the time so that they can be “understood” and hence controlled. The cultural representational signs produced in this process are of course “simple”, “comprehensible”, “coherent”, free of contradictions and shifts; they present no threat to “culture of the nation-state”, let alone to any notions of “exoticism” or myths of a polarity of national inferiority/superiority and, more seriously, the political purposes that these fictions conceal. Such notions are revealed in an even more exaggerated form in narratives about the Chinese made by many Western authors.⁵⁹²

Hou illustrates his observation by mentioning the creation of Chinatowns in Euroamerican countries that seem to come directly out of a theme park. These Chinatowns are often stereotyped to satisfy the “western” image of a Chinatown and have nothing in common with real Chinese towns. However, for a Euroamerican, it lives up to the Euroamerican image of what a Chinatown should look like and therefore makes the foreignness of a Chinatown “familiar”. As a consequence, it becomes clear who the Other is which gives a sense of safety. When an overseas Chinese artist no longer demonstrates signs of his or her Chineseness, as is the case with the overseas artists that in most cases express a position of in-betweenness (hybridity) within their creation, problems arise. When the Chinese overseas artists can no longer be identified as “Chinese”, and therefore as the

⁵⁹¹ See again paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁵⁹² Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 38.

Other”,⁵⁹³ then the nation-state culture which consists of strictly definable identities that do not allow hybridity, is menaced. Here the need for Euroamerican culture to defend the purity of the nation-state culture, whether Euroamerican or Chinese, and to continue identifying Chinese overseas artists as “Chinese”. Examples of this have been seen in various reviews that have been analysed within this dissertation. Often, the works of the Chinese experimental artists are seen as exotic and are displayed through stereotypical Chinese elements, putting an emphasis on the history or the political context of China.

The conclusion of Hou’s essay shines a light on why the third space concept encounters so much difficulty in being understood and accepted:

It is true that people in general are not yet ready to see and accept the present reality that is produced by the dialectics between the insistence on cultural differences and the inexorable cultural hybridization that is taking place. We have not yet found and developed the language to describe such a new reality. Such a language may be imagined as a language situated beyond as well as “in-between” the historical roots of “culture of the nation-state” so that it will be capable of welcoming and expressing the widest range of elements and origins so that a real coexistence of different cultures in the same space can be brought about. This language should reflect the evolution of the real. It may also be a language in which time (history) would be reduced to the minimum while space (the present) is expanded to the maximum. It is the language of the “exiled”; it is also a Utopian one – this Utopia is not only the idealist vision of the future; it is already a part of our real lives. The difficulty is that, so far, we have not yet found any name for it but “exile”.⁵⁹⁴

Here Hou Hanru speaks of the lack of language to describe the new twenty-first century reality of globalization and hybridization and that, for the time, the creation of a new language still remained a utopia. The author mentions within his essay that the only term found until now to describe this new reality is “exile”. This points to the fact that other concepts that do describe this new reality of hybridization such as transexperiences, the third space, the Mid-Ground and the in-between are not yet widely accepted. Considering Hou Hanru’s essay that has just been analysed, the reason for the non-acceptance of these terms might be due to the power that the nation-state culture, and the need to preserve it and to defend it against all cost, still has in the world. The necessity to “feel at home”, and to be able to identify with a nation-state is so important that it overshadows and silences those who express their identity through alternative terms and models such hybridity and the in-between. The word “exile”, that means so much more than just being banned from one’s homeland, then becomes the generally accepted term for those

⁵⁹³ See paragraph 3.4 of Block II.

⁵⁹⁴ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 39.

individuals who have decided to live in exile: to live outside of, and to not obey the nation-state culture.

The next essay is written by Youssef Ishaghpour, who was born in Iran in 1940 and who is a French essayist. It has been decided not to analyse this essay, as it does not elaborate on Chinese experimental art or the third space concept. The essay is about the Iranian writer Sadegh Hedayat, one of the most famous modern writers of prose and short stories in Iran, who was born in Teheran in 1903 and died in Paris in 1951. The essay comes from Ishaghpour's book *Le Tombeau de Sedegh Hedayat*, which was published in 1991 by the editorial Fourbis, and comments on the tragic life of this writer and of his Iranian encounter with the "West". This is probably why this essay has been included within the exhibition catalogue.

The next essay is titled *Duchamp's End-Game: The Fertile Impossibilities of "Modern Art"* and is written by David Elliott, who was born in the UK in 1949, and who is a gallery and museum director and curator, and writer about modern and contemporary art. David Elliott was also the curator of the *Silent Energy* exhibition that was held at the Oxford MoMA in 1993, analysed in chapter two of Block II. David Elliott's article is highly complex containing numerous ideas on various topics such as modern art, post-modernism, Duchamp, Kant, Joseph Conrad, and the role of modern art museums, among others. Only one fragment, however, shall be highlighted here, as it addresses the concept of misunderstanding, an important part of the third space concept and the situation of the overseas artists:

Looking at Post-modernism from a broader perspective it has at least institutionalised the idea of misunderstanding as the most fertile unit of cultural interchange – from north to south and from east to west and back again. In this way, hegemony has been bypassed and although cultural exports from the West which are recycled in the East or the South have been (and still are) regularly denounced as "derivative" by western critics, the fact is that such derivations have been transformed utterly in both meaning and form by a process of uncaring misunderstanding and that interchange can travel in both directions. Because we, in the West, have not valued such work other than as some form of quaint or exoticised artefact, we have been unable to see it.⁵⁹⁵

First of all, David Elliott interprets the word "misunderstanding" in a positive way and sees it as an instrument to bypass hegemony and to become a "fertile unit of cultural interchange". The importance of the concept of misunderstanding in the works of some of the overseas artists has been explained in paragraph 2.2 of the theoretic part and it is true

⁵⁹⁵ David Elliott, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 57.

that misunderstanding has become an essential part in the works of some of the overseas artists. In fact, Gu Wenda explains his view of misunderstanding a little further on in the exhibition catalogue and mentions:

The word “misunderstanding” is an interesting issue. For me, the whole of human civilization is the history of “misunderstanding”. The word “misunderstanding” doesn’t need to be highlighted in my work, because it’s already part of it, as in the case of any authentic creation. The various “misunderstandings” of different people, times, locations, are part of the intrinsic value of the creation. “Misunderstanding” is at the heart of our knowledge concerning the material world, and this is the principle of “Material Analysis”, which has been and is the field of my research. The sum of various misunderstandings is the confrontational truth of my work.⁵⁹⁶

This fragment will be analysed further on within this paragraph.

David Elliott is one of the few Euroamerican art critics, like Karen Smith and Marianne Brouwer, who openly criticizes the way non-Euroamerican art, in this case Chinese experimental art, is received in the Euroamerican art world. Within his article, the author sums up some of these ways of reception that seem to greatly coincide with the reception perceived in the exhibition reviews analysed within this dissertation: as “derivative”, “a process of uncaring misunderstanding”, “as some form of quaint or exoticised artefact”, and in general that “we [the West] have been unable to see it”. This last observation reminds of the article *China Rising*⁵⁹⁷ by Karen Smith that has been mentioned on various occasions within the previous chapters. In her article, Karen Smith alleges that it was still too early for the “West” to understand non-Euroamerican art. Keeping this article in mind, this might point to the fact that *Heart of Darkness*, as well as other exhibitions such as the *Out of the Centre* (1994) survey or *Silent Energy* (1993) curated by David Elliott himself were generally not understood by the Euroamerican critics as it was still too early. A fact that often becomes poignantly evident when analysing the exhibition reviews. It also puts in evidence that these exhibitions were ahead of their times and that they were pioneers in the struggle for the acceptance of alternative models such as the third space and the in-between, and to bypass (or question) the Euroamerican hegemonic power in a moment when the overall mindframe of the Euroamerican art world was still lacking behind in this aspect.

⁵⁹⁶ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 116.

⁵⁹⁷ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, Volume XII, issue II, quarter II, 1997. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html Date of last consultation: 03/07/2014.

The next essay titled *Anti-Symposium* was written by Remo Guidieri, curator and professor of anthropology and aesthetics at the University of Sorbonne, Paris. It is a literary text that mainly focuses on Joseph Conrad's book *Heart of Darkness*. The title *Anti-Symposium* seems to refer to the author's somewhat chaotic style of writing and the fact that the essay comments on a lot of different topics. The article does not however comment on the overseas artists, the artworks that were on display at the exhibition, Chinese experimental art or the third space concept. Therefore, there shall be no further elaboration on this text.

The next part of the catalogue consists of one-page texts about the participating artists. The first text is dedicated to the artist Cai Guoqiang. According to the author of the text, Ken Vos, who is a curator and who also works for the Dutch radio, Cai Guoqiang "makes a connection between ancient Chinese concepts and all that is timeless, universal and international. This polarity can also be discerned in his view of human beings as creatures who seek a place for themselves in a harmonious universe, in dialogue with their environment."⁵⁹⁸

Ken Vos mentions in this fragment that Cai Guoqiang connects ancient Chinese concepts with all that is timeless. This reminds somewhat of Said's essay published in the catalogue of this survey: it seems that Cai Guoqiang tries to create a world which is new yet which incorporates elements of the one he left behind. He is one of the "creatures who seek a place for themselves, in dialogue with their environment". These creatures could well be the overseas Chinese artists who are indeed searching for a place, which is not China and which is not the "West" either, by constantly interacting with their surroundings and combining elements of the land left behind with the new adopted nation.

The text by Ken Vos then continues by describing the works that Cai presented at the exhibition. The first one is his *Internal and External Universe: Drawing for "Myth – Shooting the Suns"* (1995). This was a work that consisted of firework exploding on paper, leaving burn marks and is part of a series based on the "big bang" theory of the origin of the universe. Nothing more is said about this work within the exhibition catalogue.

Another of the artist's work *Internal and External Universe* (1995) consisted of a vending machine which sold Chinese medicine according to the Taoist tradition of the five

⁵⁹⁸ Ken Vos, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 85.

elements. According to this tradition, using the correct dosages of these elements can restore the balance between the organs. The visitors could purchase the bottles after choosing the bottle that met their specific needs. This work is a good example of what Ken Vos mentioned previously in his text: the combination of Chinese traditional elements with a, in this case international concept which is the vending machine.

Cai Guoqiang made two other works especially for the Kröller-Müller museum. The first work *Project for Extra-Terrestrials No. 23: "Myth-Shooting the Suns"* was made for the opening of the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition and consisted of nine upside-down planted trees, fifty kg of gunpowder and 3500 meters of fuse. The work lasted for just twenty seconds. The upside down trees, according to Ken Vos, represented the stopping of time and the creation of the universe, although this seems to be a personal interpretation of the author. It should be mentioned that firework is a recurrent media in the works of Cai Guoqiang and that other works of this series were presented in other venues, for example, the *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 17* (1993) (Fig. 13) that was presented at the *Silent Energy* exhibition in 1993.⁵⁹⁹

The second work that was made for the opening of the survey was a floating box in the form of a cross of 6x6 meters which was set on fire with a mixture of alcohol and water. The work was called *Blue Cross: Prescription for Art Museum* (1994). There is no further explanation on this work or on the title that was chosen for it.

The next artist that is presented is Chen Zhen. He himself has written the one-page text dedicated to his work *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26), which was presented at *Heart of Darkness*. About this work, the artist explains:

The link between the inspiration provided by the place (the former auditorium of the museum) and the memory of my life in China (particularly my experience of the period of the cultural revolution when political and ideological propaganda was almost the only permitted sound in our everyday lives) has prompted me to produce a work that deals with the irreversible circumstances of power and the will to resist that is inherent in the people.

The installation of a huge bell (which for several millennia has been the symbolic object of power par excellence in China) in conjunction with megaphones from the 60s and 70s (the ubiquitous image in Communist countries during the epoch) in a western museum is a statement that the continuing supremacy of power is not only a recent history and that the cruelty of these circumstances is not confined to a single country.

⁵⁹⁹ See chapter 2 of Block II.

The charred and broken chairs are a metaphor for the violence against power (suggesting what happened in Tian An Men Square in 1989) involved in restoring the energy of another “power”, namely the voice of the masses.⁶⁰⁰



Figure 26: Chen Zhen, *Resonance*, 1994

The contradiction between such a massive, big bell and the silence which surrounds it⁶⁰¹ symbolized the voice of the people who live under a dictatorial regime. The whole work refers to power, the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square and repression. In this case, the artist himself places his creation within a political context. Although the artist mentions that his work does not address the cruelty of a single country, it does seem that this work is narrowly related to the political and historical past of China.

The third artist who is introduced is Gu Wenda. His presentation is made through the publication of a letter that he wrote to the well-known curator and specialist in Chinese art, Julia F. Andrews. The letter is a response to a letter that was written by Andrews in which she advises the artist to withdraw an installation that he had prepared for *Fragmented Memory* that she was curating at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Ohio.⁶⁰² The work in question was Gu's *Oedipus Refound: Enigma of Birth* (1993) (Fig. 11), which uses placenta powder as one of its main materials. One of the arguments of Andrews was that the use of placenta powder was needlessly shocking and sensationalist. She also warned Gu that the “West” could interpret the use of placenta powder as “both brutal and

⁶⁰⁰ Chen Zhen, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 99

⁶⁰¹ The bell was placed within the tranquil natural park that surrounds the Kröller-Müller museum.

⁶⁰² *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, 1993. See chapter 3 of Block II.

unsanitary” and that, at best, it would be seen as “a work of Asian exoticism”. According to her, his message would not come across and the work would be misinterpreted.

In his reply to Andrews, Gu, like David Elliott, focuses on the word “misunderstanding” and says:

The word “misunderstanding” is an interesting issue. For me, the whole of human civilization is the history of “misunderstanding”. The word “misunderstanding” doesn’t need to be highlighted in my work, because it’s already part of it, as in the case of any authentic creation. The various “misunderstandings” of different people, times, locations, are part of the intrinsic value of the creation. “Misunderstanding” is at the heart of our knowledge concerning the material world, and this is the principle of “Material Analysis”, which has been and is the field of my research. The sum of various misunderstandings is the confrontational truth of my work.⁶⁰³

This fragment has been highlighted earlier on within this paragraph as an illustration of David Elliot’s article. Although Gu Wenda does not specifically state it within his essay, the artist could have been referring to the misunderstandings and the misconceptions that exist between “East” and “West” and the image that the “West” has of the “East”. This misunderstanding had after all occurred between a Euroamerican art curator, Julia F. Andrews, and a “Chinese” artist, Gu Wenda.

The artist then continues:

My goal is not to create and offer a visual and sensory experience of something “beautiful”; my main effort over all these years has been and continues to be to create art works that raise questions and that in a positive sense are disquieting for people, enabling them to live without the illusionistic support of ready-made values or faiths. (...)

I think part of your confusion may be caused by your own concern with the confrontation between West and East, and the problems that arise when one’s information about contemporary art is limited. Expressing the confrontation between West and East or the relationship between them in an artistic work is absolutely not something I am concerned with; I simply don’t see it as a goal of my profession, as many outsiders do.⁶⁰⁴

Gu Wenda accuses the art critic, Julia F. Andrews, of being concerned with the confrontation between West and East, and adds, “as many outsiders do”. He however says that he has no concern whatsoever about this confrontation and seems to points to the way Euroamerican viewers and critics have interpreted his work: as opposing East and West, yet he himself says that this is not a concern to him at all and that his work does not represent this issue. This again might be a fragment which could be related to

⁶⁰³ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 116.

⁶⁰⁴ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 118.

the articles by David Elliott and Karen Smith in which they allege that Euroamerica is not yet prepared to “see” non-Euroamerican art and to go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy or to accept alternative models and points of view, such as the ones of Gu Wenda. This artist has been living in New York for many years and concepts such as hybridity and multiracialism are recurrent within his works. The fact that his works are sometimes misinterpreted within a Euroamerican art world might point to the necessity of Euroamerica to hold on to the strict separation of “East” and “West”, which on its turn reminds of Hou Hanru’s essay on nation-state culture.

Gu then continues his essay:

We are living in a multiracial and multicultural society and – though I am well aware that this present situation is characterized by profound contradictions and unsolved problems – I think that it is artificial and superficial to create an intellectual and emotional distinction between artists from different countries and cultures. This would be to force them into a mould so that their work would represent something which might simply be called exoticism; it would be to employ a double-standard with these works and artists.

I’m absolutely not interested in seeking recognition only in the West or in the East. I think such an attitude is narrow-minded. Discovering a new way of expression is the goal of my creation. It must be beyond any “ready-made” civilization; I am perfectly familiar with current conventions in the West, and I don’t need to copy either the East or the West.⁶⁰⁵

This new way of expression that goes beyond any “ready-made civilization” could might well be the third-space, even though Gu Wenda does not mention the term in his essay. The artist then mentions that he does not “need to copy either the East or the West”, which might point to the way Euroamerican art critics have received works of the Chinese experimental artists as “copying the West” or erroneously emphasizing its “Chineseness”. Another aspect that should be highlighted from this quote is the “double standard” of which the artist speaks. By portraying Chinese or non-Euroamerican artists as “exotic”, a double standard is created that treats Euroamerican art and non-Euroamerican art differently within the art world. Euroamerican art will never be characterized as exotic and therefore, these artists are never “forced into a mould” that obliges them to represent and to create artworks that could be characterised by exoticism. The Chinese experimental artists, as has been explained previously by Hou Hanru, often have to adopt the role of “Chinese”, in other words the exotic, in order to become successful within the Euroamerican art market.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁵ Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 116.

⁶⁰⁶ See also paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

Strangely, nothing is mentioned about the work that Gu Wenda presented at the *Heart of Darkness* titled *United Nations, Dutch Monument: V.O.C. – W.I.C.* (1994) (Fig. 27) made out of paper thin panels constructed from human hair. The work clearly remits to the colonial times of the Netherlands when the V.O.C. and the W.I.C. became prosperous Dutch trading companies that exploited the inhabitants of other nations, in this case Indonesia, for their own benefit and profit, a topic which perfectly fits the theme of the exhibition. It is rather strange that no explanation is given on this particular work, yet it could be a consequence of the fact that it was not yet known at the time of the publication of the exhibition catalogue which work would be presented by Gu Wenda at *Heart of Darkness*.



Figure 27: Gu Wenda, *United Nations, Dutch Monument: V.O.C. – W.I.C.*, 1994

Another of Gu's work, *United Nations-Africa Monument: the World Praying Wall* (1997) (Fig. 28), part of *The United Nations Series* (1993-1997), might clarify some aspects about the installation of *United Nations, Dutch Monument: V.O.C.-W.I.C.* (1994) (Fig. 27) displayed at *Heart of Darkness*. This installation was a site-specific work created for the second Johannesburg biennale in 1997 and consisted of huge panels that were hung from the ceiling that were written upon with pseudo-English, Chinese, Hindi and Arabic words,

all made out of human hair. The fact that Gu Wenda uses human hair, as he has also used other human materials such as menstrual blood, body fluids and placenta powder, demonstrates this creative power that leads to the “breaking of taboos”.⁶⁰⁷ However, Gu on many occasions⁶⁰⁸ has also mentioned that the use of human hair in his work is also to represent the whole of humanity, as one single strand of hair contains the complete DNA of any individual. Mixing up hair of different people of different countries and backgrounds represents the mixing of cultures, making his work truly global.



Figure 28: Gu Wenda, *United Nations – Africa Monument: the World Praying Wall* (1997)

Within her book, *Arte chino contemporáneo*,⁶⁰⁹ Susana Sanz who is an art historian and curator, also gives an insightful explanation on Gu Wenda’s panels made out of human hair. She mentions:

His aim is to create a great wall, but a wall with a clear paradoxical character. As it is made out of human hair, in reality it is in fact more like an almost transparent curtain, an ‘anti-wall’ that does not

⁶⁰⁷ See also chapter 3 of Block II.

⁶⁰⁸ See, for example, the article of Heather Jain *understanding the hairy gibberish of Wenda Gu*, published on Gu’s website: <http://www.wendagu.com/publications/on-wenda-gu/heather-jain.html>. Date of consultation: 19/09/2012.

⁶⁰⁹ Eva Fernández del Campo, Susana Sanz Giménez, *Arte Chino contemporáneo*, Editorial Nerea, San Sebastián, Spain, 2011.

separate human beings but unites them by weaving in a subtle way their hair, which in Chinese tradition is also symbolic for the ancestors and, therefore, for the whole cultural heritage.⁶¹⁰

What becomes clear is that Gu Wenda's panels made out of human hair are interpreted in different ways by different art critics. Some find them offensive, or that they are made to address taboos, others find them peaceful installations made to break down barriers between human beings and cultures.

The last presentation of this paragraph is about Huang Yongping. In this text, the artist presents and comments on his work *The Overturned Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29): "One might say that this work profits from the context of the Chinese collection [that was exhibited at the Kröller-Müller museum], or else that the Chinese collection acquires another sense through being placed in the context of my work; in fact they form a single piece."⁶¹¹

The Overturned Tomb (1994) (Fig. 29), as the title indicates, consists of a huge overturned tomb, which empty inside chamber has been exposed, indicating that the tomb has been desecrated and robbed. The work refers to the tombs that have been violated and which contents nowadays are sometimes exhibited in museums, as is the case of the Kröller-Müller museum which has a collection of ancient Chinese grave contents. Huang Yongping decided to "reunite" these robbed ancient Chinese grave contents with the *Overturned Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) by placing the tomb right outside the museum windows from which the collection of ancient Chinese artefacts could be seen: as a silent reminder of where the collection originally comes from.

As the artist says: "In Chinese tradition there was no such thing as a museum; the nearest equivalent was their concept of entombment. The notion of a museum then is a western notion; many of the collections that are shown today were formerly funerary objects."⁶¹² Huang Yongping seems to criticize the fact that the contents of some of the (art) museums are in fact robbed artefacts yet they are displayed for the public in order to appreciate or to get a better "understanding" of the, usually, non-Euroamerican cultures and traditions.

⁶¹⁰ "Su objetivo es crear un gran muro, pero un muro con un carácter claramente paradójico, pues al estar hecho de cabellos humanos es en realidad una cortina casi transparente, un 'anti-muro' que no separa a los hombres sino que los une urdiendo de forma sutil sus cabellos, que en la tradición china simboliza también a los antepasados y, por lo tanto, toda la herencia cultural." Eva Fernández del Campo, Susana Sanz Giménez, *Arte Chino contemporáneo*, Editorial Nerea, San Sebastián, Spain, 2011, p. 57.

⁶¹¹ Huang Yongping, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 127.

⁶¹² *Ibidem*.

Overtured Tomb (1994) (Fig. 29) questions the concept of the museum and criticizes it openly, yet in order for his work to get exposure and to transmit its message Huang Yongping needs the museum environment. Therefore, the artist himself actively participates in the exact system that he criticizes within his work, which makes this installation seem somewhat hypocritical. Moreover, the sketches that were made by the artists prior to the realization of the work were sold posteriorly at Sotheby's New York.⁶¹³ Huang Yongping therefore seems to have clearly profited from his display at the Kröller-Müller museum.



Figure 29: Huang Yongping, *Overtured Tomb*, 1995

As a conclusion, it seems that the exhibition catalogue and the essays that were published within it put an emphasis on the concept of exile and the in-between space that is sometimes the result of being (or feeling) in exile. However, taking a closer look at the works that were made especially for the exhibition, at least those presented by the experimental Chinese artists analysed in this chapter, these do not seem to address the concept of exile but appear to be about different topics such as the European colonial history or more global topics such as Cai Guoqiang's *Project for Extraterrestrials* (Fig. 13 and 59). Yet again, the Chinese overseas artists were only a small part of the total of thirty-seven artists from all over the world. Obviously, their cultural and historical background differs

⁶¹³ The sketches were sold for 7,950 euros at Sotheby's New York.

from the other artists that were also on display at *Heart of Darkness*. The fact that their works did not specifically address the topic of exile might be a sign that they do not feel as exiles. Their experience of living abroad might be characterized and defined by other terms such as the in-between spaces or hybridity.

5.3 The exhibition reviews

The Kröller-Müller has been so kind to provide three of the six reviews that could be traced on the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition. All three come from Dutch newspapers and were published at the time of the exposition.

In this paragraph, the following reviews shall be analysed (in chronological order):

- Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994
- Author unknown, *Expositie Heart of Darkness sluit beeldenmanifestatie af*, Cobouw, 13th January 1995
- Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie “Heart of Darkness” niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7
- Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, Metropolis M magazine, no.1, vol. 16, 1995
- Author unknown, *Heart of Darkness*, Timezone 8 contemporary art books and editions, date of publication unknown, added to online catalogue on the 13th October 2008
- Alice Smits, *Niet willen weten*, Metropolis M magazine, no. 5, 2011

5.3.1 Newspapers

5.3.1.1 Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie “Heart of Darkness” niet waar*

The first review comes from *Het Financieele Dagblad*, one of the more “serious” newspapers in the Netherlands, which focuses especially on financial aspects, as well as other news-related subjects. The title of the review is *Kunstenaars maken ambitie “Heart of Darkness” niet waar* which can be translated as “Artists do not live up to the ambitions of ‘Heart of Darkness’”. The article was written by Bert Jansen, who is a regular journalist for this newspaper and who often writes about artistic topics. The review is not very long and the following fragments shall be highlighted:

With the exhibition “Heart of Darkness” (...) she [the curator Marianne Brouwer] wants to find out if another iconography in Western art exists, a new usage of symbols by artists who work within the vocabulary of modern, Western art but who have other origins. Marianne Brouwer wants to compare their position with the ones of writers such as Conrad and Kafka, Nabokov, Rushdie and Senghor

(...). These are all writers who, at some point in time, decided to not write in their mother tongue but in the language of their environment, which often was the language of the colonist.⁶¹⁴

First of all, it must be said that, in the case of Kafka, German was the author's mother tongue, even though he was born in Prague. Therefore, it might not be exactly true that he adopted the language of the colonist. Another example is Nabokov. The author was born in Russia and decided to become an American later on in life. He then started writing in English, for example *Lolita* being one of his most famous novels. Yet, the Americans were never colonist of Russia. Within the article, the author mentions: "with the exhibition 'Heart of Darkness' (...) she [the curator Marianne Brouwer] wants to find out if another iconography in Western art exists". Yet, it could be questioned if Marianne Brouwer was searching for another iconography *in* "western" art, or if she was looking for a different iconography altogether beyond the system of "East-West" or Euroamerican hegemony. The fact that Bert Jansen only mentions the possibility of creating alternatives *within* "western" art seems to indicate his "west"-centric point of view on the arts. In no place in his article does he seem to grasp the idea that these overseas artists are precisely proposing an alternative that goes beyond the Euroamerican art market and its perception on non-Euroamerican art.

The author then mentions a few of the artworks that were on display. Two creations of the participating Chinese overseas artists are mentioned: Huang Yongping's *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) and Chen Zhen's *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26). The author's description of the first installation work connects the work with the old artefacts that are part of the permanent collection of the Kröller-Müller museum which date from the Tang period. However, the author seems to not have picked up on the message that Huang Yongping tries to express through his work as Bert Jansen does not seem to realise why the strategically placed *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) has been placed in front of the collection of old artefacts:

The museum collection [Kröller-Müller museum's permanent collection] also contains Chinese ceramics, including statues of courtiers and horses dating from the Tang period. Originally these were burial gifts that landed into Western hands who then traded them as valuable objects of art. They are displayed at the end of the gallery where there is also a very big glass façade which gives a view onto the park. This is the place where the Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping placed a grave from

⁶¹⁴ "Met de expositie 'Heart of Darkness' (...) wil zij [Marianne Brouwer] weten of een andere iconografie in de Westerse kunst is te ontdekken, een nieuw gebruik van symbolen door kunstenaars die werken binnen het vocabulaire van de moderne, westerse kunst maar die een andere herkomst hebben. Hun positie wil Marianne Brouwer vergelijken met die van schrijvers als Conrad en Kafka, Nabokov, Rushdie en Senghor (...). Het zijn schrijvers die ooit het besluit hebben genomen niet in hun moedertaal te schrijven maar in de taal van hun omgeving, die vaak de taal van de kolonisator was." Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie "Heart of Darkness" niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7.

the Tang period, made out of cement in the characteristic shape of a turtle (...). The impressive installation, however, is placed upside down, showing the bear interiors, erecting itself menacingly towards the museum.⁶¹⁵

Bert Jansen then describes Chen Zhen's *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26) as: "an installation which reminds of the Maoist times".⁶¹⁶ Although it is true that the intentions of the artist were, as described by Jansen, to remit to the political past of China, Chen Zhen mentions within the catalogue that this work gave a voice to the repressed of all nations. Chen Zhen also mentioned other interpretations of this creation, for example, that the huge bell was a symbol of power in ancient times. This is however not mentioned by Bert Jansen which seems to point to the fact that the author of the review decided to focus merely on the political context of the work.

About the survey in general, Jansen says:

[The] narrative element is linked to the private-mythology of the artists or with the collective memory of the culture to which the work refers. Other theme's are traditional medicine, social disintegration or the loss of norms and values due to external [foreign/ strange] influences. The problem of this ominous message and idealistic visions of the own culture is however, that the viewer often is required to dispose of a great quantity of benevolence.⁶¹⁷

It seems as if the author is saying that the viewer must have a lot of patience or make a big effort in order to understand the works on display as the message they transmit is not ready-made. This statement might be questioned. Huang Yongping's work, an example that the author uses within his article, seems to be quite comprehensible. It is in fact the author who did not seem to grasp the full meaning of the work, as it seems that he did not detect the relation between *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) and the collection of antique artefacts of the Tang Dynasty inside the Kröller-Müller museum. It should also be said that the exhibition catalogue provided insightful information on the exhibition catalogue and also transmitted the main aims of the survey that were then illustrated by

⁶¹⁵ "De collectie van het museum bevat ook Chinees aardewerk, waaronder beelden van hovelingen en paarden uit de Tang-periode. Oorspronkelijk zijn dit grafgraven, die echter in westerse handen terecht kwamen en toen werden verhandeld als kostbare kunstvoorwerpen. Ze staan in vitrines aan het eind van de galerij van van de Velde, waar een pui van glas uitzicht biedt op het park. Daar heeft de Chinese kunstenaar Huang Yong Ping een graf uit de Tang-periode geplaatst, gegoten in beton, in de karakteristieke vorm van een schildpad (...). De constructie is echter omgekeerd, de lege graven zijn zichtbaar en het imposante beeld richt zich dreigend op tegen het museum." Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie "Heart of Darkness" niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7.

⁶¹⁶ "Installatie die herinneringen oproept aan de maoïstische tijd". Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie "Heart of Darkness" niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7.

⁶¹⁷ "[Het] narratieve element is verbonden met de privé-mythologie van de kunstenaars of met het collectieve geheugen van de cultuur waaraan het werk wil refereren. Andere thema's zijn de traditionele geneeskunst, sociale desintegratie of verlies van normen en waarden onder vreemde invloeden. Het probleem bij deze omineuze boodschappen en idealistische visies op de eigen cultuur is echter dat van de kijker vaak een grote dosis welwillendheid wordt verwacht." Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie "Heart of Darkness" niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7.

various essays. These essays were not written in a difficult or too academic language and could be understood by anybody.

The last fragment that shall be highlighted is the conclusion of the article:

The interesting hypothesis of Marianne Brouwer about the possibilities of a changing iconography (...) is replied to in a serious way only by a few of the artists. In many cases, there is however a pedantic attitude – in which, by the way, many of the participating artists do not seem to differ from lots of the modern western colleagues – and not a new imagery.⁶¹⁸

This fragment clarifies the title of the review, in which Bert Jansen mentions that the artists did not live up to the ambition of the survey. It is however not very clear what the author means by this comment as he does not give any examples of artworks or any artists who have not responded to the museums main idea.

The author draws a similarity between the pedantic attitude of “western” artists and some of the participating artists of this survey. This comment reminds of the comments seen before in which Chinese experimental artists are compared to their Euroamerican colleagues.

To conclude, it is quite remarkable that the author does not mention “exile” anywhere in his review. This is rather strange as it was one of the main themes of the survey and was extensively elaborated upon within the exhibition catalogue. Again, it seems as if Bert Jansen has not fully grasped the ideas of *Heart of Darkness*, which then makes it rather ironical that he himself “accuses” the participating artists of not living up to the expectations of the exposition.

5.3.1.2 Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*

The second review is written by Renée Steenbergen who is an independent advisor, researcher, journalist and curator on private collecting and patronage in Holland. Her

⁶¹⁸ “De interessante hypothese van Marianne Brouwer over de mogelijkheid van een veranderende iconografie (...) wordt slechts door enkele kunstenaars met dezelfde ernst beantwoord. In veel gevallen echter is er sprake van een belerende houding – waarin veel deelnemers overigens niet blijken te verschillen van veel hedendaagse westerse collega’s – en niet van een nieuwe beeldtaal.” Bert Jansen, *Kunstenaars maken ambitie “Heart of Darkness” niet waar*, Het Financieele Dagblad, 28th January 1995, p. 7.

article is titled *Virtual dung fly as comment to corrupt Italy*,⁶¹⁹ which refers to an artwork that was presented by the Italian artist Frederico d'Orazio. The review is short but provides a lot of interesting comments. First of all, the author speaks of the words “ballingschap” and “ontheemd” which in Dutch means exile and displaced. Here, in contrast to the previous review of Bert Jansen, Steenbergen specifically emphasizes the fact that exile and displacement are the main themes of the survey *Heart of Darkness*.

She then writes: “Many artists from different parts of the world (...) live in Europe or the United States. They often have enjoyed a good education and can maintain themselves quite nicely in the western world. Moreover, they carry with them a double cultural baggage that can benefit their work.”⁶²⁰ Here the author mentions the double cultural “identity” of the artists yet she does not further elaborate on this comment. The artists that can be included within the third-space all have this double cultural “baggage”, as Steenbergen calls it. This is exactly what permits them to create artworks that can be placed in between the two cultures that they know so very well. This is how they try to express themselves and try to transmit this alternative third space which lies in between two cultures. Here, however, the author does not elaborate further on her observation, leaving out the possibility to mention the third-space, if ever she intended to.

Within her review, Renée Steenbergen also mentions the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, which was held at the Centre Pompidou in 1989. The exposition is described as a survey that focused purely on the aesthetics of non-“western” art, ignoring its symbolism, and that it presented the art from “third-world” countries as ethnic art. According to Steenbergen, the Kröller-Müller, on the contrary, focuses on establishing a “dialogue between different cultures, not in anthropological terms, but simply by inviting individuals who literally travel between different cultures.”⁶²¹ This coincides with one of the aims that Marianne Brouwer had set out for the exhibition: to present these artists “not from the ethnic perspective, nor

⁶¹⁹ *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië*.

⁶²⁰ “Er leven (...) talloze kunstenaars uit andere werelddelen in Europa of Amerika. Zij hebben vaak een goede opleiding gehad en kunnen zich heel best handhaven in de westerse wereld. Bovendien dragen zij een dubbele culturele bagage met zich mee die hun werk ten goede kan komen.” Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994.

⁶²¹ “In het Kröller-Müller museum gaat het juist om de dialoog tussen diverse culturen, niet in antropologische termen, maar eenvoudig door individuen uit te nodigen die letterlijk reizen tussen meerdere culturen.” Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994.

from that of the incomprehensible Other, but from that of contemporary politics and economics.”⁶²²

Further on in her review, Steenbergen compares Chinese experimental art to the Italian *arte povera* of the sixties and seventies: “[The] mixing of western vocabulary and one’s own thematic consists often of a poetic image and the usage of natural materials. It sometimes reminds of the Italian *arte povera* of the sixties and seventies.”⁶²³ This fragment has been highlighted as it is illustrative of a phenomenon observed many times before: Chinese experimental art is compared with, and described by resorting to a Euroamerican art style or current, in this case the Italian *arte povera*. It is recurrent that in order to understand Chinese experimental art, experienced art critics like Steenbergen resort to Euroamerican art currents or specific art works and are unable, or not willing to perceive Chinese experimental art on its own terms. In this case, the comparison between Chinese experimental art and *arte povera* is actually not entirely justified. *Arte povera* was an art current of the seventies in which artists refused to use mass-media icons and to see art as a commercial product. They therefore chose to use “cheap” materials and sometimes even waste such as old chairs, rocks, led, glass and textiles. These artworks occupied a lot of space and required the visitor to literally immerse themselves into the works. It is true that a lot of Chinese experimental installations use “old materials” and that frequently they have big, sometimes even enormous, dimensions. However, the reason for this is not always the rejection of mass-media symbols or the disagreement with the commercialization of the objects of art. In some cases, especially when it comes to the in-between artists, their message addresses more universal topics such as identity, hybridity, or, as was the case in *Heart of Darkness* European colonialism. Moreover, the usage of “natural materials” in artwork, as says the author of the article, is not necessarily exclusive to Euroamerican art.

She then comments on three overseas Chinese experimental artists: Gu Wenda, Cai Guoqiang and Chen Zhen. About Chen Zhen’s *Resonance* (1994) (Fig. 26) she writes: “Chen Zhen, who works in Paris, placed a big metal bell on the museum floor, on which megaphones were attached. They refer to the unending flow of commando’s that are

⁶²² Marianne Brouwer, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

⁶²³ “[De] vermenging van westerse vocabulaire en eigen thematiek bestaat vaak uit een poëtische beeldtaal en het gebruik van natuurlijke materialen. Het herinnert soms aan de Italiaanse *arte povera* van de jaren zestig en zeventig.” Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994.

broadcasted the whole day in China via megaphones.”⁶²⁴The author here speaks in present tense, as if the megaphones continue to broadcast their messages non-stop in the year 1994-1995. This seems to give a rather incorrect image of China in the 1990s and does not correspond with reality. It does however indicate that the author is clearly trying to describe China in political and repressive (torturing) way.

Steenbergen, like Bert Jansen, also mentions the difficulty of understanding the exhibition and says that halfway the survey the goal of the exposition is blurred. She then mentions that the curator Marianne Brouwer wanted to question the position and the concept of the museum but does not understand why Brouwer has chosen to do so via *Heart of Darkness*. She then mentions that in her opinion, the title of the exhibition is confusing. Steenberger writes that Joseph Conrad’s book refers to colonialism, the fear of the unknown and displacement, but that was a hundred years ago. “Since then, much has changed”, she says. “The title does not refer to colonialism, I think, but to *art-imperialism*”.⁶²⁵ This suspicion of the author is in fact quite true. Marianne Brouwer did speak of European colonialism as a dark period within its history, yet she then extrapolates this idea to the art world in which Eurocentrism can still be strongly felt when it comes to the exhibition and the interpretation of non-Euroamerican art.

Towards the end of the review, the author speaks of the strict separation of the different parts of the world in the arts:

Despite the post-modern pluralism that characterizes our culture, the different parts of the world are still strictly separated in the arts. It is precisely these “nomadic” artists, going back and forth between several cultures, who can make a change in a non-forced way. But, in order to do so, they must have the opportunity to show their work, and what better place than the museum?⁶²⁶

Here, the author criticizes the strict separation of the different parts of the world when reality clearly demonstrates that the world is culturally pluralistic. The author then speaks

⁶²⁴ “De in Parijs werkzame Chen Zhen zette een grote metalen bel op de museumvloer, waarop megafoons zijn vastgezet. Ze verwijzen naar de oneindige stroom commando’s die in China via megafoons de hele dag door op straat worden omgeroepen.” Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994.

⁶²⁵ “Sindsdien is er veel veranderd. De titel verwijst, denk ik, niet naar kolonialisme, maar naar *kunst-imperialisme*.” Renée Steenbergen, *Virtuele poepvlieg als commentaar op corrupt Italië – ontheemde kunst in Kröller-Müller*, NRC Handelsblad, 31st December 1994.

⁶²⁶ “Ondanks de postmoderne pluriformiteit die onze cultuur kenmerkt, blijven in de kunst de diverse werelddelen nog streng gescheiden. Juist deze “nomadische” kunstenaars, pendelend tussen meerdere culturen, kunnen daar op een niet geforceerde manier verandering in brengen. Maar dan moeten ze wel de gelegenheid hebben om hun werk te laten zien. En waar kan dat beter dan op de daarvoor geëigende plaats: het museum?” Author unknown, *Expositie Heart of Darkness sluit beeldenmanifestatie af*, Cobouw, 13th January 1995.

of the “nomadic” artists who go “back and forth” between these cultures and who are slowly blurring this strict separation. Although the author does not mention the in-between anywhere within her article, this description of the overseas artists can be easily related to this particular term. Especially when the articles within the exhibition catalogue, specifically the one written by Hou Hanru, does mention the in-between repeatedly. It might be possible that Renée Steenbergen did not read the exhibition catalogue or maybe she has decided to omit this concept and to not mention it anywhere within her article even though it exactly fits the description that she gives on the overseas artists, which she prefers to call “nomadic”. The sentence “what better place than the museum?” seems to give an ironic twist to her conclusion. The museum is questioned within the exhibition catalogue yet, it is precisely the museum where *Heart of Darkness* is held and where, as the author makes clear, the artists get the opportunity to expose themselves to the public and where they can question the role of the museum (as in the work of *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29)).

5.3.2 Magazines and newspaper supplements

5.3.2.1 Author unknown, *Expositie Heart of Darkness sluit beeldenmanifestatie af*

The next review was published in Cobouw magazine, which is a publication dedicated to the construction sector. The magazine, however, does address other subjects such as, in this case, art (exhibitions). The author of the article is not stated.

The review itself is very short and is mostly descriptive. It mentions how many installations were on display and who participated in the survey. The article writes: “The artists are all from different cultural backgrounds, all are non-western, and they have in common that all live in exile in Europe or the United States. They have achieved a place within the western art world, which they, as can be seen in the exhibition, observe with a critical eye.”⁶²⁷ The author does not further elaborate on the comment of the “critical eye”, but it might be referring to the way non-“westerners” look upon the colonialist past of Euroamerica, although, again, the author does not mention this in the review.

⁶²⁷ “De kunstenaars zijn van diverse culturele herkomst, allen niet-westers, en hebben gemeen dat zij in ballingschap in Europa of de Verenigde Staten wonen. Zij hebben een plaats gekregen binnen de westerse kunstwereld, die zij zoals op de expositie blijkt met een kritisch oog bekijken.” Author unknown, *Expositie Heart of Darkness sluit beeldenmanifestatie af*, Cobouw, 13th January 1995.

According to this article, “the artists were asked to connect with the museum that in Western culture is used as a kind of value-free art reserve where the uncontrollable often is excluded”.⁶²⁸ It is unclear what the author means by “value-free art reserve” and that “the uncontrollable often is excluded”. Could the author be referring to Gu Wenda’s work and the letter that he published within the exhibition catalogue? The fact that Gu Wenda used placenta power for his creation was a reason for the curator Julia F. Andrews to kindly but persuasively try to make Gu reconsider displaying this work.

The text then describes Huang Yongping’s *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29). About this work, the author mentions that it must be seen as a criticism towards the “western” museum that often displays artefacts that have been stolen from other cultures and nations. This explanation coincides with Huang Yongping’s explanation within the exhibition catalogue.

5.3.2.2 Author unknown, *Heart of Darkness*

The next review comes from Timezone 8⁶²⁹ and is actually about the exhibition catalogue.⁶³⁰ It is significant that this review was added to the Timezone 8 website in 2008, thirteen years after the exhibition was held. It says that the catalogue of *Heart of Darkness* explores in great depth “exile, identity, globalization, the museum, and the Other”⁶³¹ and adds: “Reading the text today, now that many of the “exiles” have returned “home” to China and receive museum shows regularly, the observations about exile, identity, globalization and the Other are given an added dimension that makes them even more poignant and insightful than ever.”⁶³²

It is not clear how the fact that “many” of the exiles have returned home makes the catalogue information more insightful or poignant. The text does not give any explanation

⁶²⁸ “Aan de kunstenaars is gevraagd een relatie te leggen met het museum, dat in de Westerse cultuur functioneert als een soort waardevrij kunstreservaat, waar het onbeheersbare veelal wordt buitengesloten.” Author unknown, *Expositie Heart of Darkness sluit beeldenmanifestatie af*, Cobouw, 13th January 1995.

⁶²⁹ According to their website: “Timezone 8 is a Hong Kong-based publisher of books on contemporary art, architecture, design and photography from GMT+8 (China). Founded in 2002, the company works with top designers, editors, critics, historians, artists, art and media institutions to publish between 10 and 15 new titles per year. To date, Timezone 8 has published more than 100 English and bi-lingual book publications.” http://timezone8.com/osc/about_us.php, n.d. Date of last consultation: 25/10/2012

⁶³⁰ http://timezone8.com/osc/product_info.php?products_id=72. October 13 2008. Date of last consultation: 01/10/2012

⁶³¹ Ibidem.

⁶³² Ibidem.

on this. Moreover, the overseas Chinese artists that participated in this show were Huang Yongping, who still lives in Paris, Gu Wenda, who lives in New York, and Chen Zhen, who lived in France until his decease in the year 2000. Cai Guoqiang first emigrated to Japan and then to the United States. It seems thus that these artists have not really returned “home” at all, as the text mentions. What should be mentioned is that most artists are not really exiles, as has been explained previously. Quite a few of them often travel to China for work or for private reasons. This fact however does not change the contents or the meaning of the artworks that were on display at *Heart of Darkness*.⁶³³

5.3.2.3 Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*

The next review was written by Max Bruinsma⁶³⁴ and is titled *Language of the exile*.⁶³⁵ It is a very extensive review of eight pages that was published in *Metropolitas M Magazine*.⁶³⁶ Although thirty-seven artists participated in the survey, Bruinsma does not mention all of them. Interestingly enough, he does mention all the participating Chinese overseas artists and speaks highly of them, as shall become clear in the following pages.

Bruinsma addresses various topics in his review, which is more of an essay actually, such as the “lingua franca”, the nomad-artists and the way non-“western” art is interpreted in the “West”. According to Bruinsma, “the nomad uses, as all travellers, an own language that should be understood everywhere. (...) Does this then mean that he or she does not feel at home anywhere?”⁶³⁷ This comment strongly reminds of the concept of the unhomely of Homi Bhabha.⁶³⁸ Bruinsma then mentions in his essay that the curator

⁶³³ The article also mentions that the exhibition was held at the Amsterdam’s Kröller-Müller museum but this is not correct. The museum is not situated in Amsterdam but in Otterloo. All in all, the information does not seem to be entirely correct.

⁶³⁴ Max Bruinsma is an independent design critic, editor, curator, editorial designer and editor-in-chief of *Items*, the Dutch review of design. He studied art-, architecture- and design history in Groningen and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Since 1985, his critical writings have featured regularly in major Dutch art- and design journals and in a range of international design publications (a.o. *Eye*, *Idea*, *ID*, *Blueprint*, *The AIGA Journal*, *Étapes*, *Form*). See: www.maxbruinsma.nl, n.d., date of consultation: 26/10/2012

⁶³⁵ “De taal van de balling”. Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, *Metropolis M magazine*, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

⁶³⁶ *Metropolis M* is a bi-monthly Dutch magazine about contemporary art and art criticism. According to their webpage they define themselves as a Dutch independent art magazine that follows contemporary art and critically observes it. The website gives complementary information about national and international contemporary art. See: www.metropolism.com/magazine, n.d., date of last consultation: 25/01/2013

⁶³⁷ “Zoals alle reizigers, bedient hij [de nomade] zich van een eigen taal, die overal begrepen moet kunnen worden.(...) Betekent dat ook dat zij nergens thuis is?” Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, *Metropolis M magazine*, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

⁶³⁸ See chapter 2.4 of the theoretic part (Block I).

Marianne Brouwer wanted to emphasize this aspect of “homelessness” in the exposition of *Heart of Darkness*. This is a statement that could be questioned as the curator seemed to be more focused on the concept of exile and the role of the art of the Other within the Euroamerican art world.

Bruinsma describes the survey in a lot of different ways. He says that *Heart of Darkness* is a conscious provocation, which can be demonstrated by the works that were on display and which were placed all over the museum as well as outside. As an example of this provocation, Huang Yongping’s *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) is once again mentioned. At the end of his description of this work, he compares Huang’s work with the Orpheus lyre and writes that both have similar forms. Again, a Chinese experimental artwork is compared to a Euroamerican icon or symbol in order to make it more familiar, and therefore more understandable. However, the comparison is actually quite unfortunate and puts in evidence the lack of knowledge of the author when it comes to Chinese culture and history. Tombs in the period of the Tang-dynasty were made to resemble the shell of a turtle. The turtle on its turn has a very important symbolic meaning in Chinese culture and represents longevity, among many other connotations. Comparing a tomb from the Tang dynasty to a lyre seems rather out of context as it completely ignores a significant part of the (symbolic) meaning of the tomb, and therefore, of the artwork. This is a good example of how the comparison of Chinese experimental artworks with Euroamerican artworks, currents or symbols often does not take into account the particular context of the work hereby creating misunderstanding and misinterpretation, not to mention the complete elimination of part of the artwork’s message.

Bruinsma also mentions that the works that were on display in *Heart of Darkness* “breathe an air of danger and confirm insecurity. That these works should be ‘read’, and want to be seen is obvious, but in which language are they ‘written’?”⁶³⁹ He then answers his question:

It is the language of the modern nomad-artist. A well defined idiom of Western contemporary art, a grammar consisting of images which can be understood all over the (art)world and which, less and less, seems to speak ‘dialects’. Artists from all continents who come from the most divergent cultures have internalized this language of images, and for the viewer who does not see their names or know their cultural background, it is sometimes almost impossible to see, just by the work itself, if the artist is from Asia, South-America or Great Britain. Just as Latin in the Middle ages and English nowadays,

⁶³⁹ “De installaties van ‘Heart of Darkness’ zaaien onrust, bevestigen een onzekerheid. Dat deze kunst ‘gelezen’ moet worden, evenzeer als ze gezien wil worden, is duidelijk maar in welke taal is ze ‘geschreven’?” Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, Metropolis M magazine, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

this language of images has, since its beginning in the Second World War in Europe and America, developed into a "lingua franca" which is understood by every civilized human being over the whole cultured world.⁶⁴⁰

Bruinsma states that the art of nowadays is a well "defined idiom of Western contemporary art" and that non-Euroamerican artists have changed this idiom into a "lingua franca" that can be understood by "every civilized human being over the whole cultured world". This idea is partly true but should be nuanced. Chinese experimental artists have been influenced by Euroamerican art however their artworks should not be interpreted from a Euroamerican point of view but should be valued on their own terms, considering their particular cultural and historic background.⁶⁴¹ Chinese experimental art is not yet understood by all, as can be observed in the exhibition reviews in this thesis. Therefore, it might be precipitated to speak of Chinese experimental art, or any non-Euroamerican art current in terms of a "lingua franca" that is understood correctly by all.

The author does mention that by looking at the artworks one cannot distinguish from which nation the artist comes. This statement points to the fact that the artworks that were on display did not show elements of a strict "nation-state culture" and that, for example, the works of the Chinese overseas artists did not necessarily display elements of "Chineseness".⁶⁴² It seems thus that the artworks were hybrid and that they did not comply with the stereotypical images of their nation of origin. This on its turn can then be related to the in-between space.

Bruinsma then adds that, contrary to the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, which has been mentioned in several of the reviews analysed in this paragraph, "*Heart of Darkness* is an essay of images about the paradoxical aspects of the hybrid: the western art idiom that is used all over the world and is therefore changed."⁶⁴³ This however could be considered a personal opinion of the author. Many would disagree with his comment that non-

⁶⁴⁰ "Het is de taal van de hedendaagse kunstenaar-nomade. Een welomschreven idioom van westerse eigentijdse kunst, een beeldgrammatica die over de gehele (kunst)wereld wordt herkend en die steeds minder 'dialecten' lijkt te kennen. Kunstenaars uit alle continenten en uit de meest uiteenlopende culturen hebben zich die beeldtaal eigen gemaakt, en voor de beschouwer die hun namen niet ziet en hun culturele achtergrond niet kent, is het soms vrijwel onmogelijk om aan het werk zelf af te lezen of een kunstenaar uit Azië, Zuid-Amerika of Groot Brittannië komt. Net als het Latijn in de Middeleeuwen en het Engels in onze tijd, heeft de beeldtaal die sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Europa en Amerika is opgebouwd, zich ontwikkeld tot een 'lingua franca', een taal die door elk geciviliseerd mens over de gehele beschaafde wereld verstaan wordt." Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, Metropolis M magazine, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

⁶⁴¹ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

⁶⁴² See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁶⁴³ "Veel meer dan die Franse tentoonstelling [Magiciens de la Terre], is 'Heart of Darkness' een essay. Een essay in beelden over de paradoxale aspecten van een hybride: het westerse kunstidioom dat over de gehele wereld wordt gehanteerd en daardoor verandert." Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, Metropolis M magazine, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

Euroamerican art changes “the western art idiom that is used all around the world”. Edward Said, for example, mentioned in his essay that the overseas artists created their works by integrating parts of their cultural background into the works, this however does not change the fact that the art idiom is mainly “west”-centric.

In the essay, Bruinsma mentions all the participating Chinese overseas artists. About Cai Guoqiang, he writes that he is like a “shaman”, who makes contact with the mysterious – and potentially dangerous – energies. This description clearly puts the artist within an exotic framework.

Towards the end of the essay, Bruinsma says:

“Heart of Darkness” is about the colonisation of meaning and makes one think about the universal claims of (western) art. It is an exhibition of present times: the spirit of the age forces you to think about the images and meanings that come from other cultures which have been absorbed by the lingua franca, however familiar this language of images might seem at first for the practiced western art viewer.⁶⁴⁴

Bruinsma speaks about the familiarity of the lingua franca which seems contrary to what some of the reviews analysed in this paragraph have mentioned: that the exhibition was confusing and that some of the works were difficult to understand or did not seem to respond to the objectives set by the curator of the survey. Bruinsma does not mention any of this in his essay.

5.3.2.4 Alice Smits, *Niet willen weten*

The last review is titled *Do not want to know*⁶⁴⁵ and is from Metropolis M magazine,⁶⁴⁶ just as the previous essay by Bruinsma. The author of this article is Alice Smits who is an art historian and freelance curator and critic. She curated exhibitions in New York and Amsterdam. Since 2004 she is the co-director of the Amakula Kampala International Film Festival in Uganda.

⁶⁴⁴ “Heart of Darkness’ gaat over het kolonialiseren van betekenissen en zet opnieuw aan het denken over de universaliteits aanspraken van de (westerse) kunst. Het is een actuele tentoonstelling: de tijdgeest dwingt je na te denken over de in lingua franca opgenomen beelden en betekenissen uit andere culturen, hoe vertrouwd de beeldtaal in eerste instantie ook mag lijken voor de doorgewinterde westerse kunstkiijker.” Max Bruinsma, *Heart of darkness – De taal van de balling*, Metropolis M magazine, no.1, vol. 16, 1995.

⁶⁴⁵ “Niet willen weten” Alice Smits, *Niet willen weten*, Metropolis M magazine, no. 5, 2011.

⁶⁴⁶ For the full article, see: <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2011-no5/niet-willen-weten>. Date of publication 2011, no.5, October/November. Date of last consultation: 01/10/2012.

The article is not about the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition, and was in fact published about sixteen years later but it has been decided to include this text in the analysis as it does make mention of the exhibition within the article. The text is actually about post-colonialism in the Netherlands in general, and the fact that this topic has not received a lot of attention in the past or the present. Consequently, non-western art is still seen in an ethnocentric way and non-“western” art of former colonies has not had a chance to integrate itself in the “western” art scene. The author illustrates this fact by commenting that “normal” art museums are mostly occupied with collecting or displaying “western” or North American art. Non-“western” art however, is usually presented in ethnic or folkloric museums. The reason for this silence or unwillingness to address and integrate non-Euroamerican art or the art from former colonies is, according to the author, because the Dutch feel ashamed about their colonial past and prefer not to be reminded of it. It is significant that this article was published in 2011 and is in fact quite recent. It seems thus that the situation of shame towards the colonial past is still valid.

Alice Smits then also mentions the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* and says that it was a survey which stirred up quite a commotion and that many criticized the exposition for the way of presenting the artworks as primitive, colonial, ethnic or ritualistic: in other words, by exoticizing it. The author, however, does mention that this exhibition can be seen as a milestone and that it marked a beginning of exhibitions dedicated to the “art of the world”.

The author then mentions the exhibition of *Heart of Darkness* and says that it was one of the first surveys in Holland that addressed non-“western” art in a non-exotic way. She also mentions, like Bruinsma in his article that the exhibition was about how the “western” art idiom is changed by non- “western” art.

The author then mentions that it is mainly the artists and art curators who are trying to introduce the topic of post-colonialism and its art into the museums and exhibitions. What they are trying to establish is “a dialogue in which the encounter with the Other takes place beyond the confirmation of cultural difference or a levelling universalism.”⁶⁴⁷ This fragment reminds of the third-space in which dialogue is one of the main elements. It should be highlighted that Alice Smith does seem to acknowledge the artists and art curators as individuals who actively try to go beyond the generally accepted models based

⁶⁴⁷ “Het gaat daarbij om het creëren van een dialoog waarin de ontmoeting met de ander plaatsvindt voorbij het bevestigen van cultureel verschil of een nivellerend universalisme.” Alice Smits, *Niet willen weten*, Metropolis M magazine, no. 5, 2011.

on cultural separation and hegemonic discourses that lead to levelling universalism. Again, the fact that this article was published in 2011, almost two decades after the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition, seems to point to the fact that the curators and artists who try to establish an alternative model have only partially been successful. Reviews that were written at the time of the exhibition generally did not capture this message and mainly focused on the fact that non-Euroamerican art is sometimes similar to Euroamerican art. This becomes clear in those reviews that compared artworks with Euroamerican works, styles or iconographies. Apparently, it took almost two decades to fully comprehend the message that *Heart of Darkness* aspired to transmit onto the public and the media. Again, the article written by Karen Smith comes to mind: in the 1990s Euroamerica was not yet prepared to receive and truly “see” the art of non-Euroamerican nations.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁸ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Volume XII, issue II, quarter II, 2007. For the full article see: www.artindiamag.com/quarter02_07/lead_essay02_07.html Date of last consultation: 15/09/2014

5.4 Conclusions on *Heart of Darkness*

Heart of Darkness is an exhibition that should be seen in a post-colonial context. The Netherlands has had a strong colonial past that for many is part of the darker side of Dutch history. Especially the time in which Indonesia was part of the Dutch colonies has been posteriorly heavily criticized. Even though the exhibition was named after Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* that strongly disapproves of the Belgian colonization of Congo, the title remits to European colonialism in general. In *Heart of Darkness* the curator of the survey, Marianne Brouwer, addresses the "dark side" of European colonization and the horrors that took place during that time. Yet, it should be mentioned that some of the works that were displayed at the survey reflected this while others did not. For example, the *Overturned Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) by Huang Yongping shows the dark side of the European explorers and strongly criticizes European colonialism and the way tombs have been plundered, and the robbed artefacts shown in "western" museums. Cai Guoqiang on the other hand presented, among other works, a creation that consisted of a vending machine of Chinese herbal tonics that does not seem to coincide with this topic.

Another main theme of the exhibition is the concept of "exile". According to the catalogue all the participating artists were "exiled". Strictly seen, and especially when it comes to the Chinese experimental artists that participated, many of them were simply overseas artists who voluntarily decided to leave their homeland for different reasons. They cannot be considered exiles as most of them still have the possibility of going home, and often do.⁶⁴⁹ It is as Edward Said mentions in the essay within the exhibition catalogue: a distinction should be made between refugees, exiles, émigrés and expatriates. Therefore, the importance that is put on the fact that all artists are exiles might not be entirely justified and the term could have been employed in order to make the survey seem more sensational by emphasizing the "dark side" of the exhibition.

In general, the exhibition catalogue is sometimes quite lugubrious and focuses on the dark sides of life in general: horror, death, loneliness, exile, war, pain... This might be a consequence of the involvement of the Netherlands at that particular time (1991-1995) in the war in Bosnia, which posteriorly would become one of the darkest periods of Dutch history.

⁶⁴⁹ See paragraph 2.1 of Block I.

The in-between is addressed within the exhibition catalogue, although no emphasis is put on this concept except for the art critic Hou Hanru. He, in his essay, mentions the in-between space and elaborates extensively on the concept. Edward Said mentions in his essay that the exiles “insist on his or her right to refuse to belong”⁶⁵⁰ and that they “cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience”.⁶⁵¹ This might be interpreted as the breaking of the strictly maintained separation which exists between the “East” and the “West” and the creation of a new space which lies in the in-between. Yet, the concept of the in-between is not repeated anywhere else by the other authors or the exhibition curator Marianne Brouwer. In some places, a similar concept is used such as “alternative cultures”, “nomads”, “hybridity”, “cross-bordering”, “de-identity” and the “lingua franca”. Yet, only Hou Hanru specifically mentions the concept of in-between. Again, it is a “Chinese” art experts who addresses and specifically states the concept of the in-between.

Gu Wenda, in his letter to Julia F. Andrews, also addresses certain elements that seem to be related to the third-space concept although he does not mention it in his letter. He talks about the misunderstanding between the “West” and the “East” saying “the whole of human civilization is the history of ‘misunderstanding’.”⁶⁵² He also mentions the fact that Julia F. Andrews, who is an American art critic and curator, is concerned with the confrontation between “West” and “East” but that this issue is not at all an aim of Gu’s creations, as many outsiders think. Also the essay of David Elliott speaks of the concept of “misunderstanding” and how this has been, as the author mentions, “the most fertile unit of cultural interchange”. As has been observed in some of the reviews analysed in previous chapters, it does seem to be true that in many cases Euroamerican reception of Chinese experimental art is based on misunderstandings.

About the reviews that have been written on *Heart of Darkness*, the opinions seem to differ quite a lot from each other. Some called the exposition confusing and one review mentioned that, in the author’s opinion, the participating artists did not respond to the main goal of the exhibition. Although most of the reviews did mention the concept of “exile” in their text, some of the critics did not. This is remarkable, as the concept was widely mentioned in the exhibition catalogue by the curator, Marianne Brouwer, as well as in the

⁶⁵⁰ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 24.

⁶⁵¹ Edward Said, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 27.

⁶⁵² Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 116.

essays that were written by for example Hou Hanru or the article by Edward Said titled *Reflections on Exile* that was specifically chosen for the catalogue.

The in-between is not mentioned by any of the critics or journalists who wrote reviews about the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition even though the concept is mentioned very clearly by Hou Hanru in his text within the catalogue. Maybe the absence of this concept within the articles is due to the fact that the catalogue has not been read by the journalists and art critics.

Other concepts, which can be related to the third-space concept or that indirectly describe it, *are* mentioned frequently within the reviews. Some authors have addressed the fact that the world is still strictly separated while other authors have mentioned concepts such as the lingua franca or the nomadic culture. Yet, they do not connect these concepts to the third-space. It is as Hou-Hanru writes in his exhibition catalogue essay: “The difficulty is that, so far, we have not yet found any name for it but ‘exile’”.⁶⁵³

A significant fact is that the overseas Chinese experimental artists are mentioned in almost all the reviews, even though they were only a minority among the thirty-seven participating artists. This might point to a certain preference for the Chinese artists within the Euroamerican context and it might even indicate the exotic attraction that these artists have in the Euroamerican mind. In some reviews, their creations are compared to Euroamerican styles or persons. For example, Huang Yongping’s *Overtured Tomb* (1994) (Fig. 29) has been compared to Orpheus’ lyre and the art on display was also compared to the Italian *arte povera*. This is a recurrent phenomenon which has been observed in various reviews analysed within this dissertation. It does however seem to point to the fact that non-Euroamerican art is not yet understood and valued on its own terms.

All in all, it seems that the exhibition had high aspirations and that the result was not in all cases satisfactory as some of the reviews speak of an exhibition which was not very comprehensible. This might indicate that the exhibition was too advanced for its time. This is somewhat confirmed by the fact that two of the reviews analysed within this last paragraph that mentioned the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition were written more than ten

⁶⁵³ Hou Hanru, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 39.

years after the survey (in 2008 and 2011). This might point to the fact that the exhibition gained relevance as times passed. Especially seen from a context in which post-colonial studies would become more important, *Heart of Darkness* becomes a significant exhibition that shines a light on the darker periods of European history: periods that are not often addressed, especially not in a Euroamerican context.

6. DES DEL PAIS DEL CENTRE: XINA: 15 ANYS D'AVANTGUARDES ARTÍSTIQUES⁶⁵⁴ (1995)

6.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Des del País del Centre was organized at the Arts Santa Mònica in Barcelona from the 19th of June until the 30th of September 1995. It was the first exposition of Chinese experimental art to be held in Spain and one of the participating exhibitions in the international program "Aperto 95". This was a program that included expositions of twenty-eight different museums around Europe that had been organized as an alternative to the Venice Biennale.

The *Aperto* was introduced in 1980 as a section of the Venice Biennale, entirely dedicated to emergent young artists of the contemporary art scene. In 1995, however, the *Aperto* section was cancelled. Some institutions and museums did not agree with this decision and took it as a sign of the Venice Biennale's reluctance to support upcoming artists. As a protest, approximately thirty European and North American museums decided to label their summer exhibitions with the title "Aperto 95". These expositions were true to the *Aperto* spirit and presented young and often unknown contemporary artists to the general public. Eventually, the Venice Biennale reconsidered their decision and offered to re-integrate the *Aperto* section into the Biennale. This proposal was refused by the participating museums, as they were afraid of becoming the organizers of the *Aperto* section of the Venice Biennale and did not want to take this role upon themselves. It seems, however, that the *Aperto* is now again part of the Venice Biennale, which is divided into two different sections: the national pavilions and the *Aperto*. The main goal of this division is to establish a dialogue between the consolidated international artists and the younger, unknown artists who often come from overlooked artistic areas such as Latin America, Africa and Scandinavia.

Inma González Puy (1959) who has been living, studying and working in Beijing since 1979 curated *Des del País del Centre*, in which thirty-five Chinese artists participated with approximately seventy artworks on display. From 1986 until 2003, Inma González Puy was the cultural and educational manager of the Spanish embassy in Beijing. From 2003 until 2005 she returned to Barcelona and became responsible for the seminars and conferences that were held at the Casa Asia in the same city. In 2005 however, she went

⁶⁵⁴ From the Middle Kingdom (nation of the centre), China: 15 years of artistic avant-gardes.

back to China and is currently the director of the Instituto Cervantes in Beijing. Inma González Puy curated two exhibitions in Spain about Chinese art: the first one being *Des del País del Centre* and the second one being *Festines, Rituales, Ceremonias: Bronces Arcaicos del Museo de Shanghái*,⁶⁵⁵ which was organized for the Universal Forum that was held at the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC)⁶⁵⁶ in 2004.

Arts Santa Mònica is not exactly an art gallery nor is it an art museum. According to the centre itself, it is a “space of convergence and crossover between the different disciplines of contemporary artistic creation and science, thought and communication.”⁶⁵⁷ Therefore, it could be seen as a meeting point or a platform for the different artistic masteries. The institution depends on the Catalan government, the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, and is therefore a public institution. According to its website, *Arts*, as they call themselves, “generates ideas, projects, research and materials that stimulate dialogue between the local, with all it has to offer, and the global dimension of society today”.⁶⁵⁸

Des del País del Centre was a large-scale exhibition that included almost all of the most well known artists of the Chinese experimental art scene such as Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, Zhang Huan, Huang Yongping and Zhang Xiaogang among many others. More importantly, a significant part of the exhibition had been dedicated to the overseas artists and how Chinese and Euroamerican culture has influenced their work, and Chinese experimental art in general. It is as Inma González Puy, curator of the survey, explains in the exhibition catalogue:

Des del País del Centre, trying to overcome the limitations of a "sealed off" exhibition, invites the visitor on a tour of the productions of the most representative artists since the beginning of an independent art in China. The link between them, beyond their intrinsic interest as artists, is the cultural bond of their origins, which allows the exploration of their individual response to the encounter between the West and their own inherited tradition, which they set out of context, constructing and deconstructing its concepts.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁵ Feasts, Rituals, Ceremonies: Archaic Bronzes from the Museum of Shanghai.

⁶⁵⁶ Museu Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona.

⁶⁵⁷ <http://www.artssantamonica.cat/ARTSSANTAM%C3%92NICA/CONCEPTE/tabid/149/language/en-US/Default.aspx>, n.d., date of consultation: 11/10/2012.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibíd.*

⁶⁵⁹ “Des del País del Centre, proposant-se superar les limitacions d’una “exposició reduïda” invita a un recorregut per les produccions dels artistes més representatius des del començament de l’art independent a la Xina. El lligam que els uneix a tots, a més del seu interès objectiu com a artistes, és el vincle cultural de la seva procedència, el qual permet explorar cadascuna de les seves reaccions davant l’encontre amb Occident i davant la seva pròpia tradició heretada, que treuen de context, amb la construcció i desconstrucció dels seus conceptes.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 4.

The exhibition was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of the artworks that were created in the 80s and the intention was to give the public an impression of how Chinese society was trying to overcome the psychological impacts that had been caused by the Cultural Revolution that ended around this period. This first part, section A, included various artworks made by the Star-group, also known as xingxing (星星), one of the first groups of experimental artists who started to organize exhibitions in 1979. They were pioneers of the Chinese avant-garde art.⁶⁶⁰

The second part, section B, was subdivided into four sections and included artworks that were created from the 90s onwards. A lot of these creations were inspired by the Chinese society of that period and the changes that were occurring due to the enormous economical growth that was starting to take flight at that time. The last part of section B contained a variety of works created by artists that had decided to emigrate to the “West”.

In the following paragraph, a more in-depth analysis of the exhibition catalogue shall be made and in paragraph 6.3 the exhibition reviews shall be analysed.⁶⁶¹ This chapter does not include a paragraph exclusively dedicated to the explanation of the works on display but this part shall be integrated in paragraph 6.2 on the analysis of the exhibition catalogue.

⁶⁶⁰ See also paragraph 2.2 of Block II on the exposition *Silent Energy* and the introduction to paragraph 1.1 of Block I.

⁶⁶¹ Arts Santa Mònica has kindly provided the reviews for this study.

6.2 The exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue is quite extent and contains sixty-three pages. It was published by the Catalan Government, the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, in 1995 and is written entirely in Catalan.

After the introduction by Inma González Puy, a short text of one page follows with a concise explanation of section A of the exhibition called *La dècada dels anys vuitanta: La porta entreoberta. Del Grup Estrelles a Avantgarde '89* (the decade of the 80s: the half-open door. From the Stars group to the avant-garde of '89.) Basically it is a historical summary of this period, from 1979 until 1989 approximately. The text starts with the death of Mao and ends with the forced closure of the emblematic *China/ Avant Garde* exhibition that was held in Beijing in 1989. The catalogue is then subdivided in one-page texts, dedicated to the works and the artists that were on display in this particular section of the exhibition (section A). For example, there is a one-page explanation of Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45).

Following section A, come the pages in which Section B is explained. The title of this part of the show was: *1990-1995. Tendències dels anys noranta* (1990-1995. Trends of the nineties). This section was subdivided into four smaller segments in which section B1 is called *El revival de la "cultura de masses"* (The revival of "mass culture"), section BII was called: *La via realista: humor, abúlia i provocació* (The way of realism: humour, aboulia and provocation), section BIII was titled: *Aproximació interior* (Interior approach), and section BIV: *Ruptures de fronteres: artistes xinesos a l'estranger* (Breaking through the boundaries: Chinese artists overseas).

The aim of section B1 is to show the changes that occurred at the beginning of the nineties when artists started to create artworks that were influenced by pop art that arrived from Euroamerica, with a self-mocking, humorous air. Artists on display here were Wang Guangyi, Yu Youhan and Feng Mengbo, among others.

Section BII is about how Chinese artists, accustomed to painting in the official social-realistic style, started to employ this same style in order to create artworks that reflected the way they perceived their daily environment. Works that were displayed in this section were, for example, the artworks of Fang Lijun.

Section BIII was dedicated to the artists who tried to transform traditional art styles, such as ink painting and scrolls, into an avant-garde style. Their aim was to find a way to change the traditional, strict style into something new that would make the expression of new sensations and concepts possible. One of the artists that showed his works in this section was Ye Yongqing.

Section BIV was entirely about the overseas artists. The works that were on display here were photographs of Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series* (1993 -),⁶⁶² an in-situ work of Huang Yongping called *Imported Articles* (1995) that would be cancelled due to the impossibility of its realization,⁶⁶³ a video installation of Xu Bing's *A Case Study of Transference*,⁶⁶⁴ (1995) (Fig. 7 and 32) his installation work *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), and an in-situ installation work created by Wu Shuanzhan in collaboration with Inga Thórsdóttir titled *Showing China from it's best sides* (1995) (Fig. 33). In the catalogue, every artwork is commented on in a one-page text illustrated with various photographs. In the text, there is an explanation of the creation as well as some background information on the artist.

Lastly, the catalogue also includes an essay written by Huang Du titled *Nou Pas* (New Step). Huang Du is a well-known art critic and curator who is a specialist in Chinese experimental art.

Starting with the introduction of the exhibition catalogue, which was written by the curator of the exposition, Inma González Puy, the author specifically addresses the overseas artists in her text. About these overseas artists she writes:

Some of the most active Chinese artists during the avant-garde movement of the 80s decided, at that time, to leave their country. Today they have settled down in different places in the West and find themselves influenced by other stimuli and situations. Emigrated from a nation that considered itself "the centre" of the universe for centuries, these artists crossed the boarder to face another "centre"; a western world that is culturally authoritarian and aggressive and that only now, at the turn of the century, starts to become interested in merging and multiculturalism. Their works, created in a "foreign" environment, show -voluntarily or involuntarily- stigmas from an obstinate cultural heritage while simultaneously reflecting problems which affect, generally, mankind as a whole: the relationship between centre and periphery, emigration, sexual or racial identity, the role of the artist, etc. By

⁶⁶² The pictures that were displayed were of the versions that were presented at the Kröller-Möller museum in the Netherlands just a few months prior to *Des del Pais del Centre (V.O.C.-W.I.C. monument*, 1994, Fig. 27), the Enrico Gariboldi Art Contemporanea in Italy, the Israeli Cultural Minister and The Artists Museum Tel-Aviv Center in Israel and the version that was presented at the History Museum of Lodz and the Artists Museum in Poland.

⁶⁶³ Further on within this paragraph, more shall be said about this work.

⁶⁶⁴ *Case Study of Transference* was a performance realized by Xu Bing in Beijing in 1994. The work was originally titled *Cultural Animal* (1994). See also chapter 3.3 of Block I. (Fig. 7 and 32)

choosing a marginal perspective in relation to whichever objective and dominant “centre”, these artists persist in this double, maybe even contradictory intention of removing borders and highlighting, at the same time, ethnic identities; an exercise fitting these times of transition towards a new culture, global, hybrid and mixed.⁶⁶⁵

It is not clear what Inma Puy means by “a western world that is culturally authoritarian and aggressive” as she does not elaborate on this point of view or justifies this comment in any way. It could be possible that she is referring to the 20th century Euroamerica, which especially in Europe was characterized by the First and Second World War. Another possibility is that the curator is referring to Eurocentrism and the exotic view that Euroamerica has had towards the non-Euroamerican. Thinking in a more present context, it also might be possible that she is pointing towards the global influences that occur in society and that often come from the Euroamerican part of the world, the United States in particular (americanization). She does however nuance her statement by mentioning that the “West” is changing its attitude towards its hegemony and is slowly becoming interested in interculturalism.

Within this fragment, Inma Puy also addresses the overseas artists as artist living in between China and Euroamerica, between an “obstinate” past and a hybrid future. She portrays these artists as pioneers in the intents of eliminating boarders and the transition towards a more global and mixed culture. In 1995, not many art critics would describe the overseas artists in such a way, especially not Euroamerican experts. This makes Inma Puy quite a pioneer, especially in Spain.

At the end of the essay, in the conclusion of the article, the author writes:

The second artists [the Chinese overseas artists], within a new context of a recent foreign identity, try to establish an active dialogue with the Occident and to express, at the same time, the contradictory emotions towards their own cultural background. The aim of this present exhibition, well aware of its own limitations, is to show the contribution that originates from this point of fusion and unison, which the Chinese diaspora has made to our global culture.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁵ “Alguns dels artistes xinesos més actius durant el moviment avantgardista dels anys vuitanta i que optaren, aleshores, per sortir del seu país, avui instal·lats en disperses punts d’Occident, es veuen condicionats per altres estímuls i situacions. Emigrats d’un país que s’ha considerat a si mateix com l’autèntic “centre” de l’univers durant segles, aquests artistes es van creuar fronteres per trobar-se amb l’altre “centre”, un món occidental culturalment autoritari i agressiu que només ara, al llindar del segon mil·lenni, comença a interessar-se per la fusió i el multiculturalisme. Les seves obres, pensades des d’un entorn “estranger”, presenten - voluntàriament o involuntàriament- estigmes d’una obstinada herència cultural i reflecteixen simultàniament problemes que concerneixen ja sense distinció el conjunt de la humanitat: la relació entre centre i perifèria, l’emigració, la identitat sexual o racial, el paper de l’artista, etc. Tot escollint com a perspectiva la seva marginalitat respecte a qualsevol “centre” objectiu i dominant, aquestes artistes persisteixen en aquesta intenció dual i també, potser, contradictòria d’eliminar fronteres i accentuar, al mateix temps, identitats ètniques, en un exercici propi d’aquesta època de transició envers una nova cultural global, híbrida i mestissa. “ Inma Puy, *Des del país del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 5-6.

⁶⁶⁶ “Els segons [artistes xinesos de fora del “País del Centre”], des del nou context de la seva recent estrenada identitat d’estrangers, miren d’establir un diàleg actiu amb Occident, ahora que donen joc a les emocions contradictòries respecte al seu propi bagatge cultural. Aquesta exposició, conscient de les seves limitacions, pretén mostrar l’aportació que des

Although Inma Puy does not explicitly mention the third space concept, she does seem to describe it indirectly when she writes about the artists that are in between two spaces: the context of a new identity, which is the “Occident”, and the contradictory feelings that the artists have towards their own cultural background, in this case China. The fact that she mentions in her introduction that one of the aims of the exhibition is to show “this point of fusion and unison, which the Chinese diaspora has made to our global culture”, can be considered as an intent to show works of art that seem to coincide with the definition of the third space.

Imma Puy speaks of the overseas Chinese artists in a similar way as in an interview that was held between two Chinese curators, Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu. This interview is published in the catalogue of the *Inside Out* (1998) exhibition that shall be analysed in chapter eight. The text shall later on be commented on extensively but it seems appropriate to quote what the curator and art critic Hou Hanru mentions in this short fragment as he seems to be describing the situation of the overseas artists in the same way as Inma Puy does. The only difference is that Hou connects this description to the third space and Inma Puy does not. This is in fact quite remarkable as by that time, the third space concept had already been coined by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* that was published in 1994.

Hou: The third space is replacing a concept of identity based on the traditional opposition between East and West. The invention of the notion of the third space itself is a cultural strategy. In general, western artists don't see art activities as a kind of strategy related to the question of cultural identity, while non-western artists living in the West necessarily face the challenge of seeking their own places there. This pushes them to conceive of artwork as a strategy. It is also the foundation of an "immigrant culture" in the West, to which overseas Chinese artists also belong. It is common to cultures composed of different communities: each community or individual can develop its or his/her own strategy of survival.⁶⁶⁷

Moving on with the exhibition catalogue, within the explanatory text of section A there are no references to the third space but there is one short mention of the overseas artists:

(...) the majority of the Star group members started to make a living out of their artistic productions, becoming the first generation of independent artists. A lot of them emigrated overseas as the 80s progressed. Nowadays they still live in France, the United States and Japan.⁶⁶⁸

d'aquest punt de fusió i convergència ofereix la diàspora xinesa a la nostra cultura global.” Inma Puy, *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

⁶⁶⁷ Interview with Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru for the exhibition catalogue of the *Inside Out* exhibition, p. 184.

⁶⁶⁸ “(...) la majoria dels components del Grup Estrelles va passar a viure de les seves produccions artístiques, tot constituint la primera generació d'artistes independents, molts dels quals van emigrar fora del país a mesura que avançava la dècada

Within this section there is a page dedicated to Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), a work that was presented for the first time in 1988. He is the only overseas artist displaying his work in section A. About this installation, the catalogue states: "The false characters were used, afterwards, to make hand-bound volumes, according to the purest traditional Chinese style, by craftsmen who only produced classics. All the seriousness of the traditional craftsmanship and history put at use of a mocking joke."⁶⁶⁹

And a few pages further on, the description continues:

The printed characters on the walls remind us of the big newspapers that were hung on the walls called *dazhibao*, in which language was put, even more, at use as a transmission vehicle of slogans, of codes repeated over and over again, which eventually made them lose their original meaning. For many youngsters, the immutability of the calligraphic scripture over the centuries is a symbol of the paralysation of traditional culture. *Book from the Sky* was meant as a deconstruction of the traditional writing of characters and, at the same time, highlighted the absurdity of language as an instrument of power and a way of transmitting propaganda. Its freshness, in its concept as well as its formal approach, has made it into one of the key creations of contemporary Chinese art.⁶⁷⁰

Within the above-mentioned fragment, Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)(Fig. 30 and 45) is seen from a political point of view when the text mentions: "The printed characters on the walls remind us of the big newspapers that were hung on the walls called *dazibao*". It should be explained here that Mao Zedong promoted the *dazibao* (大字報), also called big character posters, during the Cultural Revolution. They were hung, for example, on the walls of classrooms. These posters that attacked rivals and were employed to humiliate individuals rapidly emerged as an iconic feature of the Cultural Revolution. For many (artists), the written characters on these posters became a metaphor for the use of the Chinese language for political ends.

dels anys vuitanta, i avui viuen encara a França, als Estats Units o al Japó." *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p.8.

⁶⁶⁹ "Els falsos caràcters van ser fets servir, després, a l'edició de volums relligats en el més pur estil tradicional xinès, en un taller artesanal on només s'editen llibres clàssics, tot posant la seriositat de l'estructura de tradició artesanal i històrica al servei d'una burla." *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

⁶⁷⁰ "Els caràcters impresos a les parets evocuen els grans diaris murals *dazhibao*, en els quals el llenguatge es consolidava encara més en el seu paper de vehicle transmissor d'eslògans i consignes repetits fins a la infinitat, que perdien finalment el seu sentit original. La immutabilitat, a través dels segles, de l'escriptura cal·ligràfica simbolitza per a molts joves la paràlització de la cultura tradicional de caràcters i, al mateix temps, destaca l'absurditat del llenguatge, com a instrument del poder i mitjà transmissor de la propaganda. La seva frescor, tant el concepte com en els seus plantejaments formals, l'han convertit en una de les peces clau de l'art contemporani xinès." *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.



Figure 30: Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987-1991

Comparing this description within the exhibition catalogue with another quote by Xu Bing, the artist seems to give a different interpretation of *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45). In an interview held by the Asia Art Archive⁶⁷¹ with Xu Bing, he stated:

It all comes down to the “cultural fever” that was raging at that time [late 1980s]. We read anything we could get our hands on, with no order or method whatsoever. I read so many books, took place in so many discussions, that I began to feel it was all meaningless, and you felt you were losing yourself amid all this new knowledge. After a while, I became quite fed up with words, with books, and with talking about cultural issues. It’s like you’ve been starving, and then suddenly there’s food, and you stuff yourself until you’re sick. That’s what I felt at the time. So I wanted to create my own book to express this kind of feeling and I came up with the idea of *Book from the Sky*.⁶⁷²

As becomes clear, Xu Bing did not have a political intention when he created *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45). The work seems to be a reflection of his infatuation and later frustration with the enormous quantity of information that came from Euroamerica in the 1980s. Nowhere in this quote does he mention the Cultural Revolution or the *dazhibao*. This seems to make it clear that the exhibition catalogue tries to portray *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) as a political work when in fact the work can be understood through different interpretations.⁶⁷³ This is then also reinforced by the

⁶⁷¹ The Asia Art Archive is a documentation and research centre based in Hong Kong. Their objective is to collect information on the recent history of contemporary art in Asia and make it easily accessible for the general public.

⁶⁷² Interview with Xu Bing on Contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s, by Asia Art Archive. Seen on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d36D8wLzs44&feature=related>. Date of last update November 7, 2011. Date of consultation: 29/08/2012.

⁶⁷³ A good example of the versatility of interpretations of this particular work is also the reading by Eva Fernández del Campo, art professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid: “(...) Xu Bing (b. 1955), in his monumental 1986 work *The Book from the Sky*, poses with his invented languages an answer to the problem of lack of communication, and also an alternative to conceptual art, proposing the unreality of the world and the impossibility of knowing it through language, proposing therefore, a return to the preverbal stage which is also a look at childhood during which the universe is intelligible not by

fact that this particular work was placed in Section A of the survey which was dedicated to the artworks that were created in the 80s, and which intention was to give the public an impression on how Chinese society was trying to overcome the psychological impacts that had been caused by the Cultural Revolution that ended around this period. This particular installation was not placed in section BIV that was dedicated to the overseas artists.

Within the exhibition catalogue, the installation is also described as a “mocking joke”.⁶⁷⁴ This *does* coincide with what Xu Bing himself says a litter bit further on in the same video interview. Yet, the artist gives more explanations on what he means by “joke”, a word on which the catalogue text does not further elaborate. He says:

From the very beginning, I was very clear that the execution of this book had to be extremely meticulous, because its very perfection would underscore the absurdity of the work and the intensity I put into the execution was part of this work’s artistic language (...). If you’re not meticulous, then the force of the joke will be diminished. Because, really, what I was making was a bit of a joke. But if you take years to fabricate this joke [it took Xu Bing four years to create *Book from the Sky*], if you put all your effort into it, then the artistic power of this joke will come through and be taken seriously (...).⁶⁷⁵

It seems that Xu Bing was trying to make a joke but with a serious undertone. He did not just want to make fun of something or make people laugh, nor was it his intention to make an installation that seemed completely absurd. He wanted his work to be taken seriously. This does not seem to coincide with what the catalogue mentions: “All the seriousness of the traditional craftsmanship and history put at use of a mocking joke.”⁶⁷⁶

In *Power of the Word*⁶⁷⁷ (2001) where *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)(Fig. 30 and 45) was also displayed, the catalogue mentions:

Wood printing-type may be interpreted as a minimal woodblock print; and for the *Book from the Sky* these minimal prints were produced en masse to create the effect of an overwhelming cultural edifice, challenging the viewer to read and decipher. Yet on close inspection, the book is unreadable, every

culture or knowledge, but through a living experience of scribbling nonsense and playful spontaneity.” FERNANDEZ DEL CAMPO Eva, *Some reflections on the emergence of art in China into the contemporary scene*. Art in China. 2011-12, 4 Winter edition, p 114.

⁶⁷⁴ *Des del Pais del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with Xu Bing on Contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s, by Asia Art Archive. Seen on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d36D8wLzs44&feature=related>. Date of last update November 7, 2011. Date of consultation: 29/08/2012.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷⁷ *Power of the Word* was an exhibition curated by Chang Tsong-zung, owner of the well-known art gallery the Hanart TZ in Hong Kong. The exhibition specifically focussed on the written word and the role of words in (mis)communication. The exhibition then toured to different venues in the United States, some of them college galleries.

word is fake, thus lifting the weight of accumulated culture, leaving only amazement at Xu Bing's artistic vision.⁶⁷⁸

What should be highlighted from this quote is the statement "lifting the weight of accumulated culture" as this describes an essential part of Xu Bing's oeuvre. Within his work, Xu Bing often questions the role of culture, information, communication, and the written word.

There are no further references to the overseas artists in Section A. It is not until section BIV that the catalogue writes about the works of the overseas artists. In this case, Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, Huang Yongping and Wu Shanzhuan.

Gu Wenda

Starting with the artist Gu Wenda, in section BIV, there is a text about the artist and his works. The text mentions that Gu Wenda's works:

constantly allude to the subjectivity of the values of the human condition. Gu, interested in combining elements of different ethnographic backgrounds, ages or sexual identity, describes himself as an "intruder in any nation". In his new project titled *United Nations Series* (...) he puts emphasis on his concerns about Eurocentric hegemony (or better said, "west-centrism") that rules over the "others", the power mechanisms and discrimination that exists in the periphery and that manifests itself through the politics of the international institutions.⁶⁷⁹

This particular fragment writes about the fact that Gu Wenda is concerned about Eurocentric hegemony (west-centrism) and how Eurocentric hegemony rules over the "others". This indirectly might point to the way Chinese experimental art is sometimes received in Euroamerica,⁶⁸⁰ an experience that Gu Wenda has most probably personally dealt with on many occasions. This would reinforce the "west"-centric vision that has sometimes become evident in the exhibition reviews that were analysed in previous chapters and that shall be analysed in the following chapters.

⁶⁷⁸ *Power of the Word* exhibition catalogue, p. 46.

⁶⁷⁹ "[Gu Wenda] (...) al·ludeix constantment a la subjectivitat dels valors de la condició humana. Gu, interessat a conjugar elements de diversitat etnogràfica, diferent edat o identitat sexual, es descriu a si mateix com un "intrús a qualsevol país". En el nou projecte Nacions Unides (...) accentua la preocupació sobre l'hegemonia de l'eurocentrisme (o millor, "occident-centrisme") sobre els "altres", els mecanismes de poder i discriminació sobre la perifèria, que es manifesten a la vida política i a les institucions internacionals." *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 52.

⁶⁸⁰ See section 3 of Block I.

The fact that Gu Wenda calls himself “an intruder in any nation”⁶⁸¹ could be related to the third space and seems to point to his position as an in-between artist. An intruder is somebody who does not belong and who does not feel at ease in the place where he or she is at that moment. An intruder is someone who feels misplaced and uncomfortable. Gu Wenda, an overseas artist living in the United States, mentions that he feels like an intruder in the adopted nation: he does not feel “at home” in the US. He finds himself, in other words, in an in-between space. Interestingly, he also mentions that he feels like an intruder in *any* nation, which would also include his homeland China. It appears that he does not feel Chinese anymore either, which confirms this feeling of being in the in-between: between the United States, Euroamerica, and the “East”, China.

In a video titled *13.02.2012 The Works Hair Artist Gu Wenda*,⁶⁸² Gu talks about his work *United Nations* (1993 -) (Fig. 12, 27, 28, and 41) in an interview and says: “The new internationalism that took place in New York [Gu moved to the United States in 1987] talked about re-establishing cultural identity from different countries, different cultures. Then I started to think about “United Nations” as the project name.”

On his personal website,⁶⁸³ there is a short essay written by Gu Wenda himself, about the *United Nations Series* (1993 -). In this text, he mentions: “The notions such as transculturalism, transnationalism, hybridization are goals of the final ceremony of the project.” This preoccupation with concepts such as transculturalism, new internationalism, hybridization and transnationalism all seem to indicate that the *United Nations Series* (1993 -) could be a good example of an artwork that might be included into the third space concept.⁶⁸⁴ This makes Gu Wenda an artist and a pioneer in the establishment of hybridity and a new perception on interculturalism, and the abolishment of the “East-West” dichotomy. His work *United Nations Series* (1993 -) which already started in the early years of 1993 is an example of an artwork that was ahead of its time.

⁶⁸¹ *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 52.

⁶⁸² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhZp9J7QbJI>., February 13 2012. Date of last consultation: 15/08/2014.

⁶⁸³ <http://www.wendagu.com/home.html>., n.d. Date of last consultation: 15/08/2014.

⁶⁸⁴ See paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

Huang Yongping

The next page in section BIV is dedicated to the overseas artist Huang Yongping. The following fragment shall be highlighted:

Huang Yongping likes to provoke bureaucracy and to question the limits of the arts. (...) [Around 1985] Huang Yongping starts to experiment with random chance in order to make creations in the most objective way possible. He therefore constructs and uses various rotating discs and roulettes that enable the work to create itself and to leave, according to a Zen instinct, the personality of the artist at the side lines.⁶⁸⁵

About his work “*The History of Chinese Painting*” and “*The History of Modern Western Art*” *Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987/1993) (Fig. 31) the catalogue texts states: “the paper pulp, the result of the fusion between oriental and occidental aesthetic thought was a purifying idea and the intention was to show hope for both civilizations”.⁶⁸⁶ The well-known art curator Harald Szeeman has mentioned about this work:

“Everywhere one senses that the Chinese are beginning to flex their muscles, not just politically or economically but also artistically. Aware of their importance, they dare to invoke ancient dreams where the spiritual wedding between orient and occident ironically takes place by laundring a lavish western and eastern book. Piles of lacerated paper are the result.”⁶⁸⁷

Referring to an article published in the *Inside Out* (1998) exhibition catalogue that shall be analysed in chapter eight, the art critic and expert on Chinese experimental art Wu Hung writes about this particular work by Huang Yongping. The fragment shall be quoted here as it shines a light on the above-mentioned fragment:

Huang’s ‘*A History of Chinese Painting*’ and ‘*A Concise History of Modern Painting*’ *Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes*, 1987/1993, shifted the focus from destruction to a ‘still life’ of ruins: a conglomeration of paper paste- the remains of the two books- piled on a piece of broken glass supported by an old wooden trunk. (...) Again, this work, when viewed in the post-Cultural Revolution context, delivers two overlapping messages: according to Huang himself, it expresses his negation of any formal knowledge, ancient or modern, eastern or western; but viewers who had gone through the Cultural Revolution still remember clearly how “knowledge” was negated and how similar art books were destined to be destroyed during the political turmoil.”⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁵ “a Huang Yongping li ha agradat provocar la burocràcia i qüestionar els límits de l’art. A mitjan anys vuitanta (...) Huang Yongping comença també en aquests anys a experimentar amb l’atzar, intentant objectivitzar al màxim la peça d’art i fabricant una sèrie de discos giratoris, ruletes que permeten crear-se les obres per elles mateixes i pretenen deixar al marge, amb instint zen, la personalitat de l’artista.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 53.

⁶⁸⁶ “[*La historia de l’art xinès, i Una breu historia de l’art modern, después de dos minuts en la rentadora*] La idea purificadora: la pasta de paper, resultat de la fusió del pensament estètic d’Orient i Occident, pretenia mostrar esperances per a les dues civilitzacions.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 53.

⁶⁸⁷ Harald Szeeman, *What Makes Contemporary Chinese Art So Attractive*, 2002, <http://ccaa-awards.org/archives/2002>. Date of last consultation: 19/3/2012

⁶⁸⁸ Wu Hung in the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 62.



Figure 31: Huang Yongping, “The History of Chinese Painting” and “The History of Modern Western Art” Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes, 1987/1993

The interpretation written in the catalogue of *Des del País del Centre*, seems to be quite different from the explanation given of the work within the exhibition catalogue of *Inside Out* (1998). The *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue talks about the rebellious character of Huang Yongping and the way he tries to abolish the active role of the artist as an influence during the creation process, and his intents to create in the most objective and random way possible. The interpretation of Wu Hung, however, seems to be politically oriented as he relates Huang Yongping’s washing machine project with the destroying of books during the Cultural Revolution.

