

RHYTHMS OF ANGER

*Daoism and Chinese Untrammelled Painting,
Toward a Counter-Theorisation of avant-garde*

M. Yektaparast

Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of
the Doctor of Philosophy

2010

University of Western Sydney

"But it so happens that when the native hears a speech about western cultures he pulls out his knife, or at least he makes sure it is within reach"

[Fanon, 1967, p.33]

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution. Please note that everything that is not in inverted commas is the author's.

.....

Signature

RHYTHMS OF ANGER

*Daoism and Chinese Untrammelled Painting,
Toward a Counter-Theorisation of avant-garde*

mahmoud yektaparast

(Master of Fine Arts - University of New South Wales)

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Western Sydney

2010

Acknowledgements

A large number of past and present artists, thinkers and people in general have contributed to the ideas, propositions and statements put forward in these essays. The space here however, allows for naming only a few:

Angela Davis, bell hooks, Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, Zhuang Zi, Aboo Saeed Abol-kheir, Sheikh Attar, Omar Khayam, Karl Marx, Terayama Shuji, Alejandro Jodorovsky and Glauber Rocha.

AND

Farzin Yekta, Safina Uberoi, Rose Nakad, Rihab Charida from Safsaf in Palestine, Terumi Narushima, Taloi Havini, Fabio Cavadini, Mandy King, Himman Dhamija, Zhang Jianpu, Liu Shan, Li Gang, Mohamad Yekta and Nima Yektaparast who provides the thread with which I cling to life.

Juan Francisco Salazar, main supervisor, and Hart Cohen, co-supervisor, School of Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney.

LIST OF FIGURES	8
ABSTRACT.....	9
INTENTIONS	10
Theories of the avant-garde are Eurocentric.....	11
What is the importance of the present study?	14
REVERSE INTRODUCTION: ART IS NOT A TOOL, IT IS A WEAPON ¹	19
1/ SLOGUN	21
1.1/ WEEK ONE: "PERSONAL IS POLITICAL"	21
1.2/ WEEK TWO: "THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED"	23
1.3/ WEEK THREE: "BECAUSE REFLECT DIDN'T DO SHIT FOR US..."	26
1.4/ WEEK FOUR: ARTWORK AS "DEATH RATTLE OF A BEHEADED CHICKEN"	27
1.5/ WEEK FIVE: HOW TO MAKE WHAT WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE MADE....	30
1.6/ WEEK SIX: ART WORK AS SLOGAN	32
1.7/ SLOGUN: THE SCRIPT.....	35
2/ "PLAYING MUSIC FOR COWS" ²	39
2.1/ Un-Orthodox Orthodoxy.....	58
2.2/ "Climbing Trees To Seek Fish"	66
2.3/ "This is so, not to be explained"	78
2.4/ Flashback	81
3/NO TIME FOR TIME	82
3.1/ The unconventional and the "abnormal"	82
3.2/ The "method of no method"	84

3.3/ The idea as "rhythmic vitality"	85
3.4/ "Those who have no shame grow rich"	86
3.5/ "untrammelled" as perpetual amateur	89
3.6/ non-humanism.....	91
3.7/ From Water and Smoke.....	94
3.8/ "All that is Solid melts into Air" in Beijing.....	97
4/ WITH A MEGAPHONE IN HAND.....	99
5/ READINGS	105
5.1/ Informational	105
5.2/ Essential	105
5.3/ Inspirational	112
6/ EPILOGUE: BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED FROM.....	118
NOTES	119
1. Methodology of opposition.....	119
2. Daoism and Modernism	136
3. I read these books, so you don't!	151
BIBLIOGRAPHY	162
Inspirational	162
Essential	163
Informational.....	165
Un-Bibliography	169

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Painting by *Ba Da Shan Ren* (17th century,) taken from *Weidao Risun*

(*为道日损*), People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2006

Figure 2: Painting by *Ba Da Shan Ren* (17th century,) *Ibid.*

Figure 3: Painting by *Ba Da Shan Ren* (17th century,) *Ibid.*

Figure 4: Chinese character for water (水)

Figure 5: Painting by Pablo Picasso (20th century,) taken from S.P.A.D.E.M,

Paris/V.A.G.A, New York, 1986 (rotated at 90 degrees and flipped

horizontally)

ABSTRACT

Philosophy, arts and politics share a passion for dissent. Avant-garde art, as that which mines the territories of the conventions and undermines the what is, has always existed as a social and highly political phenomenon.

“Rhythms of Anger” is, theoretically, an anti-colonial research that highlights the existence of Daoist texts, aesthetic theories and artistic styles in the Chinese paintings that antedate the European Modernist and Avant-garde impulses by at least a millennium. Thus, it opens ways for a counter-theorisation and re-theorisation of the predominantly Eurocentric, already existing theories of the avant-garde. Practically, and through the two short films, it exemplifies how Daoist philosophy could inspire the creation of contemporary avant-garde work.

In the meantime, class, gender and racial injustices have governed human beings’ lives since their very first attempt at getting together. Rhythms of Anger is an attempt at theorising the coordinates of an un-humanist thought that challenges modernism as an extension of the project of European Enlightenment, a project of hope, and therefore prone to be incorporated, established, and become politically reactionary.

The present thesis involved the production of two short experimental films. The first titled *Slogun* was produced in Sydney in 2006/2007 and the second one titled “*All That is Solid Melts into Air*” was shot in Beijing in 2008. As creative work component, they account for 50% of the thesis.

INTENTIONS

The main purposes of the present research study are to:

Argue that all major existing theorisations of the avant-garde are Eurocentric.

Experimental innovation and political opposition have been practiced by

many painters in China from 700 A.D. to 1700 A.D. Parallel to this, a

consistent art theory that has tried to discuss such experimental,

"individualist," or "untrammelled" paintings have existed.

That the experimental art and art theory of China has been the primary result

of the influences of Daoist thought and philosophy. The ancient Daoist texts,

and the art theory and work that such texts gave rise to, could