Yet, even though this is an emblematic work for the artist, it was not presented at *Des del País del Centre*. Huang Yongping’s in-situ work, *Imported Articles* (1995) that was planned for the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition was eventually cancelled due to the technical impossibility to perform this work. Huang Yongping had planned for a wooden boat to “break through” the roof of the Arts Santa Mònica building, hereby “spilling” boxes containing “cultural contamination imported from the Middle Kingdom”⁶⁸⁹ into the exhibition space. The wooden boxes were in fact the boxes that were used to transport the works that were displayed at *Des del País del Centre*. With the title, Huang Yongping points to the “western” influences that during the Cultural Revolution carried the connotation of

⁶⁸⁹ “tot deixant caure de les seves entranyes la contaminació cultural importada del País del Centre”, *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue, 1995, p. 53.

being cheap and “toxic”, as mentions the exhibition catalogue,⁶⁹⁰ and that should be avoided at all cost. Within the exhibition catalogue no specific interpretation of this work is given but the work could be seen as the inversion of roles. Nowadays in the global society many products arrive from China to Europe and the United States and these are often considered in Euroamerica as cheap and toxic. Could it have been Huang Yongping’s intention to portray the artworks on display, coming from China (imported from China) as cheap and toxic?

Xu Bing

The next page of section BIV is dedicated to the artist Xu Bing. The catalogue mentions: “After his creation of *Book from the Sky*, the most recent works of Xu Bing reflect with more intensity on his concerns about the cultural confrontation between the Orient and the Occident, the interaction between Chinese and Western culture.”⁶⁹¹

What follows is an explanation of his work *A Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32) that was displayed at the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition via a video installation that was made specifically for the Arts Santa Mònica survey in 1995. The main objective of the text seems to be the description of this work. Although the text does not provide interpretations of this installation, it does raise questions on “west”-centrism and the cultural domination of the “West”. After the explanation of Xu Bing’s work *A Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32), two questions are asked: “[the work represents] cultural domination of the West? The chauvinistic culture of the developed countries ‘violates’ the cultures of the periphery?”⁶⁹² These questions remain unanswered.⁶⁹³

A Case Study of Transference (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32), however, does not seem to be *only* about Euroamerican hegemony or Eurocentrism. It is a highly complex work that has evolved and changed its meaning during the process of making. On Xu Bing’s website,

⁶⁹⁰ *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 53.

⁶⁹¹ “Després de la seva obra *Llibre celestial*, els darrers treballs de Xu Bing reflecteixen amb més intensitat la seva preocupació per l’enfrontament cultural, per la contaminació mútua entre Orient i Occident, per la interacció entre la cultura xinesa i la cultura occidental.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 55.

⁶⁹² “[l’obra representa] dominació cultural de l’oest? El xovinisme cultural dels països desenvolupats “viola” les cultures perifèriques?” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 55.

⁶⁹³ See also paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

there is an extensive text which explains this process. Here are some highlights that might clarify the complexity of this work:

With the performance piece, *A Case Study of Transference*, Xu Bing deliberately combined powerful cultural icons with emotionally laden issues, and left the interpretation open. (...)

For this piece (originally presented at the Han Mo Arts Center, Beijing; January 22, 1994), Xu selected a male and female pig, and printed the boar with nonsensical strings of letters from the Roman alphabet, the sow with the illegible characters he had created for *A Book from the Sky*. He then placed the pigs in an enclosure strewn with books in different languages, with the intention that they should mate. [A] video records the event itself and concurrent and subsequent reactions and comments. (...)

While Xu hoped that *A Case Study of Transference* would engender such interpretations as "nature is a greater force than culture/culture is irrelevant to nature" (if the pigs mated without regard to the books underfoot or the printing on their backs), he realized that the pigs might not cooperate. In fact, the pigs did their part with aplomb, but unforeseen reactions of the crowd viewing the event provided unexpected additional interpretations that Xu Bing finds particularly interesting. The audience was nervous and embarrassed to be witnessing two animals mating, suggesting the distance culture has placed between humankind and nature. According to Xu Bing, *A Case Study of Transference* made people contemplate what it means to be human: after all, "people and pigs are completely the same, except culture has changed people" (October 1994 conversation with Xu Bing). Xu's interest in the piece now has largely been redirected towards questions of what it is to be human.

(...) Two subtitles encourage considering the performance in terms of the interaction between Chinese and Western culture, a point of view that Xu intended from the work's conception, and that still seems relevant to him. Early in the video, Xu Bing notes that the pigs are a new breed resulting from crossing the American York with the Chinese Changbai pig, so that the video audience will contemplate successful meetings of East and West (of which Xu Bing's art is a prime example). Later in the video, a Chinese person notices the eagerness of the sow, who was printed with characters resembling Chinese, to "perform" and jokingly remarks "Hey! I understand this work. It's saying that Asian art still has some stamina left." With the inclusion of this quotation in the video, Xu Bing suggested the cultural domination of China by the West. Also supporting the idea of the West's cultural hegemony is an early title that was later rejected, *Adultery or Rape?* and the choice of the boar as the bearer of the nonsensical "English."⁶⁹⁴



Figure 32: Xu Bing, *Case of Transference*, 1994

⁶⁹⁴ http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/evolving_meanings_in_xu_bings_art_a_case_study_of_transference, n.d., date of consultation: 30/08/2012.

Wu Shanzhuan

The last text is dedicated to the work of Wu Shuanzhuan, who for this occasion collaborated with the Icelandic artist Inga Thórsdóttir. The text is very short and does not explain much about the artists nor the artwork that was created especially for Arts Santa Mònica with the title *Showing China from its Best Sides* (1995) (Fig. 33).

On the website of the Institutions of Chinart, an online database project of Chinese experimental art, there is a short description of this work.⁶⁹⁵

At the same time as the show in Hamburg, Wu Shanzhuan and Inga Svala Thórsdóttir were invited to participate in 'From the Middle Realm: Avant-garde Chinese Artists' at the Centre d'Art Santa Monica in Barcelona. They exhibited a variant of *Showing China from its Best Sides - Made in China*. They had established contact with factories in China, who were then cited as 'co-workers' in the exhibition catalogue. Posters and photos showed their advertising activities. Further photos showed to what extent the advertising of products had conquered famous Chinese buildings. The negotiations with Chinese firms were drawn out for over a half a year. (...) [I]t voiced the new mentality of the business world, with part funny, part sober and part absurd stories. In their mimicry of advertisements, the artists set a tone [which meant that] visitors weren't sure if they were dealing with an advertising event or a clownesque-serious art piece. That, however, was exactly what the artists were aiming for: to further pursue and question actual and prospective events, in the guise of an artistic camouflage. That is why *Showing China from its Best Sides* was underlined with *Taste the Sweet of Communism*, where tempting Chinese sweets were offered to the visitors.

It is very difficult to understand this artwork just by reading the exhibition catalogue or this short quote from Chinart. Nowhere in the catalogue is this particular work elaborated upon which might indicate that it was not yet known which work this duo would present at the survey at the time of the elaboration of the exhibition catalogue. In the above-mentioned fragment the work is briefly described however no further interpretation is given on it.

Showing China from its Best Sides (1995) seems to be somewhat of a joke and might be related to the relationship between Euroamerica and China in the post Cold War period. The poster that advertises China depicts beautiful cascades and an idyllic green scenery of nature. Moreover, as mentioned in the text, sweets were handed out to the audience. All this indicates a rather "sweetened" way of presenting China to the "West", almost as a way of "childish" reconciliation.

⁶⁹⁵ Institution of chinart:

http://www.centergallery.org.cn/colt_2/sFavourites_01.asp?id=1172&ArticlePage=9&listtype=11, n.d., date of consultation: 31/08/2012.



Figure 33: Wu Shanzhuan and Inga Thórsdóttir, *Showing China from its Best Sides*, 1995

To conclude this paragraph, the essay that was included in the catalogue, written by Huang Du, titled “New Way”⁶⁹⁶ shall be commented on here. It is a rather long text of about six pages containing a lot of information. Certain passages that are interesting due to their references to the overseas artists have been extracted. In general, the essay is about how Chinese experimental art and the Chinese artists are trying to find new ways to express the global changes that they experience inside and outside of China and how they try to break free from the Euroamerican hegemony that exists in global culture in general and also within the art world.

About the overseas artists, Huang says:

After the “Opening Doors” politics, a lot of Chinese artists emigrated to the United States, France and Germany, like Xu Bing, Huang Yongping, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan and Wang Gongxin, among others. Living in Europe and the US, in a multiracial and pluralist culture, they became interested, above all, in important questions that affected culture and contemporary politics, the contextual relations of the sexes, emigration culture, cultural identity, the economy and violence. The transformations that occurred in their home country inevitably made them revise their own mentality. The changes that appeared in their conceptions and their creative goals are not the result of contrasting “Chinese” thinking with “Occidental culture”, they are reflections on more general topics that surpass cultural differences. It is for this reason that they can directly relate to the Occidental society and its cultural reality. It is through conflicts and “infections” that they try to cross the barrier of antagonism, finding at the same time their own artistic identity and constructing new values.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Original title: *Nou pas*.

⁶⁹⁷ “Després de l’obertura, un gran nombre d’artistes xinesos emigraren als Estats Units, França i Alemanya, com ara Xu Bing, Huang Yongping, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan i Wang Gongxin, entre d’altres. Vivint a Europa i als Estats Units, amb

It seems that Huang Du attributes the ideas behind the creations of the overseas artists to “reflections on more general topics that surpass cultural differences”.⁶⁹⁸ According to the author, the creations of the overseas artists are not the result of contrasting “Oriental” thinking, in this case Chinese, with Euroamerican culture. This is an interesting observation and adds a new perspective to the third space concept: the hybridization of ideas that surpass cultural difference and that come from spaces that lie beyond the “East-West” dichotomy.

The essay then continues:

Before leaving the country, the culture that dominated their [the overseas artists] thinking was their “centre”, and after arriving at the “centre” of the occidental culture, a metamorphosis occurred in their linguistic context and artistic semantics. However, their psychological mind frame did not change immediately (...). At the same time, they also express their disagreement towards the sensation of oppression that they feel and that is caused by the occidental culture. (...) This is reflected in a spatial political conscience in the creations of the Chinese artists.⁶⁹⁹

According to Huang Du, the overseas artists also express, through their creations, their disagreement with the oppression that they experience that is caused by “western” culture. This might be the case in some artworks but not in all, as might have been observed in this chapter when describing the works of Gu Wenda or Huang Yongping.

Further on he continues:

In the end, the main goal of the Chinese artists is to escape the repression, the negligent trials and oppressive framework in which the West has held Chinese art and, through dialogue with western art, build new cultural and artistic values. This art has been showing the appearance of a growing Chinese generation. The awareness of what one considers ones own, in art, expresses itself by having a center, and from there to try to influence and stimulate artistic and political transformations. (...) Through different techniques, different media, the Chinese artists are searching for a cultural

una cultura multiracial i pluralista, es van interessar sobretot per qüestions importants que afecten la cultura i la política contemporànies, les relacions contextuals de sexe, la cultura de l'emigració, la identitat cultural, l'economia i la violència. Les transformacions en el seu ambient cultural d'origen, els condueixen inevitablement a revisar la seva pròpia mentalitat. Les mutacions en les seves concepcions i els seus objectius creatius no són el contrast entre el pensament dels “xinesos” i de la “cultura occidental”, sinó temes de tipus general que sobrepassen les diferències culturals. És per això que s'adhereixen directament a la societat occidental i a la seva realitat cultural, i en els seus conflictes i contagis miren de travessar la barrera de l'antagonisme, tot trobant la seva pròpia identitat artística construint els nous valors.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

⁶⁹⁸ *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

⁶⁹⁹ “Abans de sortir del país, la cultura que portaven al seu pensament era el seu “centre”, i després de la seva arribada al “centre” de la cultura occidental, el seu context lingüístic i la seva semàntica artística van patir una metamorfosi. Però, els seus factors psicològics no es transformaren immediatament. (...) Al mateix temps, expressen també la seva oposició a la sensació d'opressió que els causa la cultura occidental. (...) aquesta reflecteix una consciència política espacial en les creacions dels artistes xinesos.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

startingpoint to call their own. They have developed a cultural concern about which methods to use in order to describe feelings, beliefs and identities.⁷⁰⁰

Huang Du mentions that the “West” is oppressing Chinese experimental art, although he does not give any further explanations or examples to illustrate his statement. He also mentions the fact that overseas artists are searching for a new “centre” from which they can “influence and stimulate artistic and political transformations” and which allows them to express their feelings, their beliefs and their identity. Although Huang does not mention it specifically in his text, this search for a new centre or cultural starting point does coincide with the third space concept in which one searches for a new space between, in this case, “East” and “West”.

Later on, Huang makes a comment on art in general and insinuates a global art market in which nationalistic art shall cease to exist:

The coexistence and the cultural hegemony of post-modernism have given us a horizon that is more open and wide. Pure nationalistic art will no longer exist because the art of the whole world is being mixed. However, the cultural attitude of the occidental centrism still contains certain prejudices and even though it displays an attitude of openness, in no way does it treat the peripheral cultures as equals.⁷⁰¹

This fragment seems to be illustrative of what has been seen in the reviews analysed in the previous chapters (and the reviews that shall be analysed in the following chapters): the world is changing into a globalized society in which cultures are becoming hybrid. However, in the art world, an “occidental” superiority seems to persist. This Euroamerican superiority towards the periphery causes misinterpretations of Chinese experimental artworks.⁷⁰² It is as Huang says:

The Occidental art critics and curators of contemporary art find their references in “Occidentalism”. When validating art that is neither European nor American, they do this considering that there is a consanguinity of art and culture. This causes the misunderstanding of contemporary art of the peripheral countries. However, in fact, this does not eliminate the differences. On the contrary, the

⁷⁰⁰ “De qualsevol manera, el fi darrer dels artistes xinesos és escapar-se de la repressió, dels judicis negligents i el marc opressor en què Occident tenia l’art xinès; i, per mitjà del diàleg amb l’art occidental, construir nous valors culturals i artístics. Aquest art ha expressat la fisonomia d’una generació xinesa que creix. La consciència del que és propi, en art, s’expressa construint un centre propi, intentant estimular i influir les transformacions artístiques i polítiques. (...) A partir de diferents tècniques, de diferents mitjans, els artistes xinesos busquen un punt de partida cultural propi, desenvolupant una inquietud cultural sobre els mètodes per descriure sentiments, creences i identitats.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 50-51.

⁷⁰¹ “La coexistència i la superposició cultural que subratlla el postmodernisme, ens ha proporcionat un horitzó més obert i més extens. L’art purament nacionalista ja no existirà més, ja que l’art de tot el planeta es fusiona. Això no obstant, l’actitud cultural del centrisme occidental encara conté uns certs prejudicis i, encara que mostra una actitud d’obertura, no tracta de cap manera les cultures perifèriques amb un punt de vista igualitari.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 50.

⁷⁰² See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

differences are reinforced. It is as Edward W. Said said: Ever since there has been an occidental conscience about the Orient, this was merely a word which later has extended itself to a wide field of meanings, associations and connotations that not necessarily referred to the real Orient, but to the area that surrounded the word.⁷⁰³

Huang Du mentions a phenomenon which has been observed in the exhibition reviews analysed in previous chapters and which has also been dealt with extensively in the theoretic part of this dissertation. In many cases, Chinese experimental art is understood by resorting to Euroamerican artworks and art styles and by comparing both even though their cultural and historic background are very different. Huang Du then illustrates this observation by pointing to the author Edward Said who became well known for his book titled *Orientalism* that was published in 1978. In this book he criticizes the “West”, which consisted of the United States and Europe, and its eurocentrism by stating that there are a lot of errors in the foundation of “western” thought about the “East”. In this text, he argues that the image that the “West” has of the “East” and the Middle East is romanticized and false, and that it has served as a justification for “western” imperialism in these areas. In this fragment of the exhibition catalogue, Huang refers to Said in order to explain the fact that Chinese experimental art is seen through the image that Euroamerica has of the “East”. As seen in some reviews, Chinese experimental art is sometimes compared with or described through “western” art styles or artworks. This is a good example of what Huang is trying to make clear when he talks about the consanguinity of art and culture. Huang here says that Chinese and Euroamerican art are not the same and therefore, art critics often make a mistake when describing and interpreting Chinese artworks within a Euroamerican context, through “western” eyes.

Lastly, about Xu Bings work *A Case Study of Transference* (1994)(Fig. 7 and 32), Huang says: “it expresses the desperation and the void of current culture. At the same time, it also puts in evidence his criticism toward the inequality in the process of unification and confrontation between Chinese and the Occidental culture.”⁷⁰⁴ This again seems to reinforce the statement of inequality between China and Euroamerica of which he speaks within his article.

⁷⁰³ “Els crítics i els conservadors occidentals d’art contemporani prenen com a base l’ “occidentalisme”, i en jutjar l’art que no és europeu ni americà parteixen d’una imatge de consanguinitat d’art i cultura, mal interpretant l’art contemporani de països pertanyents a la perifèria. Però, de fet, això no elimina les diferències, al contrari, les augmenta. Com va dir Edward W. Said: “Des que va existir en la consciència occidental el coneixement sobre Orient, aquest va ser només una paraula que posteriorment es va estendre a un ampli camp de significats, associacions i connotacions que no necessàriament es referien a l’Orient real, sinó al camp que envoltava la paraula.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 46.

⁷⁰⁴ “[L’obra] expressa la desesperança i el buit de la cultural actual. Al mateix temps, posa en evidència la seva crítica per la desigualtat en aquest procés d’unió i enfrontament entre les cultures xinesa i occidental.” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

In the next paragraph various reviews that resulted from the exhibition shall be analysed. The aim is to find out how the art critics have interpreted the artworks and if they have been able to capture the contribution that the Chinese (overseas) artists have made to global culture, as was the objective of the survey.

Another question that has been raised by this analysis of the exhibition catalogue is whether this message of inequality between “East” and “West”, and the oppression of the peripheral countries by Euroamerican culture has been captured and transmitted by these reviews.

6.3 The exhibition reviews

In total there are twelve reviews, the majority written in Spanish or Catalan. As the exhibition was held in Barcelona, it is logical that the reviews come from national newspapers such as *ABC*, the *Vanguardia*, *Avui*, *el Periódico* and *El País*. Some reviews come from art magazines, in this case *Quadern d'Art*, *Ateneu* and *El Europeo*. There is also a short mention of the exhibition (not a review), which appeared in *Artworld*, a magazine that is published in London.⁷⁰⁵ An effort has been made to trace the professional background of the authors who wrote these reviews but this has not always been possible. Arts Santa Mònica has not been able to provide any further information on the reviews such as the date of publication of some of the reviews due to the remote date of the exhibition. It is for this reason that some reviews do not mention the date of publication.

The following reviews shall be analysed (in chronological order):

- Manzano, Emilio, *Dos exposiciones muestran en Barcelona la cultura china, desde sus raíces al arte actual*, La Vanguardia, 05/06/1995
- Author unknown, *Vanguardias Chinas*, El Periódico, 19/06/1995
- Ribas, Carles, *De Mao a Mickey*, El País, 20/06/1995
- Spiegel, Olga, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*, La Vanguardia, 20/06/1995
- Calderón, Manuel, *Vanguardia China: Mao según Mickey Mouse*, ABC de las artes, 07/07/1995
- Frisach, Montse, *El despertar de l'art xinès*, Avui, 20/07/1995
- Jaén, Maria, *Xina psíquedèlica*, Avui, 27/07/1995
- Puig, Arnau, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (reflexion sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, Ateneu: revista de cultura 2^a època, 1995, nr. 17, p-14-15
- Barral i Altet, Xavier, *Sis reflexions contemporànies*, Quadern d'Art, date unknown.
- Escribà, Concha G., *China Post*, El Europeo, date unknown. This magazine has ceased to exist and was closed in 1992.
- Ginart, Belén, *Mickey y Mao*, El País (?), date unknown

⁷⁰⁵ Author unknown, *The Dislocated Aperto*, Artworld, June issue 1995

6.3.1 Newspapers

6.3.1.1 Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*

The first review is titled *Psychedelic China*⁷⁰⁶ and is a concise and quite a harsh review. About experimental Chinese art, Maria Jaén, a novelist and occasional writer for the newspaper *El País* and *Avui*, states: “Apart from the more traditional and millenary art, it seems that in China there exists another kind of art, also tolerated by the authorities, but much less exportable.”⁷⁰⁷ Then she continues by saying that Chinese avant-garde art is inspired “basically by pop art and Warhol”. About the artists, she says: “In an attempt to distance themselves from the realistic style that was characteristic for the Cultural Revolution and in order to find new ways of expression through art, these authors always look to criticism and political reflexion.”⁷⁰⁸

There are various aspects that can be highlighted in this short fragment. First of all, Chinese experimental art is placed within a political context when the author mentions that is it “tolerated by the authorities”. This insinuates that it is a rebellious type of art that has to be controlled, and in this case that has been allowed by the Chinese government. This political interpretation is then later confirmed when the author mentions that the artists “look to criticism and political reflexion” as ways of expression. A third aspect that is important is that Jaén mentions that Chinese experimental art is inspired “basically by pop art and Warhol”. This seems to be an approach often used by Euroamerican art critics in order to interpret Chinese experimental art: by referring to Euroamerican art history in order to understand the Chinese artworks, which in some cases might seem foreign to the Euroamerican culture and way of thinking. It is a strategy used in order to comprehend the non-Euroamerican art: by making it more familiar to one’s own culture.⁷⁰⁹ Yet, as shall be seen later on in the review of Arnau Puig i Grau of the *Ateneu* magazine, the employment of Euroamerican styles in Chinese experimental art cannot be seen as simply copying the

⁷⁰⁶ Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*, *Avui*, June 27 1995.

⁷⁰⁷ “Al costat de l’art més tradicional i mil·lenari, sembla que a la Xina hi ha una altra mena d’art, permès també per les autoritats, però molt menys exportable.” Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*, *Avui*, June 27 1995.

⁷⁰⁸ “En l’intent d’allunyar-se del realisme característic de la Revolució Cultural, i de trobar nous camins per a l’art, aquests autors passen sempre per la crítica i la reflexió política.” Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*, *Avui*, June 27 1995.

⁷⁰⁹ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

“West”, it is a way of expressing the feelings and points of view of the Chinese artists in order to create new alternatives for Euroamerican as well as Chinese art.⁷¹⁰

About Xu Bing’s two works, *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) and *Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32), Maria Jaén mentions that these works

are purely critical and practically useless. Those in charge tolerate them and are not scared of these creations. It is hard to find a market for these artworks, inside as well as outside of China. And for us, they could merely be curiosities with an aftertaste that reminds of the past: A recent past, yet at the same time so very remote.⁷¹¹

The fact that the author perceives these artworks as “purely critical and practically useless” is quite questionable, especially after reading different opinions on these works, particularly on *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45). It is not clear if the author describes them as useless because she considers that there is no market for these works. If this is the case, then the author has a rather peculiar perception of the arts: that art is useful only when it is easy to sell. In any case, it seems that the contrary is true. *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) has been widely solicited and displayed at many exhibitions around the world and the installation has become one of the most well-known and debated artworks of the Chinese experimental art scene. Lastly, it should be mentioned that *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) was purchased in 1994 by the Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art, a year before the Art Santa Mònica exhibition.

The fact that the author writes that the works are merely curiosities with an aftertaste that reminds of the past is a personal opinion of the critic. She does not further comment on this judgement. The fact that the artworks remind the art critic of the recent past of China is, again, placing Chinese experimental art within a political context because probably, what the author insinuates with “the past” is the Cultural Revolution. In all, many points of her review are questionable and seem to lack a solid foundation, as the author does not explain herself within her review. However, it is a review that is quite illustrative of a “typical” Euroamerican review, as it shows various characteristics that have been

⁷¹⁰ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁷¹¹ “Obres purament crítiques que serveixen de ben poc. El poder les permet i no les tem. Díficilment troben mercat, ni a dins ni a fora de les seves fronteres. I per nosaltres poden ser només una curiositat amb regust de passat. Passat recent, però llunyà.” Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*, Avui, June 27 1995.

observed in many others reviews: placing Chinese experimental art within a political and historical context, and comparing it to Euroamerican styles such as pop art.

6.3.1.2 Montse Frisach, *El despertar de l'art xinès*

The next review also comes from the newspaper *Avui* and is titled *The awakening of Chinese art*.⁷¹² Montse Frisach, a journalist of visual arts, mentions in her review that the aim of the exhibition is to “introduce the viewer to a type of art which is very unknown to us but that is starting to join the international artistic agendas.”⁷¹³ About the overseas artists, she quotes a comment made by Inma Puy, the exhibition curator, in which she says that the favorite medium of expression for the overseas artists is installation works.

The review is written from a political context and the tone is set at the beginning of the article when the author says: “In 1989, *Avantgarde* was organized in Peking. The show was then closed down when the artists shot at their own works”.⁷¹⁴ This is exaggerated and gives the impression that all artists started shooting at their own works. This, however, was not the case. In total, the *China/ Avant Garde* (1989) show displayed around three hundred works and around one hundred artists participated. Only one work was shot at and this was a staged event. The female artist Xiao Lu shot at her own installation work *Dialogue* (1989) (Fig. 34), which was made out of two telephone cells with two “people’s” back turned toward the viewer, talking on the phone.⁷¹⁵ She obviously caused a stir. The show was then closed down and reopened five days later. The exhibition was then closed down again when various anonymous letters with bomb threats arrived. The letters later on turned out to be a performance by an artist although the artist remains unknown until today.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² Montse Frisach, *El despertar de l'art xinès*, *Avui*, June 20, 1995.

⁷¹³ “L’exposició vol ser una aproximació a un art que ens és molt desconegut però que comença a incorporar-se a les programacions artístiques internacionals.” Montse Frisach, *El despertar de l'art xinès*, *Avui*, June 20, 1995.

⁷¹⁴ “El 1989 es va fer a Pequín la mostra ‘Avantgarde’, que va ser clausurada després d’una acció on els artistes disparaven contra les seves pròpies obres.” Montse Frisach, *El despertar de l'art xinès*, *Avui*, June 20, 1995.

⁷¹⁵ This particular work was also described in a rather sensational way by Iain Robertson who reviewed the *Silent Energy* exhibition. See paragraph 2.4 of Block II. *Dialogue* was also mentioned by the art curator Julia F. Andrews in *Fragmented Memory*. See paragraph 3.2 of Block II.

⁷¹⁶ Among other sources, see *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 200



Figure 34: Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, 1989

The review then gives a detailed yet brief explanation on the exhibition and its different sections. The words Cultural Revolution and Mao are also mentioned within her text. All in all, the author seems to want to attribute a sensational and rather “dissident” character to the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition, maybe in order to make it more attractive for a Spanish/Catalan audience.

6.3.1.3 Belén Ginart, *Mickey and Mao*

The next review comes from *El País* and is titled *Mickey and Mao*.⁷¹⁷ Belén Ginart, the author of the review is a cultural journalist for the Spanish newspaper *El País*, and has written various articles on theatre and television programs. Her first observation on Chinese experimental art is that “it has gone from a social realistic style to Asian pop art”. She then puts an emphasis on her political view of Chinese experimental art by saying, “It is an occasion to see the art of the Chinese vanguards, an art that does not worry the totalitarian regime, which is more interested in the doctrine of benefit than in the decalogue of ideological virtues.”⁷¹⁸ The whole article, in general, has been written from a political focus. Putting emphasis on the dissident character, according to the author, of Chinese experimental art.

Also the choice of title is significant. The fact that the author seems to want to summarize Chinese experimental art by using just two concepts “Mickey” and “Mao” might seem a bit

⁷¹⁷ Belén Ginart, *Mickey y Mao*, *El País*, June 20 1995.

⁷¹⁸ “Se trata de una ocasión de ver el arte de las vanguardias chinas, un arte que no preocupa a un régimen totalitario más interesado en la doctrina del beneficio que en el decálogo y las purezas ideológicas.” Belén Ginart, *Mickey y Mao*, *El País*, June 20 1995.

too blunt. The reason for this title is clarified in the review. *Mickey and Mao* (1993) (Fig. 35) was one of the works that were displayed at the *Des del País del Centre* survey, made by Wang Ziwei. Belén Ginart uses this work as an example to illustrate a comment that she later makes within her review: “Mickey Mouse has replaced Mao and the *pop* of Andy Warhol has taken the place of the social realism style.”⁷¹⁹ In this fragment, Chinese elements, in this case Mao and the social realism style have been replaced by Euroamerican concepts, in this case Mickey Mouse and the pop art of Andy Warhol. It is yet another example of an art critic interpreting Chinese experimental art through Euroamerican eyes and understanding it by comparing it to Euroamerican styles.



Figure 35: Wang Ziwei, *Mickey and Mao*, 1993

Lastly, an interesting fact is that, Ginart makes references to all sections of the exhibition (A and BI to BIII) within her review however the last section, section BIV on the overseas artists is entirely omitted.

6.3.1.4 Olga Spiegel, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*

The following review comes from *La Vanguardia* and is titled *Santa Mónica shows Chinese art of the last 15 years*.⁷²⁰ In the introduction, Olga Spiegel, a journalist for the

⁷¹⁹ “(...) Mickey Mouse ha desplazado a Mao y el *pop* de Andy Warhol al realismo socialista.” Belén Ginart, *Mickey y Mao*, *El País*, June 20 1995.

⁷²⁰ Olga Spiegel, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*, *La Vanguardia*, June 20 1995.

Vanguardia and an art historian, mentions that the process that Chinese experimental art has made has been one of a “progressive artistic contamination of both worlds [the “West” and their own historical background].” This is confirmed by a short quote that Spiegel places within her review in which she quotes Inma Puy:

the idea of the exhibition is to show the artistic panorama of Chinese art after the first “opening up” of China in the late 70s, and to, at the same time, break the clichés about China and abandon the notions of centre and periphery. Nowadays, the Chinese artists have incorporated themselves in Western art and both parts are moving towards a confluence.⁷²¹

Later on in her review, Spiegel makes a comment about the overseas artists: “Now, the artists are not interested in creating political art. They rather look at their daily environment and artistic problems. Those who live overseas, although they maintain links with their cultural heritage, reflect on the problems that affect all humanity.”⁷²² It seems thus that Olga Spiegel has understood the message that the exhibition wanted to transmit to the audience: that the overseas artists are searching for alternative centres from which to develop their own identity and also from which to address topics that go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy.

Lastly, about Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), the author says that it is a “reflexion on oriental culture and occidental culture that are mutually contaminating itself”.⁷²³ This is quite a different interpretation than the ones mentioned in paragraph 6.2 about the works that were presented in *Des del País del Centre*. It is interesting that the author describes this process as “contamination” which makes the interrelation between “East” and “West” seem like a negative phenomenon. It does not become clear within her review but it might be that the author sees the hybridization of the arts, or of “East” and “West” as a negative influence.

⁷²¹ “La idea de la exposición es mostrar el panorama artístico del arte chino tras la primera apertura al exterior de final de los 70 y al mismo tiempo romper con los clichés que tenemos de China, prescindir de las nociones de centro y periferia. Hoy los artistas chinos se han incorporado al arte occidental y ambas direcciones marchan hacia la confluencia.” Olga Spiegel, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*, La Vanguardia, June 20 1995.

⁷²² “Ahora, los artistas no están interesados en realizar un arte político. Miran más bien su entorno cotidiano y problemas de carácter artístico. Los que viven en el extranjero, aunque mantienen vínculos con su herencia cultural, reflexionan sobre problemas que afectan a toda la humanidad.” Olga Spiegel, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*, La Vanguardia, June 20 1995.

⁷²³ “La de Xu Bing [su instalación] supone una reflexión en torno a la contaminación entre la cultura oriental y la occidental.” Olga Spiegel, *Santa Mónica muestra el arte chino de los últimos quince años*, La Vanguardia, June 20 1995.

6.3.1.5 Author unknown, *Vanguardias Chinas*

The next review comes from *El Periódico*⁷²⁴ and it is not clear who the author of the article is. It is a very brief review and the only fragment that is to be highlighted from this text is the following: “Via this exhibition one can compare the different reactions of the artists who live in and outside of their native country when confronted with the West from the 80s onwards.”⁷²⁵ This short fragment seems to coincide with the aim that was expressed in the introduction of the *Des del País del Centre* catalogue, which has been mentioned before in this chapter: to show how Chinese experimental art reacted to the “West” and how this reaction manifested itself in the artworks.

6.3.1.6 Manuel Calderón, *China Avant-garde: Mao according to Mickey*

The next review comes from the newspaper *ABC*⁷²⁶ and is titled: *China Avant-garde: Mao according to Mickey*. The author is Manuel Calderón, an expert on art and who, since 1992, writes for *ABC de las artes* about artistic events in Barcelona. It is quite a critical review and the article starts by mentioning that when one thinks of China, one usually associates China with a millenary culture in which everything that is produced has to be old, ancestral and wise. Here, the author makes reference to the stereotypical image of China that, according to the author, seems to persist in the Euroamerican mind.

Later on, Calderón continues by saying that the artworks that were displayed at the exhibition *Des del País del Centre* do not differentiate themselves from the works that are being made by young “western” contemporary artists. The fact that Chinese experimental art is just like “western” contemporary art is repeated three times within his review. He concludes by saying: “The exhibition includes a selection of Chinese artists that work overseas, in Paris, New York or Hamburg: nothing new, as we have said before. Maybe just superior technological potential, controlled by the policies of the museums.”⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ Author unknown, *Vanguardias Chinas*, *El Periódico*, June 19 1995.

⁷²⁵ “A través de esta exposición se pueden comparar las diferentes reacciones de los artistas que viven dentro y fuera de su país natal ante el contacto con Occidente desde los años ochenta.” Author unknown, *Vanguardias Chinas*, *El Periódico*, June 19 1995.

⁷²⁶ Manuel Calderón, *Vanguardia China: Mao según Mickey Mouse*, *ABC de las artes*, 07/07/1995.

⁷²⁷ “La exposición incluye una selección de artistas chinos que trabajan en el extranjero, en París, Nueva York o Hamburgo. Nada nuevo, como decíamos. Quizá unas posibilidades tecnológicas superiores y regidas por las normas de los museos.” Manuel Calderón, *Vanguardia China: Mao según Mickey Mouse*, *ABC de las artes*, 07/07/1995.

The fact that the author of the review describes the artworks of the overseas artists as “nothing new” is quite surprising, considering the fact that the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition was organized in 1995 and was the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in Spain. Again, this comment seems to be the result of interpreting and understanding Chinese experimental art strictly through Euroamerican “glasses”. The author assumes that both Chinese experimental art and Euroamerican art are comparable and ignores the fact that both art currents come from different cultural and historical backgrounds, hereby changing the message that these artworks transmit onto the audience.

It is also noteworthy that the title, as seen in the review by Belén Ginart, includes the words “Mao” and “Mickey”. Within the review, the author says: “After all, if Warhol painted or serigraphed Mao over and over again, why shouldn’t the young Chinese artists not follow the footsteps of the king of pop by painting Mickey Mouse.”⁷²⁸ It seems that the author is insinuating that all young Chinese artists paint Mickey Mouse as a reaction to Andy Warhol’s paintings of Mao. This is quite a generalizing comment to make, especially when the author does not provide any nuances or foundations for this comment. In no case was this particular painting of Mickey Mouse representative of the artworks or the participating artists of *Des del País del Centre*.

6.3.1.7 Emilio Manzano, *Dos exposiciones muestran en Barcelona la cultura china, desde sus raíces al arte actual*

The next review comes from *La Vanguardia*⁷²⁹ and is about the two exhibitions that were organized at the same time in Barcelona. One being *Des del País del Centre* and another, dedicated to antic Chinese art from the museum of Nanjing that was organized at the Fundació Miró. The author is Emilio Manzano, graduate in Spanish philology and journalist for various newspapers. He was also the host of various TV shows about literature.

⁷²⁸ “Después de todo, si Warhol pintó o serigrafó hasta a la saciedad a Mao, por qué los jóvenes artistas chinos no van a seguir al rey del pop pintando a Mickey Mouse.” Manuel Calderón, *Vanguardia China: Mao según Mickey Mouse*, ABC de las artes, 07/07/1995.

⁷²⁹ Emilio Manzano, *Dos exposiciones muestran en Barcelona la cultura china, desde sus raíces al arte actual*, La Vanguardia, June 5th 1995.

There is actually quite little said about the exhibition of Arts Santa Mònica within this particular review. However, there is mention of the overseas artists when Manzano comments:

The exhibition includes a selection of the works of Chinese artists who are living outside of the country and explores the different ways in which they have reacted while in contact with the west without forgetting their own traditional roots. Often their works decontextualize the tradition of their home country through a process of construction and deconstruction of symbols. This way, the visitor shall find works such as “Mickey Mouse & Mao” or “Portrait of two comrades and a red baby”.⁷³⁰

It should be said that the authors of these two works are Wang Ziwei, who lives between Vancouver and Shanghai and Zhang Xiaogang, who has studied in Germany for three months but lives in Beijing. It is curious that the author mentions these two artists and calls them “overseas artists” whereas artists as Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, for example, who have moved to the United States,⁷³¹ are omitted within his article. The reason for this is not clear.

And again, reference is made to the painting of Mickey Mouse and Mao. It is the third time that this particular work of Mickey Mouse is mentioned within a review. It could be that this work is easier to connect to, due to its pop-art character and familiar images, than, for example, Gu Wenda’s *United Nations Series* (1993 -) (Fig. 12, 27, 28 and 41) made out of human hair or Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), making it more attractive for a Spanish/Catalan audience. However, this particular painting should not and cannot be considered representative of the works that were on display at *Des del País del Centre* and especially not of the overseas artists who participated in the show. Nor can this particular work be considered illustrative of the way Euroamerican styles, culture, and artworks have influenced Chinese experimental art over the years. The author mentions within his article: “(...) the different ways in which [the overseas artists] have reacted while in contact with the west without forgetting their own traditional roots”. This comment is interesting yet, if the remark is illustrated by the paintings of Wang Ziwei and Zhang Xiaogang, it is quite a poor illustration of this statement. This would mean that Mickey Mouse represents the result of the overseas artists’ contact with the “West”, which

⁷³⁰ “La exposición incluye una panorámica del trabajo de los artistas chinos residentes fuera de su país, que exploran las diferentes reacciones de los creadores en su encuentro con Occidente y la propia tradición heredada, a menudo descontextualizándola, en un proceso de construcción y deconstrucción de símbolos. Así, el visitante conocerá obras tituladas ‘Mickey & Mao’ o ‘Retrat de dos camarades i un bebé vermell’.” Emilio Manzano, *Dos exposiciones muestran en Barcelona la cultura china, desde sus raíces al arte actual*, La Vanguardia, June 5th 1995.

⁷³¹ Xu Bing has currently moved back to China.

is a rather meagre way of summing up the complexity of the Chinese experimental artists' relationship with Euroamerica.

6.3.2 Magazines

6.3.2.1 Xavier Barral i Altet, *Sis reflexions contemporànies*

The first review is titled *Six contemporary thoughts* and comes from the magazine *Quadern d'Art*,⁷³² which is a magazine distributed by the Catalan newspaper *Avui*. It is a one-page text with various reviews on the exhibitions that were on display at that time in Barcelona, one of them being *Des del País del Centre*. The author of the article is Xavier Barral i Altet who is of French nationality. From 1992 until 1994 he was the director of the MNAC (National Art Museum of Catalonia) in Barcelona. Currently he is professor Emeritus of History of Medieval Art at the University of Rennes II-Haute Bretagne. During his career, he curated various exhibitions in Catalonia, mainly about subjects related to the medieval period. In his review, he mentions:

Due to the Cultural Revolution, neo-realist imagery appeared that was based on the Mao cult and the little Red Book. Keeping this in mind, it allows one to better understand the cultural impact and repression that the artists have had to overcome in order to create contemporary works of their own. The search for ways of expression that would not deny the past, even though the past is being ironized, and would not follow Western aesthetic models, were an obsession for the Chinese artists of Mainland China and those who left the country after the death of Mao and the opening-up of China, economically and socially, to the outside world.⁷³³

The first element that is highlighted within this article is the mention of the “Cultural Revolution” and the author’s claim that it is important to keep China’s recent history in mind in order to understand the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition. This comment is an indication of the author’s intent to put Chinese experimental art within a political mindframe, even though it seems to be out of context.

According to Barral, what obsessed the Chinese and the overseas Chinese artists was to create artworks that would not deny the past nor follow “western” aesthetic models. Euroamerican art critics often make this comment and it has been observed in other

⁷³² Xavier Barral i Altet, *Sis reflexions contemporànies*, *Quadern d'Art*, n.d.

⁷³³ “De la Revolució Cultural en va sortir tota una imatgeria neorealista al voltant del culte a Mao i del *Llibre vermell* que permet, veient-la, de mesurar millor tot el pes cultural i repressiu que s’han hagut de treure de sobre els artistes per afrontar una creació contemporània pròpia. La recerca de camins d’expressió que no reneguessin del passat, encara que l’ironitzessin, i que no es deixessin emportar pels models estètics dictats per l’estranger, va obsessionar, després de la mort de Mao i de les obertures econòmiques i socials, els artistes xinesos de l’interior o els que es van instal·lar en altres països.” Xavier Barral i Altet, *Sis reflexions contemporànies*, *Quadern d'Art*, n.d.

reviews analysed within past chapters. This comment does not entirely coincide with what Huang Du has written in his essay in which he mentions that the creations of the overseas artists are the result of their search for a “centre” from which they can influence and stimulate artistic and political transformations.

In his review, the author mentions Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), *A Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32), and Zhang Xiaogang’s *Bloodline Series* (1994 -). He does not, however, make any further comment on the works. The review is therefore too brief and does not provide insightful information on the exhibition.

6.3.2.2 Arnau Puig i Grau, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (reflexion sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*

The next review comes from the magazine *Ateneu*.⁷³⁴ It is quite a long review in which the author compares Chinese experimental art with the Catalan Avant-garde. The writer of the essay is Arnau Puig i Grau, who is, among many other professions, doctor in philosophy, an art critic, philosopher, head of the Aesthetic department of the UPC⁷³⁵ and writer of various books among which many on the avant-garde and the Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies, who was a personal friend.

First of all, it is interesting to underline the words “Prohibit canviar de direcció” which in Catalan means “No u-turn”. This strongly reminds of the no u-turn sign which became somewhat emblematic of the 1989 *China/ Avant-Garde* show held in Beijing.⁷³⁶ Arnau Puig i Grau does not further elaborate on the title and it thus does not become clear if he was aware of the symbolic meaning of his words that seem to remit to this emblematic sign.

⁷³⁴ Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

⁷³⁵ Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya). University in Barcelona specialized in engineering, architecture and science.

⁷³⁶ See paragraph 1.1 of Block II on the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*, and also Fig. 9.

Moving on with the review, Puig comments: “for the Chinese, the Western avant-gardes symbolize the horizon of liberty”.⁷³⁷ In his review, he comments on the fact that the Chinese avant-garde consist of artists who want to break free from repression and find an *individual* identity. He writes about the fact that, during communism, Chinese society was homogeneous and nobody but Mao stood out from the crowd, which he compares to the Franco times in Catalonia. He then continues by mentioning that, as happened in post-Franco times in Catalonia, the avant-garde were one of the first to break free and to look for liberty and an own identity: “And this is how the avant-gardes become leaders in the necessity of finding liberty and one’s own identity, not the identity that others have planned out and put a tag on, but one that demonstrates your own attitude and sentiment towards the world and its events.”⁷³⁸

He then comments on the fact that Chinese experimental art seems “occidental” in its way of expression. It sometimes resembles pop art, or other “western” art movements, or uses “western” commercial logo’s within its artwork. This is not to copy the “West” but to use the “western” style in order to create this individual identity and to search for liberty. They are not mere copies but come from within the artist and are authentic expressions of his or her personality.

This type of attitude [to continue the path of real responsibility and not the path of slogans and utopias] (...) would correspond to an art that one could appoint as sociological *Pop*, constructivism or, even, expressionism. Not because they are *ism* but because they flow directly from the personality of the author.⁷³⁹

About Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), he writes: “[he] composes immense and respectful texts with these beautiful ideograms without meaning.”⁷⁴⁰ He also comments on Qiu Zhijie’s work *Copying The “Orchid Pavilion*

⁷³⁷ “pels xinesos, les avantguardes occidentals signifiquen l’horitzó de la llibertat.” Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

⁷³⁸ “I és per aquí per on les avantguardes esdevenen sirenes de la llibertat necessària per a trobar la pròpia identitat, no aquella que els altres ens planifiquen amb un marxamo sinó aquella que testimonia de la teva pròpia actitud i sentir davant del món i dels fets.” Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

⁷³⁹ “Aquest tipus d’actitud [en avant pel camí de la responsabilitat real, del compromís amb la realitat i no amb els eslògans i la utopia] (...) correspondrien a un art que el podríem designar com a *Pop* sociològic, constructivista o, fins i tot, expressionista, no en tant que *isme* sinó rajat directament de la personalitat de l’autor.” Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

⁷⁴⁰ “[Xu Bing] compona immensos i respectuosos textos amb aquest bells ideogrames buits de sentit.” Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

Preface” *One Thousand Times* (1990-1995) and sees them both as manifestations of violence against oneself due to the oppression of others or external factors. “The artists of the Chinese avant-garde understand very well that this old system which is explosive and representative is as restricted and controlled as any other way of aesthetic communication that flows from power structures that are always coercive.”⁷⁴¹

It seems as if the author has understood that the Chinese experimental artists use Euroamerican art styles in their works in order to break free from their own cultural and historic past and to open up new possibilities for Chinese experimental art to further develop as an independent art current. This makes Puig one of the few (European) art critics to have seen the Euroamerican influence on Chinese experimental art from this perspective, especially in the early 1990s.

6.3.2.3 Concha G. Esribà, *China Post*

The last review is very extent and comes from the magazine *El Europeo*.⁷⁴² The text makes a (historical) review of all different types of art: Chinese opera, music, cinema and literature. About the artists and intellectuals that have moved to foreign countries but have decided to return to China, the author says that they did so because the “Occident” was more hostile than they had imagined before their departure. The author does not further explain this statement or illustrate it with examples.

In the last part of the article, dedicated to Chinese experimental art, the author, Concha G. Escribà⁷⁴³ writes about Xu Bing’s artworks and says, “after his stay in the United States, he is now interested in the clash between cultures, a more universal art that would transcend the imprints of his own origin.”⁷⁴⁴

It is interesting that the author mentions the words “clash between cultures”, as this might point to an influence by Samuel Huntington’s article that was published in the magazine

⁷⁴¹ “Aquests artistes d’aquesta avantguarda xinesa, entenen ben bé que aquest vell sistema explosiu i representatiu és tan encotillat i dirigit, tan travat com qualsevol altra forma de comunicació estètica emanada d’unes estructures de poder, d’entrada sempre coercitives.” Arnau Puig, *Prohibit canviar de direcció (Reflexió sobre les avantguardes artístiques a Xina i, en alter temps, a Catalunya)*, arts plàstiques, ateneu, revista de cultura, 2^a època, 1995, num. 17, p. 14-15.

⁷⁴² Concha G. Escribà, *China Post*, *El Europeo*, p. 107-111.

⁷⁴³ No information on the professional background of Concha G. Escribà could be traced.

⁷⁴⁴ “Después de su estancia en Estados Unidos, Xu Bing se interesa ahora por el choque entre culturas, por un arte más universalista que llegue a trascender su propio sello de origen.” Concha G. Escribà, *China Post*, *El Europeo*, p. 107-111.

*Foreign Affairs*⁷⁴⁵ in 1993 in which he elaborates on his theory of the clash of civilizations. Among other comments, he mentions: “The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.”⁷⁴⁶ Xu Bing was living in the United States when Huntington’s book was published and it might well be that he was influenced by it, as might have been the author of the review.

About Chinese experimental art in general, Escribà writes, “this young art still carries with it a nuance of dissidence.”⁷⁴⁷ She also mentions that a lot of Chinese experimental artists work with “western” techniques and styles. According to the author, Chinese experimental art cannot yet be interpreted within an artistic context and still has to be understood within a social framework. Finally, she mentions that Chinese experimental art is becoming an art market in which the artworks are being considered a good investment.

This fragment sums up quite a lot of elements that have been observed in previous reviews analysed in this paragraph. Chinese experimental art is seen from a political point of view, as the review mentions the dissident character of this type of art. The fact that Chinese experimental art is seen as strongly influenced by Euroamerican art and that the artists use “western” styles and techniques to express themselves is another comment that has been seen more than once in other reviews. Also, the statement that Chinese experimental art cannot yet be interpreted within an artistic context and has to be understood within a social framework seems to be a way to limit this art and to put it under a sociopolitical light. Escribà does not specify what she means by “social framework” but it is quite probable that she is referring to Chinese society and maybe even its political past. Lastly, the fact that Concha Escribà mentions that Chinese experimental art would be a “good investment” is a comment quite similar to the one made by Maria Jaén in which she mentions that the works of Xu Bing are “purely critical and practically useless (...). It is hard to find a market for these artworks”.⁷⁴⁸ Both comments seem to point to a certain narrow-mindedness towards the art by seeing artworks in a purely materialistic, financial way.

⁷⁴⁵ Founded in 1922 and published by the Council of Foreign Relations. Its main themes are American foreign policy and global affairs.

⁷⁴⁶ For the full article see *Foreign Affairs*: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations>. Summer 1993 issue. Date of consultation: 11/10/2012

⁷⁴⁷ “Este arte joven que aún arrastra la patina de la disidencia.” Concha G. Escribà, *China Post*, El Europeo, p. 107-111.

⁷⁴⁸ Maria Jaén, *Xina psíquedèlica*, Avui, June 27 1995.

6.4 Conclusions on *Des del País del Centre*

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the catalogue does not make any mention of the third space. This is notable considering the fact that the overseas artists, their search for an identity of their own, periphery and centre and the cultural differences (or confrontations) between “Orient” and “Occident” are widely discussed throughout the catalogue. In fact, one of the aims of the exhibition was to “show the contribution that originates from this point of fusion and unison, which the Chinese diaspora has made to our global culture.”⁷⁴⁹ Also the essay of Huang Du widely speaks about periphery and centre and the search for one’s own centre from which to find a new identity, yet also here, he does not specifically mention the third space.

It appears that the exhibition catalogue is trying to put an emphasis on the hegemonic role that Euroamerica plays within the art world and especially towards the periphery countries. This becomes particularly clear when the curator, Inma Puy addresses this “west”-centric vision within the exhibition catalogue. An example of this can be seen in the questions that she raises as a result of Xu Bing’s *A Case Study of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32): “The chauvinistic culture of the developed countries ‘violates’ the culture of the periphery?”⁷⁵⁰

Huang Du then seems to reinforce this point of view, which can be seen in fragments of his essay such as: “The main goal of the Chinese artists is to escape the repression (...), the oppressive framework in which the West has held Chinese art.”⁷⁵¹ Also the fact that Edward Said is quoted within the exhibition catalogue seems to illustrate the exhibition’s position towards euro-centrism and Euroamerican hegemony. It seems clear that the general message that both the curator, as well as Huang Du tries to transmit is that there is “an inequality in the process of unification and confrontation between Chinese and the Occidental culture”⁷⁵², as Huang Du has mentioned in his comment about Xu Bing’s *Case of Transference* (1994) (Fig. 7 and 32).

⁷⁴⁹ *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 6.

⁷⁵⁰ “[l’obra representa] dominació cultural de l’oest? El xovinisme cultural dels països desenvolupats ‘viola’ les cultures perifèriques?” *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 55.

⁷⁵¹ *Des del País del Centre* exhibition catalogue, p. 50-51.

⁷⁵² “Al mateix temps, posa [Xu Bing’s *Case of Transference*] la seva crítica per la desigualtat en aquest procés d’unió i enfrontament entre les cultures xinesa i occidental”. *Des del País del Centre*, exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

All in all, it seems appropriate that the exhibition was one of the participants of the “Aperto 95”, which was organized as a protest against the Venice Biennale for having cancelled this section of young upcoming artist in their art festival. The idea of oppression and not giving a “chance” to the more unknown or “periphery” artists seems to match the survey’s message of the hegemony of eurocentrism (or occidental culture) towards Chinese artists and the periphery countries of the world.

About the reviews, in this chapter twelve different texts have been analysed and none of them have mentioned the third space. It must be said though that the exhibition catalogue has not mentioned this concept either. Yet, both the reviews, at least some of them, and especially the exhibition catalogue comment on the cultural encounter between “East” and “West”, the struggle of the overseas artists to find a new identity within a foreign environment (feeling like being in an in-between space) and the effect that the Euroamerican environment has had on the artworks of the Chinese overseas artists. Considering the fact that Homi K. Bhabha had coined the concept of third space in his book *The Location of Culture* in the previous year, 1994, it could have been possible for the third space concept, which perfectly sums up all these comments, to have been mentioned within reviews and the exhibition catalogue, however this was not the case. On the other hand, the word “clash” is sometimes mentioned within the reviews to describe the encounter that the “East” has had with the “West”. Although Huntington is not mentioned anywhere in the reviews or in the exhibition catalogue, it might be due to the influence that his article “Clash of civilizations”, which was published in 1993, has had. It seems significant that the word “clash”, which indicates a rather negative encounter between cultures is used in some of the reviews, however the word “third space”, which indicates a positive relationship between “East” and “West” is not mentioned anywhere.

Again, many reviews have put an emphasis on the political history (and present) of China and have described and interpreted the Chinese artworks that were on display from this political point of view. Tiananmen Square and the Cultural Revolution have been mentioned in many occasions, if not in almost all reviews. Apart from this fact, it should be highlighted that in more than one review, the tolerance or permissiveness of the Chinese government towards Chinese experimental artwork has been mentioned, commenting that the Chinese government is not “worried” about these creations. This attributes a rather “dissident” character to Chinese experimental art. Maybe this is done in order to make this

type of art more interesting or attractive for a Euroamerican audience by making it seem rebellious and censored.

Another element that has been frequently stated in the reviews is the fact that Chinese experimental art is in fact, according to some authors, “western” (pop) art inspired by Euroamerican icons such as Mickey Mouse and the artist Andy Warhol. An example of this comment was made in the review by Belén Ginart who described Chinese experimental art simply as “Asian Pop art”, which is a quite over-simplified way to describe this art. Another example of this “western” pop-art influence in Chinese experimental art, according to various reviewers, was Wang Ziwei’s painting *Mao and Mickey* (1993) (Fig. 35) which has been mentioned on several occasions be it by written word as well as by placing an image of the painting in the article. This particular painting, however, is not representative for the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition. The fact that various authors have mentioned this particular painting within their reviews and have chosen this work to illustrate their texts reflects the rather narrow-minded perception of some of the reviewers on Chinese experimental art. Yet, the fact that so much emphasis has been put on this particular painting seems to be a sign of the way Chinese experimental art was sometimes interpreted by the Spanish and Catalan critics: through Euroamerican eyes. By using Wang Ziwei’s *Mao and Mickey* (1993) (Fig. 35) painting to explain Chinese experimental art is to emphasize its “pop” as well as its political character. However, these two characteristics are not representative of the Chinese experimental art current and in fact, by focussing on these two aspects, Chinese experimental art is strongly stereotyped. The painting was chosen purely on the fact that it is “familiar” to the Spanish/ Catalan audience, as all recognize the figures of Mao Zedong and Mickey Mouse. It therefore easily attracts the audience’s attention.

One review, written by Manuel Calderón, mentioned that the art of the young Chinese experimental artists does not differentiate itself that much from the “western” contemporary artists. This same review mentioned that the works of the overseas artists was “nothing new”. This last comment is very surprising considering the fact that *Des del País del Centre* was the first exhibition of experimental Chinese art to be held in Spain. A lot of works might have resembled “western” contemporary art, to use the words of the author, yet there were also a lot of works that were completely incomparable to “western” art, *especially* those made by the overseas artists. An example of such a creation is Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45).

The overseas artists are not mentioned frequently within the reviews. In one review, by Belén Ginart, all sections of *Des del País del Centre* were stated except for section BIV, which was entirely dedicated to the overseas artists. Why this has occurred remains unclear, especially taking into account that the exhibition catalogue does pay a lot of attention to these artists.

Another interesting comment that has reoccurred more than once in the reviews is the fact that Chinese experimental artworks were commented on as a “good investment” or, on the contrary, that they were useless due to the fact that there is no market for this type of creations (in this case *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45)). This is a rather peculiar way to consider art and seems to place art within a rather materialistic, purely profitable context. Apart from the fact that two completely opposite remarks are made here, the second statement is completely untrue considering the fact that *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) had actually been sold the year before the exhibition was held.

Lastly, it should be taken into account that all reviews were from Spanish or Catalan newspapers and magazines. It seems that the exhibition *Des del País del Centre* did not generate a big impact outside of Catalonia, or even Barcelona. This might also be due to the fact that the exhibition catalogue was not bilingual but was written entirely in Catalan. It should also be mentioned that this was quite an early display of experimental Chinese art considering the fact that the survey was held in 1995, almost twenty years ago. According to the exhibition catalogue, it was the first exposition of this type of art in Spain. Therefore, the reviews were commenting on a very new type of art that had not been seen before. This could be one of the reasons why the artworks on display have not always been interpreted and understood “correctly”. In all reviews, the authors were not specialists on Chinese experimental art and this becomes clear when reading their articles. Most of the authors were experts on Spanish art or other fields related to the arts, like television, theatre, and literature. This also might have attributed to the fact that *Des del País del Centre* has not been fully understood and has been erroneously transmitted to the public in a rather stereotyped manner.

7. CITIES ON THE MOVE (1997-1999)

7.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Cities on the Move was an immense project which lasted for over two years, travelling from one country to the next. The survey opened at the Vienna House of Secession⁷⁵³ in November 1997 and was displayed there until January 1998. Then, the exposition travelled to the Bordeaux capcMusée d'art contemporain from the 4th of June until the 30th of August 1998; to the PS1 in New York from November 1998 until January 1999; to Louisiana, Denmark's Museum of Modern Art from the 29th January until the 21st of April 1999; to the Hayward Gallery in London from the 13th of May until the 27th of June 1999; to different venues in Bangkok, Thailand, from the 9th until the 30th of October 1999⁷⁵⁴ and finally, to the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary art in Helsinki, Finland, from November 1999 until January of the year 2000.⁷⁵⁵ Literally, as its title indicates, it was an exposition on the move. Yet, there seems to have been some confusion on the different venues where *Cities on the Move* has travelled to. Not all reviews and even the catalogue do not list the same venues for this exhibition. This is due to the fact that when *Cities on the Move* was inaugurated, there was space left open for improvisation: to let the survey, or part of the survey, travel to some of the venues which were not previously foreseen. This has been confirmed by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist through the Serpentine Gallery of which he is director of International Projects.⁷⁵⁶

One hundred and three artists and architects participated in the exhibition although not all artists participated in all shows. For example, in the Bangkok edition, only one overseas Chinese experimental artist was present in the survey (Cai Guoqiang). However, in the London and the Vienna version, for example, five overseas Chinese artists participated:

⁷⁵³ The Vienna Secession was formed in 1897 by a movement which included painters, sculptors and architects. The first president of the Vienna Secession was Gustav Klimt. These were all artists who resigned from the Association of Austrian Artists, which was based in the Vienna Künstlerhaus. They did not agree with the conservatism of the Künstler Haus and decided to create a new exhibition space with other policies. The main goal of the Vienna Secession was to explore the possibilities of art beyond the academic tradition, hoping to create a new style that would not be influenced by history.

⁷⁵⁴ The Bangkok exhibition is not mentioned anywhere in the two versions of the exposition catalogue. One from the Hayward Gallery in London and the other that was published for the exhibition held at the Vienna Secession. The Hayward gallery exhibition catalogue states that the exhibition would travel from London to Helsinki, this way skipping the Bangkok version.

⁷⁵⁵ Some reviews mention that the exposition also travelled to Hong Kong yet, there seems to be confusion about this as it is not mentioned everywhere. For example, the Hong Kong version is not mentioned in the exhibition catalogue of the Hayward Gallery or in the exhibition catalogue of the Vienna Secession.

⁷⁵⁶ The e-mail was responded by Hans Ulrich Obrist through his Project-assistant Max Shakleton, and stated: "Hans Ulrich responded to your inquiry RE Cities on the Move: Your assumption is right; none of the venues were known during the planning. Each new venue was discovered as the exhibition progressed. All best regards." Date of e-mail 16/10/2014

Cai Guoqiang, Shen Yuan, Huang Yongping, Chen Zhen and Wang Du. Their works shall be commented on in paragraph 7.3. The exposition included the creations of artists from eleven Asian countries, North America and Europe that focussed on the relationship between the Asian cities' architecture and art. The works on display were varied, ranging from architectural drawings and projects to video, cinema, photography and installations.

Hans Ulrich Obrist (1968) and Hou Hanru (1964) curated the survey. Hou Hanru has been commented on in chapter four, therefore no further explanation shall be given here. Hans Ulrich Obrist is a very well-known contemporary art curator, critic and art historian with a long list of exhibitions and other art related projects to his name. He was born in Zurich in 1968 and is currently co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes, and director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London. One of his main projects presently is the *Interview Project* which consists of an ongoing series of interviews with well-known artists, writers, architects, scientist, philosophers, etc. These interviews are then published in book or magazine form. Obrist was voted the number five most influential person in the contemporary art world in 2013 by the magazine *art review*,⁷⁵⁷ which is a contemporary art magazine based in London that was founded in 1949.

Within his book *Ways of Curating* (2014), Hans Ulrich Obrist briefly comments on the initial sparks that would later lead to the *Cities on the Move* exposition and writes:

My first project that involved architecture and urbanism came about through a collaboration with the curator Hou Hanru. We curated an exhibition about art, urbanism and the Asian mega-city, which we ended up calling *Cities on the Move*. Hou and I had spoken very early on about *Magiciens de la Terre*, the ground-breaking 1989 exhibition curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, we had discussed what it meant that Western curators curate such shows and how interesting it would be if there was a meaningful back-and-forth between a Western and an Eastern curator. That's when Hou Hanru and I decided to do an Asian show together.⁷⁵⁸

What becomes clear is that the collaboration between Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist was mainly motivated as an "East-West" dialogue and as somewhat of a counter response to the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition that was curated by a French (Euroamerican) curator on non-Euroamerican art.

757 http://artreview.com/power_100/, n.d., date of last consultation: 21/07/2014.

758 OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 122.

For the exhibition that was held at the Hayward Gallery in London, two more persons were added to the curator's list, these being the well-known Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, and Ole Scheeren, who is a German architect who works at Büro Ole Scheeren which has offices in London, Hong Kong and Beijing. Scheeren is also a visiting professor at the University of Hong Kong. The two architects were in charge of adapting the *Cities on the Move* exhibition in order to fit the architectural space of the Hayward Gallery. The result was a creation of an "event city" in which the exhibition was distributed in different sections, becoming as it were a city in itself.

For this same exhibition, an extra section was added to the survey titled *London on the Move*, which extended the exhibition into the city of London. The organiser for the London show was Fiona Bradley, who has been a curator for the Tate as well as the Hayward Gallery. She is also the author of several books on various artists. Currently she is the director of the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The main theme of the exhibition was the rapid economic and cultural changes that have occurred in East Asia from 1987 until 1997 approximately, or as the catalogue mentions:

No region in the world has undergone such profound and rapid economic and cultural change as East Asia in the last decade. Poised between reaction and modernity, extreme poverty and supreme wealth, East Asian cities epitomize the concept of "urban chaos", responding constantly to technological innovations and economic challenges. *Cities on the Move* tracks the cultural impact of East Asian urban development, presenting art, architecture and film in an intense and energetic constantly changing exhibition.

According to the two curators of the survey, Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, the exhibition is:

One such ever-evolving "event city"; constantly changing, reinventing, renovating, adapting itself to different venues and encouraging cross-disciplinary and trans-national collaboration. (...)

Cities on the Move celebrates the contemporary East Asian urban condition as shifting, expanding, modernizing, unstable and exciting.⁷⁵⁹

For this exposition, two exhibition catalogues were published: one by the Vienna Secession and one by the Hayward Gallery in London. Both versions shall be analysed in this chapter.

⁷⁵⁹ *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 15.

7.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

Two catalogues shall be analysed in this chapter. One catalogue was edited for the exhibition of *Cities on the Move* that was held at the Hayward Gallery in London and the second catalogue was the edition published for the version that was organised at the Vienna Secession.

The catalogue of the Hayward Gallery is a rather small book, similar to the travel books edited by the Lonely Planet. The content is also quite similar, presenting the artists and their works in an informal way with short texts and big pictures, as if the catalogue were a small travel book guiding the visitor through the *Cities on the Move* exhibition. It is no coincidence that the catalogue seems quite similar to the little travel guides of the Lonely Planet as this particular travel book was founded in London in 1973. The exhibition catalogue of the Vienna Secession however has a much bigger format and appears more formal, with many one-page or double-page colour plates of the works on display. The texts in the Vienna Secession edition are minimal and emphasis is clearly put on the colour plates of all the participating artists' creations.

The first part of this paragraph shall be dedicated to the analysis of the Hayward Gallery catalogue. The Vienna Secession edition shall be analysed afterwards.

7.2.1 Analysis of the Hayward Gallery's exhibition catalogue

Various authors have collaborated with this catalogue. The preface is written by Susan Ferleger Brades, the director of the Hayward Gallery. Other authors that feature within the catalogue are: Mohsen Mostafavi, an Iranian-American architect and educator who has taught at Cornell University and the Harvard Graduate School of Design; an extensive essay by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist; an essay by Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist; and an essay by Julia Diamantis who is a professional publisher and sales consultant. This last essay is about the impact of East Asian culture in and around the city of London.

The preface written by Susan Ferleger is an introductory text to the exhibition. The text gives a lot of basic information about the survey such as the participating artists, the curators, the main theme, etc. No further comments shall be made on this introductory text.

The next text, written by Mohsen Mostafavi, an Iranian-American architect and educator is titled *Cities of Distraction* and comments on the urban changes that have appeared in East Asia. Mostafavi mentions: "The hybrid effects of modernization, combining Western attitude with East Asian values, confront urban populations whose origins are largely proto-rural or pre-industrial."⁷⁶⁰ This somewhat reminds of the third space concept as the fragment mentions the words "hybrid" and the combining of "western" attitude with "East Asian" values. The third space can, as can be seen here, also be detected in architecture and urban spaces. The combination of "western" attitude with "East Asian" values might be attributed to the overseas artists who find themselves living in a "western" environment and, at the same time, hold on to their Eastern values and cultural background.

Mostafavi then continues and comments on the electronic society and media that exists nowadays:

The uneven modernity of the present is further affected by new means of electronic media which, according to Arjun Appadurai, "transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds".⁷⁶¹ Images from afar are brought closer in ways that overcome national or local boundaries; they create

⁷⁶⁰ Mohsen Mostafavi, *Cities on the Move* exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 8.

⁷⁶¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 3.

mobile identities that are no longer fixed to particular concepts of region or territory. In the age of mass media, identities are de-territorialized, hybridized and constantly shifting.⁷⁶²

Arjun Appadurai is an Indian anthropologist who is an expert on the subjects of modernization and globalization. Mostafavi here speaks about the modern communication techniques that exist nowadays that permit the creation of “mobile identities that are no longer fixed to particular concepts of region or territory”. This fragment also reminds of the third-space concept which goes beyond the boundaries of nation-state cultures and which tries to create a new “identity” and space which is not limited to the strict separation of “East” and “West”. Here, Mostafavi also speaks of the concept de-territorialized, which in a way reminds of Hou Hanru’s essay in the *Heart of Darkness*⁷⁶³ exhibition catalogue in which he speaks of the process of de-identifying. De-territorializing, like de-identifying, is often the first step and an essential part in the process of the creation of an alternative space like the in-between.

The last page of his essay is dedicated to the exhibition, about which the author says:

The exhibition does not present a unitary vision of development (...). The exhibition is an analogous city made anew with the accumulated traces of economic and cultural debris; of what has been and what is yet to come.

In the context of London, *Cities on the Move* performs the urgent task of demonstrating some of the more specific consequences of the space that lies between globalization and colonialism. Globalization can, in one sense, be viewed as reframing old colonial power relations, albeit without the necessity for actual physical occupation of territory- except that global cities such as London or New York are themselves now being colonized by people whose countries have been physically or economically colonized by the West. This reverse pattern of migration suggests that many global cities will increasingly need to address issues of racial, ethnic and cultural difference – issues that have already deeply affected many East Asian cities. (...). The city must therefore provide spatially democratic frameworks which will support its citizens in order to construct new identities based on difference. *Cities on the Move* shows traits – some spectacularly inspiring, some disconcerting – that need to be included in future debates on the global city.⁷⁶⁴

Mostafavi speaks of reverse migration, which is a phenomenon that has not been mentioned before. This is a thought-provoking concept and can be applied to the overseas Chinese experimental artists who have moved to Euroamerican cities such as Paris and New York, and to the global migration movements in general. Along with other émigrés they are changing the cultural identity of these “western” cities and not only by art. Their mere presence is sufficient to change, slowly but effectively, not only their own identity but also the narrow-minded mindframe of the nation-state culture. Here, Mostafavi

⁷⁶² Mohsen Mostafavi, *Cities on the Move* exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 8.

⁷⁶³ See chapter 5 of Block II.

⁷⁶⁴ Mohsen Mostafavi, *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 9.

talks about the construction of new identities based on difference. This is exactly what the third-space concept is about: building a new identity based on the fact of being hybrid and no longer being able to identify oneself with only one cultural identity.

The next essay is written by the two curators of the exhibition: Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist. According to them the exhibition: “Presents the dynamic and highly creative situation of contemporary urban visual culture in East Asia. Art, architecture and urbanism are explored as manifestations of the process of modernization in the region – a modernization which is not only regionally important but also globally significant.”⁷⁶⁵

This modernization appears to be, according to the two curators, a process which is realised by copying a “western” economic model:

Most Asian countries have opted for modernization of the national economy and culture in the belief that this will lead to independence. However, more often, the desire for a modern, Western economy leads to a paternalistic structure of social management, and to the perverse pursuit of “hyper-capitalism”. Currently, East Asia exists in a state of permanent and frenzied transformation, with almost unbearable urban density, uncontrollably rapid economic expansion, profligate exploitation of natural and human resources and the loss of social, cultural and political stability as the new conditions of existence.⁷⁶⁶

Although the above-mentioned fragment seems to focus on the modernization of economies, this fragment can be extrapolated to the art world in which Chinese experimental art has been often accused of modernizing itself through a “westernization” of its art. In a way, it is true that some of the Chinese artists, especially in the beginning, used Euroamerican art currents, artists and artworks as their inspiration in order to open new doors for the Chinese experimental art movement.⁷⁶⁷ However, after many years, Chinese experimental art has taken an autonomous turn and is now evolving based on its own traditions and ideas. It should also be emphasized that it is the overseas Chinese experimental artists who are also adding new value and new perspectives to the international art market, although this is not always seen as such or acknowledged.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou Hanru, *Cities on the move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 11.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶⁷ See paragraph 1.1 of Block I.

⁷⁶⁸ See paragraph 1.2 of Block I.

The hybridization of “eastern” and “western” culture and the return to the traditional culture and values is further exposed in the following fragment when the essay mentions:

A new Asian middle class is emerging within these global cities. (...). The product of a post-colonial economy and culture, they are a hybrid of Westernized modernism and nationalist tradition. Theirs is the dominant influence on the configuration of Asian cities, their aesthetic preferences the driving force in the creation of new urban spaces and imagery. Their goal is the combination of the most advanced architectural know-how with the traditional ideals of “Asian identity”; this leads to a kind of in-between architectural style in which to encapsulate an Asian, non-western brand of modernization.⁷⁶⁹

Again, even though this fragment focuses on urban spaces, this quote could be seen as a continuation of what has been mentioned previously on the combination of Asian (Chinese tradition) and modern techniques in order to create new opportunities and perspectives within the international art world. In a way, the combination of the “Asian identity” with the “most advanced (architectural) know-how” does create different, hybrid, yet unique identities and models which can become an alternative to the “western” hegemony or hegemonic style. As explained in the previous fragment, the same combination also opens doors for the “Chinese” art scene and offers an alternative to the employment of “western” styles in order to “modernize”.

Then, the authors explain that, in order for an East Asian country to become global, they often reconstruct histories and become rather inauthentic:

[M]any Asian cities have a policy for the systematic recreation of “history” and the refurbishment of “indigenous” culture along the lines of Disneyland or Las Vegas. Paradoxically, the result of such initiatives is the disappearance of real historic areas, flattened to make way for hyper-“real” simulacras of tradition. Originally intended to attract tourists to East Asia, these reconstructed histories have become an integral part of contemporary urban life, a guarantee of the “globality” of an East Asian city.⁷⁷⁰

The same happens sometimes with Chinese experimental art, as has been explained in chapter 3.3 of the theoretic part. This art is sometimes made to appear more “Chinese” or “Asian” in order for the works to become more appealing (exotic) to a Euroamerican market and public. On the other hand, the consequence is that, like the Asian cities mentioned in the quote, these works lose their authenticity and become commercial products or brands, purely meant to generate money within the international art markets. Then the authors continue their essay and start commenting on the artists that participated in *Cities on the Move*, Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist comment:

⁷⁶⁹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou Hanru, *Cities on the move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 12.

⁷⁷⁰ *ibídem*.

Artists are among the most active in the reconsideration of social structure and order necessitated by the conflicting demands of modernization and tradition. Many artists from different countries and cities (...) are making work which deals critically, and often ironically and humorously, with the conflict between consumer society and human existence and the schizophrenic frenzy of the new Asian urban condition.⁷⁷¹

The text then mentions two overseas Chinese artists who are Chen Zhen and Wang Du and briefly comments on their works, respectively *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) (Fig. 38) and *International Landscape* (1997) (Fig. 40). About Chen Zhen's *Precipitous Parturition* (1999), the essay mentions that it represents the "consequence of China's stated ambition to upgrade all of the country's bicycles to cars, symbols of Western aspiration and achievement". Wang Du's work, *International Landscape* (1997) "brings statues of Western prostitutes into Asian cityscapes as part of what he [the artist] terms the 'landscape of the Other'".⁷⁷²

Then, the essay talks specifically about the overseas artists and mentions:

Another aspect of urban change in Asia is the Asian diaspora in the West. The globalization of the Asian economy and culture makes Asia increasingly open to the West, and to new forms of cultural hybridity and negotiation. Asian artists living abroad, such as Huang Yong Ping, Chen Zhen, Cai Guo-Qiang, Shen Yuan, Wang Du, (...), bring their critical observation of Asian urban life to the "internationalization" of Asian culture, their distant angle of witness making their work particularly pungent.⁷⁷³

Here, the overseas Chinese artists are specifically mentioned and an emphasis is put on their active role within cultural hybridity and negotiation. The essay comments on their critical observation and their distant angle of witness; these can only be possible when one is in the in-between and has become an outsider to one's own culture, hereby forming a bridge capable of connecting different cultures. Again, the authors speak of diaspora, cultural hybridity and negotiation yet there is no mention of the third-space concept anywhere in this essay. This is notable, as Hou Hanru is one of the principal spokesmen for this concept and often talks about alternative spaces within his essays. It is even more remarkable when considering the fact that he explicitly mentions and elaborates on the concept within the exhibition catalogue of *Inside Out* that was held at the same time (1998) and that is analysed in the following chapter.⁷⁷⁴ Why does Hou Hanru not speak of

⁷⁷¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou Hanru, *Cities on the move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 13.

⁷⁷² These works shall not be further elaborated upon here as they will be commented on in the following paragraph (7.3).

⁷⁷³ Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou Hanru, *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 14.

⁷⁷⁴ See chapter 8 of Block II.

the concept within this catalogue essay, as it seems such a suitable place for doing so. Is it because the text was written in collaboration with Hans Ulrich Obrist and that the latter did not want to propagate alternative models such as the third space within a Euroamerican / global context, himself being a Euroamerican and one of the most influential art curators? This seems unlikely, but the question shall remain open for interpretations and possible reasons.

The next text consists of an interview that was held between Hans Ulrich Obrist and the architect Rem Koolhaas who collaborated with the Hayward Gallery version of the exhibition. The interview focuses specifically on Rem Koolhaas' life and the work that he does. There shall be no further comment on this text as it does not speak of the third space, the artists or the exhibition.

The following essay was written by Julia Diamantis, a professional publisher. Her essay is about the city of London and in her text she specifically focuses on the section of the survey dedicated to East Asian culture in London. According to the author, this section:

Looks at the impact immigration from East Asia has had on the city's cultural landscape. Obviously there has been a history of racial tension but, whilst we do not wish to dismiss the very real problems which continue to exist, "London on the Move" focuses on the positive cultural effects of ethnographic mix.⁷⁷⁵

According to Julia Diamantis, the migration of East-Asian to other countries: "Has blurred the cultural boundaries. Bring all this to London and the result is a rich mixture of ideas, customs and people with Eastern and Western cultures mingling and fusing, forming something totally new; the city's cultural identity really is on the move."⁷⁷⁶ The author mentions the fusion of "eastern" and "western" cultures, which results in "something totally new", yet she does not explain what this new cultural identity is. Could she be referring to the third space? Yet, again, the concept is not mentioned within her text.

Later on, on the same page, she repeats this comment in a similar way: "East Asian cultures are not preserved here, and London is not a static place; East and West interact and produce something new."⁷⁷⁷ Here the author adds the aspect of a dynamic relation,

⁷⁷⁵ Julia Diamantis, *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 75.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

which is also the case with the third space concept: it is a constant and dynamic mixing of different influences and cultural identities which results in the creation of alternatives that go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy.⁷⁷⁸ Again, the author does not mention the third space concept anywhere within her article.

⁷⁷⁸ See paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

7.2.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue- the Vienna Secession edition

In this paragraph, another edition of the *Cities on the Move* catalogue shall be studied. This catalogue was published by the Vienna Secession, which was where the exhibition *Cities on the Move* opened. The catalogue was also used for the version of the survey that was held at the capcMusée in Bordeaux. It is a very extensive catalogue filled with colour plates of the works that were on display. The text in the catalogue is minimal and subdivided in eleven points, and has also been published in Hou Hanru's book *On the Mid-Ground*.⁷⁷⁹ The catalogue was published by Verlag Gerd Hatje, a German editorial, and was sponsored by various companies such as DHL, Lauda-Air and the Annie Wong Art Foundation.

The catalogue starts with two prefaces, the first one written by the director of the Vienna Secession, Werner Würtinger, and the second by the director of the capcMusée Bourdeaux Henry-Claude Cousseau. A fragment of the second preface, written by Cousseau, shall be quoted here: "The blending of two different worlds, of East and West, into a hybrid culture is one of the major characteristics of these [East Asian] countries."⁷⁸⁰ This fragment can easily be related to the third-space concept, yet, as has happened in the essays of the Hayward Gallery edition, the concept is not mentioned anywhere in this text.

Then the catalogue continues with a text written by the two curators, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru. The text is quite similar to their essay published in the exhibition catalogue of the Hayward Gallery and basically addresses the rapid changes that have occurred in East Asia. There shall be no further comment on this text as it does not provide any additional information.

Then, in point seven of the text, the catalogue mentions: "it matters much more to be 'in-between' geographies than to belong to a fixed geography".⁷⁸¹ The text refers to the city of Hong Kong and the "in-between" character of this area. This particular fragment can easily be interpreted within the third space concept, yet, the term is not mentioned here.

⁷⁷⁹ Hou Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground- selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 214-229.

⁷⁸⁰ *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue, Vienna Secession, n.p.

⁷⁸¹ *Cities on the Move* in *On the Mid-Ground - selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 222.

A little further on in the same paragraph, Homi Bhabha is mentioned: "Drawing from Homi Bhabha's notion of the split of the national subject in modern society, the physical urban fabric -- skyscrapers, highways and infrastructural development: experiments meet interpretation."⁷⁸² This seems to be a rather vague comment and it does not become clear what the meaning is. Even though Homi Bhabha's name is stated here, there is no mention of the concepts that he coined such as the in-between, the unhomely or the third space. Again, Hou Hanru does not take advantage of the opportunity to comment or speak on the third space concept of which he is such as fervent spokesman. The reason that was mentioned in paragraph 7.2.1 can again be applied here.

Later on, in point nine, the text speaks of the "western" influence in East Asia, especially when it comes to the modernization process of this region. The text mentions the concept of Feng Shui and considers it a way for East Asia to minimize "western" influence. It says: "Feng Shui should be understood as a "tentative fiction" designed to deconstruct the dominance of the West".⁷⁸³ This comment seems to refer to the "western" hegemony in the modernization process of the "East". This seems to coincide with the Hayward's Gallery exhibition catalogue in which some fragments mentioned that Asian cultural heritage and traditions should be employed to create an alternative for the Asian modernization. Here, this Asian influence is illustrated by Feng Shui, a unique Asian tradition, but which on the other hand might also seem to be a rather stereotypical example of "Asian" tradition.

The text then continues:

Cities on the Move, is the first joint presentation of art and architecture from Asian Cities in Europe. The exhibition endeavours to shed some light on the incredibly dynamic architecture and art scenes of these cities which are mostly unknown in Europe, and will try to introduce to visitors, more than one hundred different positions and points of view. Recurrent themes are Density, Growth, Complexity, Connectivity, Speed, Traffic, Dislocation, Migration, Homelessness and Ecology. The different positions make clear that there is no such thing as an "Asian City" but that there are manifold heterogeneous concepts of the city.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸² *Cities on the Move* in *On the Mid-Ground - selected texts* edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 222.

⁷⁸³ *Cities on the Move* in *On the Mid-Ground- selected texts* edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 224.

⁷⁸⁴ *Cities on the Move* in *On the Mid-Ground- selected texts* edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 226.

Concepts that should be highlighted here are dislocation, migration and homelessness⁷⁸⁵ as all three concepts can be related to the third space concept. However, again, the third space concept is not mentioned anywhere within the exhibition catalogue.

The Vienna Secession version of the exhibition catalogue then presents many colour plates of the works that were on display. There are also colour plates of the works that were presented by the overseas artists:

Cai Guoqiang: *A Cosmic Diagram: The Feng-Shui Project for Mito* (presented at the Mito Annual '94: Open System, Japan, 1993-1994)
The Century with Mushroom Clouds – Projects for 20th Century (realised at the Nevada nuclear test site, 1996) (Fig. 36)
Red Golf (in situ, 1998) (Fig. 37)

Chen Zhen: *Pu Dong: future Oriental Manhattan* (date unknown)
Precipitous Parturition (in situ 1999)(Fig. 38)

Huang Yongping: *Turtle Town* (in situ 1997). Work in collaboration with the architect Yung Ho Chang's *the Asia City*⁷⁸⁶ (1997) (Fig. 39)
Pearl River (previously shown at Documenta X in Kassel, 1997)

Shen Yuan: No title. Newspaper clippings and drawings (date unknown)

Wang Du: *International Landscape* (1997) (Fig. 40)

Apart from the big colour plates, very little explanation is given on the artworks within the exhibition catalogue. Explanations of the artwork are mostly provided via a short introduction or description written by the artists themselves. These are sometimes written in Chinese, which is then translated to English. These short texts are not always very clear and are insufficient in order for the viewer (or reader of the catalogue) to fully understand (the meaning of) the work. These works shall be further described in the following paragraph.

⁷⁸⁵ See paragraph 2.4 of the theoretic part.

⁷⁸⁶ One of the works by the architect Yung Ho Chang on display at the same survey.

7.3 The works on display

Cai Guoqiang

On Cai Guoqiang's first work, *A Cosmic Diagram: The Feng-Shui Project for Mito* (presented at the Mito Annual '94: Open System, Japan, 1993-1994) no information has been found and this work shall therefore not be commented on. His second work presented at the *Cities on the Move* exhibition, *The Century with Mushroom Clouds – Projects for 20th Century* (realised at the Nevada nuclear test site, 1996) (Fig. 36) is part of his series *The Century with Mushroom Clouds* that started in 1995 upon recent arrival in the United States.



Figure 36: Cai Guoqiang: *The Century with Mushroom Clouds – Projects for 20th Century*, Nevada nuclear test site, 1996

Cai Guoqiang travelled to different venues such as Salt Lake City, and Manhattan New York in order to set off a hand-held, self-made firework devise that produces a small explosion in the form of a mushroom cloud. This form remits to the nuclear explosions that have a similar shape and also alludes to the destructive capacity of modern weapons. Ben Tufnell, Director of Exhibitions for Haunch of Venison in London published an insightful article on this specific work of Cai Guoqiang and explains:

These [Cai Guoqiangs *The Century with Mushroom Clouds* series] are all examples of what the artist calls 'fighting fire with fire', using the tools of destruction to create resonant and potentially affirmative actions. Importantly, it connects the time he spent in Japan, where he lived in the mid-1980s, and the US, where he now resides. The work bridges these two geographies by addressing one of the most momentous events of the twentieth century – the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the American armed forces – and does so by recreating, and

photographically representing miniature versions of the bombings in landscapes that symbolise the creative power of the United States.⁷⁸⁷

It seems thus that this particular work is the result of Cai Guoqiang's situation of living outside of China and getting a better perspective on United States and Japan relations. It is a very illustrative example of the in-between position of an overseas artist that often permits for the artist to gain a better insight into the culture by which he or she is surrounded. The artwork also addresses a more global topic which are the weapons of mass destruction, capable of destroying all of humanity.

The other work that was presented by Cai Guoqiang at *Cities on the Move* was the in situ installation titled *Red Golf* (1997) (Fig. 37). This installation, which consisted of a small, one-hole golf course, was placed as one of the first works at the entrance of the exhibition and invited the public to interact with the installation by "playing a hole". On the golf course, flags of Asian communist countries were placed. The catalogue does not give any further explanation on this work but it could be interpreted as a metaphor for the somewhat contradictory upcoming new elite within the Asian communist countries. Golf is one of the sports that can easily be related to "high society", and it is also a sport which is often played in order to do business or to close a business deal. This installation work could have alluded to these phenomena.



Figure 37: Cai Guoqiang, *Red Golf*, 1997

⁷⁸⁷Ben Tufnell, *Atomic Tourism and False Memories: Cai Guo-Qiang's The Century with Mushroom Clouds*, Tate Research articles, 11 May 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/atomic-tourism-and-false-memories-cai-guo-qiangs-century-mushroom>. Date of last consultation: 25/07/2014.

Chen Zhen

Moving on to the next work by Chen Zhen, again there is also no extensive explanation on Chen Zhen's *Pu Dong: future Oriental Manhattan* (1997) within the exhibition catalogue. Even on the website of the *Association des Amis de Chen Zhen* (ADAC) no mention is made of this work even though this website has an extensive catalogue of all the works of this particular artist. It seems thus that this work has been somewhat "forgotten". However, within the exhibition catalogue, Chen Zhen writes that Pudong, which is an area within Shanghai that has become an important economical and commercial centre, is an example of Shanghai's urbanism. The artist writes:

The main issues of Shanghai's urbanism are: the crucial confrontation between the 'invasion' of westernised buildings and the maintenance of historical houses and districts; the unceasing rupture between the economic boom which lead to emerge a rich class and some wealthy areas and the ordinary Shanghailanders who are under the menace to be evacuated from the city's centre (...).⁷⁸⁸

It thus becomes clear that this installation, even though it is not clear what the installation physically looked like, as there is no colour plate of it within the exhibition catalogue, refers to the rapid urbanisation (in sometimes "western" style) that seems to take over and erase all signs of the Shanghai traditional urban setting. It is a battle between modernizing and maintaining the original identity of the city of Shanghai: a battle that can frequently be seen in Asian countries that are "modernizing" their urban cities. Seen from this perspective, this particular work fits perfectly within the *Cities on the Move* exhibition theme as it clearly addresses the rapid urbanization of an East Asian city, in this case Shanghai.

Chen Zhen's second work, *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) (Fig. 38) was an installation made especially for the exhibition and it was also chosen as the image for the frontcover of the Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue.

⁷⁸⁸ *Cities on the Move* exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery edition, p. 6.

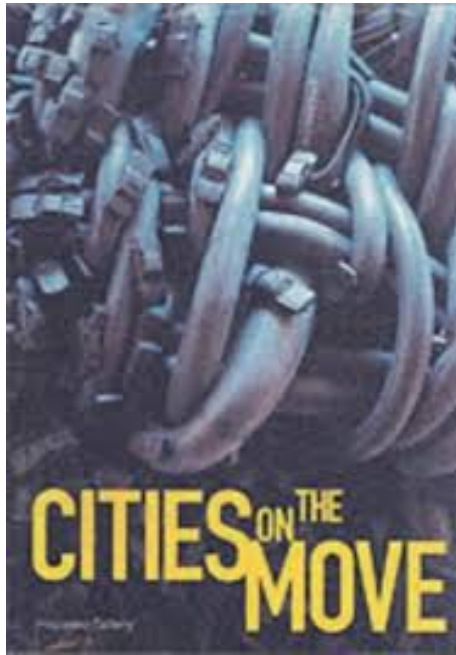


Figure 38: Frontcover of the Hayward's gallery edition of the *Cities on the Move* exhibition catalogue

The work consists of a dragon, symbolic for China, made out entirely from the inner tubes of bicycle wheels. As one takes a closer look at these tubes, little toy cars can be distinguished, driving all over the dragon as well as inside of it, as little ants invading a body creating an image of chaos and lack of control. The work is based on the artist's observation and criticism of the upcoming capitalism in China in which cars are slowly substituting the traditional use of bicycles as the main means of transportation. The consequences are disastrous for the urban life as well as for the environment, collapsing the cities with traffic and smog.

Huang Yongping

Huang Yongping's on sight work titled *Turtle Town* (1997) (Fig. 39) was made in collaboration with the Chinese architect Yung Ho Chang. The architect had made a two-story structure representing an "Asian town". The centre of this structure was deliberately left empty, ready to receive any possible interaction that might occur. Huang Yongping, as he often does, intervened in this two-story "Asian city" by placing fifty-two plastered turtles under the pillars that held the structure in place. By placing the turtles under the structure, it is as if the Asian town would be literally "on the move", pointing to the title of the exhibition. This work is representative of the mixture of modern urbanism and traditional Chinese symbolism as the turtle is a Chinese symbol representative of the creation of the universe. By representing Chinese symbolism by the usage of a turtle: a persistent,

hardworking animal symbolic for life and longevity, it might be that Huang Yongping was also pointing towards Chinese society or China in general. Maybe he was trying to express that even though Asia is being modernized through a rather Euroamerican style, Chinese symbolism, tradition and culture cannot be erased and shall persist into the future, remaining, literally, the foundation of Chinese architecture and society.

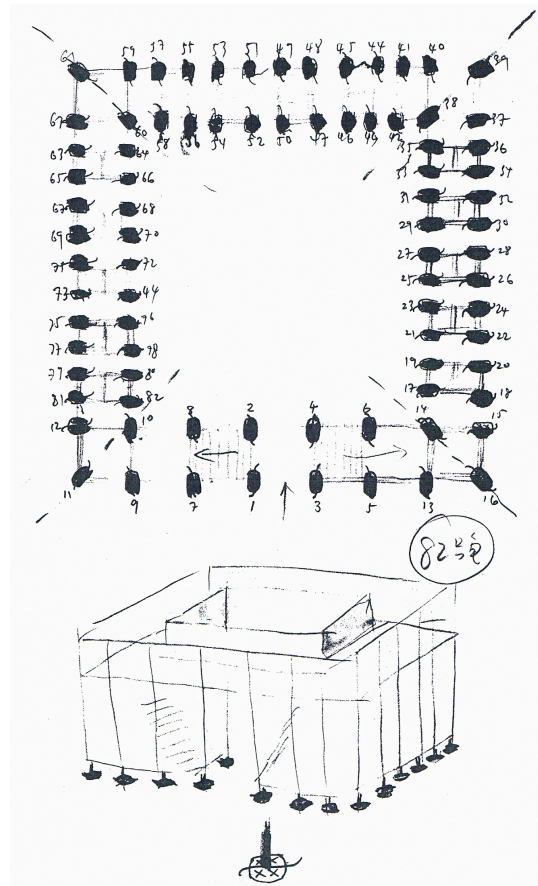


Figure 39: Huang Yongping, *Turtle Town*, scetch of the artist, 1997

His second work was *Pearl River* (1997) that had previously been displayed at the Documenta X in Kassel, Germany. Nothing is mentioned about this work within the exhibition catalogue, nor is there any colour plate of this particular installation. That makes it very difficult to explain and further interpret this specific creation. What can be said is that the Pearl River Delta is one of the most influential areas and economic centres within China, and it is also the birth ground of the '85 New Wave Movement of which Huang

Yongping was a member. Therefore, this work might have addressed the technological and economical advances that some regions of China are going through.

Shen Yuan

The work of Shen Yuan has no specific title and consists of newspaper clippings placed together with the artist's drawings of bicycles. The newspaper clipping is in French and talks about the "sans-papiers" which is one of the darker sides of modern day globalization. Within the exhibition catalogue, a small text is quoted written by the artist herself:

Movements- turmoils -rebellions, why?
Too many people. Too many inhabitants? or too many passengers?
Too many idlers. Too many escaped criminals? or too many policemen?
Too many houses. Are the houses of the poor too high?
or those of the rich too large?
Too many sales. Too many commodities? or too many businessmen?
Too many intellectuals. Too man students? or too many politicians?
Too much garbage, Too much bullshit? or too many eggs?
Then nothing is too little? No, there's too little money, too few good citizens.

It seems as if the artist is portraying the modern city as a place of decadence, of abundance, of the masses, as a city of "too many". Especially her last sentence seems significant: "too few good citizens". The work might be criticizing modern life within the urban context.

Wang Du

The last work that shall be commented on here is the work of Wang Du titled *International Landscape* (1997) (Fig. 40) which consisted of an enormous blown-up sculpture of a ("western") prostitute. By placing this sculpture of the prostitute within an Asian urban context, Wang Du creates what he calls "the landscape of the Other". In fact, this particular work is inspired on the artist's experience upon arriving in Paris in the 1990s. As Wang Du arrived in Paris, he was at first shocked yet fascinated by the images that he saw around him. Since then, his work has consisted of taking these images and information that were everywhere, especially those from the media, and blowing them up to enormous proportions hereby pointing out the images which for many go by

unnoticed.⁷⁸⁹ He acts, as it were, as a broadcaster or a “collective consciousness”, processing information and making society more aware of the enormous quantity of information that surrounds us on a daily basis. This work, and the work of Wang Du in general is a great example of the in-between position of the overseas artists that permits them to critically, yet objectively, look towards both cultures, Chinese and Euroamerican, and to distinguish those aspects that the “locals” no longer perceive.



Figure 40: Installation view of *Cities on the Move*, Vienna Secession, 1997. In the background one can perceive the work of Wang Du, *International Landscape*, 1997

In general, all works presented by the artists at the *Cities on the Move* exhibition coincided with the curators' objective of portraying the modernization of the urban scene within Asian cities. The overseas artists that participated within the survey made works that in some cases reflected their in-between position, as was the case with the work of Wang

⁷⁸⁹ See also his work *Promener mon Chien* (Fig. 49) in *Paris pour Escalpe* (2000), chapter 9 of Block II.

Du, while others expressed their critical view towards the modernization of Asian cities, which was often put into a rather negative light, as was the case of Shen Yuan's newspaper clippings and Chen Zhen's *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) (Fig. 38). This last work, as Huang Yongping's *Turtle Town* (1997) (Fig. 39) were also very good examples of how Chinese overseas artists often combine traditional Chinese elements (Chen Zhen formed the bicycle tubes into the shape of a dragon, while Huang Yongping used the symbolic meaning of the turtle within Chinese tradition) with their Euroamerican influence resulting of their in-between position in order to take a critical look at both cultures, and to reflect upon these cultures from this in-between position. They are great examples of how the overseas, in-between position of these artists can be enriching to the international art scene by creating new and hybrid possibilities. However, these aspects of the overseas artists were not at all highlighted within either of the exhibition catalogues.

7.4 The exhibition reviews

The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, has been so kind to provide the reviews from the museum's archives. In this chapter, the following reviews shall be analysed (in chronological order):

- Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the Move*, Art Asia Pacific, issue 20, 1998
- Author unknown, *Città d'Asia crescono*, I viaggi, supplement of the newspaper La Repubblica, 18th February 1999
- Author unknown, *Asian beauties*, Scanorama, February 1999
- Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, cultural supplement of the NRC Handelsblad newspaper, 19th March 1999
- Author Unknown, *Città mutant. Metropoli d'Asia proiettate verso il Duemila*, Arte, March 1999
- Author unknown, *Cities on the Move 4: The Asian City of the '90s*, Frame, issue 7, March-April 1999
- Author unknown, *Movimento continuo*, Il giornale dell'arte, nr. 176, April 1999
- Author unknown, *Cities on the Move 4*, Travel lines, spring 1999
- Andrew Gellatly, *Cities on the Move- Hayward Gallery, London*, Frieze, nr. 48, 1999
- Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*, Parachute, nr. 90, December 1999

7.4.1 Specialized magazines

7.4.1.1 Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the Move*

The first review that shall be analysed comes from the magazine Art Asia Pacific, which is one of the leading magazines in the field of contemporary art. According to their own website they are the "leading English-language periodical covering contemporary art and culture from Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East."⁷⁹⁰ Francesca Dal Lago who at the time was a PhD candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University has written the review. Francesca Dal Lago is an expert on modern and experimental Chinese art and she has also been a visiting scholar at the Chinese Academy of Art.

⁷⁹⁰ <http://artasiapacific.com/About/History>, n.d., date of consultation: 13/11/2012

The author of the review makes an interesting comment on the first page of her text when she says:

In the recent flurry of events organised by western museums on the subject of contemporary Asian art, cultural attribution has too often become the only basis for curatorial choices. Adopting national definitions as the main theme of an exhibition often obscures subtler and more revealing issues addressed by artists, and initiates a process of “othering” that provides an unnecessary distance between the daily conditions of the viewer and those experienced by the artist in his or her own context of creation.⁷⁹¹

Francesca Dal Lago seems to be criticizing the way Asian art is being displayed in “western” museums, by mainly focussing on the origin (Chineseness) of the participating artists. She speaks about the adoption of “national definitions as the main theme of an exhibition”, which as a consequence, commences a process of “othering”. The concept of the Other can be related to exotism or eurocentrism and seeing other cultures and nations as distant or as objects of gazing.⁷⁹² Dal Lago mentions that *Cities on the Move* is different and that “the choice of the city as a specific theme represents a much-needed critical approach”.⁷⁹³

The author then comments on the exhibition and specific works that were on display. One of the comments is about Huang Yongping’s work *Turtle Town* (1997) (Fig. 39). About this work, she mentions:

The turtles, which in Huang’s original project were supposed to be alive, recall the traditional steel-bearing elements of Chinese monuments, where the turtle as a symbol of longevity is often employed at the base of historically significant writings. Its position within this installation aptly symbolised the century-long traditions of Asia which are bearing the burdens of modernisation.⁷⁹⁴

Here, Francesca Dal Lago gives an interpretation of this work, something that the exhibition catalogue has not. Her explanation highlights the fact that Chinese experimental art often is a combination of traditional Chinese culture with modern art creations. This feature has been highlighted within both catalogues as a way of creating a new Asian modernity. Huang Yongping is a good example of this combination of tradition and modernity as he often incorporates Chinese symbolisms and traditions within his work. Another clear example of this is his work *Overtured Tomb* (1995) (Fig. 29) that was presented at the *Heart of Darkness* (1995) survey, analysed in chapter five.

⁷⁹¹ Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the move*, Art Asia Pacific, Autumn issue 20, 1998, p. 36.

⁷⁹² See paragraph 3.4 of Block I.

⁷⁹³ Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the move*, Art Asia Pacific, Autumn issue 20, 1998, p. 36.

⁷⁹⁴ Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the move*, Art Asia Pacific, Autumn issue 20, 1998, p. 39.

Towards the end of her review, Francesca Dal Lago addresses the chaotic aspect of the exhibition and writes:

Although the curators' wilfully created chaos was one of the strongest aspects of "Cities on the Move" it seriously affected the possibility of grasping the full implications of individual artworks in the show. Visually and conceptually overwhelming, the exhibition left one with a sense of physical fatigue and mental confusion, with the multi-layered visual experience converging into a chaotic impression of the incomprehensible processes of Asian modernisation. While this could provide stimulus for further investigation, a smaller selection of artists might have helped to maintain the conceptual strength of "Cities on the Move" without forfeiting a more in-depth understanding of the contributions of individual artists.⁷⁹⁵

The reason for the lack of "more in-depth understanding of the individual artists" is, according to the author, the excessive number of artists that participated in the show. This is true, as one hundred-three artists participated, which is an enormous number for a single exhibition. Francesca Dal Lago also mentions the fact that the viewer is left with a sense of mental confusion, a feeling that shall be repeated by other art critics in the following reviews. She attributes this to the fact of the wilfully created chaos that was induced by the exhibition curators. However, it could be alleged that the scarcity of information within the exhibition catalogue might also have been a contributing factor in this feeling of mental confusion. Francesca Dal Lago however does not mention anything about the exhibition catalogue.

Hans Ulrich Obrist in fact has written about the large-scale exhibitions he sometimes carries out within his book *Ways of Curating* (2014). Here he has stated:

When you have a big exhibition, I realized, you gain territory but the risk is that you lose concentration. Nevertheless, the critical mass in a large exhibition is very attractive. There are more works than you can perceive in a single visit, and there are many more zones of contact than in a normal exhibition.⁷⁹⁶

The fact that Francesca Dal Lago mentions in her review that the chaos was wilfully created by the curators seems to be confirmed by the above-mentioned quote of Hans Ulrich Obrist himself. It seems that this chaos is indeed purposely generated in order to create more zones of contact and also, maybe, to oblige the visitor to return to the exhibition. Moreover, the curator and art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev has also commented on the chaos that is sometimes generated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and has

⁷⁹⁵ Francesca Dal Lago, *Cities on the move*, Art Asia Pacific, Autumn issue 20, 1998, p. 39.

⁷⁹⁶ OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 99.

written: “Hans Ulrich Obrist employs a Boetti strategy, providing simple rules to produce a kind of chaos, and another arises. This is creative curating.”⁷⁹⁷

Lastly, the Art Asia Pacific magazine mentions that the *Cities on the Move* exhibition can be seen at the Vienna Secession, at the capcMusée Bordeaux and the P.S.1. International Art Institute of New York yet omits the editions that were held in London, Denmark, Helsinki, Hong Kong and Bangkok.

7.4.1.2 Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*

The next review comes from Parachute magazine,⁷⁹⁸ which is published in Canada in French and English. It is a publication dedicated to the contemporary art world and, according to their website: “Parachute is a contemporary art magazine that seeks to harbour the emergence of an advanced form of art criticism encompassing both conceptual and historical approaches in the analysis of new art artistic practices.”⁷⁹⁹

The article is written by Joan Kee who is a lawyer graduated from Harvard Law School as well as an art historian and critic, graduating in History of Art from Yale University. She is an assistant professor at the department of History of Art at the Michigan University and is a specialist in modern and contemporary art of the East and Southeast Asia. She has also published a book about Korean contemporary art. In chapter eight on the exhibition *Inside Out* she is again mentioned as she conducted an interview with the overseas artist Gu Wenda.

The first thing that should be highlighted about this article is that it, as others reviews, omits the Hong Kong, Helsinki, and Bangkok versions of *Cities on the Move*. According to the information given in the review, the show ends at the Hayward Gallery in London.

⁷⁹⁷ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 77.

⁷⁹⁸ Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*, Parachute, nr. 96, December 1999, p. 88-89.

⁷⁹⁹ See the Parachute Press kit: http://www.parachute.ca/dossier_presse-ang01.htm, n.d, date of last consultation: 14/11/2012.

The author of the article underlines, like Francesca Dal Lago, the chaotic character of the exhibition and comments on this aspect of the survey in different ways. First of all, she calls the show “helter-skelter”⁸⁰⁰ and then continues:

Yet for whom were these works intended? The artfully delineated chaos posed nothing new for those already desensitized by frequent and prolonged contact with Asian urban life. Rather, the insistent emphasis on confusion and the chaotic implied that the works, and the exhibition as a whole, was intended for a Eurocentric visitor unaccustomed to the hustle and bustle of Asian urban culture. It is quite fitting, then, that the exhibition is primarily intended for European venues.⁸⁰¹

Joan Kee mentions that the exhibition was intended for a Eurocentric visitor. The comment is remarkable as it was not the curators’ intention to make the exhibition for an eurocentric viewer. Quite the contrary, the objective was to show the rapid changes that are occurring in Asia’s architecture and urban space in the recent decades, and to create an “East-West” dialogue. In a certain way, it is quite ironical that Joan Kee insinuates that the exhibition was meant for a Euroamerican audience, as this was precisely one of the factors that Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obirst wanted to avoid. Remembering the quote of Hans Ulrich Obrist at the beginning of this chapter, one of the reasons why *Cities on the Move* was created was to counteract the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition held in 1989 that was acused of presenting non-Euroamerican art in a stereotypical, often exotic way. In no way were they trying to adapt the survey to a Eurocentric audience. Also, *Cities on the Move* was exhibited at many different venues, some of them outside of Euroamerica. Was the author not aware of this fact? Again, she does omit the Bangkok and Hong Kong edition.

The author then moves on to comment on different artworks that were on display at the exposition. Firstly, she mentions the work *Billboard* (1997) made by the Thai artists and curator Rirkrit Tiranvanija and Navin Rawanchaikul. She describes it as a “mesh of cultural references extended beyond the simplistic East-West dichotomy”.⁸⁰² Although the author mentions the fact that the work goes beyond the “East-West” dichotomy she does not mention the third space, which here could be applied. She then mentions another work titled *Hydra* (1999) which was created by the artist Lee Bul. About this work, she says that it “also revolved around a multiplicity of stereotypes (...). Hydra became a reflection of

⁸⁰⁰ Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*, Parachute, nr. 96, December 1999, p. 88.

⁸⁰¹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰² Ibidem.

Western expectations regarding the exotic East.”⁸⁰³ This comment seems to coincide with the observation made earlier on in her review about the exhibition being meant for a Eurocentric viewer as non-Euroamerican art is often made exotic to make it more appealing for a Euroamerican audience.⁸⁰⁴

The author then comments on the “westernization” of the Asian cities and writes:

As former colonial capitals and concessions, cities like Saigon, Singapore and Hong Kong have been heavily influenced by the “Western” presence both in spatial organization and type of architecture. For the most part, the exchange depicted in this exhibition was a one-sided one in which the work concerned itself with the effects of globalization, or more accurately, Westernization. (...) [I]t is the process of hybridization or fermentation of disparate elements that should have occupied a more prominent space in the conceptualization of “Cities on the Move”.⁸⁰⁵

The fact that the Asian cities have turned into global cities, which in many articles has been described as “western” cities or “westernized” cities, has been stated in different reviews that have been analysed in this paragraph. Joan Kee here mentions that the exhibition was one-sided, highlighting mainly this “western” influence on the global Asian cities and leaving out the process of hybridization of these cities. This is an important critique towards the show and especially towards the curator Hou Hanru who is one of the pioneers in the defence of hybridity and the third space. The fact that Joan Kee mentions that this element was missing from the survey therefore becomes very significant. All in all, the review is very critical and portrays the show as being one-sided and Eurocentric.

7.4.1.3 Andrew Gellatly, *Cities on the Move*

The next review comes from Frieze magazine,⁸⁰⁶ which according to their website is “the leading magazine of contemporary art and culture”.⁸⁰⁷ The magazine is published in London. The review that shall be analysed next is titled *Cities on the Move* and writes about the edition of *Cities on the Move* that was organized at the Hayward Gallery in London. The author of the review is Andrew Gellatly, who is an artist and a regular writer for Frieze magazine.

⁸⁰³ Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*, Parachute, nr. 96, December 1999, p. 88.

⁸⁰⁴ See paragraph 3.3 of the theoretic part (Block I).

⁸⁰⁵ Joan Kee, *Cities on the Move*, Parachute, nr. 96, December 1999, p. 89.

⁸⁰⁶ Andrew Gellatly, *Cities on the Move*, Frieze, nr. 48, 1999, p. 108-109.

⁸⁰⁷ <http://www.frieze.com/about>. Date of consultation: 14/11/2012.

About the show, the author seems to coincide with the previous review by Joan Kee as he mentions: "As an approximation of the urban helter-skelter of the new East it does a convincing job of giving uptight Western types the howling fantods."⁸⁰⁸ Again, this author uses the word "helter-skelter" to describe the survey within his review. As the review continues, he again seems to coincide with Joan Kee when he writes that for the Eastern viewer, the exposition presents nothing new. Yet, for the European or, as Gellatly calls it the "uptight Western types",⁸⁰⁹ it is completely shocking. The author however does not go so far as to say that *Cities on the Move* therefore was Eurocentric, meant for this "western" viewer.

The author then comments on the fact that the travelling of the exhibition to different venues has had its toll:

"Cities on the Move" has been on the move for a while. It arrived in London dusted off from the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen. Before that it had been in Bordeaux, New York's PS1 and the Vienna Secession. (...) The exhibition suffers to a certain degree from psychological wear and tear.⁸¹⁰

To illustrate this fact, he mentions the two works by the overseas Chinese artist Huang Yongping. About these creations, he says that they were displayed in earlier venues of *Cities on the Move* and other exhibitions. As a consequence, according to the author, the work (Huang Yongping's *Pearl River* installation that was previously displayed at Documenta X in 1997) "needs to struggle to be looked at properly. With so many specially created works in the show (...)." ⁸¹¹

In general, the author criticizes the fact that there were too many artworks on display at *Cities on the Move* and that the survey becomes tiring for the viewer. He illustrates his comment by mentioning the work of the overseas Chinese artist Chen Zhen: "(...) *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) by Chen Zhen, a huge 20 metre snake of inner tubes and rubber tyres that considers the Chinese commitment to upgrade every bicycle to a car. Almost in recognition of the viewer's weariness, the curators placed a caged hamster nearby, spinning its wheel."⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁸ Andrew Galletly, *Cities on the Move*, Frieze, nr. 48, 1999, p. 108.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibidem.

⁸¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹¹ Ibidem.

⁸¹² Ibidem.

What should also be highlighted from this fragment is that the author has not captured the idea of the dragon as a metaphor for China. Here in this quote, the author describes the work as a “huge 20 metre snake”.⁸¹³ This points to the fact that he has missed an important part of the meaning of this particular installation.

Towards the end of his review, the author again emphasizes the chaotic aspect of the survey and says: “the whole installation is hellishly complicated and slightly confusing.”⁸¹⁴ The comments of this review seem to coincide with previous articles in that *Cities on the Move* was too overwhelming for some of the art critics.

7.4.2 Non-specialized magazines

7.4.2.1. Author unknown, *Asian beauties*

The first review is very brief and comes from the magazine Scanorama, which is a magazine published by Scandinavian Airlines (SAS). The review is featured within their “What’s up” section of the magazine and is about the version of *Cities on the Move* that was held at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. The title of the review is *Asian beauties*.⁸¹⁵ About the exhibition, the brief text mentions: “The cities are developing at a rate no one has ever witnessed before. This places enormous demands on architecture and city planning and also has an impact on art, which becomes political and comments on the social conditions and situations.”⁸¹⁶

This review mentions that the urban changes and development have an impact on art, which then becomes political. This statement is not further elaborated upon and therefore remains quite unclear. Where this observation comes from or on what information it is based remains unknown. The exhibition catalogue does not put a political focus on the exhibition and the political aspect that has been insinuated in this review might have been created in order to attract an audience for the exhibition, by attributing a political, dissident character to it.

⁸¹³ Andrew Galletly, *Cities on the Move*, Frieze, nr. 48, 1999, p. 108.

⁸¹⁴ Andrew Galletly, *Cities on the Move*, Frieze, nr. 48, 1999, p.109.

⁸¹⁵ Scanorama magazine, *Asian Beauties*, February 1999 issue, p. 34, autor unknown, February 1999.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

The review does not say much more about the exhibition yet towards the end, it mentions that the survey will travel to London and Helsinki and that the tour will end in Hong Kong. It is not clear on what information this itinerary is based as it is not mentioned within the exhibition catalogue. This review omits the edition that was organised in Bangkok.

7.4.2.2 Author unknown, *Cities on the Move*

This text is not a review but it mentions the *Cities on the Move* exhibition. It was also published in an inflight magazine, i.e. the Dutch magazine *Travellines*.⁸¹⁷ About the exhibition, the short article mentions that it was impressive⁸¹⁸ and well worth a visit. Again, there seems to be confusion about the different venues of the survey. The article mentions that the show shall end in Bangkok and it does not mention the Hong Kong edition.

7.4.2.3 Author unknown, *Movimento continuo*

The next review comes from the Italian magazine *Il Giornale dell'arte* and is titled *Movimento continuo*.⁸¹⁹ This is the first review to mention the fact that the exhibition is trying to establish a dialogue between East and West:

The survey wants to follow up on the cultural, economical, political and artistic development of the Asian cities and to establish a dialogue with the artistic scene of the European city that welcomes it. (...) Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist have tried to focus the attention on the consequences of the encounter between occidental and oriental culture in the daily life of the Asian cities and the changes that have occurred after the recent economical crisis.⁸²⁰

The review is very brief and there is no example given for this dialogue between East and West in the Asian cities. This means that the reader of the review shall have to interpret the article in his or her own way. Yet, it is significant that the article has mentioned the word “dialogue” and does not speak of the “western” influence in Asian society and the urban environment, which is what is often mentioned within reviews and catalogues.

⁸¹⁷ *Travellines*, voorjaar (spring edition), March 1999, author unknown.

⁸¹⁸ “Indrukwekkend”. *Travellines*, voorjaar (spring edition), March 1999, author unknown.

⁸¹⁹ *Il Giornale dell'arte*, *Movimento continuo*, April 1999, nr. 176, author unknown.

⁸²⁰ “La rassegna vuole seguire lo sviluppo culturale, economico, politico e artistico delle città asiatiche e stabilire un dialogo con la scena artistica della città europea che la ospita. (...) Hou Hanru e Hans-Ulrich Obrist hanno cercato di focalizzare l'attenzione sulle conseguenze dello scontro tra cultura occidentale e orientale nella vita quotidiana della città dell'Asia e sui cambiamenti intercorsi in seguito alla recente crisi economica.” *Il Giornale dell'arte*, *Movimento continuo*, April 1999, nr. 176, author unknown.

7.4.2.4 Author unknown, *Città d'Asia crescono*; Author Unknown, *Città mutant. Metropoli d'Asia proiettate verso il Duemila*; and Author unknown, *Cities on the Move 4: The Asian City of the '90s*

The next three short reviews should be analysed together. One comes from the cultural supplement of the Italian newspaper La Repubblica,⁸²¹ the other from the Italian magazine Arte⁸²² and the other is a short notice that was published in the cultural agenda of the magazine Frame,⁸²³ which is one of the three magazines published by Frame Publishers that is a reference for designers and interior architects.⁸²⁴

All three texts are nothing out of the extraordinary. They are all very brief and meant to inform the reader about the existence of the exposition. These three texts are analysed together as one paragraph seems to be exactly the same or very similar in all three articles. The only difference being that two of the texts are written in Italian and one in English. The cultural supplement of the newspaper La Repubblica mentions:

È la prima esposizione in Europa ad occuparsi dell'arte e dell'architettura di una serie di città asiatiche. Riunendo assieme le opera di oltre 100 tra artisti e architetti l'esposizione vuole sottolineare l'incredibile dinamismo e creatività che oggi caratterizzano la vita e la cultura di queste città. Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur (...)⁸²⁵

Arte mentions: "Si tratta della prima esposizione europea sul tema dell'architettura e dell'arte in una serie di città asiatiche: Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Bangkok e Kuala Lumpur."⁸²⁶

Both Italian reviews list the same Asian cities, and in the same order, however neither of them lists any Chinese cities such as Shanghai or Beijing, which have experienced enormous and impacting changes in the recent years.

⁸²¹ Author unknown, *Città d'Asia crescono*, La Repubblica, supplement, no. 66, February 18 1999.

⁸²² Author unknown, *Città mutant. Metropoli d'Asia proiettate verso il Duemila*, Arte, March 1999.

⁸²³ Author unknown, *Cities on the Move 4: The Asian City of the '90s*, Frame, issue 7, March-April 1999.

⁸²⁴ According to their website "Frame Publishers specializes in high-end publications for a global audience of creative professionals. Its three highly international magazines cover art, architecture, design and interiors, reaching readers in seventy-seven countries." <http://www.frameweb.com/service/about-us>, n.d, date of last consultation: 13/11/2012.

⁸²⁵ *Città d'Asia crescono*, La Repubblica, supplement, no. 66, author unknown, February 18 1999.

⁸²⁶ Author unknown, *Città mutant. Metropoli d'Asia proiettate verso il Duemila*, Arte, March 1999.

Frame magazine writes: “This major show is the first comprehensive exhibition in Europe of art and architecture found in a number of Asian cities. It demonstrates the almost unbelievable dynamism and creativity characteristic of life and culture in these cities today.”⁸²⁷ This review is very similar to the fragment quoted previously by the Italian cultural supplement of La Repubblica and could almost be seen as a literal translation of it.

The English review then mentions that the exhibition was “comprehensive”,⁸²⁸ which contradicts the opinions stated within the reviews of the specialized magazines.⁸²⁹ No reasons are given in the article for why the show has been considered “comprehensive”, which would have been helpful in order to contrast the different opinions of the art critics. Yet, the fact that the author mentions that the show was comprehensive might point to the fact that he or she did not personally visit the show. *Cities on the Move* was most probably a rather chaotic (especially when purposely induced⁸³⁰) survey as it included one hundred-three participating artists over different venues. “Comprehensive” therefore seems a rather “unfitting” word to describe the survey.

7.4.1.5 Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*

The following review comes from the cultural supplement of the NRC Handelsblad,⁸³¹ one of the main newspapers in the Netherlands. The article is titled *The Asian metropolis as an ideal*⁸³² and was written by Anna Tilroe who is an art and culture critic, and writes as an art critic for the NRC. She also holds an Honorary Chair of Art and Culture at the Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen, Holland.

The review is quite extensive and mentions various aspects of the *Cities on the Move* exhibition. Firstly, the author mentions: “The last station is the Hayward Gallery in London where later on this year Rem Koolhaas will, as it were, recycle the “rubbish” of the *Cities*

⁸²⁷ Author unknown, *Cities on the Move 4: The Asian City of the '90s*, agenda section, Frame magazine, March / April 1999.

⁸²⁸ Ibidem.

⁸²⁹ See paragraph 7.4.1.

⁸³⁰ See the review by Francesca Dal Lago, point 7.4.1.1.

⁸³¹ Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

⁸³² “De Aziatische metropool als ideaal”. Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

versions.”⁸³³ The author here mentions the word “afval” which in Dutch means “rubbish” and not, for example, “remains”. It is not clear why she has decided to use this word which seems rather derogatory. Also the fact that she employs the word “recycle” seems slightly disrespectful.

According to Anna Tilroe, the final station of *Cities on the Move* is the Hayward Gallery in London. This does not seem to be correct, as some reviews and the catalogue have mentioned that the exhibition would travel to Helsinki, Hong Kong and Bangkok after visiting the Hayward Gallery in London. Again, there seems to be quite some confusion about the different venues and the itinerary of the *Cities on the Move* survey.

Then, the author continues:

Art works are meant to close the gap between culture and life” [According to Rirkrit Tiravanija, a Thai artist]. That is a “new button on an old coat”. A big button because it implies that art is no longer automatically Western art, but that it has become global. And *Cities on the move* is proof of that. And how does global art look like? As Hong Kong: a colourful, carnival-like chaos.⁸³⁴

It is important to highlight the fact that the author portrays the *Cities on the Move* exhibition as a survey that presented art as no longer automatically “western” but as global art. This is one of the first reviews written by an art critic within a newspaper that speaks of non-Euroamerican art in terms of global. However, the author then makes another statement which seems to insinuate that the participating artists somehow catered to the audience: “most of the artists have made a big effort to present the message they want to transmit in the most pleasurable way”.⁸³⁵ This somewhat reminds of the review written by Francesca Dal Lago in which she mentioned that *Cities on the Move* was curated for a Euroamerican audience. It also reminds of the phenomenon of embassy art and “catering to the West” which has been explained in chapter three of the theoretic part. Why does the East Asian artists have to transmit their message in a pleasurable way? Is the same also expected of Euroamerican artists?

⁸³³ “Eindstation is de Hayward Gallery in Londen waar Rem Koolhaas later dit jaar het “afval” van de reeks *Cities*...als het ware zal recyclen.” Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

⁸³⁴ “Kunstwerken [zijn] bedoeld om de kloof tussen cultuur en leven te dichten. Dat is een nieuwe knoop aan de oude jas. Een grote knoop, want het betekent dat kunst niet meer automatisch westerse kunst is, maar wereldomspannend is geworden. En *Cities on the move* is daar proeve van. Hoe ziet die global art eruit? Als Hong Kong: een bonte, kermisachtige chaos.” Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

⁸³⁵ “De meeste kunstenaars hebben zich ingespannen om dat wat ze over willen brengen zo plezierig mogelijk te presenteren.” Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

The author then further elaborates on her statement about the goodwill of the artists:

It is obvious that this art has not been chosen for its aesthetic value. One even gets the impression that the art objects do not matter at all. Primarily, the function of these objects is to be the packaging of good intentions and it is supported by the certainty that it will automatically achieve meaning just because it is displayed in a museum. The selection of the curators seems to be tailored to this fact. Probably they have made a list of concepts that are related to the idea of global city – identity, consumption society, ecology – and have searched for matching artists.⁸³⁶

This fragment appears to be rather critical and could maybe even be described as cynical. The author mentions that the works were not chosen for their aesthetic value and that they, in fact, do not seem to matter at all. What does she mean by this? That they are dreadful to look at and are just a façade? That the works on display were chosen due to the ethnic background of the artist or their fame? What “good intentions” do they conceal? The author does not further explain her rather harsh comments. The author then alleges that the curators have set up a list and matched the artists to the concepts stated on it. This comment emphasizes the author’s previous statement on the non-importance of the artworks that were on display. Anna Tilroe writes that the art objects merely obtain meaning by being placed in a museum, again quite a critical comment to make. What does she mean by this? That the artworks on display at *Cities on the Move* were in fact not art at all?

Towards the end of her review, she makes another critical comment towards the exhibition and says: “But an exposition erases itself when ideas are accepted without any consideration simply because they express the desired good intentions.”⁸³⁷ Again, the author seems to repeat the fact that she considered the exhibition non-critical and that the artists presented works that were not really artworks but mere works of goodwill, presenting their message “in the most pleasurable way”. These “good intentions” of which the author speaks is illustrated by a work that was presented by an architect which consisted of creating a “bioclimatic” skyscraper. The design involved the plantation of trees and bushes in order to create an ecological climate. This is then considered a “joke” by the author of the review. She does not explain why. Maybe she found the idea too

⁸³⁶ “Het is duidelijk dat deze kunst niet om zijn esthetische waarde is uitgekozen. Je krijgt zelfs de indruk dat het kunstvoorwerp er helemaal niet toe doet. Het functioneert vooral als verpakking van goede bedoelingen en het vindt steun in de zekerheid dat het vanzelf betekenis krijgt omdat het zich in het museum bevindt. De selectie van de samenstellers lijkt daar op toegesneden. Waarschijnlijk hebben ze een lijst opgesteld van begrippen die te maken hebben met het idee van global city – identiteit, consumptie maatschappij, ecologie – en daar kunstenaars bij gezocht.” Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

⁸³⁷ “Maar een tentoonstelling gumt zichzelf uit als ideeën klakkeloos worden aanvaard omdat ze de gewenste goede bedoelingen uitdrukken.” Anna Tilroe, *De Aziatische metropool als ideaal*, NRC Handelsblad Cultureel Supplement, 19 maart 1999.

simple or too unoriginal? Yet, she does not seem to consider all the other works that were on display at the survey in which more than one hundred artists participated. All in all, it seems to be a very critical review and not all of her comments are founded or justified.

7.5 Conclusions on *Cities on the Move*

Cities on the Move was an exhibition of enormous proportions with one hundred-three participating artists and a duration of two years, travelling to different venues in different continents. The main objective of the survey was to portray the changes that have taken place within cities and urban areas of East Asia and how the artists reflect on these through their creations. It is as the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist mentions in his book *Ways of Curating* (2014) about the *Cities on the Move* exhibition: “We [Rem Koolhaas, Hou Hanru, Hans Ulrich Obrist] discussed how it would be much more interesting to do an exhibition on cities rather than just on Asian art.”⁸³⁸

Yet, various reviews mentioned that the exposition was chaotic, “helter-skelter” and tiring. According to some of the authors there were too many works on display, too many participating artists and the exhibition became a weary journey for the viewer.

Some of the reviews were quite critical, especially the ones written by Anna Tilroe and Joan Kee. The latter mentioned that the exhibition was meant for a Eurocentric viewer as it presented nothing new for an “Asian” audience, and Anna Tilroe mentioned that the works on display were presented in “the most pleasant way possible”, as if catering to a specific audience. It seems as if both critics are suggesting that the exhibition was adapted to a “western” public and that the works on display were not necessarily authentic but were meant to please the viewer. Many reviews also mentioned the fact that the Asian cities were becoming global cities, which is the same as becoming “westernized”.

Another remarkable fact is that three reviews seem to be quite similar even though the texts were published in different magazines, and even came from different countries. This might point to the fact that the authors of these reviews had not actually visited the exhibition but merely consulted the catalogue and based their information on the other reviews that were available, copying (sometimes quite literally) part of their content.

There is not a single review that mentions the third space concept although some reviews do speak about concepts which can easily be related to the third space such as identity, hybridity and the mutual influence between “East” and “West”. Although the survey was

⁸³⁸ OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 122.

not about Chinese experimental art specifically but about architecture and urbanism in Asia, the third space can be related to this area, as architecture and urban spaces can also become a point of encounter, hybridity, and dialogue between “Oriental” and “Occidental” culture. However, again, the concept is not mentioned by the curators in the exhibition catalogue or by the art critics in their reviews.

Another point that stands out in the reviews is the general confusion about the different venues to which *Cities on the Move* travelled. Some venues, such as the Bangkok and Hong Kong version were often omitted. Some others also left out the Helsinki venue, mentioning that the exposition would end at the Hayward Gallery in London. Even the exhibition catalogues were not clear on this subject: the Bangkok venue was not mentioned in either of the two catalogues. As has been clarified in the first paragraph, this confusion is due to the fact that the definitive list of participating venues was not known beforehand. This permits the exhibition to achieve a rather flexible, improvisable character but on the other hand also creates confusion which can clearly be perceived in the catalogue as well as the reviews.

It should also be taken into account that both exhibition catalogues did not provide a lot of useful information on the works that were on display. This might have contributed to the fact that the exhibition was not completely understood or that the works on display have been interpreted in different ways. An example of this was the review of Andrew Gellatly in *Frieze* magazine in which he somewhat missed the symbolic meaning of Chen Zhen’s *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) (Fig. 38) by describing the form of the installation as a snake, and not a dragon. This lack of insightful and clarifying information might have also contributed to the fact that the exhibition was considered too large and tiring.

Lastly, quite a few reviews have mentioned the sight specific work *Red Golf* (1997) (Fig. 37) by Cai Guoqiang, one of the overseas Chinese artists. The work was either mentioned within the review itself or a photograph of the work was placed with the article. The work consisted of a miniature golf course of one hole, which was placed right at the beginning of the exposition. The exhibition visitors could interact with this installation, trying to get the golf ball into the hole. The interpretations that existed on this work were varied. Some saw it as the representation of “western” influence in “eastern” society. Others portrayed it as a metaphor for the changing economical status of the “eastern” (and maybe more specifically the Chinese) society and the upcoming of a new middle and high class within

(Chinese) society. The fact that this work has been mentioned so frequently might be due to the fact that golf is a sport which is considered “western” and which appears familiar to a “western” viewer. Maybe it served as a point of reference or a work that was easy to understand within a confusing and chaotic *Cities on the Move*.

8. INSIDE OUT: NEW CHINESE ART (1998-1999)

8.1 Introduction to the exhibition

The exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, organized by the Asia Society New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, was curated by the Chinese born art curator and critic Gao Minglu, who is now based in the United States. As explained in chapter three of Block II, Gao Minglu is considered one of the key figures within the Chinese experimental art world. He was the editor of the Chinese art journal *Meishu* that was the leading art journal in China in the 1980s. He also was one of the curators of the emblematic *China/ Avant garde* exhibition that was held in 1989 in Beijing. After the *Tiananmen* Square events, Gao Minglu was placed on involuntarily leave from *Meishu* magazine and would leave for the United States in 1991. There he would become a prominent researcher, obtaining his PhD in Art History from Harvard University in the year 2000. He curated the *Inside Out* exhibition in 1998, which was then considered the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art on this scale to be held in the United States (this in fact is rather remarkable as Gao Minglu also curated the exhibition *Fragmented Memory* in Ohio in the early year of 1993). In 2005 he would curate another emblematic exhibition in the United States titled *The Wall: Reshaping Chinese Contemporary Art*. Gao currently serves as both Head of Fine Arts at Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, and a Research Professor at the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh.

Inside Out toured different venues for three years. It was presented simultaneously at the Asia Society and the PS1 Contemporary Art Centre from September 1998 until January 1999. It then travelled to the San Francisco MoMa, The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the Henry Art gallery in Seattle, the Tacoma Art Museum and then to the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* in Monterrey to end up at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. It was a major exposition of Chinese experimental art spanning about fifteen years, the earliest works dating from 1984 and the latest from 1998, including eighty works of fifty-eight different artists. Some reviews called it the first major exhibition of new art from China to be seen in the US.⁸³⁹ Emphasis should be put on the word “major” as

⁸³⁹ Former West Research Library, <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/InsideOutNewChineseArt>, n.d., date of consultation: 05/05/2012. The Former West project is a part of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst (base for contemporary art). See also: Tarzan, D., “*Inside Out*” Show Both Big and Surprising, Artguide Northwest, <http://www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm>, n.d., date of consultation: 05/05/2012

Inside Out was certainly not the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in the United States. Previous exhibitions were for example *Fragmented Memory* (1993) that has been analysed in chapter three, and *China's New Art Post 1989*⁸⁴⁰ that was held in 1995.

The exhibition was divided into four sections and introduced the viewers to art being produced by artists in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese artists who have emigrated, primarily to Europe and the United States since the late 1980s. Most of these émigré artists who participated in *Inside Out* were members of the “’85 New Wave”, an artistic avant-garde movement that started in China in 1985 and lasted for four years, until 1989. The ’85 New Wave reacted against the political oppression that existed during the Cultural Revolution of the 70s and 80s. It was also due to a continuing repression that many artists of the ’85 New Wave decided to leave China in order to work in foreign countries.

The exhibition included different types of media such as paintings, installation works, sculpture, video art and photography. Through these artistic expressions the artists tried to give their point of view on the social and political aspects of their environment and how they personally respond to these. Recurrent themes were calligraphy and the meaning of the written character in Chinese society, cultural identity and change, gender issues, consumerism, and family and social issues. Important works that were on display were Gu Wenda’s *United Nations series: Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41), Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), Wang Guangyi’s *Great castigation series: Coca-Cola* (1993), Zhang Xiaogang’s *Bloodline: Family portrait no. 2* (1994) and Song Dong’s *Printing on Water* (1996) among many others.

See also: Updike, R., *The New Face of China—Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, Seattle Times, 18/11/1999.

And: <http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/introduction.html>, n.d., date of consultation 05/05/2012

⁸⁴⁰ *China's New Art Post 1989* curated by Li Xianting and Chang Tsong-zung was also a major show held in different venues around the globe. According to the catalogue it was the first major collection of Chinese experimental art to be held outside of the mainland in 1993 as it travelled from Hong Kong to Australia and then to the United States. The focus of this show was not on the overseas artists as the catalogue literally mentioned, therefore it has not been included within this analysis (see introduction to Block II).

The overseas artists that participated in the *Inside Out* exhibition were:

Cai Guoqiang: *Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows* (sight specific, 1998)
(Fig. 42)
Traces of Ancient Explosions (1985)

Gu Wenda: *Pseudo-Characters Series: Contemplation of the World*
(1984) (Fig. 53)
United Nations Series: Temple of Heaven (China Monument)
(sight specific, 1998) (Fig. 41)

Wu Shanzhuan: *Red Humor* (1986)

Xu Bing: *Book from the Sky*⁸⁴¹ (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45)

Huang Yongping: *Turntable* (1988)
*"A History of Chinese Painting" and "A Concise History of
Modern Painting" Washed in a Washing Machine for Two
Minutes*⁸⁴² (1987/1993) (Fig. 31)

It should be mentioned that the exhibition catalogue does not make specific references to the works that were on display. The catalogue consists mainly of the essays written by various authors in which the artworks are sometimes addressed, however when it comes to the artworks on display, it limits itself to the reproduction of colour plates of some of the works without any further explanation apart from references to size, year of production, artist, etc. Although this has occurred in other exhibitions such as the *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) survey analysed in the previous chapter, it is rather inexplicable that the explanations of the artworks on display, such an essential element of an art exhibition, are so widely omitted and that these works are not explained by the exhibition catalogue or by the artists themselves via a short text. This of course makes it more probable for these works to be misunderstood or erroneously viewed.

⁸⁴¹ Also seen in *Des del País del Centre*, chapter 6 of Block II.

⁸⁴² Also commented on in *Des del País del Centre*, chapter 6 of Block II.

8.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue is one of the most important catalogues within this dissertation as it explicitly and extensively elaborates on the third space concept,⁸⁴³ and the political reception of Chinese experimental art in Europe and the United States: two essential pillars of this dissertation that have also been extensively elaborated upon within the theoretic part of this thesis.⁸⁴⁴ Therefore, the analysis of the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue shall follow a slightly different manner. In the second part of paragraph 8.2 all mentions to the third space concept shall be highlighted. The aim is to underline the references made to concepts such as third space, Mid-Ground, diaspora artists, and the in-between. Certain sections of the catalogue, not all, make mention of the diaspora artists, the third space and the in-between, as will be outlined in these pages. It is also relevant to point out that the last section of the catalogue is entirely dedicated to a conversation between Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu titled *Strategies of Survival in the Third Space*.⁸⁴⁵ In paragraph 8.2.1, the focus shall lie on the elements within the exhibition catalogue that speak about the political reception of Chinese experimental art. These shall be highlighted and further analysed within this specific paragraph.

The exhibition catalogue was edited by the Asia Society in 1998 and includes a foreword, introduction, and nine essays written by seven scholars and curators from China, Europe, and the United States in which they discuss the cultures, concepts, and personal and political concerns that were present in the artworks on display. The catalogue also contains colour plates of some of the works on display, as well as biographical information on the artists, a chronology of mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and a selected bibliography. *Inside Out* curator Gao Minglu edited the volume and provides an overview of the exhibition as well as an essay on transitional avant-garde art in mainland China. The catalogue is extensive and has a total of two hundred-four pages.

⁸⁴³ In fact, the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue is the first within this dissertation to specifically address and mention the third space concept.

⁸⁴⁴ See paragraph 2.4 and 3.2 of Block I.

⁸⁴⁵ Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, exhibition catalogue, 1998, p.183-189.

The authors who collaborated with the catalogue are also plentiful and it is for this reason that in this chapter they have been listed:

- Foreword: Vishakha N. Desai, president of the Asia Society, and David A. Ross, former director of the San Francisco MoMa.
- Introduction: Gary Garrels, *Elise S. Haas* Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Colin Mackenzie, Curator and Assistant Director of the Galleries at the Asia Society.
- Gao Minglu, an active art critic and curator of the *Inside Out* exhibition.
- Norman Bryson, Professor in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Harvard University.
- Chang Tsong-zung, curatorial director of Hanart TZ Gallery in Hong Kong and an independent curator of several international exhibitions of Chinese Art.⁸⁴⁶
- David Clark, Associate Professor in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Hong Kong.
- Hou Hanru, one of the most important curators and scholars specializing in experimental Chinese art.⁸⁴⁷
- Leo Ou-Fan Lee, Professor of Chinese Literature at the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. He specializes in the areas of contemporary Chinese cultural studies and modern Chinese literature.
- Victoria Y. Lu, Associate Professor at Shih Chien University, Taipei.
- Wu Hung, a *Harrie A. Vanderstappen* Distinguished Service Professor in Chinese Art History at the University of Chicago and another key figure within Chinese experimental art.

According to the exhibition catalogue, the main goal of the exhibition was not to display the works of the overseas artists exclusively nor was it entirely dedicated to the transmission of the third space concept. This was not the main objective, although the section devoted to overseas Chinese artists did make up an important part of the survey, moreover due to the fact that Chinese artists living abroad, like Xu Bing⁸⁴⁸ and Gu Wenda, are sometimes the better-known ones among a Euroamerican public.

⁸⁴⁶ Chang Tsong-Zung curated the exhibition *Paris-Pékin* (2002) analysed in chapter 10 of Block II.

⁸⁴⁷ Various exhibitions curated by Hou Hanru have been analysed in this thesis. See chapter 4, 7 and 9 of Block II. He is also a regular contributor to exhibition catalogues analysed within this dissertation: see chapter 2 and 5 of Block II.

⁸⁴⁸ Currently, Xu Bing has moved back to China.

According to the foreword of the exhibition catalogue, written by Vishakha N. Desai, president of the Asia Society, and David A. Ross, former director of the San Francisco MoMa, the objective of the show was “to introduce North American viewers to the dynamic new art being produced by artists in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and by Chinese artists who have emigrated since the late 1980s.”⁸⁴⁹ Further on, it states that the organizing principle of the show is “to understand contemporary Chinese art as simultaneously belonging to the international art community as well as the new ‘Chinese’ culture. (...). The ambition is [to break] down the barriers between audiences for ‘contemporary’ and ‘Asian’ art.”⁸⁵⁰

This ambition is confirmed later on in the introduction written by Gary Garrels, *Elise S. Haas* Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Colin Mackenzie, Curator and Assistant Director of the Galleries at the Asia Society:

It is the very hybridity of many of the works in this exhibition that lends them their strength and freshness. They fit neither into traditional notions of “Chineseness” nor into the comfortable assumptions about what constitutes “contemporary art”, and thereby forces us to question definitions of both.⁸⁵¹

These two fragments point to the fact that the exhibition did not aim to pigeonhole Chinese art into a specific “box” of Chineseness nor as “contemporary art”. The objective was to show Chinese experimental art as a hybrid art, influenced by many factors, local and international, that cannot be easily classified.

Coming back to the foreword by Desai and Ross, the text explains that the curator Gao Minglu had two overarching themes in mind for the exposition, i.e. Chinese modernity and identity. This is later confirmed by Gao Minglu himself in his essay which shall be analysed within this paragraph. According to the authors of the foreword, the title “evokes not merely the diaspora and the relocation of individual artists but also the sense of a continuous interpretation of ideas between regions and individuals (...).”⁸⁵² Again, the authors put an emphasis on the hybridity of Chinese experimental art and the multiple influences (from inside and out) that affect this particular art current.

⁸⁴⁹ Vishakha N. Desai, David A. Ross, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵¹ Gary Garrels, Colin Mackenzie, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

⁸⁵² Vishakha N. Desai, David A. Ross, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 8.

The foreword then makes two specific references to the diaspora artists. It refers to the Chinese artists working and living abroad as

cultural nomads, embracing and exploring themes that arise from interaction with new environments. These Taiwanese and Chinese artists who have not returned home and who are now active in the US or Europe, “[are], no matter where they are located, (...) responding to both their own heritage and to increasingly postnational audiences.”⁸⁵³

This is a phenomenon which has been explained in paragraph 2.2 of the theoretic part and points to the fact that overseas artists often integrate traditional elements as well as elements from their current situation into their artworks.

The foreword is followed by the introduction, written by Gary Garrels and Colin Mackenzie. In this introduction, there is a paragraph that mentions the overseas artists:

It is interesting that some of the artists who deconstruct script [i.e. Xu Bing and Gu Wenda] now work outside China and consider themselves primarily as contemporary rather than Chinese artists. Others, such as Cai Guo Qiang, still draw on Chinese themes but explore them through the distanced perspectives of expatriates catering to an audience that is more often non-Chinese. Exhibiting worldwide, yet frequently visiting China, these artists demonstrate through their work that the globalization of contemporary Chinese art has not resulted in homogenization but rather in increasing diversity and richness.⁸⁵⁴

It is stated here that some Chinese artists prefer to see themselves as contemporary rather than Chinese artists. It is an indication that seems to point to the fact that Chinese artists prefer to perceive themselves as part of the global contemporary art current instead of limiting their (artistic) identity to one country, in this case China. It could even be interpreted as a negation of the Chinese identity. On the other hand, it could also be the indication of the loss of identity that some artists feel when leaving their home country and entering a foreign nation with a different culture, language, political system, etc. This can be related to the in-between space that has been explained in paragraph 2.4 of the theoretic part.

The authors also mention that the Chinese overseas artists are demonstrating that the globalization of contemporary art does not necessarily lead to homogenization but to a diversification of the international art scene. This fragment becomes particularly significant considering the reviews analysed within this dissertation in which it is often stated that

⁸⁵³ Vishakha N. Desai, David A. Ross, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 8.

⁸⁵⁴ Gary Garrels, Colin Mackenzie, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

Chinese experimental art is following “western” art styles, artists or artworks. In these cases, Chinese experimental art is not perceived as an instrument for the diversification or enrichment of the international art scene.

Moving on to the first essay *Toward a Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, written by Gao Minglu himself, two goals for the exhibition are stated:

Inside Out: New Chinese Art strives to present a survey of contemporary art from the Chinese societies of Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the overseas Chinese artist community that retains or respects its original content and milieu insofar as possible in the very different cultural and social context of the western museum space. (...) The primary goal of this exhibition is to enrich the western audience’s understanding of contemporary art from the selected Chinese regions, both visually and conceptually.⁸⁵⁵

This particular fragment coincides with the aims that were mentioned in the foreword of the catalogue written by Desai and Ross. The only slight difference is that Gao Minglu speaks of a “western audience” whereas Desai and Ross spoke specifically of the North-American audience.

Then, within his essay, Gao explicitly mentions the concept of the third space. It is the first time within this dissertation that the third space concept is mentioned within an exhibition catalogue.⁸⁵⁶

Chinese artists overseas may play the most important role in confronting and communicating with an international cultural mainstream. Rather than being part of a “diaspora”, the identity and visual world of recent émigrés may be shaped by, and may be shaping, a “third space” that truly is between East and West.⁸⁵⁷

And later:

To be successful, these artists have adopted a strategy of neither emphasizing nationalistic cultural characteristics to play the role of a minority or exotic nor overtly de-emphasizing their Chinese identity and becoming internationalists. As they have begun to realize that cultural differences only appear in a situation of negotiation, they have presented Chinese traditional materials not as the touchstones of a monolithic entity but as dimensions of material language, and as bridges over which different interpretations can cross. (...) The real situation and cultural space of these Chinese artists overseas is what Bhabha⁸⁵⁸ has called “the third space”.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁵ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

⁸⁵⁶ Hou Hanru addressed a similar concept within his exhibition *Out of the Centre* held at the Pori Art Museum in 1994, however the specific term “third space” was never mentioned.

⁸⁵⁷ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 19.

⁸⁵⁸ Homi Bhabha has not written an essay for this exhibition catalogue. The author is only briefly mentioned in this paragraph of Gao Minglu’s text. It was Bhabha who coined the term “third space” in his book *The Location of Culture*, 1994.

This comment does and does not coincide with what Garrels and Mackenzie have said earlier in their introduction. According to Gao, Chinese artists do not emphasize their national identity in order to avoid becoming a minority or exotic. Yet, he also mentions in this paragraph that Chinese experimental artists also do not de-emphasize their Chinese identity, becoming internationalist. It does therefore not coincide entirely with what Garrels and Mackenzie previously said about these artists: that they preferred to consider themselves as contemporary artists than Chinese artists.

What is essential is that the third space is mentioned for the first time and is applied to the situation of the overseas artists. In previous exhibitions, like *Out of the Centre* (1994) or *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) similar concepts were used to describe the situation of the overseas artists, often referring to it as “in-between” or in terms of hybridity. The *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue is the first to address this particular situation by the term third space, coined by Homi Bhabha in 1994 in his book *The Location of Culture*. Considering the fact that this is the first time the third space is mentioned it would be interesting to find out if it has had any impact on the media. In paragraph 8.3, the reviews of the exhibition shall be analysed and it will become clear if the art critics have also picked up on the term so explicitly mentioned within this exhibition catalogue.

In the second essay, written by Leo Ou-Fan Lee, cultural critic and former professor of Chinese literature at Harvard University, there is one clear reference to the diaspora artists:

And then there are the large Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and the migrant communities in North America and Australia: the latter may be called “Chinese diasporas” (...) Their politics of identity could be an extension of those of their homelands, but they have also taken on inevitably the “local” character of the country of their “permanent residence.” The construction of these “diasporic identities” is fundamentally ambivalent, precarious, and indeterminate. (...) Consequently, I would like to argue that contemporary Chinese culture is becoming increasingly “multicultural” and “trans-Chinese”.⁸⁶⁰

Interestingly, Lee does not mention Europe in the list of Chinese diaspora countries although it is known that, especially Paris is home to a large community of Chinese experimental artists. He also does not specifically mention the third space concept previously addressed by Gao Minglu’s essay but speaks of the overseas artists in terms of “multicultural”, “diaspora”, and “trans-Chinese”.

⁸⁵⁹ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 33.

⁸⁶⁰ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 41.

Here, the question of identity is mentioned once again. Lee says that the politics of identity of the Chinese diaspora could be an extension of those of their homelands, meaning that according to Lee, the Chinese experimental artists still hold on to their Chinese identity and background. Yet, he then writes that the foreign country these overseas artists choose to move to then later influences this identity. The result seems to be a mix of the artist's own national identity and the "adopted" one.⁸⁶¹ This is a phenomenon that was also addressed by Desai in Ross within their text.

Chang Tsong-Zung, in his essay *Beyond the Middle Kingdom: An Insider's View*, makes a specific comment on the overseas artists:

The strategy of engagement and exotic appeal has been most effective for Chinese artists currently living abroad. Artists like Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Cai Guo-qiang have participated in numerous international exhibitions in recent years; Gu's dedication to avant-gardist usurpation of conventions and Xu's persistent exploration of the relationship between language and power have become hallmarks of Chinese expatriate art. Artists like Huang Yong Ping and Chen Zhen in France, active in many important shows, have adapted their art to engage contemporary issues from the position of Chinese culture, often resorting to exotic elements in traditional customs.⁸⁶²

It is interesting that Chang writes that the artworks of overseas artists use exotic elements to appeal to a Euroamerican public and that this has been an effective strategy, making it possible for certain overseas artists, in this case Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Cai Guoqiang, Huang Yongping and Chen Zhen to be able to participate in the international art exhibitions.⁸⁶³ This comment however does not coincide with what Gao mentioned earlier in his essay namely that Chinese experimental artists do not want to emphasize their national identity in order to avoid being considered exotic. It seems that Chang has quite an opposite point of view and perceives Chinese overseas artists as holding on to their Chinese traditions in order to take part in the international art world. In no place does he make reference to these artists as multicultural, hybrid, in-between or third space artists.

In the following essay, *From Elite to Small Man* the second one written by Gao Minglu, the curator of the *Inside Out* exhibition explores the role of calligraphy, writing, and language as a way of communication in certain works of Wu Shanzhuan, Xu Bing and Gu Wenda. The essay is dedicated mainly to commenting on the different artists who participated in this exhibition as well as explaining certain phenomena that have appeared in the Chinese

⁸⁶¹ It has also been elaborated upon in paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁸⁶² Chang Tsong-Zung, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 72.

⁸⁶³ See also paragraph 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 of Block I.

experimental art world such as Apartment Art (a concept coined by Gao Minglu) and Performance Art. No further comment shall be made on this particular text.

The last essay of the catalogue consists of a conversation between Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu, two key figures in the transmission of the third space concept. The essay is titled *Strategies of Survival in the Third Space: A Conversation on the Situation of Overseas Chinese Artists in the 1990s*. The text is, as the title implies, entirely dedicated to the overseas artists and the third space.

Hou Hanru mentions that the overseas Chinese artists

no longer see themselves as simply Chinese artists but as independent, individual artists. At the same time, they bring their experiences of Chinese culture, in particular those of a generation who went through changes ranging from the Cultural Revolution to the Reform and Opening of Doors. This particular set of experiences has become a cultural reserve to support their survival and work in the new context of the West.⁸⁶⁴

Here, Hou introduces new information on the question of identity of the Chinese experimental artists. He says that these artists consider themselves independent, individual artists. Not as a contemporary artists, as have said Garrels and Mackenzie, therefore identifying themselves with a group: the group of contemporary artists; yet also not as a mixture of a Chinese identity in able to succeed in the “West”, as has alleged Chang Tsong-zung: or a Chinese identity mixed with the new identity coming from the foreign country they have decided to emigrate to, as has said Gao. Instead, Hou speaks of a “cultural reserve” which is, according to Hou, made out of events that have happened in the recent history of China. These events, according to the author of the essay, help the artists survive and work in the “West”, which for them is an entirely new environment. How this functions, he does not mention.

Then, Hou Hanru also mentions that the reconsideration and criticism of eurocentrism in culture is actually an opportunity for the Chinese artists who have moved to the “West”. It seems that the open-mindedness of a new global culture is beneficial to overseas artists who are making an effort to construct a new identity in the “West”, which is neither strictly Chinese nor “western”. This assuming that a globalized public is willing to think outside of the box of a rigorous separation between the “East” and the “West”. This can be verified by looking towards the reviews written by the art experts or to the exhibition catalogues

⁸⁶⁴ Hou Hanru, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 183.

published on non-Euroamerican art exhibitions. The analysis made of these two elements within this dissertation have pointed out that, in general, only a few art critics and curators go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy and they are usually non-Euroamerican. Therefore, the questioning of eurocentrism of which Hou here speaks could be partially questioned, as it is mostly the non-Euroamerican, like Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu who question euro/”west”-centrism.

Gao Minglu then says:

Now I think that the Chinese artists overseas are becoming objects of a kind of “post-orientalism”. Homi Bhabha uses the term “third space” to turn what Edward Said considered as the opposition between the East and the West into a kind of interactive “in-betweenness”. It can help in understanding the work of the Chinese artists overseas. Although centered in the 1980s, their backgrounds also include the whole of twentieth-century cultural history in China, that is, the antagonism between eastern and western aspects of China’s modern and contemporary culture. However, in my opinion, what is crucial for overseas Chinese artists is not the preservation of Chinese characteristics but rather to act effectively in the third space. This causes a kind of metamorphosis: a shift from dichotomous ideas about East and West to the practice of cultural strategies. More concretely, the artists’ task is to make their own Chinese cultural experiences into efficient languages to intervene in the new social reality, instead of holding on to a preconceived idea of Chinese culture.⁸⁶⁵

This is a key fragment within this dissertation in which the third space is explicitly mentioned and accordingly explained in a very clear way. It describes the overseas artists as the pioneers and as active figures within the third space that should result in what Gao states as “efficient languages to intervene in the new social reality”. This would be a new reality that goes beyond the strict separation of “East” and “West”. According to Gao, Chinese culture, which continues to be the origins of these artists, should not merely be used as an instrument of exoticism in order for Chinese artists to succeed abroad, as Chang wrote earlier in his essay *Beyond the Middle Kingdom: An Insider’s View*. It should foremost be used as a tool, an “efficient language” as he puts it, for establishing a dialogue that could minimize or completely abolish the strict separation between “East” and “West”. In other words, Chinese culture should be employed as an instrument in order to create a new space: the third space.

According to Hou, the third space could actually be considered a survival strategy for all overseas artists, not only the Chinese artists. Overseas Chinese artists residing in the “West” live in a situation of confusion. They come from the “East” but are living in a “western” context. This means that they are influenced by both and therefore can feel

⁸⁶⁵ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 184.

either identified, or no longer, by both cultures. Creating the third space is a solution to this dilemma and state of uncertainty when one no longer feels identified by one single cultural background. The third space is a Mid-Ground, as Hou has coined; a breathing space or gap which is situated between the two cultures and which is not defined neither by “eastern” nor “western” culture but precisely by being both simultaneously. It is an idea based on the fact that nowadays, cultural identity no longer is a fixed state; it shifts constantly and is influenced by and based on a lot of different factors other than nation and community. It is in fact, as Hou says, “a negotiation between the individual and all kinds of historical presumptions.”⁸⁶⁶ It is for this reason that many Chinese artists no longer consider themselves as Chinese anymore and prefer to think of themselves as contemporary artists, with no particular and therefore limiting background.

This attitude can cause, however, quite a paradoxical situation. Chinese artists insist on their neutrality and are refusing to be considered “Chinese artists” yet, when they enter the grounds of the international art scene they find that in order to succeed and for their works to be exhibited they often have to present themselves as Chinese artists who create “Chinese” artworks in a way to attract an audience or possible buyer.⁸⁶⁷ Therefore, as Hou describes “the challenge is how to reorient western expectations of the oriental towards the unexpected”.⁸⁶⁸ Maybe the change should not so much occur within the Chinese overseas artists, as it should in the Euroamerican audience and the expectations that they have towards non-Euroamerican art. In order to go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy, a two-way road has to be established. It is not only the overseas artists who have to undergo the change, it is the general expectation of the international art world, and especially the expectations of the Euroamerican art public and art critics that has to transform and transgress the expected.

Hou then continues the conversation on cultural strategies and says that (Chinese) artists abroad, who live and work within the third space play an important role in “[opening] up the ‘mainstream culture’ toward ‘other cultures’ at every moment.”⁸⁶⁹ Apart from opening up mainstream culture, the position of one living between the “East” and the “West” also allows for a critical point of view towards what is considered “eastern” and “western” and

⁸⁶⁶ Hou Hanru, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 185.

⁸⁶⁷ This phenomenon also known as “catering to the West” has been explained in paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁸⁶⁸ Hou Hanru, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 185.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

to question and deconstruct these ideas and preconceptions. The demystification of the Euroamerican perception of Chinese culture and “oriental” culture in general is often one of the characteristics of the artworks of the overseas Chinese artists, although this is not always understood as such.

Gao then continues and says: “[t]he artists who live overseas have wider experience (...). They live in a ‘nomad’ situation, a state typical of globalization. This is inscribed concretely in their work.”⁸⁷⁰ This statement coincides with what Desai and Ross mentioned in the foreword, labelling the Chinese experimental artists as “cultural nomads”. Here, according to Gao, the artworks of Chinese overseas artists should be interpreted within a global context. However, in spite of what Gao says, as later shall be demonstrated in paragraph 8.2.1, Chinese experimental art is more often interpreted within a political context than a global one.

The conversation on globalization then continues when Hou says:

[new] methods of communication, such as the Internet, are bringing about new means of expression. And, as these new communications vehicles are extremely democratic and accessible to the masses, they must to a great extent meet the masses’ capacity of reception and their aesthetic expectations.⁸⁷¹

According to Hou, in order to catch the eye of an audience that is constantly submerged in a visually saturated environment on a daily basis, it is required that the artworks make a visual impact. It is for this reason that “many artists’ works are unpredictable. They are not producing objects, but opening new spaces through negotiations with contemporary cultural reality.”⁸⁷² It is as Gao says, “ours is a time of ‘trans’.”⁸⁷³

This interview between Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru is one of the key texts when it comes to the third space concept. As has been mentioned before, it is in the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue that the third space is mentioned as such for the first time. This text which extensively elaborates on the term and provides the opportunity for the two main figures on the third space concept, apart from Homi Bhabha himself, to speak of the concept is

⁸⁷⁰ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 186.

⁸⁷¹ Hou Hanru, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 187-188.

⁸⁷² Hou Hanru, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 189.

⁸⁷³ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 189.

quite ground-breaking and makes the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue somewhat of a milestone in the diffusion of the third space.

However, it is also a significant fact that the third space concept is only spoken of by Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu. All other authors who have collaborated in the exhibition catalogue do not continue the conversation on the third space and it is therefore not mentioned in any of the other essays.

As stated in the introduction of this paragraph, the *Inside Out* exhibition also addresses the fact that Chinese experimental art is often understood exclusively from a political point of view. In the following paragraph, fragments where this becomes evident shall be highlighted.

8.2.1 The interpretation of Chinese experimental art within a political context

According to some experts, especially art critics of “Asian” origin, Chinese experimental art is often misinterpreted and therefore misunderstood. This is due to the fact that Chinese experimental art is often placed within a political context, which is not always justified.⁸⁷⁴ In the exhibition catalogue Gao adverts the reader about this common “misinterpretation”.

A shift in the art world on the Mainland [China] from the ideological concerns of the 1980s to the monetary concerns of the 1990s is evidence of the process of globalized modernization. There has been a distinct shift from an avant-garde targeted on a local political and cultural reality to a neo-avant-garde visuality that strives to transcend local interests in favor of involvement in the international arena. This is less a product of internal factors than of the impact of outside forces. Thus the title “Inside Out” also reflects a transition in Chinese societies and in relationships between inside and outside through visual practice. If we do not keep in mind this transition in contemporary Chinese art and instead view such shifts from ideological perspectives current during the Cold War, we may misunderstand contemporary Chinese art in both its original context and in terms of global modernization. Such misunderstanding may create political and aesthetic dislocations.⁸⁷⁵

This is an interesting fragment and well worth mentioning. As the reader shall see later on in paragraph 8.3, many “western” reviewers and even essays within the *Inside Out* catalogue have placed Chinese experimental art within a Cold War ideological mind frame, perceiving and describing it as a political kind of art that is generated from within China. This is one of the main characteristics of how Euroamerica perceives, or would like to perceive, Chinese experimental art.⁸⁷⁶ Yet, as Gao here writes in his essay, Chinese experimental art is more the result of external influences, or as he writes: the “impact of outside forces”. Merely perceiving Chinese experimental art and its artists as Chinese, focused on internal circumstances and their local environment, rebelling against these and at the same time being completely shut of from the global culture is often the context in which this art is interpreted and contemplated in the “West”. This, logically, leads to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

An example of this misinterpretation can be found in the essay of the *Inside Out* catalogue written by Norman Bryson, professor at the History of Art and Architecture department at Harvard University, titled *The Post-Ideological Avant-Garde*. The essay describes the role Chinese calligraphy and language plays within Chinese experimental art. Bryson

⁸⁷⁴ See paragraph 3.2 of the theoretic part.

⁸⁷⁵ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 29.

⁸⁷⁶ See paragraph 3.2 of the theoretic part.

interprets the use of calligraphy or, “pseudo characters” in works such as the ones of Gu Wenda and Xu Bing within a political context. He says: “the emphasis on semantic exhaustion or nullification seems to have a particular valence in the political context of the post-Mao years”.⁸⁷⁷ Although it is not quite clear what the author of the essay means by “the political context of the post-Mao years”, it could be interpreted as the political situation in general after the death of Mao in 1976 up until today, and it seems that Bryson is insinuating that this is a situation of repression making it necessary for the artists to rebel against it by exhausting Chinese characters of their meaning. It seems that Bryson is saying that the nullification or semantic exhaustion of Chinese characters could be considered as the breaking free from, and the refusal of any type of authority, especially the Chinese political authority. However, Bryson does not contemplate the possibility of seeing these particular works within a more global context. Xu Bing and Gu Wenda were both overseas artists (Gu Wenda still is) at the time of these works. The nullification of Chinese calligraphy within their installations could also have been a consequence of their reflection on the role of language, communication and misunderstanding as a result of the experience of moving abroad.⁸⁷⁸ It is what Gao previously warned about in his text: some of the works should not be seen from an internal, local perspective, but should be interpreted from an external, global perspective: a perspective that Norman Bryson completely omits within his essay.

Although many artworks of the experimental Chinese artists are understood in a political perspective, as seems the case here in Bryson’s essay, it is mostly the Asian critics who offer a different point of view. Many critics have placed the works of Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, among other artists that work with Chinese characters and calligraphy, within a non-political context. One of them is the curator Gao Minglu himself. In the essay *From Elite to Small Man* of the *Inside Out* catalogue he talks about Xu Bing’s installation work *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), which was one of the works that was displayed at the survey. It consists of more than two thousand wooden type elements inscribed with “pseudo characters” made up by the artist. These were then used to print unreadable texts onto traditional style long scrolls and books that were then displayed like an ocean of unreadable characters.⁸⁷⁹ As Gao mentions in his essay “[b]y removing all

⁸⁷⁷ Norman Bryson, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 56.

⁸⁷⁸ See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

⁸⁷⁹ *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)(Fig. 30 and 45) was commented on in chapter 6 as it also featured in the exhibition *Des del País del Centre*, curated by Inma González Puy in 1995.

semantic significance from the “writing” itself Xu left a giant space for the audience to invent meaning. He erased with meaninglessness the traces of his own ego as the creator of a spectacular but fake monument.”⁸⁸⁰ These are two examples of entirely different interpretations of the employment of pseudo-characters in Chinese experimental art. In one case, Norman Bryson, an American Harvard professor interprets the phenomenon within a political context considering it an act of rebellion in “post-Mao years”. In the other, a “Chinese” art-critic sees it as the nullification of the artist’s ego, leaving space for the audience to attribute the artwork with a personal interpretation. What becomes evident here is that Chinese experimental art is sometimes placed within a political context, usually by Euroamerican interpreters.

This way of interpreting Chinese experimental artworks within a closed, internal, Chinese (political) context is confirmed by the ending of Bryson’s essay where he writes: “The art of the avant-garde becomes a model of the ways in which subjects- however great the historical pressures acting upon them- may organize and lead their own lives.”⁸⁸¹ Again, the author of the essay perceives Chinese experimental art exclusively as a result of internal forces. In his conclusion he adds the factor of “historical pressures”, which presumably should be interpreted as *national* historical pressures. It is also significant that Bryson considers the art of the avant-garde, which in this case is the Chinese avant-garde, as an instrument to be able to lead ones own life. This seems to indicate the fact that before the avant-garde or, if not for the avant-garde, one could not or cannot lead one’s own life. This, on its turn, seems to point to the communist years of Mao and the Chinese communist regime in the post-Mao years in which oppression and total control of the Chinese population was current. Again, only the internal political situation and the internal history are being considered.

Another example on how Chinese experimental artwork is sometimes politically interpreted is Huang Yongping’s installation of “*A History of Chinese Painting*” and “*A Concise History of Modern Painting*” Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes (1987/1993) (Fig. 31) that was also displayed in the *Inside Out* exhibition.⁸⁸² The essay of Wu Hung, one of the renowned art critics of Chinese experimental art, studies the

⁸⁸⁰ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 160.

⁸⁸¹ Norman Bryson, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 58.

⁸⁸² Huang Yongping’s work “*A History of Chinese Painting*” and “*A Concise History of Modern Painting*” Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes (1987-1993) (Fig. 31), has also been commented on in chapter 6 of Block II as this work was also displayed at the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition (1995).

meaning of modernity and postmodernity seen from a point of view of ruin and fragmentation. He compares the meaning of ruins within a Chinese context with the signification of ruins within the “western” world. When he comes to the interpretation of Huang Yongping’s “*A History of Chinese Painting*” and “*A Concise History of Modern Painting*” *Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987/1993) (Fig. 31), he says:

Huang’s “*A History of Chinese Painting*” and “*A Concise History of Modern Painting*” *Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes*, 1987/1993, shifted the focus from destruction to a ‘still life’ of ruins: a conglomeration of paper paste- the remains of the two books- piled on a piece of broken glass supported by an old wooden trunk. (...) Again, this work, when viewed in the post-Cultural Revolution context, delivers two overlapping messages: according to Huang himself, it expresses his negation of any formal knowledge, ancient or modern, eastern or western; but viewers who had gone through the Cultural Revolution still remember clearly how “knowledge” was negated and how similar art books were destined to be destroyed during the political turmoil.⁸⁸³

This fragment describes two possible interpretations of the work: one political and one not. According to Wu, the artist says that his work expresses his negation of any formal knowledge of any kind. However, viewers have interpreted this installation work within the context of the Cultural Revolution, in other words, a political context. In a way, this work can be compared to the nullification of Chinese calligraphy within the works of Gu Wenda and Xu Bing. In all three works, the meaning of the artworks is voided and there is a negation of any formal knowledge. The work is left open for the personal interpretation of the viewer as the work itself has been emptied of its meaning, at the same time filling itself with a whole array of new possible interpretations. All three works are an example of deconstruction and re-construction, a process which the artists themselves had to go through personally when moving abroad. As becomes evident, all three works are highly complex and should not be interpreted from a merely political angle.

Chang Tsong-zung, a “Hong Kong Chinese” art critic and gallery owner, in his essay titled *Beyond the Middle Kingdom: An Insider’s View* makes an interesting comment about the political way in which Chinese experimental art is sometimes interpreted. He says: “Unlike traditional-style art, experimental art is often seen to be the daring, inquisitive mind of society, which partly accounts for the emphasis of its “dissident” and “unofficial” character until recently.”⁸⁸⁴ In his essay, Chang explains that the political and dissident character that this art has promoted in the “West” has contributed to its success in America and Europe. An example of this, according to the author of the essay, is the exhibition *Mao*

⁸⁸³ Wu Hung, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 62.

⁸⁸⁴ Chang Tsong-zung, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 68. Chang Tsong zung also curated *Paris-Pékin* (2002), analysed in chapter 10 of Block II.

Goes Pop (1993) that was curated by Li Xianting at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Sydney. It is, as he writes, a good illustration of

an inclination prevalent in western institutions: to stress the “dissident” aspect of such [contemporary Chinese] art. This would enhance an exhibition’s sensational quality, but may also effectively limit it to a passive political voice. (...) Indeed, the Sydney showing broke attendance records and was enormously successful.⁸⁸⁵

As becomes clear within this paragraph, two points of view of Chinese experimental art are addressed. The Chinese art experts like Gao Minglu and Chang Tsong-zung warn the viewer of possible misinterpretations that can occur when seeing Chinese experimental art from a purely political point of view. However, American authors like Norman Bryson commit this exact misinterpretation by limiting their perspective on Chinese experimental art to a political mindframe. It is interesting that both essays are placed within the exhibition catalogue and it is in fact a reflection of the reality of the way Chinese experimental art is perceived in a Euroamerican context: it is often the non-Euroamerican art critics and curators who advert for the misinterpretation of this art current when seeing it strictly through a political perspective however it is often the Euroamerican art critic or curator who commits the “error”.

In the following reviews it shall become clear how the Euroamerican art critics have reacted to the *Inside Out* exhibition and what messages have been transmitted to them.

⁸⁸⁵ Chang Tsong-zung, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 70.

8.3 The exhibition reviews

Inside Out was a large scale and important exposition on Chinese experimental art at the time. Therefore, quite a lot of reviews and articles have been written about it, the majority of North-American origin. *Inside Out* was also the first exhibition in which the third space concept was explicitly mentioned, therefore, in this paragraph, the objective is to analyse the exhibition reviews in order to answer these questions: has the third space concept been captured? Is this concept then transmitted on to the readers? From which perspective has the exhibition been received by the art critics?

Some of the reviews come from the digital version of newspapers, such as the *New York Times*. Others come from webpages that specialize in cultural and artistic themes or that dedicate their content to the cultural events that are held in their locality. Within this paragraph, it is noticeable the amount of expert art critics who have written a review on the *Inside Out* exhibition, and the elaborateness in which they have written their texts. Examples of these are Jenny Liu, Nicholas Jose, Holland Cotter and Barbara Pollack.

The articles that will be analysed in this paragraph are (in chronological order):

- Kee, J., *An Interview with Gu Wenda*, Asia Society, July 30, 1998, <http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/gu.html>. Date of last consultation: 15/03/2012
- Cotter, H., *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, The New York Times, September 18, 1998
- Pollack, B., *Eastern Exposure*, September 29, 1998, www.villagevoice.com/1998-09-29/art/eastern-exposure/2. Date of last consultation: 09/05/2012
- Cheng, S., *What would Mao Think?* Los Angeles Times, October 11, 1998
- Liu, J., *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999
- Jose, N., *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing-Machine*, London Review of Books, vol. 21 No. 12, June 10, 1999
- Fredericksen, E., *Inside Out*, August 26 - September 1, 1999 issue, Autumn Almanac, Seattle Pullout
- Updike, R., *The New Face of China—Sprawling Exhibits Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, Seattle Times, November 18, 1999.

- Esposito, M., *Inside Out- new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*, World Socialist Web Site, May 14, 2001
www.wsws.org/articles/2001/may2001/chin-m14.shtml. Date of last consultation 07/05/2012
- Cotter, H., *Art Review; Like a Bird in Flight: Capturing Today's Chinese Culture in Transition*, The New York Times, June 11, 2004
- Cotter, H. *Chinese Art, in One Man's Translation*, The New York Times, September 7, 2007
- Cotter, H., *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*, The New York Times, October 1, 2009
- Former West Research Library, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, n.d.
<http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/InsideOutNewChineseArt>. Date of last consultation: 27/8/2014
- Stevenson, John, amazon book review on *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue. See the amazon.com website: http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Out-New-Chinese-Art/dp/0520217489/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1406908975&sr=8-1&keywords=inside+out+exhibition+catalogue, n.d., date of last consultation: 1/8/2014
- Tarzan, D., *"Inside Out" Show Both Big and Surprising*, Artguide Northwest, n.d.
www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm. Date of last consultation 28/8/2014

The purpose of this paragraph is to find if and how the public and the media have captured the concept of the third space within the *Inside Out* exhibition and if the overseas Chinese artists have been successful in transmitting this concept through their artworks. Other significant aspects of the exhibition that are not related to the third space shall also be highlighted within this paragraph.

8.3.1 Jenny Liu *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*

The first review comes from *Frieze* magazine⁸⁸⁶ and is titled *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*. The review is written by the art critic Jenny Liu who is a frequent collaborator with *Frieze* magazine. The author clearly mentions that the intention of the show "is to draw out themes of modernity and identity, while positioning Chinese work as a local elaboration on

⁸⁸⁶ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, *Frieze* magazine, issue 44, January-February 1999. Jenny Liu is director of the New York art gallery "the Project" that specializes in contemporary art.

an international contemporary art scene". The fact that the main themes of the exhibition are modernity and identity coincides with what was mentioned in the exhibition catalogue by the curator Gao Minglu. It is interesting however that the review also mentions that another objective is to position Chinese work as a *local* elaboration. This does not quite correspond to what was mentioned in some of the essays of the exhibition. Recalling what Garrels and Mackenzie wrote in their introduction: "It is the very hybridity of many of the works in this exhibition that lends them their strength and freshness. They fit neither into traditional notions of "Chineseness" nor into the comfortable assumptions about what constitutes "contemporary art".⁸⁸⁷ And it is also quite the opposite of what Gao Minglu adverted within his essay: to not perceive Chinese experimental art as a result of only internal influences.

The review then continues by saying that "[t]he 80 works, organised by theme and locale, present a Chinese-inflected compendium of references to recent and not so recent Western art history."⁸⁸⁸ This seems a rather bold statement to make as the author of the review refers to *all* eighty experimental Chinese artworks as a compendium of references to "western" art history. In order to illustrate her observation, the author then points to various works of the exhibition. For example, she describes Huang's "*A History of Chinese Painting*" and "*A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987/1993) (Fig. 31) as a "Dadaist washing of canonical text".⁸⁸⁹ It should be mentioned that Huang Yongping is a self-taught artist and it is true that he took example from three well-known artists: Joseph Bueys, a German artist, John Cage, an American music theorist and philosopher, and Marcel Duchamp, who is related with the Dadaist and Surrealist art movement. Therefore, the Dada movement indeed hugely inspired Huang Yongping⁸⁹⁰ yet, by considering the artist's work as purely Dada-inspired is too reductive. Huang Yongping's "*A History of Chinese Painting*" and "*A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987/1993) (Fig. 31) is the result of mixing two books of reference within the art world, one from the "East" (*A History of Chinese Painting* by Wang Bomin) and one from the

⁸⁸⁷ Gary Garrels, Colin Mackenzie, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

⁸⁸⁸ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44, January-February 1999.

⁸⁸⁹ Professor Eva Fernández del Campo mentions quite the contrary about this work: "(...) *The History of Chinese Painting and The History of Modern Western Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes*, proposes a renovation or 'washing of art', but also makes a harsh critique of the blind assimilation of contemporary Western art." FERNANDEZ DEL CAMPO Eva, *Some reflections on the emergence of art in China into the contemporary scene*. Art in China. 2011-12, 4, Winter issue, p. 111.

⁸⁹⁰ It should also be mentioned that Huang Yongping was the founder of the Xiamen Dada movement (1986-1989), the title of this group paying tribute to his hometown, Xiamen, and the Dadaist movement.

“West” (*A Concise History of Modern Painting* by Sir. Herbert Read) by putting them in a washing machine for two minutes. The outcome is a homogenous mass of paper pulp, making it impossible to differentiate the books. This work is here compared to the work of the Dadaist movement yet it is also a creation that is quite characteristic of Huang Yongping himself. The pile of pulp represents the process of creation, destruction and transformation (or the negation of all formal knowledge, as has explained Wu Hung within his essay): a process that is often present in Huang’s creations. It is literally the breaking down of internal structures, blending the “orient” with “occident” and making them inseparable and indistinguishable. It is not about replacing one culture by another but mixing them to create a new culture. This mixing and blending of cultures in this creation can be seen as representative for Huang Yongping’s daily environment as he himself is an overseas artist who lives in France.

Another example that Jenny Liu then gives in her review is the work of Wang Guangyi, famous for combining “western” commercial logos such as the ones from Rolex or Coca Cola with Cultural Revolution propaganda posters. About his work the author says: it is “only superficially a post-Tiananmen critique of Mao, Socialism and the infiltration of Western commercialism.”⁸⁹¹ This is an example of interpreting Chinese experimental art from a purely local point of view, addressing Chinese politics. An interpretation that according to Gao Minglu should be avoided.

About Wenda Gu’s work *United Nations* (1993-) (see for example Fig. 12, 27, 28 and 41), which consists of pseudo-characters made out of human hair, she states that it is a “creepy and overproduced installation (...). Presenting supposedly authentic ethnographic goods, it is a serviceable facsimile of international installation art, drearily untainted by irony or reflexivity.”⁸⁹² Again, this seems quite a harsh comment to make and it seems only to be founded on the personal opinion of the author, as she does not further explain her statement. Describing this monumental work as “creepy” also seems a rather unprofessional and narrow-minded vocabulary for a professional art expert to use. The fact that she then portrays the work as a “serviceable facsimile of international installation art” seems to insinuate that she finds the work as “catering to the Euroamerican audience” or that it is an exact copy of other Euroamerican installations, even though she does not mention which “international installation art” these are.

⁸⁹¹ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999.

⁸⁹² *Ibidem*.



Figure 41: Gu Wenda, *United Nations - China monument: Temple of Heaven*, 1998

Liu then describes Cai Guoqiang's work, a suspended wooden boat pierced with hundreds of arrows (*Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows* (1998))(Fig. 42), as "a kind of nautical St. Sebastian".⁸⁹³



Figure 42: Cai Guoqiang, *Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows*, 1998

Here, the author has chosen a "western" icon in order to make the work more familiar or understandable for a Euroamerican audience. This is a strategy often employed by Euroamerican art critics within their reviews and it has been observed on various occasions within this dissertation. Jenny Liu here compares Cai Guoqiang's suspended wooden boat pierced with arrows with St. Sebastian: a Christian saint and martyr who is

⁸⁹³ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999.

venerated within the Christian and Orthodox Church and who has been extensively represented in art and literature, especially during the Renaissance. Yet, this comparison is merely based on the fact that both are pierced with arrows. The author then seems to weaken her statement by saying: “The narrative however, flows not from Christian myth, but from a tale of Chinese cunning in the dubious arts of war. Cai invites us to recognise the signifiers of Chinese-ness, only to trip us up by reflecting back our own expectations of China.”⁸⁹⁴ It is not quite clear what the author means by this last comment also due to the fact that it seems that the Saint Sebastian comparison is merely based on the author’s own association, as both works have nothing more in common other than the arrows. Moreover, Cai often pierces his objects of art with arrows or other objects. This has been the case in his work *Installation Inopportune: Stage one* (2004) (Fig. 44), in which real cars are suspended in the air with light tubes pierced through them. This work was made as a reaction to the 9/11 events.⁸⁹⁵ Another example is his work *Installation Inopportune: Stage two* (2004) (Fig. 43), in which he pierces fake tigers with arrows. The artist has also created works in which sculptures of Jesus on the cross and bodhisattva’s are pierced with arrows as well. About his work in general Cai mentions: “Looking at the work that I’ve done, I’ve noticed things sticking into or out of objects a lot. I think this has to do with my interest in explosions, but it also has to do with the aesthetics of pain”.⁸⁹⁶



Figure 43: Cai Guoqiang, *Installation Inopportune: Stage two*, 2004

⁸⁹⁴ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999.

⁸⁹⁵ See the video in which Cai Guoqiang explains this work: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG3H0pk4RCk>, 30/4/2009. Date of last consultation: 24/08/2012.

⁸⁹⁶ Cai Guoqiang in an interview with the Guggenheim museum. For the entire video see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=2ckLqrUkl4c>, 7/12/2007. Date of last consultation: 24/08/2012.



Figure 44: Cai Guoqiang, *Installation Inopportune: Stage one*, 2004

Coming back to Cai Guoqiang's work *Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42), the New York Moma writes on its website:

Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows delivers a timeless message rooted in Chinese philosophy and expressed in the Western vocabulary of the readymade. Built on the skeleton of an old fishing boat excavated near Cai's birthplace, the sculpture, suspended aboveground, is pierced with 3,000 made-in-China arrows and flies the national flag.

The title—which alludes to a text from the third century (known as *Sanguozhi*)—refers to an episode in which the general Zhuge Liang, facing an imminent attack from the enemy, manages to replenish a depleted store of arrows. According to legend, Zhuge Liang tricked the enemy by sailing across the Yangtze river through the thick mist of early dawn with a surrogate army made of straw, while his soldiers remained behind yelling and beating on drums. Mistaking the pandemonium for a surprise attack, the enemy showered the decoys with volleys of arrows. Thus the general returned triumphantly with a freshly captured store of weapons.

Surreptitiously gathering strength from one's opponent is also a strategic principle in martial arts. Turning to a militaristic episode and a cultural practice, Cai not only suggests a defensive strategy in the face of foreign intervention, but also creates a poetic metaphor in the image of a wounded body transcending pain and floating in a cloud of feathered arrows.⁸⁹⁷

There is no mention of any Saint Sebastian. There is only the reference to “the image of a wounded body transcending pain.” Again, the reference to Saint Sebastian by Jenny Liu

⁸⁹⁷ The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999, p. 362.

<http://arthistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.moma.org/collection/browse%5Fresults.php%3Fcriteria=O%253ADE%253A1%253A5%7CG%253AHO%253AE%253A1%26page%5Fnumber=135%26template%5Fid=1%26sort%5Forder=1>

Date of last consultation: 25/08/2012.

seems to be based on a strictly personal association and does not seem to have any foundation.

Then Liu describes the artworks that include calligraphy or brush painting as “most refreshing”.⁸⁹⁸ She then describes the work *Writing the Orchid Pavilion Preface a hundred times* (1990-1995) of Qiu Zhijie and relates the repetition of Chinese characters, which is also the case in Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)(Fig. 30 and 45) with “the Asian tradition of obedience to established precedent”.⁸⁹⁹ Here, the works are not attributed as references to Euroamerican art history but they are perceived as representative of Chinese culture, in this case the tradition of Asian obedience. It is however not clear what the author means by “the Asian tradition of obedience to established precedent.” Does she mean the obedience to the communist regime? Or does she mean the fact that in times of the Chinese dynasties, in order to become an administrative official of the imperial court, one had to memorize texts by Confucius, amongst many others, by heart? Or does she mean the fact that the four pillars of Chinese art: calligraphy, poetry, painting and seal carving are mastered by copying one’s own master and by endless repetition? Fact is, as it seems, that the artworks of Xu Bing and Qiu Zhijie are attributed to a strictly “Asian” context and are not, as could be the case of Xu Bing’s works, interpreted from a more global context.

The review ends with the following paragraph:

With globalisation the current big thing, and China increasingly a power to reckon with, this survey was both inevitable and ambivalent. The intentions are good, the effort and curatorial impulses admirable, but the work, however, is too often turgid and uncritically adoptive of Western artistic frameworks. The show tells us something about the pitfalls facing Chinese artists, whose work at its worst veers between the tediously derivative and the hopelessly provincial. At the same time, the many successes and near-misses bring up the questions about what we, in the West, expect in terms of a global Modernism or Postmodernism. Is contemporary art, wherever it originates, supposed to address itself to an international community? (...) I’m not convinced that the homogenisation of contemporary art is so desirable. Nor that the only worthy art is that which explores previously unoccupied territory.⁹⁰⁰

As a summary of this review, Liu’s text describes Chinese artworks of the exhibition as tediously derivative, hopelessly provincial and based on “western” styles. Which seems somewhat contradictory in itself. How can Chinese experimental art be considered

⁸⁹⁸ Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

“hopelessly provincial” and “uncritically adoptive of Western artistic frameworks” at the same time?

Jenny Liu also interprets Chinese experimental art strictly within a political context when, for example, she describes Wang Guangyi’s work as superficial post-Tiananmen critique of Mao, or Zhijie’s work as an example of the Asian tradition of obedience to established precedent. On the other hand, the artworks seem to have been understood from a strictly Euroamerican point of view and have been attributed as “references to Western art history”. An example of this is when the author compares Cai Guoqiang *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42) to the figure of Saint Sebastian although this comparison was not founded on anything but the author’s personal association.

In general, the review seems rather contradictory. On the one hand, Liu questions if the homogenization of contemporary art is a good thing however on the other, she also questions if the only worthy art is that which explores previously unoccupied territory. These statements seem to contradict itself, as the homogenization of contemporary art is usually a consequence of considering Euroamerican contemporary art the only valid art style, while on the other hand, exploring other territories such as Chinese tradition and integrating this into the international contemporary art scene is considered “not the only worthy art”, even though the author does not mention this in so many words.

Lastly, the review makes no comment on the overseas artists, nor does it specifically mention the concept of the third space. This is remarkable as the exhibition catalogue extensively elaborates on these concepts.

8.3.2 New York Times: reviews by art critic Holland Cotter

The following four articles come from the New York Times. Holland Cotter, the author of these texts writes most of its reviews when it comes to exhibitions on Asian art. Cotter is an experienced critic with an extensive curriculum that starts in the 1970s when he co-edited the New York Arts Journal. According to the website of the New York Times, Cotter “introduced readers to a broad range of Asian contemporary art as the first wave of new

art from China was building and breaking.”⁹⁰¹ In 2009 he won the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism.

8.3.2.1 Holland Cotter *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation*

The first review⁹⁰² is mainly about the Chinese experimental artist Zhang Huan and the artworks he exhibited at *Inside Out*. The review was written almost ten years after the *Inside Out* exhibition however it has been decided to include this review as it makes quite a few references to the exposition. Cotter begins his review by saying:

When the exhibition “Inside Out: New Chinese Art” opened at Asia Society and P.S. 1 in 1998, it caused a stir because it both did and did not meet expectations of contemporary art from China.

The show had plenty of Mao portraits, but they came with jokes: Mao behind bars, Mao in Pop colors, with beauty marks and a flower in his teeth. There was also calligraphy, but it was messed-up calligraphy: illegible, computerized, used to write nonsense characters, fake language. Such irreverence was taken as the sign of a cultural revolution that Americans were ready to like, one of brave young artists-dissidents defying a stiflingly imperial past and a repressive Communist present in an effort to breath free democratic air. That the artists adopted certain Occidental forms to do so – oil on canvas, for example – only confirmed that the West had won again, bringing light to a benighted world. [Author’s emphasis].⁹⁰³

In the first paragraph where Cotter talks about the exhibition and the fact that it both did and did not meet expectations of contemporary art from China, it is not clear to whose expectations he is referring. Yet, it seems that he is referring to the North-American public when he says: “Such irreverence [Mao portraits with jokes and nonsense characters] was taken as the sign of a cultural revolution that *Americans* were ready to like” [author’s emphasis].⁹⁰⁴ It seems thus that, according to his review, what was expected of this exhibition and of Chinese art in general was an irreverent type of art, or as the author says, the art of “brave young artists-dissidents defying a stiflingly imperial past and a repressive Communist present”.⁹⁰⁵ The artworks and the exhibition is hereby placed in and understood from a political point of view. Moreover, it seems that the expectation of the American public was to see political artworks. Yet, in 1998, this somewhat Cold War sentiment seems rather out-dated.

⁹⁰¹ http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/holland_cotter/index.html, n.d. Date of last consultation: 24/08/2012.

⁹⁰² Holland Cotter, *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation*, the New York Times, Art review, September 7, 2007.

⁹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

There are two other elements from this review that should be highlighted. The first is the way in which Cotter describes the works that use calligraphy. Although he does not explicitly mention which artworks he is describing, it is most possibly Gu Wenda's *United Nation Series – China Monument: Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), both exhibited at the survey. The pseudo-characters that are being used in these works are described by the author as “messed-up calligraphy: illegible, computerized, used to write nonsense characters, fake language”.⁹⁰⁶



Figure 45: One of the hand-carved woodblocks with Xu Bing's “invented” characters used for *Book from the Sky*

This seems a rather reductive, simplified way to describe the characters used within both installations. In no way does Cotter relate these pseudo-character artworks to the third space concept or to any of the plentiful interpretations that were stated in the previous paragraph. It seems thus that the author reduces these highly complex works into simple works of “non-sense”. It is also rather strange that the author describes these characters as “computerized”, as this was absolutely not the case. In fact, the hand-made characters, either made out of human hair (Gu Wenda), or the four-year long process of carving them in wooden blocks (Xu Bing) are an essential part of this work. Using the word “computerized”, apart from being completely unfounded and erroneous, erases an

⁹⁰⁶ Holland Cotter, *Chinese Art, in One Man's Translation*, the New York Times, Art review, September 7, 2007.

indispensable part of the meaning of these works: it obliterates its foundation and essence.

Secondly, Cotter mentions that Chinese artists have adopted “occidental” forms in order to “breathe free democratic air”,⁹⁰⁷ this way, again, placing Chinese experimental art within a political, dissident framework. He insinuates that Chinese artists find themselves oppressed if they do not adopt a “western” style. He later on states that the work of the slightly older artists in China “had begun to attract Western attention in the wake of the Tiananmen Square protests, though few of them had been directly involved in them.”⁹⁰⁸ Probably Cotter is saying that the political character of Chinese art has been and still is beneficial to the success of Chinese artists who are trying to succeed in the “West” (catering to the “West”), even if some artists have not actually lived through these events. Also, if they adopt a “western” style, not only do they get to “breathe free democratic air”, they also get a chance to become successful in the international art scene.

Lastly, again, apart from the political references, overseas artists and the concept of the third space are not mentioned within Cotter’s review.

8.3.2.2 Holland Cotter *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*

The second review also comes from The New York Times and is again written by Holland Cotter. This time, the review was written in the same year that the *Inside Out* exhibition was held. In *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*⁹⁰⁹ the *Inside Out* exhibition is described as “an ambitious and stimulating selection of experimental work from the mid-1980’s to the present.”⁹¹⁰ It also mentions the fact that “the exhibition includes more than 60 artists from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as from the United States and Europe.”⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁷ Holland Cotter, *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation*, the New York Times, Art review, September 7, 2007.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰⁹ Holland Cotter, New York Times, *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, September 18, 1998.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

The art critic then describes the art on display as “daunting: the messages complex and contradictory enough to defy any ready cultural translation. Attention to the exhibition’s wall text is recommended, and even a little knowledge of China’s recent political history, which has done so much to shape its art, will go a long way.”⁹¹²

The author then illustrates this last sentence by mentioning that traditional forms of art like ink painting were suppressed during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966. Hereby again placing Chinese experimental art within a political framework. He then continues:

as with so much Chinese work, the attitude it embodies are elusive, oblique and mutable. (...) One certainly picks up the impression of idealism fading fast in the paintings that surround it, and those produced after 1989 [the year of the Tiananmen protests], the pessimism seems to deepen. Few if any clear references are made to the Tiananmen catastrophe, but the disorienting impact of a new consumerist economy is evident.⁹¹³

Here, Cotter once again places Chinese experimental art within a political context by mentioning that it has been China’s recent political history; the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square incident, which has shaped this type of art, although it is not explicitly evident in the artworks that were on display at the *Inside Out* survey, as it was also not one of the objectives of the show. It seems that, according to the author, Chinese avant-garde art, which flourished in the late 80s has been influenced and shaped by the Cultural Revolution period that started about twenty years earlier and culminated in the Tiananmen Square incident, which took place almost ten years prior to *Inside Out*. He also mentions that another influence is the new consumerist economy that is starting to come up in China. This is again an internal force: in no place does he see Chinese experimental art influenced by external forces (as has said Gao in his essay) such a globalisation.

Taking a closer look at the title of his article *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, it points to political references from the very start: “A Great Chinese Leap”, which could be interpreted as a wordplay on “the Great Leap Forward”: one of Mao’s social and economic campaigns that was held from 1958 until 1961; and “A New sort of Cultural Revolution”, which obviously points to the Cultural Revolution that lasted from 1966 until 1976.

⁹¹² Holland Cotter, New York Times, *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, September 18, 1998.

⁹¹³ *Ibidem*.

Apart from the very brief references to the overseas artists who live in the United States and Europe, there is no mention of the third space.

8.3.2.3 Holland Cotter, *Art Review; Like a Bird in Flight: Capturing Today's Chinese Culture in Transition*

Cotter's third review is titled *Like a Bird in Flight: Capturing Today's Chinese Culture in Translation*.⁹¹⁴ The review is about the exhibition *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video From China* that opened at the International Center of Photography and the Asia Society in 2004 and then travelled to different venues until 2006. Cotter refers to this exhibition as "a perspective-altering show (...) [that] gives a panoramic glimpse of the continuing cultural revolution after the Cultural Revolution. It is the first such glimpse New York has had since Asia Society's 1998 survey, 'Inside/Out: New Chinese Art,' for which the new show provides a historical update."⁹¹⁵

The review is mainly about the way Chinese experimental art has evolved over the years since the Cultural Revolution. Again, there are quite a lot of references to the political past of China, even though the review was written in 2004, almost thirty years after the ending of the Cultural Revolution in China due to the death of Mao. A little further on in the text, there is a second reference to the *Inside Out* exhibition:

"History and Memory" [one of the sections of the "Between Past and Future" exhibition] picks up more or less where "Inside/Out" left off with images that make provocative references to cultural and political monuments. The Great Wall, for example, becomes a stage for a nude performance by the androgynous artist Ma Liuming (...). And the totemic Tiananmen Square portrait of Mao is shot by the Gao Brothers (...) from directly below, so it looks like a guillotine blade descending.

Cotter seems to say that the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square are provocative references to cultural and political monuments, which they obviously are, however the fact that he mentions that this is the continuation of where the *Inside Out* exhibition has left off could be seriously questioned as the *Inside Out* exhibition did not have a political aim. Remembering one of Gao Minglu's objectives for the exhibition, the *Inside Out* exhibition's main goal was "to enrich the western audience's understanding of contemporary art from the selected Chinese regions, both visually and conceptually."⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁴ Holland Cotter, *Like a Bird in Flight: Capturing Today's Chinese Culture in Translation*, New York Times, June 11 2004.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹⁶ Gao Minglu, *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

8.3.2.4 Holland Cotter, *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*

The next review, also by Cotter, is titled *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*, and was written in 2009, almost ten years after *Inside Out*.⁹¹⁷ It is a review about the exhibition *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art From Pakistan* (2009). This review is included in this analysis because there is an interesting reference to the Asia Society, where *Inside Out* was held, and the exhibition itself. According to Cotter, the exhibitions organized by the Asia Society are “often [topical] in content, market ready in format and didactic in delivery”.⁹¹⁸ He then continues:

One of the first of the society’s big one-country shows, “Inside/Out: New Chinese Art” in 1998, sold itself on the notion that the most significant work emerging from China was all by brash, young, implicitly democracy-loving rebels in thrall to the Western media and eager to break with their own cultural past. This profile was meant to win Western hearts, and it did. That many artists still produced ink-and-brush landscapes and calligraphy and were subtly but radically updating these traditions was barely acknowledged. [Author’s emphasis.]⁹¹⁹

This fragment is quite illustrative of how Cotter perceives “Asian” art and especially the expectations that an occidental audience has towards exhibitions that show this type of art. It seems that Cotter is saying that the *Inside Out* exhibition was sold in order to win “western” hearts, promoting and exhibiting a type of art, which is not authentic yet, which was guaranteed to succeed among the “western” public. It is also interesting to remark that this review was written in 2009, more than ten years after the *Inside Out* exhibition and that his opinion on the survey is quite similar to his other article, also written in 2009, titled *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation* on the artist Zhang Huan that was analysed previously in this paragraph.

His opinion on the *Inside Out* survey has however changed over the ten years. Remembering what he wrote in his review in 1998, he mentioned about the exhibition that it was: “daunting: the messages complex and contradictory enough to defy any ready cultural translation”.⁹²⁰ Here however, in 2009, his opinion has radically changed as he now describes *Inside Out* as a show successful due the “democracy-loving rebels” who

⁹¹⁷ Holland Cotter, *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*, New York Times, October 1 2009.

⁹¹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹¹⁹ Ibidem.

⁹²⁰ Holland Cotter, *Art Review; A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, New York Times, September 18, 1998.

were willing to “break with their own cultural past” and to please a Euroamerican audience or as Cotter mentions, “to win Western hearts”.⁹²¹

Even though Holland Cotter seems to often refer to the *Inside Out* exhibition within his reviews on other exhibitions, even after ten years, his opinion has not changed significantly over the years when it comes to the perception of Chinese experimental art. Cotter still continues to perceive Chinese experimental art within a political context.

8.3.3 Joan Kee, *An interview with Gu Wenda*

Joan Kee is an author who has already been mentioned in the previous chapter in which she published a review within Parachute magazine on the exhibition of *Cities on the Move*. This article was however published in the Asia Society website and is titled *An interview with Gu Wenda*.⁹²² The interview is about Gu Wenda’s work *The United Nations Series- China Monument: The Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) that was exhibited in the *Inside Out* exposition. In this interview there are a few references to Gu’s multicultural background and the cross-cultural influences in his works. He says for example that “the goal of his art was not simply to serve as a translator of my own culture, but to be hybrid, transcultural.”⁹²³ He then continues: “Some artists like to play [the] ‘exotic’ game; others like to play the ‘multicultural’ game. For me, I like to deal with global issues and this whole project is ten years, ongoing. I try to sum up all the different races, contexts.”⁹²⁴ Later on in the interview, Gu talks about his artwork in general and says: “I want to be involved with the audience and society. My work, actually, is not art for art’s sake; it’s more on the cultural side and the way you talk about culture can extend to politics, the economy, it can be related to so many different things.”⁹²⁵

This interview is included into the analysis because it describes Gu Wenda and his work as cross-cultural and therefore, although it is not specifically stated as such, belonging to the third space. Also, the interviewer has given Gu the opportunity to explain that his

⁹²¹ Holland Cotter, *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*, New York Times, October 1 2009.

⁹²² Gu Wenda in Joan Kee, *An interview with Gu Wenda*, July 30 1998, <http://www.sites.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/gu.html>. Date of last consultation: 10/10/2013

⁹²³ *Ibidem*.

⁹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

artworks are not Chinese but that he tries to reflect multicultural and global issues through his works. The interview gives a personal explanation from the artist's point of view, which is quite different from some of the reviews that have been analysed in this paragraph that have classified Gu's pseudo-characters in quite a different way such as the review of Holland Cotter in which he says that "calligraphy, that most venerated art, is being put to perverse, absurdist ends".⁹²⁶

8.3.4 Scarlet Cheng, *What would Mao Think?*

The next review comes from the *Los Angeles Times* and is titled *What Would Mao Think?*⁹²⁷. It was written by Scarlet Cheng who is a regular contributor to *The Los Angeles Times* especially when it comes to art criticism and exhibition reviews. The review starts with the phrase: "Forget Ming vases and jade. The U.S., at last, is starting to get a glimpse of contemporary Chinese art. (...) [*Inside Out*] offers the heady lure of forbidden fruit, as well as the promise of insight into the psyche of that awakening giant: modern China."⁹²⁸ This is quite a remarkable quote. First of all, Cheng creates the impression that the American view of Chinese art in 1998 was still based on traditional, antique art such as Ming vases and jade. Also, she mentions that the U.S., at last, gets a glimpse of contemporary Chinese art, hereby omitting the exhibition *Fragmented Memory* of 1993 and *China's New Art Post 1989*, a major show held in the United States in 1995. Then she describes the artworks on display as a "heady lure of forbidden fruit" which seems like a rather exotic description. The same goes for her posterior remark on the awakening of the giant.

Cheng then describes *Inside Out* as an underground type of art that is not permitted in China and therefore seeks to display itself outside of China, mainly in the "West". She later on describes the show as "relatively uncensored from the People's Republic".⁹²⁹ According to Cheng, the "Inside/Out covers the period from 1985 until now, the critical time in which mainland artists discovered Western contemporary visual idioms and began

⁹²⁶ Holland Cotter, Art Review; *A Great Chinese Leap Into a New Sort of Cultural Revolution*, *The New York Times*, September 18, 1998.

⁹²⁷ Scarlet Cheng, *What Would Mao Think?*, October 11, 1998. <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/oct/11/entertainment/ca-31286>. Date of last consultation 07/05/2012.

⁹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

to adopt those expressions as their own.”⁹³⁰ Her review ends in the same line: “In short, the latter-day pieces are using Western vehicles—oil painting, assemblage, installation, even performance art—but looking to their own society, be it issues of stultifying tradition or crass materialism.”⁹³¹

The review ascribes a “dissident” aspect to the *Inside Out* exhibition, describing the works on display as an underground type of art that is not permitted in China. Cheng also highlights the fact that Chinese experimental art has adopted “western” styles and that it, especially in the 1980s was copying “western” styles at a rapid tempo. This coincides in some ways with what Cotter has said in his review *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation* analysed previously, in which he says: “That the artists adopted certain Occidental forms to do so [to breath democratic air] – oil on canvas, for example – only confirmed that the West had won again, bringing light to a benighted world.”⁹³² Interestingly, even though Cheng has written a review that insinuates political oppression of the Chinese experimental artists, the difference here is that Cheng simply mentions the fact that Chinese artists gladly absorbed all artistic styles and movements that came from the “West” after China had been closed of from the outside world for decades. She does not attribute any political context to her comment and differs, in this way, from Cotter’s opinion.

8.3.5 Deloris Tarzan Ament, “*Inside Out*” Show Both Big and Surprising

The next review comes from the webpage of *Artguide Northwest*, an artistic online guide to the Seattle and Pacific Northwest art scene. It gives a review of the *Inside Out* edition that was held at the Henry Art Gallery and the Tacoma Art Museum. The review is titled: *Inside Out: Show Both Big and Surprising*.⁹³³ The author, Deloris Tarzan Ament, was an art critic for the *Seattle Times* from 1971-1995. She is specialized in the Northwest School⁹³⁴ and has written various books on this subject.

⁹³⁰ Scarlet Cheng, *What Would Mao Think?*, October 11, 1998. <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/oct/11/entertainment/ca-31286>. Date of last consultation 07/05/2012.

⁹³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹³² Holland Cotter, *Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation*, the New York Times, Art review, September 7, 2007.

⁹³³ Deloris Ament Tarzan, *Inside Out: Show Both Big and Surprising*, n.d. <http://www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm>. Date of last consultation: 06/05/2012.

⁹³⁴ The Northwest School was an art movement based in small-town Skagit County, Washington, and was at its peak in the 1930s and 1940s.

In this review, there are no references to the third space but there is a brief mention of the overseas artists, which she labels as “diaspora” when Ament comments:

The most outrageous show of Chinese art ever to hit the U.S. makes its debut in the Northwest (...). “New Chinese Art: Inside/Out” is so big it fills both the Henry Art Gallery and the Tacoma Art Museum with contemporary art from four sources: the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and individual Chinese artists in diaspora around the world.⁹³⁵

Here, the author, like the previous review, also attributes a “secretive”, underground and political air to the exhibition when she mentions: “Difficult political times don’t make artists disappear; they simply force them underground where tension and secrecy add to their power. “New Chinese Art: Inside/Out” shows the audacious creativity brewing in China, one of the fastest changing areas of the world both economically and politically.”⁹³⁶

Apart from the fact that this fragment attributes a rather dissident, underground air to Chinese experimental art, which in 1998 could be considered quite out-dated, it omits that an important part of the exhibition was about the overseas artists. She is somehow contradicting her previous introduction in which she mentions that the show comes from “four sources” when she here writes that *Inside Out* shows “the audacious creativity brewing in China”, without further referral to the artists abroad, in Hong Kong or in Taiwan. Or does she consider these all part of mainland China? Being a North-American art critic, her stand on Taiwan should probably be that of acknowledging it as an independent nation.

The review then continues by describing quite a few of the artworks that were on display. About artists that work with pseudo characters, such as Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, she says:

A pervasive theme in the show is the exploration of written script as form without meaning. Pseudo-graphs which look at first like Chinese characters, but on closer inspection turn out to be meaningless patterns invented by the artist, turn up everywhere. The predilection for distorting and dissolving images into meaningless patterns is a hallowed tradition in Chinese art. Applied to script, it becomes a way of subverting a powerful tool of state. In the China of years gone by, when ordinary citizens were largely illiterate, any piece of paper with writing on it was sacrosanct. It was forbidden for ordinary citizens to discard or destroy it. In contemporary reversal, artists show it empty of meaning.⁹³⁷

⁹³⁵ Deloris Ament Tarzan, *Inside Out: Show Both Big and Surprising*, n.d. <http://www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm>. Date of last consultation: 06/05/2012.

⁹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹³⁷ *Ibidem*.

Here, the author attributes a political meaning to these works by referring to the political past of China, in this case the Cultural Revolution period, even though the author does not explicitly mention it within her review. She does not however, as Norman Bryson within the exhibition catalogue, consider these pseudo characters within a global perspective, considering the fact that Xu Bing and Gu Wenda (and Wu Shanzhuan, who also works with Chinese characters) were, at the time, artists living abroad. It is a good example for which Gao Minglu adverted within his catalogue essay: Chinese experimental art is often (mis)perceived when taking into consideration only the local factors and not the factors that influence Chinese experimental art from the outside.

About Cai Guoqiang, she writes:

Cai Guo-qiang, a Quan zhou artist who has lived in the U.S. since 1995, communicates by more traditional symbolic means. Cai hangs a boat of rice straw in the air, flying a Chinese flag, pierced by arrows. Titled "Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows," it is a political piece, although anyone not Chinese is apt to miss its historic reference.

Some time around 350 A.D., a Chinese general realized he did not have enough arrow for a battle he was facing. He ordered his troops to make 300 boats of rice straw and push them out on the water toward the enemy on a misty morning. When the enemy peppered the boats with arrows, the general pulled the boats back to his own shore, retrieved the arrows, and used them to defeat his enemy. The moral: Beware of shooting at Chinese.⁹³⁸

Previously in this paragraph, this work of Cai Guoqiang has been commented on. Here, Ament places the artwork within a political context by saying literally that it is a "political" piece, although she does not give any further explanations. Her final comment: "Beware of shooting at Chinese"⁹³⁹ seems rather vague and it is not clear what the author is implying here. In any case, Ament gives a very distinct interpretation to this particular work that does not coincide with anything analysed before in this chapter about this installation. Also the fact that she mentions within her review that "anyone not Chinese is apt to miss its historic reference"⁹⁴⁰ might point to the fact that this particular work was not fully explained within the exhibition catalogue or within the survey itself via information panels. Earlier it has been commented on that the exhibition catalogue does not provide specific information on the artworks that were on display and that this might contribute to the misunderstanding of the works that were exhibited at *Inside Out*.

⁹³⁸ Deloris Ament Tarzan, *Inside Out: Show Both Big and Surprising*, n.d. <http://www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm>. Date of last consultation; 06/05/2012.

⁹³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

About the exhibition in general, Ament says:

“New Chinese Art: Inside Out” spans 15 years, from 1984 through 1998. It includes everything from the sublime (...) to the ridiculous (...). The show challenges our traditional perceptions of Asian art. It was organized to showcase contemporary Chinese artists as a vital part of the international art community, and as elements of the new Chinese culture.⁹⁴¹

Here, the author makes mention of a “new Chinese culture”. She does not, however, give any explanation on what she means when she says “new Chinese culture”. It is also significant that the exhibition, according to her review, challenges the traditional perceptions of Asian art that are still valid in the “West”. This comment is the opposite from the reviews of *The New York Times* in which Cotter implies that the *Inside Out* exhibition was made according to “western” expectations in order to “win the Western hearts”.⁹⁴²

8.3.6 Robin Updike, *The New Face of China—Sprawling Exhibits Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*

The next review comes from the digital version of the *Seattle Times* and is titled *The New Face of China- Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*.⁹⁴³ The author, Robin Updike, writes about art and cultural affairs from Seattle. She is the former art critic for the *Seattle Times* and has worked as a reporter on newspapers in California, Colorado, and Washington.

Updike writes her review about the version of the *Inside Out* exhibition that was held in Seattle and Tacoma, after it had been in San Francisco and New York. In the introduction, she makes an interesting statement when she says: “But who can name a single contemporary artist of note from China, Asia’s largest and most politically powerful nation? To most of us, Chinese art means 1,000-years-old porcelains and elegant calligraphic scrolls.”⁹⁴⁴ This might be an important indication on how the American public perceived Chinese art in 1998 and strongly reminds of the previous review by Scarlet Cheng. Could

⁹⁴¹ Deloris Ament Tarzan, *Inside Out: Show Both Big and Surprising*, n.d. <http://www.artguidenw.com/Chinese.htm>. Date of last consultation: 06/05/2012.

⁹⁴² Holland Cotter, *Activist Energy With a Light Touch*, *New York Times*, October 1 2009.

⁹⁴³ Robin Updike, *The New Face of China- Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, November 18 1999, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19991118&slug=2995923>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

it be that the image of Chinese art at that time was made out of the ancient Chinese art, such as the thousand years old porcelains and calligraphic scrolls? Again, it should be kept in mind that *Inside Out* was not the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in the United States. In 1993, *Fragmented Memory*, analysed in chapter three, was held in Ohio, and in 1995 the major survey *China's New Art Post 1989*, was held in different venues throughout the US as well.

About the exhibition, the author states:

Inside Out: New Chinese Art (...) is an admirable introduction to the complex, heavily nuanced world of contemporary Chinese art. (...) Billing itself as the first major international exhibition of art by contemporary Chinese artists, the show includes work not only by artists from the People's Republic of China, but also artists of Chinese descent from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Included too is work by Chinese artists who now live in Europe or the U.S. Though the artists share a common language and culture, one of the points of this mostly interesting exhibition is that a Chinese diaspora has resulted in art with many points of view.⁹⁴⁵

In this fragment, Updike makes mention of the diaspora artists although she does not directly make reference to the third space or Mid-Ground. The author merely states that the Chinese "diaspora" has resulted in "art with many points of view". She does not elaborate further on her statement.

About the art works she later on mentions:

Some of the work looks tired, Chinese variations on themes and styles we've all seen before. And some is too veiled in subject matter to make much sense to viewers not well-versed in the cultural issues of Chinese who live in Taiwan, for instance, compared with those who live in Hong Kong. Other work, especially by a few artists who've found commercial success in Europe and New York, is as slick and as geared for the art market as anything being produced by artists in New York or London.⁹⁴⁶

Here the author says that some works look tired, "Chinese variations on themes and styles we've all seen before".⁹⁴⁷ Yet, previously in her own review she mentions that, in general, nobody can name a single Chinese contemporary artist: "But who can name a single contemporary artist of note from China, Asia's largest and most politically powerful nation?"⁹⁴⁸ As she also mentioned that *Inside Out* is "an admirable introduction to the

⁹⁴⁵ Robin Updike, *The New Face of China- Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, November 18 1999, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19991118&slug=2995923>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibidem.

complex, heavily nuanced world of contemporary Chinese art.”⁹⁴⁹ There seems to be a certain incoherence between these three comments: how can art unknown to the Euroamerican audience at the same time be art one has seen so many times it becomes tiring? How can a “complex, heavily nuanced” art current be titled “slick and geared for the art market” at the same time?

In this fragment, the author also makes reference to the incomprehensibility of some of the artworks on display when she writes: “And some [of the works] is too veiled in subject matter to make much sense to viewers not well-versed in the cultural issues of Chinese who live in Taiwan”.⁹⁵⁰ This is the second time an art critic mentions that some of the works on display are difficult to interpret, probably due to the fact that they were not well explained by the catalogue and by the exhibition itself.

The review ends with a description of the *United Nations Series- China Monument: Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) of Gu Wenda. In this reference, Updike insinuates certain characteristics of the Mid-Ground, such as political and cultural transcendence, although she does not mention the term third space or Mid-Ground in her text.

For sheer poetic beauty and craftsmanship, it’s impossible not to admire “United Nations Series: Temple of Heaven”, 1998, by Gu Wenda, at the Henry. The room-sized installation is made up of 10 high-backed, traditional wooden chairs spaced around two low tables. Sitting benches are arranged in back of the chairs.

The table and chairs suggest discourse, a coming together of many people in an atmosphere of democracy and respect. On each chair seat a video monitor displays a soothing image of clouds, and the sound of bells gong faintly in the background. The entire scene is encased in a tent of screens in which strands of human hair have been lacquered into scripts that look like real languages, though they are not. This peaceful, lovely installation seems to be about the transcendence of political and cultural divisions.⁹⁵¹

This appraisal for Gu Wenda’s *United Nations Series- China Monument: Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) hugely differs from Jenny Liu’s review of the work, analysed at the beginning of this paragraph, in which she described the same installation as a “creepy and overproduced installation (...). Presenting supposedly authentic ethnographic goods, it is a serviceable facsimile of international installation art, drearily untainted by irony or

⁹⁴⁹ Robin Updike, *The New Face of China- Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, November 18 1999, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19991118&slug=2995923>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁹⁵¹ Ibidem.

reflexivity.”⁹⁵² This a good example of the fact that the descriptions of the artworks on display are often hugely dependent on the personal opinion of the art critic and that they are not always founded on objective information.

8.3.7 Erik Fredericksen, *Inside Out*

The next review comes from the website *The Stranger*. This is a free weekly alternative newspaper that comes out in Seattle. The title of the article is simply *Inside Out*.⁹⁵³ It is a short review in comparison with the others that have been analysed until now. Eric Fredericksen who collaborates with *The Stranger* starts by writing about the large extension of the show and refers to it as “huge”. He then says: “The art on view will be largely unrecognizable to fans of Chinese art as it’s currently defined, which is as a historical form. (...) [T]his kind of work has never been seen in Seattle.”⁹⁵⁴ This comment coincides with the previous review by Robin Updike, and is a comment that should and could be questioned as has been commented before.

He then mentions the sections of the exposition and makes reference to the segment dedicated to “the vast diaspora of Chinese artists who’ve emigrated to Europe and the U.S.”⁹⁵⁵ About these artists, he then says: “The overseas artists negotiate a space within the international art world while retaining certain native influences.”⁹⁵⁶ This coincides with one of the key points that curator Gao Minglu tried to transmit to the audience and the art critics through his catalogue essay, yet to which not many art critics have referred to within their reviews. Eric Fredericksen is somewhat of an exception here.

The conclusion of the text is as follows: “It’s no repackaging of popular European impressionist, no corporate collection promoting itself: It’s a breathtakingly wide view of an almost unknown art world, and it’s a must see.”⁹⁵⁷

⁹⁵² Jenny Liu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Frieze magazine, issue 44 January-February 1999.

⁹⁵³ Erick Fredericksen, *Inside Out*, *The Stranger*, August 26 – September 1, 1999 issue.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

Although Fredericksen briefly talks about the diaspora artists, there is again no mention of the third space. This review however does seem to be completely opposite to the review by Updike in which she mentions that the show did not present anything new (“Chinese variations on themes and styles we’ve all seen before”).⁹⁵⁸ Here, Fredericksen repeatedly mentions that the survey shows an “almost unknown art world” and that “this kind of work has never been seen in Seattle.”⁹⁵⁹

8.3.8 Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing-Machine*

The next review, which actually is an essay, comes from the webpage the *London Review of Books* and is called *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*.⁹⁶⁰ The author of the essay, Nicholas Jose was born in London but both his parents are Australian. From 1986 to 1990 he worked in Shanghai and Beijing where he was Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy from 1987-1990. Also, he was the curatorial advisor to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney on the exhibitions *Mao Goes Pop* (1993) and co-edited ARTTAIWAN (1995). He has collaborated as an author of many reviews in different magazines such as *Art Monthly*, *Art Asia Pacific* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, amongst many others.

The essay is a six page long text, written in 1999, that is included within this analysis due to the few references it makes to the *Inside Out* exhibition. It is a rich yet critical review towards Chinese experimental art in general and starts out with an extended description of the history of this type of art. The author talks about the polemic *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, also curated by Gao Minglu that was held in Beijing in 1989 and that was closed down twice by the authorities during its two-week run. The first part of the text is full of historic references, especially to the Tiananmen Square incident and the years that followed. Apart from this, the author talks about various artists such as Zhang Huan and Huang Yongping and other exhibitions that have been organized in the “West” such as Wu Hung’s *Transience* that was held in 1999.

⁹⁵⁸ Robin Updike, *The New Face of China- Sprawling Exhibits In Two Museums Showcase Contemporary Asian Artists*, November 18 1999, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19991118&slug=2995923>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁵⁹ Erick Fredericksen, *Inside Out*, *The Stranger*, August 26 – September 1, 1999 issue.

⁹⁶⁰ Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*, vol. 21 No. 12 – 10 June 1999. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n12/nicholas-jose/pulping-herbert-read-in-a-washing-machine>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

On page three one finds the first mention of the *Inside Out* exhibition when the author calls it “the most ambitious survey of contemporary Chinese art to date”. About the works he says:

The later, mostly post-1994 works respond to more rarefied Post-Modern art discourse, showing, in the curator’s words, “a distinct shift from an avant-garde targeted on a local political and cultural reality to a neo-avant-garde visuality that strives to transcend local interest in favour of involvement in the international arena”. Where else can you go? It’s an uncomfortable fact that most of the recent work of China’s élite graduates has been widely disseminated through the international art circuit and gone largely unseen by the public in China.⁹⁶¹

This fragment coincides with what Gao has mentioned in the exhibition catalogue. Chinese experimental art is influenced more by external factors than internal ones. Moreover, the author of this review clearly states that there is, in fact, no other market for Chinese experimental art than the international art scene. He calls this an “uncomfortable fact” which might point to his insinuation that these artworks are mostly censored within mainland China, which on its turn adds a political nuance to his statement.

The descriptions that Jose makes about certain artworks of the overseas artists, such as Xu Bing, Huang Yongping and Cai Guoqiang should also be mentioned. About Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) Jose writes:

Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky*, created in the seclusion of his Beijing studio in 1987, [was] shown briefly in *China/Avant-Garde* and in many foreign exhibitions since, but not again in China. Using traditional methods of woodblock printmaking, Xu Bing produced dozens of handmade books of pseudo-Chinese characters: non-existent ideograms generated from the component strokes of standard characters, every one of them unreadable to even the most educated Chinese. The books were then placed in wooden boxes in a shrine-like arrangement beneath a canopy of long paper scrolls printed with hundreds more of the same illegible language-signs. To readers of Chinese, *Book from the Sky* is a brain-scrambler. It is as if the Chinese script, the binding essence of the culture, had been turned into an impenetrable wall of mumbo-jumbo. *Book from the Sky is a monumental act of disrespect for the written word* - and was denounced in the grimmest terms. For most foreign viewers, *it remains mute*, a devoted revisiting of traditional practice by a contemporary installation artist. [Author’s emphasis]⁹⁶²

It is interesting that the author, who has worked and lived in China for quite some years, mentions that this work by Xu Bing is “a monumental act of disrespect for the written word” and that it was denounced in the grimmest terms, again insinuating censorship within mainland China. It is, however not clear if this is the opinion of the author of the

⁹⁶¹ Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*, vol. 21 No. 12 – 10 June 1999. <http://www.irb.co.uk/v21/n12/nicholas-jose/pulping-herbert-read-in-a-washing-machine>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁶² *Ibidem*.

essay or if he is commenting on the general reaction of the Chinese public when it was shown during the *China/ Avant-garde* exhibition of 1989. Having lived in China for some time, it is assumable that Jose has some knowledge, if not complete, of the Chinese (written) language. It therefore makes no sense that he says that the pseudo-characters are “unreadable to even the most educated Chinese”. The *made-up* characters of Xu Bing are unreadable to anyone, well educated or not. The fact that he mentions that the work “remains mute” to foreign visitors is also quite noticeable. It could be stated that *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) is an installation which is anything but mute. It is a highly complex work that can be interpreted, and in fact has been commented on in multiple ways. These two comments by the author on *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) with no further explanation or interpretation seem rather abrupt and narrow-minded. Especially if one compares them to any of the numerous texts that have been written on this particular work like for example a text written by Alice Yang⁹⁶³ that is published on Xu Bing’s personal webpage:

(...) "A book from the sky" [is] a monumental installation, which Xu Bing initially produced in Beijing in 1998 and for which he became recognized as leading member of avant-grade in China. An all-enveloping textual environment, "A Book from the Sky" is composed of massive sheets of Chinese characters, some left loose and some bound into books, which are suspended from the ceiling, pasted on the wall, and laid on the floor. Everything about "A book from the Sky" has the look of authenticity. From its arrangement of headings and marginalia on the page to its string bindings and indigo covers. The work mimics in every detail the characteristics of traditional Chinese printing and book-making. While donning such a guise, however, "A book from the sky" is supremely inauthentic. Its characters are purely of the artist's invention and utterly without meaning. What is most unsettling perhaps is the way in which Xu Bing's characters approximate the real thing, for the artist has composed them from the variant parts that make up Chinese characters. In fact, Xu Bing's lexicon is derived from and authoritative Chinese dictionary, but subjected to a radically deconstructive bricolage. When it was initially shown in China, "A book from the sky" became the focus of instant acclaim and notoriety among artists and critics, provoking volumes of intense criticism. Some found the work a devastation critique of Chinese culture, a condemnation of its inutility and meaninglessness. Others viewed the work as a tribute to Chinese culture, a testament to the beauty and balance of its aesthetic structures as well as distillation of the tenets of Chan Buddhism founded on metaphysics of silence and paradox.⁹⁶⁴

Moving on to another work of the exhibition, Nicholas Jose writes about Cai Guoqiang’s work *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42):

According to the artists, the boat embodies “the perseverance and cunning of China’s traditional culture, which can turn disadvantage into advantage”: it may look crude, archaic and rudderless, but it has the capacity to absorb the opposition’s power for its own ends. Cai’s boat is a Chinese version of

⁹⁶³ Alice Yang was an American-Chinese, born in Taiwan. She was tragically killed in an accident in 1997 at the age of thirty-five. She was an art critic, art historian as well as a curator and was an expert on Chinese and Taiwanese (contemporary) art.

⁹⁶⁴ Alice Yang, *Xu Bing: Rewriting Culture*, in *Why Asia? Contemporary Asian and Asian American Artists*, New York: New York University Press, 1998, p. 24-29. http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/xu_bing_rewriting_culture. Date of consultation: 25/08/2012.

the wooden horse – a droll meditation, in this case, on how Chinese artists are using the weaponry of the international curatorium to expand their territory. It's what the late Qing dynasty reformers hoped to do with their slogan *xitizhongyong*: Western ideas put to Chinese uses.⁹⁶⁵

What is interesting in this fragment is the expression “wooden horse”. Possibly, this concept can have two meanings which both come down to the same idea. “The Wooden Horse” was a 1950 British Second World War film in which prisoners try to escape by digging a tunnel and covering up their escape by using a wooden horse; an exercise instrument often used in gymnastics. The other wooden horse is the Troy Horse; a wooden horse that was built by the Greeks during the Trojan War in order to conquest de city of Troy. In both versions, the horse is a false appearance and is used in order to succeed in a personal objective that is not obvious, and should be hidden, to the outside world, or the enemy. It is significant that the author uses this expression in order to explain the strategy for Chinese experimental art to succeed in the “West”. This somewhat secretive strategy is later confirmed when the author mentions, “outside China the diaspora tends to be constructed as a network of consular outposts of the northern capital.” This strategy of using a more familiar symbol for the Euroamerican public in order to clarify the meaning of a Chinese experimental artwork is often used by Euroamerican art critics. A previous example was seen in the review written by Jenny Liu in which she compared Cai Guoqiang’s *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42) with Saint Sebastian.

Continuing with Jose’s review, he is the first writer to mention the third space in this review. On page five, towards the end of his essay, he writes:

With a kowtow to Homi Bhabha, Gao Minglu concedes a “third space” to Chinese artists working overseas, who have learned to present “traditional materials as...bridges over which different interpretations can cross”. They are the “post-Orientalist transnationals”. Yet hybridity of this kind is neither new nor surprising. In *Modern Asian Art* (1998), John Clark places it in perspective with a series of diachronic case-studies of artistic Modernism, ranging through prewar Japan and India, Revolutionary China and South-East Asia in the Eighties and Nineties. Clark warns against the “acceptance of a type of transfer of cultural capital” from Asia “to Euramerica almost on the terms that now govern economic exchanges”. He notes that “it was just when some Asian art discourses had begun to lose interest in any further reference to a Euramerican stylistic that Euramericans began to think of Asia as a typical example of the Post-Modern.” This may be a managed deception, he hints, noting in relation to contemporary Chinese artists that “Chinese” culture is sometimes highly oblivious to the politics of “self” and “Other”-naming.” Which is to say, the move into a “third-space” as a way of negotiating global cultural politics may merely be another means of storming the headquarters, in the old revolutionary jargon.⁹⁶⁶

⁹⁶⁵ Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*, vol. 21 No. 12 – 10 June 1999. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n12/nicholas-jose/pulping-herbert-read-in-a-washing-machine>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

Although the author is the first to mention the third space, it seems however that he does not take the third space seriously when he uses the expression “kow-tow to Homi Bhabha” and does not consider it an instrument of negotiation in the global cultural and political arena. It is suggestive that the author mentions that “hybridity of this kind is neither new nor surprising” however, as has been seen in the reviews and exhibition catalogues analysed previously within this dissertation, the third space is hardly ever mentioned. And when it is, it is usually by a non-Euroamerican art critic like Hou Hanru or, in this case, Gao Minglu. Therefore, even though the author then explains his statement by referring to the art historian John Clark, this particular statement seen in the light of the results of this dissertation could be seriously questioned.

As a conclusion, in his review Jose comments on the guestbook that was placed at the exhibition. This fragment gives a brief impression on the way the exhibition had been received by the public. Although it is probable that there were many more comments, Jose chooses to copy only two into his review, both of them negative. The author writes:

I was amused to see *Inside Out* experienced as a species of trash and perversion in the museum's comments book in San Francisco. One visitor said it was the first museum show in which he got a “woody”. Another wrote: “we were happy that the Chinese frontiers had been closed until now. We believe we are in a real danger.”⁹⁶⁷

This seems to emphasize the rather negative evaluation that the author has of the *Inside Out* exhibition and the fact that he did not take the message it transmitted seriously.

8.3.9 Barbara Pollack, *Eastern Exposure*

The next, rather brief review is from the website *The Village Voice*, a site that informs of the cultural activities and events that are held in New York City. The author, Barbara Pollack is a writer, critic, artist, and educator who has been writing about contemporary art in New York since 1986. Her reviews have been published in various magazines and newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *Art News*. According to her own website,⁹⁶⁸ she “is considered one of the leading experts in the field of Chinese

⁹⁶⁷ Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*, vol. 21 No. 12 – 10 June 1999. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n12/nicholas-jose/pulping-herbert-read-in-a-washing-machine>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

⁹⁶⁸ <http://barbarapollack.com/writResume.html>, n.d., date of consultation: 25/08/2012.

contemporary art” and she has been covering this type of art since the late 1990s. Several of her books and articles have been used within this dissertation as bibliographic sources.

The review is titled *Eastern Exposure: Curator Gao Minglu Brings the Chinese Avant-Garde West*.⁹⁶⁹ About the exhibition, the author writes:

Western observers are most familiar with the post-Pop painters of the early 1980s, sometimes called “double-kitsch”. (...) However, in “Inside Out,” Minglu reveals the full range of radical impulses, many of which have been overlooked or entirely misinterpreted by European observers. He points out that, for example, while the U.S. press hailed Fang Lijun’s surrealist paintings of screaming heads as “a cry against Communist repression,” they were more accurately a commercial enterprise, (...), calculated to appeal to the new leisure class emerging from the economic liberalization.⁹⁷⁰

Here, Barbara Pollack addresses the fact that Chinese experimental art has often been misunderstood when she writes that many works (“full range of radical impulses”) have been overlooked or entirely misinterpreted by European observers. It is not clear why she only refers to the European observers and not to American observers, as misunderstanding also frequently takes place among the American art critics and experts. The author then also emphasizes the fact that Chinese experimental art has sometimes been interpreted from a political point of view when in fact, only commercial reasons resided behind the work. This is a phenomenon which has been extensively commented on in chapter 3.2 of the theoretic part of this dissertation.

All in all, Pollack’s review seems to look rather critically towards her Euroamerican (even though she only mentions European) art colleagues. But again, she does not however make any reference to the third space even though it was extensively addressed within the exhibition catalogue.

8.3.10 Maria Esposito, *Inside Out- new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*

Another review comes from the website the *World Socialist Web Site* and is titled *Inside Out - new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*.⁹⁷¹ The *World Socialist*

⁹⁶⁹ Barbara Pollack, *Eastern Exposure: Curator Gao Minglu Brings the Chinese Avant-Garde West*, September 29 1998. <http://www.villagevoice.com/1998-09-29/art/eastern-exposure/2>. Date of last consultation: 05/05/2012.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁹⁷¹ Maria Esposito, *Inside Out - new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*, World Socialist Web Site, 14 May 2001. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/05/chin-m14.html>. Date of last consultation: 02/08/2014.

Web Site is published by the *International Committee of the Fourth International*, which is leader of the world socialist movement founded by Leo Trotsky in 1938.

The review writes extensively on the history of Chinese experimental art: former exhibitions that were held in China, certain art groups that existed in the past, and the Tiananmen Square incident. About the exhibition the author Maria Esposito, who is a Sydney-based occasional correspondent for the World Socialist Website, says:

It is impossible to fully appreciate this multi-faceted exhibition without some understanding of the difficulties facing contemporary artists in China – their isolation, censorship and constant repression under the ruling Stalinist Communist Party of China, which views any innovative artistic work as a political threat.⁹⁷²

Keeping in mind the background and interest of the website, it is probably clear why the author highlights the fact that Chinese artists in China are being isolated, censored and repressed under the *Stalinist* Communist Party of China. This also justifies the fact that the author perceives the exhibition within a political context. This becomes clear in the next fragment.

Inside Out includes a good cross-section of work from this difficult and complex period [period up until 1996]. The exhibition has a number of thoughtful and unsettling pieces and an honesty and enthusiasm sadly lacking in most of the artistic work produced in the West over the last 20 years. Obviously much of the work contains an elemental hostility to the ruling regime, with serious attempts to explore some of the tensions and contradictions of political and social life in contemporary China.⁹⁷³

The second part of the review is dedicated to some of the artists that participated in the *Inside Out* exhibition. Among them, there are the descriptions of the artworks from Gu Wenda and Xu Bing.

The most interesting pieces in the exhibition are by Wenda Gu and Xu Bing. (...) Gu places a Chinese character in the centre of the large black ink paintings. But the Chinese character is meaningless and its size disrupts the tranquil but dark landscape. Rather than producing a sense of rest and peace, as traditional Chinese pictures did, the picture is unsettling and agitating. Behind the familiar is the likelihood of menace. While something is wrong with the old world, moving to the new presents unknown dangers.

(...) Another astonishing work by Gu (...) is his *United Nations Series: The Temple of Heaven* (China Monument) (1998). (...) Although Gu builds new versions of the *United Nations Series* for each exhibition, the installation, like his ink paintings, is strangely tranquil and unsettling – a room that

⁹⁷² Maria Esposito, *Inside Out - new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*, World Socialist Web Site, 14 May 2001. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/05/chin-m14.html>. Date of last consultation: 02/08/2014.

⁹⁷³ *Ibidem*.

emits a feeling of inner peace, as well as a dreamlike atmosphere of confused ideas and unresolved problems.⁹⁷⁴

The fact that Gu's creation is considered "unsettling" to the author is purely a personal interpretation. According to Gu Wenda himself, *Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) has quite the opposite intention:

The title [Temple of Heaven] comes from an actual temple in Beijing, which is really beautiful. The space will be totally sealed by curtains; there will be twelve chairs and eight stones and two large tables. The seating area will be replaced by TV monitors and the monitors will show running clouds, so the audience they come, and will be able to sit on the clouds. It's like meditation, transcendence...(...) The work is intended to have audiences face heaven made of fake text in different languages...the image of the running clouds is, in a way, urging the audience to think freely beyond the burden of cultures, beyond the limitation of mankind's knowledge. In this way, you [the spectator] are as free as if you sat on flying clouds in a blue sky. We [mankind] created all artificial civilizations, and yet we are not free from what man made...this meditating site provides a moment of freedom.⁹⁷⁵

About Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45), she says: "The contrast between the traditional forms and the sheer size of the installation is impressive and thought-provoking."⁹⁷⁶ She does not comment further on this highly complex work and it thus does not become clear what the author found so "thought-provoking" about the work. The review ends with the conclusion: "the *Inside Out* exhibition indicates that there are many who have maintained their artistic integrity and continue to produce intelligent and confronting work. Their efforts deserve a much wider audience."⁹⁷⁷

This comment might point to the fact that the author insinuates that other artists have not maintained their artistic integrity and are "catering to the West". It is also significant that she mentions that the show deserves a much wider audience. Does this mean that *Inside Out* did not achieve a great impact on the media and did not receive a significant amount of visitors? This does not become clear, as the author does not further explain her statement.

⁹⁷⁴ Maria Esposito, *Inside Out - new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*, World Socialist Web Site, 14 May 2001. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/05/chin-m14.html>. Date of last consultation: 02/08/2014.

⁹⁷⁵ Asia Society interview with Gu Wenda conducted by Joan Kee, "New Chinese Art, inside out, An Interview with Gu Wenda. <http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/gu.html>. Date of consultation: 06/06/2012.

⁹⁷⁶ Maria Esposito, *Inside Out - new Chinese art and the political conditions that produced it*, World Socialist Web Site, 14 May 2001. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/05/chin-m14.html>. Date of last consultation: 02/08/2014.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

8.3.11 John Stevenson, amazon book review on *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue

Next is a short review from the amazon website about the *Inside Out* catalogue.⁹⁷⁸ The author of the text is John Stevenson, who seems to be a freelance writer in the Seattle area although the professional background of this author could not be confirmed. Stevenson calls the exhibition “groundbreaking”, and “the first major presentation in the West of contemporary Chinese art and (...) the most important critique of the field to date.”⁹⁷⁹ He then continues by describing some of the artworks that were on display, like the creation of Xu Bing and Cai Guoqiang, about which his *Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42), according to the author, has “an implicit anti-West message”.⁹⁸⁰ This “anti-West” message has not been previously seen in the reviews analysed until now and does not coincide with the comments on this artwork that have been seen earlier within this paragraph. It does not become clear why the author sees this particular work as “Anti-West” and it seems to be a comment which appears rather out of context. *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42) has been commented on within this chapter and it referred to a specific event within Chinese history. In no case did Cai Guoqiang mean for the work to be anti-“West”, especially considering the fact that the artist himself was living in the United States at the time of the exhibition and often tries to blend “East” and “West” within his work, creating hybridity and multicultural connotations. Thus, again it seems that this political view, which seems to fit better in a Cold War context, appears to be founded merely on the personal interpretation of the author. It is also possible that the author portrayed this work as “anti-West” to make the book more appealing to the *Amazon* buyers.

About the works in general, John Stevenson says, “an original new force has joined the global art community.”⁹⁸¹ This statement seems to be quite the contrary of his previous statement in which he placed a Chinese experimental artwork within a limiting political framework. Here, he describes Chinese experimental art as an “original force”⁹⁸² that takes part in the global art community. This confirms somewhat Gao Minglu’s intention to

⁹⁷⁸ See the amazon.com website: http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Out-New-Chinese-Art/dp/0520217489/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1406908975&sr=8-1&keywords=inside+out+exhibition+catalogue, n.d., date of last consultation: 1/8/2014

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸² *Ibidem*.

present Chinese experimental art as an original art current within the international art scene. However, again, there is no reference to the third space or diaspora artists which was one of Gao Minglu's other key points.

8.3.11 Former West Research Library, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*

The last review⁹⁸³ of this analysis comes from a Dutch website called the *Former West* that is dedicated to research, among other activities, of contemporary art. It is a very short review and actually is more of a concise informative text. About the *Inside Out* exhibition, it says:

This was the first major exhibition of new art from China to be seen in the US; it reflected a growing interest in China (culturally, economically, politically) as it became an increasingly powerful geopolitical force in the post-1989 world. Questions of national identity and cultural specificity—and the translatability of Chinese aesthetics to the western context—were consciously raised in the exhibition. Other key issues included: the use of language, the body and performance, consumerism, urban growth, popular culture, etc.⁹⁸⁴

It seems that this rather brief but concise text captured the essence of the *Inside Out* exhibition and understood the main objectives that Gao Minglu, curator of the show, tried to transmit. The short fragment states the fact that the survey raised questions on national identity and cultural specificity, and also mentions the question of the integration of “western” aesthetics within Chinese experimental art. The review does not give a lot of other information apart from this rather objective data that could have been extracted from the exhibition catalogue. In no place does the reviews give any opinion on the exhibition.

And again, there is no mention of the third space. This seems to be a recurrent phenomenon. In some occasions, concepts such as the third space, the in-between or transexperiences can be fully applied to the explanations given by the art experts or the critics. But, even though they are implicitly addressed, they are not explicitly mentioned. Why does this occur? Why are terms such as third space, transexperiences, and the in-between not more frequently used within the vocabulary that describes these artworks and artists that deal with subjects such as identity, globalization and hybridity? Why have these definitions not become common terms within our current times? Could the answer be that dominant Euroamerica is not interested in these alternative models and definitions and try to keep them out of the artistic language used within the global art scene? If this is

⁹⁸³ <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/InsideOutNewChineseArt>. Author unknown, n.d.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

true, it confirms the fact that Euroamerican hegemony is artificially being maintained and that alternative systems are purposely not accepted on a wide scale. This shall make the work of art experts such as Gao Minglu, Fei Dawei and Hou Hanru a very long, uphill battle.

8.4 Conclusions on *Inside Out*

First of all, referring to the exhibition catalogue, it is as if the essays of the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue sometimes seem to lack an internal coherence. In various occasions, what is mentioned in one essay is later completely omitted by the next which makes for the articles to become unrelated. This, for example, has been the case with the essays of Gao Minglu and Norman Bryson. In his essay, Gao adverts to not interpret Chinese experimental art within an exclusively political context. He clearly states that Chinese experimental art is more a result of external forces than internal ones. Yet, later on in the essay of Bryson, artworks of Chinese experimental art, in this case the works of Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, are interpreted only from a political point of view. Terms as “post-Mao years” and “Cultural Revolution” are mentioned in his essay indicating this political interpretation. The essay of Bryson also seems to insinuate that the Chinese artists are being repressed and that, thanks to the (Chinese) avant-garde art, they are able to “live ones own life”.

There also seems to be no clarity on what the identity of Chinese experimental artists should be. Some authors in the exhibition catalogue see them as “cultural nomads” (Gao, Garrel and Mackenzie). Others, such as Desai and Ross mention that the Chinese experimental artists prefer to see themselves primarily as contemporary rather than Chinese artists. Gao Minglu however says that, in order to succeed in the “West”, these artists do not emphasize their national identity in order to avoid being considered a minority or exotic yet they also do not de-emphasize their Chinese identity. A bit later on, the author Chang Tsong-Zung mentions that it is thanks to the exotic appeal of the Chinese artists that they have been able to survive and thrive overseas. Hou Hanru, on his turn then mentions that Chinese experimental artists no longer see themselves as Chinese artists but as independent, individual artists. Yet, later on Gao mentions “the artists’ task is to make their own Chinese cultural experiences into efficient language to intervene in the new social reality”. Somehow, there seems to be no agreement on whether Chinese experimental artists see themselves as contemporary, individual, independent, exotic or Chinese (to a certain degree). This might be an indication of how the Chinese experimental artists themselves feel within the international art market or when they move overseas. It is a state of confusion, especially in a twenty-first century global world in which borders disappear and cultures and identities all seem to mix and change constantly. It is also the consequence of a Euroamerican dominated art scene in

which Chinese experimental artists often have to obey the demands and the expectations of the often Euroamerican art curators and investors.⁹⁸⁵

The question whether the exhibition catalogue transmits the concept of the third space or not can be answered affirmatively. There are plenty of references to the overseas (sometimes called diaspora) artists and the third space. Especially the last essay; the conversation between Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru, puts an emphasis on these concepts and explains very clearly what the third space is and how it is being created. However, the fact that the concept has been mentioned in and transmitted by the catalogue does not mean that this concept has been received and understood. This could be due to the fact that not all essays within the exhibition catalogue mention the concept. It could also be the consequence of the fact that a lot of works on display at the *Inside Out* exhibition have not been explained in the catalogue. For example, there are only a few colour plates of the artworks made by the overseas artists. These images contain no further explanation apart from the basic information such as the title, the name of the artist, the year of creation, measurements and the material that has been used for the work. The third space concept has not been applied to any of the works of the overseas artists. This could be one of the reasons for the non-effective transmission of this concept. When looking at the artworks on display, some of these clearly could be seen as third space works. Good examples are Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series- China Monument: Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1993) (Fig. 30 and 45) that clearly go beyond the "East-West" dichotomy and cannot be seen as "Chinese" or "western" works but have to be perceived as works that lie somewhere in the in-between.

In general, the art critics have not picked up on the third space concept. Of all the reviews and articles analysed in this chapter only the review of Nicholas Jose has mentioned the idea of the third space yet in a rather "disrespectful" way ("kowitz to Homi Bhabha").⁹⁸⁶ The concept of the diaspora artists has been mentioned more frequently but usually without further explanations. The term Mid-Ground or in-between has not been mentioned at all. It thus seems that the concept of the third space has not been understood, or simply

⁹⁸⁵ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

⁹⁸⁶ Nicholas Jose, *Pulping Herbert Read in a Washing Machine*, vol. 21 No. 12 – 10 June 1999. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n12/nicholas-jose/pulping-herbert-read-in-a-washing-machine>. Date of last consultation: 07/05/2012.

has been ignored, even though it was elaborately commented on within the exhibition catalogue. Therefore it has not been transmitted through the media onto the general public. This could indicate that the art critics only on few occasions have read the exhibition catalogue prior to writing their reviews and that their opinion is often based on their personal experience of their visit to the survey.

In general, the reviews were focussed primarily on the political aspect of Chinese experimental art, placing it within a recent, or not so recent, historical context. References to the Tiananmen Square incident and the Cultural Revolution were present in almost all reviews. It seems that this way of perceiving Chinese experimental art, in some cases, does not change over the years, as one has been able to see in the reviews of Holland Cotter. In one of his reviews written more than ten years after the *Inside Out* exhibition, the author still refers many times to the political past of China.

More than one review has made mention of the fact that Chinese experimental art has based itself on a “western” type of art. Jenny Liu, for example, writes in her review that the eighty works of the *Inside Out* exhibition were “references to Western art history”. And two reviews have compared Chinese experimental artworks with “western” icons; Saint Sebastian and the Wooden Horse, or “western” art currents, in this particular case, Dadaism. It is interesting that even though the artworks are labelled as “western”, many times the authors of the reviews do not mention, as has Gao wrote in his catalogue essay, that external forces are the primary influence of Chinese experimental art. Usually, the authors of the reviews mention China’s recent (or not so recent) political past or the present economical situation in China itself as the main influential factor of this type of art.

It seems, also, that the opinions of the art critics seem to differ a great deal from each other. This fact can be illustrated by referring to the work *Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42) by Cai Guoqiang. This work has been compared to Saint Sebastian and a Wooden Horse, which can have different meanings as explained in the previous paragraph. It has also been described as containing an anti-West message, and as a “political piece”. One of the critics even mentioned that the moral of this work was to “Beware of shooting at Chinese”. However, as we have seen in this chapter, the intention of the artist himself, Cai Guoqiang, does not coincide with any of these interpretations. Therefore, this particular installation becomes a good example of how Chinese experimental art is often misinterpreted by the Euroamerican art critics.

Also, the interpretations of the works of Gu Wenda en Xu Bing have been very different. Some perceived these works as “unsettling”. Others called the pseudo-characters as “mute to a foreign public”. Some considered Gu Wenda’s *Temple of Heaven* (1998) (Fig. 41) as “this peaceful, lovely installation [that] seems to be about the transcendence of political and cultural divisions”. Another critic described the same work as “creepy and overproduced”. *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) by Xu Bing has been referred to as “a monumental act of disrespect for the written word” and “numbo-jumbo”. Holland Cotter called the pseudo-characters “messed-up calligraphy: illegible, computerized, used to write nonsense characters, fake language.” All in all, these interpretations seem to be personal and subjective, and often are made from a Euroamerican point of view.

In general, the Chinese experimental art showed at *Inside Out* is often projected as a type of rebellious, dissident political art that is prohibited in mainland China. This might have been done to appeal to the Euroamerican public that expects a certain exotism from this type of art and finds it irresistible the fact that it is being oppressed in its homeland.

It has to be taken into consideration that the *Inside Out* exhibition was organized in 1998-1999. In more than one occasion the exhibition was described as the first major survey of Chinese experimental art to be held in the “West”, which should be questioned as the North-American public had the opportunity to come into contact with Chinese experimental art in 1993 with the exhibition *Fragmented Memory* and especially in 1995 with the major show *China’s New Art Post 1989*. In the same lines, it was also commented by several reviewers that Chinese experimental art was not yet widely known in North-America and that the audience was more accustomed to relating Chinese art with antique and traditional Chinese art. It could well be that some of the art critics at the time did not have sufficient knowledge on Chinese experimental art to correctly interpret it. On the other hand, some of the reviews analysed within this paragraph were written by acknowledged art critics and experts like Barbara Pollack. Yet, their reviews cannot counteract all the reviews that misinterpreted the show and that did not transmit its message and objectives. It should also be mentioned here that especially Holland Cotter, a well-known art critic for the New York Times who won the Pulitzer for criticism, saw and continued to see Chinese experimental art from a euro-American, heavily politicized point of view. This viewpoint did not change as time passed as he continued to describe *Inside Out* as a political show, even ten years after the survey was held.

As a conclusion, *Inside Out* was the first show to explicitly mention and elaborate on the third space concept. Nevertheless, this idea was not taken over by any of the reviews that were posteriorly written on the survey, at least not in a serious way. The fact that most reviewers, and even some of the (expert) authors that collaborated within the exhibition catalogue continued to interpret Chinese experimental art only from a political, Euroamerican point of view might point to the fact that the art reception in the United States at that time was highly west-centric and that alternative models such as the third space, and art currents such as Chinese experimental art were not considered equals and were compared to Euroamerican art forms in order to maintain the status quo of Euroamerican hegemony within the global art world. Again, referral to Karen Smith's article seems to be appropriate here: even in 1998-1999, North America was not yet ready to receive the art of the Other.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁷ Karen Smith, *China Rising*, Art India magazine, 2007, Vol. XII, Issue II, Quarter II.

9. PARIS POUR ESCALE (2000-2001)

9.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Paris pour Escale was an exhibition held at the Musée d'art modern de la Ville de Paris from the 7th of December 2000 until the 18th of February 2001. A total of twenty-seven artists participated in the survey, among which five were overseas "Chinese". The participating Chinese artists were Chen Zhen, Huang Yongping, Shen Yuan, Wang Du and Yang Jiechang. All participating artists in *Paris pour Escale* were foreigners who were living in Paris at the time or who considered Paris as an "escale"; a stopover on their frequent travels to and fro. This also explains the title that has been chosen for the survey: Paris as a transitory place between journeys and also maybe as a temporal, not permanent, home for the artists living in the city of the lights.

The Musée d'art modern de la Ville de Paris was inaugurated in 1961 and dedicates itself to the exhibition of contemporary art in all its forms, be it video, installation works, painting, sculpture, literature, fashion, etc. The museum was built in 1937 due to the occasion of the *Exposition Universelle* but was not opened entirely to the public until 1961. When one looks at the long list of exhibitions held at the Musée d'art modern de la Ville de Paris since the 1970's, it becomes clear that quite a lot of the surveys were about "foreign" modern art and artists. A few examples are the exhibitions *Avant-Garde Russe* (1973), *Tendances actuelles de la nouvelle peinture américaine* (1976), and *Life/Live, la scène artistique au Royaume Uni en 1996* (1996-1997). Also, in 2014 the museum organized a solo exhibition about (one of the best selling) Chinese experimental artist Zheng Fanzhi. At the time of *Paris pour Escale*, the director of the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, that will be called MAM from here on, was Suzanne Pagé. She used to be one of the conservators of the museum before becoming the director and also had organized some surveys for the MAM, and is considered one of the leading figures in the contemporary art world in France.⁹⁸⁸

Paris pour Escale was organized by the curators Hou Hanru and his wife Evelyne Jouanno. Hou Hanru has been mentioned many times in this dissertation and he is considered one of the leading figures in the contemporary Chinese art scene. No further

⁹⁸⁸ The well-known curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has said about Suzanne Pagé: "Above all, the Musée d'Art Moderne under Pagé was a museum of, by and for artists. She always involved contemporary practitioners, even in historical exhibitions, believing that the eye of an artist would always reveal unnoticed correlations and correspondences." OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 101.

explanation shall be given on him in this chapter as it has been extensively done in previous chapters.⁹⁸⁹

Evelyne Jouanno is an independent art critic and curator who lived in Paris during the exhibition but who moved to San Francisco in 2006 with her husband. In this sense, Paris was an “escale” for them as well. She has organized surveys about art and its relation to geopolitics, and other topics related to cross-cultural dialogue, like *Paris pour Escale*. She has also been curator or co-curator to other exhibitions about Chinese art such as *Back to Zhongguo* that was held during the France/China year in 2005, and biennales such as the Venice Biennale and the Istanbul Biennale. She has also taught at the Université VIII de Paris and at California-Berkeley and is a frequent writer for catalogues as well as art magazines.

As mentioned previously, five Chinese artists participated in *Paris pour Escale* and all five were, at the time, overseas artists. The artworks that were presented by them were:

Chen Zhen: *Quand les villes dialoguent avec le paysage intérieur du corps*⁹⁹⁰ (Shown previously at the Civica d’Art Moderna e Contemporanea in Turin, 2000) (Fig. 46)

Huang Yongping: *Le Kiosk flottant* (sight specific, 2000)

Shen Yuan: *Un Matin du Monde* (Previously displayed at the Galerie Eric Dupont in Paris in 1999. It was then exhibited in various other venues such as *Paris pour Escale* and would also be displayed at the *All under Heaven* exhibition held in 2004 at the Museum of contemporary art in Antwerp, analysed in chapter eleven.) (Fig. 47)

Wang Du: *Promener mon chien* (installation and performance, sight specific, 2000) (Fig. 49)

⁹⁸⁹ See chapter 3 and 4 of Block II.

⁹⁹⁰ In the exhibition catalogue the work is titled *Quand les villes dialoguent avec le paysage intérieur du corps* however in the book *On the Mid-Ground*, in which Hou Hanru publishes the essay that he wrote with Evelyne Jouanno for the exhibition catalogue of *Paris pour Escale*, an image of Chen Zhen’s work that was exhibited at the survey is titled as “Interior Landscape”. This is quite confusing as Chen Zhen made two works with similar titles in the year 2000: *Inner Body Landscape* and *Cristal Landscape of Inner Body*.

Yang Jiechang:

The eye of the Storm (sight specific, 2000) (Fig. 50)

Not all works that were displayed at the survey were especially made for the occasion of *Paris pour Escale*. Some works had been previously exhibited at other venues.

Lastly, *Paris pour Escale* can be considered as a partner of another exhibition that was held simultaneously at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris titled *L'École De Paris, 1904-1929: La Part De L'autre*, from the 30th of November 2000 until the 11th of March 2001. This exhibition was also about foreign artists living in Paris however from an earlier period, i.e. the early decades of the 20th century. It is as the director Suzanne Pagé mentions in the catalogue of *Paris pour Escale*: "Au moment où le Musée d'art modern choisit de présenter l'École de Paris – 1904/1929 – à travers 'la Part de l'Autre' et le rayonnement acquis alors à partir de la formidable énergie des diaspora, il est apparu opportune de s'interroger sur l'état actuel des lieux."⁹⁹¹

⁹⁹¹ Suzanne Pagé, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 8.

9.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was edited by the MAM for the occasion of the exhibition. Keeping in mind that twenty-seven artists participated, the extension of the catalogue is not excessive and counts one hundred twenty-seven pages and is written entirely in French. Some essays have been translated into French for the catalogue.

All artists have a one-page space in which they are given the opportunity to express themselves. The texts written by the five participating Chinese artists shall be analysed within this chapter as they give more inside information on the exhibition and the experience of being a migrant in France, which is important when investigating the concept of third space.

The catalogue contains a foreword by the director Suzanne Pagé; a Preface by Laurence Bossé who is an art curator at the MAM; an introductory essay written by Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno; an essay by Gilane Tawadros, founding Director of the Institute of International Visual Arts (InIVA)⁹⁹²(this article was translated from English to French); and an essay written by Michel Wieviorka, a French sociologist. The articles and essays are then followed by one-page texts in which the participating artists were given the space to write about their work, and their experience as an immigrant in Paris. The exhibition catalogue includes colour plates of some of the works that were on display.

The title of the exposition, *Paris pour Escale*, indicates the fact that Paris is a (temporary) home for many artists that were not born in France but that have come from abroad. The survey included artists from all over the world: China, Italy, Japan, Algeria, and South Africa, among many other countries. Throughout the whole catalogue, all essays make references to the role of the immigrants in Paris who change the art scene of the city, and the importance of the art of the Other in order to invigorate art and create new artistic possibilities. The catalogue in general does not treat the art of the participating artists as “Other” or exotic. There are no references within the exhibition catalogue that try to do so. The art of the Other is seen as equal and as a positive and essential influence in the global art scene.

⁹⁹² InIVA is a contemporary visual arts agency in London. Tawadros is also joint Chief Executive of Rivington Place, which is, as they call themselves “London’s global art centre”, and the headquarters of InIVA. She has also curated various shows on contemporary art.

However, before starting the analysis of the exhibition catalogue's essays, it should be mentioned that some texts define the participating artists as diaspora artists. As has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation,⁹⁹³ the concept of diaspora should be handled with care. In some cases, strictly speaking, the term cannot be applied to immigrant artists, or the Chinese experimental artists who left China to start their lives abroad. As has been explained in the theoretic part, the term "diaspora" indicates a static relation between the homeland and the current situation of the émigré. In this case, China should be seen as the "promised land" or the land to which one desires to return but cannot. In the case of the Chinese experimental artists, they often travel back to China for professional as well as private reasons. Therefore, instead of the term diaspora, other terms such as transexperiences,⁹⁹⁴ coined by the overseas artist Chen Zhen, that indicate a dynamic relation between homeland and adopted land could be considered more suitable. However, in the exhibition catalogue, the term is freely used when referring to the immigrant artists in Paris.

Starting with the analysis, the first article is a one-page introductory text written by the director of the MAM, Suzanne Pagé. As mentioned before, she used to be one of the museum's curators and conservators before becoming the director of the art centre. In the foreword she starts out by questioning the importance of the concept of centre within a global world in which there are many more alternatives to the centre-periphery dichotomy. This reminds strongly of the exhibition *Out of the Centre*, curated by Hou Hanru at the Pori Art Museum in 1994 that was analysed in chapter four. It seems thus that the objective of the curator, Hou Hanru, is once again the questioning of centre-periphery model. "Tandis que la question d'un Centre est devenue vaine face à la multiplication des alternatives, beaucoup d'artistes continuent à trouver à Paris un refuge et un laboratoire urbain."⁹⁹⁵

It appears that Suzanne Pagé is on one line with Hou Hanru and agrees that the concept of centre has become somewhat out-dated in the global twenty-first century. In a way, the conversation on the periphery-centre model seems to be retaken from where Hou Hanru left off in 1994 with the exhibition of *Out of the Centre*. Here however, the author might also be indicating that Paris can no longer be referred to as the (artistic, cultural) epicentres of the world, as it used to be in past times, bearing in mind that Paris was also one of the

⁹⁹³ See paragraph 2.1 of the theoretic part (Block I).

⁹⁹⁴ See paragraph 2.2 of the theoretic part (Block I).

⁹⁹⁵ Suzanne Pagé, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition, p. 8.

main destinations of the Chinese artists in the 1920s and 1930s. However, she does mention that currently many artists from all around the world still choose Paris as their place of residence where they continue to develop their art.

She then mentions that for some foreign artists Paris has become a stopover in their global nomadic lives and that the city is rarely the definitive place of residence for many of them. She then highlights the fact that one of the objectives of the exhibition is to shine a light on the identity crisis that some of the overseas artists go through and how they try to give a voice to their experience of living outside of their homelands through their art.

The next article is the preface of the exhibition catalogue and is also only one page long. The text is written by Laurence Bossé who was the director of the ARC (Animation/ Research/ Confrontation) from 1990 until 2007. The ARC is an area within the Musée d'art Moderne dedicated to the exhibition and research of contemporary art. Although physically housed within the MAM it was an independent institution governed and financed by the Fine Art Department until 1988 when Suzanne Pagé became the director of the MAM and integrated the ARC section into the museum.

As Suzanne Pagé mentioned in her previous foreword, Laurence Bossé also starts out by mentioning that the exhibition *École de Paris* was a great opportunity for the MAM to reflect further on the question of foreign artists living at that time in Paris. He then also continues by saying that even though Paris is no longer the world centre for the arts, it continues to attract many artists from all over the world. He then also mentions, just like Suzanne Pagé, that the artists do not stay in Paris and that they continue travelling in search of new experiences: Paris becomes a stopover.

Laurence Bossé then comments on the artists that have been chosen for the survey and mentions that it is not a systematic representation but that they have been brought together in order to show the dynamics that they generate in Paris. An interesting fact is that Bossé mentions that the works are brought together to confront each other. He does not further explain what this confrontation consists of. Does he mean that the works confront each other, or that they confront “western” art, hereby questioning the concept of the centre? “Sont ainsi rassemblées ici, et confrontées, des oeuvres relevant soit de la culture dite occidentale dans toutes ses variantes, soit d’une mixité avec une culture autre.

Afin de mieux évoquer le dynamisme des acteurs de cette scène artistique parisienne (...)"⁹⁹⁶

He then continues by addressing some of the participating artists and comments, very briefly, what topics they express in their art. Be it the Parisian architecture, the confrontation between cultures, social struggles, etc. He then ends his text by mentioning that all the artists question and apprehend, sometimes in a provocative way, sometimes in a moving way, the reality of the world:

Ces artistes, malgré leur difficulté initiale à gagner une certaine visibilité sur la scène artistique française, participent de sa revitalisation, au redéploiement des interrogations dans la remise en cause, parfois provocante ou émouvante, mais généreuse des modes de penser et d'agir afin d'appréhender la réalité du monde.⁹⁹⁷

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the article of Laurent Bossé is in some aspects quite similar to the foreword that was written by Suzanne Pagé. In some cases, the information is almost literally the same, even in word choice, for instance when both articles talk about the out-dated view of Paris as the centre of the art world. What is interesting in Bossé's article is that he mentions the word "confrontation". However, it is then not further elaborated upon within the text, which makes it difficult to fully understand what the author meant by it.

The following essay is written by the two curators of the survey, Hou Hanru and his wife Evelyne Jouanno. The essay is four pages long and is titled *Ils résident en mouvement*. The text starts out by stating that migration and migratory movements have become part of our global world and that immigrants are no longer strangers but that they have become a common phenomenon in the (big) cities. The text then mentions that Paris has become a home ("maison") for a lot of new Parisians but that it is also a stopover, as the city has become a home for its residents on the move. These immigrants have brought new influences to the art scene, and artworks are now a result of local as well as international ways of thinking and negotiation. Immigrant artists are essential to big cities such as Paris and these artists are usually the more innovative artists, forming platforms for culture and art. According to the authors, this has saved the arts of a collapse and has made it revive:

⁹⁹⁶ Laurence Bossé, *Paris pour Escalé* exhibition catalogue, p. 9.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

L'oeuvre d'art est ainsi devenue le résultat de négociations entre les conditions locales et les différents courants internationaux de pensée, d'imagination et d'action. De plus, l'intensité de ces négociations a orienté l'art vers de nouvelles défis visant à surmonter l'effondrement de ses limites établies, tant esthétique que géopolitiques. Finalement, c'est par ce processus que l'art peut aujourd'hui redécouvrir la vitalité qui lui est nécessaire.⁹⁹⁸

The authors then mention that late-Capitalism (which is called “capitalisme global” within the French text of the exhibition catalogue) is seen as a power that represses intellectual liberties and the imagination. According to the writers of the essay, it is one of the tasks of the cultural and artistic circles to combat these forces. Then it is mentioned that by introducing elements of the non-Euroamerican culture of the Other, a very effective strategy is created in order to try to counterforce late-capitalism.

[...] partant du fait que l'idéologie du capitalisme global est née de la modernité eurocentrique, l'une des stratégies les plus efficaces permettant de la perturber, voire de la renverser, est sans doute d'y introduire des éléments de cultures “Autres”, autrement dit non-occidentales, et plus précisément leur différentes expériences et traductions de la modernité.⁹⁹⁹

This fragment is quite characteristic of Hou Hanru's thought and the unceasing effort he makes to introduce an alternative perspective into the international art world.¹⁰⁰⁰ Here, together with Evelyne Jouanno, once again he tries to point to the need for an alternative model to be employed in the global art world. This not only in order to combat the homogenizing power of globalisation but also to make it easier for non-“western” artistic expressions to be understood in the “West” and to be correctly interpreted. The fact that non-“western” artists such as the experimental Chinese artists that are being studied in this dissertation are gaining attention in the international art scene, also brings new elements of other non-Euroamerican cultures into a, up until recently, Euroamerican dominated art market. This is positive and adds new perspectives to the art world. However, it should also be said that the time has not yet come that these non-Euroamerican artists are seen as fully equal. The theoretic part of this thesis,¹⁰⁰¹ as well as in some of the analysis of the exhibitions done in Block II of this dissertation, has made it clear that concepts of exoticism and “othering” have not completely been eradicated from the Euroamerican (international) art scene. The authors make this clear when they mention that “nous devons accepter que les divers points de vue issus de différentes

⁹⁹⁸ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

⁹⁹⁹ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰⁰ As could also be seen in his exhibition *Out of the Centre* held six years before, which was analyzed in chapter 4 of Block II, *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) analysed in chapter 7 of Block II, and his catalogue essays in the exhibitions *Silent Energy* held in 1993 (see chapter 2 of Block II) and *Heart of Darkness* in 1995 (See chapter 5 of Block II).

¹⁰⁰¹ See chapter 3 of Block I.

cultures soient considérés à valeur égale et coexistent.”¹⁰⁰² The grammatical tense “soient” which is the subjunctive in French, indicates the fact that this is not yet present tense, that it has not yet become reality.

Later on in the essay, the authors mention that immigrants within the city play an important role and that their influence is essential to the city culture. They also then mention that “Elles n’ont plus rien d’exotique. Au contraire, elles sont devenues une condition élémentaire pour le mode de vie et de pensée de chacun habitant de la ville.”¹⁰⁰³ The fact that the authors state that they are not at all exotic and should not be considered as such seems to point to the fact that in the year 2000, the year in which *Paris pour Escale* was held, non-Euroamerican artists were still perceived this way. A phenomenon that has been often detected within the exhibition reviews analysed in previous chapters. In this sense, Paris has become another type of stopover: a city that is in transition from seeing foreign artists and immigrants in general as exotic individuals but that is converting itself into a city that accepts the Other as equal and as an essential element of renewal and inspiration for a new contemporary urban identity.

The authors emphasize the fact that to truly obtain a global society it is absolutely necessary to incorporate other cultures and to leave eurocentrism behind. One of the ways to do so is by incorporating the Other in a different way that is no longer ruled by exoticism. The authors then mention the exhibition of *Magiciens de la Terre* that was held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou, and write that this was the first attempt of showing a more open attitude towards the Other. Although the exhibition has been heavily criticized posteriorly for different reasons, especially for portraying the non-Euroamerican artists in a rather exotic way, according to the two authors of this essay, the fact that this exposition was realised was a sign that the “West” was becoming conscious of their eurocentric attitude and that it was time for a change. According to the authors this whole process of becoming conscious has led to a creation of new cultural centres: “Cette prise de conscience a non seulement conduit au changement des méthodologies curatoriales mais aussi à l’émergence de nouveaux pôles culturels sur la carte du monde.”¹⁰⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰² Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibidem.

Although the essay speaks of the creation of a new centre and a different attitude towards the centre-periphery system, this statement could be questioned. In quite a few reviews about various exhibitions that have been analysed in this dissertation it has become clear that the centre-periphery system is often still valid and that a difference exists between peripheral countries, such as for example Finland, and “centre countries” such as the United States. One of the main topics of the exhibition *Out of the Centre* that was held in Pori, Finland, dealt with exactly this issue. Although the exhibition was held in 1994, approximately six years prior to *Paris pour Escale*, it might seem quite a bold statement to make when saying new cultural poles have emerged. This is in some cases quite true, as is the case with Chinese experimental art, but this might be due to the fact that Chinese (experimental) art within the international art market has become enormously successful and lucrative. Other non-Euroamerican art such as African or Latin-American art might not have such an influence within the “global” art scene.

The authors then continue by saying: “Ces différentes initiatives ont ainsi permis d’encourager une compréhension véritablement multiculturelle de la création artistique contemporaine.”¹⁰⁰⁵ For the same reasons as mentioned before, again, this seems quite a bold statement to make.

According to the authors, many of the exhibitions that were organized in the 1990s could be seen as acts of redemption or self-satisfaction, which goals were to maintain the binary opposition between “we” and “them”:

Pourtant, le ‘multiculturalisme’ tel qu’il a été pratiqué et interprété par les institutions occidentales dans les années quatre-vingt-dix, s’est souvent manifesté comme un réponse à la pression exercée par le monde postcolonial et le marché mondial, pour, d’une certaine façon, connaître les histoires des migrations de la modernité, depuis les centres du pouvoir vers leurs périphéries. Beaucoup de ces expositions se sont donc traduites comme des exercices de ‘rédemption’ ou d’‘autosatisfaction’ destinés à maintenir les vieilles oppositions binaires occidentales du ‘nous’ et des ‘autres’ et les structures qui les soutiennent.¹⁰⁰⁶

More than half of the exhibitions that are analysed in this dissertation were organized in the 1990s. *Paris pour Escale* is the first exhibition to be analysed up until this point that was held in the year 2000. The fact that the authors speak about these exhibitions of the 90s in these terms shines a new light on these exhibitions and adds valuable information to this analysis. In a certain way, it explains why some of the exhibition reviews or even

¹⁰⁰⁵ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibidem.

the curators of the surveys were sometimes quite “west”-centric and portrayed Chinese experimental art as the Other or as an exotic object by placing it into a political framework. Maybe the years of the 1990s were simply too early for Euroamerica to appreciate non-Euroamerican art as it was still caught up in the post-colonial period and felt *obliged* to demonstrate a certain interest towards “foreign” cultures and nations. As a consequence, this obligation resulted in seeing the non-Euroamerican arts as the “Other” or the “victim” and not as equals. In a certain way, this post-colonial influence of which the authors speak within their essay could be clearly distinguished in the exhibition *Heart of Darkness*, curated by Marianne Brouwer in the Netherlands in 1995 that was analysed in chapter five. The exhibition dealt with the colonial past of the European countries and shed a light on the negative, dark aspects of this period. However, in no way did the exhibition portray the participating artists as “Other” or exotic. Other exhibitions of a larger scale such as the *Inside Out* exhibition (1998-1999) analysed in chapter eight, and *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) analysed in chapter seven, were exhibition held in the late 1990s but they had already lost their “post-colonial” influence and dealt more with the globalisation of the international art world (or the “modernization” of Asian cities) and the influence that non-Euroamerican artists played in this process.

The authors then mention that, in that time, the interpretation of the art of the Other was eurocentric. This as a consequence caused a lot of misunderstandings, which is a fact that has become clear in quite a few of the reviews analysed within this dissertation as well as in some of the exhibition catalogue essays.

The authors then state that the avant-garde artists who were conscious of this eurocentric viewpoint in the world of the arts were the ones who changed the binary system:

Conscients de l'eurocentrisme dominant dans l'art et la culture, conscients également des mutations géopolitiques et géoculturelles du monde contemporain, leur défi commun consistera à élaborer des stratégies permettant de restituer leur travaux dans ce nouveau contexte 'international', en se démarquant d'une part de la logique occidentale de l'avant-garde mais en évitant aussi d'être classifiés dans la catégorie d'un style 'exotique'. Leur vision offre ainsi un véritable contre-point nécessaire face aux clichés, nous montrant simplement qu'il n'y a pas de retour en arrière possible (...). Bien entendu, cette démarche va caractériser davantage les artistes qui vont venir s'installer à cette période en Occident.¹⁰⁰⁷

As can be clearly seen in this fragment, the non-“western” artists that have moved to the “West” are seen as one of the solutions to finding a new world model that goes beyond

¹⁰⁰⁷ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

the “East-West” dichotomy. Hou Hanru already addressed this point in 1994 in his exhibition *Out of the Centre*. In a certain way, this quote can be related to the third space, widely addressed in the *Inside Out* exhibition of 1998-1999 that was curated by Gao Minglu and in which Hou Hanru collaborated within the exhibition catalogue. Even though the above-mentioned fragment does not mention the third space concept, it does speak of an alternative model (“nouveau contexte international”) which could be the alternative space to the “East-West” separation, that goes beyond the dominant eurocentrism of which the Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno speak. The authors then elaborate further on their statement and write that foreign artists often resort to self-mocking or refer to their experience as immigrant artists in a, for them, “strange” environment within their artistic creations. This on its turn makes their art an alternative and actively contributes to the change of society and the art world. To use the words of the authors: “Cette position leur permet de développer de nouvelles compréhensions de l’identité mais aussi de nouvelles stratégies fondées sur la revendication de moyens d’existence à la fois plus ouverts et flexibles.”¹⁰⁰⁸

The authors then mention that the work of the immigrant artists goes beyond “western” thinking and that it mixes elements of different (cultural) backgrounds. This makes their oeuvre highly complex as their artistic language is hybrid and cannot be pinned to any particular space or time. This is essential, as it is one of the main reasons why this art is often misjudged by audiences as well as art critics. In most cases, it is not taken into consideration that the artists are émigrés living in the “West”. For example, as has become clear in the theoretic part,¹⁰⁰⁹ the Chinese overseas artists are often not mentioned as such and they are seen as “Chinese”, or what the Euroamerican image or expectation is of Chinese.

The essay ends by stating that it is often the administrative and legislative system that does not collaborate in the creation of a truly multicultural society:

le plus important est l’établissement d’un véritable multiculturalisme dans la société parisienne malgré le refus permanent de cette réalité par les machines administrative et législative officielles. (...) Pourtant, au niveau institutionnel, il existe encore une ignorance considérable de cette tendance.¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁸ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

¹⁰¹⁰ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 14-15.

This might not only be true for the city of Paris, but for the whole Euroamerican society in general. It is often the case that non-Euroamerican art is labelled as Other out of fear. It seems as if Euroamerican society is not prepared to accept the Other as an equal and that there is still a tendency to cling to “western” superiority.¹⁰¹¹

The following essay is written by Gilane Tawadros and is titled *Paris transformé*. The author herself is a curator, a writer, and founding director of InIVA; the Institute of International Visual Arts. She is also an expert on contemporary art and has written many books on the topic.

In her article that was translated from English into French, Gilane Tawadros comments on an exhibition that was curated by Hou Hanru for the InIVA institute. The exhibition was held in London and was titled *Parisien(ne)s*. For the show, Hou Hanru asked nine artists who were living in Paris but who were not born in Paris to participate. The goal of the exposition was not to choose the artists based on race and nationality but to show how the artists thought about the boundaries of racial and national identity. The author then writes about the first immigrant artists to arrive in the United Kingdom and how this new internationalism developed in the UK. She then comes back to France and comments on how Paris and France have reacted to the newcomers and its change into a multicultural society.

In her text, Gilane Tawadros also explains how difficult it was to find sponsors for the InIVA exhibition *Parisien(ne)s* and how this ended in failure. A reason for this failure, according to the author, was the fact that the exhibition questioned the French identity, and in particular what it meant to be a citizen of Paris. It seemed that the official institutions were not eager to accept the fact that the French identity was bound to change due to the income of new non-French cultures into the country. This affirms what had been previously said by Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno in their essay in which they mentioned that it is sometimes difficult to find funding from official entities when it comes to exhibiting and giving a voice to non-French cultures.

Tawadros then compares the situation to the United Kingdom and explains how the UK deals with this same topic. She explains that the United Kingdom is also quite clung to its national identity however that they deal with the issue in a more subtle way than the

¹⁰¹¹ See paragraph 1.2 and 1.3 of the theoretic part (Block I).

French. Towards the end of the page, the author mentions how these new influxes of immigrants in various European countries have provoked the rise in fundamentalist, nationalist parties and how some countries have become more reluctant towards immigrants.

All in all, there are very little references to the exhibition of *Paris pour Escalé* in the article, apart from a very brief explanation of the title at the beginning of the essay. The main message that the author wants to transmit is that the French identity, just as the English identity, is being questioned in our present times of globalization and immigration. The author also mentions quite a lot about the exhibition *Parisien(ne)s* that was held in London in 1997 but the main focus of her essay does not seem to be on the exhibition of *Paris pour Escalé*.

The last article written for the exhibition catalogue is written by Michel Wieviorka and is titled *Paradoxes des identités*. The author of the essay was born in Paris and is a well-known French sociologist (in France and abroad) who specializes in topics such as terrorism, racism and social change, among other themes.

The author gives his sociological point of view on the question of identity in France and mentions that the immigrant artists who come to France find themselves dealing with a strong national French identity. He then explains how, historically, this strong identity has been created. Then he mentions that in the 1990s, the attitude towards the immigrants has become xenophobic and how they were classified as working class, living in the French *banlieus*. He then also mentions, as has Gilane Tawadros, how this xenophobic attitude has led to a rise in right-wing nationalistic political parties in the whole of Europe.

Towards the end of the article, the author mentions that cultural difference was seen as a menace or as an exotic phenomenon, and that it should be limited to the private space of the home. Any public showing of cultural difference was seen as suspicious and generated feelings of hatred and contempt. However nowadays, public references to cultural differences are more accepted, and it is the immigrant artists who are contributing to this process of increasing freedom. He also mentions that in our present times, one's identity is more and more based on personal choices and how a person currently can construct his or her own identity. An individual is no longer born a certain identity but can choose how he or she wants to define oneself. In the case of the immigrant artists, the

author mentions that they can adapt to different attitudes: try to assimilate the French identity, or adopt a hybrid identity and contribute to turn Paris into a space of renewed confrontations (“confrontations renouvelées”).¹⁰¹²

It is obvious that the text has been written from a sociological point of view and that almost the entire essay is about sociological topics; this of course due to the fact that the author is a renowned sociologist. However, the essay hardly talks about the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition nor does it make references to the participating artists. It is as if the article was meant to give (historical) background information about immigration and the sociological confrontations or issues this sometimes causes in European countries.

All in all, all three essays seem to have quite a critical point of view on the way public entities support, or in this case, do not support, influences from outside that are slowly changing the national identity and the culture of the nation-state. It is significant that these topics are raised within an exhibition that was held in an important venue as is the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. On the other hand, the fact that the exhibition did not get a lot of attention media-wise does make a statement on how the exhibition was received in the city of Paris.¹⁰¹³

Following the essays, the exhibition catalogue continues by dedicating one-page texts to all the participating artists. In this section only the text written by the participating Chinese artists will be highlighted. As mentioned before, the artworks that were on display at *Paris pour Escale* were not all especially made for the occasion but had been, in some cases, previously displayed in other venues. It should also be taken into account that five Chinese experimental artists participated in a show that exhibited the works of twenty-seven foreign artists in total. Therefore, they were only a small part of a bigger whole.

Chen Zhen

The first text is by Chen Zhen who moved to Paris in 1986 and who passed away in the same city in 2000 when *Paris pour Escale* was being exhibited at the MAM. In the text, he speaks of the experience of being an immigrant and how challenging it sometimes is to try to integrate into a new environment, but at the same time to keep a critical distance to it

¹⁰¹² Michel Wieviorka, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 23.

¹⁰¹³ See paragraph 9.3 of this chapter.

and to maintain the cultural ties with the homeland. In the text, he poses the question: “comment sortir de ce simple processus d’intégration pour pouvoir s’inspirer des autres cultures sans s’enfermer dans un ‘Chinatown’?”¹⁰¹⁴ Here, Chen Zhen speaks about the danger of the immigrant to end up enclosed in a ghetto or diaspora culture. However, it does not become clear if he considers the immigrants, or himself for that matter, as part of the diaspora. What he does confirm is that Paris is indeed, for him, a stopover on his many trips around the world.

He then continues by commenting on the work that he displayed at the survey that was titled *Quand les villes dialoguent avec Le paysage intérieur du corps* (2000) (Fig. 46) and that was made for the artist’s exhibition at the Civica d’Art Moderna e Contemporanea in Turin in 2000. The work reflects on the emotions that three world cities had on the artist: Shanghai, Johannesburg and Salvador de Bahía.

As has been mentioned before, the artist passed away after a long period of being ill while the exhibition of *Paris pour Escale* was still on. When Chen Zhen was twenty-five years old he was diagnosed with haemolytic anaemia and this disease then became a strong influence within his work. His creations are often inspired by or related to the human body or organs, sometimes connecting the human body to nature. In some of his other works, he points to the differences between Chinese medicinal practices and “western” medicine. In the case of *Quand les villes dialoguent avec le paysage intérieur du corps* (2000) (Fig. 46), the human body is related to urban cities that have impacted the artist in some way. In this case, the cities that he used for this creation were Shanghai, Johannesburg and Salvador de Bahía. For the work, he combined a previous work, *Paysage intérieur du corps (Inner Body Landscape)* (2000) (Fig. 46) with four projections of slides and a CD Rom, this way reconstructing the urban scene of these cities. *Paysage intérieur du corps* (2000) (Fig. 46) consists of five metallic structures that sustain sculptures made out of candles in different colours (yellow, black, white, red, and purple). According to the artist “cette pièce fragile et flottante, bâtie avec des bougies, démontre une synergie entre la vulnérabilité de notre corps et la sensibilité de notre esprit.”¹⁰¹⁵

Candles often represent a spiritual element in a religious context as it provides light (symbolic for knowledge and hope) within the darkness. Using candles as a material for

¹⁰¹⁴ Chen Zhen, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibidem.

this installation adds an aspect of fragility that could also be seen as a metaphor of the fragility of the human body and the value of human life, of which Chen Zhen, considering his diagnosis, was well aware of. It also converts the human body from something purely physical of flesh and blood into a more spiritual being: the light of a candle, fragile and ephemeral, at a certain moment shall go out, like the life of a human being will at a certain point in time end as well.

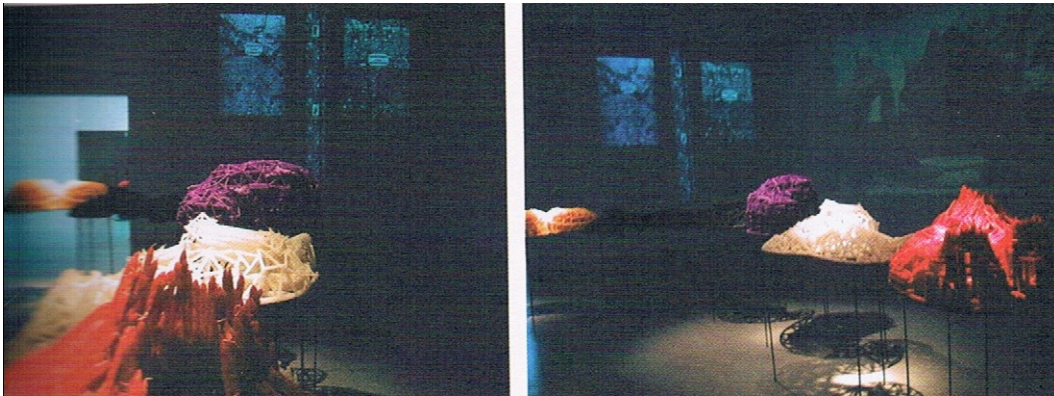


Figure 46: Chen Zhen, *Paysage intérieur du corps (Inner Body Landscape)*, 2000

About the work, the artist then also mentions in the catalogue: “C’est une pièce base sur l’idée que les organes humains, dans la médecine chinoise, se constituent sous forme de un ‘paysage inséparable’ de l’univers”.¹⁰¹⁶

As can be read here the artist mentions the organs as a part of the universe, which is a Chinese way of perceiving the body as a whole, interconnected with everything. This is a completely different perception than “western” medical methods that see the body as an autonomous entity, independent from the outer world or the universe. This thought can then been transposed to Chen Zhen’s interest in the intercultural dialogue between “East” and “West” and how these two halves interact with and differ from each other. Chinese traditional and “western” modern medicine has been one of the ways for the artist to compare the two. In this particular work, by combining these fragile candle structures with slides of urban city landscapes, the contrast is remarkable. However, by connecting the human body with the urban cities from the slides, Chen Zhen then pays tribute to Chinese medicine by connecting the human body with the space that surrounds it. The artist then asks the question: “Cette confrontation et ce dialogue entre les réalités du monde (trois

¹⁰¹⁶ Chen Zhen, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

villes) et la vie illusoire de notre corps, provoquent-ils une tension, une liaison ou une distance dans notre vision du monde? ”¹⁰¹⁷

Quand les villes dialoguent avec le paysage intérieur du corps (2000) (Fig. 46) and the questions that the artist generates through this installation might be aimed at comparing “western” medicine and “eastern” medicine, and also how both cultures perceive the human body in relation to exterior elements. In Chinese traditional medicine, the body is connected to the exterior and a relation is created, however from a “western” medical point of view, the body and the outer landscape are completely separated elements and no relation is established between the two.

Huang Yongping

The next text from the catalogue is written by Huang Yongping in Chinese and was translated by Hou Hanru. The article seems rather mysterious and vague as the artist quotes various historical events, the first one dating from 219 b.C. reaching up to the year 2000. Here he mentions that he received a sign from the Yi Qing for the exhibition of *Paris pour Escale*. He then ends the text by mentioning that:

Cette chronologie est un collage de différentes citations, un collage de mémoire. Ces notes n’ont pas pour objectif d’expliquer mon projet pour cette exposition mais résultent du processus de réflexion sur celle-ci. Les notes m’évoquent l’idée de “flottement”. L’escale est un lieu, ‘flotter’ es un état.

‘Flotter’ transforme tous les lieux de la vie en ‘escale’.¹⁰¹⁸

The text is half a page long and does not mention anything about Huang Yongping’s experience as a foreigner in Paris, nor does it mention anything about the work that he presented at the survey rather than the fact that it was a result of the Yi Qing. It should be explained here that this artist often consults the Yi Qing in order to create his works. The goal is to make the artwork as objective as possible, minimizing the influence of the artist by creating artworks according to chance. This in fact might also be characteristic for Huang Yongping. As he wants to minimize the influence of the artist within the creation process, it is therefore no longer important what the artist wants to express with his artworks and therefore, an explanation of the work seen from the point of view of the artist is no longer relevant.

¹⁰¹⁷ Chen Zhen, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 47.

¹⁰¹⁸ Huang Yongping, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 67

The fact that Huang Yongping describes the word “escale” as a way of “floating” is interesting and confirms what has been said in the exhibition catalogue since the beginning: that most artists continue travelling and that very few consider Paris as their permanent home. Most of them continue “floating” and never settle down anywhere. They are constantly in the in-between.

Another detail worth highlighting is that the text was written in Chinese and was translated by the curator Hou Hanru. Huang Yongping moved to France in 1989 and had been living there for over eleven years when *Paris pour Escale* was exhibited. The fact that the artist preferred to express himself in his mother tongue and not the adopted tongue is significant and points to the fact that émigrés often hold on to their cultural or linguistic background and that many years of living outside of the homeland is not always capable of altering this strong bond.

Shen Yuan

Shen Yuan, the wife of Huang Yongping, wrote the next brief text. In this text she explains how it was for her to leave China behind and start a new life in France. She however does write the text in French, as she often titles her works in French as well. In this sense, she differs from her husband. Also, her text is very clear and does not have the enigmatic character of the text written previously by her husband. Here, Shen Yuan writes about the first impressions she experienced upon arrival in Paris:

ma langue maternelle devient inutile. Cette langue n'est plus que du bruit. Mon cerveau rentre lui aussi dans un état d'éponge. Impression d'avoir une bouche mais ne sais pas comment l'ouvrir; et oreilles, mais elles n'entendent plus rien. (...) La première réflexion: comment recommencer sa vie, à 31 ans?¹⁰¹⁹

In this text, there is an emphasis on the linguistic difficulties that this artist was confronted with while moving to France. And it could be stated that language is a recurrent topic within Shen Yuan's work (very illustrative is her installation *Perdre sa Salive* (1994)(Fig. 3)).¹⁰²⁰ Shen Yuan is an artist who often reflects on the cultural difficulties or barriers that one encounters when moving to a foreign environment. This makes her a good example

¹⁰¹⁹ Shen Yuan, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 87.

¹⁰²⁰ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

of an artist who is able to critically look towards the homeland as well as the new adopted land, and who is capable of expressing the observation within her artwork.¹⁰²¹

Shen Yuan's *Un matin du monde* (1999) (Fig. 47) was presented for the first time at the Galerie Eric Dupont in Paris in 1999 and was then presented at different other venues, among which the *Paris pour Escalé* exhibition. In this work, the artist has recreated an entire traditional Chinese house rooftop. On the roof, duck and spices are laid out to "dry" and sounds of everyday life can be heard.



Figure 47: Shen Yuan, *Un matin du monde*, 1999

As commented before, in the exhibition catalogue, Shen Yuan writes about the big changes a sixteen-hour flight from China to France implies and the difficulties she had with the new language. It seems that she was rather nostalgic towards China, especially at first when she had to adjust to the new circumstances. Reproducing an entire Chinese style roof might point to this "home sickness" that she might have felt and her yearning for her home back in China where everything, including smells and sounds, was recognizable and familiar. Of course, the mere action of placing a "foreign" element, in this case a Chinese rooftop, inside a French museum, also addresses topics such as displacement and migration.

¹⁰²¹ The installation consists of tongues made out of ice that are clung to pillars. As the ice slowly melts, it becomes clear that the structure that holds the ice in place are knives. This work has been explained in paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

Wang Du

The next text, half a page long, is written by Wang Du, another artist who also lives in Paris. The artist describes himself as a “journaliste des journalistes”. This is a good description of this artist who specializes in three dimensional painted objects (sculptures) from real images found in the media such as newspapers and magazines, which are then blown up in full detail to huge proportions. In a way, he trivializes the media images that one sees everyday and questions their credibility. By blowing the images up to massive proportions, they become almost ridiculous, and taken out of their context, they become incomprehensible and sometimes even threatening (Fig. 48). What the artists wants to generate through these works is our questioning of images generated by the media and the way we have become accustomed to them. In our current society, images and information are all around us, twenty-four hours a day, and we are invaded by them, often unconsciously.



Figure 48: Wang Du, *Entrer*, 2004 (height 260 cm)

In his writing, the artist comments on the role of the media and how it is almost always dependent on and controlled by collectives or groups. Finding a way to make the media completely independent and global is one of Wang Du's main aims. He also mentions that the power of the media is stronger than military power as behind the emitted information, there is always a political interest. In the work that he presented at *Paris pour Escale*, he portrayed the media as a military force and makes it clear that it is difficult to trace the line between reality and media.

The work that was presented at *Paris pour Escale* titled *Promener mon Chien* (2000) (Fig. 49), consists of the artist walking around the museum, dressed in a military suit, with the head of an electric dog which barks all kinds of information. About the work, the artist mentions in the exhibition catalogue:

Pour ce projet, j'ai donc choisi d'endosser une tenue militaire et de me promener avec une tête de chien téléguidée qui aboiera toutes sortes d'informations dans les salles d'exposition du musée. Le modèle de la guerre moderne, présentée comme un jeu électronique (Guerre du Golfe, du Kosovo, etc.) rappelle aux nations que seule la possession d'une grande puissance militaire permet aujourd'hui d'acquérir ou de protéger ses pouvoirs et ses intérêts. Selon moi, le pouvoir des medias est pourtant plus important et efficace que celui des militaires; derrière les informations émises se cachent toujours des intentions fortement politiques. Ici, mon objectif est double: masque ou effacer d'abord ma propre identité, et surtout designer les medias comme une force militaire qui intervient partout. Cette force et son pouvoir d'intervention sont tels qu'aujourd'hui, il est difficile de situer la frontière entre réalité et medias.¹⁰²²



Figure 49: Wang Du, *Promener Mon Chien*, 2000

¹⁰²² Wang Du, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 107.

The fact that the head of the dog is barking all types of information into the museum halls might be a metaphor for all the information that is being emitted (or barked) by the television, the magazines, the newspapers, twitter, etc. that one receives on a daily basis. Information has become power and therefore, the media has obtained a lot of control within society. The artist mentions clearly in his text that this is almost like a military power, capable of conquering other nations and territories. Wang Du refers to this by putting on a military suit himself when he walks with the dog. Promenading in a military suit with a head of a dog, ridicules the situation and it might even seem funny, however the message he tries to transmit is for one to question the information received on a daily basis and to also question who is really behind this information.

Yang Jiechang

The last text that shall be commented on in this chapter is the one written by Yang Jiechang. The artist moved to Paris in 1988 but currently lives between France and Germany. The text is very short and mainly comments on the work that he presented at the exhibition titled *Eye of the Storm* (2000) (Fig. 50). The text is quite cryptic and mentions that the eye of the storm is in fact a place of “silence fantomatique”.¹⁰²³ He then mentions that the work “est une récréation: une peinture de style chinois refaite selon la tradition trouve sa place au milieu d’éléments naturels ou artificiels. Dissocié de ses origines et étranger à son contexte habituel, *The Eye of the Storm* apparaît comme le mirage d’une impossible beauté.”¹⁰²⁴

What should be highlighted is that the artist has chosen to title the work in English and not in French. It is also interesting that he mentions in this short fragment that the work is a recreation of a Chinese style painting made according to the traditional way. As seen in the theoretic part of this dissertation, in some cases, the Chinese experimental artists integrate Chinese elements into their contemporary work, making it hybrid.¹⁰²⁵

Yang Jiechang’s work titled *Eye of the Storm* (2000) (Fig. 50) consisted of a painting in traditional Chinese style combined with an installation of tree trunks, foam rubber and

¹⁰²³ Yang Jiechang, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 111.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰²⁵ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

artificial grass.¹⁰²⁶ This work that was presented at *Paris pour Escale* is characteristic for Yang Jiechang's work as it combines traditional Chinese artistic elements with contemporary art. About the work, the artist mentions in the catalogue:

The Eye of the Storm (L'oeil de la Tempête) est un lieu de silence fantomatique. Autour d'un centre immobile tournoient des objets et des éléments disparates, qui se mêlent, se mélangent pour se fixer en une mise en scène éphémère, au moment où la tempête change de direction. (...) *The Eye of the Storm* apparaît comme le mirage d'une impossible beauté.¹⁰²⁷

It does not become clear by reading these words what the exact meaning is of the work. It could be an indication of the feelings that an émigré has when moving to a completely different environment: a feeling of being inside of a storm in which things are constantly changing (flying around) and are hard to grasp. Or maybe the artist is pointing to the fact that immigrating to another country with a different culture, language, etc., stirs up emotions, values, thoughts and impressions, as it were a kind of internal storm.



Figure 50: Yang Jiechang, *Eye of the Storm*, 2000

Martina Köppel Yang, the wife of Yang Jiechang, has written a text about his work for Yang Jiechang's solo exhibition at the Hong Kong University that was held in 2001. The text comments on his whole oeuvre, and might provide some insight into *Eye of the Storm* (2000) (Fig. 50). In the text, the author mentions:

¹⁰²⁶ The work was put up for sale in 2008 by Sotheby's New York however failed to sell. The website mentions: "the auction totaled \$8.513,288 but less than two-thirds of the offered lots sold. The auction house noted that 'this was the final dedicated Contemporary Art Asia sale to be held in New York – all future sales will be held in Hong Kong, as previously announced'." Could this indicate that buyers and investors of Chinese experimental art are slowly shifting to the "Asian" countries? See: Michele Leight, <http://www.thecityreview.com/f08sas1.html>, n.d., date of last consultation: 5/8/2014.

¹⁰²⁷ Yang Jiechang, *Paris pour Escale* exhibition catalogue, p. 111.

In 2000 then, he showed (...) a painting done in the meticulous technique of traditional gongbi painting, which is part of his installation 'Eye of the Storm', in the exhibition 'Paris pour escale' in the Museum for Contemporary Art of the City of Paris (ARC). Painting here again is beyond visual effects, is beyond representation. Painting here is a proposition, to go beyond fixed categories and notions of identity and an invitation to consider art and life a creative force open to multiple transformations.¹⁰²⁸

According to Martina Köppel Yang, Yang Jiechang is influenced by various elements. First of all, he was educated as a Red Guard in the traditional styles of Chinese painting, such as the gongbi style that he used for *Eye of the Storm* (2000) (Fig. 50). Later on in life, he went to study with a Daoist master for two years and this also hugely influenced his works. One of his aims is to deconstruct the ego and to achieve the sublimation of the Self. In the article, Martina Köppel Yang mentions:

Painting for him [Yang Jiechang], rather is a way of contemplation, not a means of representation (...) The artist looks for experiences that make the viewer feel insecure and tries to push the perception or the experience of his work to a point where the individual life and the life as *natura naturans*, as well as mind and body get close to each other.¹⁰²⁹

Eye of the Storm (2000) (Fig. 50) can therefore be interpreted as an installation that should be contemplated and not as a representation of, for example, nature. It could be seen as a meditative creation.

All in all, it should be emphasized that the explanations on the works that were on display given by the exhibition catalogue were quite minimal. This seems to be a recurrent phenomenon within the exhibition catalogues analysed in this study. On the other hand, it should also be stated that most of the works that were presented by the Chinese experimental artists were representative of their experience of living abroad and the cultural barriers that they encountered that sometimes shocked them or sometimes just had to be overcome.

¹⁰²⁸ For the full text see: Martina Köppel Yang, http://yangjiechang.com/data/pub_paintingbeyondthevisual.xml. April 26 2001. Date of last consultation: 6/4/2014.

¹⁰²⁹ *Ibidem*.

9.3 The exhibition reviews

Not much has been said in art magazines and newspapers about the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition. As far as the author of this dissertation is aware, only three reviews have been written about the survey. This is significant as the exhibition was not a small one, considering the fact that twenty-seven international artists participated in the show, and that the exposition was held in Paris. It is also notable that the art magazine *Artpress*, one of the leading art journals in France about contemporary art, did not write any article about *Paris pour Escale*. The French newspaper *Le Monde* did mention the exhibition in its cultural agenda, however did not comment further on it. There appears to be a review by *Le Monde* about the exhibition however this article has not been able to be traced by the author of this dissertation.

The art professor and expert on Chinese experimental art Dr. John Clark has written an article titled *Chinese artist in France*¹⁰³⁰ in which he mentions the exhibition *Paris pour Escale* and quotes from three reviews that were written about the survey at the time. This has been of great help in order to find out about the existence of some of the reviews. Unfortunately, as Dr. Clark has written by e-mail, he has not kept these reviews in his archive.

The website of the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris does have an archive that can be consulted online, unfortunately the earliest exhibition that can be consulted is dated 2008. *Paris pour Escale* that was held in 2000-2001 has not yet been digitalized.¹⁰³¹ It is also important to mention that while browsing the various articles that were published about the works that were displayed by the participating Chinese artists, in some cases the exhibition of *Paris pour Escale* was not mentioned as the exhibition venue for these works, and in some cases the exhibition was not mentioned in the curriculums of the artists. Why the information has been omitted is not explained.

¹⁰³⁰ John Clark, *Chinese Artists in France*, *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds. G. Mosquera & J. Fisher, 210-233, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004.

¹⁰³¹ The author of this thesis has contacted the museum to ask for further references or reviews that might have been kept in the archives however, no answer was received from the institution up to date.

The articles that have been located and will be analysed in this present paragraph are (in chronological order):

- Elisabeth Lebovici, *La dernière escale de Chen Zhen*, Libération, 15 December 2000¹⁰³²
- Marek Bartelik, *Paris Stopover*, Artforum International, Vol. 39, Issue 9, May 2001¹⁰³³
- Alice Planel, *Shifting narratives: Artists of the Algerian diaspora and institutional politics in contemporary France*, inter-disciplinary.net, May 2013¹⁰³⁴

The fact that the exhibition had little impact on the art scene in Paris and France in general should be emphasized. As have written Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno, as well as Gilene Tawadros in the exhibition catalogue, public (art) institutions pay little attention to the art of the immigrants that questions or changes the current status quo of the national identity or nation state culture. The fact that not much has been written about *Paris pour Escale*, in a way, confirms this suspicion.

It is true that French culture has the image of being homogenizing and that it is sometimes said that it prefers to eradicate minority cultures or the culture of the Other, and absorb these cultures into the all-compassing French culture. As later will become clear in Alice Planel's essay, the French culture does not pay much attention to the projection of cultural differences within the nation but rather prefers to portray one unified French culture.

9.3.1 Elisabeth Lebovici, *La dernière escale de Chen Zhen*

The first article that shall be analysed is titled *La dernière escale de Chen Zhen* and was published in the French newspaper *Libération*.¹⁰³⁵ The author of the article, Elisabeth Lebovici is a regular writer for *Libération*, and an art historian and critic. She often writes

¹⁰³² For the full article see: http://www.liberation.fr/culture/2000/12/15/la-derniere-escale-de-chen-zhen_347824. 15 December 2000. Date of last consultation: 4/8/2014.

¹⁰³³ For the full article, see: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22PARIS+STOPOVER%22.-a075914308>. May 2001. Date of last consultation: 31/3/2014.

¹⁰³⁴ For the full article see: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/planeldiaspaper.pdf>, May 2013. Date of last consultation 7/4/2014.

¹⁰³⁵ Elisabeth Lebovici, *La dernière escale de Chen Zhen*, Libération, 15 December 2000.

about immigrant artists and also figures in the article by Alice Planel about the Algerian artists in Paris that shall be mentioned later on.

The article is not a review of the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition but is more of an article in remembrance of the passing of the participating artist Chen Zhen while the exhibition was still being held at the MAM. It hardly makes any reference to the survey but mainly comments on some of the artist's works and his life. Some quotes that are stated in the text come from the exhibition catalogue of *Paris pour Escale*, like the question that Chen Zhen poses in the catalogue about how to integrate oneself into society without locking oneself up in a Chinatown. The article does not provide any information about the exhibition itself.

9.3.2 Marek Bartelik, *Paris Stopover*

The next article is titled *Paris Stopover* and was written by Marek Bartelik. The author was born in Poland however moved to France to study art at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris in 1981. He has a Master of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Columbia University and a PhD in Art History from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He has also been teaching modern and contemporary art at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York since 1996 and has been a Visiting Professor at Yale and MIT. He is also an art critic and has written various books about modern Polish art, among other topics.

Paris Stopover is an article that turns out to be quite harsh with the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition. About the show, the author writes:

The exhibition's curators, Evelyne Jouanno and Hou Hanru, say they want to subvert Eurocentric modernism by 'introducing elements of 'Other' – i.e., non-Western – cultures.' But the terms 'multi culturalism' and 'the Other' have become tired catchwords by now, and the art chosen for the show looked quite homogeneous, despite its vaunted diversity and pluralism. Although many non-Western artists referenced their original cultures, their artistic vocabulary is essentially 'Western'.¹⁰³⁶

The author mentions that concepts such as the Other and multiculturalism have become tired catchwords. Obviously, this is a personal opinion of the author that could be questioned. On the contrary, it could be alleged that multiculturalism and the Other are concepts that have become more important than ever, especially in the art world where

¹⁰³⁶ Marek Bartelik, *Paris Stopover*, Artforum International, May 1 2001. For the full article see: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22PARIS+STOPOVER%22.-a075914308>. Date of last consultation: 7/4/2014.

non-Euroamerican artists are trying to generate a change within the international art world, and are trying to integrate non-Euroamerican art styles into the “west”-centric mainstream. Seen from this perspective, maybe the concept of multiculturalism has become somewhat of a tired catchword, and the time has come to substitute it for new definitions such as interculturalism.¹⁰³⁷ *Paris pour Escale* was precisely one of these intents to demonstrate the importance of the immigrant artists in the city of Paris and how valuable they are for the global (intercultural) art scene.

The author then mentions that the works were “quite homogeneous”¹⁰³⁸ and that the artistic vocabulary was basically “Western”.¹⁰³⁹ This is a comment that has been observed in numerous other reviews about different exhibitions that are analysed within this study. The fact that the author mentions that the works are all quite similar and that they are based on a “western” artistic language seems to indicate a lack of knowledge in the cultures of the Other and also seems to point to the fact that the author of the article is judging and interpreting the artworks from a Euroamerican point of view. It is actually quite ironic that the author argues that concepts such as multiculturalism and the Other are tired catchwords, however, he does not seem to have caught on to these two concepts as he continues to understand the art creations of non-Euroamerican cultures from a mainly “west”-centric perspective.

Later on in the same article the author mentions:

There is too much déjà vu and too little serious reflection in a work like the Chinese-born artist Shen Yuan's *Un matin du monde* (one world morning), 2000, which comments on the omnipresence of mass culture by covering a TV antenna on what looks like the roof of a typical Chinese house with empty cans of Western-brand soft drinks.¹⁰⁴⁰

First of all, the description of the work seems completely different from the descriptions made within this dissertation. In the latter, there is no mention of a TV antenna or empty cans of “western”-brand soft drinks, which puts the work within a “western” context. Quite the contrary, the description given in this chapter mentions that pieces of duck are laid out to dry on the roof, and sounds of daily street life can be heard on the sound system. This

¹⁰³⁷ See paragraph 1.4 of Block I.

¹⁰³⁸ Marek Bartelik, *Paris Stopover*, Artforum International, May 1 2001. For the full article see: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22PARIS+STOPOVER%22.-a075914308>. Date of last consultation: 7/4/2014.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

clearly places the work within a Chinese context. This distinct description implies a completely different way of interpreting this particular work. By placing the Chinese roof within a Chinese context, it might point to the feelings of “home sickness” that the artists might have experienced when moving to France. On the other hand, by placing the roof within a more “western” context, the work might then refer to the “westernization” of Chinese towns and culture. Also, the fact that the author mentions that the roof “looks like” the roof of a typical Chinese house seems to be rather strange as it was an exact reproduction of a typical Chinese roof, not something that was meant to “look like” one.

The author of the article then mentions that “there is too much *déjà vu*”¹⁰⁴¹ in *Paris pour Escale*, which seems to be quite similar to other comments that Euroamerican art critics have made about other exhibitions analysed in previous chapters in which it was stated that the art presented was, for example, “nothing new”, or that the Chinese experimental artworks were mere copies of their “western” colleagues. Yet, how many exact reproductions of a typical Chinese roof could Marek Bartelik have seen during his professional career? Probably not many.

Towards the end of the article, the author mentions that *Paris pour Escale* “celebrated marginality”.¹⁰⁴² This actually is quite true. The exhibition did celebrate the role of the immigrant within urban city life as well as the importance of the integration of “foreign” artists into the global art scene. However, the exhibition did not want to portray the participating artists as marginal and in this way, mentioning that the exhibition celebrated marginality does not seem to be entirely entitled. All in all, this review is not enthusiastic about the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition, however, it also seems to be based mainly on the subjective opinion of the author and the “west”-centric point of view that he just does not seem to be able to let go of.

9.3.3 Alice Planel, *Shifting narratives: Artists of the Algerian diaspora and institutional politics in contemporary France*

The next article is not a review of the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition but actually is an article on the Algerian artists that live in Paris. The article has been analysed for this research as

¹⁰⁴¹ Marek Bartelik, Paris Stopover, Artforum International, May 1 2001. For the full article see: <http://www.thefreeibrary.com/%22PARIS+STOPOVER%22.-a075914308>. Date of last consultation: 7/4/2014.

¹⁰⁴² Ibidem.

it does mention the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition, as some Algerian artists were among the twenty-seven participating artists in the exhibition.

The article is titled *Shifting narratives: Artists of the Algerian diaspora and institutional politics in contemporary France* and was written by Alice Planel.¹⁰⁴³ The author seems to be quite a versatile person and is the founder of “The Dinner Exchange” in which she cooks meals made from “wasted food” for complete strangers. The author was born in the south of France and then has lived in France, Berlin and London. She has a MA in cultural memory at the School of Advanced Studies and teaches History of Art. She has conducted research in the Middle East and her PhD is focused on contemporary art from the Algerian diaspora.

As mentioned previously, the article that shall be studied here is not a review on *Paris pour Escale* but is actually about the Algerian diaspora in France. The article is very critical towards the French government and cultural institutions and states that Algerian artists are often made visible when it is convenient, and become invisible when not. Planel also comments on the concept of diaspora at the beginning of the text and mentions that it is a necessary concept: “the concept of diasporic artists is useful for it alludes to diverse contexts of production. I argue that these differences in context of production *need* to be recognised because they shape artistic practices.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Here she seems to agree with Hou Hanru that émigré artists are playing an active and very necessarily role in the opening up of the international art market.

She also mentions that the term diaspora “is used by art historians and art professionals to distinguish between artists who are producing work in their country of origin and artist who are producing work elsewhere – often in western countries.”¹⁰⁴⁵ Although this is true, Alice Planel makes this statement as it were a matter of fact. However, in this dissertation, it has been explained that the usage of the term diaspora is not without problems and there are other alternatives that might better describe the artists that are living and working abroad.¹⁰⁴⁶ One of these alternatives might be the third space, for example or the concept of transexperiences, coined by Chen Zhen.

¹⁰⁴³ Alice Planel, *Shifting narratives: Artists of the Algerian diaspora and institutional politics in contemporary France*, interdisciplinary.net, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/planeldiaspaper.pdf>, May 2013. Date of last consultation 7/4/2014.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See paragraph 2.1 and 2.2 of the theoretic part (Block I).

About the exhibition *Paris pour Escale*, the author mentions: “And the meaning of a French art needs to be questioned – in the context of an artworld that claims to be global, and a multicultural society that the public administration does not acknowledge – as Jouanno and Hanru had attempted to do in 2001 with *Paris pour Escale*.”¹⁰⁴⁷

Within the text, *Paris pour Escale* is portrayed as an exhibition in which the two curators, Evelyne Jouanno and Hou Hanru were trying to make clear that multiculturalism and migration were phenomena ignored by French art institutions. This is partly true, as some of the essays within the exhibition catalogue mention exactly this.¹⁰⁴⁸ It is also true that it was one of the goals of the curators to change the status quo of the immigrant artists within a Euroamerican art scene. However, it was not the only objective of the exhibition as might be understood when reading the article of Alice Planel.

About the exhibition itself, the author does not give any further evaluation. The artists that are highlighted from the show are logically Algerian. In conclusion, Alice Planel seems to mention *Paris pour Escale* in order to question what is understood by “French art” and to illustrate how French institutions ignore its multicultural society, and the role and importance of the culture of the Other. Alice Planel’s article seems to point again to the fact that little interest was shown by the French institutions and this on its turn is confirmed by the fact that probably only three articles have been written about *Paris pour Escale* in the media.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Alice Planel, *Shifting narratives: Artists of the Algerian diaspora and institutional politics in contemporary France*. For the full article see: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/planeldiaspaper.pdf>, n.d., date of last consultation: 7/4/2014.

¹⁰⁴⁸ The “French reluctance” towards non-Euroamerican art currents can also clearly be perceived in the exhibition *Alors, la Chine* that was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2003. The show is heavily criticized by curator Bart de Baere (see chapter 11 of Block II) and one of the assistant-curators of *Alors, la Chine*, Pi Li (see also chapter 11 of Block II) in which he described the *Alors, la Chine* exhibition as a “troubling experience” and “replete with exotic political coatings confirming the French imagination of China rather than representing the real Chinese perspective”. THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 100.

9.4 Conclusion on *Paris pour Escale*

Recalling the aims of the exhibition, the objective was to portray Paris as a “stopover” city for the immigrants who have chosen to live there, although maybe not permanently. It cannot be said, after analysing only the works made by the Chinese experimental artists, if this goal was met. Therefore, an analysis of all the works that were presented by the twenty-seven participating artists should be completed. However, after analysing the works of the five participating Chinese artists, it becomes clear that some works do express the experience of being an immigrant artist in Paris, while others do not.

The work of Shen Yuan clearly shows the difficulties that she has been confronted with when moving from China to Paris. This also becomes very clear in the text which she wrote for the exhibition catalogue. However, other works, such as the installation of Wang Du, express other messages. In his case, the power that the media holds in our daily society and which, according to the artist, is more influential than military power. It is true however that Wang Du was shocked by all the images and information that was “thrown” at him upon arrival in Europe. The fact that he is then inspired by the media within his work is a direct result of his experience as a *émigré* artist living abroad.

Chen Zhen, has addressed more personal issues such as spirituality and the perception of the human body within “eastern” and “western” medicine, which could have been inspired by the artist’s illness. Yang Jiechang also made a creation that seemed to be closely related to meditation and contemplation. It did not clearly express the experience of him as an immigrant artist in Paris.

In no place was the third space mentioned by the artists or the exhibition catalogue. The works of the artists, even though they did not speak of the third space concept, however did portray a combination of traditional Chinese elements and experimental art and in some cases, a clear reference is made to the homeland. A good example of this is Shen Yuan who reproduced an entire rooftop of a traditional Chinese home. Seen from this perspective, the artworks lie in the in-between: they are no longer Chinese however they cannot be considered “western” either. There is a hybrid element that makes them characteristic of the immigrant artists that integrate the different influences into their work.

The exhibition catalogue consisted of three essays by different authors. The essays provided different points of view on the concept of Paris as a stopover city and the role of

the immigrants, or the Other, in the art and in city life in general. Especially the text that was written by the two curators emphasized the importance of non-Euroamerican artists in the art world and how they are incorporating new elements into the art scene in order to change the inequality between Euroamerican and non-Euroamerican artists, and to put in evidence the out-dated systems of western superiority and the centre-periphery model. This is a very characteristic thought of Hou Hanru which he already tried to make clear in his 1994 exhibition *Out of the Centre*,¹⁰⁴⁹ held at the Pori art museum in Finland, and his essay published in the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy*, organized in 1993.¹⁰⁵⁰

The essays in the exhibition catalogue also make it clear that there exists a certain resistance to these changes and that often the institutions are not willing to support exhibitions or other initiatives that go in these lines. This is information that should be considered, as it might explain why it is so difficult for alternative models that go beyond the “East-West” binary to be implemented, and why alternative spaces, such as the third space, find so much difficulty in being acknowledged or even mentioned within exhibition catalogues and expositions.

The catalogue states that the goal was not to portray the participating artists as exotic. On the contrary, everything has been done to avoid this tendency. The participating artists are portrayed as immigrant artists who are living in Paris but who have decided to not live there permanently. Even though all artists are foreigners and are living in between the French as well as their homeland culture, in no place is there anything mentioned about homelessness, in-betweenness or the third space. This in fact is rather strange as Hou Hanru spoke so fervently of the third space concept just two years earlier within the *Inside Out* exhibition catalogue (1998). But not even in the essay that he wrote together with his wife Evelyne Jouanno, did he speak of these concepts. This is poignant as *Paris pour Escale* was an exhibition that was all about the important role that foreign, non-Euroamerican artists are playing within the international art scene, trying to generate a more equal art market between Euroamerican and non-Euroamerican art. It would have been the ideal opportunity for Hou Hanru to have further explored and diffused the concept of the third space. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the media did not pay a lot of attention to the *Paris pour Escale* exhibition and that, had Hou Hanru spoken of the third space, his words might well have been largely ignored.

¹⁰⁴⁹ See chapter 4 of Block II.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See chapter 2 of Block II.

Paris pour Escale referred to the city of Paris as the “stopover” refuge for many émigré artists on their travels around the world. Yet after analysing the scarce number of reviews written about the survey, the word “Escale” could also be applied to the city of Paris (and Euroamerica in general) and the fact that they are not yet ready to acknowledge and to accept the essential role that these émigré artists are playing within the international art scene. They are, as it were, at the “stopover” that will take them from postcolonial times to the moment in which they will be able to let go of the illusion of national identity and the nation-state culture.

10. PARIS-PÉKIN (2002)

10.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Paris-Pékin was an exhibition organized at the Espace Cardin in Paris from the 5th of October until the 28th of October 2002. The Espace Cardin was opened by the famous fashion designer Pierre Cardin in 1970 and is situated at the far end of the Champs-Élysées in Paris. It is a multifunctional building that consists of a theatre with 673 seats and more than 1200 m² of space that can be used for conferences, receptions, (festive) events as well as exhibitions.

All the works that were displayed at the exhibition came from the Guy and Myriam Ullens Collection of Chinese experimental art. Therefore, the works were not especially made for the exposition. It was a huge survey and according to the curator Chang Tsong-zung, it was the largest exhibition of Chinese experimental art to be held in Europe until that time: “Paris-Pékin is to date the most ambitious exhibition in Europe to survey China’s contemporary art scene.”¹⁰⁵¹ This statement shall be questioned in the following paragraph.

The Ullens’ collection is one of the most extensive collections of experimental Chinese art in the world.¹⁰⁵² An important part consists of works dating from the nineties until the present day, but the collection also contains Chinese painting and calligraphy dating from as early as the 11th century. Guy & Myriam Ullens started buying Chinese experimental art in 1987 at the very beginning of the avant-garde movement. By supporting experimental art in its early stages Guy Ullens played an important role as a maecenas of experimental Chinese art for both artists and the art galleries specialized in this art.

The fascination of Guy Ullens for Chinese culture is rooted in his childhood: his father was a diplomat in China and his uncle was the ambassador of Belgium there. Guy Ullens extended his father’s collection of mainly classical Chinese art first with classical works, and later on with works of experimental art. The collection is extensive and contains works

¹⁰⁵¹ Chang Tsong-zung, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵² Another important art collection belongs to the collector Uli Sigg who was also a former ambassador in China. The role of the collector in the organization of exhibitions becomes more and more noticeable in the international art scene. Paris-Pékin was based on the collection of Guy and Myriam Ullens but another good example was the exhibition *Vermell Apart* that was held at the Fundació Miró (Barcelona) in 2008. This exhibition was entirely based on the collection of Uli and Rita Sigg.

of all kinds of media. Part of the collection was presented at the exhibition *Paris-Pékin*, and in the same year, a number of paintings and calligraphies were exhibited at the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

A total of eighty-eight Chinese experimental artists participated in *Paris-Pékin*, seven of them being Chinese overseas artists. The participating artists that were living abroad at the time, and that are studied in this dissertation are: Cai Guoqiang, Chen Zhen, Gu Wenda, Huang Yongping, Wu Shanzhuan, Xu Bing and Yang Jiechang. It could be said that the most representative, or most well known artists of the Chinese experimental art scene were present at this exhibition. Also, several of the works of art that have become iconic in the Chinese experimental art world were on display at this exhibition, such as Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45)¹⁰⁵³ or Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series* (1993-) (Fig 12, 27, 28 and 41).¹⁰⁵⁴ In total, one hundred and forty works were displayed at *Paris-Pékin*.

The *Paris-Pékin* exhibition was curated by Chang Tsong-zung, also known as Jason Chang. Chang was born in Hong Kong and he is a curator and art dealer of Chinese experimental art and co-founder of the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong. He also founded the Hanart TZ gallery in Hong Kong, which over the years has become one of the most established art galleries in the country. He also organized Hong Kong's participation at the Sao Paolo art biennale in 1996, and in Venice in 2001, among many other exhibitions inside and outside of Hong Kong. It should be mentioned that the Hanart TZ gallery in Hong Kong was one of the galleries where Guy Ullens bought Chinese experimental artworks for his collection. Therefore, Guy Ullens and the curator Chang Tsong-zung are good friends and have known each other for years. Chang Tsong-zung was one of the first advisors that Guy Ullens had when he started buying Chinese experimental art in the 1980s.

The associate curator of *Paris-Pékin* was Jean-Marc Decrop who is a Chinese experimental art expert who started collecting this art in 1992. Jean-Marc Decrop was one of the first experts on this art in Europe and in 2001 was appointed expert at the French National Chamber of Experts of Chinese experimental art. He was also one of the first to promote Chinese experimental art in Europe and has tried to persuade French art critics

¹⁰⁵³ See chapter 6, and 8 of Block II.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See chapter 5, 6, and 8 of Block II.

and journalists to write more about Chinese experimental art by organizing various workshops in order to enhance the knowledge about this type of art. From 1999 until 2007 he was the artistic advisor of Paris Galerie Loft and it is in these years that he organized various exhibitions on Chinese experimental art, including a number of monographic exhibitions from the better-known Chinese experimental artists such as Rong Rong, Qiu Zhijie and Zhao Bandi. It should also be said that he used to be a partner of the Hanart TZ gallery that is owned by Chang Tsong-zung. It might be significant that all three involved in this exhibition, Chang Tsong-zung, Guy Ullens and Marc Decrop are somehow related to Chang Tsong-zung's art gallery in Hong Kong. In general, as mentioned in the previous chapter, artworks that are shown at exhibitions increase in value. Therefore, it might be assumed that one of the reasons for showing part of Guy Ullens' collection at the *Paris-Pékin* show was to raise the value of his collection, which on its turn might have benefitted Chang Tsong-zung and Marc Decrop as gallery owners. Obviously, this is not stated anywhere within the exhibition catalogue but it should be taken into account as possibly one of the underlying reasons for the *Paris-Pékin* survey.

Paris-Pékin was also held as an introduction to the "Année de la Chine" that was held in France in the year 2003. The first article written in the exhibition catalogue is from Jean-Jacques Aillagon, who was the French Minister of Culture and Communication at the time. Although the exhibition was privately organised honouring the wish of the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation to share their Chinese experimental art collection with the audience, this foreword points to a slight diplomatic character of the exhibition although this is later not emphasized within the exhibition catalogue. It is important however to keep in mind that the China-France year was to be held in the year after *Paris-Pékin*.

Also, it should be mentioned that *Paris-Pékin* was also somewhat of a charity act as all the benefits were destined to the AVEC association which is the association of Life and Hope against Cancer.

As mentioned previously, eighty-eight Chinese artists participated in *Paris-Pékin* and seven of them were, at the time, overseas artists. The artworks that were presented by these overseas artists were:

- Cai Guoqiang: *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51)
- Chen Zhen: *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52)¹⁰⁵⁵
- Gu Wenda: *Pseudo Script: Wind* (1996) (Fig. 53)¹⁰⁵⁶
United Nations: Silk Road (2000)¹⁰⁵⁷
- Huang Yongping: *One Man Nine Animals: Model No. 1, Snake* (1999)
(Fig. 54)¹⁰⁵⁸
One Man Nine Animals: Model No. 6, Eagle (1999) (Fig. 54)
- Wu Shanzhuan: *Paradise* (1993) (Fig. 56)
Today no Water No. 187 (2000) (Fig. 55)
Vege Pleasure (1996) (Fig. 57)
- Xu Bing: *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45)¹⁰⁵⁹
- Yang Jiechang: *100 Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58)¹⁰⁶⁰

As mentioned before, all works were part of the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation's collection and none of the works were site-specific.

Lastly, to conclude this first paragraph, Jean-Michel Wilmotte, who is a famous French designer and architect made the exhibition design for *Paris-Pékin*. He has, for example, also collaborated in the big renovation of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam that took place between 2003 and 2013 together with the Cruz and Ortiz architects.

¹⁰⁵⁵ This work was also exhibited at *All under Heaven*, see the following chapter of Block II.

¹⁰⁵⁶ See also chapter 8 of Block II.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Other works of Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series* have been seen in chapter 5, 6, and 8 of Block II.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Both works were also displayed at the *All under Heaven* exhibition (see chapter 11 of Block II) two years later.

¹⁰⁵⁹ See chapter 6, and 8 of Block II.

¹⁰⁶⁰ This work was also displayed at *All under Heaven*. See the following chapter, and chapter 2 of Block II.

10.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was edited by the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong (that was funded by Chang Tsong-zung) and published by Chinese Century for the occasion of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition. The catalogue is extensive and counts 287 pages. This is understandable considering the size of the exhibition with the participation of eighty-eight Chinese experimental artists and one hundred forty works on display. The exhibition catalogue is written in three languages: French, English and Chinese.

The catalogue could be divided into two main parts. The first part contains a foreword by the French Minister of Culture and Communication Jacques Aillagon. This introduction is then followed by a rather long essay by the curator Chang Tsong-zung titled *Journey West*; an article by Jean-Marc Decrop titled *Idiosyncrasies of Contemporary Chinese Art*; a text by the well-known curator Fei Dawei titled *Some Thoughts on Contemporary Chinese Art*; and lastly, an interview with Guy Ullens by the curator and art critic Henri François Debailleux. The second part of the exhibition catalogue is dedicated to the artists that participated in the exhibition and the artworks they presented. The layout of this part is quite similar for all artists and consists of a very short comment on the artist (and sometimes on their work) extracted from other catalogues or articles written by (Chinese experimental) art experts. Some of these authors were for example Hou Hanru, David Elliott, Britta Erickson and Melissa Chiu who have been mentioned on several occasions within this thesis. This part also includes various color plates of the works that were on display at *Paris-Pékin*. The last pages of the catalogue are dedicated to a chronology about the history of Chinese experimental art written by the art critic and curator Lü Peng.

First of all, the foreword by the French Minister of Culture and Communication Jacques Aillagon shall be analysed here. It is a very brief text of three paragraphs in which the author mentions that the aim of *Paris-Pékin* is to “fully reveal the dynamism of contemporary Chinese art to the French public.”¹⁰⁶¹ It is quite poignant that *Paris-Pékin* is here described as one of the first exhibitions on this scale to “fully reveal the dynamism of contemporary Chinese art to the French public” when taking into account that Chinese experimental art was introduced to France more than a decade ago with Fei Dawei’s *Chine demain pour hier*, held in Pourrières in 1990.¹⁰⁶² Moreover, Jacques Aillagon also

¹⁰⁶¹ Jacques Aillagon, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶² See chapter 1 of Block II.

omits the exhibition *Paris pour Escale* that was held just two years prior to *Paris-Pékin*, also in the city of Paris. This might confirm the fact that the impact of these two exhibitions effectively has been quite minimal. In the case of *Chine demain pour hier*, this might have been due to the time of the exhibition as it was held in the early year of 1990 when Chinese experimental art was just entering the international art market, twelve years before *Paris-Pékin*. In the case of *Paris pour Escale*, the fact that the French minister of culture omits mentioning this exhibition within his text might corroborate what has already been stated in chapter nine where this exhibition was analysed: that the exhibition was not supported and was largely ignored by the French public institutions, as the promotion of non-French culture and art within France is generally not very much appreciated by the French government.¹⁰⁶³

In the second paragraph Jacques Aillagon mentions: “With infinite ardour and imagination, contemporary Chinese artists are relentlessly creating new works. ‘Paris-Pékin’ highlights this vitality, this desire to treat every subject without any pretence or taboo.”¹⁰⁶⁴ The author does not further comment on this sentence yet it is significant that he mentions that the exhibition treated every subject without taboo. Does this comment point to the fact that Chinese experimental art sometimes touches certain topics that might be considered taboo in Europe (like some of the works of Gu Wenda)? Or does it mean that Chinese experimental art is sometimes censored within mainland China (as well as abroad), however that the *Paris-Pékin* survey does not do so?

Following the foreword is a twenty-six-page long article written by the curator Chang Tsong-zung. The curator starts his text by mentioning that “Paris-Pékin is to date the most ambitious exhibition in Europe to survey China’s contemporary art scene”.¹⁰⁶⁵ Again, it is as if other important exhibitions are here omitted. The fact that *Paris-Pékin* is described as the first major show of Chinese experimental art in Europe should be nuanced, as other (major) shows like *Cities on the Move*,¹⁰⁶⁶ *Des del pais del centre*,¹⁰⁶⁷ and *Heart of Darkness*¹⁰⁶⁸ had been held in European countries prior to the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition.

¹⁰⁶³ See the conclusion of the analysis on *Paris pour Escale*, paragraph 12.5 of Block II.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Jacques Aillagon, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See chapter 7 of Block II.

¹⁰⁶⁷ See chapter 6 of Block II.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See chapter 5 of Block II.

What could be deduced from Chang Tsong-zung's omission is that European countries seem to be quite isolated from one another when it comes to exhibitions on Chinese experimental art (and maybe on other art currents as well). What can be observed in Block II is that exhibitions are often titled "the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in....."¹⁰⁶⁹ This indicates that exhibitions held in one particular European country generally do not cause very much impact or attract audiences from other European countries.

Then the curator mentions one of the aims of the show:

Important artworks covering the decade of the 1990s up through to the present give a succinct account of China's evolving cultural temperament over this period of rapid and critical changes. This exhibition represents both a condensed art history of the period as well as a statement about the vibrant, unruly flux of creative energy that is shaping the culture of today.¹⁰⁷⁰

It seems thus that one of the main aims of the exhibition was to familiarize the French public with Chinese experimental art and to give an idea of the creative energy and the changes that are going on within this art in China as well as abroad. This statement of "familiarizing" the French audience with Chinese experimental art should be nuanced and questioned, and should be seen in the light of the comment quoted earlier within this paragraph by Jacques Aillagon in which he stated that the exhibition's aim was to "fully reveal the dynamism of contemporary Chinese art to the French public."¹⁰⁷¹

Then, the author mentions:

Perhaps even more sympathetic to China's history than many practicing Chinese experimental artists, whose cultural references and modes of discourse are often entrenched in the West or made exotic for an imagined foreign audience, this collection is assembled with a footing in the best of China's cultural past, and a keen eye on new sparks of creativity that invigorate contemporary culture."¹⁰⁷²

First of all, it is interesting that Chang Tsong-zung mentions that the works of the experimental artists are sometimes made exotic in order to become more appealing to a foreign audience. This has been extensively commented on in the theoretic part of this

¹⁰⁶⁹ For example, exhibitions on Chinese experimental were described as such in France (see chapter 1), UK (see chapter 2), The United States (chapter 3), Finland (chapter 4), Holland (chapter 5), Spain (see chapter 6), again in the US (chapter 8), and Belgium (chapter 11). This observation shall be further elaborated in Block III of the conclusions.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Chang Tsong-zung, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷¹ Jacques Aillagon, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷² *Ibidem*.

dissertation.¹⁰⁷³ Secondly, the curator describes the Ullens' collection as an example of the best of China's cultural past. This might be a bit exaggerated as the collection does contain a lot of works made by the better-known Chinese artists, including more "political pop" works by artists such as Zhang Xiaogang and Zhang Peili which are "famous" (and highly marketable) in a Euroamerican context but which only partly can be considered representative of China's cultural past.

Then Chang Tsong-zung elaborates on the past of Chinese experimental art and explains the different movements and artists that appeared during the 1980s and 1990s. He also points to China's political past as an influence to be considered in Chinese experimental art. When the author refers to the Political Pop movement he mentions: "(...) Political Pop, was light-hearted because it resolved an unarticulated burden from the 1980s, which was the suppressed memory of the Cultural Revolution."¹⁰⁷⁴ This fragment is quoted here as it gives an explanation on why Political Pop appeared in this period of time. As explained in paragraph 3.2 of Block I, Political Pop was an artistic movement closely related to China's historical past as it was used as somewhat of a "remedy" or maybe even a kind of "therapy" to deal with the past events of the Cultural Revolution. However, in Euroamerica this current is frequently wrongly interpreted and art critics often describe Political Pop as a way of copying Euroamerican Pop Art. In many of these cases, art critics do not perceive Political Pop as a kind of "cathartic therapy" related to the Cultural Revolution, and they often do not realize how intimately it is linked to China's historic past. Moreover, this type of Chinese experimental art has become "gaudy" over time, to use the term coined by Chinese art critic and Chinese experimental art expert Li Xianting: it has become vulgar, a brand. This type of art is what the mainland Chinese, in a disrespectful way, call "embassy art": art purely as a commercial product destined for the international art market where it has become highly profitable.¹⁰⁷⁵

The text then continues by making short comments on various artists of the Chinese experimental art scene and how their works have evolved over time. The author then also comments on the influence that the "West" had on Chinese experimental art in the 1990s and how it became popular in Europe and the United States.

¹⁰⁷³ See chapter 3 of Block I.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Chang Tsong-zung, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 22.

¹⁰⁷⁵ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

He then dedicates a part of his essay to briefly describing several of the artists that moved abroad:

For artists residing in the West the sudden interest in Chinese art has prompted them to be even more self-conscious of their Chinese identity than they would already have been. Strategies of engaging western issues with emblems of Chinese culture have allowed many artists to find a position on the margin, and even to perhaps help re-marginalise the host countries they occupy.

(...) The question of 'Chineseness' becomes acute outside China, especially in the West (...).¹⁰⁷⁶

Here, the author speaks about finding a position "on the margin". He does not clarify which margin this is. It could be the margin of society or the margin of the in-between space that lies between "East" and "West". It could also be the margin between being Chinese and no longer identifying with China. It is interesting that Chang Tsong-zung speaks about the overseas Chinese artists in this way and describes them as artists that become more self-conscious about their identity. This is true, although there are more nuances to this phenomenon. As mentioned in the theoretic part of this dissertation,¹⁰⁷⁷ Melissa Chiu differentiates the Chinese artists that have moved to Australia, Europe and the United States and mentions that these different groups reconsider and reconstruct their (Chinese) identity and background in a different manner. In this text, Chang Tsong-zung does not elaborate further on the overseas artists and neither does he mention concepts such as the in-between or the third space.

The essay then continues by explaining why the human body became important in Chinese experimental art. Chang Tsong-zung then also addresses the role of calligraphy within Chinese culture and the immense importance it has within society, history, and art, and how calligraphy became a source of inspiration for some of the experimental Chinese artists. All in all, this essay explains many aspects of Chinese experimental art and relates it to China's history as well as its present. It is a very clearly written and informative essay that truly shines a light on Chinese experimental art and which provides insightful information for an audience who might not be familiar with this art current. Chang Tsong-zung does not limit himself to a chronological summary of Chinese experimental art history, but gives a lot of background information that helps interpret this type of art which is so different from Euroamerican contemporary art. Although the author dedicates part of his article to the overseas artists, he does not however mention anything about the third

¹⁰⁷⁶ Chang Tsong-zung, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 28-29.

¹⁰⁷⁷ See chapter 2 of Block I, and especially paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

space or the in-between position in which these artists find themselves. Within his essay he writes that these artists are living on the margin, but it does not become clear what he means by this.

The next text is written by Chinese experimental art expert, curator, and collector Jean-Marc Decrop. The text starts out by mentioning different characteristics about Chinese experimental art. For example, that most art works are closely related to the Realism style and that only few artists create abstract works. He then also comments briefly on several of the Chinese experimental artists and their works. The author then, like Chang Tsong-zung in his essay, explains the importance of Chinese calligraphy and the written word as a source of inspiration for many Chinese artists. Here the author points to artists such as Gu Wenda, Xu Bing¹⁰⁷⁸ and Wu Shanzhuan, yet he does not mention that all three are in fact overseas artists. Consequently, neither is there any mention of the third space concept. Yet, it is crucial to understand that, most probably, these artists are fascinated by language and communication due to their situation of living abroad. Yet, like most (Euroamerican) art critics, the overseas Chinese artists are not distinguished from the mainland artists and their position of living outside of the homeland is not related and taken into consideration when interpreting their works.¹⁰⁷⁹

On the last page of the essay, Jean-Marc Decrop writes:

In one of his cultist works *Writing the Orchid Pavilion Preface One Thousand Times*, Qiu Zhijie copied the paradigm text of Chinese calligraphy, *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* by the fourth-century writer Wang Xizhi, one thousand times on the same sheet of paper. Successive accumulations lead to a black monochrome. This work brings to mind the first abstract work of the twentieth century, Malevitch's Black Square.¹⁰⁸⁰

This fragment has been highlighted as it is another example of how Chinese artworks are sometimes compared to or made more familiar by referring to Euroamerican artworks, a practice often employed by Euroamerican art critics and experts. Here, Qiu Zhijie's work is compared to the black squares by Malevitch. Of course, visually, there is a resemblance, however, can these two works coming from completely different backgrounds be compared? In Qiu Zhijie's work, the black square is the result of a thousand layers of

¹⁰⁷⁸ Xu Bing is currently living in China.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Yet, the fact of living abroad is essential to the understanding of the works of the overseas artists. See chapter 2 of Block I.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Jean-Marc Decrop, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 49.

calligraphic text written over and over again. This was definitely not the case in Malevitch's work. It is surprising that Jean-Marc Decrop, who is an expert in the field of Chinese experimental art, makes this comparison and seems to obviate the fact that Chinese experimental art and Euroamerican contemporary art are historically and culturally different. Visually both works might seem "similar", yet symbolically the works could and should not be compared.

The following text is written by the art curator and critic Fei Dawei and is titled *Some thoughts on Contemporary Chinese art*. The article starts out by describing how Chinese experimental art became popular in the "West" and how, on the other hand, it did not take off in the domestic art market. The article seems to compare the development of Chinese experimental on the mainland with the development it experienced overseas. Then, the author mentions:

While since the early 1990s increasing numbers of artists have been invited to participate in exhibitions in the West, very few Chinese art critics have been invited to use their expertise in curating or organising exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art. As a result many artists have a much clearer understanding of the Western contemporary art scene than do Chinese critics, with the result that these critics have lost both the initiative and the authority to act as spokesmen in this important area of contemporary cultural discourse. In stark contrast to the leadership roles held by critics during the avant-garde movements of the 1980s, today the work they are doing seems to have little impact on Chinese artists. Thus, although there is a great deal of creative activity in Chinese contemporary art, there is also simultaneously an ideological impoverishment and intellectual weakening.¹⁰⁸¹

This fragment might explain one of the reasons why there seems to be a lack of knowledge about Chinese experimental art in Euroamerica that leads to frequent misunderstandings and misinterpretation of Chinese experimental artworks. As Fei Dawei mentions in this quote, the Chinese art critics, who are experts in Chinese experimental art and who have personally experienced it from the very beginning, should be the main spokesmen of this art in the "West". However, they are often left out and therefore it becomes impossible to learn about Chinese experimental art from the inside, seeing it through the eyes of the Chinese art critic. Currently, what seems to be the case in the "West" is that Chinese experimental art is perceived predominantly from a one-sided view, the Euroamerican one.¹⁰⁸² Yet, Fei Dawei's comment should probably be nuanced. In this dissertation, various exhibitions have been analysed and the majority of them were curated by "Chinese" curators (ten out of the twelve exhibitions). Therefore, Fei Dawei's comment might not be entirely true. What should be highlighted though, is the fact that a

¹⁰⁸¹ Fei Dawei, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸² See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

Chinese curator is often “assisted” by a Euroamerican art curator or expert whenever an exhibition is held on Chinese experimental art. This has become clear in this study and *Paris-Pékin* is another example of this.¹⁰⁸³ Also, most of the exhibition curators studied in this dissertation were not living in China and have moved abroad, like Fei Dawei, Gao Minglu, and Hou Hanru. Chang Tsong-zung, the curator of *Paris-Pékin* does not live in China either, but in Hong Kong. Therefore, their vision of Chinese experimental art is not “from the inside” either but is often from an in-between position. This on its turn makes it easier for these curators to relate to the in-between position of the overseas artists, as has become clear for example in Hou Hanru’s exhibition *Out of the Centre*¹⁰⁸⁴ held in 1994 or *Paris pour Escale*,¹⁰⁸⁵ organized by the same curator in 2002. Yet it should be mentioned that not all of the overseas curators emphasize the in-between position of the overseas artists as Hou Hanru does.

Fei Dawei ends his article with an observation:

In absorbing Western culture the Chinese have also transformed Western culture, and the phenomenon of Westernisation is gradually losing its ‘Westernness’. This is completely natural. Cultural misunderstanding is thus not always negative; it can also become a creative source. Having distorted the imported Soviet model of Socialist Realism, Chinese artists now make use of the Sino version of Socialist Realism to distort imported Western contemporary art. This may well be where the future hope of Chinese art is invested.¹⁰⁸⁶

This fragment has been highlighted, as it understands the “westernization” of Chinese experimental art from another perspective. Usually, Chinese experimental art is seen in Euroamerica as an art style that copies the Euroamerican styles, artists and currents. Also the mainland artists often speak about the “westernization” of Chinese art. Here Fei Dawei mentions that Chinese experimental art not only absorbs “western” art styles, but also changes them in the process which could be seen as something of an “easternization” of “western” art. This is a new perspective and makes it clear how the interpretation and point of view of a Chinese art critic and curator, in this case Fei Dawei, varies with the interpretations of Euroamerican art critics who often limit their view to seeing Chinese experimental art as copies of Euroamerican art. Fei Dawei also speaks of this “easternization” of “western” art as a “future hope” for Chinese art. This comment points to

¹⁰⁸³ This points shall be further elaborated within the Conclusions of Block III.

¹⁰⁸⁴ See chapter 4 of Block II.

¹⁰⁸⁵ See chapter 9 of Block II.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Fei Dawei, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 56.

a future in which Chinese art will become hybrid, integrating “Chinese” as well as “western” features, while on its turn “western” art will become more “eastern”. This clearly insinuates the third space even though Fei Dawei does not mention the concept anywhere within his essay.

The last article that is included within the first part of the exhibition catalogue consists of an interview between Guy Ullens and Henri François Debailleux, who is an art critic and a curator who has also written books and articles about several contemporary artists. Within the article, Henri François Debailleux asks Guy Ullens about his collection and how he became interested in Chinese experimental art. Then, he asks Guy Ullens why the exhibition was organized. To this question, Guy Ullens answers:

Firstly, there’s the question of duty. I believe that when you own significant works of art, you have an obligation to make them accessible for others to discover. (...)

I would like to see the public have the chance to discover this extraordinary hotbed of young, motivated artists who are exceedingly creative, and who wish to have their works known after having been stifled for such a long time. (...)

Lastly, it’s a question of pleasure. As I have just said, I don’t really live with the works in my collection, and so the chance to be able to exhibit them allows me also to rediscover them, to see them together and to establish various relationships between them.¹⁰⁸⁷

And:

There are only a few people in the world, gallery owners and art collectors, trying to awaken both China and the West to the incredibly rapid expansion of the Chinese art world, as it parallels China’s economic explosion. Here we have artists whose intense energies have been admirably developed, creative artists who are frighteningly on the ball. What better dream, than to be one of the first to bring them to the public.¹⁰⁸⁸

This fragment shines a light on the reasons why *Paris-Pékin* was held. As can be seen, it was above all a personal wish of Guy Ullens that led to the exhibition. It seems that the main motivation was to introduce Chinese experimental art to the public and the desire of the collector to share his collection with the outside world. In no case is the exhibition portrayed as an instrument to shine a light on China’s reality, as is sometimes the case with Chinese experimental art exhibitions held in the “West”. Also, it should be highlighted that Guy Ullens here mentions that he is one of the first to bring Chinese experimental art to the public. As mentioned previously in this chapter, this is a comment that should be

¹⁰⁸⁷ Guy Ullens, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Guy Ullens, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 63.

nuanced, as Paris-Pékin was definitely not the first show on Chinese experimental art to be held in France or Euroamerica.

The second part of the exhibition catalogue consists of brief, one-page texts about the artists that participated in *Paris-Pékin* and the works that they presented at the survey. The texts are written by various art experts in the field such as Hou Hanru, David Elliott, Britta Erickson, Jeremie Barmé and Francesca Dal Lago, among others. These texts were not especially written for the exhibition catalogue but were taken from other sources such as articles and catalogues that were written prior to the exhibition. At the end of each page, one paragraph is written by the artist in which he or she briefly comments on the work that was presented at *Paris-Pékin*. Only two of these texts shall be analysed, as in some cases, the text was about the artist's technique or the materials that are often used within his or her oeuvre. This has not been considered relevant for the analysis of the exhibition catalogue but will be used in the following paragraph 11.3 in order to shine a light on the works that were on display.

The first text that shall be focused on is a brief text on the artist Gu Wenda that was published in the magazine *Orientations*. It consists of an interview between the artists and the art critic and curator Melissa Chiu. In the fragment of this article that was published in the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue Gu Wenda speaks about the role of the immigrant: "For immigrants there seem to be three cultural choices: you can retain your cultural traditions, abandon or rebel against them."¹⁰⁸⁹ This comment seems to point to the way in which Chinese artists who move abroad sometimes deal with their cultural heritage and background. Gu Wenda, for example, in a certain way, retained his cultural traditions but modified them. For example, in his *United Nations Series* (1993-) he uses (Chinese) calligraphy and changes it into an illegible language. About the *United Nations Series*,¹⁰⁹⁰ presented at *Paris-Pékin*, the artist mentions:

I tried to find the most inclusive subject, to include all cultures in my work. That is why I was happy when I started United Nations, now in its tenth year, because it avoided the stereotype of what kind of work a Chinese artist should do. United Nations covers everything. It is difficult to identify which culture the work comes from because it is international or universal.¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁹ Gu Wenda, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Other works of Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series* have been seen in chapter 5, 6, and 8 of Block II.

¹⁰⁹¹ Gu Wenda, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 94.

Two aspects of this short quote should be stressed. First of all, Gu Wenda mentions that the works of Chinese experimental artists sometimes is expected to satisfy certain stereotypes that exist about Chinese art, Chinese culture and China in general. Although the artist does not mention it explicitly within this text, it seems that he is referring to the Euroamerican art market and the expectations that it has when it comes to the art of the Other.¹⁰⁹² Secondly, Gu Wenda speaks of his art as universal and international. He mentions that his work is difficult to identify and to attribute to a specific culture. The artist does not speak of the third space in this text but the fact that his work cannot be defined as Chinese or as “western” indicates the fact that his works are hybrid and that they are placed somewhere in-between.

Towards the end of the text Gu Wenda seems to contradict himself by mentioning that no one can really escape one’s cultural background: “No one can escape from tradition. If you escape from it you end up doing Expressionism or Surrealism. It is a predicament.”¹⁰⁹³ It does not become clear what the artist means by this comment but the fact that he mentions that one can never let go of one’s cultural background seems to contradict his previous comment about making art that is universal and that cannot be attributed to any cultural background.¹⁰⁹⁴

The next article is about the artist Huang Yongping and was written by Hou Hanru. In the text, he mentions:

Today, living and working in the West, he [Huang Yongping] focuses on a critique of Eurocentrism that still prevails in the dominant global discourse. To emphasise the alternative position of his critique, he resorts increasingly to Chinese culture that remains unfamiliar to the Western intellectual world. At the same time, various deconstructivist and post-colonial theories continue to provide him with a source of inspiration as critical counter-positions to the established order of Modernist culture.¹⁰⁹⁵

Hou Hanru mentions in this quote that Eurocentrism still prevails in the global discourse. This can be seen in the various reviews that have been written by Euroamerican art critics about the works of the Chinese experimental artists. Frequently, these works are seen

¹⁰⁹² See paragraph 3.4 of Block I.

¹⁰⁹³ Gu Wenda, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹⁴ In paragraph 3.3 of Block I, several artists express their feelings towards “Chineseness” and how their Chinese background influences, or not, their current artwork and identity. See also paragraph 2.2 of Block I on the way the “Chinese” background forms an essential part of the works of the overseas artists.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Hou Hanru, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 114.

from a Euroamerican, often superior, point of view. The works of art of the Other are often exoticized or politicized, which is a form of eurocentric discourse. The second point that Hou Hanru makes and that shall be highlighted here is that he mentions that there seems to be a lack of knowledge about Chinese culture in the “West”. This is one of the reasons why Chinese art is often misinterpreted and why stereotypes of China and Chinese culture seem to be maintained in the Euroamerican reception of this art. In order to break eurocentrism, Hou Hanru writes:

Whereas, since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Western idea of the world and modernity has stressed rationalism, now the emphasis of ‘irrational’ movement, change, chance and even chaos (as a more complete world view) can provide an effective strategy to deconstruct the redundant ideologies of Modernism and Eurocentrism. Huang Yong Ping understands this perfectly.¹⁰⁹⁶

It is true that disorder and irrationalism deconstructs the Eurocentric core of rationalism and order however, it might not be the most effective instrument to break Eurocentric discourse. Works that are considered chaotic or “irrational” are often not understood by the public. Therefore, the message that the artworks carry is not captured and this makes it impossible for it to have an effect on Eurocentrism. Examples of this “misunderstanding” have been observed in the exhibition *Cities on the Move* in which some of the art critics mentioned that it was rather “chaotic” and therefore tiring.¹⁰⁹⁷ In the following chapter on the analysis of the exhibition *All under Heaven* held two years later in Belgium, some art critics “complained” about the lack of information which made the exhibition difficult to comprehend.¹⁰⁹⁸ Therefore, in some cases it seems as if Euroamerican art critics and the public still need for the exhibition to provide them with the right tools in order to really grasp the message of an exhibition on Chinese experimental art. Irrationality might not be the best way to change the Euroamerican hegemonic discourse within the international art scene. Contrary to what Hou Hanru proposes, irrationality and chaos might put up a barrier, impeding artists to get their message across and to truly change the Euroamerican domination.

Lastly, the exhibition catalogue ends with an extensive chronology written by the art critic and curator Lü Peng. The chronology is very schematic and gives brief information on important events that took place in Chinese experimental art history. The chronology

¹⁰⁹⁶ Hou Hanru, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 114.

¹⁰⁹⁷ See chapter 7 of Block II.

¹⁰⁹⁸ See chapter 11 of Block II.

starts in the year 1976 and ends in the year 2000. Only one short sentence shall be highlighted here and that is when Lü Peng mentions that in 1990, during the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*, which is also analysed in this dissertation,¹⁰⁹⁹ the participating artists met “art critics from all over the world, discussing ideas on the subject ‘Misunderstanding in the Exchange of Chinese and Western Cultures’.”¹¹⁰⁰ Although this information is not related to the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition, it is highlighted here as this discussion is not mentioned anywhere in the exhibition catalogue of *Chine demain pour hier*. It is also very suggestive that the topic of this discussion was misunderstanding in the exchange of Chinese and “western” cultures, a matter that touches the very core of this dissertation. In this period, Chinese experimental art was just entering the international art scene. Therefore, to speak of “misunderstanding” in this early stage seems very advanced for its time. It would have been immensely valuable to read this discussion and what comments were made by both parties. Unfortunately, Lü Peng has written that he has not kept any record of this meeting between the artists and the “western” art critics.

¹⁰⁹⁹ See chapter 1 of Block II.

¹¹⁰⁰ Lü Peng, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 280.

10.3 The artworks on display

As mentioned before, the artworks on display at *Paris-Pékin* were not specially made for the occasion but were part of the extensive collection of Guy and Myriam Ullens. In total, eighty-eight Chinese experimental artists participated in the exhibition and a total of one hundred and forty works were displayed at the survey. Seven of these participating artists were overseas Chinese artists and they presented a total of thirteen works. Considering the size of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition, less than ten per cent of the works were from overseas Chinese artists. Therefore, the impact that these artists might have had as overseas artists with a different perspective might have been relatively small.

The works that were exhibited were:

Cai Guoqiang: *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51)

Chen Zhen: *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52)¹¹⁰¹

Huang Yongping *One Man Nine Animals, model no.1, Snake* (1999)
(Fig. 54)¹¹⁰²
One Man Nine Animals, model no.6, Eagle (1999) (Fig. 54)

Gu Wenda: *Pseudo Script: Wind* (1996) (Fig. 53)¹¹⁰³
United Nations: Silk Road (2000)¹¹⁰⁴

Wu Shanzhuan: *Paradise* (1993) (Fig. 56)
Today no Water No. 187 (2000) (Fig. 55)
Vege Pleasure (1996) (Fi. 57)

Xu Bing: *Book from the Sky* (1991) (Fig. 30 and 45)¹¹⁰⁵

¹¹⁰¹ Also displayed at *All under Heaven*, see chapter 11 of Block II.

¹¹⁰² Both these works from Huang Yongping's *One Man Nine Animals* were also displayed at *All under Heaven*, analyzed in chapter 11 of Block II.

¹¹⁰³ See also chapter 8 of Block II.

¹¹⁰⁴ Other works of Gu Wenda's *United Nations Series* have been seen in chapter 5, 6, and 8 of Block II.

¹¹⁰⁵ See chapter 6 and 8 of Block II.

Yang Jiechang: *100 Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58)¹¹⁰⁶

Some of these works, such as Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)(Fig. 28) and Gu Wenda's United Nations Series (1993-) have already been commented on in other chapters of this dissertation therefore they shall not be extensively explained within this paragraph. Any references to these works shall only be made if the exhibition catalogue provides extra information on these pieces that is useful to this study. The remaining works of which this dissertation has not spoken of shall be analysed here. These works are:

Cai Guoqiang: *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51)

Chen Zhen: *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52)¹¹⁰⁷

Gu Wenda: *Pseudo Script: Wind* (1996) (Fig. 53)¹¹⁰⁸

Huang Yongping: *One Man Nine Animals: Model No. 6, Eagle* (1999)
(Fig. 54)¹¹⁰⁹
One Man Nine Animals: Model No. 1, Snake (1999) (Fig. 54)

Wu Shanzhuan: *Paradise* (1993) (Fig. 56)
Vege Pleasure (1996) (Fig. 57)

Yang Jiechang: *100 Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58)¹¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰⁶ This work was also displayed at *All under Heaven*. See the following chapter.

¹¹⁰⁷ This work was also displayed at *All under Heaven*. See the following chapter, and chapter 2 of Block II.

¹¹⁰⁸ See chapter 8 of Block II.

¹¹⁰⁹ Both these works from Huang Yongping's *One Man Nine Animals* were also displayed at *All under Heaven*, analysed in chapter 11 of Block II.

¹¹¹⁰ This work was also displayed at *Silent Energy* (chapter 2 of Block II), and *All under Heaven*. See the following chapter.

Cai Guoqiang

About the work of Cai Guoqiang, *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51), the exhibition catalogue mentions:

This drawing was a project proposal for the 1993 Expo in Tokyo. Entitled *Sun Dial*, the project would consist of a series of craters dug into the ground and laid with gunpowder. A large magnifying glass was to suspend over each crater, and as the sun travelled in the sky, the sunbeams will pierce through the lens and ignite the gunpowder in the craters. Created by the power of nature, the work presented a traditional Asian concept of keeping time, which was also a way to govern and regulate the order of the ancient city and everyday life. The project was eventually not realized because the entire Expo was cancelled after the new mayor of Tokyo took office.¹¹¹¹

The work consists of gunpowder and ink on paper and is characteristic for the artist as it uses firework and explosions for its creation. The catalogue does not give any further explanation of the work, which makes it seem quite abstract. Yet on the Sotheby's website¹¹¹² one can find a good description of this particular work:

'Right from the proverbial nest, life begins with a "0", the gaping mouth waiting to be fed. We begin with this circle, which expresses a theme: civility and harmony. We begin with this circle, activating a sundial.' At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Cai Guo-Qiang uttered these words, explaining the chosen theme of sundials he orchestrated for the Olympics' opening ceremony fireworks. (...)

Sun Dial is an early work that predates the Olympic fireworks, one which exemplifies a rare and early conception of this potent image. This series was created in Japan (...). While he is an artist who is a chameleon: shifting seamlessly through cultures and countries, Cai is also an artist who stays true to his Chinese identity. He is not only a creator capable of fusing different worlds onto a single canvas; he is also an artist who has chosen to do so with an erratic medium such as gunpowder. (...)

In Japan, Cai believed that he was able to find 'China's past', marking a 'return' to Chinese traditional culture, remnants of which could be found in Japan.¹¹¹³

The text mentions that Cai Guoqiang is a chameleon capable of fusing different cultures into his work, which on its turn points to the third space concept. Yet, it might be questioned if *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51) could be considered a good example of this fusing of cultures. The use of gunpowder is closely linked to Chinese culture and it is not clear what the Euroamerican influence might have been. This "absence" of "western" influence at this moment of the artist's career might be due to the fact that when Cai made *Sun Dial* (1991) (Fig. 51) he was still living in Japan (from 1986 to 1995). Cai Guoqiang moved to New York in 1995, where he lives until the present day. This work that was exhibited in 2002 was made in 1991 at which moment the artist was not yet living in the United States.

¹¹¹¹ Cai Guoqiang, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 66.

¹¹¹² It might be interesting to mention that the Ullens Foundation put the work up for auction in April 2014 at Sotheby's Hong Kong.

¹¹¹³ The pdf can be downloaded at: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.HK0528.html/f/152/HK0528-152.pdf>, n.d., date of last consultation: 8/5/2014.

This might be the cause for the work to not yet show clear “western” traits that would make the work hybrid.



Figure 51: Cai Guoqiang, explanatory drawing for *Sun Dial*, 1995

Chen Zhen

The work of Chen Zhen, *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52) does not have any further explanation in the exhibition catalogue either. A colour plate of this work is placed in between the essay of Chang Tsong-zung and Marc Decrop’s essay¹¹¹⁴ but no information is given on the work apart from the title, author and year of creation. Yet, an explanation would be helpful as Chen Zhen is quite a complex artist who differentiates himself from the mainland as well as the Euroamerican artists. Chen Zhen moved to Paris¹¹¹⁵ in the 1980’s and has been described as the artist who lived between the East and the West.¹¹¹⁶ Instead of trying to separate the two, he tried to find a synthesis between both cultures by staying connected to his Chinese roots while at the same time embracing “western” culture, which was the environment in which he lived on a daily basis. Also the fact that the artist was trained in Shanghai as well as in Paris helped him get an insider’s view of

¹¹¹⁴ *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 40.

¹¹¹⁵ See also chapter 9 of Block II on the exhibition of *Paris pour Escale*.

¹¹¹⁶ An example of this is the solo exhibition held in 2003 in his honour at the PAC Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea in Milan titled “Chen Zhen: an artist between East and West”.

both cultures. It was Chen Zhen who coined the term “transexperiences”¹¹¹⁷ which is, as Chen Zhen has put it, “a kind of fusion-transcendence experience...which summarizes vividly and profoundly the complex life experiences of leaving one’s native place and going from one place to another in one’s life.”¹¹¹⁸



Figure 52: Chen Zhen, *Human Tower*, 1999

In an article that was published in 1999 Chen Zhen explains his work *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52). The work consists of a “tower” of 2.7 meters high, made out of chairs, candles and metal. Chairs and candles are recurrent materials in Chen Zhen’s creations¹¹¹⁹ and especially the latter symbolizes the spiritual ritualistic world.¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁷ See chapter 2.2 of Block I.

¹¹¹⁸ Fragment from an interview between Chen Zhen and Zhu Xian. Translated by William Y. Jiang. The whole interview can be read here: <http://www.chenzhen.org/francaise/page.php?id=32>, n.d., date of consultation: 27/09/2012.

¹¹¹⁹ Another example using candles is his *Paysage intérieur du corps* (2000) (Fig. 46) consisting of five metallic structures sustaining sculptures made out of candles. See also chapter 9 of Block II on *Paris pour Escale*.

¹¹²⁰ See the interview published by the Museum of Modern Art PS1: <http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/51>, n.d., date of consultation: 30/01/2013. See again chapter 9 of Block II on *Paris pour Escale*.

About *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52) the artists says: [it is] “like a universal home for all human-beings”.¹¹²¹ There is no further explanation on how he tries to achieve this but, according to the artist, the intention of the creation was to make something universal, not Chinese. Could Chen Zhen have been referring to the fact that candles are a universal symbol of light and hope? This remains a question unanswered.¹¹²²

Gu Wenda

The third work that shall be commented on in this paragraph is Gu Wenda’s *Pseudo Script: Wind* that was made in 1996 (Fig. 53). It consists of an “invented” character written with ink on rice paper. The work is of considerable dimensions and measure 2.53 cm by 1.55 cm. Gu Wenda’s *Pseudo Script: Wind* (1996) (Fig. 53) is a part of a series of works of ink on rice paper representing imaginary characters. Although the work is mentioned in the exhibition catalogue as *Pseudo Script*, it is also actually better known as *Pseudo Character: Wind (Sky Dynasty Format #4-1)* (Fig. 53).



Figure 53: Gu Wenda, *Pseudo Character: Wind (Sky Dynasty Format #4-1)*, 1996

¹¹²¹ This reference was kindly provided by the ADAC (Association Des Amis de Chen Zhen) in Paris. See the article written by the artist himself: *Couldn't Bananas Be Black?*, Project Raw House, Houston, 1999.

¹¹²² See also chapter 9 for further comments on the use of candles in the work of Chen Zhen.

Gu Wenda moved to the United States in 1987, therefore, this work that was created in 1996 was while he was living abroad. The fact that Gu Wenda became fascinated by script and the written word is most likely a consequence of having moved overseas. As an artist living abroad, Gu Wenda had to personally experience what it was like to have to learn a new language. This probably has sparked his interest for topics such as the written word, intercultural dialogue and misunderstanding.¹¹²³

About this pseudo-characters, Gu Wenda has mentioned in an interview that:

These early works, which used meaningless but now readable or invented characters, actually contain several meanings. Our knowledge is limited by our written language;... the universe is infinite [but] language [is not]. There are many unknowns [and] these are like unreadable characters, meaningless characters, [that can represent] imagination beyond the limitation of the language.

Another meaning [stems] from the massive posters created by working class people during the Cultural Revolution. The calligraphy used on these posters is the most unique and modern Chinese calligraphy. It is creative and truly emotional because of what people believed during that period. It is also connected to mass culture rather than limited to scholarly [study]. Educated people wrote the calligraphy on these posters, so their language is not profound but defined. They use strong words. I took influence from this.¹¹²⁴

Taking a look at the exhibition catalogue, not much is said about *Pseudo Character* (Fig. 55). Within the catalogue, an interview is published between the artist and the art critic and curator Melissa Chiu. However, the interview is mainly about Gu Wenda's other work, the *United Nations Series* (1993-) (Fig. 12, 27, 28 and 41). The artist does not give any explanation on how *Pseudo Script*¹¹²⁵ should be interpreted, which is in fact quite characteristic of this artist who has mentioned that his aim is often to provoke misunderstanding as this would be a sign of true communication (see his correspondence with Julia F. Andrews in chapter three and five of Block II).

As a conclusion to this particular work, it might be interesting to mention that *Pseudo Character: Wind (Sky Dynasty Format #4-1)* (Fig. 53) was sold in 2014 by the Hanart TZ Gallery through Sotheby's Hong Kong for almost ninety thousand euros.

¹¹²³ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

¹¹²⁴ Art Radar, an online independent news source that writes about contemporary art in Asia. <http://artradarjournal.com/2011/06/15/words-in-arts-wenda-gu-on-rewriting-and-reranslating-traditional-culture/>. Date of consultation: 10/09/2012.

¹¹²⁵ For a possible interpretation of this work, see chapter 8 of Block II.

Huang Yongping

Moving on to the next work, Huang Yongping's *One Man Nine Animals* (Fig. 54), made in 1999 for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, is not extensively commented on either within the catalogue. Therefore, an explanation of this work on the website chinese-art.com might be insightful:

Nine Animals, One Man consists of nine natural wood pillars positioned in a loosely formed queue. Starting from the rear of the pavilion at a height of 15 meters the columns proceed one by one, becoming gradually shorter through the entrance with the two shortest ones standing out in front of the pavilion itself. The columns pierce the pavilion's roof and lodge themselves into its floor as if unexpectedly plunging down from the sky. The effect is almost pure Hollywood in its theatricality. Huang's columns navigate through the pavilion at once acknowledging and countering the staid symmetry of its design. Atop each column, as if poised in mid-stride, are perched the nine imaginary beasts of the *Shanhaijing* from *The Book of Mountains and Seas* which is devoted to Chinese mythology. Coming from distant lands each of these species deliver a different prediction of the fate of the world.

Facing this procession of fantastical beasts on the ground before the pavilion is a lone character pointing in amazement at the forthcoming stampede. The One Man, as denoted in the piece's title, stands atop an idle Compass Chariot, the traditional Chinese tool for measuring time and direction. This lone figure, presumably the artist himself, heroically confronts the convoluted situation of culture at the end of the 20th century.

Beginning with a direct attack on the architectural authority of the pavilion itself and the edifice's embodiment of Nationalist self-consciousness, Huang's piece performs as a metaphoric conduit. The hybrid beasts connote a homogenizing global culture whereas the broken Compass Chariot signifies the end of the millennium, void of any discernible ideology. The contradictory omens that each of these fantastical beasts are said to deliver is but a subtext to the mythic sense of chaos created by the haunting scale of the columns themselves. The piece pierces and stretches through the pavilion- eventually looking back on itself in paralyzed astonishment.¹¹²⁶

Again, it seems that his work is a reflection on global culture, or better said, the lack of any discernible ideology at the end of the millennium. The text speaks of a homogenizing global culture yet the work contains clear references to Chinese mythology. Moreover, the work was presented at the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale that still categorizes its pavilions according to national identities. Therefore, this work, seen within its context, becomes highly complex and can be interpreted from various perspectives. Although the catalogue does not give specific information on this work, it does provide a very brief quote from the artists in which he mentions:

My intention was to expand a one-hundred-year-old cultural space and the restrictions historically imposed on it. I wanted both to physically go beyond this space and to insert within it voices from another culture. The ultimate intention was a rethinking of the formal 'national pavilion' model of the Venice Biennale.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²⁶ See the article by Mathieu Borysevicz, Another point of view: HYP in Venice, <http://www.chinese-art.com/Contemporary/volume2issue4/Other/other1.htm>, n.d., date of consultation, 27/09/2012.

¹¹²⁷ Huang Yongping, *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 114.



Figure 54: Huang Yongping, *One Man Nine Animals*, 1999. Installation for the French Pavillion.

Huang Yongping made *One Man Nine Animals* (1999) (Fig. 54) for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. This is highly significant as it might indicate Huang Yongping's adaptation to and identification with the French culture, as he is here invited to represent his adopted country, France, and not his country of origin, China. This indicates the changes that occur within the sense of identity of overseas artists and indirectly might also point to their in-between position among different cultures and nationalities. As Huang Yongping mentions in this quote, this in-between position makes him rethink the model of "national pavilion", as he is a "Chinese" (overseas) artists representing another country, in this case France. Consequently, he proceeds to go beyond the limitations of the national pavilions by literally piercing through the roof of the pavilion with nine enormously high pillars. Metaphorically this could also point to the fact that Huang Yongping considers that the Venice Biennale's model of categorizing the pavilions according to the ethnic background of the artists, as representatives of their country, has become out-dated within a global twenty-first century. Huang Yongping himself is a good example of these global times as he is a "Chinese" artist living in France.

Wu Shanzhuan

The next artist that shall be commented on is Wu Shanzhuan who moved to Germany in the late 1980s. The three works that were on display at the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition were all from previous years. *Paradise* (Fig. 56) dates from 1993, *Vege Pleasure* (Fig. 57) was made in 1996, and *Today No Water n° 187* (Fig. 55) in the year 2000. The catalogue text written by Chang Tsong-zung about Wu Shanzhuan focuses mainly on the role of calligraphy within his works and makes a special reference to *Today no Water* (2000) (Fig. 55), yet no references are made to the other two works that were also presented at *Paris-Pékin*.

Wu Shanzhuan was born in China but resided in Hamburg and Iceland until 2005, when he decided to return to China. In general, it could be alleged that Wu's work tries to demonstrate the meaninglessness of Chinese characters by reflecting on their ambiguity. An example of this is his reflection on the word *chi* (赤) which in Chinese means "red", "communist" but also "void" "empty" or "bare". The different meanings for this particular character are contradictory yet the character is used for words such as "red guard" and "red China" but also to describe that something is "empty" and therefore meaningless. Wu's conclusion is that Chinese characters by themselves have no meaning and only obtain significance through their context.

Another example of Wu's theory comes from one of his other works titled *Today No Water* (1986-1999) (Fig. 55) which became a non-linear and non-narrative graphic novel in which the artist questions the role of the written language. This work started out when the artist was washing his hands in his home, at the same time reading an official poster that notified the inhabitants of his neighbourhood that there would be no water that day. The fact that he was washing his hands while reading this pamphlet made him reflect on the nonsense, or meaninglessness of the text and this confirmed his philosophy on the meaninglessness of written words by themselves if not interpreted within their context.

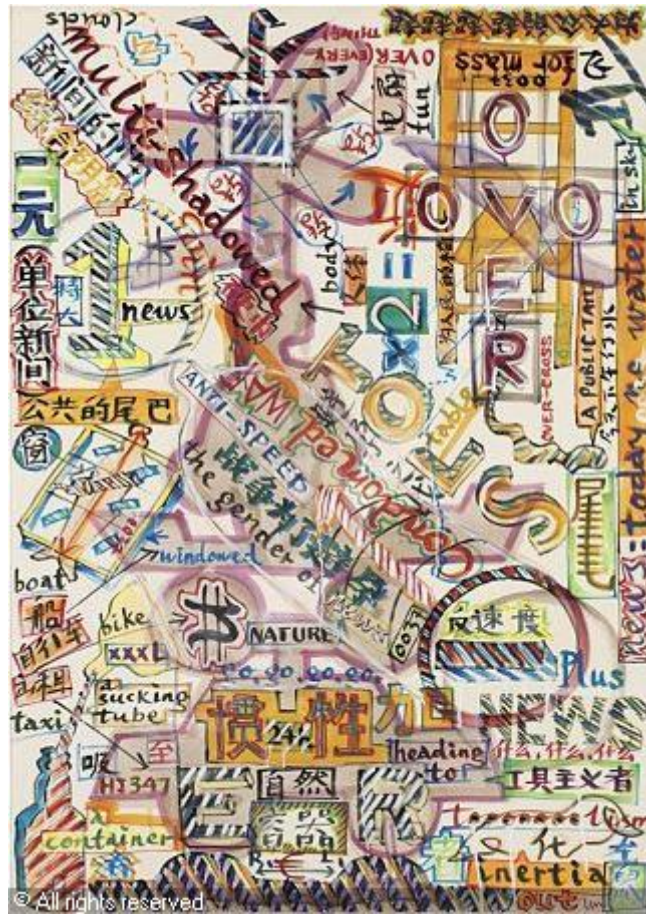


Figure 55: Wu Shanzhuan, *Today No Water Series*, no. 37, 2001

Paradise (1993) (Fig. 56) consists of a color photograph of the artist together with the Icelandic artist, and also wife of Wu Shanzhuan, Inga Svala Thórsdóttir in a supermarket. They are completely naked and are posing amidst an abundance of fruits and vegetables. It is said that the painting is inspired by Albrecht Dürers' *Adam and Eve*,¹¹²⁸ which is an example of how Chinese experimental art is often compared to Euroamerican references in order to make it more "familiar". On this photograph, Inga Svala Thórsdóttir is holding an apple, the forbidden fruit, and is tempting Wu Shanzhuan who seems to be reaching his hand towards it. The shopping cart that Wu Shanzhuan is holding on to is filled with milk products and junk food, as if they are preparing for their expulsion from paradise.¹¹²⁹

¹¹²⁸ See for example the New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/13/arts/art-in-review-wu-shan-zhuan-and-inga-svala-thorsdottir.html>, July 13th 2001, date of last consultation: 31/8/2014.

¹¹²⁹ The photograph is the fourth in a series of ten and was sold in 2014 by Sotheby's Hong Kong for almost eighty-two thousand euros, which was much more than was expected.



Figure 56: Wu Shanzhuan, *Paradise*, 1993

Paradise (1993) (Fig. 56) is somewhat linked to the other work that was on display, *Vege Pleasure* (1996) (Fig. 57) as both address the abundance of consumer society and the varied choice modern society has when it comes to food. Moreover, both projects were a collaboration between the Chinese artist Wu Shanzhuan and the Icelandic artists Inga Svala Thórsdóttir. The webpage invaluable.com which is dedicated to art auctions all over the world quotes:

Vege-pleasure (Lot 67, 1999) documents a veritable orgy of vegetables, progressively rotting in various relationships of physical intimacy and imagined reproductive capacity.

In making *Vege-pleasure*, the artists wished to distance the quotidian products of habitual consumption from bodily experience, making a landscape of them in their home. In arranging their various vegetables still-lives, the artists had in mind the decreasing bio-diversity available to the average supermarket consumer. "There was a lot of ecological literature behind it," says Thórsdóttir, "but the products used were simply what we could afford. The principle was to imagine that one vegetable could profit from another... that every intercourse among vegetables could be productive, that a life could start from this. If you put a mango with a potato it's like anonymous sex, but it's a forced diversity... various things don't go together, like mango and avocado... It became a process of observing nature, like a scientific experiment, but our results were visual and uncontrolled: the greatest life we had was flies and mould."¹¹³⁰

¹¹³⁰ <http://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/wu-shanzhuan-and-inga-svala-tha-rsda-ttir--vege-67-c-wsywl0zb8b>, September 20 2007. Date of last consultation: 9/5/2014.



Figure 57: Wu Shanzhuan, *Vege Pleasure*, 1996

Vege Pleasure (1996) (Fig. 57)¹¹³¹ was made in Hamburg in 1995 and it might be interpreted as criticism on the “western” society of consumerism and throw-away culture in which food is often wasted. Reading the above-mentioned fragment, both works have a highly sexual connotation and seem to relate food with eroticism. In *Vege Pleasure* (1996) (Fig. 57) vegetables and fruits are left to rot and the work is about the process of decay, which might point to the inevitable human destiny of death, which is a consequence of being expelled from Paradise.

Both works could be seen as the result of a cultural shock, consequence of the artist moving abroad. In these works, the artist seems to address “western” materialism, capitalism, and abundance which might not have been present in China when the artists was still living on the mainland. Additionally, both works were made in collaboration with a

¹¹³¹ A chromogenic print of this work was sold at New York Sotheby’s in 2007 for approximately 9000 euros.

“western” artist, which adds a hybrid aspect to them. They can no longer be seen as purely “Chinese” nor as purely “western”.

Yang Jiechang

The following work of Yang Jiechang that shall be analysed here does have a fairly insightful text within the exhibition catalogue. *100 Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and 58), which consist of a big black square of ink on a white paper background was made in 1989 and exposed at the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, which was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris the same year.



Figure 58: Yang Jiechang amidst his black squares at the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition

The text dedicated to the artist and this particular work is written by David Elliot who was also the curator of the exhibition *Silent Energy* held in 1993¹¹³² in which Yang Jiechang participated. Within this text, David Elliot explains the role of calligraphy and colour within Yang Jiechang’s work and then also mentions that his “black squares” are often interpreted in different ways. According to the author “Yang’s black changes with the light and with one’s mood...though never sad, they can be somber at times. They can also convey joy and a sense of space...they are never dark or devoid of meaning.”¹¹³³

¹¹³² See chapter 2 of Block II.

¹¹³³ *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 226.

On the same page, Yang Jiechang comments on an experience he had while visiting an eminent master of Quanzhen Taoism of the south. Towards the end of this brief fragment the artist states: “However, time passed and I became aware of having been profoundly affected. I have retained a spiritual gift that will last my entire life. It is said somewhere: The real is without form”.¹¹³⁴ This brief fragment might help to gain a better understanding of *100 Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58), as the colour black is without form, left open for the personal and subjective interpretation of anyone who perceives this work. This coincides with what David Elliot has previously mentioned that the “black squares” change according to one’s mood. Also the artist has commented on the fact that *100 Layers of Ink* has been interpreted very differently in different countries.¹¹³⁵

In Mainland China, [my paintings] provoked [discussion] as works about a ‘darkening socialism’. In France, people consider [my works] as ‘Oriental Black’, representing Nothingness and Nihilism. In Japan, some critics judge this kind of painting as ‘very romantic’. When my work was showing in the Kunstverein, in Heidelberg, Germany (the epitome of German Romanticism), it was actually attacked as ‘full of violence’ with ‘Fascist tendencies’.¹¹³⁶

100 Layers of Ink has also been compared to Euroamerican minimalism or abstract art and has been said to reassemble the work of Kasimir Malevich’s *Black squares on White Ground*, made in 1914-1915¹¹³⁷ (which was also compared to Qiu Zhijie’s *Copying the “Orchid Pavilion Preface” a Thousand Times* (1990-1995) by Marc Decrop earlier within this chapter). This is a good example of how Chinese experimental artworks are sometimes compared to more “familiar” Euroamerican works in order to make them more comprehensible to a Euroamerican public. What becomes clear is that the interpretation and understanding of an artwork is always subjective and is enormously influenced by the historical and cultural background of the public or country of reception.

As a conclusion to this paragraph, it could be said that the works that were displayed by the overseas Chinese artists at *Paris-Pékin* were examples of hybrid works and that elements of the third space could be observed. Yet in the exhibition catalogue there is no mention of the third space and the works of the overseas artists that were on display at

¹¹³⁴ *Paris-Pékin* exhibition catalogue, p. 226.

¹¹³⁵ See also paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹¹³⁶ Artist statement, Art Beatus website, November 1998. Taken from the Hide literature and catalogue notes of the Sotheby’s website. For the full article see: <http://www.sothebys.com/es/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/the-ullens-collection-the-nascence-of-avant-garde-china-hk0373/lot.855.html>, n.d., date of last consultation 15/6/2014

¹¹³⁷ See the article *Yang Jiechang: The Communist Party Didn’t Pay the Bill* written by Britta Erickson, published by Art Asia Pacific, Issue 65, Sep/Oct 2009, p. 119.

the survey were not interpreted or explained from this point of view. In no place was there any mention of how the overseas artists were influenced by the fact of living abroad and how this changed their work and their identity professionally as well as personally. The Chinese overseas artists were not seen any different from the mainland artists and hereby an essential part of the meaning of their works is lost.

In this part of the dissertation only the works of the overseas artists have been analysed. However, remembering the initial goals of the art curator Fei Dawei and art collector Guy Ullens, *Paris-Pékin* definitely was a great example of “introducing” experimental Chinese art to the French public as it contained the most well-known artists as well as many of the signature artworks of the experimental Chinese art scene.

10.4 Analysis of the exhibition reviews

For an exhibition on this scale with so many works on display it is remarkable that so little reviews have been written on this survey. Only four online reviews have been able to be traced, of which three are rather similar. In some places the text within these articles is even exactly the same. Also, only one of these reviews comes from a French website. The other three have been published on websites that are not French. On the one hand, this indicates that *Paris-Pékin* did cause an impact outside of France but on the other hand it also points to the little impact it caused nationally. The reviews that have been located are (in chronological order):

- Author unknown, *Paris-Pekin Exhibition*, 5/10/2002, from the webpage [undo.net/](http://www.undo.net/), (Italian website) <http://www.undo.net/it/mostra/11070>. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014
- Jack Biddington, *Paris Autumn 2002 – Special Art Exhibitions*, from the website of biddingtons auction house, (located in the United States) n.d., <http://www.biddingtons.com/content/bentley.html>. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014
- Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin*, review from the centre national des arts plastiques, <http://www.cnap.fr/paris-pekina>, n.d. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014
- Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin Exhibition*, published in the Indepth Art News section of absolutearts.com, (website from Ohio) n.d. <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/10/04/30352.html>, n.d. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014

11.4.1 Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin*

The first review is written in French and comes from the website of the *centre national des arts plastiques* which was founded in 1982 and has as its main mission the promotion and support of the contemporary art scene in France. It also manages the *Fonds national d'art contemporain* on behalf of the French government which allows them to buy contemporary artworks from French as well as international artists. Their collection has grown up to 92.000 pieces which are maintained and sometimes displayed. The CNAP also supports upcoming artists by providing research grants and legal assistance when required.

The review written by the CNAP is very brief and principally gives practical information on the exhibition. According to the text, the main goal of the exhibition was to fill a gap in the French artistic scene “l’initiative ambitieuse de compléter un vide sur la scène”.¹¹³⁸ This coincides with Chang Tsong-zung’s objective of presenting Chinese experimental art to the French audience. Yet, as mentioned in the first paragraph, it should be remembered that *Paris-Pékin*, held in 2002, is spoken of in terms of providing the opportunity for the French public to “discover” Chinese experimental art. This seems to disregard the other intents of earlier shows of experimental Chinese art like *Chine hier pour demain* that was held in Pourrières almost twelve years earlier or the *Paris pour Escale* held just two years before.¹¹³⁹ This might be an indication that these exhibitions did not cause an impact within France and that for this reason Chinese experimental art remained rather unknown to the French audience. This is somewhat confirmed by the fact that *Paris-Pékin* is presented as an opportunity to “fill a gap”, like this review mentions. Yet, as *Paris-Pékin* did not cause a big impact in the media either (seen from the few reviews that have been written on the survey from which only one is French), it might be assumed that even a show of this scale was not capable of generating a greater interest in the French public and media. This might indicate a more profound problem of disinterest in Chinese experimental art within France which might partly be explained by the *Paris pour Escale* (2000) exhibition in which it was alleged that French institutions are not collaborative when it comes to the promotion of non-French art and culture within France.¹¹⁴⁰ Yet on the other hand, this hypothesis is then contradicted by the fact that *Paris-Pékin* was also held as an introduction to the France-China year of 2003, and that the exhibition catalogue included a foreword by the French minister of Culture and Communication.

10.4.2 Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin* Exhibition

The next review comes from the website of absolutearts.com which is a website from Ohio (United States) dedicated to the buying and selling of (contemporary) art. It also includes some artistic blogs that provide information on events such as the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition. The review does not give any personal opinion on the exhibition and remains rather objective, focussing mainly on practical information on the survey. Yet, it is significant that

¹¹³⁸ Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin*, review from the centre national des arts plastiques, <http://www.cnap.fr/paris-pekini>. Date of last update 23 September 2011. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014.

¹¹³⁹ See chapter 1 and 9 of Block II.

¹¹⁴⁰ See chapter 9 of Block II.

an American website has mentioned this exhibition that was held in Paris, as it points to the impact the exhibition generated outside of France, even though it was rather minimal. The text on [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com) literally copies part of the text previously seen on the website of the *centre national des arts plastiques* when it mentions “this exhibition, achieved through private funding, fills a void in the French art scene: to date there has been no exhibition on such a large scale seen in France.”¹¹⁴¹ Which seems to be a quite literal translation of the French text from the CNAP that mentions “Entièrement réalisé grâce à des fonds privés, l’initiative ambitionne de combler un vide sur la scène artistique français. Il n’y a eu, à ce jour, aucune exposition d’envergure traitant de l’art contemporain chinois en France.”¹¹⁴² The text on [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com) then also emphasizes the fact that this exhibition is an ideal opportunity for the French public to “discover” Chinese experimental art: “it will be an exciting occasion for the public to discover and experience this extraordinary art.”¹¹⁴³ Which is not only a repetition of the earlier review but also a comment that should be nuanced (see previous review).

All in all, it seems as if all the information within this text has been copied literally from the website of the *centre national des arts plastiques* which might point to the fact that the author of the review has not visited the exhibition personally.

10.4.3 Author unknown, *Paris-Pekin Exhibition*

The third review published on the website [undo.net](http://www.undo.net) also literally copies entire paragraphs of the article that was published on [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com). The website was created in 1995 by three Italian artists in order to form a network of artists, curators and other art professionals. These were then offered the opportunity to come into contact with each other, to organize projects and to promote their artworks and project to the general public.

As mentioned earlier, the entire text of [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com) is copied word for word into this review. Then the review continues by adding half a page more in which it speaks of the specific artists within each media that was presented at *Paris-Pekin*. It does not give any

¹¹⁴¹ Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin Exhibition*, published in the Indepth Art News section of [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com), n.d. <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/10/04/30352.html>, n.d. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014.

¹¹⁴² Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin*, review from the *centre national des arts plastiques*, <http://www.cnap.fr/paris-pekin>. Date of last update 23 September 2011. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014.

¹¹⁴³ Author unknown, *Paris-Pékin Exhibition*, published in the Indepth Art News section of [absolutearts.com](http://www.absolutearts.com), n.d. <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/10/04/30352.html>, n.d. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014

opinion on these artworks but limits itself to enlisting the artists according to their speciality, e.g. photography, video, sculpture, etc.

The article mentions at a certain point that “this exhibition places established artists of the Chinese avant-garde movement of the end of the 20th century (...) up against their particularly interesting younger counterparts (...)”.¹¹⁴⁴ Here, a number of artists are mentioned but all of them are mainland artists. No overseas artist is mentioned here, which might be due to the fact that the overseas artists were not clearly distinguished within the exhibition catalogue either. Some of the overseas artists are enlisted in the section “calligraphy” however, the fact that they are living abroad is not highlighted.

All in all, this review is of a rather poor quality as it does not provide any insightful information on the exhibition but seems to limit itself to copying entire paragraphs from another website (without publishing the original source of this information).

10.4.4 Jack Biddington, *Paris Autumn 2002 – Special Art Exhibitions*

The last review is from the website biddingtons.com which is an art gallery as well as an auction house. The owner of the gallery, Jake Biddington, has created a blog within his website in which he writes about his “art travels” all over the world. One of these blog posts was about his visit to Paris in the autumn of 2002 in which he also briefly speaks of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition. According to the author the exhibition provides an “informative picture of Chinese culture and politics”, and then later on mentions “this show reflects various aspects of changes in China itself”.¹¹⁴⁵ This does not coincide with the aims set out by the curators of *Paris-Pékin* and is another example of how Euroamerican art experts sometimes emphasize the political aspect of Chinese experimental art, even when it was clearly not the intention of the exhibition. This political aspects is then later on stressed even more when the author continues and writes: “It is a study of what artists in insular cultures select as expressive means when wishing to communicate to the worldwide audience.”¹¹⁴⁶ Here, Jack Biddington describes China as an “insular culture”, as if China in the year 2002 still were the communist, closed-off nation reigned by Mao

¹¹⁴⁴ Author unknown, *Paris-Pekin Exhibition*, 5/10/2002, from the webpage undo.net/it, <http://www.undo.net/it/mostra/11070>. 5 October 2002, Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014.

¹¹⁴⁵ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴⁶ Jack Biddington, *Paris Autumn 2002 – Special Art Exhibitions*, from the website of [biddingtons auction houses](http://biddingtons.com), n.d., <http://www.biddingtons.com/content/bentley.html>. Date of last consultation: 28/8/2014.

Zedong of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, he then insinuates that the artists within China are somewhat repressed, or “desperate” to communicate with an outside world when he uses the word “wishing”. *Paris-Pékin* was held in the year 2002, at this moment in time Chinese experimental art had already entered the international art scene and communicating with the outside world had long gone ceased to be a wish but had become a reality. Therefore, this portrayal of China and Chinese artists given by the author seems highly exaggerated.

Also, this review emphasizes the fact that the exhibition provides the opportunity to get insight into Chinese culture and politics. This comment is sometimes repeated among Euroamerican art critics: they see Chinese experimental art as windows into Chinese society, and not as art currents that are actively taking part in the international art scene. This comment is rather narrow-minded as it perceives Chinese experimental art as Chinese, providing insight into Chinese society, and not as an independent, global art.

All in all, most of the reviews found about *Paris-Pékin* did not give any subjective information about the exhibition and seemed to be limited to providing objective and practical information on the survey. Most of the reviewers have probably not personally visited the exhibition as some of the information within these reviews are literarily copied from other websites. This is rather poignant, as *Paris-Pékin* was an exhibition on Chinese experimental art on a very large scale, yet the impact that it caused seems to have been quite insignificant. The intention of letting the French public “discover” Chinese experimental art appears to have resulted, once again, a failed mission.

10.5 Conclusions on *Paris-Pékin*

All in all, the exhibition catalogue of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition is very comprehensible and it becomes a very useful tool for a (non-)expert audience on Chinese experimental art to gain insight into this particular art current. All articles and essays within the catalogue were written by international experts in the field which results in a lot of interesting background information that shines a comprehensive and a much needed light on Chinese experimental art. Compared to the exhibition catalogue analysed on the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition held almost twelve years earlier,¹¹⁴⁷ the differences are enormous. As times passes, the catalogue becomes more specialised, more “to the point” and more exclusively oriented on Chinese experimental art. No longer are exhibition catalogue articles written by non-experts on Chinese experimental art or on topics that do not seem to be related to Chinese experimental art or the exhibition, a phenomenon observed in the exhibition catalogue of *Chine demain pour hier*. Here, in *Paris-Pékin*, the catalogue has become an excellent instrument to improve the understanding of Chinese experimental art in general. The catalogue does not limit itself to basic, introductory explanations of the historic evolution or development of this art, but also addresses more detailed, in-depth themes such as the influence of the human body, Chinese calligraphy and China’s past within Chinese experimental art.

As to the more specific topics, in some of the essays, especially in the one written by Chang Tsong-zung, the Chinese artists who are living abroad are briefly highlighted, even though the curator then does not further elaborate on their in-between position. However, it should also be stated that concepts such as third space are not mentioned at all anywhere in the catalogue, neither by the authors of the essays, or by the artists.

Then, it is also important to underline the fact that some of the essays were quite critical on the way the “West” receives Chinese experimental art. Hou Hanru openly describes eurocentrism within the international art market and also Gu Wenda, within his interview, speaks of the way Chinese experimental art is sometimes expected to be a certain way when presented in a Euroamerican context. This was also mentioned by the curator Chang Tsong-zung within his catalogue essay when he spoke of the fact that Chinese experimental art is often exoticized within the international art scene. Fei Dawei on his turn spoke of the unilateral vision of Chinese experimental art and how the Chinese curators

¹¹⁴⁷ See chapter 1 of Block II.

are often left on the sidelines when it comes to organizing surveys on Chinese art. Yet, these points are then not further elaborated upon and become isolated elements within the catalogue. Had these points been further explained as a collective, or been picked up on by other essays within the catalogue, its impact would have been far greater. This kind of information is essential as it is the first step to changing the status quo of inequality between Euroamerican and non-Euroamerican art. Catalogues that contain interviews and essays like these of *Paris-Pékin* should be emphasized more as they create awareness on the way non-Euroamerican art is received in the international art world.

What becomes clear is that in twelve years time, more specialists on Chinese experimental art have appeared. This is of course very positive yet, seen the scarcity of reviews written on the survey and the way the exhibition was described by these, these experts somehow do not seem to reach the media and the art critics, and are not able to transmit and share their expertise with them. This way, the intents to generate a true understanding of Chinese experimental art become an uphill battle. This is also reaffirmed by the fact that *Paris-Pékin* is presented as an opportunity for the French audience to “discover” Chinese experimental art. The *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition held in Pourrières in the early year of 1990 is not mentioned in the exhibition catalogue apart from the very brief mention Lü Peng makes on this survey within his extensive chronology. Also *Paris pour Escalé*,¹¹⁴⁸ organized in Paris just two years prior to *Paris-Pékin* is omitted within this catalogue. So, it seems that specialists on Chinese experimental art and their knowledge on this art have significantly improved yet the general interest towards non-Euroamerican art (within France) seems to have stagnated and not evolved at all during this time: twelve years later, Chinese experimental art is once again presented as a “discovery”.

The little impact that these experts on Chinese experimental art have on the art critics becomes evident in the few reviews that were written on the survey. Only four reviews could have been located, which is extremely meagre for an exhibition of this magnitude and quality. Moreover, three of these reviews came from websites outside of France, only one very brief review was written about the *Paris-Pékin* survey by a French source. As mentioned before, the poor result might be due to the fact that the exhibition was held in France which allegedly seems to be rather protective of its nation-state culture and generally does not support non-French artistic movements that challenge this national

¹¹⁴⁸ See chapter 9 of Block II.

identity and culture.¹¹⁴⁹ Yet on the other hand, *Paris-Pékin* was also held as an introduction to the France-China year that would be held the year after. Therefore, it does show certain openness towards other cultures and nations, in this case, China. This seems rather contradictory and might indicate France's confusion when it comes to the acceptance of other "foreign" influences and the protection of the French nation-state culture.

Coming back to the low impact that the survey caused, the Ullens' collection is one of the best and largest collections on Chinese experimental art in the world. The fact that not much has been written on this exhibition outside of France might indicate that exhibitions held within the United States or European countries remain rather isolated and generally do not cause an impact on a more international level. This might be one of the differences between exhibitions and biennales that often do generate enormous impact on the media on a global level as it reunites the artistic currents of many different nations from around the world. An exhibition on Chinese experimental art, as it only presents one specific "nationality", one specific current, as a result remains a "local" event.¹¹⁵⁰

Yet, as has been mentioned before, only few reviews were written on this survey and in general they were of a rather poor quality. It does not seem that the authors of these texts have read the exhibition catalogue, as they have not picked up on the messages that were transmitted by, for example, Hou Hanru and Gu Wenda. As long as art critics and (Chinese) art curators remain disconnected, exhibitions of the scale of *Paris-Pékin* and exhibition catalogues such as the one published for this survey will not be able to live up to the enormously useful tools they could be when it comes to changing the status quo of the international art scene.

¹¹⁴⁹ See chapter 9 of Block II on the exhibition of *Paris pour Escalé*.

¹¹⁵⁰ This point shall be further elaborated in Block III of the Conclusions.

11. ALL UNDER HEAVEN (2004)

11.1 Introduction to the exhibition

The following introduction is based on the press kit that was released for the occasion by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Antwerp¹¹⁵¹ where the exhibition *All under Heaven* was organized in 2004.

From March 20th until May 30th 2004 the Museum of Contemporary Art of Antwerp (MuHKA, *Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen*) presented various artworks of Chinese experimental art. Parallel to this exhibition, the Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp (KMSKA, *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*) showed some of the masterpieces of classical Chinese art. The main objective of *All under Heaven* was to renew the “western” perception of Chinese art and to focus on its universal meaning. As it states in their press kit “the dangerous lack of openness towards Chinese society, (...) is one of the problems with which ‘All under Heaven’ is dealing.”¹¹⁵²

The survey was a co-production between the MuHKA, the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, and the KMSKA. The exhibition displayed works that came from the collection of the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, just like the previous analysis of the exhibition *Paris-Pékin*, held two years earlier. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Ullens’ collection is one of the most extensive collections of experimental Chinese art in the world including works dating from the nineties until the present day, but the collection also contains Chinese painting and calligraphy dating from as early as the 11th century.

Guy Ullens’ wish to share his collection with the audience resulted in the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation that was initiated in 2003 and in the beginning was directed by Fei Dawei.¹¹⁵³ Under his guidance, the foundation aims at developing a living and open collection, as well as building a dynamic relationship with artists and institutions. In 2003, the foundation sponsored the Venice Biennale and various exhibitions by Chinese artists

¹¹⁵¹ MuHKA (Museum Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen).

¹¹⁵² *All under Heaven* press kit, p. 1. The press kit can be found and downloaded in pdf format from Google’s search machine by typing “all under heaven press kit”. Date of consultation: 26/08/2014.

¹¹⁵³ See also chapter 1 of Block II on the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*, also curated by Fei Dawei.

in China and abroad.¹¹⁵⁴ The twofold project *All under Heaven* at the MuHKA and the KMSKA in Antwerp was a first step for the foundation to further promote Chinese art in Europe.

Fei Dawei,¹¹⁵⁵ the curator of the exhibition, is currently Vice-president of the '798' art district expert committee in Beijing, China.¹¹⁵⁶ The 798 district is an industrial zone which now also concentrates a huge amount of art studios and galleries, becoming one of the main hubs for Chinese experimental art in China. Fei Dawei graduated from the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts with a BA, majoring in History of Art, and received an MA (majoring in History of Art) from the Université Paris VIII. After being awarded a *Chercheur Libre* research grant by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he moved permanently to France, acquiring French nationality. Since 2000, he works and lives alternatively in both France and China. While being the Director of the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, he also set up the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in the Beijing 798 district, from which he resigned in 2008. Fei Dawei has acted as Chief Curator in numerous exhibitions, including the 1990 *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition in Pourrières analysed in chapter one; the 1991 *Exceptional Passage* exhibition in Fukuoka, Japan; the 1994 *Promenade in Asia* exhibition in Tokyo, Japan; the 1995 *Asiana* exhibition during the Venice Biennale, Italy; and the 2007 '85 *New Wave* inaugural exhibition at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, China.

In *All under Heaven* at the KMSKA, twenty works by classical Chinese painters and calligraphers were displayed together with the museum's collection of classical European art. In the section of *All under Heaven* that was exposed at the MuHKA, however, the emphasis was put on artists from China representative of the nineties, but also pioneers of experimental art in China from the latter half of the eighties, like Xu Bing and Chen Zhen. In this aspect, the exhibition is quite similar to the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition held two years earlier in Paris. The survey also focused on the most promising artists of the upcoming generation who were invited to make artworks especially for the occasion. For some of the participating artists this was the first time that their work was shown in Belgium.

¹¹⁵⁴ It should be stated that the Guy and Myriam Ullens foundation started to sell part of its collection in 2009. It is not clear why. Some say that it was in order to raise money for the Ullens Centre of Contemporary Art that has been set up in Beijing. Other rumours have mentioned that it has been in order to make funds available to invest in the new and upcoming Chinese artists. Other information insinuates that Guy Ullens wanted to make his collection available to other collectors.

¹¹⁵⁵ See also chapter 1 of Block II. Fei Dawei was also the curator for the first exhibition analysed within this dissertation titled *Chine demain pour hier* that was held in 1990 in Pourrières, France.

¹¹⁵⁶ Source: <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/person/219>, 2014. Date of last consultation: 28/9/2014.

Fei Dawei, the curator of the exhibition and at the time Director of the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, worked together with Bart De Baere, the Director of this museum, for this occasion. For the classical part of the exhibition, the advice of Jean-Marie Simonet was called upon, honorary curator of the Chinese department at the Royal museum for Art and History in Brussels.

Lastly, the title of the survey *All under Heaven*, *tianxia* (天下), is one of the foundations of Chinese philosophy and comes from the Confucian concept that expresses a universal harmony among all that is under heaven. The expression “all under heaven” was also a way to define, in ancient China, all the lands that belonged to the Emperor. *Tianxia* was a way for Chinese (ancient) civilization to perceive the world: an integrated whole in which heaven, earth and all life are in harmony. Maybe it could even be seen as the ancient ancestor of what we now know as “global” or “universal”. This becomes significant as one of the goals of the curator, Fei Dawei, was to demonstrate that Chinese experimental art does not have an exclusively Chinese message but a universal one. This coincides with Fei Dawei’s vision of the non-existence of a *Chinese* experimental art movement. As was mentioned in paragraph 3.3 of Block I:

I [Fei Dawei] never organize large-scale Chinese art shows. I always try to focus on the individual works of Chinese artists. And even though I want to show Chinese artists, I will not show the ‘Chinese avant-garde’. For me, the Chinese ‘avant-garde’ does not exist. We can only speak about art by focusing on the work of the artist.”¹¹⁵⁷

¹¹⁵⁷ Fei Dawei in Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano 2007, p. 122.

11.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, like the *Paris-Pékin* catalogue, is edited by *Chinese Century* and was published in March 2004. The extensive catalogue of 175 pages contains essays by various authors, and nineteen interviews with some of the artists who participated in the exhibition. It also includes several colour plates of some of the works that were on display in the classical section as well as some of the experimental artworks. The exhibition catalogue is published in a bilingual version of Dutch and English. The book itself is subdivided into two parts: one part on the exhibition that was held at the KMSKA on classical Chinese art, and a second part about experimental Chinese art, held at the MuHKA.

The analysis that shall be carried out in this chapter shall focus mainly on the second part about Chinese experimental art but will include the essays published in both parts of the catalogue. Remarkably, no interviews were held with any of the overseas artists. All interviews were done with mainland Chinese artists. Why this has been decided is not clear as no justification is given anywhere within the catalogue. This does seem to confirm the fact that most exhibitions about Chinese experimental art do not make any distinction between mainland and overseas Chinese artists. They are often presented as one homogeneous group.¹¹⁵⁸ Also, it seems quite contradictory to what Fei Dawei proposes within this exhibition: to present Chinese experimental art as universal and not as Chinese. What better way to achieve this message than by emphasizing the overseas artists who find themselves in an in-between position?

The catalogue starts with a text written by Marc Holthof, who is an author of various books of the visual arts genre. The text consists of an interview with Guy Ullens in which he comments on his attraction to China, how the Ullens collection started off, and Chinese experimental art and its tendencies. The same article was published in the Belgian newspaper *De Tijd* and shall be analysed further on in this chapter. There is an interesting fragment that shall be highlighted here:

How do you regard your role as a collector and maecenas?

My role is temporary. At the time there was little interest in Chinese art. The Chinese themselves were afraid of it. In the West we were so lucky as to be in the position to be able to look at

¹¹⁵⁸ See paragraph 1.1 of Block I, which speaks of the Euroamerican tendency of seeing the Chinese “avant-garde” as one homogeneous group.

contemporary art as children. We have learnt to appreciate it and we have become familiar with it. China has other priorities: primary needs like food, sleep, schools, hospitals, organising transport. The rest comes later. This accounts for occasional strong reactions against modern art. They sometimes label contemporary art¹¹⁵⁹ which fascinates us in a despising manner as 'embassy painters'. They have not yet been in contact with contemporary art all that much. But there is an enormous generation of artists over there who know exactly what they are doing and who have had an excellent training.¹¹⁶⁰

It is interesting that Guy Ullens says that the Chinese were afraid of Chinese experimental art and that it has not been appreciated within the mainland due to the fact that the country has had other priorities. However, another reason for its strenuous development within the mainland, of which Ullens does not speak, might be due to the fact that the Chinese government was immensely critical towards Chinese experimental art and censured it on various occasions, giving way to a phenomenon coined as Apartment art.¹¹⁶¹ However, taking into consideration that the exhibition catalogue and the interview were held in 2004, China has changed immensely since then and it is very probable that the priorities of the nation have shifted significantly. Currently, China and Hong Kong have also become investors/collectors of Chinese experimental art and this art current is no longer exclusively popular outside of China.

Then, Guy Ullens continues on how he tries to change this lack of interest in Chinese experimental art:

Do you intend to enthuse the Chinese too, to get them interested in their own contemporary art?

Certainly. They still have a great many complexes. Yet, this will not last all that long anymore. They are not used to contemporary art and, of course, the West dominates the art world. We sort of try to tell the Chinese: 'You know what is happening on the level of economy in your country (...). But do not forget what is happening on the level of contemporary art'. (...)¹¹⁶²

Here Guy Ullens mentions that the "West dominates the art world", a phenomenon which has been extensively commented on in paragraph 3.1 of Block I, and which was also mentioned in the exhibition catalogue of *Paris-Pékin* within the essay of Hou Hanru.¹¹⁶³ Especially in the nineties, most of the experimental art that was created within China was

¹¹⁵⁹ The same interview was published in the Belgian newspaper "De Tijd", here however the word "art" has been substituted for "artists": "They sometimes label contemporary artists which fascinate us in a despising manner as 'embassy painters'." Holthof, Marc, *Economie en kunst gaan in China samen- Mecenas Guy Ullens over de tentoonstelling 'Alles onder de hemel' in het MuHKA*, De Tijd, date unknown.

¹¹⁶⁰ Marc Holthof, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

¹¹⁶¹ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

¹¹⁶² Marc Holthof, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

¹¹⁶³ Hou Hanru spoke of eurocentrism within the international art scene. See chapter 10 of Block II.

displayed and sold outside of China, usually by and to Euroamerican collectors like Guy Ullens, galleries, and museums. As a consequence, Chinese experimental art became hugely dependent on the Euroamerican art market.¹¹⁶⁴ Guy Ullens does not further elaborate on his statement but he seems to confirm that the international art world in general is rather “west”-centric.

Towards the end of the interview Ullens comments on the future perspectives of his collection and says: “Either the collection goes to a western museum or- and this is my dream – it goes to a museum of its own in China. At any rate, I hope that my collection can contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of that fantastic country: China.”¹¹⁶⁵ Here it should be mentioned that Guy Ullens indeed fulfilled his dream when the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art was inaugurated at the Beijing 798 district in 2007.

This interview is followed by a one-page introduction written by Fei Dawei, the curator of the exhibition. In his introduction, various goals of the show are mentioned. First of all, the curator says, “The underlying goal is to support novel forms of creativity and emerging artists based upon a sponsoring programme.”¹¹⁶⁶ Here it should be reminded that some of the works were made especially for the exhibition. The second goal is “to [show] the profound relationship between Chinese contemporary art and its historical and cultural context.”¹¹⁶⁷ This second remark might be a confirmation of what has been alleged throughout this whole dissertation: that Chinese experimental art should be interpreted and understood on its own terms, and not from a Euroamerican perspective.¹¹⁶⁸

About the experimental artworks that were on display, the curator mentions: “It does not present some past acquisitions but the main focus is on very recent ones, existing works but also new creations and work in progress. Therefore several artists were invited to create temporary work especially for the exhibition.”¹¹⁶⁹

¹¹⁶⁴ See also paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

¹¹⁶⁵ Marc Holthof, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

¹¹⁶⁶ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 14-15.

¹¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁶⁸ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹¹⁶⁹ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 14-15.

Then the introduction speaks of the universality of Chinese experimental art:

The reason why China and its contemporary art may draw much attention is that it does not only call China into question but also some universal contemporary cultural issues. Artists have to deal with questions arising from the cultural tradition and social rules of their respective countries. They address these questions within their own context and thereby create different forms. But in essence artists from China and other countries all give similar answers.

Therefore I come to the conclusion that Chinese contemporary art, under the various forms it may adopt, has a universal meaning. It cannot give new possibilities or new directions to the world. It is like any art of any country, it tries to address the same questions by means of different forms. I think the question is about how any individual should deal with reality.¹¹⁷⁰

In chapter three of Block I, it has been explained that Chinese experimental art is often seen from a Euroamerican point of view, and not a universal one. Fei Dawei is one of the main figures when it comes to the promotion of Chinese experimental art as not necessarily *Chinese*. This point of view also indirectly points to the fact that Chinese experimental art cannot be classified as “eastern” or “western” which could indicate an alternative, more hybrid space, even though Fei Dawei does not make mention of the third space concept within this text.

The next text comes from Bart De Baere, director of the MuHKA and the second curator of *All under Heaven*. This essay, as the introduction by Fei Dawei, is one page long. De Baere starts out by criticizing the exhibition *Alors, La Chine* (2003)¹¹⁷¹, which was curated by Roland Barthes at the Centre Pompidou in 2003, the year before. De Baere writes about this exhibition that

it blended art in a hip cultural framework which aimed at prominence, it merged projections of the architectural boom in China with souvenirs of Mao and film clips. Amongst all the latter, art seemed to be selected in view of this exotic spectacle. China as ‘the Other’ which can be consumed by Europe.¹¹⁷²

¹¹⁷⁰ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven exhibition catalogue*, p. 14-15.

¹¹⁷¹ *Alors, la Chine* was an exhibition held in the France/China year that was sponsored by the French government. The exhibition displayed 50 artists from mainland China at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The show was curated by seven curators: Fan Dian, Laurent Le Bon, Alain Sayag, Pi Li, Chantal Beret, Marion Bertagna and Alfred Pacquement. It might be interesting to here add that also the art curator Pi Li heavily criticized *Alors, la Chine* and mentioned: “One show for which I was an assistant curator, *Alors, la Chine*, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2003, was a troubling experience. We had been asked to curate an official exhibition, but the French museum officials treated the artists arrogantly, ignored the curators and censored proposals containing naked bodies or violence. The exhibition that emerged, although beautiful, was replete with exotic political coatings, confirming the French imagination of China rather than representing the real Chinese perspective.” In which the interviewer Carolee Thea comments: “It seems that the French hadn’t learned much from the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens [sic.] de la Terre*. THEA Carolee, *On Curating – Interviews with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, 2009, p. 100.

¹¹⁷² Bart De Baere, *All under Heaven exhibition catalogue*, p. 16-17.

This portrayal of Chinese experimental art as exotic, or as a brand for the Euroamerican art market has been extensively written on in chapter three of Block I. Here, De Baere seems to confirm that in 2003, well after the introduction of Chinese experimental art in the 1990s, this procedure still carries on. De Baere refers to the *Alors, La Chine?* exhibition in order to contrast its intentions with the main goal of the *All under Heaven* survey. According to De Baere, the intention of the exhibition at the MuHKA

consisted of what art in China today has to say about art, not so much what art has to say about China. (...) Both partners [the Ullens Foundation and the MuHKA] did not aim at presenting an encyclopaedic survey of recent China in art, (...) departing from an assessment of what is going on over there at this moment.¹¹⁷³

This goal coincides with the point of Fei Dawei to consider Chinese experimental art a universal art current. It also coincides with the curator's goals of presenting Chinese experimental art not as Chinese, but as an art current that encloses topics that go beyond its "Chineseness". It seems thus that both curators have agreed on "showing what art in China has to say about art and not so much what art has to say about China". However, this aim might not entirely coincide with the goal of Guy Ullens. As he mentioned earlier in his interview with Marc Holthof, his (personal) goal was to create "more understanding of that fantastic country: China." This seems quite the opposite of De Baere's and Fei Dawei's aim.

De Baere then shortly mentions the overseas artists when he states: "The radical avant-garde from after the Cultural Revolution- and namely Chinese artists who emigrated: the Chinese overseas- still constitutes an important model of challenge." This "challenge" about which the author speaks in this fragment might point to the next fragment in which he mentions: "it is striking with which clarity [the Chinese experimental] artists speak about their own attitude - something which is almost a taboo in Europe, something which is often passed over in silence for tactical purposes – as well as how their work acts within reality as an autonomous given."¹¹⁷⁴

This is quite a vague fragment and it is not entirely clear what the author means by acting "within reality as an autonomous given". Also the fact that he points to an existing taboo in Europe that impedes European artists to speak their mind is quite a strong statement

¹¹⁷³ Bart De Baere, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 16-17.

¹¹⁷⁴ Ibidem.

which is not elaborated upon within his essay. It is not clear which taboo this is. Does the challenge of the Chinese experimental artists consist of speaking their mind? Or does the challenge consist of expressing a certain attitude within the confines of the Euroamerican art world and art market? This remains a question unanswered.

As a conclusion, the author mentions the main intention of the exhibition:

Both [the Ullens Foundation and MuHKA] think that it is remarkable and unfair that only business life is aware of what is happening in this vast part of the world. However, they do not think that this could be changed by marketing the otherness of China. They rather consider the possibility of a conversation in which China and Europe, small parts of China and pieces of Europe, can find each other in a conversation amongst equal parties.¹¹⁷⁵

It seems that this exhibition was aimed at addressing the fact that China and Europe (Euroamerica), from an artistic perspective, are not on equal terms and that the dialogue that takes place between the two parts is often established from a Euroamerican hegemonic and dominating position. This becomes clear when Guy Ullens mentioned in his interview with Marc Holthof that the “West dominates the art world”. Also De Baere seems to agree on this standpoint as he started out his essay by criticizing the exhibition *Alors, la Chine* for presenting the Chinese artists as exotic objects of gazing. Looking back at the exhibition *Chine demain pour hier*, curated by Fei Dawei in 1990, his aims were quite similar. Back in 1990, one of the aims of that show was to change the status quo of a modern “West” dialoguing with a traditional China. It thus seems that fourteen years later, Fei Dawei is still one of the pioneers in making China and Euroamerica more equal, especially in artistic terms. This also indicates that in these fourteen years, not much has changed and that his efforts might have been greatly in vain.

Coming back to de Baere’s essay, he also seems to insinuate that Chinese experimental art, like China, is appreciated mainly from an economic point of view (seeing Chinese experimental art as a commercial brand that can easily make profits within the Euroamerican art markets) when he states that only “business life is aware what is going on in China.” Another significant part of this quote that should be highlighted is that De Baere takes into account that Europe and China are not homogeneous masses. He does not classify these vast regions into one big group when he speaks of “small parts of China

¹¹⁷⁵ Bart De Baere, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 16-17.

and pieces of Europe”. This makes him quite unique, as it does not occur frequently that China is spoken of in terms of a heterogenic nation.

This short text by De Baere is followed by an interview with three participants: De Baere, Fei Dawei and the sinologist Jean-Marie Simonet.¹¹⁷⁶

The first part of the conversation between the three curators revolves around the concept of “otherness”. Simonet starts by mentioning that:

Sinologists have developed the concept of the ‘otherness’ of Chinese civilization. They have described it as a fundamentally other. This means that there are no common points that could be compared. The two traditions are seen as two universes that are founded on fundamentally different concepts. In other words, what is not comparable cannot be compared.¹¹⁷⁷

This coincides with what has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation: Chinese experimental art cannot be explained by referring to Euroamerican art history, theories or references, as they are very different and therefore quite incomparable. Fei Dawei, although he insisted earlier that Chinese experimental art is a universal art with a universal meaning, interestingly agrees with Simonet and says:

Exactly. It is nearly impossible to make evident, to translate the fundamental concepts of Chinese thought or aesthetics into a Western language: for example, you would need a book to explain *yun*, *qi*, or *shen* [fundamental principles of Chinese painting theory, approximating respectively ‘resonance’, ‘material force’ and ‘spirit’]. There is no corresponding word.¹¹⁷⁸

The fact that these fundamental principles of Chinese painting cannot be explained because they are particular, and not universal, seems to contradict Fei Dawei’s earlier statements written in his introduction. Here Fei Dawei says: “It is nearly impossible to make evident, to translate the fundamental concepts of Chinese thought or aesthetics into a Western language” which seems to be quite distinct from his own essay a few pages before this interview in which he writes: “Therefore I come to the conclusion that Chinese contemporary art, under the various forms it may adopt, has a universal meaning. (...) It is like any art of any country, it tries to address the same questions by means of different forms.”¹¹⁷⁹

¹¹⁷⁶ *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 18-25.

¹¹⁷⁷ Jean-Marie Simonet, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 18.

¹¹⁷⁸ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 18.

¹¹⁷⁹ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 14-15.

Then, De Baere continues on this same topic and adds:

The West has been very strong in developing the concept of otherness. Ethnology is based on it. It enhances a model of Western dominance. (...). The concept of otherness may exclude the other. You can cultivate it, even on a level of individuals. (...) Of course, you can agree with the concept of the other as something fundamental, which is also the difference between this bottle of water and me, between the moon and us.¹¹⁸⁰

This fragment seems to confirm what has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation: that the Other is often a way for the hegemonic “West” to maintain its dominant position within the global world, and the art world. It is a Euroamerican man-made construction. By labelling the Other as exotic, or simply as the Other, it reaffirms the identity of the Self and hereby makes it possible to distinguish the Self from the Other, excluding any possibility of hybridity capable of endangering the purity of a clearly-depicted nation-state culture.

Simonet reacts to this comment and says: “I think this is not disturbing; you can be bi-cultural, even multi-cultural. After which De Baere responds: “Being somewhere in-between the moon and us.” Although it is not specifically mentioned here in any place, the fact that De Baere speaks about an in-between space between the “moon and us” does remind of the concept of the third space. This also occurs when Simonet speaks of bi-culture or multi-culture, which all indicate a mix of two or more different cultures which do not define themselves by being strictly “East” nor “West”, Self and Other.

Later on in the conversation, Simonet comes back to the fact that the “West” has characterized China as “the Other” and says: “People in the West often think of China as mysterious. This is nonsense. Behind all this is knowledge, which is accessible to everybody. All depends on your efforts. Knowledge means science.”¹¹⁸¹ It is interesting that Simonet who is a sinologist, which means that he is an expert on China, mentions the fact that the “West” sees China as mysterious. This can directly be related to orientalism and exoticism, in which the Other is seen as mysterious, different, exotic and therefore attractive.¹¹⁸² However, that this is still the case in 2004 is significant and seems to point to the fact that the Euroamerican image of China has not changed much over the centuries. It could be stated that orientalism started approximately in the 16th century

¹¹⁸⁰ Bart De Baere, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 18.

¹¹⁸¹ Jean-Marie Simonet, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 20.

¹¹⁸² See paragraph 3.4 of Block I.

when Mateo Ricci first arrived in China in 1601. *Chinoiserie* peaked mid 17th century and lasted well into the 18th century. However, this is more than three hundred years ago. The fact that a sinologist, in the year 2004 still mentions that the “West” sees China as mysterious is quite poignant.

Then Fei Dawei continues the conversation by saying:

I would like to recount the first encounter of Chinese literati with a Western painting in the 18th century. The literati were shocked. The trace of the brush (*bifa*), essential to traditional Chinese painting, was not visible at all. In the occidental tradition, it is the *trompe l'oeil*, space, perspective, and chiaroscuro that are important. The eyes that look at a painting are conditioned by the culture they belong to. The literati were not used to looking at this kind of painting and consequently held it in very low esteem.¹¹⁸³

The sentence “the eyes that look at a painting are conditioned by the culture they belong to” should be highlighted here. It seems a very adequate comment that can be applied to this dissertation in general. Euroamerican eyes that look at Chinese experimental art are almost implicitly influenced by Euroamerican culture. This might be one of the reasons why artworks are sometimes interpreted in very different ways, according to the particular viewpoint and background of the art critic. It is very difficult to see artworks from other cultures with objective eyes, to see it from the perspective of the Other. Maybe this will never be possible at all. When trying to comprehend an artwork, the mind automatically resorts to familiar references in order to interpret the creation, to make it more “familiar” and less “foreign”. These references inevitably come from a particular repertoire based on our own cultural background. However, interpreting artworks from other cultures from one’s own cultural perspective often leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Examples of this have often been seen in the previous chapters of Block II, and shall also become evident in the reviews written about *All under Heaven*.¹¹⁸⁴

Towards the end of the text, there is an interesting comment by Martina Köppel-Yang,¹¹⁸⁵ a participant that has not intervened until this moment and who seems to “pop up” rather unexpectedly and unannounced within this group conversation. She says:

¹¹⁸³ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 22.

¹¹⁸⁴ See paragraph 11.4 of Block II.

¹¹⁸⁵ Martina Köppel Yang is an independent art historian and curator with a PhD in East Asian Art History and Sinology from the University of Heidelberg. She is also the wife of the well-known Chinese experimental artists Yang Jiechang, one of the overseas artists who is studied within this dissertation.

Chinese thought was very important for the Western modernist movement. And interestingly young Chinese artists of the 1980s rediscovered their tradition through the reception of Western works that at some point had absorbed Eastern concepts. We have here a kind of double reflection. Chinese artists of the mid-1980s, for example, rediscovered *chan* (zen) through the reception of John Cage whose work is deeply impregnated by *chan*. Huang Yongping, for example, related *chan* to Dada, stating that “*chan* is Dada, and Dada is *chan*.” In the mid-1980s this was a scandal. To come back here to the notion of translation, I do not think that a translation of other, foreign concepts is impossible. But no translation can be congruent with the original. Precisely in the gap lies the possibility of creation.¹¹⁸⁶

Here, Martina Köppel-Yang seems to refer to Fei Dawei’s previous comment in which he mentioned that some definitions specific of Chinese art are not translatable to a “western” language. Köppel-Yang seems to partly disagree and says that it might not be impossible but that if translated, it will never be congruent with the original. She then mentions that an opportunity for creation lies within this gap. Even though she does not speak of the in-between position of many overseas artists, this comment can easily be related to it. The overseas artists are precisely these “translators” capable of switching between different languages, as they have become insiders as well as outsiders to two or more cultures. This makes them the ideal candidates for approximating and reducing the cultural differences between cultures.

Fei Dawei reacts to Martina Köppel-Yang’s comment by saying:

What is interesting is that through the double reflection Chinese artists came to another understanding and interpretation of their own tradition, different again from that of John Cage. (...) It was not only Western contemporary art that had driven the Chinese avant-garde of the 1980s but also traditional Chinese concepts, such as *chan* Buddhism and Daoism. (...)¹¹⁸⁷

Fei Dawei and Martina Köppel-Yang here comment on the fact that Chinese experimental art was in fact influenced by “western” art, but that “western” art, on its turn, had been influenced previously by Chinese art. This remark has not been mentioned before by any critic or curator and makes it therefore the more significant. Especially Euroamerican art critics seem to often “forget” the fact that Euroamerican art has been influenced and still is influenced by the “East” as well. This statement opposes certain comments observed before in various reviews on the shows analysed until this point in which the art critics mentioned that Chinese experimental art mainly followed (and copied) Euroamerican art movements.

¹¹⁸⁶ Martina Köppel-Yang, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 24.

¹¹⁸⁷ Fei Dawei, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 24.

At the end of the catalogue, there is one last text. In this essay, Zhao Xudong, who works at the department of Sociology at Beijing University, reflects on the concept of *Tianxia*, which means “All under Heaven” in Chinese: “Inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness is emphasized in the cosmology of *tianxia* in which boundaries of nation-states are difficult to imagine. (...) Boundaries in *tianxia* (...) are recognized according to the natural boundaries of rivers and mountains, rather than by ethnicity and religion.”¹¹⁸⁸ This quote seems to coincide with Fei Dawei’s point of view of seeing Chinese experimental art as a universal art phenomenon, not bounded to any particular nation-state culture.

Zhao also talks about the role of the leader within *tianxia*. An interesting fragment shall be highlighted in which he writes about the worshipping of Mao in China:

A villager responded at once to my question [why the villagers liked to hang up Chairman Mao’s picture on the occasion of a festival]:

“Because Chairman Mao is the great god, (*dashen*), i.e. he is a larger god than other, smaller ones, such as, for example, ox-ghosts and snake-gods (*niugui sheshen*). If he were to come back as the biggest god, no other small ones could come out. Our world then would be changed into a peaceful world. Causes of disorders (*bu taiping*) in recent years all over our China are just the result of the passing away of the great god.”¹¹⁸⁹

Zhao comments on this fragment by saying that Chinese people nowadays might still worship Mao hoping for this harmonious world. In Chinese experimental art however, when Mao is represented, it often does not have the meaning of the “great god”. It seems rather that Mao is used as a symbol of political power and an icon of recent Chinese history. Examples of Chinese experimental art in which Mao is portrayed are plentiful.¹¹⁹⁰ It should also be said that often the figure of Mao is used in a mocking way within these artworks. In these cases, Mao is used as a figure who can be easily recognized for a Euroamerican public.¹¹⁹¹ Making “fun” of the political leader might play into the Euroamerican desire of seeing Chinese experimental art as a dissident, political art current, hereby enhancing its brand, and therefore commercialization. Yet, it should be questioned why Zhao speaks about the figure of Mao within his essay. Is it for the same reasons that some of the Chinese artists use the figure of Mao in order to awaken the interest of a Euroamerican audience?

¹¹⁸⁸ Zhao Xudong, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 164

¹¹⁸⁹ Zhao Xudong, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p.166.

¹¹⁹⁰ See chapter chapter 6 of Block II on *Des del Pais del Centre: avant-gardes artistiques xineses*, 1995.

¹¹⁹¹ See for example Fig. 35.

Towards the end of the essay, Zhao comments on the shortcomings of typical Euroamerican concepts. It has been chosen to include the fragment in this study because it seems, although it is not specifically mentioned, to coincide with certain aspects of the third space. Zhao says:

At present, many scholars begin to reflect on the shortcomings of typical western conceptions such as nationality, ethnicity and identity, and they attempt to find a new possibility by which many differences of our world could be integrated into a uniform whole under the banner of what is called “cosmopolitanism”.¹¹⁹²

In some aspects, this fragment reminds of the overseas artists who also reflect on and question concepts such as identity, nationality and ethnicity, among others. They too are trying to integrate their multicultural background and experiences into an alternative space, which could well be called the third space. Zhao speaks of “cosmopolitanism” which is the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to one community and to one universal moral. This thought can be traced back all the way to the Ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes, who, at one point in time, called himself “a citizen of the world”. In cosmopolitanism, boundaries between nations and cultures become irrelevant and therefore can no longer be separated or distinguished. In this aspect, cosmopolitanism also coincides with the third space in which “East” and “West” no longer are seen as separate entities but as blended into an alternative whole.

Zhao’s essay then ends by mentioning: “So far, the western world is unacquainted with the signification of *tianxia* or it is still underestimated by some sinologists.”¹¹⁹³ It seems as if Zhao considers *tianxia*, seeing the world as a whole, as a typical Chinese or “eastern” ideology. If this is true, it could help understand why the third space is often not acknowledged in Euroamerica either. *Tianxia* means seeing the world beyond the limitations of nation-state cultures and man-made frontiers. In this sense, it could be compared to the third space concept even though the definition has not been mentioned anywhere within the exhibition catalogue.

¹¹⁹² Zhao Xudong, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 168.

¹¹⁹³ Zhao Xudong, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 171.

11.3 The artworks on display

In this paragraph, the artworks of the overseas artists shall be commented on. As shall be seen later on, many of the artworks that were on display at the survey have a multicultural background to them and cannot be classified as purely Chinese.

Remarkably, the works by the overseas artists have not been explained in the catalogue. Also, the colour plates that were included in the catalogue give no further information on the works of the overseas artists apart from the title, the name of the artist, the year of creation and the materials that were used. It is as if they were somewhat “ignored”. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the overseas artists were not distinguished from the mainland artists.

In the *All under Heaven* show, the following artworks of the overseas artists were displayed:

Cai Guoqiang: *Project for extraterrestrials no.8. Reviving the ancient signal towers* (1991) (Fig. 59)

Chen Zhen: *Human tower* (1999) (Fig. 52)¹¹⁹⁴

Huang Yongping: *Bat Project* (2003) (Fig. 60)
One man, nine animals, model no.1, Snake (1999)
(Fig. 54)¹¹⁹⁵
One man, nine animals, model no.6, Eagle (1999) (Fig. 54)

Shen Yuan: *Un matin du monde* (2000) (Fig. 47)¹¹⁹⁶

Yang Jiechang: *100 Layers of Ink* (1990-1995) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58)¹¹⁹⁷
3000 needles (1993) (Fig. 61)¹¹⁹⁸

¹¹⁹⁴ See chapter 10 of Block II.

¹¹⁹⁵ For both models of *One Man Nine Animals*, see chapter 10 of Block II.

¹¹⁹⁶ See chapter 9 of Block II.

¹¹⁹⁷ See chapter 2 and 10 of Block II.

¹¹⁹⁸ This work was also displayed at *Le moine et le démon* in the same year. See chapter 12 of Block II.

As becomes clear from this list, some of these works had also been displayed at *Paris-Pékin*, held two years prior to *All under Heaven*. The works that have been previously explained shall not be commented on within this chapter unless the catalogue provides extra information on these particular pieces.

Cai Guoqiang

Cai Guoqiang's work *Project for extraterrestrials No. 8: reviving the ancient signal towers* (1991) (Fig. 59)¹¹⁹⁹ is a work made out of gunpowder on paper. The work represents the fires that messengers who travelled along the Silk Road made while they moved from one place to the other. It was a way of communicating in ancient China. In this work, various "burns" can be observed which resemble these fires along the Chinese wall made out of lines drawn in ink. In this exhibition, this particular work is a good example of the combination of ancient and experimental Chinese art. Even though the work is experimental and has been made by an experimental artist, the message can only be understood within a historical context that points to ancient China. Also the fact of using gunpowder, assumed to have been invented in China as early as the 9th century, in combination with ink are typical elements of (ancient) Chinese culture and tradition.



Figure 59: Cai Guo Qiang, *Project for extraterrestrials No. 8: reviving the ancient signal towers*, 1991

Huang Yongping

Huang Yongping's *Bat Project* (2001-2004) (Fig. 60) consisted of creating replicas of the American Spy plane, known as the EP-3, which had a logo of a bat on its tail, that accidentally crashed into a Chinese aircraft in 2001 in which a Chinese pilot lost his life. The American plane was then forced to make an emergency landing in Hainan after which

¹¹⁹⁹ See chapter 2 of Block II for more background information on Cai Guoqiang's *Project for Extraterrestrials Series*.

it was dismantled to pieces by the Chinese government and then flown back to the U.S. by another aircraft. Huang Yongping became fascinated by the dismantling of the aircraft and saw it as a work of art. The Chinese government has removed *The Bat Project* (2001-2004) (Fig. 60) on various occasions while it was on display at different exhibitions as they considered it offensive.¹²⁰⁰ However, as explained in paragraph 3.2 of Block I, the censoring of Chinese artworks often makes these works only more popular in the Euroamerican art market, as it reinforces its dissident and political character often attributed by the Euroamerican art world. Huang Yongping's *Bat Project* (2001-2004) (Fig. 60) might be a good example of this phenomenon. Was it chosen for display due to this rather "rebellious" or "sensation" character?



Figure 60: Huang Yongping, *The Bat Project*, 2001-2004

According to the website art radar:

Seen as one of Huang's most ambitious works, it [Bat Project] incorporates a real Lockheed EP-3, the same type of plane involved in the 2001 incident, and viewers have the opportunity to enter the fuselage to investigate its fabricated and politically weighted contents.

As the viewer climbs the small staircase into the plane they are confronted by a series of display cases filled with historical reference material and memorabilia in relation to the incident. The stuffed bats that hang in the blasted windows of the cockpit reflect the logo on the tail fin of the original US aircraft and can be seen as an example of Huang's play on the double meanings of symbols.

¹²⁰⁰ For example, the work was removed from the Guangzhou triennial in 2002. It might be interesting to here mention that it is the Guangdong museum of art that organizes the Guangzhou triennial. The 2002 Guanzhou Triennial in fact was the first triennial to be organized by the Guangdong museum of art. This same museum colabored with the Ullens Foundation and the Museum of Contemporary art in 2004 for the exhibition *Le moine et le démon*, analysed in the following chapter (chapter 12 of Block II).

The bats also reference the cultural differences of East and West and Chinese mythology, as bats are sometimes feared in the West but are believed to symbolise happiness and bring good fortune in China.¹²⁰¹

Also Hou Hanru, the well-known Chinese curator, has said about the work: “Huang uses this [‘Bat Project’] as an anecdotal thing to dig deeper into historical and global complexity to provoke other consequences and questions.”¹²⁰² It seems thus that this work is also a display of comparing “East” with “West” and putting emphasis on the differences. Or, as Hou mentions; “to dig deeper into global complexity”. Yet again, clarifications on the meaning of this particular work had to be found outside of the exhibition catalogue, as the work was not explained within the catalogue. This seems to become one of its most significant shortcomings.

Shen Yuan

The work of the overseas artist Shen Yuan, who lives in Paris with her husband Huang Yongping, also is an example of cross-culture. As the website of the Chisenhale gallery, where *Un Matin Du Monde* (2000) (Fig. 47)¹²⁰³ was displayed in 2001, explains:

Shen Yuan's dramatic sculptural installation *Un Matin Du Monde* re-creates the entire roof-top of a traditional Chinese house. Using terracotta clay tiles in the style of the Fujian Province, the roof is adorned with spices and dried duck, and houses the sounds of everyday life.

Un Matin Du Monde is a memento of the artist's Chinese hometown, directly transplanted into Chisenhale's large East End space. However, the forms, sounds and odours of *Un Matin Du Monde* are essentially fragments, unloaded from Shen Yuan's own biographical narrative. The work not only embodies questions of identity: it is a concrete display of the critical global issues of displacement and transmigration.

(...) Shen Yuan is a Chinese-born artist who moved to live and work in Paris in 1990. Her recent work, including *Un Matin Du Monde*, is manifest with observations on her cultural environment.

What the exact elements are that make this work a “display of the critical global issues of displacement and transmigration” are not clear and are not further explained by the above-mentioned fragment. The roof is described as a typical Chinese rooftop, however it is unclear which part of it reflects the “observations on her cultural environment”. Maybe what is trying to be explained here is that the Chinese rooftop symbolizes the artist’s

¹²⁰¹ See the article published at: <http://artradarjournal.com/2011/06/29/chinese-artist-huang-yong-pings-once-banned-bat-project-gets-first-european-showing>. June 26 2011. Date of consultation: 27/09/2012.

¹²⁰² Hou Hanru, see the article published at: <http://artradarjournal.com/2011/06/29/chinese-artist-huang-yong-pings-once-banned-bat-project-gets-first-european-showing>. June 26 2011. Date of consultation: 30/01/2013.

¹²⁰³ See also chapter 9 of Block II.

identity and that by placing it within a Euroamerican context (the art museum) it is displaced and is, in a way, “out of place”, like so many migrants and travellers in the 21st century. This “feeling” on its turn could symbolize the feelings of the artist being a Chinese artist living in Paris.¹²⁰⁴

Yang Jiechang

Yang Jiechang presented two works at the *All under Heaven* exhibition. His first work, *100 Layers of Ink* (1990-1995) (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58), which consist of a big black square of ink on a white paper background was made in 1989. His second work displayed at the survey was *3000 needles* (1993) (Fig. 61) and was made for the Artist’s Museum in Lodz, Poland. The work consists of three thousand needles that were stuck into a canvas. Each needle had a strand of hair of the artists attached to it by means of his blood. Apart from the paintings, the needles were also stuck into long, cylinder formed bags made out of the skin of recent slaughtered pigs. These were then filled with human hair from local barbershops and beauty parlours. The work represents the artist’s wish to bring back to memory the Jewish community that used to live in Lodz and that was totally eradicated by the Nazis.¹²⁰⁵

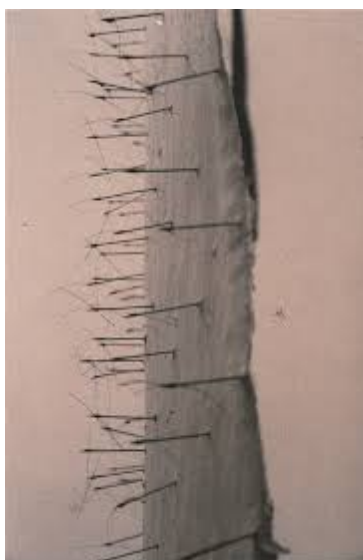


Figure 61: Yang Jiechang, *3000 Needles*, 1993

¹²⁰⁴ See also chapter 9 of Block II on the exhibition *Paris pour Escale* where this work was also displayed.

¹²⁰⁵ See the same article *Yang Jiechang: The Communist Party Didn't Pay the Bill* written by Britta Erickson and published by Art Asia Pacific, Issue 65, Sep/Oct 2009, p. 120.

All in all, what becomes evident is that the artworks of the overseas artists are not easy to understand by simply looking at them. The absence of further information within the exhibition catalogue not only makes it more difficult to understand the meaning of the artworks, it also makes it harder to capture the transcultural message that they are sometimes trying to transmit. Many artworks did not have a Chinese message to them, quite the contrary: a lot of the creations were focused on global issues, as was the intention of the curator Fei Dawei. Due to the inexistence of an insightful explanatory text to clarify the complex meaning of these works, a big part of their message is lost. Also, due to this lack of information many reviewers have wrongly interpreted the works on display, as shall become clear in the following paragraph.

11.4 The exhibition reviews

In this chapter, the following reviews shall be analysed (in chronological order):¹²⁰⁶

- Author unknown, e-flux website New York, *All under Heaven*, March 20 2004
- Hove van, Jan, *Het volgeltje van de Keizer*, De Standaard, March 24 2004
- Laureyns, Jeroen, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004
- Vuylsteke, Catherine, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004
- Klerk de, Wiet, *Altijd op zoek naar toppers*, FEM Business, April 3 2004
- Schoonenboom, Merlijn, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004
- Desaive, Pierre-Yves, *Tous sous le ciel*, Arte News, April 6 2004
- Elkaïm, Kerenn, *Echine de Chine*, La Semaine, April 8 2004
- Velde van, Paola, *Reuzenkrijt van Mensenas*, De Telegraaf, April 9 2004
- Braet, Jan, *Terwijl China Sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004
- Smets, Joëlle, *L'art chinois s'éveille*, Le soir magloisirs, p. 42, April 14 2004
- Martens, Dirk, *Een deur die plots opengaat*, Kunst & Antiek Veilingen, Het Nieuwsblad, April 23 2004
- Fiers, Els, *Chinese gespletenheid*, FOCUS KNACK, April 28 2004
- Vuegen, Christine, *Chinese schoonheid*, De Huisarts, April 28 2004
- Os van, Pieter, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*, de Groene Amsterdammer, May 15, 2004
- Bekkers, Ludo, *Chinese kunst van toen en nu -Radicaal Subjectief*, Kunstbeeld, May 31 2004
- Author unknown, *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*, De Tijd, January 22 2008

Most reviews come from Belgian or Dutch newspapers and magazines. Reviews from magazines and newspapers outside of Holland and Belgium have been minimal, the only exception being an article published on the website of e-flux which is based in New York.¹²⁰⁷ This is rather strange, as the collection of Chinese experimental art of the Guy

¹²⁰⁶ The MuHKA has kindly sent the majority of the reviews that shall be analysed in this chapter.

¹²⁰⁷ According to the art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, e-flux is “an artist-run initiative founded by the artist Anton Vidokle, which has become a central information clearinghouse for the art world”. OBRIST Hans Ulrich with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 134.

and Myriam Ullens Foundation is internationally known for its quality and extensiveness. Yet, it seems that the exhibition has had a rather local impact.¹²⁰⁸

11.4.1 Author unknown, *All under Heaven*

The first review¹²⁰⁹ comes from the website e-flux, which is a website for visual art professors all around the world. It gives a lot of information on contemporary art exhibitions and reaches around 90,000 readers a day, according to their website. Apart from the practical information given about the exhibition such as location and opening times, the article states: “All under heaven’- a unique and original exhibition about China (...)”.¹²¹⁰ This is particularly interesting due to the fact that the main subject of the exhibition, according to the curators, was not China. On the contrary, the focal point of the survey was to display Chinese art as universal with a universal meaning. Or, as De Baere has said in the catalogue: “showing what art in China has to say about art and not so much what art has to say about China”.¹²¹¹ However, a little further on, the review does mention that the exhibition “attempts to renew the way in which the West perceives Chinese art and to emphasise its universal meaning.”¹²¹²

Towards the end of the text it mentions that the exhibition “Also presents the founding artists of contemporary art in China from the second half of the eighties onwards, such as Huang Yongping, Cai Guo-Qiang, Gu Dexin, Yang Jiechang or Chen Zhen, who remain of crucial importance”.¹²¹³

In no place does this fragment mention that these artists, apart from Gu Dexin, are all overseas artists who have decided to leave China in the second half of the eighties and onwards. This is maybe due to the fact that the exhibition catalogue has not mentioned the overseas artists either.

¹²⁰⁸ The “isolation” between European countries when it comes to their exhibitions was also observed in the previous exhibition, also based on the collection of the Ullens Foundation, *Paris-Pékin* held two year earlier in Paris. This point shall be further elaborated in Block III on the Conclusions.

¹²⁰⁹ <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/all-under-heaven>. March 20 2004. Date of consultation: 30/09/2012.

¹²¹⁰ Author unknown, e-flux website New York, *All under Heaven*, March 20 2004.

¹²¹¹ *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 16-17.

¹²¹² Ibidem.

¹²¹³ <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/all-under-heaven>. March 20 2004. Date of consultation: 30/09/2012

11.4.2 Els Fiers, *Chinese gespletenheid*

The second review is titled *Chinese Split* and was written by Els Fiers for Focus Knack magazine.¹²¹⁴ Els Fiers is a freelance writer and an art critic for Focus Knack as well as Metropolis M magazine. She is also in the board of the subsidy commission of Pro Stroom, a centre for art and architecture in The Hague. The subsidies are destined for the promotion of cultural and artistic life in The Hague. Focus Knack is a weekly tv-magazine that focuses on art, music, television, games and films. Knack is a Belgian magazine that started in 1971 and is sometimes seen as a competitor to Time Out Magazine and other magazines of the like.

The review is very brief and only one fragment shall be highlighted where the author mentions: “The selection [of artworks at the survey] maintains itself easily yet, the feeling that one has seen all this before is inevitable. The newness of global art-from-other-continents has already worn off a bit since the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in Paris that has become legendary.”¹²¹⁵ First of all, as mentioned on various occasions within this study, the exhibition of which the author speaks, *Magiciens de la Terre*, is quite controversial and has posteriorly received a lot of criticism. One of the main “complaints” was that the survey displayed the non-Euroamerican artworks clearly as the “Other” making them exotic. This might be a reason why Els Fiers found it so “new”. Maybe, at the time, showing the creations in a context of exoticism did “excite” more and stimulated the impression of newness. *All under Heaven*, held almost twenty-five years after *Magiciens de la Terre*, was not meant to present non-Euroamerican art in an exotic way or to distinguish the artworks as the Other. On the contrary: the objective was to change the Euroamerican vision of Chinese art and, according to Fei Dawei, demonstrate the universal meaning of it. Seen from a twenty-first century global perspective, this way of portraying non-Euroamerican art does seem more fitting. Maybe because the works displayed at *All under Haven* somehow seemed familiar to Els Fiers, which is highly improbable, it gave her the impression that she had seen it all before, even though she does not explain what she finds familiar about the exposition. It should be remembered that this comment of “having seen it all before” is quite common among Euroamerican art critics when it comes to Chinese experimental art. An explanation could be that

¹²¹⁴ Els Fiers, *Chinese gespletenheid*, Focus Knack, April 28 2004, p. 88.

¹²¹⁵ “De selectie houdt vlot stand, maar toch ontkom je niet aan het gevoel het allemaal wel eens eerder te hebben gezien. Het nieuwe aan de globalistische kunst-uit-andere-continenten is er alweer wat af sinds de inmiddels legendarische tentoonstelling *Magiciens de la Terre* in Parijs.” Els Fiers, *Chinese gespletenheid*, Focus Knack, April 28 2004, p. 88.

Euroamerican art critics, due to the fact that Euroamerican art history and references seem to be employed as a universal art language within the international art world,¹²¹⁶ interpret non-Euroamerican art by resorting to more familiar Euroamerican art references. As a consequence, by not seeing Chinese experimental art on its own terms and according to its own particular background, it becomes “familiar”, even when the foundations of this familiarity are non-existent.

Els Fiers does however mention one exception that she finds an example of “the style of the new generation of globalists”¹²¹⁷ and which she characterizes as “contemporary”.¹²¹⁸ The work was made by Gu Dexin, a Chinese experimental artist. It consists of two screens that are placed opposite from each other on which an animation movie is shown. On one screen, a figure jumps from a red diving board into water. On the other, the figure jumps from the diving board and splatters onto the ground. Els Fiers does not further explain why she finds this work so “contemporary” and “new”, and it does not become clear why the other works on display did not give her the same impression.

11.4.3 Dirk Martens, *Een deur die plots opengaat*

The next review comes from a magazine which is called “Kunst en antiek veilingen” which means “Art and antique auctions”. The article is written by Dirk Martens, who has his own auction house in Belgium.¹²¹⁹ The title of the text is *A door that suddenly opens*¹²²⁰ and speaks about the *All under Heaven* exhibition. According to the author, *Red Doors* (2002), made by the Chinese experimental artist Wang Gongxin is “one of the most impacting art videos seen in years.”¹²²¹ This fragment is mentioned here because it shows the different opinions of the art critics. Dirk Martens speaks of this particular work as “most impacting” yet, interestingly enough, the previous art critic, Els Fiers, does not mention the work at all.

¹²¹⁶ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹²¹⁷ “de stijl van de nieuwe lichting globalisten”. Els Fiers, *Chinese gespletenheid*, Focus Knack, April 28 2004, p. 88.

¹²¹⁸ “hedendaags”. Els Fiers, *Chinese gespletenheid*, Focus Knack, April 28 2004, p. 88.

¹²¹⁹ See his web: <http://www.verkoopzaalvdm.be/home-nl.html>, n.d., date of consultation: 30/01/2013.

¹²²⁰ “Een deur die plots opengaat”. Dirk Martens, *Een deur die plots opengaat*, Kunst & Antiek Veilingen, Het Nieuwsblad, April 23 2004.

¹²²¹ “een van de sterkste videowerken die we in jaren hebben gezien”. Dirk Martens, *Een deur die plots opengaat*, Kunst & Antiek Veilingen, Het Nieuwsblad, April 23 2004.

He then also mentions Huang Yongping's work *EP3 (the Bat Project)* (2003) (Fig. 60) but merely says that it is not the real American spy plane that crashed in Hainan but a replica that was especially made for and displayed at the Venice Biennale.

11.4.4 Jan Braet, *Terwijl China Sliep*

The next review comes, again, from KNACK magazine¹²²². The title is *While China slept*¹²²³ and was written by Jan Braet, editor at KNACK. The author starts out by mentioning the universal character of the Chinese experimental artworks.

It is not until later, while reading the interviews with those artists [Chinese experimental artists], that the confirmation is mentioned clearly: it is striking how often the comment is repeated that the artists focus on personal affairs. It is within the private domain of the other that billions of humans find themselves the best. Thousand chitchats about the gap between East and West, Buddha, Confucius and Christ cannot weigh up against that.¹²²⁴

This fragment seems to coincide with the goal of Fei Dawei to demonstrate, via this survey, that Chinese experimental art has a universal meaning. Jan Braet appears to agree with this point of view and has been able to capture it within the artworks that were on display and the interviews that were published within the exhibition catalogue. It should be repeated though that all the interviews that were included within the exhibition catalogue were held with Chinese mainland artists. No overseas Chinese artists were interviewed for the catalogue. This is rather strange, as they often have a more "universal" point of view due to the fact that they live in between Chinese culture (their origins) and, often, Euroamerican culture.

Later on, the author seems to contradict himself when he refers to the work *Red Doors* (2002), which was also highlighted by the reviewer Dirk Martens. Jan Braet speaks about the work of Wang Gongxin that consisted of four doors that were projected onto four different walls. Each door would open, showing a scene: some people were dancing, some were singing, some were parading, etc. Before the viewer realises what he or she is seeing, the door shuts and another opens. According to the author this is "a metaphor for

¹²²² Jan Braet, *Terwijl China sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004.

¹²²³ Ibidem.

¹²²⁴ "Pas veel later, bij het lezen van de interviews met die kunstenaars, komt de bevestiging ook zwart op wit: de opvallendste constant in wat ij zeggen, is dat het persoonlijke zaken zijn die hen bezighouden. En in het private domein van een ander herkennen miljarden stervelingen het best zichzelf. Daar kunnen duizend jaar praatjes over de kloof tussen Oost en West, tussen Boeddha, Confucius en Christus, niet tegenop." Jan Braet, *Terwijl China sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004.

the limited conditions with which we can look at such a strange, far away nation. The doors of China alternately open and close, which makes us extremely curious, but unlimited access is not granted.”¹²²⁵ It seems that this fragment highlights a different image which is quite the opposite of the universal intentions of which the author spoke previously. Here, it is as if the author is trying to evoke a closed-off and enigmatic image of China, maybe even exotic, by describing China as such a “strange and far away land”.

The author then continues by writing:

The confrontation between Chinese landscape painters and old Flemish religious art of the permanent collection of the museum is valid for the whole exposition. Yet, the two are truly fundamentally different. A confrontation without causing any sparks is doomed to stay sterile. Even when we try to see it as the Chinese do, and consider that all under heaven is one.¹²²⁶

All under Heaven consisted of two exhibitions that were held in two different places. The first exhibition displayed the old Chinese paintings, mainly calligraphy and landscape paintings at the *Koninklijk Museum voor de Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (KMSKA). These artworks were placed within the same space as the old Flemish works that are part of the permanent collection of this museum. The question here is whether it was the intention of the curators to oppose and confront the old Chinese paintings with the old Flemish paintings? According to the curators, this was not the plan. As Bart De Baere writes in his catalogue essay:

The fact that this venture developed into a dual exhibition and that a number of top quality pieces of old art from the Ullens collection are shown at the KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Art of Antwerp), serves to express the equivalence governing this meeting. The river landscape by Wang Zhenpeng from the 14th century can easily stand next to the Saint Barbara by Jan van Eyck.¹²²⁷

It looks as if the intention was not to confront the two art traditions and “make sparks fly” but to demonstrate that they are both equal in their value. It is not about “East” vs. “West” but “East” equals “West”.¹²²⁸

¹²²⁵ “een dot van een metafoor voor de gelimiteerde voorwaarden waarin we naar zo’n vreemd ver land kunnen kijken. De poorten van China gaan afwisselend open en dicht, wat ons razend nieuwsgierig maakt, maar echt onbeperkte toegang krijgen we niet.” Jan Braet, *Terwijl China sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004.

¹²²⁶ “De confrontatie tussen Chinese natuurschilders en oude Vlaamse religieuze kunst uit de vaste museumcollectie geldt echter voor de hele tentoonstelling. Terwijl het hier echt wel om fundamenteel verschillende dingen gaat. Confrontatie zonder overspringende vonken is gedoemd om steriel te blijven. Zelfs al proberen we het als de Chinezen te bekijken, en alles onder de hemel te zien als één.” Jan Braet, *Terwijl China sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004.

¹²²⁷ Bart De Baere, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 16-17.

¹²²⁸ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

Lastly, Jan Braet also mentions that the part about old Chinese art was quite “ordinary”: “Somehow the whole seems a bit ordinary, as if a rather random selection has been made out of an enormous cultural heritage warehouse. For the Ullens it undoubtedly is a costly treasure. For the public with a desire to know more about old Chinese paintings on silk it is rather meagre.”¹²²⁹ Here the author seems to criticize the fact that the exhibition did not enhance the audience’s knowledge about Chinese painting on silk. This could have been due to the fact that the exhibition catalogue did not provide sufficient information, or maybe no insightful information panels were placed at the survey. As has been commented before, the exhibition catalogue on the experimental part of the exhibition was rather meagre and did not give any information on the work of the overseas artists. The lacking of information might have also been the case with the part on the traditional Chinese paintings.

11.4.5 Ludo Bekkers, *Chinese kunst van toen en nu -Radicaal Subjectief*

The next review comes from the magazine *Kunstbeeld*, which is published in Holland and comes out ten times a year. The magazine states that it has been giving in depth information on national and international modern and contemporary art for the last thirty-five years. The contents of the magazine consists of essays, interviews, articles, background information and exhibition reviews. The publication has 15.000 subscribers.

The article that shall be analysed here is titled *Chinese art then and now- Radically subjective*¹²³⁰ and was written by Ludo Bekkers, who is a Flemish art critic. He published a book in 1995 titled *Contemporary Painting of the Low Countries*, and is also a journalist for the Flemish Radio-and Television broadcast BRT. He has collaborated with KNACK magazine as well.

The review is two pages long and includes various colour plates of some of the works that were on display. The first fragment that shall be commented seems to, indirectly, point to the third space:

¹²²⁹ “Op de een of andere manier komt het geheel een beetje gewontjes over, als een vrij willekeurige greep uit een ontzaglijke culturele voorraadschuur. Voor het verzamelaarsechtpaar Ullens ongetwijfeld een kostbare schat. Voor een publiek dat zich over de oude Chinese schilderijen op zijde wil informeren, wat mager.” Jan Braet, *Terwijl China sliep*, KNACK, April 14 2004.

¹²³⁰ Ludo Bekkers, *Chinese kunst van toen en nu -Radicaal Subjectief*, *Kunstbeeld*, May 31 2004, p. 42.

The works that are being displayed at these exhibitions come from all disciplines – painting, installation, photography, videos – It would be difficult to label them as typical Chinese. So, an influence from Western art is most definitely noticeable. That also goes, by the way, for other continents such as Africa but what we see here is neither purely Chinese nor Western, it is a new Chinese language. One should not forget that typical Chinese is not an axiom. Because it is a nation that for almost half of its extensive history has been influenced by other cultures.¹²³¹

The author of the article does not give any example of the “western” influence that he observes within the Chinese art creations. However, it is interesting that he mentions that the artworks cannot be characterized as typically Chinese or as “western”. In general, Ludo Bekkers seems to emphasize the fact that Chinese art cannot be seen as Chinese or as he says, “typical Chinese is not an axiom”. This seems to be very different from the previous comment by Jan Braet in which he called China a “strange and far away nation”.

Ludo Bekkers then explains that China had been under the influence of national minorities such as the Mongols, and that Chinese culture could be seen as a “mixed salad”. He does however add to this comment that the “essence of it [Chinese culture] is still the language, because language determines our way of thinking.”¹²³² This fragment might remind of the works of Xu Bing and Gu Wenda. Both are overseas Chinese experimental artists, who are now living and working in the United States.¹²³³ They could be seen as third space artists as they make artworks that are like “mixed salads”, to use Ludo Bekker’s words. Gu Wenda’s *United Nations Series* (1993-) (Fig. 12, 27, 28, 41), examples of which have been seen in other chapters of this dissertation,¹²³⁴ would be a good example of this culturally mixed art. Moreover, some of their creations are based on (made up) calligraphy and the written language. Another example of this is Xu Bing’s *Book of the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45),¹²³⁵ which consists of invented characters yet which creation process is based entirely on the traditional Chinese way of bookbinding and printing. It is an example of mixing Chinese traditional culture with an international focus by means of language and calligraphy.

¹²³¹ “De werken op deze tentoonstellingen komen uit alle disciplines – schilderkunst, installaties, foto’s, video’s – en je kunt ze bezwaarlijk als typisch Chinees bestempelen. Er is dus wel zeker een invloed van de Westerse kunst merkbaar. Dat geldt trouwens ook voor andere continenten zoals Afrika maar wat we hier zien is niet zuiver Chinees noch Westers, het is een nieuw Chinees idioom. Men mag niet vergeten dat typisch Chinees geen axioma is. Want het land is bijna voor de helft van zijn lange geschiedenis door andere culturen beïnvloed geweest.” Ludo Bekkers, *Radicaal Subjectief*, Kunstbeeld, May 31 2004, p. 42.

¹²³² “Het Chinese territorium stond meermaals onder invloed van nationale minoriteiten zoals de Mongolen en anderen en de Chinese cultuur kun je vergelijken met een gemengde sla. En die vermenging gaat nu verder, maar de kern blijft Chinees met als basis de taal want de taal bepaalt onze manier van denken.” Ludo Bekkers, *Radicaal Subjectief*, Kunstbeeld, May 31 2004, p. 42.

¹²³³ Currently Xu Bing has moved back to China.

¹²³⁴ See chapter 5, 6, 8 and 10 of Block II.

¹²³⁵ See chapter 6, 8, and 10 of Block II.

The author of the article then makes a significant statement when he writes: “(...) contemporary Chinese art might give the impression that it comes from the West – like the installations, the performances, the videos -, but the content, the way of thinking and reflecting upon, is fundamentally different from Western art.”¹²³⁶

This fragment is precisely what this dissertation alleges: Chinese experimental art cannot be interpreted from a Euroamerican point of view, as its essence is completely unlike.¹²³⁷ Here, the author mentions that Chinese experimental art might sometimes seem “western” due to the form it has taken or the media it uses, however the content is always *fundamentally* different. The essence of the artwork will never be completely “western” (or Chinese, in some cases). This also puts in perspective the review of Els Fiers in which she mentions that the exhibition presented “nothing new”. That implies that the art critic, in this case Els Fiers, has seen it all before, which seems rather improbable if the essence of the art is not “western”. It only reinforces the idea that art critics like Els Fiers, incapable of seeing non-Euroamerican art from its own perspective, are seriously misjudging these art currents, which has grave consequences for the reception of non-Euroamerican art within the international art scene.

11.4.6 Paola van de Velde, *Reuzenkrijt van Mensenas*

The following review was published in one of the main Dutch newspapers,¹²³⁸ *de Telegraaf*. The article is titled *Giant chalk of human ashes* and was written by Paola van de Velde.¹²³⁹ Currently she works for the art fair *Realisme*, which is dedicated to figurative art and which is situated at the Passengers Terminal in Amsterdam. She used to be the chief art editor at *de Telegraaf* as well as a teacher at the *Koninklijke Academie voor Beeldende Kunst* in The Hague (Royal Art Academy). She is also a member of the AICA, *Association Internationale des Critiques des Arts*.

¹²³⁶ “(...) de actuele Chinese kunst kan dan wel de indruk geven uit het Westen vergenomen te zijn – zoals de installaties, de performances, de video’s -, maar het inhoudelijke, de manier van denken en reflecteren, is fundamenteel verschillend van de Westerse kunst.” Ludo Bekkers, *Radicaal Subjectief*, Kunstbeeld, May 31 2004, p. 43.

¹²³⁷ See particularly paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹²³⁸ In 2004 the newspapers had 782.216 subscribers.

¹²³⁹ Paola van de Velde, *Reuzenkrijt van mensenas*, *de Telegraaf*, April 9 2004, p. 15.

The author of the article seems to largely repeat what has been said in the exhibition catalogue when she writes: “The double exhibition is worth visiting. (...) [c]ontemporary art from China, which has been receiving growing international interest in the last couple of years, for once [is] not presented as an exotic phenomenon but is selected for its high artistic quality.”¹²⁴⁰ However, she then makes a remarkable statement when saying: “Many young Chinese artists are extremely fascinated by the eternal sleep. Particularly the ‘post-sensationalists’ go, especially in western eyes, way to far in their work. For example, they did not have any problems using real bodies in their sculptures.”¹²⁴¹

The usage of dead bodies in sculptures, probably, would be shocking to Chinese eyes as well. It is not clear why the author wants to make it appear as if Chinese experimental work is shocking, or meant to be shocking, *especially* for “western” eyes. Chinese experimental art exhibited in surveys held in China have often been taken out of the exposition, or the survey was shut down completely due to these kinds of artworks. Also, not all Chinese experimental artwork is shocking or uses dead bodies. Quite the contrary, the Flesh-art artists¹²⁴² are the minority within the group of Chinese experimental artists. And it is also not accurate, as the author mentions, that “*many* young Chinese artists are extremely fascinated by the eternal sleep” (author’s emphasis). Here she is probably referring to the works of the artist Wang Ningde that were displayed at the show. Yet, he was only one of the many artists that participated. All in all, by mentioning these particular works within her review, it is as if Paola van de Velde wants to falsely attribute a sensationalist character to Chinese experimental art. This also becomes clear by the title she has chosen for her review which refers to a work made by Peng Yu and Sun Yuan, who used the ashes of several bodies that were not claimed by family members or acquaintances to build a huge pillar (a similar pillar was made by the same artists out of human fat). Yet again, these works are exceptions.

¹²⁴⁰ “De dubbeltentoonstelling is zeer de moeite waard. (...) [d]e hedendaagse kunst uit China, die zich de laatste jaren mag verheugen in groeiende internationale belangstelling [wordt] nu eens niet als exotisch fenomeen (...) gepresenteerd, maar [is geselecteerd] om zijn grote artistiek kwaliteiten (...)” Paola van de Velde, *Reuzenkrijt van mensenas*, de Telegraaf, April 9 2004, p. 15.

¹²⁴¹ “Veel jonge Chinese kunstenaars zijn extreem gefascineerd door de eeuwige slaap. Vooral de ‘postsensationalisten’ gaan, zeker in westerse ogen, vaak schokkend ver in hun werk. Zo deinsden zij er niet voor terug echte lijken in hun beelden te verwerken.” Paola van de Velde, *Reuzenkrijt van mensenas*, de Telegraaf, April 9 2004, p. 15.

¹²⁴² For an explanation on Shock Art, see the introduction to Block II and paragraph 2.3 of Block II.

11.4.7 Christine Vuegen, *Chinese schoonheid*

The next review is titled *Chinese beauty*¹²⁴³ and was written by Christine Vuegen, who is an author of books about visual art. She is also a regular collaborator of various art magazines such as *Kunstbeeld* and *Collect*.

The article does not provide a lot of interesting information. The only part that shall be highlighted here is as follows: “In my opinion, that small presentation [the section of the exhibition about Chinese antique art] could have been left out and the contemporary art section could have been extended as it was decided not to include the most spectacular installations of the [Ullens] collection.”¹²⁴⁴ What is interesting about this fragment is the opinion that Christine Vuegen has about the part that was dedicated to the antique Chinese paintings. According to her, it could have been left out, which is quite a radical thing to say. In previous reviews Jan Braet also complained about this part of the exhibition, saying that it was rather meagre. However, a lot of art critics highly appreciated this section of the survey as shall be seen in upcoming reviews. It seems that the opinions of the different art critics do not coincide here.

Another interesting observation is that Christine Vuegen mentions that the most spectacular installations of the Ullens collection were not included in *All under Heaven*. This has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and it is indeed unknown why this has been decided. Maybe, according to the curator Fei Dawei, including such “spectacular” works of Chinese experimental art would go against his objectives of presenting this art as universal. Because, *who* finds these works “spectacular”? The art market, the Chinese artists themselves, the curators, or the art critics? This question should then be followed by asking *why* they are considered “spectacular”: because they reinforce an exotic image of China? Because they are shocking to a Euroamerican audience? Another reason for not including the more “spectacular” works of the Ullens collection might be deduced from De Baere’s criticism expressed within the exhibition catalogue towards the *Alors, la Chine* exhibition. Here, De Baere criticizes this particular exhibition of portraying the works of the Chinese artists as exotic, as “a hip framework”

¹²⁴³ Christine Vuegen, *Chinese schoonheid*, *De Huisarts*, April 28 2004.

¹²⁴⁴ “Voor mijn part had die kleine presentatie achterwege mogen blijven en het hedendaagse gedeelte mocht nog meer uitgebouwd zijn. Er werd namelijk niet gekozen voor de meest spectaculaire installaties uit de collectie.” Christine Vuegen, *Chinese schoonheid*, *De Huisarts*, April 28 2004.

and an “exotic spectacle”.¹²⁴⁵ Being one of the curators of *All under Heaven*, he might have wanted to avoid this kind of portrayal and therefore opted to not include the more “spectacular” works of the Ullens’ collection.

11.4.8 Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*

The next review is titled *A Chinese Heaven above Antwerp*¹²⁴⁶ and was written by Catherine Vuylsteke. The article was published in the newspaper *De Morgen*¹²⁴⁷ which is a Belgian newspaper. Catherine Vuylsteke studied sinology at the University of Gent and has spent time studying in Shanghai. She is a regular freelance writer for Belgian art magazines such as KNACK, and a full time foreign news editor for *De Morgen*. She also writes regularly for the Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* and teaches Chinese. She is the author of various books on China and has curated exhibitions about China, as well as other countries.

About the exhibition of antique Chinese work, she mentions that they are “absolutely beautiful works, and of a level that is seldom seen.”¹²⁴⁸ How different is this opinion from those of Jan Braet and Christine Vuegen. However, she does mention later that:

Although the artworks are absolutely fantastic, the exhibition that was held at the KMSKA [of antique Chinese art] is not a success. The curators explain that they wanted to confront West with East and that they work in two dimensions: the permanent, western collection hangs on the wall, the Chinese scrolls are displayed lying down in showcases. However, in practice this does not work out well. Most of the masterpieces of Flemish painting, with their refined yet exuberant colour palette, are overwhelming, loud even. The difference with the Chinese pieces is enormous. These are subdued and rather silent, and their strength lies in their fragility. While the Flemish paintings almost jump off the walls, the Chinese scrolls creep further into their showcases due to so much excess. In a more peaceful environment, with soft lighting and a hint of classical erhu-music, the Chinese masterpieces would have come to life.¹²⁴⁹

¹²⁴⁵ *All under Heaven*, exhibition catalogue, p. 16-17.

¹²⁴⁶ “Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen.” Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

¹²⁴⁷ Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

¹²⁴⁸ “Absoluut prachtige werken, van een zelden gezien niveau.” Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

¹²⁴⁹ “Hoewel de stukken ronduit fantastisch zijn, is de tentoonstelling in het KMSKA niet geslaagd. De expocommissarissen leggen uit dat ze het Westen met het Oosten wilden confronteren en dat ze in twee dimensies werken: de permanente, westerse collectie hangt, de Chinese rollen liggen in vitrinekasten. In de praktijk werkt dat echter niet. De meesterwerken uit de Vlaamse schilderkunst, met hun geraffineerde maar uitbundige kleurenpalet, zijn overweldigend, zonder meer luid. Het verschil met de Chinese stukken is hemelsbreed. Die zijn ingetogen en verstillend, en hun meesterlijkheid ligt deels juist in hun teerheid. Terwijl de ene zo ongeveer van de muur springen, duiken de andere bij zoveel overdaad dieper weg in hun kasten. In een vredige omgeving, met gedempt licht en een streepje klassieke erhu-muziek, zouden de Chinese meesterwerken wel tot leven zijn gekomen.” Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

The author writes that with the right atmosphere, the Chinese masterpieces would have “done better”. However, the ambient that she describes seems to be quite stereotypical of “Chineseness”.¹²⁵⁰ According to her, with “typical” Chinese music in the background (erhu) the antique Chinese art would have come to life, which seems a rather narrow-minded comment to make for somebody who is an expert on China, a sinologist, and somebody who has spent time living in China and studying its culture and language. It is as if she is saying that the exhibition would have been better understood by resorting to stereotypes of Chinese culture, in order to make it more familiar for the audience. Yet, this is precisely a strategy that should be avoided. Why does Chinese art have to adapt to Euroamerican necessities in order to be understood or valued?

The author also mentions that the Chinese scrolls’ strength lies in their fragility. It is true that the paintings are made on silk, which is a fragile material yet, Chinese painting is not about fragility: it is all about energy. What made a good Chinese painter (in old times) was the way in which he was able to let the *qi* flow: the energy of life. The Flemish paintings of the permanent collection of the KMSKA might have been brightly coloured and enormously refined yet, this does not mean that the Chinese scrolls were overwhelmed by them and “crept into their showcases”. It seems as if the author is comparing two different artworks that are incomparable. Chinese and Flemish paintings are not the same and should not be perceived from the same references. This comment is a good illustration of a Euroamerican art critic interpreting non-Euroamerican art merely on Euroamerican references.

Vuylsteke also mentions that it was the intention of the curators to confront East with West. This seems to be quite the opposite of Fei Dawei’s intent of demonstrating the universal value of Chinese experimental art. Where the author has gotten this information from is not clear and it is probably an erroneous interpretation of the author of the article.

About the experimental art section, Catherine Vuylsteke mentions that “Fei and De Baere have chosen especially for installations and conceptual art, for works that reflect the problems of modern Chinese society. These are thus installations that question the fast transformation.”¹²⁵¹ Again, this seems a completely erroneous interpretation of the aims of

¹²⁵⁰ See paragraph 3.3 of Block I.

¹²⁵¹ “Fei en De Baere gingen vooral voor installaties en conceptuele kunst, voor werken waaruit de problemen van de modern Chinese maatschappij spreken.” Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

the survey. Remembering the goals that Fei Dawei had set for this exhibition, his intentions were to show the universal meaning of Chinese experimental art. Not to give a better image of the reality of China or to reflect on the rapid changes that are occurring there. It should be mentioned that the comment of Vuylsteke is again quite common of Euroamerican art critics who often mention that exhibitions of Chinese experimental art are a “window” into China’s reality and that they give information on China’s current situation although this is not always the case, as with the exhibition of *All under Heaven*.

Towards the end of her article the author mentions Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s pillar made out of human ashes and writes that the same artists have also made a video which shows a woman in rubber boots emptying a bottle of human fat into “a probably very dirty river.”¹²⁵² By mentioning that the river is “probably very dirty”, the author reveals her personal image on China, which seems to be rather negative. All in all, apart from the fact that the author did not capture the main objective of the curator, moreover it seems that the opinions of Vuylsteke are rather stereotypical and do not necessarily correspond with reality.

11.4.9 Author unknown, *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*

The following review comes from the newspaper *De Tijd*, which is a Belgian newspaper focused on economy and business affairs. The author of the article is not mentioned; it just says “BP”. The title of the review is *Cynical realism as money machine*.¹²⁵³ The article was published four years after the exhibition *All under Heaven* and mainly writes about Chinese experimental art as a commercial product and a good investment. Towards the end of the article, the author writes about the *All under Heaven* exhibition, he does not however give any opinion on it. Only objective information is provided on the survey such as to whom the collection belonged, where it was held, which artists participated, etc. Yet, this article is included within this study as it provides several fragments that are worth analysing:

Contemporary Chinese art is artistically not innovatory. Style-wise it follows and applies art styles that were occurring in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, such as English and American pop art and

¹²⁵² “een vast smerige rivier.” Catherine Vuylsteke, *Een Chinese hemel boven Antwerpen*, De Morgen, April 1st 2004, p. 19.

¹²⁵³ *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*, De Tijd, January 22 2008, p. 32.

hyperrealism. The Chinese add cynicism to that and that seems to please the new rich Chinese. It is especially they who buy.¹²⁵⁴

The author then later on mentions: “The critical world view that contemporary Chinese art offers, with its social subjects and search for an own identity, is much closer to Western art than the old Chinese cultural tradition.”¹²⁵⁵ This fragment is another example of Chinese experimental art seen as a copy of Euroamerican art styles and culture. The fact that the author mentions that it is artistically not innovatory is a rather bold statement to make, and clearly indicates the lack of knowledge that the author has on Chinese experimental art. As has been explained in the theoretic part, Chinese experimental art is constantly searching for new ways to express itself and is a highly complex art current that fights many battles to become independent from Euroamerican, Chinese traditional and, in the case of the overseas artists, mainland art. Moreover, they also struggle to change the image within the international art market in which art critics, such as the author of this review, portray Chinese experimental art as copies of Euroamerican art. Again, this is another clear example of a review that has only taken into consideration Euroamerican references and which has not interpreted Chinese experimental art according to its own particular background.

Then, the author of the article says something that has been observed many times before in previous chapters. The author describes China as a strictly controlled nation, especially for artists, this way attributing a “dissident” character to the Chinese artists: “China is not readily known in the West for its big artistic and intellectual freedom. But the contemporary visual arts are especially tolerated in China.”¹²⁵⁶

All in all, the article fits the genre of the newspaper: Chinese experimental art is merely seen as a commercial product and as a hot, fashionable item capable of generating a lot of money. This is also why the title speaks of Chinese experimental art in the terms of a “money machine”. Within the article itself, Chinese experimental art is not seen as an

¹²⁵⁴ “De hedendaagse Chinese schilderkunst is artistiek niet vernieuwend. Ze is naar stijl een late toepassing van wat in het Westen reeds gebeurde in de jaren 1960 en 1970 met de Engelse en Amerikaanse popart en het hyperrealisme. De Chinezen voegen daar cynisme aan toe. Dat bevalt blijkbaar de nieuwe rijke Chinezen. Het zijn vooral zij die kopen.” *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*, De Tijd, January 22 2008, p. 32.

¹²⁵⁵ “Het kritische wereldbeeld dat de actuele Chinese kunst biedt, met haar sociale thema’s en zoektocht naar een eigen identiteit, leunt veel dichter aan bij de westerse kunst dan bij de oude Chinese cultuurtraditie.” *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*, De Tijd, January 22 2008, p. 32.

¹²⁵⁶ “China staat in het Westen niet meteen bekend als een land met een grote intellectuele en artistieke vrijheid. Maar hedendaagse beeldende kunst wordt in China wel bijzonder gedoogd.” *Cynisch realisme als geldmachine*, De Tijd, January 22 2008, p. 32.

autonomous art style and China is described as a closed off and politically strictly controlled nation.

11.4.10 Wiet de Klerk, *Altijd op zoek naar toppers*

The next review was published in FEM Business,¹²⁵⁷ which was a weekly financial magazine for the professional businessman. The magazine stopped publishing in 2010 due to bad economic circumstances. The title of the article is *Always looking for whoppers*¹²⁵⁸ and was written by Wiet de Klerk. No further information could be verified about the professional background of the author.

The author writes in this article: “Not only painters, but also photographers, video artists and sculptors, have developed their own visual language. The survey at the Muhka proves that.”¹²⁵⁹ This seems quite the opposite of the previous review in which it was mentioned that Chinese experimental art copied, or was strongly influenced by the “West”. Here, the author speaks of Chinese experimental art as an autonomous current with its own particular language.

The author then mentions that the “Chinese artists are not yet very successful in their own country where their work is often condescendingly called ‘embassy art’. It feels as if they are focussed mainly on the West.”¹²⁶⁰ This seems to be taken directly from the interview that was published between Marc Holthof and Guy Ullens in the exhibition catalogue. In this particular interview, Guy Ullens says exactly the same and also mentions the fact that Chinese experimental art is sometimes called “embassy art.” In a way this fragment contradicts the previous one in which the author mentions that the Chinese experimental artists have developed their own visual language. Here it seems as if he is saying that Chinese experimental art is “catering to the West”.

¹²⁵⁷ It had 19,830 subscribers in 2004.

¹²⁵⁸ Wiet de Klerk, *Altijd op zoek naar toppers*, FEM Business, April 3 2004.

¹²⁵⁹ “Niet alleen schilders, maar ook fotografen, videokunstenars en beeldhouwers, hebben hun eigen beeldtaal ontwikkeld. De tentoonstelling in het Muhka bewijst dat.” Wiet de Klerk, *Altijd op zoek naar toppers*, FEM Business, April 3 2004.

¹²⁶⁰ “De Chinese kunstenaars hebben in eigen land nog niet veel succes, hun werk wordt vaak minachtend ‘ambassadekunst’ genoemd. Het gevoel bestaat dat zij zich vooral op het Westen richten.” Wiet de Klerk, *Altijd op zoek naar toppers*, FEM Business, April 3 2004.

Lastly, the author makes a mistake at the beginning of his article by saying that the section with antique art of the survey was held at the Museum for Contemporary Art (MuHKA) and not, as it should have been, at the *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten* (KMSKA). This might be an indication that the author never visited the exhibition in person and referred to the exhibition catalogue as the main source of information for the review.

11.4.11 Jan van Hove, *Het vogeltje van de Keizer*

The next review was written by Jan van Hove for the Belgian newspaper *De Standaard*.¹²⁶¹ The title of the article is *The little emperor's bird*. Jan van Hove works as a journalist for *De Standaard* and specializes in culture and media.

The first fragment that shall be highlighted here is when the author of the review describes the meeting between Jan van Eyck's *Saint Barbara* (1437) and Whang Zhengpeng's landscape painting. Different opinions have been read in this paragraph about this section of antique Chinese art. While some authors have called it unsuccessful, e.g. by the sinologist Catherine Vuylsteke, and Christine Vuegen, here, Jan van Hove, is very enthusiastic and writes:

An impacting moment is the meeting between Jan Van Eyck [the painting the *Saint Barbara*] en Whang Zhengpeng [landscape painting] (...). [*Saint Barbara* is a] good example of the precision and the extreme sharpness of the details of Van Eyck's drawing style. It is a revelation to see how the Chinese artist, with a comparable sense of detail, placed his miniscule figures within the landscape. The fishermen, farmers and soldiers of Wang Zhengpeng, depicted doing their daily activities, are of an incredible lifelines and naturalness, however tiny they might seem in the overwhelming landscape.¹²⁶²

This opinion is quite the opposite of the outlook seen earlier by Catherine Vuylsteke. Jan van Hove does not mention that the Chinese antique artworks seemed "small" or inferior in comparison with the Flemish masterpieces. The contrary, he puts an emphasis on the fact that both are master painters. He is however not as enthusiastic about the contemporary art section of the exhibition:

¹²⁶¹ Jan van Hove, *Het vogeltje van de Keizer*, de *Standaard*, March 23 2004.

¹²⁶² "Een sterk moment is de ontmoeting tussen Jan Van Eyck en Whang Zhengpeng in de zaal van de Vlaamse primitieven. Daar hangt de bekende tekening van de Heilige Barbara, een goed voorbeeld van de precieze en tot in de details haarscherpe tekenstijl van Van Eyck. Het is een revelatie wanneer je ziet dat de Chinese kunstenaar met een vergelijkbare zin voor het detail zijn minuscule figuurtjes in het landschap plaatste. De vissers, boeren en soldaten van Wang Zhengpeng, afgebeeld in hun dagelijkse bezigheden, zijn van een onvoorstelbare levendigheid en natuurlijkheid, hoe nietig ze ook lijken in het overweldigende landschap." Jan van Hove, *Het vogeltje van de Keizer*, de *Standaard*, March 23 2004.

The exhibition held at the MuHKA clearly shows that Chinese contemporary artists are on the exact same wavelength as their Western colleagues. Whoever is looking for exoticism, came to the wrong place (...). There is not any really surprising work, although various artists appeal due to their high sophistication.¹²⁶³

This opinion coincides with some of the other reviews analysed previously in which it was also mentioned that the artworks on display at the MuHKA were “nothing new”. The author does not, however, explain why he says this and does not give any examples. Neither does he give examples of the resemblance between the Chinese experimental artists and the “western” colleagues of which he speaks. His comment “whoever is looking for exoticism, came to the wrong place” is also significant. It is as if the author is saying that one of the goals of Chinese experimental art surveys is to exoticize and that this art is expected to be exotic. Yet, in a twenty-first century context, this seems rather out-dated.

11.4.13 Jerone Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*

The next review was written by Jeroen Laureyns, also for the Belgian newspaper *De Tijd*.¹²⁶⁴ The title of the article is *Difficult confrontation between Western and Eastern art*. The author teaches contemporary art at the Saint Lucas School for the arts in Gent. He is also an art critic and has collaborated in the publication of the book *Jan de Maesschalck: the sublime loneliness, sublime solitude, the sublime solitude*.¹²⁶⁵

The first thing that catches the eye is the fact that the author speaks of “confrontation”. He does so in his article as well as in the title. About this confrontation he mentions that it is one of “falling and getting up again.”¹²⁶⁶ Strangely enough, he does not seem to further elaborate on this concept of confrontation within his review. The contrary, he then writes that there is no real confrontation:

In *All under Heaven*, The KMSKA presents the old Chinese works mixing them with the permanent collection of the museum. For example, the work of Zhenpeng is placed next to the Saint Barbara of Jan Van Eyck. If it were only in order to show that both traditions are equal, then this presentation

¹²⁶³ “Op de tentoonstelling in het MuHKA is te zien dat de Chinese hedendaagse kunstenaars perfect op de golflengte van hun westerse collega’s zitten. Wie op exotisme uit is, is hier aan het verkeerde adres (...) Echt verrassend werk is er niet bij, al weten verscheidene kunstenaars te bekoren door hun groot raffinement.” Jan van Hove, *Het vogeltje van de Keizer*, de Standaard, March 23 2004.

¹²⁶⁴ Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, *De Tijd*, March 31 2004.

¹²⁶⁵ Rudy Vandendaele, Jeroen Laureyns, a.o., *Jan de Maesschalck: De Sublieme Alleenheid, Sublieme Solitude, La Sublieme Solitude*, Oogachtend, December 2006.

¹²⁶⁶ “De confrontatie van de westerse met de oosterse kunst blijkt er een van vallen en opstaan.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, *De Tijd*, March 31 2004.

here is merely delivering a mock fight. Nowadays, one has to be especially prejudiced to think that old European visual art is superior to all other big visual art traditions of this world.¹²⁶⁷

It seems as if the author is saying that European art is not superior to “eastern” art and that both are equal. So, why does he then speak of a confrontation between “East” and “West” when in fact there is not any? This does not become clear in his review, nor does it become clear why he mentioned earlier on in his text that this confrontation was one of falling and standing up. It is interesting however that he mentions that one has to be “especially prejudiced” to think of European art as superior to all other arts. However, as seen in this thesis, this is still often the case with the Euroamerican art critics and curators.¹²⁶⁸

Jeroen Laureyns is especially fond of the antique Chinese art section of the exhibition and writes that it is “especially the old works that steal the show in ‘All under Heaven’.”¹²⁶⁹ Although he does criticize the way in which these artworks are presented: “One cannot doubt the artistic quality of the works [the old Chinese artworks], only the presentation of the works is of a rather meagre intellectual quality.”¹²⁷⁰ This comment has been observed in other reviews as well and seems to be a recurrent point of criticism. The author then adds that this lack of information about the Chinese works and Chinese culture is proof of a “lack of respect”.¹²⁷¹ Good background information about Chinese culture would have been very helpful in order to understand the Chinese antique paintings that were on display as they are fundamentally different from Euroamerican art tradition and culture. If Chinese experimental art, or in this case Chinese antique art, is often misinterpreted and misunderstood by Euroamerican art critics, without any good background information this will only become more evident.

¹²⁶⁷ “In ‘Alles onder de Hemel’ presenteert het KMSKA de oude Chinese werken tussen de werken uit de vaste collectie. Het werk van Zhenpeng hangt bijvoorbeeld naast de Sint-Barbara van Jan van Eyck. Als het er alleen om ging om aan te tonen dat beide tradities evenwaardig zijn dan wordt heur in de presentatie alleen nog een schijngevecht geleverd. Je moet dezer dagen al bijzonder bevooroordeeld zijn om te denken dat de oude Europese beeldende kunst superieur is aan alle andere grote beeldende tradities op de wereld.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

¹²⁶⁸ See also paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹²⁶⁹ “En vooral die oude werken stelen de show in ‘Alles onder de Hemel’.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

¹²⁷⁰ “Over de artistieke kwaliteit van de werken bestaat geen discussie, alleen de presentatie is op een nogal magere intellectuele leest geschoeid.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004. It must be said that the words “leest” en “schoeien” are unfamiliar to the writer of this dissertation and seem to be typical Flemish rather than Dutch. It has been tried to trace the significance of these words yet doubts remains to the exact meaning of this sentence.

¹²⁷¹ “Het getuigt van niet veel respect als men zo weinig moeite doet om vanuit het begrippenkader van de Chinese cultuur te denken.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

The art critic is also not very pleased with the experimental art section of the survey. He criticizes quite a few of the artworks that were on display and calls the artwork of Xu Zhen, *From inside the body* (1999), as “foolish”. About the artist Wang Xingwei he mentions that it confirms the prejudice that a lot of Chinese artists have a love for “kitschy colours”. He does not further elaborate on these statements and it therefore does not become clear what he means by “foolish”¹²⁷² and “kitschy colours”.¹²⁷³ About the section in general he says, “works with remarkable artistic and cultural value are the minority”.¹²⁷⁴ This comment coincides with some of the earlier reviews in which it was said that the best works of the Ullens’ experimental art collection were not chosen for this survey. Why this has been decided remains unknown but it does seem to cause that some of the art critics were not impressed with this particular part of the survey.

11.4.14 Pieter van Os, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*

The following review comes from the *Groene Amsterdammer* which is a weekly newsmagazine that exists since 1877. It is said to be one of the four most influential magazines in Holland, together with, for example *Elsevier*. It is known for its critical and independent view of, especially, international affairs. The extensive four-page article titled *China grows, in economy as well as in art*¹²⁷⁵ was written by Pieter van Os who is currently an editor at *NRC Handelsblad*, one of the main newspapers in Holland. He used to be an editor at the *Groene Amsterdammer* and studied art at the Design Academy in Eindhoven as well as at the University of Barcelona, and the University of Leiden.

The first paragraph of the article says:

Many Western critics still see new Chinese art as a way of expressing resistance against an authoritarian regime. They are making a mistake. What is important to the Chinese artist is expressing the rapid adjustments to the West – of the artist himself as well as his country and culture. China’s economic growth started by copying Western products, the artists did not do anything else. In the meantime, they have taken over the Western language of autonomy and originality (...)¹²⁷⁶

¹²⁷² “dwaas.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

¹²⁷³ “kitscherige kleuren.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

¹²⁷⁴ “In het actuele deel van ‘Alles onder de hemel’ zijn de werken met een bijzondere artistieke en culturele waarde in de minderheid.” Jeroen Laureyns, *Moeilijke confrontatie tussen westerse en oosterse kunst*, De Tijd, March 31 2004.

¹²⁷⁵ Pieter van Os, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*, De Groene Amsterdammer, May 15 2004, p. 14-18.

¹²⁷⁶ “Veel westerse commentatoren zien in de nieuwste Chinese kunst nog altijd een uitlaatklep van verzet tegen een autoritair regime. Ten onrechte. Het gaat de Chinese kunstenaar om de artistieke verwerking van de razendsnelle aanpassing aan het Westen – zowel van hemzelf als van zijn land en cultuur. Begon China’s economische groei met het kopiëren van westerse artikelen, de kunstenaars deden niet anders. Inmiddels hebben ze zelfs het westerse idioom van

Here the author openly criticizes the art critics who describe Chinese experimental art as “dissident”, opposing the Chinese regime. This does not occur very often among Euroamerican art critics. However, he then does mention that Chinese experimental art copies the “West”, another comment frequently made by Euroamerican art experts. This however, as has been explained in the theoretic part of this dissertation, should be nuanced and is not entirely correct.¹²⁷⁷

The article then talks about different aspects of the Chinese economy and the growth it is experiencing. Towards the middle of the article, the author writes about *All under Heaven* and says:

In the exhibition catalogue, Dawei emphasizes that his intention was not to present the artists as typically Chinese or as exotic flowers but to present them as an important part of the international avant-garde that struggles just as much as the artists from America, France or Japan with universal, cross-boarder subjects. (...) However, Fei Dawei does not succeed. Even in the disguising and often meaningless jargon of contemporary art curators such as his, it is impossible to cover up the common element that almost all works that were on display at the survey have shown: the artistic digestion of extremely rapid and rigorous adaptations to the West- of the artists themselves as well as their country and culture.¹²⁷⁸

This quote seems rather harsh when he describes Fei Dawei as a curator speaking in “disguising and often meaningless jargon”. The author then also mentions that the aim of Fei Dawei to present Chinese experimental art as universal has not been successful at all. According to the author Chinese experimental art cannot be seen as an individual, autonomous force within the international avant-garde movement, which was one of the goals of the curator Fei Dawei, but it is merely an avant-garde movement which is expressing the way in which China and Chinese culture is adapting to and taking over “western” (cultural) aspects. It is true that some of the works that were on display did reflect these rapid changes occurring in China yet, many other works did not express this concern and had a very different theme, for example Chen Zhen’s *Human Tower* (1999) (Fig. 52). As has been explained in the theoretic part, it is often the mainland artists who

autonomie en originaliteit overgenomen (...).” Pieter van Os, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*, De Groene Amsterdammer, May 15 2004, p. 14.

¹²⁷⁷ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

¹²⁷⁸ “In de catalogus benadrukt Dawei dat het zijn streven was de kunstenaars vooral niet als typisch Chinees of als exotische bloemen te presenteren, maar als schatplichtig aan de internationale avant-garde, net zo worstelend met universele, continenten overschrijdende thema’s als kunstenaars in America, Frankrijk of Japan. (...) Toch slaagde Fei Dawei niet in zijn opzet. Zelfs in het verhullende en vaak betekenisloze jargon dat hedendaagse kunstbeschouwers als hij hanteren, blijkt het onmogelijk het gemeenschappelijke element in bijna alle geëxposeerde werken te verdoezelen: de artistieke verwerking van de razendsnelle en rigoureuze aanpassing aan het Westen- zowel de aanpassing van de kunstenaars zelf als die van hun land en cultuur.” Pieter van Os, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*, De Groene Amsterdammer, May 15 2004, p. 15.

deal with a rapidly changing China. The overseas artists are often inspired by more “global” topics or refer to China in a more traditional way.¹²⁷⁹ The author however does not make any distinctions.

Towards the end of the essay, the author comes back to his earlier statement in which he writes that “western” critics often point to Chinese experimental art as an expression against the authoritarian regime in China and says:

The young and successful artist Han Lei explains that he and his peers sometimes like to go along with these Western expectations [Chinese contemporary art as an expression of resistance against the authoritarian regime]. But however much foreign collectors or documentary makers want to believe this, the authorities have not interfered in any way with art for years. Han Lei: “the government could not care less. Politicians are interested in doing business, not in art. As long as we don’t spoil this, they do not have a problem with us. Probably there is more freedom here than in New York, where they already start complaining about much less than that Fuck-Off book. [Fuck-Off was a controversial and in some aspects shocking exhibition that was curated by Ai Wei Wei in Shanghai in 2000].¹²⁸⁰

This fragment gives an insiders view of what is going on in China and the false portrayal that is sometimes made of Chinese experimental art in the “West”. Another significant comment of this extract is the fact that Han Lei explains that the Chinese experimental artists play along with “western” wishes and demands. Earlier on in this dissertation Guy Ullens mentioned that many Chinese artists, overseas as well as mainland artists, adapt their artwork to Euroamerican taste and expectations in order to thrive in the mainly Euroamerican dominant art market, the so called “embassy artists”.¹²⁸¹ This comment by Han Lei seems to confirm this.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that the author chose to illustrate his article with various images. One of the images is a photograph of the artist Zhu Yu while performing his work *Eating people* (2000) in which he allegedly cooked and ate a human foetus. By placing this particular image within his article, it is as if Pieter van Os wants to attribute a very sensational and “shocking” character to Chinese experimental art. This becomes even more evident considering the fact that this particular work was not exhibited at A//

¹²⁷⁹ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

¹²⁸⁰ “De jonge succesvolle kunstenaar Han Lei vertelt dat hij en zijn leeftijdgenoten soms graag inspelen op die westerse verwachtingen. Maar hoe graag buitenlandse verzamelaars of documentairemakers het ook willen, de overheid bemoeit zich al jaren op geen enkele wijze met de kunst. Han Lei: “De regering interesseert het geen klap. Politici zijn geïnteresseerd in zaken doen, niet in kunst. Zolang wij die zaken niet verpesten, hebben ze geen probleem met ons. Waarschijnlijk bestaat hier nog een grotere vrijheid dan in New York, waar ze al klagen om veel minder dan dat Fuck-Off-boek.” Pieter van Os, *China groeit, in economie en kunst*, De Groene Amsterdammer, May 15 2004, p. 16.

¹²⁸¹ See paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

under Heaven. Like other authors seen previously who have mentioned the tower made out of human ashes by the artists Peng Yu and Sun Yuan, it should be stated that these works are a minority within Chinese experimental art. They are only partly representative for the Chinese experimental art scene and should not be used as illustrative for the whole art current as it attributes a false image that does not correspond with reality.

11.4.15 Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*

The following review comes from one of the main newspapers in Holland, *De Volkskrant*. The title of the article is *East meets west, but then again does not*¹²⁸² and was written by Merlijn Schoonenboom. The author is the correspondent in Germany for *De Volkskrant* as well as a journalist and the editor of the art section of the same newspaper.

According to the author the exposition has as its goal to “confront old and new, but also east and west”.¹²⁸³ This comment was also made previously by Christine Vuylsteke yet it does not coincide with any of Fei Dawei’s aims mentioned within the exhibition catalogue. Neither does it coincide with what was mentioned by Guy Ullens in his interview with Marc Holthof. The author does not give any examples to illustrate this particular statement. It is therefore not clear from which source he got this information.

About the Chinese experimental artists he says: “especially the stories about extremes are the ones that stick, they are seen as an outlet for these artists who are thwarted by communism”.¹²⁸⁴ This fragment is especially significant in comparison with the previous review of Pieter van Os in which one of the Chinese experimental artists, Han Lei mentions that this “western” vision of Chinese experimental artists as dissidents is not true at all (according to the artist, the Chinese government does not bother with Chinese experimental art), and that this image is maintained for purely commercial reasons.

Merlijn Schoonenboom also complains about the lack of information available at the Chinese antique art section that was held at the KMSKA. He writes:

¹²⁸² Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

¹²⁸³ “(...) twee exposities (...) die samen een confrontatie tussen oud en nieuw, maar ook tussen oost en west zouden moeten vormen.” Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

¹²⁸⁴ “Van China blijven vooral de verhalen over extremiteiten hangen, geïnterpreteerd als een uitlaatklep van kunstenaars die onder het communisme worden gedwarsboomd.” Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

These are two completely different worlds: the art of omitting versus the art of clogging, Chinese line drawings versus the colour explosions of the West, European ideology, violence and martyrdom versus Chinese peace. And for this reason it is a mystery why it has not been completed with a clear explanation.¹²⁸⁵

The same complaint is made about the contemporary section of the survey:

Not all works are strong, but as a collection it is worthy of reflection. They [the Chinese experimental artists] themselves like to do so as well: about their own and the Western tradition, about their bizarre society of nowadays that is changing so extremely fast that they can only look upon it in amazement. However, one asks why hasn't there been done more with this material.¹²⁸⁶

As a reason for this, the author then responds by saying that De Baere “appears to be protecting contemporary art against its context”,¹²⁸⁷ what this means is unclear. Is he referring to the context of the Euroamerican art world and the images it sometimes projects via art critics and curators? One would think that providing “correct” information within the exhibition and the catalogue would have been more beneficial (protective) towards the works on display, this way avoiding the probabilities for the works to be misinterpreted.

11.4.16 Joëlle Smets, *L'art chinois s'éveille*

The last three reviews come from Belgian francophone newspapers and magazines. The first that shall be analysed here is the article *L'art chinois s'éveille*, written by Joëlle Smets who is a journalist working for the newspaper *Le Soir*, where the article was published. The article starts with the author questioning the identity of the artists:

Do they still have a Chinese identity? The Chinese contemporary creators, are they still Chinese? Given the works displayed at the MuHKA, the Museum of Contemporary art in Antwerp, the question could be raised. When one looks at “3000 Needles” by Yang Jiechang, an installation made of sacks punctured with thousands of needles, or “Human tower” by Chen Zhen (...), one is hit by their resemblances with American or European productions¹²⁸⁸

¹²⁸⁵ “Het zijn twee complete verschillende werelden: de kunst van het weglaten tegenover de kunst van het dichtsmere, Chinese lijntekening tegenover de kleuruitbarsting van het Westen, Europese ideologie geweld en martelaarschap tegenover Chinese rust. Het is juist daarom een raadsel dat het niet is aangevuld met een heldere verantwoording.” Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

¹²⁸⁶ Niet allemaal even sterk [the contemporary art works], maar als verzameling de moeite waard om over te reflecteren. Ze doen het zelf immers ook graag: over de eigen en de Westerse traditie, over hun bizarre huidige maatschappij, die zo enorm snel veranderd dat ze er alleen nog in verbazing naar kunnen kijken. Je vraagt je echter af waarom hier dan niet meer mee is gedaan.” Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

¹²⁸⁷ De Baere lijkt de hedendaagse kunst wel erg te willen beschermen tegen ‘context’. Merlijn Schoonenboom, *Oost ontmoet west, maar ook weer niet*, De Volkskrant, April 5 2004.

¹²⁸⁸ “Ont-il encore une identité chinoise? Les créateurs actuels chinois sont-ils encore chinois? Au vu des œuvres exposées au MuHKA, le Musée d'Art Actuel d'Anvers, la question peut être soulevée. Que l'on regarde “3000 Needles” de Yang

Again, Chinese experimental art is compared or seen as replicas of Euroamerican art, which is a recurrent comment among Euroamerican art critics. It would have been interesting if the author had given examples of these Euroamerican artworks which, according to her, resemble the Chinese ones.

The author then mentions that: “The Chinese contemporary creation has succeeded to assimilate an exterior culture in order to position itself in the international network.”¹²⁸⁹ Although the author does not explicitly mention it, it does seem as if she is insinuating that Chinese experimental art, in some cases, has adopted “exterior culture” (which might well be Euroamerican) in order to succeed in the international art market. This is what has been coined as “embassy art”,¹²⁹⁰ of which Guy Ullens speaks in his introduction, and which is posteriorly confirmed by the Chinese experimental artist Han Lei within the article of Pieter van Os.

11.4.17 Kerenn Elkaïm, *Echine de Chine*

The following review was written by Kerenn Elkaïm for the newspaper *La Semaine*.¹²⁹¹ Kerenn Elkaïm is a journalist and a literary critic. Only the beginning of this one-page review shall be highlighted here as the rest of the article seems to have been copied straight from the exhibition catalogue, and does not provide any extra information useful for this analysis.

The author starts the article by giving quite a *noyellesque* description of China which could be considered as China portrayed in a very exotic way: “Chinese night, cuddly night, night of love’...Mesmerizing, mysterious and full of song, China is attractive and at the same time unknown.”¹²⁹² This image however does not necessarily coincide with the reality of China but it is an excellent illustration of how Euroamerican art critics sometimes still cling

Jiechang, installation de sacs perforés de mille aiguilles, ou “Human tower” de Chen Zhen (...), on est frappé par leurs affinités avec les productions américaines ou européennes actuelles.” Joëlle Smets, *L’art chinois s’éveille*, Le soir magloisirs, p. 42, April 14 2004.

¹²⁸⁹ “La création actuelle chinoise a ainsi réussi à assimiler une culture extérieure et à faire sa place dans le réseau international.” Joëlle Smets, *L’art chinois s’éveille*, Le soir magloisirs, p. 42, April 14 2004.

¹²⁹⁰ See also paragraph 3.2 of Block I.

¹²⁹¹ Kerenn Elkaïm, *Echine de Chine*, La Semaine, April 8 2004.

¹²⁹² “Nuit de Chine, nuit câline, nuit d’amour...’ Envoûtante, mystérieuse et chantante, la Chine est à la fois attirante et méconnue.” Kerenn Elkaïm, *Echine de Chine*, La Semaine, April 8 2004.

to an out-dated, exotic and mysterious image of China that seems to date from the seventeenth century within an article that is published in the twenty-first century.

11.4.18 Pierre-Yves Desaiwe, *Tous sous le ciel*

The last review of this chapter was written by Pierre-Yves Desaiwe and was titled *All under Heaven*.¹²⁹³ The author is an art critic and historian who specializes in contemporary art. He is currently head of the Digital museum department of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels. About the section of antique Chinese art he mentions:

This is why the juxtaposition, at the Museum of Fine Art in Antwerp, of a painted scroll by Wang Zhenpeng of the 14th century and the Saint Barbara by Jan van Eyck is so passionate (...). There is most definitely a visual affinity. On the contrary however, the proposal of juxtaposing a Crucifix with the representation of Chinese saints, in my opinion, is totally out of place: the notion of martyrdom is non-existent in Chinese religious culture.¹²⁹⁴

First of all, it is not clear about which Chinese saints the author is speaking. In general, saints are non-existing in Chinese culture. They do not have martyrs but kings and gods. It is also unclear what the author means by “Chinese religious culture”, as China does not really have a religious culture either.

Towards the end of the article, the author concludes his review by mentioning that the works on display at the exhibition show “an active contribution to the necessary search for true freedom of expression in contemporary China.”¹²⁹⁵ Again, this is a good example of a recurrent comment among Euroamerican art critics of portraying and emphasizing the political, dissident character of Chinese experimental art. This is often done in order to make it more “exclusive” or interesting for the international art market but, as has said the artist Han Lei in a previous review, the Chinese government is generally not very worried about the Chinese art scene. Therefore, this image that is created of Chinese experimental art as a dissident art that goes against the political regime and has to fight

¹²⁹³ Pierre-Yves Desaiwe, *Tous sous le ciel*, Arte News, April 6 2004.

¹²⁹⁴ “C’est pourquoi la juxtaposition, au Musée des Beaux-Arts d’Anvers, d’un rouleau peint par Wang Zhenpeng au XIV^e siècle et de la *Sainte Barbe* de Jan Van Eyck se révèle passionnante. (...) Il y a certainement une affinité visuelle. Par contre, la proposition de juxtaposer une Crucifixion avec la représentation de saints chinois me semble tout à fait déplacée: la notion de martyr est absente de la culture religieuse chinoise.” Pierre-Yves Desaiwe, *Tous sous le ciel*, Arte News, April 6 2004.

¹²⁹⁵ “(...) une contribution active à la quête nécessaire d’une véritable liberté d’expression dans la Chine d’aujourd’hui.” Pierre-Yves Desaiwe, *Tous sous le ciel*, Arte News, April 6 2004.

for its existence seems to be rather false and could be considered more of an Euroamerican creation in order to make Chinese experimental art more interesting.

11.5 Conclusions on *All under Heaven*

All under Heaven was an exposition with various objectives. One of these was to better understand China (Guy Ullens), and the other was to prove that Chinese experimental art goes beyond China with a meaning that is universal (Fei Dawei). However, in many occasions within the catalogue the “West” is compared to the “East”, for example when Zhao talks about *tianxia* or when Fei Dawei, one of the curators of the show, mentions the impossibility to translate certain concepts of Chinese painting and aesthetics into “western” language. This seems to generate separation instead of unity, which is contradictory to the proposed goal: to demonstrate the universality of Chinese experimental artwork.

A second goal that was mentioned in the introduction by Fei Dawei was “to [show] the profound relationship between Chinese contemporary art and its historical and cultural context.” This objective is then not further mentioned anywhere else within the catalogue and appears to be forgotten. It also seems to be quite contradictory to Fei Dawei’s previous aim of portraying Chinese experimental art as universal. However, if the exhibition had followed through with this goal of presenting Chinese experimental art within its own particular background, it would have greatly improved the interpretations of this exhibition by the art critics. Yet, due to the fact that information on the exhibition was rather “meagre”, as some of the critics mentioned, this goal was obviously not accomplished.

One of the gravest faults of this exhibition is that the artworks on display are not sufficiently explained within the catalogue. Without an explanatory text, important information that could significantly improve the comprehension of these works is withheld. Quite a few reviewers complained about the lack of information given on the works and it was also mentioned a few of times that the artworks on display at the experimental section were not the most interesting or impressive ones of the Ullens’ collection. Also, the exhibition catalogue does not distinguish the overseas artists and does not mention much about their works on display. Significant is also the fact that no interviews were included on any of the overseas artists that participated in the exhibition. In total, nineteen interviews were held but all of them with Chinese artists from mainland China who had not left the country. The absence of interviews with overseas artists is not explained within the catalogue but is quite a common occurrence. Usually, the fact that some Chinese artists

are living or have lived abroad for years is not highlighted and no special attention is paid to it. Although it is a daring statement, it seems as though the overseas artists have been “left out”. There are no interviews with any of them and their most significant works were not included in this survey. This is rather surprising as Fei Dawei, the curator of the exposition is an overseas Chinese himself. Why has he not put more emphasis on the overseas Chinese artists and their artworks? At the beginning of this chapter, Fei Dawei mentions in a quote that he does not want to organize exhibitions on “Chinese avant-garde art” as he believes that this does not exist. This indicates his dislike of stereotyping artists according to their ethnic background. Yet, by not highlighting the fact that some of the artists within the exhibition were living abroad, an essential part of the meaning of their works is lost. Without this background information, their works cannot be fully comprehended, as they are not distinguished from the art of the mainland artists.

Another interesting fact is that the catalogue mentions that the most important works of the overseas artists were not chosen for *All under Heaven*. This has then also been mentioned in various reviews. Why was this decided? No explanation is given anywhere within the catalogue. It is mentioned though at some point in the catalogue that the survey wanted to include and display the more recent works yet, this does not mean that the more recent works are less impacting or less important, or does it? It should also be mentioned that some works were not the most recent works of the artists. For example, some of Yang Jiechang’s *Ink Squares* (Fig. 15 and Fig. 58) date back from 1989 (*All under Heaven* was held in 2004).

Although the third space is not mentioned at all in the catalogue, there are a few indications that do point to the concept. Questions about identity, ethnicity, and nationality are posed and reflected on in several of the catalogue’s texts. Also the conversation about Otherness between Fei Dawei, De Baere, and Simonet is focused on dismantling the concept of the “Other” and to debate questions such as boundaries, bi-culturalism and multiculturalism. It is significant that ten years after Homi K. Bhabha coined the concept of the third space (in 1994 within his book *The Location of Culture*), the concept remains unspoken of, even when the main topic of the conversation is precisely about the third space. Why is it so widely ignored?

On the other hand, as also observed in the *Paris-Pékin*¹²⁹⁶ exhibition catalogue, some of the essays were rather critical with eurocentrism and the exotic way in which Chinese experimental art is sometimes portrayed within the international art scene or in exhibitions. This becomes clear in Bart De Baere's introduction in which he speaks disapprovingly about the *Alors, la Chine?* exhibition held at the centre Pompidou in 2003 which he accuses of portraying Chinese art in an exoticizing way. Also Guy Ullens speaks of "western" domination within the art world when he mentions that "the West dominates the artworld".¹²⁹⁷ The criticizing of euroamericanism in the art world within exhibition catalogues seems to be a recurrent phenomenon as times passes, and this aspect shall be further commented on in Block III of the Conclusions.

It could be stated that the goals of the art curators Fei Dawei and Bert De Baere have not been accomplished. In general, the art critics have not captured the message that they were trying to transmit via this survey. Chinese experimental art has not been seen as universal. Quite the contrary, many art critics saw Chinese experimental art as copies of "western" art. Others saw the Chinese experimental artworks as a way for the artists to express themselves while under political repression. Some reviewers mentioned that the works did not impress them and some of them described them as "nothing new". According to the exhibition catalogue, *All under Heaven* was one of the first surveys in Belgium to show Chinese experimental art. For some of the artists that participated in this exposition it was their first time to display in Belgium. How is it then possible that the works were seen as nothing new? A possible explanation could be that the works seemed similar to other works previously displayed at other venues, yet considering the works that were on display this was not always the case, as some of the works were made in situ. The press kit mentioned that in the "West" there is "a dangerous lack of openness towards Chinese society" and therefore, one of the goals of this exhibition was to change this image and to open the "West" up towards China. However, considering the reviews that have been studied in this last chapter, this objective has not been met.

The opinions about the section on antique Chinese collection were also quite varied. Some critics found it a great success while others did not. Also here, some articles complained about the lack of information that could have facilitated the understanding of

¹²⁹⁶ See chapter 10 of Block II.

¹²⁹⁷ Marc Holthof, *All under Heaven* exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

the Chinese works. Some reviewers saw this part of the exhibition as an intent to confront “East” with “West”, however, this was not the goal of the curator Jean-Marie Simonet. Others however saw that both art styles were equal and highlighted the qualities of both.

In general, it could be said that the art critics saw *All under Heaven* as an exhibition displaying Chinese art, and not, as Fei Dawei and De Baere intended, “to show what China has to say about art”. But, in a show including exclusively Chinese artists, to create a universal image might have been quite impossible, especially when considering that the survey was held in Belgium, i.e. within a Euroamerican context that appears to cling to its need of identifying the Other at all cost. Overall, the reviews did not consider Chinese experimental art as a part of the international avant-garde movement. In general it was either seen as politically dissident, highly sensational, or as followers of the Euroamerican art scene.

12. LE MOINE ET LE DÉMON (2004)

12.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Le moine et le démon was an exhibition organized at the Musée d'art Contemporain de Lyon from the 9th of June until the 15th of August 2004. The MAC Lyon organized this exhibition in collaboration with the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, and the Guangdong Museum of Art. According to the exhibition catalogue it was the first time for a Chinese museum to organize an exhibition outside of China: "C'est la première fois qu'un musée d'art chinois organise, à l'étranger et en collaboration avec des institutions d'art étrangères, une exposition d'art contemporain chinois."¹²⁹⁸ (Yet this statement could be somewhat questioned as *Silent Energy*, held at the Oxford Moma in 1993 was also organized in collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Culture.¹²⁹⁹) The collaboration with the Guangdong museum¹³⁰⁰ of art was a result of the China-France year that was being held in France in 2003 and 2004. In certain aspects, this exhibition shows some similarities with the *Paris-Pékin* (2002) exhibition analysed in chapter eleven. Both exhibitions were partly based on Guy Ullens' collection¹³⁰¹ and were held in the context of the France-China year. It is noteworthy that, even though the exhibitions could be related to each other in certain aspects, nowhere within the catalogue is there any mention of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition held just two years earlier in Paris.

Another fact that should also be mentioned is that in the same year, in 2004, part of the Ullens' collection was displayed at the *All under Heaven* exhibition held in the Museum of Contemporary art of Antwerp, Belgium.¹³⁰² This exhibition was held just a month prior to *Le moine et le démon*, from the 20th of March until the 30th of May. Yet again, no mention is made of this exposition either. It is interesting that the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation financed and made available part of their collection of Chinese experimental art on three occasions within a very short period of time. As mentioned in chapter eleven,

¹²⁹⁸ *Le moine et le démon* exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

¹²⁹⁹ See chapter 2 of Block II.

¹³⁰⁰ The Guangdong Museum of art is a public museum inaugurated in 1997. It is also the founder of the Guangzhou Triennial which first edition was organized in 2002. The second edition of the Guangzhou Triennial was held by Hou Hanru, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Guo Xiaoyan. As explained in this dissertation, Chinese experimental art first became popular outside of the mainland long before it did within China. Not until it became highly lucrative and a "hot item" within the international art world were Chinese (including Hong Kong Chinese) interested in collecting Chinese experimental art. It would take until the first years of the 2000s approximately, also sometimes referred to as the Museum Age, for Chinese experimental art to be exposed within China. A good example is the Guangzhou Triennial.

¹³⁰¹ For more information on the Ullens' collection see chapter 10 and 11.

¹³⁰² See chapter 11 of Block II.

the display of artworks in exhibition raises their value and often has a positive impact on the artworks when they are posteriorly sold at auction. The fact that Guy Ullens financed three, in some cases major exhibitions on Chinese experimental art within Europe might be related to the sale of part of his extensive collection from 2009 onwards.

It should also be mentioned that another major scale exhibition was held in 2003 in France titled *Alors, la Chine?* This survey included fifty mainland artists and presented mostly the works created in the last five years. This particular show was partly financed by the French government as a project held in the context of the France-China year and it is for this reasons that Fei Dawei mentioned that the French government was then not capable of financing a second project, that of *Le moine et le démon*, obliging Fei Dawei to look for financing elsewhere, which he eventually found in the Ullens Foundation. As Fei Dawei mentioned in an interview in the magazine Asian Art:

As the Museum of Guangdong was late with getting the funds together, I turned to the French Ministry of Culture for help. Unfortunately, as the Ministry had just financed the exhibition *Alors la Chine?* at the Centre Pompidou last summer, it was no longer willing to support another exhibition devoted to contemporary art from China. I then turned to the Ullens Foundation, with which I had recently started working, and it kindly stepped in.¹³⁰³

Thus it becomes clear that in a very short period of time, the France-China year immensely influenced the opportunities for Chinese experimental art to be displayed in France (and Europe). From 2002-2004, four major shows were held: *Paris-Pékin* (2002), *Alors, la Chine?* (2003), *Le moine et le démon* (2004) and *All under Heaven* (2004).

Le moine et le démon was not as extent as *Paris-Pékin* in which eighty-eight artists participated or the *Alors, la Chine?*, which displayed fifty artists from mainland China. Here, twenty-two Chinese artists from the mainland as well as abroad participated, most of these artists being the better-known ones in the international art scene like Gu Dexin, Wang Gongxin, Peng Yu and Sun Yuan, all of which also participated in the *All under Heaven* exhibition held the previous year in Antwerp.¹³⁰⁴ The overseas artists that participated in *Le moine et le démon* where Huang Yongping, Shen Yuan and Yang Jiechang,¹³⁰⁵ all three artists were living in France at the time and all made works specifically for the exhibition. In total fifty-seven works were displayed within the survey

¹³⁰³ Fei Dawei in Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹³⁰⁴ See chapter 11 of Block II.

¹³⁰⁵ Yang Jiechang lives between France and Germany.

with different media. Some were installation works, others consisted of photography, sculpture or video art. One of the new characteristics that could be observed in all of these exhibitions held between 2002-2004 in the context of the France-China year was the clear presence of new media works, such as video and photography, and the scarce examples of more traditional media such as painting. This indicates a new direction of Chinese experimental art and a clear preference of some of the artists for these new techniques within a twenty-first century context. Another factor that contributes to the upcoming of the new techniques within Chinese experimental art are also the exhibition curators and museum directors who often have a preference for these new artistic expressions.¹³⁰⁶

The *Paris-Pékin* exhibition was curated by three curators: Thierry Raspail, director of the MAC Lyon, Fei Dawei who has been mentioned on several occasions within this dissertation,¹³⁰⁷ and Wang Huangsheng, director of the Guangdong Museum of Art. Thierry Raspail is an art historian who has spent the early years of his career at the art museum of Grenoble, and then several years in West-Africa. He has been the director of the MAC Lyon since its founding in 1984. Thierry Raspail is also the creator of the Lyon contemporary art Biennale which held its first edition in 1991. In 2009 he chose the curator Hou Hanru to organize the fourth Biennale of Lyon under the title of *Le spectacle du quotidien* and in 2013 Thierry Raspail curated a monographic show on the works of the overseas Chinese artist Huang Yongping, titled *Amoy/Xiamen* that was held at the MAC Lyon.

Wang Huangsheng is an art historian who was born in Guangdong. Before becoming the director of the CAFA (China Central Academy of Fine Arts) art museum in Beijing he was the director of the Guangdong Museum of Art. Wang Huangsheng is an artist himself, as well as a curator and art critic. He is also the chief editor of *Art museum magazine* and has written various books on Chinese (traditional) art. He has also published painting collections of his own works.

¹³⁰⁶ A good example is the exhibition that was held in the Art Santa Mònica in Barcelona in 2013. Here, the artistic director of the Arts Santa Mònica, Vicenç Altaió, specifically requested for Chinese experimental art that integrated these new techniques and media in order to show the latest trends within Chinese experimental art. The amount of paintings that were exhibited at this show were therefore minimal.

¹³⁰⁷ See chapter 1 and 11 of Block II.

As mentioned previously, twenty-two Chinese artists participated in *Le moine et le démon* of which three were overseas artists. The works they presented were:

Huang Yongping: *Tête d'Or* (in situ, 2004) (Fig. 63)

Shen Yuan: *Pousse-pousse, 18 km/h* (in situ, 2004) (Fig. 64)

Yang Jiechang: *3000 Needles* (1993) (Fig. 61)¹³⁰⁸
Parchemin divinatoire (Scroll of Secret Merits) (in situ, 2004)
(Fig. 62)

Le moine et le démon also dedicated part of its exhibition space to the large-scale project called *The Long March Project*. This project started in 2002 as a travelling art project curated by the Chinese art curator Lu Jie and was sponsored by the Long March Foundation that was established in New York in 2000 by the curator. Liu Ye came up with the project in 1999 while following his curatorial study at London University. The entire third floor of the MAC Lyon displayed photographs and other informative materials on this project that consisted of following the Long March itinerary of the Red Guards, but this time bringing experimental Chinese art to the people who live along this route. As is explained within the catalogue, some of these people had never been in contact with Chinese experimental or “western” contemporary art. This travelling exhibition, which also created works in situ in collaboration with the local inhabitants had as its main aim the introduction of this art to the Chinese population who do not usually have access to it as they do not live in the big cities such as Beijing or Shanghai. The project was brought to a halt on the first of September 2002 due to several problems that it encountered. Instead, a cultural and artistic centre was set up in Beijing from which the project continues to function as a motor for the diffusion of (Chinese) experimental art within China. Parts of the Long March project were displayed at different venues internationally including the 2004 Shanghai Biennale, the 2004 Taipei Biennale and the Vancouver Art Gallery. In some cases this has only been a video, or a certain work that was made for the project or a selection of works, yet at *Le moine et le démon* the largest display of the Long March project was exhibited which truly made it an exhibition within an exhibition.¹³⁰⁹

¹³⁰⁸ This work was also displayed at *All under Heaven*, see chapter 12 Block II.

¹³⁰⁹ For more information on the display of the Long March Project at *Le moine et le démon*, see: <http://www.longmarchproject.com/images/lyon/index-e.htm>, n.d. Date of last consultation 5/10/2014.

The Long March Project has been included within the exhibition of *Le moine et le démon* due to the fact that *Le moine et le démon* puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that Chinese experimental art has transformed from an underground movement to a publically promoted art current within the international art world, which shall become clear in the following paragraph. *The Long March Project* might have served as a visible example of this public promotion of Chinese experimental art within China as well as abroad, and shows the opening up of the experimental art world to the Chinese population as well as the international art scene. This is confirmed by the curator Lu Jie on the webpage of the Canadian art publication Filip:

The issue of what Chinese art should be was a very important departure point for the *Long March Project*. When tensions between so-called underground art—avant-gardism—and the mainstream—socialism, the official culture—dissipated, Chinese curators and artists started to rethink what constitutes a local context. It is crucial to question the whole system of contemporary art in the global context. These were issues that were brought up at the Zunyi Symposium—Site 8 of the *Long March Project*. I do not think that it is wrong to try and celebrate China's place within the global context. But the *Long March Project* is quite different from the current discussions being put forward by critics and curators in China. These discussions have tended to be very nationalistic and narrow-minded.¹³¹⁰

This fragment is a good example of how Chinese experimental art became popular within the Chinese context in the early 2000s. *The Long March Project* is an illustration of this new phenomenon within Chinese experimental art that promotes it internationally, sometimes as a positive image of China. Quite the contrary, as *Le moine et le démon* makes clear, to its previous period of underground art.

¹³¹⁰ On October 12 2005 the Vancouver Art Gallery presented *Dialogues on Art: Lu Jie in Conversation with Shengtian Zheng and Hsingyuan Tsao*. This article was then published in Filip 2, Winter 2006. For the full article see: <http://fillip.ca/content/the-long-march-project>. Date of last consultation 5/10/2014.

12.2 Analysis of the exhibition catalogue

The exhibition catalogue was edited by Five Continents Editorial in Milan and counts 183 pages. It was published in two versions, one in French and the other as a literal translation of the French version into English. Here in this analysis it has been chosen to quote the fragments from the English catalogue.

The catalogue includes one- or two-page colour plates of all the works on display and essays written by the three curators. Explanations on these works are rather scarce and vary according to the artwork. In some cases, the works on display have been commented on by the artists themselves, like in the case of Shen Yuan and Huang Yongping, and in other cases experts have been chosen to elaborate on the works. This was the case with, for example, Yang Jiechang whose work was commented on by his wife, Martina Köppel-Yang. The catalogue also includes a text by the Chinese curator Feng Boyi in which he speaks of Chinese experimental art when it was still in its phase of an underground current, which is a topic addressed by all the essays published within the catalogue. There is also a text by the artist Qiu Zhijie, known for his work *Copying the Orchid Pavillion Preface a Thousand Times* (1990-1995), in which he writes about the Chinese experimental art scene from an artist's insiders point of view. Lastly, towards the end of the catalogue there is also a text included about the exhibition *The Long March Project*. As explained previously, this project was of enormous proportions and followed the itinerary of the Long March made by the Red Guards, stopping in different towns along the way to introduce the local population to Chinese experimental art as well as "western" contemporary art. According to the catalogue text the main aim of this project was "to allow the people on this route to see contemporary art from China and abroad, and to create art in their presence."¹³¹¹ The project was stopped on the first of September 2002 due to several adversary circumstances. As a continuation of the project a "cultural transmission" centre was set up in Beijing that resumes the project by trying to establish artistic dialogue between Chinese experimental artists and the Chinese population by organising different activities and projects.

The Long March project was present at *Le moine et le démon* and occupied the whole third floor of the MAC Lyon with explanatory panels, photographs of the project and other material that explained the project. In a way, this part of the exhibition seems to be

¹³¹¹ *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 124.

somewhat “added” to the exhibition. Maybe, as explained in the previous paragraph, because it represents a new phase of Chinese experimental art that has left its underground state, and has “resurfaced”, now publically acknowledged, in search of new dialogues and opportunities to continue developing.

Continuing with the analysis of the exhibition catalogue, it commences with a four-page essay by the director of the MAC Lyon, Thierry Raspail, and is titled *Beginnings: How to Record the Present and Make History*. Within this essay, Thierry Raspail focuses on various aspects of Chinese experimental art and starts out by commenting on its reception within Euroamerican countries. The essay begins by commenting on the consequences that the France-China year has generated and describes:

All it took was a spark, and one as official as it comes – The France in China/ China in France years- for the loudest, most hysterical commentators to open fire. All of a sudden, after years of ignorance and silence, over-zealous clichés started piling up, left and right, in a dramatic face-off: in one corner, the good old yin-tinged Middle Kingdom, Jesuit missionaries, the Tao, the Great Wall, the Long March, and Judge Ti; in the other, the dynamic, all new, post-Tiananmen economic utopia of globalization, neoliberal realism, world-beating productivity, and “ditto” creativity.¹³¹²

What Thierry Raspail seems to evoke here is a scene of “hysterical commentators”, as he mentions, that seem to recuperate the stereotypes that exist on China and have taken the opportunity of the France-China year to reinforce these.¹³¹³ As Raspail mentions, these stereotypes are either related to Chinese traditional culture or to its current situation of upcoming economical power within the globalized world.

Then Raspail starts to demystify these stereotypes and addresses the process in which Chinese art is often received within the “West”. Firstly, he mentions that

Until recently China, in our field – art history- was not so much what Bergson termed as “useful reference” as it was, to use the apt expression coined by the sinologist François Jullien, a continent “kept at bay”. We shall leave it to our Eurocentric egos (...) to assess our capacity to handle the high-speed shift from silence to astonishment, then from recognition to overt condescension.¹³¹⁴

The fact that Chinese art has not been included in the international art discourse has been described in paragraph 3.1 of the theoretic part in which it is alleged that the international art vocabulary is mainly based on Euroamerican art and art history. Therefore, Chinese

¹³¹² Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹³¹³ A good example of the reinforcement of stereotypes within exhibitions held during the France-China years is the comment quoted on the art curator Pi Li who co-curated the *Alors, la Chine?* exhibition. See the previous chapter.

¹³¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

art and non-Euroamerican art are hardly ever understood and valued from their own particular perspective. Thierry Raspail seems to explain this status quo in this fragment when he mentions that China has been “kept at bay” when it comes to art history. It is also worth mentioning that Thierry Raspail, as a French and therefore Euroamerican art curator and critic here talks about “our Eurocentric egos” and then describes the way these “eurocentric egos” receive non-Euroamerican art in a process of silence-astonishment-recognition-overt condescension. This is a very summarized way of describing the way Chinese experimental art, and any non-Euroamerican art or culture, is frequently received within a Euroamerican context. At first there is somewhat of a “cultural shock”, then there is fascination and attraction, then the art or culture is made more familiar to one’s own cultural background (this has often been observed within this thesis when Euroamerican art critics search for Euroamerican references in order to explain or describe Chinese experimental artworks) and then there is the elevation of the Eurocentric ego that considers itself superior to all other non-Euroamerican artistic expressions and cultures.¹³¹⁵ Although Euroamerican art critics and curators have become more critical about the way non-Euroamerican art is received in the “West”, they are still by far not the majority. Yet, in 2004 one can see an evolution in this aspect, as also this Eurocentric reception of Chinese experimental art was criticized in the exhibition catalogue of *All under Heaven* in which Bart de Baere, one of the curators, also criticized the *Alors, la Chine?* exhibition of portraying the artists in a rather exotic way.¹³¹⁶ It should probably be reminded here that Thierry Raspail spent part of his professional career living in Africa, this might be the reason why he has the capacity to see the Euroamerican reception from an outsider’s point of view, and with a more critical eye. Had he stayed in France, this insight might not have been made available to him.

Then, Thierry Raspail raises a question that is also posed within this thesis and asks: “how do we avoid dragging it [Chinese art] onto the only turf that is truly ours”,¹³¹⁷ referring to the Eurocentric art language that seems to be the only and universally applied reference within the international art world. Raspail here asks a very important question and that is: how does one interpret the art of the Other? This is a difficult question to

¹³¹⁵ This process has also been explained in paragraph 3.4 of Block I about the art of the Other.

¹³¹⁶ See chapter 11 of Block II.

¹³¹⁷ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

answer, especially when the director of the MAC Lyon then mentions that Eurocentric reception has a “perceptual block” and a “never-changing ignorance of the territory”.¹³¹⁸ But, Thierry Raspail then partly answers his own question and mentions that the question is not “how can one understand another’s tradition?”¹³¹⁹ but how to understand the artwork as it emerges from the studio? Or in other words, how do we understand an artwork from its own particular point of view, without including it within a greater art current? This question leads to one of the main aims of *Le moine et le démon* and that is to portray the artists as individual artists, and not as exotic “Chinese” artists who are part of a homogenous group of “Chinese experimental artists”. It is as the author mentions clearly within his essay:

Our initial question, or rather idea, was above all that of making a “Chinese” exhibition “normal”, neither more nor less exotic or esoteric than any other exhibition made up of works chosen somewhere which is never simply anywhere at all. All that mattered was the performative quality of the works, not their origin.¹³²⁰

What can be deduced from this quote is that in 2004, the year in which *Le moine et le démon* was organized, the portrayal of Chinese experimental art is more and more about avoiding stereotypes and its “exotic” character, and portraying these artists according to the quality of their work, and not according to their ethnic background. There seems to be more awareness about the exotic way in which Chinese experimental art is still often received within the Euroamerican art scene: a phenomenon that seems long out-dated within the twenty-first century. Yet, even though some of the Euroamerican curators like Thierry Raspail seem to have become “enlightened” about this phenomenon of which Chinese curators such as Hou Hanru and Fei Dawei have been predicating about for years, the art critics who posteriorly write the reviews on this show do not seem to have grasped this notion. This will become clear in paragraph 12.4 in which the reviews shall be analysed.

Avoiding the exotic way in which Chinese experimental art is received within a Euroamerican context, and also the stereotypes that seem to exist on the cultures of the Other, in this case China, Raspail mentions again that

¹³¹⁸ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹³¹⁹ Ibidem.

¹³²⁰ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 8.

the focus of our current effort with Fei Dawei and Wang Huangsheng is the configuration and reconfiguration (...) of a discourse free of facile anthropologizing and thereby conducive to the definition of a Chinese expressive/creative environment. The outcome, however, is neither an environment (...) nor a discourse (...), but rather a jumble, made up of individualities that cannot be reduced to their cultural/ generational affiliations.¹³²¹

This fragment again seems to respond to Raspail's initial question on how to receive the art of the Other without "dragging it onto the only turf that is truly ours" as he mentioned two pages earlier. It seems thus that one of the main objectives of *Le moine et le démon* was to eliminate the stereotyping of Chinese experimental art and its interpretation only according to eurocentric references by taking a closer look at the artists as individual artists with a personal and unique view on the world, and not as a group of Chinese artists presenting Chinese artworks in a survey on "Chinese experimental art".

Then the essay of Thierry Raspail takes a radical turn and switches to an entirely different topic that is then also addressed in all the other essays published within the catalogue. Here, towards the end of his essay, the curators speak about Chinese experimental art in its time of "post-underground" art. He poses another question and asks: "How does one make the shift from unofficial minority to official majority, when for and against no longer have any meaning, without losing something in artistic terms? How does one become receptive to receptivity?"¹³²² According to the author, this is one of the points of the "hidden agenda",¹³²³ to use the curator's words, of *Le moine et le démon*. The exhibition not only wants to portray Chinese experimental art in terms of individual artists and according to the quality of their work (and not their ethnic provenance) but also to show what happened with Chinese experimental art when it transformed from an underground art current to an art that is now (in 2004) officially accepted, and in some cases even promoted by the authorities. Yet, this aim might be questioned and it could possibly backslash on the exhibition and the curators. First of all, the curators want to portray Chinese experimental artists in a non-exotic way, yet by focussing on the underground character of this art (which is extensively elaborated upon within almost all the essays within the catalogue), one focuses precisely on its "dissident" character, which places this art in a political spotlight. The effect that is then achieved is the contrary of what was initially proposed. As shall become clear later on in paragraph 12.4 in which the reviews are analysed, this "underground" character so elaborately and extensively commented on within the

¹³²¹ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 9.

¹³²² Ibidem.

¹³²³ Ibidem.

catalogue is taken over as one of the main references in practically all of the reviews. Yet, this was not the initial aim of the survey, quite the contrary, emphasis and effort was put on the fact of portraying the artists as unique *individual* artists. Not as a part of a homogenous group that finds its origins in the underground current of “counter culture” that goes against the policies of the Chinese authorities. And this brings us to the second problem with this aim: Chinese experimental art is portrayed as an art current that finds its roots within the underground current but this is not true for all the artists. The artists that left China in the late eighties, early nineties, some of which are studied within this dissertation, did not truly undergo this phase of the underground current. By leaving in the early stages of Chinese experimental art, they did not have to deal with the Chinese authorities but focussed on the international art markets. Therefore, this aim that is set for *Le moine et le démon*, in which three overseas artists participated, seems to be too generalizing. The underground movement within Chinese experimental art existed but it cannot be applied to all artists. Lastly, one should question why so much emphasis is put on the underground beginnings of Chinese experimental art as it seems to point to the dissident characterization put on this art, when the aims of the survey was to portray the artists as individual, unique artists. Has an emphasis been put on the underground character of Chinese experimental art in order to make it more appealing to the French/Euroamerican audience?

Thierry Raspail then speaks of the early years of Chinese experimental art when shows were regularly shut down by the authorities. As mentioned in paragraph 3.2 of Block I, this in fact made Chinese experimental art more popular within Euroamerica as it portrayed the artists as dissidents, as taking on the risks of going against the communist regime, which was highly admired within a (post) Cold War context. Yet, what becomes clear is that this image of the Chinese “dissident” artists remains in place, well into the years after 2000. The director of the MAC Lyon mentions that the artists chosen for *Le moine et le démon* were all dissident artists: “dissenting artists – and those we have chosen all belong in this category”,¹³²⁴ which again seems to emphasize a dissident character that in 2004 seems to be rather misplaced, as, according to the same catalogue, the Chinese government embraced Chinese experimental art already in the early 2000s.¹³²⁵ It also places all artists into a homogeneous group of “dissident” artists when some of these, like the artists living abroad who also participated in the survey such as Huang Yongping and

¹³²⁴ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 10.

¹³²⁵ See the essay by Fei Dawei that shall be analysed next.

Shen Yuan cannot be classified as only “dissident” artists. Again, this reiteration of the dissident, underground phase of Chinese experimental art does not seem to coincide (or do justice) to the main aim that was stated for this particular exposition: to portray the artists as individual artists.

Towards the end of the essay, Thierry Raspail mentions that *Le moine et le démon* strives “to bring clarity to a confused situation”.¹³²⁶ Here, the curator refers to the “confusing” situation of transforming from one extreme to the other: from an underground art to an art current that has been “accepted” and acknowledged by the Chinese government and that is even promoted by it in order to improve its image in the world as an open, creative and “tolerant” nation that faces the future not only in economic terms, but also artistically. This image that the survey wants to portray might also explain why the project of the Long March has been included within this exhibition as it clearly shows this opening up of Chinese experimental art from an underground movement to an openly itinerant art movement that creates dialogue and coherence among the Chinese population as well as internationally.

All things considered, Thierry Raspail’s essay is insightful and seems to be quite critical towards the Euroamerican reception of non-Euroamerican art, which is elaborated upon at the beginning of his essay. Yet, towards the end of his text, the message that he seems to want to transmit becomes more and more political as he places the artists in a dissident light, elaborating extensively on the initial phases of Chinese experimental art when it was still an underground movement.

Fei Dawei, who writes the following essay continues this discourse on the underground movement of Chinese experimental art. Practically the entire text is about this particular topic.

At the beginning of his article, Fei Dawei makes a comment that seems to be rather utopic when he writes:

On the other hand, the Western art world had also begun to realize that it could not continue to validate itself as long as it remained a closed system. The West and China were both emerging from their respective seclusions, searching for their own forms of opening, and trying to draw new energies from the possibilities that lie ahead.¹³²⁷

¹³²⁶ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon* exhibition catalogue, p. 10.

¹³²⁷ Fei Dawei, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 11.

This most definitely was the case of Chinese experimental art in its initial phase, and it continues to search for new ways of development and possibilities that might open up new perspectives for this art within the international art scene. Yet, the same cannot be said of Euroamerican art, or as Fei Dawei mentions the “West”. There was a period in the late eighties, beginning of the nineties when especially European countries tried to embrace their former colonies and intended to portray them as equals, and not as exotic cultures. A good example of this intention undertaken in the postcolonial period of Europe is the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. This exhibition was one of the first intents of presenting non-Euroamerican art in a non-exotic way, even though it has been posteriorly criticized for doing precisely the opposite. Fei Dawei’s comment seems rather utopic because the “West” has not really searched for new openings and the occasions it has made an effort to open itself up to non-Euroamerican art as an equal are scarce. This dissertation professes the notion that Euroamerican art is dominating in the art scene, as well as Euroamerican art language that is being applied universally to all arts, whether Euroamerican or not.¹³²⁸ This for example was also insinuated by Thierry Raspail in his essay when he spoke of the “eurocentric egos”, dragging the art of the Other onto its own turf, and when he described the way Euroamerica frequently receives the art of the Other as a process of silence-fascination- familiarization- and eventually condescension. Yet, Fei Dawei seems to have a more positive outlook on the Euroamerican art scene, which in fact is quite ironical considering the circumstances. Here, a non-Euroamerican art expert somewhat “idealizes” the Euroamerican art market as an open and including market while the Euroamerican art expert, Thierry Raspail, puts this same art market in a rather eurocentric and negative light.

As mentioned before, Fei Dawei then quickly takes up the topic of Chinese experimental art as an underground movement and explains its historical evolution over the years. As the essay advances, he mentions that “Beginning in 2001, the Chinese government began to openly support the exportation of Chinese contemporary art abroad.”¹³²⁹ And that this was the year in which Chinese experimental art ceased to be an underground and “counter” current to transform into a new type of art, openly tolerated by the authorities, hereby losing its “counter” characteristics. He then later adds that “Contemporary art, as

¹³²⁸ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

¹³²⁹ Fei Dawei, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 11.

a mode of individual creative expression has become officially accepted and, indeed, enjoys ever-increasing support.”¹³³⁰ This comment should be kept in mind when reading the reviews that were written on *Le moine et le démon* analysed in paragraph 12.4 that do not seem to have captured this acceptance and continue to portray, in some cases, the artists and their artworks in a political, dissident way.

As mentioned by Thierry Raspail within his essay (who spoke about the “hidden agenda” of *Le moine et le démon*), Fei Dawei here openly mentions that one of the aims of the survey is “to take the reality created by these changes as its background and show how artists have faced this new landscape and these new problems before and after the changes in official attitude.”¹³³¹ He then connects this thought with the title of the show and mentions that it stands for the fact that “just as one achieves a degree of success, he or she will face ever greater challenges.”¹³³² This explanation on the title of the show should be remembered, as some of the reviews have given quite a different interpretation on the expression “le moine et le démon”.

According to Fei Dawei, the fact that Chinese experimental art lost its underground character by being officially acknowledged and promoted by the Chinese government has led to somewhat of an “identity-crisis”. Chinese experimental art could no longer define itself as a counter-current, going against the official policies and rules. Therefore, it needed to find a new meaning to its art, a new aim, a new “reason to be”. According to the curator, this search has resulted in a different challenge in which the artists no longer go “against” but try to go beyond themselves “to transcend (...) himself or herself, not the outside world.”¹³³³ Yet again, this seems to be rather generalizing and seems to portray the Chinese experimental artists as a homogenous group. Not only is there any mention of the overseas artists, they are portrayed as part of this underground movement when in fact they were not really part of the mainland scene of Chinese experimental art. Already in a much earlier state were they confronted with this “identity crisis” and many of them had to transcend and go beyond themselves already in the early nineties when they were

¹³³⁰ Fei Dawei, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12.

¹³³¹ Ibidem.

¹³³² Ibidem.

¹³³³ Ibidem.

confronted with a completely new cultural environment, consequence of having moved abroad.¹³³⁴

Then, also Fei Dawei makes a radical shift and somewhat leaves behind the underground character of Chinese experimental art to highlight the individual qualities of the artists. He mentions that this has been one of the main goals of the survey:

This exhibition is unlike exhibition [sic.] held in the West, because in it, Chinese contemporary art is not posited, yet again, as a collective entity, nor as a manifestation of social phenomena, but instead as an individual undertaking. The participants have been selected not because of their identity as Chinese artists, but because of the quality of their work. The entire structure of the exhibition is based on displaying individual artists and their works. The works exhibited here are not illustrations of the changes in Chinese society, nor are they reports on the latest trends. They are simply juxtapositions of different works by different artists.¹³³⁵

Yet, again, this quote seems to somewhat contradict the elaborations made on the underground years of Chinese experimental art. Here, Fei Dawei mentions that this exhibition does not want to portray Chinese experimental art as a collective entity, nor as a manifestation of social phenomena, but precisely by referring to and elaborating so repetitively and extensively on their “common” background as the underground art current that goes against the authorities and that has had to search for new direction since its acceptance by the Chinese government, Fei Dawei portrays Chinese experimental art as a homogenous group, result of a collective social situation. Proof of this is for example the fact that the overseas artists are not distinguished from their mainland counterparts. Yet, precisely by distinguishing the artists who live abroad from their mainland colleagues, they are highlighted as individual artists. All artists are unique but the overseas artists do not work from the same perspective, and do not have the same outlook on the world as the mainland artists. Yet this individual quality is not highlighted anywhere within this exhibition that supposedly proposes as one of its main goals to make the artists stand out as *individual* artists.

Fei Dawei’s text is then followed by an essay written by Wang Huangsheng, who is the third curator in *Le moine et le démon*. The title of his article is *Creating a Dialogue*, yet like the previous two essays, also this article seems to focus mainly on the underground period of Chinese experimental art. It starts out by historically describing the situation of

¹³³⁴ See paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

¹³³⁵ Fei Dawei, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12-13.

the underground artists and mentions that in the 1980's, Chinese experimental art was "outside the system".¹³³⁶ But also here, the text takes a radical turn and then starts to elaborate on the "western" reception of Chinese experimental art. These three topics seems to be the main features of all the essays written by the three curators within this exhibition catalogue: Chinese experimental art in its underground phase, Chinese experimental art and its "western reception", Chinese experimental art as an art current made out of individual artists with unique qualities.

About this "western" reception, Wang Huangsheng writes:

But all the while, Chinese contemporary art has not been able to free itself from the cultural net of the Western art system. In the landscape of world culture, the status of Chinese art remains embedded in the transcendent concepts that underlie the frameworks of the exhibitions in which it appears. Western centrism inherently imbues the selection of works of Chinese art with a certain ideology, which results in a serious misunderstanding of the art. This renders the art nothing more than illustrations depicting Chinese social reality, devoid of any real discursive power in the international landscape.¹³³⁷

This fragment seems to coincide more with the vision of "western" reception of Chinese experimental art described by Thierry Raspail than the "utopic" description mentioned by Fei Dawei within his essay. It is significant that Wang Huangsheng here speaks of the fact that Chinese experimental art within a Euroamerican context is often misunderstood. The reasons for this misunderstanding are the same that were previously mentioned by Thierry Raspail: Chinese experimental art is seen and interpreted from "western centrism". In other words, the Euroamerican-centric international art scene is not capable or does not have the tools to interpret the art of the Other on its own terms, according to its own historical and cultural background.¹³³⁸

As a consequence, Wang Huangsheng then repeats the goal that has been set out by Fei Dawei and that has been mentioned in all three essays:

In the course of this project, we have come to a common understanding: we feel that Chinese contemporary art, after undergoing so many years of development, should return anew to the fundamental question of how to look at art. As art, Chinese contemporary art has a unique artistic and cultural style, as well as meanings that arise from its interactions with the society of its times and, indeed, from the works themselves. It should be more than a simple illustration of social change and the value conflicts it brings about. Artworks should be the creations of individual artists, not the

¹³³⁶ Wang Huangsheng, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

¹³³⁷ Ibidem.

¹³³⁸ See paragraph 3.1 of Block I.

reflections of a collective; artists should enter into and create artistic tides and trends through individualized thinking.¹³³⁹

It seems that all curators have agreed on this strategy: by portraying the Chinese experimental artists as individual artists, with their own particular view on the world, and not as part of a collective, stereotypes on Chinese experimental art might be avoided. This way, the exhibition hopes to side step the image of exhibitions held on Chinese experimental art as “windows” into Chinese society, as reflections on social and economical changes.

After these three essays written by the three curators of *Le moine et le démon*, two more essays are added to the catalogue. One is written by the art curator and critic Feng Boyi, followed by the text written by Qiu Zhijie, one of the better known artists within the Chinese experimental art scene.

The title of Feng Boyi’s essay already indicates what the text is about “*Under-underground*” and *Others on Chinese Avant-garde Art Since the 1990s*. As this title clearly suggests, almost the entire eight-page text reiterates the historical background of Chinese experimental art starting out as an underground, and counter current, yet here in more detail than the previous essays written by the three curators. Towards the middle of the article, Feng Boyi makes an incision in his discourse and speaks of the “western” reception of Chinese experimental art:

The name “under-underground” originated partly from the fact that the art could not be openly exhibited and partly due to the handling of the international media, which regarded Chinese avant-garde art as the “art of dissidents”. It exaggerated the political and ideological significance of avant-garde art from a socialist country. This somehow turned into a kind of channel and strategy by which artists, especially younger artists, gained fame and international recognition. Therefore, an examination of “under-underground art” not only spans the art within and without the official system in the 1990s, but is also a scene of artists and artworks from a socialist Third World country escaping and being trapped as reflected in the mirror of globalization and post-Cold War thinking.¹³⁴⁰

This entrapment between the Euroamerican portrayal of Chinese experimental art as dissident art within a post Cold War framework, and the censorship that was practiced on Chinese experimental art within the mainland has been elaborated upon in chapter three of Block I about the Euroamerican reception of Chinese experimental art. Therefore, no

¹³³⁹ *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 15.

¹³⁴⁰ Feng Boyi, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 61.

further comments shall be made here as Feng Boyi does not provide any extra information on this topic but does seem to confirm this situation.

What should be highlighted is the fact that Feng Boyi speaks of the “under-underground avant-garde” yet nowhere in his article does he explain why he calls it the “under-underground”. Also in the French edition of the catalogue does Feng Boyi speak of “under-underground” hereby excluding the possibility of it being a translation error. It is not clear if Feng Boyi is here coining a new concept or if the word “underground” might have been wrongly translated from Chinese. This cannot be verified, as the catalogue does not mention if the article was translated from Chinese.

Feng Boyi seems to commit an error within his article when he speaks of the *Chine demain pour hier* exhibition, curated by Fei Dawei in 1990.¹³⁴¹ Here he writes “Demain pour Hier, curated by Fei Dawei, a Chinese art critic and curator residing in France, took place in the southern French province of Var (...)”¹³⁴². This seems to be incorrect. Firstly, the exhibition has not been correctly stated here, as it was “Chine demain pour hier” and even though it was held in the province of Var, he could have been more specific by mentioning that the exposition was held in Pourrières.

Then, also Feng Boyi, like Fei Dawei within his essay, seems to have a rather utopic vision on Chinese experimental art within the international art scene when he describes:

But they [the exhibitions of Chinese avant-garde art in foreign countries] also made traditional Chinese art concepts and forms an integral part of contemporary global art, for they combined the understanding of international art trends with attention to the reality in China, and eliminated the contradictions and misunderstandings between Chinese art and international art.

This quote should be seen in the light of the comments given out earlier when a similar quote was stated from Fei Dawei. It also should be mentioned here that this statement seems to radically contradict or oppose what has previously been mentioned by Wang Huangsheng, who spoke of the misunderstanding of Chinese experimental art within the international art scene.

¹³⁴¹ See chapter 1 of Block II.

¹³⁴² Feng Boyi, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 63.

No further comment shall be made on this essay as it mostly elaborates on the Chinese experimental art period of the 1990s, highlighting its “under-underground” aspect. Feng Boyi does not make any mention of the *Le moine et le démon* which might point to the fact that the author had written the essay in a previous stage. This also becomes clear when Feng Boyi refers to Fei Dawei as “a Chinese art critic and curator residing in France”,¹³⁴³ which seems to be a rather “distant” description, considering the fact that Fei Dawei curated the show of which this particular catalogue speaks. Feng Boyi does not mention anywhere within his catalogue that Fei Dawei was the curator of *Le moine et le démon*.

Towards the end of the catalogue, a last essay is published by the artist Qiu Zhijie and is titled *A Travel Guide for Purgatory*. The text aims at giving an insiders view of the Chinese experimental art scene from the perspective of the artist. Yet, also this text speaks about the early stages of Chinese experimental art of the late eighties, beginning of the nineties. Qiu Zhijie mainly addresses his own career and the events that happened when he started to become famous. Within his article, the artist speaks rather negatively about the Chinese art critics¹³⁴⁴ that seemed to “rule” the mainland art scene and who turned themselves into key figures, making it possible for the artists such as Qiu Zhijie to enter the art scene and make a name for themselves.

In 1992, the critics passed and published a unified fee schedule that was equivalent to a professional consortium or union. This document shows that, at the time, the common belief was that artistic creativity needed to pass through their filter – the critical apparatus- before becoming discourse. Only then could it be “pushed” into the art market. This belief system led in the mid-’90s to many “critic’s choice exhibitions”. These critics were usually magazine editors, because opportunities and spaces for large-scale exhibitions were extremely few. Thus, a very small number of fine art magazines became the most important platform for artist. Critics an artist could make a name for themselves on the printed page, and artists threw themselves into the laps of critics with the power to publish, considering a mention in an article the stamp of “legitimacy”. Likewise, critics each cast their nets around the artist communities, competing to become the spokesperson for one or another faction, seeing this as the emblem of their power and success.¹³⁴⁵

¹³⁴³ Feng Boyi, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 63.

¹³⁴⁴ Especially in the beginning, the role of the art curator within Chinese experimental art was more of an insider’s job. It was not enough to live by and most curators had other jobs on the side as magazine editors, teachers or artists. Curators were certainly not “officially” acknowledged and often had to organize exhibitions either underground or in a way that would not displease the officials of the Chinese government who often shut down surveys due to “politically sensitive works”. Important Chinese art critics were for example Gao Minglu, Fei Dawei, Hou Hanru and Li Xianting. Fei Dawei and Hou Hanru have moved abroad in the late eighties while others such as Li Xianting have continued to make way for the Chinese experimental art scene within the mainland. In the case of Hou Hanru and Fei Dawei, the analyses carried out here give a good impression on how these “Chinese” curators have tried to promote Chinese experimental art within the art scene as an international art current, equal to Euroamerican art currents, and to avoid the exotic image that is often evoked by the word “China” and all that is related to it. This has been an uphill battle and the effects that this impact has had on the international art world is questionable. A good example of this was the dialogue between Li Xianting and Fei Dawei in which Li Xianting clearly questioned Fei Dawei’s efforts made in the international art market by saying: “Do you really believe that you yourself have had an impact on the Western art world?”(LI Xianting in LU, Carol Yinghua, *Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds*, e-flux journal nr. 11, December 2009, p. 1-9, p. 3.) See also paragraph 2.4 of Block I.

¹³⁴⁵ Qiu Zhijie, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 118.

Seen from this perspective, Qiu Zhijie then explains that the underground movement within Chinese experimental art was not only to loophole the Chinese authorities, but also the mainland art critics: “All manner of ‘live’ exhibitions had become the sites where artists could make a name for themselves; art magazines were no longer ‘it’.”¹³⁴⁶ This adds new information to the underground movement that has not been mentioned by any of the other authors who have extensively spoken of it within their essays.

The last element that shall be highlighted from this essay is when the artist explains why video and other media art have become so popular within Chinese experimental art. Later on in paragraph 12.4 various art critics wrote within their review that video art seemed to have taken over from painting and other more traditional art forms. This is true and here Qiu Zhijie explains why:

(...) new media was safest because it co-opted with new technology; it would be seen as part of the party’s doctrine of “first productive capacity” and, thus, likely to be the most immune to ideological debate. Furthermore, its impact was the strongest, and it offered the largest space for experimentation. It was also most likely to be the first to have new departments established in the art academies. So the precedence given to promoting video art was not merely meaningful in and of itself but, also, as a path toward opening space for all Chinese experimental art. History has proven that our choice was correct.¹³⁴⁷

Here, Qiu Zhijie makes it clear that the upcoming of video art within Chinese experimental art is not a coincidence but that its underlying reasons are plentiful. One of them being the fact that video art was somewhat seen with a positive eye by the Chinese government, which most probably might have benefitted its financing and displaying. These reasons given by Qiu Zhijie should be kept in mind when reading some of the reviews that are analysed in paragraph 12.4 as these articles seem to portray the vast presence of video art at the *Le moine et le démon* survey as a conscious decision of the curators to somewhat suppress the more traditional art forms such as painting, which was not the case.

To conclude, the exhibition catalogue is insightful and provides thought-provoking information on the experimental Chinese art movement. It is significant that some of the authors have critically looked towards the way this art is received within the “West”, yet it is also noteworthy how the curator Fei Dawei and Feng Boyi look upon the same situation

¹³⁴⁶ Qiu Zhijie, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 118.

¹³⁴⁷ Qiu Zhijie, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 121.

in a rather utopic way, quite the contrary of the other authors Thierry Raspail and Wang Huangsheng.

It should also be stated that the exhibition catalogue repetitively elaborates on the same topics within all essays and especially on the underground aspect of Chinese experimental art. This seems rather strange considering the goals that were set out for the survey to portray the Chinese artists as individual artists and not as a collective or as a reflection on social changes occurring within China. Yet, by repeatedly explaining the underground initial phase of Chinese experimental art, the contrary is accomplished: the survey seems to appear as a reflection or a result of the events that took place in the 1990s, which is completely distinct from the situation of these same artists in 2004. The underground aspect of Chinese experimental art is emphasized within the catalogue as it explains the new situation of these artists who no longer are “against” anything, who no longer are part of a counter current, but who have become part of an acknowledged, accepted and promoted art current within mainland China. Yet, again, this seems to generalize the Chinese artists and seems to portray them as artists who have gone through the same evolution. No mention is made of the overseas artists, whose history within Chinese experimental art is very different from the artists who stayed on the mainland. The result is that the catalogue portrays these artists as coming from the same background (underground art), going through the same process of becoming an official art, and now finding themselves in search of a new direction. Yet this cannot be applied to all artists, especially not to the artists living abroad.

12.3 The artworks on display

As mentioned in paragraph 12.1, of the twenty-two artists that participated in *Le moine et le démon*, three artists were overseas. All three were living in France and all three made sight specific works for the exposition.

The works that were exhibited were:

Huang Yongping: *Tête d'Or* (in situ, 2004) (Fig. 63)

Shen Yuan: *Pousse-pousse, 18 km/h* (in situ, 2004) (Fig. 64)

Yang Jiechang: *3000 Needles* (1993) (Fig. 61)¹³⁴⁸
Parchemin divinatoire (Scroll of Secret Merits) (in situ, 2004)
(Fig. 62)¹³⁴⁹

Yang Jiechang

3000 Needles by Yang Jiechang has already been explained within this dissertation in chapter eleven and shall not be further elaborated upon as the exhibition catalogue of *Le moine et le démon* does not provide any extra information on this work.

His other work, *Scroll of Secret Merits* (2004) (Fig. 62) is made in memoriam of the Tiananmen Square events. Yang Jiechang makes one of these works every five years in commemoration of the events that took place in Beijing in 1989. *Scroll of Secret Merits* is one of these works. It consists of five panels, some embroidered with gold silk thread, while others are painted on with ink on paper. According to the Sotheby's auction site:

This work expresses the despair inherent in the knowledge of one's mortality, but turns that desperate knowledge into a thing of beauty. The rough quality of the brushstrokes and awkward rendering of the flying skulls, ribs, feet, hips, and so on assert the truth of the image in a way that photorealist perfection could not: we are all fallible humans, whether we be the artist, the viewers, or those felled before their time.¹³⁵⁰

¹³⁴⁸ This work was also displayed at *All under Heaven*, see chapter 11 Block II.

¹³⁴⁹ This work was also displayed and performed at the Stanford Asian Music Festival that was held in February of 2005. *Scroll of Secret Merits* (2004) (Fig. 62) was put up for auction by the Ullens collection and was sold for approximately 71,000 euros at Sotheby's Hong Kong in 2011.

¹³⁵⁰ <http://www.sothebys.com/fr/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.HK0373.html/f/854/HK0373-854.pdf>, n.d., date of last consultation 2/9/2014.



Figure 62: Yang Jiechang, *Scroll of Secret Merits*, 2004

The work depicts flying human remains such as bones, ribs, skulls, feet, etc. that are placed within a “dream like bubble”. These human remains are sucked up into a vacuum cleaner that is surrounded by flying birds. Behind the panels, a group of Chinese musicians play Chinese folkloric music which turns the installation work into a performance. Within the catalogue, Martina Köppel-Yang, the wife of Yang Jiechang explains about some of the works of Yang Jiechang like his work *Eye of the Storm* (2000) (Fig. 50)¹³⁵¹ or his work *Thousand Layers of Ink* (1992-1997) (Fig. 15 and 58).¹³⁵² About the work displayed at *Le moine et le démon* she does not provide any extra information. The human remains that are drawn onto the huge panels might be seen as a symbol of the individuals who lost their lives at the Tiananmen Square events. The vacuum cleaner might be seen as a symbol for the modern times, sucking up history and tradition, capable of erasing tragic events of the past that people over time shall start to forget. Maybe this is the reason why Yang Jiechang makes a work every five years, in order to keep the memory alive and to impede that these events fade away by the hands of time.

Huang Yongping

The next work that shall be commented on is Huang Yongping’s *Tête d’Or* (2004) (Fig. 63) that was also a sight-specific work for the exhibition. It consists of a Song dynasty replica, gold-plated pagoda that was installed on the roof of the MAC Lyon. The title of the work points to the park that lies in front of the museum which is called “le parc de la Tête d’Or”.

¹³⁵¹ See chapter 9 of Block II on the exhibition *Paris pour Escalé*.

¹³⁵² See chapter 10 and 11 of Block II.

Within the exhibition catalogue, Huang Yongping explains that the story behind this park inspired him for this particular work. According to the legend, a Jewish colonist buried a golden sculpture of the head of Christ within this park. Huang Yongping sees this pagoda that carries the same title as a reincarnation of the head of Christ. According to the artist himself: “Tout peut évoluer, se transformer et se réincarner. Tout comme une tête de Christ disparue peut se transformer en un pavillon de l’époque Song. Seule la propriété de l’or ne se détériore ni ne change. Tout comme l’or d’aujourd’hui, l’or chinois, l’or d’hier et l’or français sont identiques.”¹³⁵³ It seems that the artist wants to make clear that French culture, Chinese culture or their histories are all the same and that in the end, hybridity is what will take over. A Jewish urban legend can “reincarnate” into a Chinese pagoda erected on the roof of a French contemporary museum. From this perspective, the Chinese pagoda added to the roof of the rather neo-classical architecture of the MAC Lyon can also be seen as a fusion of “East” and “West”, and a hybridization characteristic of the modern times. The work was displayed again in 2009 at the Lyon biennale and was then incorporated into the Ullens Collection, who financed this work back in 2004.



Figure 63: Huang Yongping, *Tête d’Or*, 2004

¹³⁵³ Huang Yongping, *Le moine et le démon* exhibiton catalogue, p. 16.

Shen Yuan

The last work that shall be commented on is Shen Yuan's *Pousse-pousse, 18 km/h* (2004) (Fig. 64) that was also a sight specific work that consisted of putting tricycles outside of the museum at the disposal of the visitors.



Figure 64: Shen Yuan, *Pousse-pousse 18 km/h*, 2004

According to the exhibition catalogue, the artist explains that she found an old postcard within a bookshop in Lyon that dated from 1914 on which similar Chinese tricycles were displayed. The Chinese bicycles were shown in Lyon due to the *Exposition universelle* that was held in Lyon in that year. The artist then explains that it would take ninety years to go from Guangzhou to Lyon on a tricycle, with a velocity of 18 km per hour. According to the artist, this is also the distance that separates the universal exhibition held in 1914 in Lyon and the exhibition *Le moine et le démon* held in 2004. No further explanation is given on the work itself but what becomes clear is the artist's interest in calculating the distance between China and France, the place where she currently lives. By calculating the years it would take to complete this distance with a tricycle, she might be pointing to the modern means of transportation that can take anyone from China to France in a question of hours. It might take ninety years to physically get from one place to the other,

or maybe just a few hours, but mentally and sentimentally the distance might never be overcome. Shen Yuan is an overseas artist and often expresses in her work the difficulties she has experienced with language and communication, and with adapting to a completely different environment and culture.¹³⁵⁴ This work might be another manifestation of this estrangement, and the feelings that can be caused by the distancing of the homeland and all that is familiar.

Also this work was posteriorly displayed again at the Lyon Biennale that was held in 2013-2014

¹³⁵⁴ A good example is her work *Perdre Sa Salive* (1994) (Fig. 4) explained in paragraph 2.2 of Block I.

12.4 Analysis of the exhibition reviews

Le moine et le démon was an exhibition that was widely written about in the media inside as well as outside of France. In this aspect, it hugely differs from the exhibition *Paris-Pékin* (2002) which did not appear to have a noticeable impact on the press, even though it was of a bigger scale including more artists and artworks.

The reviews written on this exhibition have been plentiful.¹³⁵⁵ Some have spoken extensively on the exhibition and provide useful information. Other articles were briefer and shall only be highlighted for certain aspects that should be mentioned within this paragraph. The articles that shall be commented on are as follows (in chronological order):

- Author unknown, *Asiagora*, les Inrockuptibles, week 2-8/6/2004
- Author unknown, *La Chine contemporaine*, Le Figaro, Guide Eté Festivals, 17/6/2004
- Étienne Dumont, *L'art chinois actuel voit très grand à Lyon*, La Tribune de Genève, 18/6/2004
- Judith Benhamou-Huet, *Chocs contemporains et historiques*, Les Echos, supplement week-end, 18-19/6/2004
- Mié Kohiyama, *France-Chine-culture-art*, Agence France Presse, 22/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon: l'art chinois à Lyon*, Le Journal de l'île de la Réunion, 23/6/2004
- Author unknown, *L'art contemporain chinois à Lyon*, Le Petit Bleu du Lot et Garonne, 23/6/2004
- Mié Kohiyama, *L'art contemporain chinois s'expose*, La Marseillaise, 30/6/2004
- Mireille Descombes, *L'art chinois a trouvé son langage*, L'Hebdo, week 24-30/6/2004
- Author unknown, *La Chine expose ses artistes à Lyon*, National Geographic, June 2004
- Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, Techniques et Architecture, June-July 2004
- Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*, Métro, 6/7/2004

¹³⁵⁵ All reviews were kindly provided by the MAC Lyon.

- Author unknown, *Les créateurs chinois d'art contemporain s'exposent à Lyon*, Le Populaire du Centre, 11/7/2004
- Author unknown, *Les créateurs chinois d'art contemporain s'exposent à Lyon*, Le Berry, 11/7/2004
- V. Ct (it is not clear what this means), *L'EXPO – Le Moine et le Démon*, Valeurs actuelles, week 16-22/7/2004
- Geneviève Beerette, *A Lyon, les revolutions individuelles des nouveaux artistes chinois*, Le Monde, 22/7/2004
- Marie-douce Albert, *La creation chinoise à l'épreuve de l'art*, Le Figaro, 30/7/2004
- Author unknown, *la Chine à Lyon*, Etapes, July 2004
- Author unknown, *Modern China, modern art*, French News, July 2004
- Author unknown, *Musée d'Art contemporain de Lyon*, Beaux Arts magazine, July 2004
- Author unknown, *Nouvelle revolution culturelle*, magazine Air France, July 2004
- Annick Colonna-Césari, Frédéric Koller, *Chine L'art en avant*, L'express Le magazine, week 26/7-1/8/2004
- Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*, Le Journal des Arts, 30/7-5/8/2004
- Sabine Gignoux, *Formes et méformes de l'empire du Milieu*, la Croix, 2/8/2004
- Bernard Génies, *Le show et l'effroi*, le nouvel Observateur, week 5-11/8/2004
- Author unknown, *France/ Lyon – Musée d'art contemporain*, International Herald Tribune, 6/8/2004
- Henri-François Debailleux, *Une chine de démons inédits*, Libération, 10/8/2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, L'Humanité hebdo, week 14-21/8/2004
- Alain Vollerin, *Chine, la liberté de créer*, Mémoire des Arts, Dossier Spécial Chine, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon – l'art contemporain Chinois à Lyon*, Préférences Mag, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, Bouddhisme Actualités, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon- Le moine et le démon*, Connaissance des Arts, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Made in China*, Mouvement, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *MOCA Lyon*, Tema Celeste, July-August 2004
- Étienne Dumont, *La Chine d'aujourd'hui prend racine à Lyon*, La Tribune des Arts, July-August 2004
- Françoise Biver, *Le Moine et le Démon*, L'imbécile, July-August 2004

- Jean-Pierre Frimbois, *Au vent d'est – creation d'images*, art actuel, July-August 2004
- Jean-Pierre Frimbois, Sandrine Cormault, *Art actuel chinois – La nouvelle donne*, art actuel, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Le Moine et le Démon*, Sortir ici et ailleurs, July-August-September 2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon- Le Moine et le Démon*, Watch Out, July-August-September 2004
- Magali Nachtergaele, *le moine et le démon*, artpress, September 2004
- Gallia Valette Pilenko, *Moine et démon, belle equation*, www. Plumart.com, summer 2004. For the full article see: http://www.plumart.com/vf66-6704/html/body_11667_moine_et_demon.html. Date of last consultation 5/9/2014
- Author unknown, *L'Annee de la Chine*, Rézo international, winter 2004

The announcements that shall not be included within this essay but that did make mention of the exhibition, sometimes complemented with practical information such as opening times and location are:

- Author unknown, *Et aussi.....Policultures*, 15/5-15/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon*, Le Journal des Arts, 28/5-10/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, les Inrockuptibles, week 2-8/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon*, Le Journal des Arts, 11-24/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Photo d'un jour- La main de Mao*, Le Journal de la Haute Marne, 23/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Art*, Mon Quotidien, 25/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon*, Le Journal des Arts, 25/6-8/7/2004
- Author unknown, *picture of the exhibition*, L'Eveil de la Haute Loire, 27/6/2004
- Author unknown, *La photo du jour*, Le Petit Quotidien, 29/6/2004
- Author unknown, *Exposition Le Moine et le Démon à Lyon*, Glamour, June 2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon- Le Moine et le démon*, Art Antiques Auctions, 15/7-15/8/2004
- Author unknown, *Le Moine et le Démon à Lyon*, Aujourd'hui en France, 13/8/2004
- Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, Images Magazine, July-August 2004
- Author unknown, *Lyon – Musée d'Art contemporain*, L'oeil, July-August 2004

- Author unknown, *M.A.C. de Lyon*, Sortir ici et ailleurs, July-August-September 2004

To start out, a series of (short) texts shall here be mentioned. A distinction has been made between those which have captured the aims of the show (paragraph 12.3.2), and those which seem to have misunderstood the objectives of the survey (paragraph 12.3.1). Some of these reviews also contain errors regarding the title of the show, or certain works that were exposed. The source of some of these errors can probably be traced to an article that was published by the Agence France Press that was written by the journalist Mié Kohiyama and which was then copied by various other articles.

Following this section of short articles, more extent texts, often written by art critics, shall be commented on in paragraph 12.4.3.

12.4.1 Reviews that misinterpreted (the aims of) *Le moine et le démon*

12.4.1.1 Author unknown, *L'EXPO – Le Moine et le Démon*

The first review comes from the newspaper *Valeurs actuelles* and briefly describes the exhibition. Apparently, it has not understood the aims that were set for the exhibition as it mentions that the show invited “près de vingt-cinq artistes à s’exprimer sur le thème de la société chinoise”¹³⁵⁶, which was exactly what Fei Dawei wanted to avoid. The article then also places Chinese artists within a political framework when it mentions “cet immense pays qui, chaque année, s’ouvre un peu plus en matière de culture. Ainsi l’art contemporain, depuis trois ans, est-il sorti de la clandestinité pour être soutenu par les institutions.”¹³⁵⁷ The text then concludes by describing the show as “tentaculaire”. What this exactly means does not become clear. Does it mean that the exhibition was of a rather large scale? Does it mean that Chinese experimental art is expanding or that it is extending its “tentacles” into the international art market? The question remains unanswered.

12.4.1.2 Author unknown, *Musée d’Art contemporain de Lyon*

The short announcement of *Le moine et le démon* published in *Beaux Arts* magazine also misunderstood the aims of *Le moine et le démon* when it stated: “Grande exposition collective d’art contemporain chinois organisé par le commissaire Fei Dawei et centrée sur la position de l’artistes face à la légitimation international de l’art chinois”.¹³⁵⁸ The emphasis on the used-to-be underground character that is here mentioned is probably a consequence of the enormous emphasis that was put on this topic within the exhibition catalogue.

¹³⁵⁶ V. Ct (it is not clear what this means), *L'EXPO – Le Moine et le Démon*, *Valeurs actuelles*, week 16-22/7/2004.

¹³⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹³⁵⁸ Author unknown, *Musée d’Art contemporain de Lyon*, *Beaux Arts* magazine, July 2004.

12.4.1.3 Author unknown, *Lyon- Le moine et le démon*

And also the text published in *Connaissance* wrongly understood the main aim of the show and mentions “Pour souligner les difficultés de la Chine actuelle, le critique d’art Fei Dawei a choisi ce titre pour son exposition réunissant vingt-deux artistes”.¹³⁵⁹

12.4.1.4 Author unknown, *Modern China, modern art*

The following article comes from the newspaper *French News* and makes a new “contribution” to this analysis by mentioning something which has not been stated by any other review. According to this short article, the exhibition “showcases both the tensions and the connections between contemporary Chinese and French societies”.¹³⁶⁰ This seems to be information which originates from the personal interpretation of the author as it is not stated anywhere within the catalogue. This review does however make reference to the overseas artists that participated in the survey yet without further elaboration on the topic.

12.4.1.5 Marie-douce Albert, *La création chinoise à l’épreuve de l’art*

The next review from *Le Figaro* was written by Marie-Douce Albert who is a freelance journalist graduated in political sciences. Since becoming a journalist she has developed a special interest for architecture and heritage and writes for several newspapers. The author, contrary to the previous review, does seem to have captured Fei Dawei’s intention of displaying the Chinese artists first and foremost as individual artists when she mentions “Les organisateurs (...), sont partis en quête ‘de Chinois qui soient d’abord des artistes’”.¹³⁶¹

However, she then does attribute a rather dissident character to the survey by relating Chinese art to Chinese politics when she further on mentions “Plus généralement, le pouvoir chinois ayant desserré son étau sur les artistes, ceux-ci n’ont plus le loisir de se faire remarquer par leur seule opposition”¹³⁶², which is clearly a statement based on information from the exhibition catalogue. This political framework is then converted into a

¹³⁵⁹ Author unknown, *Lyon- Le moine et le démon*, *Connaissance des Arts*, July-August 2004.

¹³⁶⁰ Author unknown, *Modern China, modern art*, *French News*, July 2004.

¹³⁶¹ Marie-douce Albert, *La création chinoise à l’épreuve de l’art*, *Le Figaro*, 30/7/2004.

¹³⁶² Ibidem.

sensationalist characterization when the author describes the works on display as “d’une bonne mesure de provocation et de violence”.¹³⁶³ It is true that some of the works were quite sensationalist and these are then often described within most of the reviews. These works were Sui Jianguo *Clothes Wrinkle Study -Right Arm* (2003), Gu Dexin’s installation *Congélateurs* (2004) which consisted of frozen pig brains, among other elements (of which the author writes in her essay “Pour avoir son content d’émotions, on peut faire confiance à Gu Dexin”¹³⁶⁴), and Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s cement bricks made out of human ashes titled *One or All II* (2004). Yet, a lot of other works were not so violent or shocking, like the sight specific works that were made by Huang Yongping, Yang Jiechang, and Shen Yuan. These are however not frequently mentioned within the art reviews, as shall become clear in this paragraph. What seems to be repeated in a lot of reviews, like the one written by Marie-Douce Albert are the more sensationalist or violent works, which gives a wrong impression of the exhibition and puts it into a sensationalist framework which was not at all the intention of the curators.

The sensationalist characterization of the survey is then reaffirmed by the author when she mentions as a conclusion that the visitor will remember mostly the extremes of the show “le visiteur retient forcément – c’est humain – le cocasse et l’extrême”.¹³⁶⁵ In general, the way in which Marie-Douce Albert describes this particular exhibition does not seem to correspond with the survey when contemplated as a whole, as she only seems to highlight the more shocking works that were on display at the exhibition.

12.4.1.6 Magali Nachtergaele, *le moine et le démon*

The next article is written by Magali Nachtergaele, who is a specialist on contemporary literature and art. She has also not understood the main objective of the curators when the article mentions: “Les oeuvres, la plupart réalisés pour l’exposition, reflètent un état à la fois esthétique et social de l’Empire du milieu (...)”¹³⁶⁶ The fact that she refers to China as the “Empire of the Centre” seems to point to a rather exotic definition of this nation. The author then also mentions the more sensationalist works of the exhibition within her article

¹³⁶³ Marie-douce Albert, *La création chinoise à l’épreuve de l’art*, Le Figaro, 30/7/2004.

¹³⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹³⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁶⁶ Magali Nachtergaele, *Le moine et le démon*, artpress, September 2004.

and comments on the work of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, and the installation work of Gu Dexin. The article is rather brief and does not give anymore in depth information on *Le moine et le démon*.

12.4.1.7 Bernard Génies, *Le show et l'effroi*

Also the next review from *le nouvel Observateur* makes mention of the more sensationalist works of the show and comments on Sui Jianguo's arm of Mao, and Peng Yu and Sun Yuan's bricks made out of human ashes. The author, Bernard Génies, who is the editor and assistant-chief of *le nouvel Observateur* and who is in charge for the "Arts et spectacles" section, does however make mention of the overseas artists and briefly comments on the work of Huang Yongping and Yang Jiechang without much elaboration. He then continues by putting the exhibition into a political framework when he describes China as "un pays où le tourbillon effréné d'un apparent libéralisme économique n'a rien porté atteinte aux verrous essentiels du régime politique en place."¹³⁶⁷ The author then ends his article by describing the exhibition as "Quel spectacle!" which seems to attribute somewhat of a sensationalist character to *Le moine et le démon*, which was not at all the intention of the curators.

12.4.1.8 Geneviève Beerette, *A Lyon, les révolutions individuelles des nouveaux artistes chinois*

The next review comes from *Le Monde* and was written by Geneviève Beerette who is an art critic specializing in modern art and who also was the president of the AICA (Association Internationale de Critiques d'Art) from 2009 until 2013. Her article is titled *A Lyon, les révolutions individuelles des nouveaux artistes chinois*.¹³⁶⁸ According to the author, the exhibition reunites around twenty artists from Peking, Shanghai or Canton which is a statement that entirely omits the overseas artists who were living in France at that time. It seems that the author has also not understood the aims that were set for the exhibition by the curators when she explains within her article that the works on display "sont volontiers devenues le lieu d'une interrogation sur les grandes mutations de la société chinoise, ses chantiers de construction, le béton qui se joue contre la tradition –

¹³⁶⁷ Bernard Génies, *Le show et l'effroi*, le nouvel Observateur, week 5-11/8/2004.

¹³⁶⁸ Geneviève Beerette, *A Lyon, les révolutions individuelles des nouveaux artistes chinois*, Le Monde, 22/7/2004.

qu'ils semblent d'ailleurs inventer au fur et à mesure que l'on creuse le sol pour construire." ¹³⁶⁹

As Fei Dawei mentioned clearly within the catalogue, the main objective of *Le moine et le démon* was to present Chinese artists as individual artists within the international art scene, and not to display the current sociological changes that are occurring within China or to expose Chinese art in an exotic way. Apparently, Geneviève Breerette has not captured this message which might be due to the fact that she did not read the exhibition catalogue. She does however make mention of the *All under Heaven* show when her article comments on the fact that the show was partly sponsored by the Ullens Foundation, however it does not mention the title of this exposition but merely mentions that the Ullens Foundation had organized another exhibition in Antwerp in the same year.

12.4.1.9 Jean-Pierre Frimbois, *Au vent d'est – creation d'images*

The following article was published in *art actuel* and was written by Jean-Pierre Frimbois who is the founder and director of this magazine. Firstly he attributes a political character to the exhibition when he mentions "Les artistes chinois se penchant avec un regard neuf sur leur passé politique récent", ¹³⁷⁰ which was not the aim of the show. Then, remarkably, the author titles the show as "l'ange et le démon", which is rather strange and might point to the fact that Jean-Pierre Frimbois did not personally visit the show.

12.4.1.10 Jean-Pierre Frimbois, Sandrine Cormault, *Art actuel chinois – La nouvelle donne*

In the same edition of *art actuel*, another article was published by the author Jean-Pierre Frimbois, this time in collaboration with Sandrine Cormault, who works at Villa Arson, which is a contemporary art centre in Nice. It is an extensive article of four pages that comments on several exhibitions on Chinese art that were held in the France-China year. ¹³⁷¹ Here strangely, the authors do seem to have understood the aims of Fei Dawei as the article states: "Fei Dawei a voulu 'privilegier la question de l'art par rapport à celle

¹³⁶⁹ Geneviève Beerette, *A Lyon, les revolutions individuelles des nouveaux artistes chinois*, *Le Monde*, 22/7/2004.

¹³⁷⁰ Jean-Pierre Frimbois, *Au vent d'est – creation d'images*, *art actuel*, July-August 2004.

¹³⁷¹ This article does make reference of the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition.

de la société et des conflits dus aux changements sociaux”.¹³⁷² This could point to the fact that the article was mainly written by Sandrine Cormault, as the co-author, Jean-Pierre Frimbois previously did not give the same explanation. The text then also makes mention of the artworks that seem to have caused more sensation among the art critics and repeats the works that have been mentioned in many other reviews: Mao’s arm by Sui Jianguo, Gu Dexin’s installation work and Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s bricks made out of human ashes.

12.4.1.11 Author unknown, *L’Annee de la Chine*

Another review that, as Jean-Pierre Frimbois, got the title wrong was the short announcement published in Rézo international as it titles *Le moine et le démon* as “L’Art contemporain en Chine 1985-2004”.¹³⁷³

12.4.1.12 Annick Colonna-Césari, Frédéric Koller, *Chine L’art en avant*

The next article published in *L’express- Le magazine* was written by Annick Colonna-Césari, who is an art critic for this paper, and Frédéric Koller who was a correspondent in Peking for several French newspapers from the year 2000 until 2006. The text mainly puts the exhibition in a political light by firstly mentioning the Tiananmen Square events within its article and also when it later on mentions “L’effervescence créative est rendue possible grâce à l’esprit d’ouverture qu’affichent en ce moment les autorités politiques.”¹³⁷⁴ This is then later on reaffirmed when the authors write “Quant à la creation, elle semble libre”.¹³⁷⁵

Towards the end of the article, the text concludes by mentioning:

L’organisation d’une exposition, hors des structures officielles, relevait de la gageure. Toutes les raisons étaient bonnes pour ne pas délivrer d’autorisation, formalités incomplètes ou conditions de sécurité non assurées. Pour faire connaître leur travail, les artistes en étaient donc réduits à la clandestinité des entrepôts, des sous-sols d’immeubles, des logements et des ateliers. Les expositions étaient annoncées au dernier moment, par téléphone ou par Texto, et se déroulaient sur de très courtes durées, afin d’éviter les descentes de police. (...) Même si l’ombre de la répression continue de planer, chacun s’accroche à cet espoir de liberté”.¹³⁷⁶

¹³⁷² Jean-Pierre Frimbois, Sandrine Cormault, *Art actuel chinois – La nouvelle donne*, art actuel, July-August 2004.

¹³⁷³ Author unknown, *L’Annee de la Chine*, Rézo international, winter 2004.

¹³⁷⁴ Annick Colonna-Césari, Frédéric Koller, *Chine L’art en avant*, *L’express Le magazine*, week 26/7-1/8/2004.

¹³⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁷⁶ Ibidem.

In general, the text focuses mainly on the political aspect of Chinese experimental art that seems to be based on the situation of this art current in the early stages of the 1990s. Yet, in 2004, the year of the survey, the situation had changed and Chinese experimental art was no longer “underground”, especially not in the international art scene. It is rather remarkable that the text describes Chinese experimental art from this somewhat narrow-minded and stereotypical perspective taking into account that one of the authors, Frédéric Koller, has been a correspondent in China for over six years. As he has lived in China for quite some time one would assume that his view on this nation would have been more open and that he would not describe China as the closed-off, repressive communist country so often described within Euroamerican reviews, with a mindset that seems to date back from Cold War times.

12.4.1.13 Author unknown, *Nouvelle révolution culturelle*

Also the brief review of the in-flight magazine of Air France puts this exhibition in a rather political light when it mentions “Contemporary art in China dates from 1985 and has only recently emerged from the underground. (It is now officially blessed by the powers that be)”.¹³⁷⁷ Another element from this quote that should be highlighted is the fact that it mentions that Chinese experimental art began in 1985, which is not exactly true as it already started in the late 1970s, after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. It is not clear on what information this statement is based but it is then later on repeated by various other articles.

12.4.1.14 Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*

An article published by *Techniques et Architecture* seems to also attribute a political character to the exhibition when it states “[22 artistes chinois] sont tous peu à peu sortis du statut ‘underground’ et témoignent de cette toute nouvelle dynamique entre la création des oeuvres et la réalité, se libérant ainsi du cadre théorique préétabli.”¹³⁷⁸

¹³⁷⁷ Author unknown, *Nouvelle révolution culturelle*, magazine Air France, July 2004.

¹³⁷⁸ Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, Techniques et Architecture, June-July 2004.

12.4.1.15 Mié Kohiyama, *France-Chine-culture-art*

The text written for the Agence France Presse¹³⁷⁹ comes from Mié Kohiyama who is one of the AFP correspondents who is regularly asked to write about events related to Japan. Maybe due to the fact that this exhibition was on Chinese experimental art she was asked to report even though she is not an expert on Chinese experimental art. The fact that a Japanese journalist is asked to write on Chinese art might point to a rather stereotypical assumption that all Asia is perceived as one homogeneous area and that all “Asian” people are capable of understanding the cultural and artistic expressions of other “eastern” countries.

The text written by Mié Kohiyama seems also to be the source of a rather strange and political fragment that has been repetitively quoted by different reviews that mentions “Le titre de l’exposition, inspire d’un proverbe bouddhiste ‘le moine grandit d’un pied et le démon de dix’, sous-entend que quoi que vous fassiez vous n’êtes jamais libre, l’État est toujours derrière vous”,¹³⁸⁰ which according to the AFP has been quoted from one of the “responsables” of the survey.

This article then also puts the exhibition within a political framework when it mentions “L’exposition reflète l’évolution de l’art contemporain chinois qui, au cours de ces dernières années, a été ‘légitimé’, voire soutenu par les organes officiels, délaissant peu à peu son statut ‘underground’.”¹³⁸¹ This is also a fragment which has been copied on several occasions in the reviews of some of the magazines analysed in this paragraph, and seems to come from the information provided by the exhibition catalogue.

One of the works that is mentioned by this article of the AFP is Shen Yuan’s *Pousse-pousse* (2004) (Fig. 64), yet the text does not mention the author of this work. This error is then taken over by other articles that also mention *Pousse-pousse*, yet without stating the artist who made the installation. This might point to the fact that some of the articles analysed within this paragraph have based their information on the text given out by the AFP without looking up who the artist of this particular work was. Another indication that

¹³⁷⁹ The AFP is an international news agency that writes in French, English and Arabic which provides information to other media.

¹³⁸⁰ Mié Kohiyama, *France-Chine-culture-art*, Agence France Presse, 22/6/2004.

¹³⁸¹ Ibidem.

some of the reviews have simply copied or based their information on the AFP text is that Mié Kohiyama makes reference to the more sensationalist works that have been repeated frequently by other reviews, i.e. Gu Dexin's installation and Sun Yuan and Peng Lu's bricks of human ashes.¹³⁸²

12.4.1.16 Author unknown, *Les créateurs chinois d'art contemporain s'exposent à Lyon*

The article published in *Le Populaire du Centre* is an exact copy of the article that was given out by the AFP, including the error of the twenty-one participating artists, the political but erroneous interpretation of the title of the exhibition, and the placement of the survey within a political framework. This is also the case with the article published in *Le Berry*,¹³⁸³ *Le Petit Bleu du Lot et Garonne*,¹³⁸⁴ and *Le Journal de l'île de la Réunion*,¹³⁸⁵ that moreover commits an error within the title of Sui Jianguo's sculpture of Mao's arm by titling it as "Clothe Wrinkle Studying – Right Arm." This error is then taken over by the article published in *Le Journal de la Haute Marne* which also mentions the error of "Clothe".¹³⁸⁶

12.4.1.17 Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*

This short text published in *Bouddhisme Actualité* mentioned:

La plupart des oeuvres exposées ont été créées pour l'occasion, principalement par des artistes résident en Chine. L'exposition reflète l'évolution de l'art contemporain chinois qui, au cours de ces dernières années, a été "légitimé", voire soutenu par les organes officiels, délaissant peu à peu son statut "souterrain".¹³⁸⁷

Apart from the fact that the exhibition was not about the evolution of Chinese experimental art, it becomes clear that the brief article emphasizes the political aspect of this art. This is then reinforced towards the end of the article in which it states that the title of the

¹³⁸² The article written by Mié Kohiyama is then also published in *La Marseillaise*. Mié Kohiyama, *L'art contemporain chinois s'expose*, *La Marseillaise*, 30/6/2004.

¹³⁸³ Author unknown, *Les créateurs chinois d'art contemporain s'exposent à Lyon*, *Le Berry*, 11/7/2004.

¹³⁸⁴ Author unknown, *L'art contemporain chinois à Lyon*, *Le Petit Bleu du Lot et Garonne*, 23/6/2004.

¹³⁸⁵ Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon: l'art chinois à Lyon*, *Le Journal de l'île de la Réunion*, 23/6/2004.

¹³⁸⁶ Author unknown, *Photo d'un jour- La main de Mao*, *Le Journal de la Haute Marne*, 23/6/2007.

¹³⁸⁷ Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, *Bouddhisme Actualités*, July-August 2004.

exposition refers to the fact that “quoi que vous fassiez vous n’êtes jamais libre, l’État est toujours derrière vous”,¹³⁸⁸ which according to the article is a quote from one of the “*responsable de l’exposition*.” This statement is probably literally copied from the article published by the AFP. Yet, as was mentioned by Fei Dawei in the exhibition catalogue, the title does not refer to the Chinese State, but to the difficulties and challenges that the artists encounter after they become successful.

12.4.1.18 Françoise Biver, *Le Moine et le Démon*

The next article was published in *L’imbécile* and was written by Françoise Biver who is an artist living in Strasbourg. The author mentions the work *Pousse-pousse* (2004)(Fig. 65), but does not mention the artist Shen Yuan who made this installation, which for an artist is a rather strange thing to do. This might point to the fact that Françoise Biver also based part of her article on the information of the AFP. According to the author, the title of the show seems exotic yet she then mentions that one should be aware that the artists participating in the survey are definitely not so: “Le titre, ‘Le Moine et le Démon’, fleure bon l’allégorie exotique. Mais attention, ce fumet folklorique ne doit pas tromper: ces Chinois-là parlent couramment l’idiome plastique contemporain.”¹³⁸⁹

She then compares the work of Yang Jiechang, *3000 Needles* (1993) (Fig. 61) with the work of the French artist Henry Ughetto and comments that the resemblance between the two works is normal as art has become global and hybrid:

Vous tombez en arrêt à la vue des seize polochons de Jang Jiechang, piques de 3000 aiguilles, avec à chaque extrémité un cheveu collé par une goutte de sang. Que fait d’autre Henry Ughetto, qui s’astreint depuis des années au comptage de gouttes de sang peintes sur des coquilles d’œufs? Normal, l’art est mondialisé et l’hybridation est la règle.”¹³⁹⁰

The article is then again places the exhibition within a political framework when it mentions:

“Qu’est-ce qu’un avant-garde dans un système tolérant? L’exposition veut confronter la création contemporaine chinoise intramuros avec sa version expatriée, sous influence; mettre en relation les oeuvres qui ont eu à braver la censure avec celles qui naissent désormais sous l’oeil bienveillant du système.”¹³⁹¹

¹³⁸⁸ Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, Bouddhisme Actualités, July-August 2004.

¹³⁸⁹ Françoise Biver, *Le Moine et le Démon*, *L’imbécile*, July-August 2004.

¹³⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹³⁹¹ Ibidem.

This moreover, is also an erroneous interpretation of the objectives of the survey.

12.4.1.19 Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon – l'art contemporain Chinois à Lyon*

The following review published by *Préférences Mag* is also based on information that was published by the *Agence France Presse*. The concise text mentions that a total of twenty-one artists participated in the show, which is not correct as there were twenty-two. It then also states that Chinese experimental art started in 1985, like the article that was published in the inflight magazine of Air France. The text then also places the exhibition within a political light when it mentions

L'art contemporain chinois a, au cours de ces dernières années été 'légitimé', 'voire soutenu par les organes officiels', délaissant peu à peu son statut 'underground'. Mais le titre de l'exposition inspire d'un proverbe bouddhiste: le moine grandit d'un pied et le démon de dix, laisse sous-entendre que quoi que vous fassiez vous n'êtes pas jamais libre, l'État est toujours derrière vous.¹³⁹²

This seems to be a literal copy of the article previously analysed that was published by *Bouddhisme Actualités*.¹³⁹³ Both articles seem to be based on information from the AFP. When one takes a look at the text given out by the Agency, it mentions the exact same errors, such as the fact that twenty-one artists participated in the survey.

12.4.1.20 Étienne Dumont, *L'art chinois actuel voit très grand à Lyon*

The following review published by *La Tribune de Genève* is not so positive about the exhibition and is one of the few that criticizes the survey. This becomes clear when taking a look at the title of the article that insinuates that *Le moine et le démon* was too ambitious for the MAC Lyon. The author of this review¹³⁹⁴ is Étienne Dumont who studied law but later became interested in art and culture. Étienne Dumont is particularly "well-known" for his rather extraordinary physical appearance that has been commented on in several articles.¹³⁹⁵

¹³⁹² Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon – l'art contemporain Chinois à Lyon*, *Préférences Mag*, July-August 2004.

¹³⁹³ Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, *Bouddhisme Actualités*, July-August 2004

¹³⁹⁴ Étienne Dumont, *L'art chinois actuel voit très grand à Lyon*, *La Tribune de Genève*, 18/6/2004.

¹³⁹⁵ See for example: <http://www.taringa.net/posts/offtopic/10428738/Etienne-dumont-arte-viviente.html>, n.d., date of last consultation: 6/9/2014.

The author starts his article by describing the work of Lin Yilin titled *Our Future* (2002) (Fig. 65) that was also chosen for the frontcover of the exhibition catalogue. The installation consists of the sculpture of a kylin, which is an animal recurrent in Chinese mythology. About this particular work, Étienne Dumont mentions that in fact it seems more of a dragon “mais nous sommes bien face à un dragon”¹³⁹⁶ which is a rather stereotypical description intended to make the work (or the animal) more comprehensible for a “western” audience. As seen in many chapters of this thesis, resorting to Euroamerican references in order to “understand” non-Euroamerican cultures and traditions is a strategy often used by Euroamerican critics. About this work the author states that it was not surprising “La chose n’a rien d’étonnant”,¹³⁹⁷ even though he does not elaborate further on the reasons why he does not find it surprising.

Then the author misunderstands the main aim of the show when he writes “[le] Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon, propose en effet un panorama de l’art contemporain chinois”¹³⁹⁸ which does not correspond with the objectives of Fei Dawei who in fact wanted to avoid the presentation of Chinese experimental art as a homogeneous mass.

The author then continues by putting the exhibition in a political light when he writes “Montée dans le cadre de ‘l’année de la Chine’, l’exposition s’interdit de faire de la politique. Mais comment y échapper dans un contexte aussi explosive que celui de la démaoïsation?”¹³⁹⁹ Yet, one has to remember that Mao died in 1976 and *Le moine et le démon* was held in 2004, almost thirty years later!

Towards the end of the article, the author makes one last erroneous interpretation by writing that “la manifestation insiste sur la vidéo, les environnements ou les installations aux dépens des arts traditionnels que restent la peinture ou la sculpture”.¹⁴⁰⁰ It is true that the majority of the work did not consist of paintings yet this was not the result of the insistence on video art but it is a natural consequence of the development of Chinese experimental art that more and more seems to go in the direction of installation, sculpture, performance, video and photography. All in all, it seems that the author has not really understood the exhibition as he appears to make “wrong” interpretations within his review.

¹³⁹⁶ Étienne Dumont, *L’art chinois actuel voit très grand à Lyon*, La Tribune de Genève, 18/6/2004.

¹³⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹³⁹⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Ibidem.

12.4.1.21 Étienne Dumont, *La Chine d'aujourd'hui prend racine à Lyon*

The next review is again from the art critic Étienne Dumont, this time published a month later in *La Tribune des Arts* which has its headquarters in Paris. This review seems to show some similarities with Dumont's earlier review of *La Tribune de Genève*. First of all, he mentions that installation and video works are predominant, which he also mentioned in his other review when he comments that paintings and sculptures have not been prioritized within the survey. The author then seems to generalize a little too much when he mentions that the exhibition "accueille la grande manifestation consacrée à la création d'aujourd'hui, de Pékin à Shanghai"¹⁴⁰¹ which is a statement that completely omits the overseas artists that also participated in *Le moine et le démon* as well as the participating artists that do not live and work in Beijing or Shanghai.

Then again, as in his previous article, Étienne Dumont comments on the fact that the show has prohibited to talk about politics "notons pourtant que la manifestation s'interdit de faire de la politique", which again puts the survey into a political light. Yet, he does not further explain his comment.

The author then chooses the title "Cendres humaines" as one of the subtitles of his article, which points to the work of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, mentioned repetitively among several of the articles analysed within this paragraph. This puts a rather sensationalist character on the survey which does not seem justified as this work was only one of the fifty-seven works displayed at the exhibition.

The author then concludes by describing the exhibition as "écrasants, bruyants et déprimants"¹⁴⁰² which again seems to emphasize the more shocking works of the exhibition.

¹⁴⁰¹ Étienne Dumont, *La Chine d'aujourd'hui prend racine à Lyon*, La Tribune des Arts, July-August 2004.

¹⁴⁰² Ibidem.

12.4.2 Reviews that did capture the aims of *Le moine et le démon*

Many reviews, however, do seem to have captured the main aim of *Le moine et le démon*. These are often rather brief articles or announcements, habitually without mention of the author, that usually do not further elaborate extensively on the show or the works that were on display.

12.4.2.1 Author unknown, *Asiagora*

Examples of these kind of articles are les *Inrockuptibles*¹⁴⁰³ that mentions “Fei Dawei, qui tente de se départir de la dimension sociale de la production artistique dans une Chine en pleine mutation pour se concentrer à proprement parler sur les oeuvres”.

12.4.2.2 Author unknown, *Made in China*

Or the brief review placed in *Mouvement* that mentions “*Le moine et le démon*, une exposition d’artistes contemporains chinois, qui ‘privilégie les oeuvres d’art et les artistes, et rejette les idées préétablies’. Les oeuvres ne sont pas organisées pour répondre à un cadre théorique.”¹⁴⁰⁴

12.4.2.3 Author unknown, *La Chine expose ses artistes à Lyon*

The article published by the *National Geographic* also has “correctly” understood the aims of the show when it states “le Moine et le Démon privilégiant les oeuvres d’art et les artistes, en rejetant les idées préétablies. (...) Il s’agit de rendre visible l’art contemporain chinois et non d’esquisser le fil conducteur d’une histoire”¹⁴⁰⁵, which seems to be quite similar to the article published in *Mouvement*.

12.4.2.4 Author unknown, *La Chine contemporaine*

Another brief article published in *Le Figaro* also mentions the aim for the survey: “Fei Dawei, l’influent critique d’art chinois. Le commissaire dit avoir voulu privilégier la question

¹⁴⁰³ Author unknown, *Asiagora*, les *Inrockuptibles*, week 2-8/6/2004.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Author unknown, *Made in China*, *Mouvement*, July-August 2004.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Author unknown, *La Chine expose ses artistes à Lyon*, *National Geographic*, June 2004.

de l'art chinois plutôt que elle de la société chinoise, privilégiant l'artiste individuel aux dépens du phénomène collectif auquel on le réduit souvent."¹⁴⁰⁶

12.4.2.5 Author unknown, *France/ Lyon – Musée d'art contemporain*

Also the article published in the *International Herald Tribune* seems to have understood the aims of the show and mentions: "as part of the festivities of the Année de la Chine, an exhibition of contemporary Chinese artists that emphasizes individual creativity rather than social phenomena and artistic movements."¹⁴⁰⁷

12.4.2.6 Author unknown, *Lyon- Le Moine et le Démon*

And the announcement placed in *Watch Out* that mentions "Cette approche de l'art contemporain chinois privilégie la démarche individuelle des artistes et non les questions de société".¹⁴⁰⁸

12.4.2.7 Author unknown, *la Chine à Lyon*

Also the brief article published in *Etapes* seems to have captured the aims of the show when it mentions: "la présentation lyonnaise a choisi de centrer sa sélection d'oeuvres sur la notion d'art et non sur celle de société, c'est à dire sur des démarches expérimentales et individuelles".¹⁴⁰⁹ This same article does seem to make an error when it mentions that twenty-five artists participated in the show.

12.4.2.8 Author unknown, *Le Moine et le Démon*

Also the article published by *Sortir ici et ailleurs* seems to have captured the intentions of curator Fei Dawei:

[Le moine et le démon] diffère de toutes les autres expositions d'art contemporain chinois dans sa volonté de privilégier la question de l'art, sur la question de la société. Ce qu'elle expose de 'l'art

¹⁴⁰⁶ Author unknown, *La Chine contemporaine*, Le Figaro, Guide Eté Festivals, 17/6/2004.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Author unknown, *France/ Lyon – Musée d'art contemporain*, International Herald Tribune, 6/8/2004.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Author unknown, *Lyon- Le Moine et le Démon*, Watch Out, July-August-September 2004.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Author unknown, *la Chine à Lyon*, Etapes, July 2004.

contemporain chinois', c'est 'l'art' lui-même, et non une illustration des conflits dus aux changements sociaux. L'exposition traite de l'art en tant que phénomène individuel et non au titre de phénomène collectif. C'est la pensée individuelle des artistes qui compte, et non les tendances, les situations ou les modes artistiques.¹⁴¹⁰

12.4.2.9 Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*

Also the article published in *Métro* "correctly" states "Une exposition qui se différencie par son attachement à privilégier la question de l'art, par rapport à celle de la société."¹⁴¹¹

12.4.2.10 Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*

The article published in *L'Humanité hebdo* also captures the main aim of the show when it mentions "Contrairement à nombre d'expositions d'art contemporain chinois, 'Le moine et le démon' se focalise non sur les questions sociales et les mouvements qui leur sont liés, mais sur l'expression personnelle des artistes."¹⁴¹² This particular review then also makes mention of Huang Yongping and "She Yuan", which supposedly should be Shen Yuan, even though it does not mention anything about their works that were presented at the survey.

12.4.2.11 Author unknown, *MOCA Lyon*

This is also the case in the short review published in *Tema Celeste* which makes mention of an artist called "She Yuan".¹⁴¹³

12.4.1.12 Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*

Also the very brief article published in *Le Journal des Arts* states the aims of the show correctly "Refusant une approche sociologique, le critique Fei Dawei profite des 3 000 m² du musée pour mettre en valeur les parcours individuels d'une vingtaine d'artistes."¹⁴¹⁴ However, this article commits the same error and also makes mention of an artist named

¹⁴¹⁰ Author unknown, *Le Moine et le Démon*, Sortir ici et ailleurs, July-August-September 2004.

¹⁴¹¹ Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*, *Métro*, 6/7/2004.

¹⁴¹² Author unknown, *Le moine et le démon*, *L'Humanité hebdo*, week 14-21/8/2004.

¹⁴¹³ Author unknown, *MOCA Lyon*, *Tema Celeste*, July-August 2004.

¹⁴¹⁴ Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*, *Le Journal des Arts*, 30/7-5/8/2004.

“She Yuan”, who probably is Shen Yuan. It also mentions that the show portrayed a selection of videos: “et propose à travers une sélection de vidéos un riche aperçu de cette scène”,¹⁴¹⁵ which creates the impression that *Le moine et le démon* was only about video art.

12.4.2.13 Judith Benhamou-Huet, *Chocs contemporains et historiques*

The next review comes from the weekend supplement of *Les Echos* and was written by Judith Benhamou-Huet who is a journalist, a curator and an author on art and especially its relation to the art market. In general, the author seems to have captured the intentions of the curators when she mentions in her text “Les organisateurs ont choisi de montrer, non pas des oeuvres reflétant cette société en mutation, mais implement des creations pertinentes.”¹⁴¹⁶ Yet, the title of the article seems to point to the author’s intention of attributing a shocking or sensationalist character to the exhibition: “Chocs contemporains et historiques”, even though this is not further reflected within the rest of the article which is only half a page long. The rest of the article does not provide any insightful information and shall not be analysed further.

¹⁴¹⁵ Author unknown, *La Chine à Lyon*, Le Journal des Arts, 30/7-5/8/2004.

¹⁴¹⁶ Judith Benhamou-Huet, *Chocs contemporains et historiques*, Les Echos, supplement week-end, 18-19/6/2004.

12.4.3 The more extent reviews

12.4.3.1 Sabine Gignoux, *Formes et méformes de l'empire du Milieu*

The first text that shall be analysed here¹⁴¹⁷ was written by Sabine Gignoux who is a journalist who majored in Modern Literature. She entered *Le Croix* in 1986 and became the editor of the Culture and Arts section of this newspaper in 1999. The article starts out by mentioning “La Chine s’ouvre” which is a statement that could be questioned as the exhibition *Le moine et le démon* was held in 2004. Deng Xiaoping’s politics of Opening Doors already started in 1979. It seems as if the author is insinuating that China was until recently still shut off from the rest of the world, which seems a rather Cold War perspective on China. The article then emphasizes this political character of China by mentioning “Le gouvernement de Pékin laisse faire, dans une indifférence relative, censurant seulement les attaques directes contre son régime et l’évocation de sujets très politiques, comme le rôle du Parti Taïwan ou le Tibet.”¹⁴¹⁸ Keeping in mind what was previously mentioned within the exhibition catalogue, Chinese experimental art is no longer a counter-current and, according to Fei Dawei, has been embraced by the Chinese authorities in 2001 when it openly started to promote this art within China as well as internationally. Therefore, the comment by Sabine Gignoux on the Chinese government as “laisse faire, dans une indifférence relative” is outdated. Moreover, it should also be highlighted that the author mentions the highly political question of Taiwan and Tibet within this review, which have no relation at all to the exhibition but which is only mentioned in order to place this exhibition within a dissident, political light.

The author then criticizes the exhibitions and mentions that the majority of the artists are unknown to the “western” public and that there were too little works on display: “Mais la difficulté n’est pas moins grande pour le visiteur occidental, ainsi confronté à une vingtaine de noms, pour la plupart inconnus de lui, et représentés chacun par un trop petit nombre d’oeuvres (...)”.¹⁴¹⁹ This statement might have been made due to the fact that Sabine Gignoux is not an expert on Chinese experimental art, therefore, personally the artists might be unknown to her yet she should not extrapolate this judgement into a generalization when she mentions that these artists are unknown to the “western” visitor.

¹⁴¹⁷ Sabine Gignoux, *Formes et méformes de l'empire du Milieu*, *la Croix*, 2/8/2004.

¹⁴¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

Almost all artists who participated in *Le moine et le démon* were well-known artists within the Chinese, and in 2004 also within the international art scene. This comment clearly points to the fact that the author of this review was not an expert in the field.

According to the author, the quantity of works were too little. The fact that “art critics” or the audience value an exhibition based on the amount of works on display and not on quality is one of the comments that Fei Dawei makes within his interview with Olivia Sand that shall be analysed later on in this paragraph.¹⁴²⁰ Within this interview, Fei Dawei mentions: “Most exhibitions on contemporary art from China display the art as a consequence of China’s social or cultural changes. I believe that most exhibitions built around this assumption are either very political and tend to be too superficial or are solely based on quantity.”¹⁴²¹ Yet, fifty-seven works were shown at the exhibition, which is not an insignificant number. Moreover, some of the works were of monumental size, taking up entire rooms within the MAC Lyon.

The author then also criticizes the fact that the works on display are too literal: “On peut trouver ces oeuvres un peu trop littérales”,¹⁴²² and she then mentions as an example the work of Lin Yilin (*Our Future*, 2004) (Fig. 65) and the bricks made out of human ashes by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu. About the latter work, the author then mentions in between brackets “(pour construire la Chine de demain?)” This question seems to contradict the author’s earlier statement that the works on display were “too literal” as she does not seem to have understood the meaning of the work. Moreover, Lin Yilin’s work *Our Future* (2002) (Fig. 65) is a complex work that could be interpreted from various perspectives. The installation has been chosen for the frontcover of the exhibition catalogue and consists of the mythical figure of the kylin placed head first into a brick wall.

¹⁴²⁰ See the interview between Fei Dawei and Olivia Sand towards the end of this paragraph.

¹⁴²¹ Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹⁴²² Sabine Gignoux, *Formes et méformes de l’empire du Milieu*, la Croix, 2/8/2004.

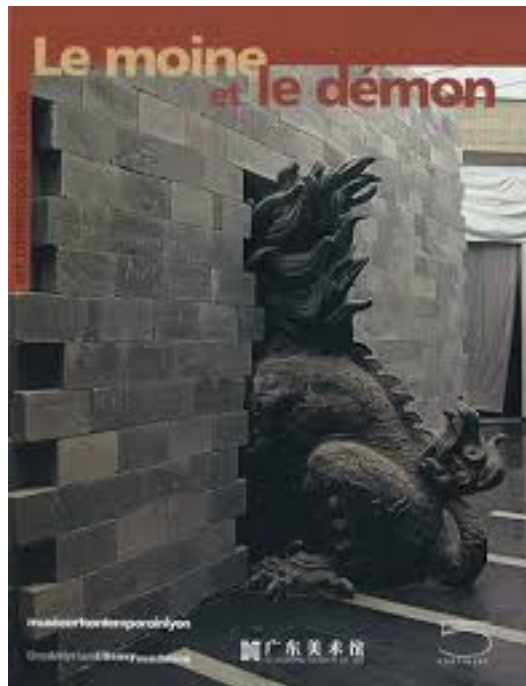


Figure 65: Frontcover of *Le moine et le démon* exhibition catalogue. On the cover: Lin Yilin, *Our Future*, 2002

This work might point to the difficulties that Chinese artists encounter within the international art scene, within China or in general, facing the future and leaving behind the past. It is rather improbable that Sabine Gignoux could precisely interpret these works without resorting to subjectivities and different perspectives. Her statement is then contradicted for the second time towards the end of her article in which she writes “on aurait aimé en savoir (et voir) davantage”¹⁴²³ in which she seems to point to the fact that she would have wanted to know and see more about the artists and the works on display. Yet, if their meaning is so literally obvious, as mentioned by the author, why is any further information necessary?

12.4.3.2 Henri-François Debailleux, *Une chine de démons inédits*

The next review is from the newspaper *Libération* and was written by Henri-François Debailleux who is an art critic for this paper. The title of the article is *Une Chine de démon inédits*.¹⁴²⁴ In the subtitle of the article, the author writes “Sans gout de déjà-vu”¹⁴²⁵ which is the contrary of a comment often made by Euroamerican art critics of “having seen it all

¹⁴²³ Sabine Gignoux, *Formes et méformes de l’empire du Milieu*, la Croix, 2/8/2004.

¹⁴²⁴ Henri-François Debailleux, *Une chine de démons inédits*, *Libération*, 10/8/2004.

¹⁴²⁵ *Ibidem*.

before". In general, the article is enthusiastic about the exhibition and the artworks that were on display. Henri-François Debailleux describes the show as "l'une des plus imposantes montées sur les artistes chinois d'aujourd'hui".¹⁴²⁶ On the one hand this is of course very positive however, on the other hand it also seems to omit the exhibitions *Alors, la Chine?* (2003), and *Paris-Pékin*¹⁴²⁷ displayed two years before in Paris which was in fact an exposition of a larger scale.

He then also makes mention of the overseas artists, but does not further elaborate on them. Within the article, Henri-François Debailleux makes a special reference to the work *3000 Needles* (1993) (Fig. 61) of Yang Jiechang that was displayed at the exhibition and calls it "Réjouissant",¹⁴²⁸ which in fact is rather strange as this work was not meant to be "amusing". The author does not explain what he found so amusing about this work.

12.4.3.3 Alain Vollerin, *Chine, la liberté de créer*

The next article published in *Mémoire des Arts* consists of an interview between the art collector and curator Thierry Rapail and Alain Vollerin, who is the founder of *Mémoire des Arts*. He also published various books on topics related to art and especially to the city of Lyon. One of his books is specifically about the Biennale of Lyon.

The interview is six pages long and starts out with the catchy phrase: "L'art contemporain chinois comme vous ne l'avez jamais vu".¹⁴²⁹ This particular statement might be questioned as *Le moine et le démon* is certainly not the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in France or within a more international context. The text then seems to attribute a rather dissident character to the exhibition which can be clearly seen in the title of the article *Chine, la liberté de créer*. This is then later on reinforced when Thierry Raspail comments on the title of the show and says: "La légende du Moine et du Démon est l'histoire d'une lutte infinie entre des pouvoirs constitués et des tentatives individuelles" within a context in which the director of the MAC Lyon elaborates on the Chinese experimental artists as an opposition to the official discourse. This might explain

¹⁴²⁶ Henri-François Debailleux, *Une chine de démons inédits*, Libération, 10/8/2004.

¹⁴²⁷ See chapter 10 of Block II.

¹⁴²⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁴²⁹ Alain Vollerin, *Chine, la liberté de créer*, Mémoire des Arts, Dossier Spécial Chine, July-August 2004.

who the “*reponsable*” was, mentioned in the article by the AFP that explained the title as related to the Chinese State. If this “responsible” truly is Raspail, it indicates a serious misunderstanding of the exhibition and the title chosen by Fei Dawei.¹⁴³⁰ Yet, later on in the interview Raspail does mention that the exhibition is not about the social circumstances in China, but about the individuality of the artists presented at *Le moine et le démon*: “on a essayé de ne pas tenir compte de liens directs avec des questions sociales. On a tenté de cerner la force, l'étrangeté, l'originalité d'individus avec tous les risques que cela comporte.”¹⁴³¹

A rather strange fragment within the article is when Alain Vollerin refers to Huang Yongping to which Raspail answers:

Il y a eu dans la génération Tien an men une génération d'une dizaine d'artistes très importants qui sans s'extraire de la question chinoise: Cai Guo Qiang, Chen Zeng, Gu Dexin, Wang Hiong Ping, etc. Certains émigrèrent aux Etats-Unis d'autres se réfugièrent en France comme Wang Hiong Ping.¹⁴³²

First of all, the first sentence seems to be cut off rather abruptly and it does not become clear what is intended here. Then, the names of the artists like Chen Zheng (Chen Zhen?) and Huang Yongping, written here as Wang Hiong Ping and Wang Hiong Ping have been misspelled. Are these typographic errors or is this humorously intended (which seems improbable)?

12.4.3.4 Mireille Descombes, *L'art chinois a trouvé son langage*

The following text consists of an interview between the art collector Uli Sigg and Mireille Descombes who is a cultural journalist who used to work for the magazine *L'Hebdo*, which is a Swiss magazine. Mireille Descombes majored in philosophy, French and Spanish. It is quite unclear why the author mentions the exhibition within this interview with Uli Sigg, as he had no relation to the exhibition. Somehow it does not connect with the article in general and seems somewhat of an addition.

¹⁴³⁰ Here it should be stated that the article by the AFP was published before the interview by Alain Vollerin.

¹⁴³¹ Alain Vollerin, *Chine, la liberté de créer*, Mémoire des Arts, Dossier Spécial Chine, July-August 2004.

¹⁴³² Ibidem.

Within the article about Uli Sigg, the author makes mention of *Le Moine et le Démon* in a separate column, and seems to be rather critical towards it. She starts her comment by mentioning “Dommage que la retrospective annoncée ait été abandonnée au profit d’une simple collective axe sur des travaux récents!”¹⁴³³ It is not clear where Mireille Descombes got the idea that the exhibition was a retrospective exhibition. Fei Dawei’s intentions was the contrary, as he mentions that he does not want to portray Chinese experimental art from a historical or sociological point of view. She then nuances her statement by adding that this did not mean a loss of interest or quality “l’exposition du Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon n’en reste pas moins intéressante et de qualité”.¹⁴³⁴ Yet towards the end of her article, the author concludes with another criticism and writes: “Le Moine et le Démon est censé évoquer les ‘graves question’ auxquelles se heurte aujourd’hui l’art contemporain chinois sorti de son statut underground et livré à toutes les tentations. Il apporte de fait plus de confusion que de sens au propos.”¹⁴³⁵ It seems as if the author wants to attribute a political character to the exhibition by stating that the Chinese experimental artists, now out of their underground position, have to confront new temptations. This is clearly a consequence of the exhibition catalogue that strongly emphasized the underground stage of Chinese experimental art.

Mireille Descombes is the only author who criticizes this exposition for being confusing but does not explain why she found the survey unclear.

Lastly, within her text, Mireille Descombes also makes reference to the works that seems to be highlighted the most which are Gu Dexin’s installation, and Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s “cement” blocks, which were the more “shocking” works of the exhibition.

12.4.3.5 Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*

The next review is titled *The Monk and The Demon* and is written by Olivia Sand who is a regular contributor to the *Asian Art Newspaper* and who has written many articles and interviews on Chinese experimental art and artists. This particular article is in fact an interview with the curator Fei Dawei. At the beginning of her article she makes a rather remarkable statement when she writes: “Curated by Fei Dawei, independent curator and

¹⁴³³ Mireille Descombes, *L’art chinois a trouvé son langage*, L’Hebdo, week 24-30/6/2004.

¹⁴³⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴³⁵ Ibidem.

artistic Director of the Ullens Foundation, the exhibition is a large-scale project, actually one of the most ambitious undertaking on contemporary art from China ever to take place in Europe.”¹⁴³⁶ This comment seems to omit all the other rather large-scale exhibitions that were held in Europe such as *Des del País del Centre* (1995)¹⁴³⁷, *Cities on the Move*,¹⁴³⁸ *Paris-Pékin*¹⁴³⁹ (held just two years prior to *Le moine et le démon*), *Alors, la Chine?*, and the *All under Heaven* exhibition held in Antwerp the same year.¹⁴⁴⁰

Then the curator Fei Dawei responds to one of the questions of Olivia Sand and makes an interesting comment:

In my opinion, the exhibitions I have curated were very different from the other Chinese contemporary art exhibitions. Most exhibitions on contemporary art from China display the art as a consequence of China’s social or cultural changes. I believe that most exhibitions built around this assumption are either very political and tend to be too superficial or are solely based on quantity.¹⁴⁴¹

Here, Fei Dawei seems to criticize other exhibitions that were held on Chinese experimental art and also seems to confirm the fact that Chinese experimental art exhibitions are sometimes placed into political frameworks by the art critics, as has been observed within this paragraph. Fei Dawei then continues to criticize these shows when he mentions:

I have rarely seen an exhibition providing thorough information on the works themselves. Perhaps it is because these exhibitions were often organised by Western curators, who have put the exhibition together from their first trip to China. In this context, I believe that the artists and their work have been somehow neglected. (...) My goal [of *Le moine et le démon*] is to avoid the various stereotypes that come to mind when referring to contemporary art from China, and I hope I succeeded.¹⁴⁴²

Seen in the light of the reviews of *All under Heaven*,¹⁴⁴³ this criticism can also be applied to Fei Dawei. Some art critics criticized the show for its lack of information and it is true that the exhibition catalogue does not provide a lot of information on the artists nor on the works on display. *Le moine et le démon* is quite an extensive catalogue with essays from

¹⁴³⁶ Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹⁴³⁷ See chapter 6 of Block II.

¹⁴³⁸ See chapter 7 of Block II.

¹⁴³⁹ See chapter 10 of Block II.

¹⁴⁴⁰ See the previous chapter.

¹⁴⁴¹ Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹⁴⁴² Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴³ See chapter 11 of Block II.

several experts in the field yet also here, not much is explained about the works that were presented at the survey.

On the other hand, it is interesting that Fei Dawei criticizes the “western” curators and insinuates that the shows that they organize are based on “their first trip to China”, what seems to point to a very superficial knowledge of these “western” curators and also to the demeaning image that Fei Dawei has of these “western” curators. This phenomenon of art collectors or curators going to China to visit the most well-known artists to then select part of their works for an exhibition was quite common in the early years of Chinese experimental art yet, as the years have passed, curators (including “western” curators) have become more specialized.

Then Fei Dawei talks about the exhibition and mentions that it is not a thematic show but that he wants “to show a specific moment in time in Chinese contemporary art where contemporary art is beginning to be accepted by the authorities”.¹⁴⁴⁴ This is emphasized within the exhibition catalogue but it was not the only objective for the survey. This quote differs from the aims that Fei Dawei set out within the exhibition catalogue in which he mentions that he does not want to portray Chinese experimental art but wants to present the artists as individual artists within the international art scene.

Then the curator explains the title of the show and says:

In the context of this exhibition, the saying means that if an artist has become successful, the difficulties the artist has to face are even greater. The difficulties remain always greater than the success. This saying, and consequently the title of the exhibition, reflects the present situation quite accurately.¹⁴⁴⁵

This is the same explanation given by the curator within the catalogue yet here Fei Dawei does not further explain what these difficulties are: is it the Chinese government, it is the expectations of the international art market, is it the personal difficulties experienced when dealing with fame? Fei does not clarify yet he does not seem to refer to the State that is “always behind you”, impeding the artists to be really free as is alleged in some of the reviews (based on the press article of the AFP by Mié Kohiyama, and probably a comment made by Thierry Raspail).

¹⁴⁴⁴ Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Ibidem.

Then Olivia Sand asks about the increasing presence of photography and video art within Chinese experimental art. Fei Dawei responds that paintings are slowly losing ground “There is indeed a trend towards new media like photography and video. However, a lot of the exhibitions in the past 15 years were mainly built around paintings, simply because political pop from China was extremely popular”.¹⁴⁴⁶ This adds information to the reasons that Qiu Zhijie gave within his catalogue essay. However, on the other hand this comment seems somewhat blunt. The way Fei Dawei mentions it, it seems as if all paintings within Chinese experimental art were from the political pop current.

He then concludes by mentioning that currently Chinese experimental art has no movements, no tendencies and that it is difficult to predict its future. This becomes clear in *Le moine et le démon* in which Fei Dawei did not want to present any theme and did not want to portray Chinese experimental art as a homogenous art current, or as a sociological or historical art movement.

12.4.3.6 Gallia Valette Pilenko, *Moine et démon, belle equation*

Lastly, a review published on plumart.com shall be analysed. The article is written by Gallia Valette Pilenko who seems to be a dancer and choreographer, and a regular contributor to plumart.com when it comes to exhibitions. The author seems to have correctly understood the main aim of the show when she mentions “Dans ‘le moine et le démon’ (...) comme l’écrit le ‘guide du visiteur’ ‘il s’agit de rendre visible l’art contemporain chinois et non d’esquisser le fil conducteur d’une histoire.”¹⁴⁴⁷ She then also mentions the works of Gu Deixin, and the “cement” blocks of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu.

The author then seems to be confused when she mentions that France first came into contact with Chinese experimental art in 1985: “Des installations puissantes, représentatives (du moins on le suppose) de cet art que la France a découvert en 1985 lors d’une exposition à Beaubourg.”¹⁴⁴⁸ Most probably, the author is here referring to 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* that was held at the Centre Pompidou, which is also known as the Beaubourg.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Olivia Sand, *The Monk and The Demon*, Asian Art, June 2004.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Gallia Valette Pilenko, *Moine et démon, belle equation*, www. Plumart.com, summer 2004. For the full article see: http://www.plumart.com/vf66-6704/html/body_11667_moine_et_demon.html. Date of last consultation 5/9/2014.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Ibidem.

The author then concludes by mentioning: “autant de représentations de la Chine d’aujourd’hui qui peuvent perturber le spectateur occidental. C’est pourtant une démarche salutaire nettoyeuse de neurones. Renvoyant à ses clichés et sa propre culture en miroir de celle de l’autre.”¹⁴⁴⁹

It seems thus that the author is referring to *Le moine et le démon* as an exhibition that also questions one’s own culture and traditions as it acts as a mirror of the Other, and of the Self. This is an interesting statement which leads to a thought-provoking idea: exhibitions could be perceived as an “neurone cleaning tool” that makes us question stereotypes and other preconceived ideas on the culture of the Other. As alleges the introduction of this thesis, exhibitions could become one of the most effective tools in the approximation of cultures by eradicating the fear of the Other. *Le moine et le démon* is a good example of this type of survey which aspires to present Chinese experimental art as an art current consisting of individual artists whose artworks have been selected based on its quality, and not because of its ethnic background. Yet, as has happened in almost all of the chapters within Block II, this message is then often not captured by the Euroamerican art critic and the media, who frequently seems to cling to stereotypes and who continues to perceive China as the exotic, often political, communist nation of the “East”.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Gallia Valette Pilenko, *Moine et démon, belle equation*, www. Plumart.com, summer 2004. For the full article see: http://www.plumart.com/vf66-6704/html/body_11667_moine_et_demon.html. Date of last consultation 5/9/2014.

12.5 Conclusions on *Le moine et le démon*

The main goal of *Le moine et le démon* was to portray the Chinese experimental artists as individual artists, and to avoid any emphasis made on their ethnic background. The survey clearly states that it did not want to serve as a “window” into the social and economical changes that were going on in China and that its focus was not political in any way. Yet, as the catalogue puts so much emphasis on the underground origins of Chinese experimental art, this first objective is then overshadowed. As becomes clear in the analysis of the reviews that have been written on the show, many art critics perceived *Le moine et le démon* from a political point of view, repeating the idea of Chinese experimental art being an underground movement that has now resurfaced as an “officially embraced” art current of the Chinese authorities. Seen from this perspective, Fei Dawei only partly achieved his goal of portraying Chinese experimental art as an independent, non-Chinese and non-exotic art current within the international art scene.

Another contradictory point of the exhibition catalogue seems that it wants to portray the artists as individual artists yet it is rather homogenizing. Firstly, it does not distinguish the mainland artists from the overseas artists. Three overseas artists participated within the survey, yet nowhere are they mentioned as such. Secondly, the catalogue emphasizes the fact that the Chinese experimental artists all share the same roots of the underground current when in fact this cannot be applied to the overseas artists that left in the late eighties. The problems with which they had to deal with are completely different yet in no place is any attention paid to the differences between the mainland and the overseas artists. This in fact is rather strange as Fei Dawei himself is an overseas Chinese who has been living in France for years. For him, it would be very easy to understand the position of the overseas artists and to see how they differ from their mainland counterparts, just as Fei Dawei differs from the mainland art curators such as Li Xianting. Yet, for some reason he has decided to not put any emphasis on the overseas artists and has chosen, on the other hand, to focus on the “underground” roots of Chinese experimental art. This might have been done in order to make the survey more attractive for the French/ Euroamerican audience. Were this to be true, Fei Dawei hereby undermines his own intentions of portraying the artists of *Le moine et le démon* as individual, non-exotic artists.

Another fact that also should be highlighted from the exhibition catalogue is the critical tone in which it describes the Euroamerican reception of Chinese experimental art. This is especially noticeable in the essay of Thierry Raspail and Wang Huangsheng. On the other

hand, Fei Dawei and Feng Boyi seemed to have a far more positive, maybe even utopic, point of view. This is interesting as two “Chinese” art experts speak of the Euroamerican reception in positive terms while Thierry Raspail, a French art critic and curator speaks of the same reception in a completely distinct manner. The attention that is paid to the reception of Chinese experimental art seems to be addressed in various exhibition catalogues that were analysed in the latter chapters of Block II. This seems to point to a growing tendency that shows interest in the way non-Euroamerican art is received within a Euroamerican context. It is also significant that it is often the Euroamerican curator who criticizes the way Chinese experimental art is received within a “western” context. Here it was Thierry Raspail who addressed this topic, and in the exhibition catalogue of *All under Heaven* (2004) it was Bart de Baere who criticised the exhibition *Alors la Chine?* (2003) for portraying the participating artists in an exotic way.¹⁴⁵⁰

As to the reviews that were written on the show, these have been plentiful. Most of these were published in French media, with only a few mentions of the show in foreign papers such as the International Herald Tribune. In general, the reviews can be divided into two groups: the reviews that understood the main aim of the show of portraying the artists as individual artists; and the reviews that did not understand the objective of the show and described *Le moine et le démon* as a survey that reflected on the political and social changes of China.

It is interesting that in 2004 Chinese experimental art is sometimes still described from an exclusively political mindframe, which seems to be more fitting in a Cold War context than a twenty-first century global one. Especially considering the fact that this exhibition was held in the context of the France-China year, these reviews seem to have missed the point. These thematic years are intended to approximate nations, not to reinforce boundaries and separation by referring to the characteristics that make nations different. Especially when these references are Eurocentric and rather out-dated.

Another point that should be mentioned here is the fact that a part of the articles analysed in this chapter was based on the information that was given out by the Agence France Press. On their website, the AFP mentions that “Truth, impartiality and plurality are

¹⁴⁵⁰ In previous chapters other Euroamerican art critics have also criticized the way Chinese experimental art is often received and portrayed within the Euroamerican art scene. Examples have been Jari-Pekka Vanhala and David Elliott who criticized the Venice Biennale (1993) in the exhibition catalogue of *Silent Energy* (1993), and Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist who somewhat criticized *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) in their exhibition catalogue of *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999). Also Marianne Brouwer, curator of the exhibition *Heart of Darkness* (1995), and Inma González Puy, curator of *Des del País del Centre* (1995), strongly critique the Euroamerican vision of non-Euroamerican arts and cultures.

Agence France-Presse's golden rules. These values guarantee rigorous, verified news, free from political or commercial influence."¹⁴⁵¹ Yet, the article that was written by Mié Kohiyama for the AFP on the exhibition of *Le moine et le démon* could be considered as a text that did not meet these values. It contained various errors on the exhibition, like the number of artists that participated in the show; omitted some of the information as it did not mention the artist Shen Yuan as the author of one of the works mentioned within the text; it put the show in a political light by misinterpreting the title of the exhibition; and finally focused on the most sensational works that were on display, i.e. Gu Dexin's installation *Congélateurs* (2004), and Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's installation *One or All II* (2004). This erroneous information was then later picked up by various other reviews that on their turn multiply the erroneous information given out on *Le moine et le démon*. Not only is this an example of how incorrect information expands but it is also an example of how some of the reviews written on exhibitions are sometimes not based on the personal experience of the reviewer, but on information from other sources. Mié Kohiyama is a journalist who is regularly asked by the AFP to collaborate yet she is not an expert on Chinese experimental art. Therefore, she was not the most adequate person to have reported on this particular topic and survey, and the consequences are obvious.

Lastly, *Le moine et le démon* was only one of the shows and activities that were organized in the context of the France/ China year yet the exhibition catalogue, and almost all of the reviews do not mention anything about the other shows that were organized on Chinese experimental art such as the *Paris/Pékin* survey, *Alors, la Chine?* or *All under Heaven* that was held just one month prior to *Le moine et le démon*. This seems to point to the fact that surveys are often independently organized and are not interrelated to each other. This is somewhat unfortunate as they would be more effective in transmitting a more realistic, non-exotic image of Chinese experimental art were they to collaborate among each other. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, exhibitions could be effective tools in order to eradicate misconceived and unquestioned prejudices on the culture of the Other, yet if every exhibition is seen as a world of its own, the impact they generate is limited. Were they to collaborate with other exhibitions held inside as well as outside of the nation, these efforts could be joined and the effect they would have would be of a far greater scale.

¹⁴⁵¹ <http://www.afp.org.es/en/agency/ethics/>. Date of last consultation: 14/9/2014.

BLOCK III: CONCLUSIONS

“Art ceases to root in fixed territory, the roots extending into the air, like a plant in vertical position. This uprooting forces culture to compete with its opposite in a territory without borders.”¹⁴⁵²

¹⁴⁵² “El arte deja de hundir sus raíces en un territorio fijo para extenderlas al aire, como una planta que invirtiera su posición en la vertical. El desarraigo fuerza a la cultura a competir con su opuesto en un territorio sin fronteras.” Javier Arnaldo and Eva Fernández del Campo, *El arte en su destierro global*, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 2012, p. 12

This dissertation started out as a research project which intention was to dig deeper into the way the artworks of the overseas Chinese artists was and is received within a Euroamerican context. Looking back with the analysis now completed, this question shall have to be further explored and can only partially be answered with this present study. As the overseas artists are often not distinguished from their mainland colleagues, mostly in exhibition reviews, it has resulted impossible to shine a light on the reception of these specific artists and artworks. Consequently, this thesis has taken a different turn and ended up digging into the different ways Chinese experimental art in general, from the overseas as well as the mainland artists, has been received in Europe and the United States. This has led to the questioning of Euroamerican dominance within the international art world and also to the search for the reasons why this status quo is maintained.

Twelve exhibitions have been extensively analysed within this study but there is still so much more to be discovered. Of course, these conclusions will only partially provide answers to the questions formulated in this thesis. This study would have to be much more extent for the conclusions to be more definitive. Therefore, it has to be stated beforehand that they are generalizing and that it addresses certain patterns and phenomena that have been observed within these specific exhibitions that are then extrapolated to a wider scope. But in no case can this conclusion be considered a closed, complete answer to the way Chinese experimental art is received within a Euroamerican context. There is always more research to be carried out, more questions to be answered and this Ph.D. has only been the beginning of a much longer journey that will have to explore more aspects of the reception of Chinese experimental art in the Euroamerican context, the evolution of the alternative models and how the portrayal of the Other has evolved over time until our current days. In order to do so, further research shall have to be done in this area, not only by myself but hopefully also by other scholars.

1.1 Critics and their reviews

After the analyses of the exhibitions selected for this particular research, certain conclusions can be drawn. Even though these conclusions are well-founded and representative of this study, they are also generalizing and it should be kept in mind that they are based on only a small part of the enormous amount of exhibitions on Chinese experimental art that have been held up until our present day. Moreover, they are limited to a specific time period that starts in the year 1990 and ends in the year 2004 for reasons

that have been explained within the introduction to Block II. This is a period that reflects the first years of Chinese experimental art exhibitions held in Europe and the United States, includes the turn of the millennium and ends with Chinese experimental art starting to be promoted by China within the mainland as well as within the international context. In the 1990s one can see that surveys are based mostly on sight-specific works and that the focus lies on “introducing” these artists to the Euroamerican audience. The word “introduce” is rather complex and one must reflect on its meaning. How was Chinese experimental art introduced to the Euroamerican audience in the beginning of the 1990s? What can be seen from the exhibitions analysed that were held in this period of time is that the curators make a tremendous effort to portray the Chinese experimental artists as part of the international art scene, as equals. From the very start, the image of the Chinese artists, or Chinese art as “Chinese”, exotic, the Other, political or peripheral is strongly opposed in all exhibitions and catalogues analysed within these pages. However, when one looks at the reviews, the image that is often evoked by the art critics does not (cor)respond to the efforts made by the curators. Even in 2004, Chinese experimental art was still interpreted through a highly and often exclusively political, dissident lens. In a way, it seems as if Euroamerican art critics try to maintain the image of the Chinese experimental artist as the Other and as a sensational, sometimes even rebellious object of gazing.

When looking at the different ways Chinese experimental art is received in a Euroamerican context, various patterns can be pointed out. First of all, there is the strategy of familiarizing Chinese experimental art by comparing it to Euroamerican artworks or artists. Especially in the early 1990s this was a common method among the Euroamerican art critics. Of course, this could be considered quite logical as Chinese experimental art in the early 1990s was not at all well-known within the international art scene. Therefore, certain works might have been rather “enigmatic” for audience and art critics alike. Comparing or explaining these works by referring to well-known artworks, artists or currents from a European or American context therefore becomes a convenient solution. Yet, what is not taken into account is that Chinese experimental art, as explained in paragraph 1.1 of Block I, does not share the same cultural, historical and artistic baggage as Euroamerican art currents. Its evolution and the circumstances under which it developed are completely different. Therefore, even though resorting to Euroamerican references can be seen as an easy and logical solution, it does not mean that it does

justice to Chinese experimental art, and more than once the result has been misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

The comparison of non-Euroamerican art to Euroamerican works has another underlying motive that points to the Euroamerican dominance within the international art world. As explained in chapter 3.1 of Block I, non-Euroamerican art, like Chinese experimental art, is often interpreted on Euroamerican terms and according to Euroamerican references and vocabulary due to the fact that there simply is no widely accepted alternative. The absence of the tools in order to interpret the art of non-Euroamerican countries is like an enormous wall in the middle of a street. Like the partitions created by Gu Wenda, a way must be found to transform it from solid to transparent in order to advance on the path of becoming a truly international and equal art scene. The existence of one single art vocabulary has come this far, yet in the global society of today it no longer serves the diverse and complex art world of the new millennium. For centuries, it maintained the status quo and firmly kept Euroamerica in its hegemonic and dominant position, and this is probably the main reason why it has survived for so long. There is a fear for the Other, a fear for the unfamiliar, and above all, there is a fear of losing power over the other, of becoming undistinguishable among the rest. The “West” has always reigned, or tried to reign, over the “East”. There has always been a distinction between the first and the third world, the advanced and the underdeveloped, modernity and tradition, superior and inferior. The art world has only been one of the ways in which this distinction was imposed and upheld. It was only one of the ways in which the status quo could be sustained.

In the same lines, Chinese experimental art has also been portrayed as copies of Euroamerican art. As time progresses, this tendency becomes less frequent but especially in the early 1990s up until the mid 1990s, this comment has been frequently observed within the reviews of the art critics. Again, this of course is a sign of Euroamerican hegemony and its fear of losing dominance within the international art world. By not acknowledging that non-Euroamerican art currents and artists are independent, and by pretending that they are somehow dependent on Euroamerican art, the hegemonic position of Euroamerican art as universal art reference is left intact. Yet, Chinese experimental art is most definitely an autonomous art current. It is true that, especially in its initials, it was strongly inspired by Euroamerican art currents and artists, yet these did not serve as mere references to be copied. As explained in paragraph 1.1 of the theoretic

part, they were sources of inspiration and became instruments for the Chinese artists in order to find their own way in exiting and what seemed like promising times.

The voice that questions Euroamerican hegemony, the “East-West” dichotomy, and “western” superiority has become louder over the years, and not only in academic circles. Within the arts, especially towards the latter exhibitions held in the 2000s, one can perceive a critical view towards this superior Euroamerican gaze towards the Other, the non-Euroamerican artist. And more often this criticism comes from Euroamerican art critics and curators. The awareness on the exoticized vision of non-Euroamerican art is growing, also due to post-colonial studies, and this could be clearly denoted within the exhibitions held towards the end of the analysis. What was at first only spoken of by non-Euroamerican curators such as Fei Dawei, Gao Minglu, and Hou Hanru has gradually been picked up by their Euroamerican colleagues and this is a first step in a new direction. Curators are key within the art world and their vision and interpretation of non-Euroamerican art can be clearly denoted within an exhibition. The way the artists are portrayed, the way their work is displayed and explained, the way the catalogue is written and who is invited to collaborate are all tools that become immensely important when it comes to changing the status quo of transforming “eurocentric ego’s” into transcultural eye-openings.

Coming back to the different ways in which art critics often receive Chinese experimental art, a clear pattern can also be denoted in the way this art current is often perceived from a sometimes exclusively political viewpoint. In the early 1990s, seen from a Cold War context, this might be logical yet towards 2004 this vision becomes out-dated and rather delusional. References to Tiananmen have often been made in the reviews that were written by the art critics, well into the 2000s. Also, on many occasions were the Chinese experimental artists seen as political dissidents, making art that was reluctantly “approved” by the Chinese authorities. This image becomes even more fabricated when some of the artists within China have mentioned that the authorities are in fact not preoccupied with Chinese experimental art and that they have, in some cases, even begun to see it as a lucrative way of putting China within a positive, modern light. *Le moine et le démon* that was held in 2004 within the context of the France-China year, with which this dissertation has ended its study is a great example of this promotion of China through Chinese art. It was a conjoint collaboration between the MAC Lyon, the Ullens Foundation and the Guangdong Museum of Art. But this is not the only example of the

Chinese government's implication in the Chinese art world. The Biennales held all over the world, and also within China, speak for themselves and are testimonies of the relatively open attitude of the Chinese government towards this art current.

Chinese experimental art is put within this artificial political and dissident light in order to make it more sensational, more secretive, more "dangerous". All these techniques, in the end, make Chinese experimental art more "the Other". And this again brings us to the desperate intents of Euroamerica to uphold its hegemonic, dominant position within the international art world. By portraying Chinese art as the Other, as politically dissident, it becomes exotic, it becomes different, it becomes highly lucrative and attractive. A clear example is the artist Ai Wei Wei, most probably the most well-known artist in the Euroamerican context and a clear example of a Chinese, polemic and most importantly, politically dissident artist.¹⁴⁵³ Euroamerica, the forerunner and most fervent promoter of democracy and freedom "loves" these artists who, supposedly, fight for their freedom and go against the regime. They become heroes in Euroamerican eyes, and enormously popular, and this is also precisely what is needed in Euroamerica: the portrayal of non-Euroamerica as the retarded, repressed, and clear opposite of the free "West". In other words, the Other that serves to effectively reinstate the ego and the definition of the Self.

Towards the early years of the 2000s a shift can be denoted in the way Chinese experimental art is perceived. As mentioned previously, it is still often interpreted from a political perspective yet a new angle is added. Chinese experimental art is seen as a "window" into Chinese society and somehow is expected to give insight into what is going on in China in the twenty-first century. China in our current times is often valued and admired for its economical force and it is also understood as the nation of the future that will soon take center stage. Yet, it is also seen as a nation in somewhat of an identity crisis and this becomes clear when one looks at its art. Particularly in the last few exhibition analysed within Block II, one of the topics that often comes up within catalogues and reviews is how Chinese artists are going to deal with the modernization of their nation: how are they going to find a way to stay true to their cultural background and the Chinese tradition while at the same time embracing "western" modernity and the undeniable Euroamerican influences? As Chinese experimental art loses its underground,

¹⁴⁵³ As I am wrapping up this dissertation, an exhibition on Ai Wei Wei titled *On the Table* is being held at the Virreina in Barcelona until the first of February 2015. A big photograph of Ai Wei Wei was placed on the frontpage of the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* (November 2nd 2014) announcing the survey. The title of the image stated "Ai Wei Wei. Barcelona hosts an exhibition on the artist and dissident. 'What can I do if they consider me a danger!'" ("Ai Wei Wei. Barcelona acull una exposició de l'artista i dissident. 'Què hi puc fer, si em consideren un perill!'")

dissident character and becomes an openly promoted, lucrative, sometimes even somewhat of a commercial product, how does it then cope with this new identity and these new circumstances (of fame)?

This dissertation focuses on the overseas Chinese artists and it is especially these artists who have been dealing with “identity crisis” for years. They are the living examples of how individuals can become hybrid, and can identify with more than one culture, more than one tradition, and more than one nationality. They become in-between artists who can critically and quite objectively look towards their own culture and towards the cultures of the Other, as they have an insider’s as well as an outsider’s view of both. Why is it considered necessary to *choose* between one’s own tradition and new influences that come from outside? Why is it so unimaginable to accept hybridity, multiple angles of seeing things, and identifying with more than one nationality?

Another aspect that was a focus of this dissertation is the third space concept. It has only been mentioned explicitly on one occasion throughout the whole analysis (in the *Inside Out* (1998) exhibition catalogue), a sign that it was hardly picked up on by any of the art critics or curators. On many occasions, the third space, the in-between or any other alternative model was implicitly spoken of by the curators, the essayists and sometimes even the art critics. Of course, this is also an acknowledgement of the alternative spaces, and it indicates a first step towards a true eradication of rigid models such as the “East-West” dichotomy, yet the question remains: if there are definitions that perfectly fit these descriptions and insinuations, such as transexperiences or the third space, why are they not more frequently used and *explicitly* called by their name? Why has the third space concept or the term transexperiences that so well describe the feelings of so many artists as well as “transcultural” individuals not become part of our day-to-day vocabulary? Why are we still often using century-old terms such as diaspora, exile, and “nomadic” culture when we have at our disposal this array of definitions that have been coined specifically to describe these feelings and experiences?

It is especially Hou Hanru who speaks of alternative models that go beyond one-sided, narrow-minded “East-West” dichotomies and nation-state cultures yet his message is then often met with silence. In a intercultural, globalized society, how can it be that one still has to define oneself according to one single nationality and that a “Chinese” artist cannot be perceived as an in-between artist but will always remain a “Chinese” artist? How long will

it take before the “in-between” is acknowledged as a legitimate and existing space and not as a theoretic, often silenced alternative?

1.2 The exhibitions and their catalogues

Taking a closer look at the exhibition catalogues, one can also clearly see a certain evolution as time elapses. The first exhibition catalogue that was analysed in Block II was *Chine demain pour hier*, one of the first catalogues to be published on a Chinese experimental art exhibition held in Euroamerica. Back in 1990, one can clearly denote a difference when comparing this catalogue to, for example, the last catalogue that was analysed that dates from 2004. First of all, the amount of essayist within the *Chine demain pour hier* catalogue who were not experts on the matter is noticeable. Many authors who collaborated with this catalogue were in fact not experts on Chinese experimental art and clearly stated so within their text. Therefore, they often wrote about other topics that did not necessarily provide insight into the exhibition or into Chinese experimental art. This is a clear sign that in the early years of 1990, there was a lack of Euroamerican experts on this art, a balance that would clearly change over time.

Another interesting fact is that this particular catalogue, *Chine demain pour hier*, prominently placed on its frontcover the words “Art Chinois” (Fig. 8). This is particularly interesting when taking into account that in the last catalogue, that of *Le moine et le démon* (2004) (Fig. 65) the curators somewhat excused themselves for putting “art contemporain chinois” on the frontcover and mentioned: “The deliberately restrictive but informative subtitle ‘Chinese Contemporary Art’ remains on the cover of the catalogue. It’s left, however, but only for the unaware ‘European’ reader.”¹⁴⁵⁴ This comparison provides significant information on how Chinese experimental art and its reception evolved between the fourteen years that lie between 1990 and 2004. While in the beginning the exhibition needed the subtitle of “Art Chinois” in order to define itself and to attract the French audience, in 2004 these words are reluctantly and with somewhat of a feeling of shame placed on the frontcover of the catalogue. In 2004, Chinese experimental art is not portrayed as “Chinese” anymore and any indication that might point to the fact that it is, is apologetically admitted. What the curators try to promote in the 2000s is Chinese experimental art as international experimental art, part of the global art scene. How

¹⁴⁵⁴ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon* exhibition catalogue, p. 8.

different from the situation in 1990 when Chinese experimental art relied on its “Chineseness” in order to obtain a place within the international scene.

This intention to portray Chinese art as an international art current is especially emphasized by the “Chinese” curators, and it can be detected throughout all the exhibitions that were analysed within this study. It is a red line that runs through all of the expositions from the first to the very last survey. Already in 1990, Fei Dawei intended to present the Chinese artists as equals to their “western” colleagues. Fei Dawei spoke of the fact that the modern “West” was still dialoguing with a traditional China and that this situation had to be changed. He also criticized the Euroamerican way in which China was often perceived and portrayed, and especially the way in which Chinese artists were expected to behave and “produce”. Yet, fast forward to the latest exhibition of *Le moine et le démon* (2004) held fourteen years later that was also curated by Fei Dawei, one can see that the objectives have remained quite the same. Within this catalogue, Thierry Raspail speaks critically of Eurocentric reception and speaks here of the “eurocentric ego’s”¹⁴⁵⁵ mentioned previously within these conclusions. Also Wang Huangsheng, director of the Guangdong Museum of Art, speaks very harshly of “western” reception of Chinese experimental art and states “Chinese contemporary art has not been able to free itself from the cultural net of the Western art system”.¹⁴⁵⁶ This comment makes it evident again that Euroamerican hegemony within the international art scene, in 2004, was still prominent and that the status quo had not changed much over the years. This could be partly explained by the fact that the media and most of the art critics, whether specialist or not, continued to portray Chinese experimental art as they had during all these years: by politicizing it, by making it exotic and sensational, and mostly by interpreting this art exclusively through Euroamerican terms and perspectives. This indicates the immense influence art critics have within the art world. Even if the exhibition catalogue and the curators severely criticize the Euroamerican reception of non-Euroamerican art, the status quo remains unchanged. Not until the art critics become fully aware of their “eurocentric ego’s”, to use the words of Thierry Raspail, can non-Euroamerican art be valued and understood as an equal.

All the exhibitions analysed within this study aimed to present Chinese experimental art as a non-exotic and autonomous art current, and not as the art of the Other. Their objective

¹⁴⁵⁵ Thierry Raspail, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Wang Huangsheng, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

was to demystify the exotic, political, and dissident image that Chinese experimental art had in the Euroamerican context. Another red line that can be seen throughout most of the exhibitions is the presence of Hou Hanru, sometimes as the curator and sometimes as an essayist. He is one of the key figures when it comes to the promotion and transmission of the alternative spaces that go beyond the “East-West” dichotomy. Important exhibitions which he organized or with which he collaborated were *Silent Energy* (1993), *Out of the Centre* (1994), *Heart of Darkness* (1995) *Inside Out* (1998), *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999), *Paris pour Escale* (2000), and *Paris-Pékin* (2002). In each of these exhibitions his voice can be clearly distinguished as he deliberately reiterates the topic of alternative spaces and of presenting, especially the Chinese overseas artists as active figures who are slowly changing the lop-sided status quo of the international art scene. His voice that questions the validity of the nation-state culture and addresses the fact that identities can also become hybrid can be heard throughout almost all of the exhibitions analysed within this dissertation. Yet again, his message did not resonate either with the art critics or with most of his (curator) colleagues, and was mostly silenced.

Another thought-provoking fact is that in the cases of the exhibitions curated by a “Chinese” curator, these curators were often accompanied by a Euroamerican curator. This has been the case in eight of the twelve surveys studied in this dissertation.¹⁴⁵⁷ The four remaining expositions were either curated by one single Euroamerican curator, in this case both times female curators (*Des del País del Centre* (1995) and *Heart of Darkness* (1995)), or by two Euroamerican art curators (David Elliott and Lydie Mephram, *Silent Energy*, 1993). In only one of the twelve cases was the exhibition carried out by one single “Chinese” curator, i.e. *Inside Out* (Gao Minglu, 1998). The reason that might explain this could again point towards Euroamerican-centrism. Is it assumed that a single Chinese curator would not be capable of organizing a survey that could attract and be “understood” by the Euroamerican audience? Was it therefore considered necessary the inclusion of a Euroamerican curator in order to assist as somewhat of a mediator (or chaperone)? It should be reminded here that not in all cases did both curators have the same vision on Chinese experimental art. A good example was the exhibition *Fragmented Memory* (1993) curated by Gao Minglu and Julia F. Andrews in which their different perspectives became clear within their essays published within the catalogue. Gao Minglu, as one of the main defenders of the hybrid spaces along with Hou Hanru, intended to portray Chinese

¹⁴⁵⁷ It should be mentioned here that, as explained in chapter 7 on the exhibition of *Cities on the Move*, the choice to curate the exhibition between Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist was a personal choice of both curators in order to establish an “East-West” dialogue. See chapter 7 for the full quote of Hans Ulrich Obrist in which he explains the reasons for this co-curatorship.

experimental art as an international art current and not as “Chinese”, while Julia F. Andrews emphasized the political character of Chinese experimental art and reiteratively repeated that this art current was oppressed making the artist dissidents. Seen in its context, this particular exposition was held in 1993 and the Cold War might have still been present in the background. It was also the first time Chinese experimental art was introduced to the American public, as was mentioned by the catalogue. Therefore, for that time, maybe it would have been unheard of that a single Chinese curator would take charge of an exposition without any “assistance” from a Euroamerican colleague.

Why the same has occurred in other expositions held posteriorly and in other countries remains a question that cannot be satisfied with a definitive answer. Maybe again here one can see the tendency of Euroamerica to keep the Other, the non-Euroamerican artists and curators “at bay”. Appointing one single “Chinese” curator to the exposition might imply that full authority is given to the Other and that this individual is considered independent and autonomous. By adding a Euroamerican art curator, this “Chinese” art curator is no longer seen as an autonomous entity but has now become part of a duo. In a way, by not letting Chinese art curators organize expositions on their own, it seems as if they are somewhat side-lined. This could also be a way for the “western” art world to continue to uphold its “western cultural net”,¹⁴⁵⁸ to use the words of the curator Wang Huangsheng, and to maintain its dominant position as the one and only reference within the international art scene.

Another pattern that can be seen in almost all of the exhibition catalogues is that almost all of these include a chronology on Chinese experimental art or some other text that refers and explains the past of this art current or the historical context of Chinese art in general. This has been the case in *Chine demain pour hier* (1990), *Silent Energy* (1993), *Fragmented Memory* (1993),¹⁴⁵⁹ *Des del País del Centre* (1995), *Inside Out* (1998), *Paris Pékin* (2002), *All under Heaven* (2004), and *Le moine et le démon* (2004). Why is so much emphasis put on the past? By referring and reiteratively repeating what lies behind, it is often the political aspects of Chinese experimental art that are again brought to the surface. It might sometimes be considered necessary to explain the historical origins of Chinese experimental art yet on the other hand it is often employed as a way to remind the audience of the political and dissident character of this art. This of course is a strategy

¹⁴⁵⁸ Wang Huangsheng, *Le moine et le démon*, exhibition catalogue, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵⁹ This exhibition catalogue even included two extensive and very detailed chronologies.

used to make it more interesting and sensational, and to again differentiate it from Euroamerican art but in the twenty-first century the time has come to leave the past behind and to look towards what lies ahead. The past is important and of course it has its influence in the present day, yet in Chinese experimental art it is often as if one dwells in history. The way Chinese experimental art is understood and displayed frequently seems to be the result of a gaze looking backward rather than forward.

Another phenomenon that seems to be recurrent in practically all of the exhibition catalogues analysed is that there is often a lack of information on the works on display. In some cases this can be explained when the works are sight specific. In these cases it was impossible to know beforehand what works would be displayed at the exhibition and therefore no explanation on these works could be included within the catalogue. Yet, in many other occasions the works included were not made in situ. In these cases, the information given on the artwork has often been very meagre in almost all of the exhibition catalogues. Artworks are of course freely interpretable, that is what makes art *art*. Every person can subjectively look at these creations and interpret them in their own way, according to their own cultural background, mood, knowledge and personal experience yet in some cases it might have been helpful for the catalogue to have elaborated more on the works present at the show. As mentioned on various occasions within this dissertation, an exhibition catalogue can become a useful tool in the diffusion of messages that promote the alternative models and that can make a difference in converting the art world into a more equal and less stereotypical one. Yet, when there is a lack of information within the catalogue, one of the essential tools when it comes to the transmission of these messages is lost. Consequently, when art critics are left to interpret the works according to their own subjective, and often stereotypical vision, these works are frequently misinterpreted. The result is that these creations of the Chinese experimental artists are not employed to change the status quo within the international art world, but are used in order to reinforce the exotic, political, dissident image of this art current that is strongly present among the Euroamerican art critics. A good example is Cai Guoqiang's *Borrowing Your Enemies Arrows* (1998) (Fig. 42) that was displayed at the *Inside Out* exhibition held the same year. This work was described by one of the reviews as containing an "implicit anti-West message".¹⁴⁶⁰ One of the critics even mentioned that the moral of this work was

¹⁴⁶⁰ See the amazon.com website: http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Out-New-Chinese-Art/dp/0520217489/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1406908975&sr=8-1&keywords=inside+out+exhibition+catalogue, n.d., date of last consultation 10/9/2014.

to “Beware of shooting at Chinese”.¹⁴⁶¹ Yet the artist’s intention was not at all what these reviews insinuated. Moreover, Cai Guoqiang is an artist who lives and works in the United States (a fact that was omitted by all reviews). How can his art then imply an anti-“West” image?

In general one can also observe that every exhibition remains a rather “local event” and that the impact it causes often stays within national borders. An exhibition that is held in Holland, for example, hardly causes any impact in France or New York, and vice versa. This is also the reason why some catalogues alleged to be the first exhibition on Chinese experimental art to be held in that particular nation. This has been stated in the catalogues of *Chine demain pour hier* (1990, France), *Silent Energy* (1993, UK), *Fragmented Memory* (1993, USA), *Out of the Centre* (1994, Finland), *Des del País del Centre* (1995, Spain), *Inside Out* (1998, first major exhibition in the USA), *Paris-Pékin* (2002, largest exposition to be held in Europe), *All under Heaven* (2004, Belgium), and *Le moine et le démon* (2004, first exhibition to be held in collaboration with a Chinese art museum in France). This becomes even more evident when the same exhibition catalogue omits other, sometimes major, exhibitions that were held in the same geographical area. For example, the *Paris-Pékin* exhibition alleged to be the largest exposition to be held in Europe, hereby omitting other major exhibitions like, for example, *Des del País del Centre* that was held in Barcelona in 1995 that displayed seventy works of the most well-known artists of the Chinese experimental art scene. Also *Inside Out* (1998) claimed to be the first major show in the United States hereby omitting the *China’s New Art, Post 1989* (1993) survey that was also of enormous proportions. This local impact becomes somewhat of a barrier when one’s aim is to transmit a message of presenting the Chinese experimental artists as international artists, as active participants within the global art world. If every exhibition is seen as an event on its own, there is no opportunity to join forces and to present these artists in a continuous, collective way.

This might also be one of the reasons why the third space concept has not been widely mentioned by art curators and critics. The third space has not been explicitly spoken of in any of the exhibition catalogues, being the only exception the *Inside Out* exposition (1998) in which the third space concept was addressed by its name, and elaborated upon by Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu. It is rather strange that Hou Hanru on other occasions, like the exhibition *Paris pour Escale* (2000) of which he was the curator together with his wife

¹⁴⁶¹ See paragraph 8.3 of Block II.

Evelyne Jouanno, did not grasp the opportunity to transmit the third space concept. Why is it that he does not go further into the matter when he has the chance to do so?

1.3 Recurrent artworks

Taking a closer look at the works that are recurrent within these exhibitions one can see that *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 30 and 45) was shown on three occasions, i.e. *Des del País del Centre* (1995), *Inside Out* (1998), and *Paris-Pékin* (2002). *Book from the Sky* is a major scale installation that took the artist years to complete. Throughout this dissertation a lot has been commented on this work and it should be remembered that it was widely discussed within China as it challenged one of the main pillars of Chinese culture: Chinese calligraphy. The fact that Xu Bing modified these century-old characters and “manipulated” and transformed them into what some critics have called “non-sense language” was sometimes seen as blasphemous (Fig. 45). In Euroamerica, the work has not always been understood and some critics were not able to go beyond the initial appearance of this installation and simply commented that it was a “joke”. A good example is the awarded art critic Holland Cotter who described the characters as “messed-up calligraphy: illegible, computerized, used to write nonsense characters, fake language.”¹⁴⁶² Yet this work represents so much more. It represents the written word in communication and misunderstanding. By creating a work with “Chinese” characters that are created by the imagination of the artist, the words are made universal. No longer is the Chinese written word exclusively accessible to those who know how to read these. As the characters lose their meaning and no longer represent established significances, they become void: a void that can then be filled with the personal interpretations of individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. And this is precisely where the richness of this work lies. It becomes universal and accessible to all.

Another artist that was recurrent throughout almost all exhibitions was Gu Wenda. Either with his *Oedipus Refound Series* (1992-) (Fig. 11 and 18), especially in the early nineties: *Silent Energy* (1993), *Fragmented Memory* (1993)); and then posteriorly mainly with his *United Nations Series*: (1993-) (Fig. 12, 27, 28 and 41) (*Des del País del Centre* (1995), *Heart of Darkness* (1995), *Inside Out* (1998), and *Paris-Pékin* (2002)). Gu Wenda is a polemic artist per se and the use of materials such as menstruation blood, human placenta powder and hair has often stirred up quite some commotion within the

¹⁴⁶² See paragraph 8.3 of Block II.

Euroamerican context. According to the artist, his goal is to create works that are visually “beautiful” but that also question ready-made values or faiths.¹⁴⁶³ These ready-made beliefs also have led him to question “East” and “West” and the way Euroamerica sometimes portrays him, as well as his fellow “Chinese” artists as *Chinese*. Yet, his work is more often than not interpreted as sensational by the Euroamerican art critics. This is also probably one of the main reasons why the *United Nations Series* and the *Oedipus Refound Series* have been included in so many of the expositions analysed within this study. But again, there seems to be a misinterpretation of his works. Of course, an installation made entirely out of human hair might generate quite an impact yet the meaning of these works goes far beyond their sensational character. Gu Wenda is an overseas Chinese artist and the fact of living in-between cultures has enormously influenced his work. Yet again, the critics, and in most cases the catalogues hardly ever mention this. The *United Nations Series* (1993 -) are made out of “walls” built from human hair collected from all over the world. Yet these walls are transparent and are often floating in space. Therefore, they do not separate human beings and cultures, but bring them together through the hair that, according to the artist, represents the DNA of every single person who collaborated with the installation. Hair is a heavily symbolically charged “material” and in Chinese culture represents the ancestors, one’s private life and even sexuality in the case of women. Cutting of one’s hair often represents a new beginning and the closure of the past. The fact that these installations use the cut off hair of hundreds of individuals from around the globe might represent a collective “new start” towards global equality and the eradication of out-dated models such as the “East-West” separation.

An artists that has been invited to participate in all exhibitions is Huang Yongping, known as a rather polemic artist who often makes installations that take over whole exhibition spaces, and sometimes even buildings, hereby upsetting his fellow artists as well. Huang Yongping is also an artist who deliberately addresses “taboo” topics or themes that are politically sensitive. Examples of these works have been *Yellow Peril* (1993) (Fig. 14) displayed at *Silent Energy* (1993), *Human Snake Plan* (1993) (Fig. 19) seen at *Fragmented Memory* (1993), *Overtured Tomb* (1995) (Fig. 29) made for the *Heart of Darkness* exhibition, *Bat Project* (2004) (Fig. 60) shown in *All under Heaven* (2004) and of course his “*A History of Chinese Painting*” and “*A Concise History of Modern Painting*”

¹⁴⁶³ See Gu Wenda’s letter to the art curator and expert Julia F. Andrews in the catalogue of *Heart of Darkness*. Gu Wenda, *Heart of Darkness* exhibition catalogue, p. 118. See also chapter 5 of Block II.

*Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes*¹⁴⁶⁴ (1987/1993) (Fig. 31) that was addressed on two occasions, firstly at the *Des del País del Centre* exhibition (1995) and then again in *Inside Out* (1998).

As with Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, Huang Yongping is often a cause of sensational works that stir up discussion. This might be one of the reasons why he is so frequently asked for exhibitions held in the Euroamerican context. Yet again, he is not asked for being an in-between artist, capable of seeing life from different angles. Might it be that he is often invited as his works can be considered more sensational? Even though this statement might be questioned, it is true that the more sensational works, especially towards the period of the 2000s, become more “popular” among the Euroamerican art critics. An illustrative example of this was the work of Peng Yu and Sun Yuan that was presented at the last two exhibitions analysed within Block II, *All under Heaven* (2004), and *Le moine et le démon* (2004). These artists often make installations made out of “waste” such as human fat tissue and dead animals. At *Le moine et le démon* their work consisted of bricks made out of human ashes. *Le moine et le démon* displayed fifty-seven works of twenty-two artist from mainland as well as overseas Chinese artists yet, Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s human ash bricks were mentioned in almost all of the reviews that were posteriorly written on this survey. This indicates that there is a preference for the sensational works among the Euroamerican art critics. Obviously, the fondness for morbidity is not limited to Chinese experimental art alone but extends itself to all art currents. This of course is logical and it should not be denied that the reasons that these artists work with this type of materials might be precisely to attract media attention. Yet the underlying reasons that these particular works are so strongly highlighted within the media might again point to the desperate need for Euroamerica to define and locate the Other. By emphasizing these artworks, it is as if a finger is pointed at these “Chinese” artists as somewhat of an exotic object and the cause of uproar. Moreover, these works that can be included with the Flesh art current¹⁴⁶⁵ of Chinese experimental art are only a small part of this art current. Yet by focussing on them in such a massive way, they become representative of Chinese experimental art and hereby a new false stereotype is added to the already long list of existing stereotypes on Chinese (experimental) art.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Also commented on in *Des del País del Centre*, chapter 6 of Block II.

¹⁴⁶⁵ For an explanation on Flesh Art, see the introduction to Block II and paragraph 2.3 of Block II.

1.4 To conclude...

This conclusion will end with two questions that might be seen as the culmination point to which all these pages have led. First of all, can we speak of Chinese experimental art in a global context?

The answer is two-folded. On the one hand, the answer should be no. This dissertation defends the standpoint that the concept of “Chinese” experimental art is a highly complex definition. This has been extensively elaborated upon in paragraph 1.1 and 3.3 of Block I. What do we understand by “Chinese”? Does “Chinese” exist? Apart from the fact that the label is immensely reductive and generalizing, the word “Chinese” seems more of a “western” invention, an illusion. It might just be a strategy to, again, be able to identify the Other: the “Chinese” artist as the clear opposite of the Self, the Euroamerican. The word “Chinese” also attributes a rather exotic character to Chinese experimental art that seems to find its origins in the chinoiserie period of the 18th century. In that time China was the image of everything that was considered different and exotic. It represented the far-away, mysterious land of pig-tailed men, dragons, submissive concubines and vicious emperors. Some traces of this exoticized image have lingered into the twenty-first century and when the word “China” or “Chinese” is mentioned, a flash of these images comes to the Euroamerican mind. This makes Chinese experimental art highly attractive for the Euroamerican audience yet, on the other hand, it also impedes for this current to fully become a participant of the international art scene as an equal. By focussing on the “Chineseness” of Chinese experimental art, it will always remain the art of the Other.

The label Chinese is also almost always applied to the artists that no longer live and work in China. These artists, however, are hardly ever distinguished as such and are more often than not placed within the homogeneous group of “Chinese artists”. As explained in paragraph 3.3 of Block I, in the case of the overseas artists the word “Chinese” becomes even more problematic as some of these artists no longer feel “Chinese” as they have lived so many years outside of the mainland. For them, their identity and their art represents a hybrid space that combines elements of their inevitable Chinese background with the new, and in some cases “western” influences of their current environment (see paragraph 2.2 of Block I). Fei Dawei, for example, mentioned that he does not organize exhibitions on the “Chinese avant-garde” as he does not believe that this actually

exists.¹⁴⁶⁶ Chinese experimental art is an art current that is made out of individual artists, with their own unique perspectives and styles. Sweeping them all together into one anonymous group, even though sometimes necessary, is simply generalizing an enormously complex and versatile art.

Can we therefore speak of Chinese experimental art within a global context? The previous answers indicate that this is highly problematic and that the concept should not be taken lightly. Yet, on the other hand, the answer might be yes, but under certain conditions. Yes, it should be possible to speak of Chinese experimental art, just as it should be possible to speak of Indian, African, Hungarian or American art. The problem lies in the fact that one does not speak of *American* contemporary art. Damien Hirst is not considered an *English* contemporary artist and Jeff Koons is not emphasized as an *American* contemporary artist. Then why are all the artist studied within this dissertation portrayed as *Chinese* artists, members of the *Chinese* experimental art current? Why is there a separation between what is considered “contemporary art”, i.e. Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Euroamerican contemporary art; and *Chinese* experimental art, or Indian experimental art? Here, the inequality between what is considered the first world, the “West”, and the third world, “the rest”, can be clearly denoted.

The problem when one speaks of Chinese experimental art is that it generates certain expectations. When Chinese artists make artworks that cannot be clearly attributed to a Chinese tradition or image, their work is not understood and confusion arises. When a Chinese artist no longer makes “Chinese” art, how can this artist then be classified? This question points to a much bigger problem: the lack of acknowledgement for hybrid identities. It should not be a problem when a Chinese artist makes art that is no longer “Chinese”. Yet, in the Euroamerican context, it means that this artist no longer has an identity and therefore cannot be identified as the Other anymore. When a “Chinese” artist makes art that cannot be recognized as “Chinese”, he or she then becomes an artist with an “identity crisis”, an artist who copies the “West”, or an artist whose work is either ignored or not understood. In the international art world there is still no place and no widespread acknowledgment for these in-between, hybrid artists within an art scene that stubbornly clings to the importance of ethnic background.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Fei Dawei in Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese art outside China*, Edizioni Charta, Milano 2007, p. 122.

As long as this condition stays the same, the international art world, and especially Euroamerica will not be able to truly understand the art of the Other. And this brings us to our second and final question. Will we ever be capable of understanding art that is unfamiliar to our eyes? Naturally, we as spectators are conditioned by our own subjective vision that is made out of our personal life experiences, our mood, our knowledge of art, the things we have seen, and our either open-mindedness or narrow-mindedness. Yet, we can make an effort to switch off this internal voice conditioned by all these factors, even if it is just for an instant. We can try to look at artworks with all our primitive senses open and ready. As a fresh blank canvas not yet impregnated by any kind of stereotype, preconceived idea and unchallenged opinions. Often, looking at the artworks that have been seen within this study, one cannot deduce that the artist is Chinese, and it should not matter. The importance of the work does not lie in the ethnic background of the artist. It does not lie in the fact if the artwork meets or not the expectations of the international art world. What matters is the message it transmits, and this is almost always a universal message and not a “Chinese” one.

By trying to see the artworks through the eyes of the artist, considering these works as a unique result of his or her personal circumstances, life experiences, dreams, and fears, our horizons will expand as our preconceived ideas and stereotypes are being challenged. Instead of projecting our vision onto these creations, we can also try to silence the voice inside that searches for the confirmation of what we already know and that tries to protect us from questioning our own values and opinions. When the spectator is willing to let go of their need to define the Other, to differentiate among cultures and to limit identities to a national frontier, a first step has been made. As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, exhibitions can be stepping stones that facilitate this process that leads to a truly equal art scene, and the spectator is one of the stones within the process.

Another steppingstone can also be clearly differentiated and defined; it is namely the figure of the art curator. It has been alleged that curators in our current times have become somewhat of a random figure. Nowadays, anyone with free time on hands and the right connections can become a curator. And it is not necessarily mandatory to be an expert on the arts, or even to have a genuine interest for the arts for that matter.¹⁴⁶⁷ As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, exhibitions are sometimes held for

¹⁴⁶⁷ See the critical article of Rosa Olivares, *La exposición como herramienta*, Exit Books, Libros de Arte y Cultural Visual nº 17, 2012. For the full article see: <http://www.revistasculturales.com/articulos/121/exit-book-libros-de-arte-y-cultural-visual/1617/1/la-exposicion-como-herramienta.html>. Date of last consultation 20/8/2014.

commercial reasons and in many cases the underlying motives for an exposition are monetary, converting the exhibition space into somewhat of a showroom, or somehow linked to promotional or propagandistic aims. Yet, when stripped of all these underlying intentions, exhibitions in its purest form are opportunities to learn, to see the world from a different perspective, to create new realities and to change what is expected. This study, among other topics, has focused on the creation of alternative spaces that question century-old models such as the centre-periphery model or the “East-West” dichotomy. Hybridity and the in-between spaces are examples of these horizon-expanding realities that put in evidence that these age-old systems are no longer valid and are held in place only for artificial, illusionary and often political (power) reasons. Therefore, in the twenty-first century the true professional and passionate art curator has become somewhat of a cultural mediator. An individual who creates bridges that connect ideas, cultures, people and continents. It is as the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has mentioned: “The task of curating is to make junctions, to allow different elements to touch (...). A form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, people or a world.”¹⁴⁶⁸ In the case of the third space, the art curator has become the person who amplifies the voice of the in-between artists who have become more numerous in our global times. The curator helps transmit *their* message, and not only facilitates but also physically becomes the space where crossings between life’s reality and art are made possible. Yet, as the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist very well states: “Fly-in, fly-out curating nearly always produces superficial results”.¹⁴⁶⁹ “There is also an extraordinary amnesia about exhibition history”.¹⁴⁷⁰ The question then arises: How to make exhibitions durable and to somehow preserve this transmission of knowledge and life-expanding ideas?

This brings us to our third identifiable steppingstone and that is the exhibition catalogue. Catalogues have a longer duration than surveys, which always end some day. The catalogue therefore becomes an essential tool when it comes to the preservation of the message that is transmitted by an exposition. Catalogues contain the essence of a survey, the ideas of the curators and other experts who have been invited to collaborate with it. It also contains colour plates of the artworks that were on display, sometimes explained by art experts or by the artists themselves. It is a palpable memory of an event,

¹⁴⁶⁸ OBRIST Hans Ulrich – with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶⁹ OBRIST Hans Ulrich – with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 24.

¹⁴⁷⁰ OBRIST Hans Ulrich – with RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, London, 2014, p. 58.

the exhibition, which shall always remain ephemeral. More importance should be given to the role of the catalogue as a didactical instrument and it should not be considered merely a mandatory, and often expensive, accessory to a survey. Art critics, when writing a review, should base part of their texts on the catalogue, and not only on their visit to the exposition which will always be biased by their personal and therefore subjective perspectives. Because art critics are the fourth identifiable steppingstone that can here be listed. They, just like the curators, are transmitters of messages. The reviews they write and that are often published in specialized magazines and daily newspapers probably generate a greater impact in society, as they are more widely accessed than the exhibition catalogues or the exhibition itself. Reading a review written by an art critic might be the decisive factor in deciding whether to visit an exhibition or not. It influences the way society perceives art, artists, artworks, and art currents like, in this case, Chinese experimental art. This study has made it quite clear that exhibition catalogues often try to transmit new ideas such as alternative spaces and the “west”-centric way in which non-Euroamerican art is received within the Euroamerican context. But, no matter how the catalogue challenges established status quo, if this is not taken over by the art critic, its impact is significantly reduced. Without the art critic on board, the path formed by steppingstones is incomplete and will not help us get across into new territories.

Exhibitions, curators, catalogues, and in some cases the art critic, show us that the difference between the Self and the Other is not as big as we human beings, out of fear, make believe. When we are willing to open our minds and expand our horizons beyond our comfort-zone, soaking up what these steppingstones have to offer us, the fear will disappear and only then might we get a glimpse of what it feels like to really see.

LIST OF EXHIBITIONS IN WHICH ARTISTS FROM THE SELECTED GROUP PARTICIPATED

This table contains all the exhibitions that were traced during these three years of research. The exhibitions included in this table are selected based on the fact that one or more of the nine artists chosen for this study participated in the survey. As can be observed, the earliest exhibition dates from 1987 and the latests from 2011.

It should be clarified that the exhibition *Chinese Avant-garde counter-currents in art and culture* that was held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in 1993 was initially selected for analysis within this study. However, after consulting the exhibition catalogue, the catalogue seemed more of a history book, limiting itself to giving a chronological explanation of Chinese experimental art. The author of this dissertation consulted the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong and they confirmed that no other catalogue was elaborated for this exhibition except for this book. It has therefore been decided to not include this exhibition within this study.

Also the exhibition *Power of the Word* (2000) was initially selected to be analysed as three artists of the selected group participated. Yet, posteriorly it was decided to not include this particular survey in this study as it somewhat fell out of tune with the other expositions. It did not specifically address the third space concept or the way Chinese experimental art was received within a Euroamerican context.

Lastly, as explained in the introduction, the exhibition *China's New Art Post-1989* is also not included in this study as it specifically mentions within the exhibition catalogue that the overseas artists are not distinguished from their mainland counterparts within the exposition.¹⁴⁷¹

¹⁴⁷¹ See the first page of the introduction to Block II for the exact quote by Chang Tsong-zung.

Year	Title	Place	CZ	GW	CGQ	HYP	YJC	XB	WD	WSZ	SY
1987	Dangerous Chessboard Leaves the Ground.	Art Gallery of York University Toronto		x				x			
1989	Magiciens de la Terre	Centre George Pompidou, Paris				x	x				
1990	Chine demain pour hier	Pourrières	x		x	x	x				
1991	Three installations by Xu Bing	Maddison									
1991	I don't want to play cards with Cézanne	Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena California							x		
1992	Small Medium Large Life Size.	Prato: Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci				x					
1993	Silent Energy	MoMa Oxford	x	x	x	x	x				
1993	My Home Is Your Home	Lodz, Poland: The Artists' Museum				x	x				
1993	New Art from China, Post-1989	London: Marlborough Fine Art							x		
1993	China's New Art Post-1989	University of Oregon Art Museum (e.o.)		x				x		x	
1993	Fragmented memory: the Chinese Avant-garde in Exiles	Ohio, USA		x		x		x		x	
1993	China Avant-garde: Counter-currents in Art and Culture	Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
1994	Flesh and Ciphers	Here Foundation, New York		x					x		
1994	Out of the centre	Pori Art Museum Finland	x			x	x				
1995	Open your mouth and close your eyes	Beijing-Berlin art exchange									
1995	In the Absence of Ideology	Hamburg: Kampnagel Hamburg									x
1995	Heart of Darkness	Kröller-Müller Museum Otterlo	x	x	x	x					
1995	West-Östliche Kontakte	Heidelberg: Heidelberger Kunstverein						x			
1995	Asian. Italy: Contemporary Art from the Far East	Fundazione Mudima				x					
1995	Change-Chinese Contemporary Art	Konsthallen Göteborg, Sweden									
1995	Des del país del centre: avant-gardes artistiques xineses	Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona		x		x		x		x	
1996	Galerie des Cinq Continents: Huang Yong Ping	Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris				x					
1996	China! Zeit genössische Malerei	Bonn Art Museum									
1996-1997	Face à l'histoire: 1933-1996	Centre George Pompidou, Paris				x					
1997	Uncertain Pleasure: Chinese Artists in the 1990's	Art Beatus, Vancouver					x		x		
1997	Flying Dragon in the Heavens	Denmark			x						
1997	Around Us, Inside Us—Continents	Boras, Sweden: Boras Museum of Art					x				

Title	Place	CZ	GW	CGQ	HYP	YJC	XB	WD	WSZ	SY
1997 Cultural Melting Baths	Queens Museum of Art			x						
1997 Another Long March: Chinese conceptual and installation art in the nineties	Fundament Foundation, Breda									
1997 Zeitgeössische Fotokunst aus der Volksrepublik China	Neuer Berliner Kunstverein									
1998 4696/1998 Contemporary Art from China	Art Beatus Gallery, Vancouver		x			x				
1998 Modern and Contemporary Art from the South of the Yangzi River	Vancouver									
1998 New Art from the '90s, Part II	Deste Foundation, Athens	x		X						
1998 Asian-American Artists: Cross Cultural Voices	Staller Centre for the Arts, New York		x							
1998 Animal. Anima. Animus	Pori, Finland: Pori Art Museum						x			
1998 Where Heaven and Earth Meet	Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York,			x			x			
1998 Crossings/Traversées	National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada			x			x			
1998 Inside Out	Asia Society New York, San Francisco Moma	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
1998 Die Hälfte des Himmels: Chinesische Künstlerinnen	Frauen Museum Bonn									
1998 Representing the People	Chinese Art Centre Manchester									
1999 Transcience	University of Chicago Smart Museum of Art		x				x			
1999 Contemporary Chinese Art and the literary Culture of China	Lehman College Art Gallery									
1999 Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s	Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York		x				x		x	
1999 Kunst-Welten im Dialog (Art-Worlds in Dialogue)	Museum Ludwig Köln, Cologne	x		x			x			
1997-1999 Cities on the move	Wiener Secession Vienna	x		x	x			x		x
2000 The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art and Project Axé	Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador da Bahia	x		x						
2000 Paris pour escale	Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France	x		x	x					x
2000 Continental Shift	Musee d'Art Moderne Liege, Belgium	x								x
2000 Power of the Word	Independent Curators International, New York		x				x			x
2000 Word and meaning: Six Ccartists	University of Buffalo Art Gallery, New York									
2000 Canceled: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China	Smart Museum of Art, Chicago									
2001 Living in Time	Week of Chinese culture Berlin									
2001 Word Play: Contemporary Art by Xu Bing	Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Washington D.C.									
2002 Paris-Pekin	Espace Cardin, Paris	x	x							x
2003 Alors, la Chine?	Year of Chinese culture France, Paris				x					

Year	Title	Place	CZ	GW	CGQ	HYP	YJC	XB	WD	WSZ	SY
2004	All Under Heaven	Museum of Contemporary Art of Antwerp	x		x		x				x
2004	Le moine et le démon	MAC Lyon				x	x				x
2005	On the Edge	Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, USA				x		x			
2005	The Wall: reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art	Buffalo Fine Arts Academy. Albright Knox Gallery			x			x			
2006	La Force de l'Art, Laboratoire Pour un Avenir Incertain	Grand Palais, Paris, France	x				x				
2006-2007	Wherever we go	Milan Spazio Oberdan, San Francisco art Institute				x					x
2007	Energies-Synergy, Tradition, Expansion, Exile, Individual	Galerie: De 11 Lijnen, Oudenbourg, Belgium	x					x			
2010	Director's Choice	ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, Denmark	x								
2011	L'Odyssée de l'Espace 1989/2011	Centre d'art contemporain de Colomiers, France	x								
2011	TRA Edge of Becoming	Palazzo Fortuny, Venezia, Italy	x								
2011	Repères – 10 Ans	Espace Topographie de l'art, Paris, France	x								

CZ: Chen Zhen
 GW: Gu Wenda
 CGQ: Cai Guoqiang
 HYP: Huang Yongping
 YJC: Yang Jiechang
 XB: Xu Bing
 WD: Wang Du
 WSZ: Wu Shanzhuan
 SY: Shen Yuan

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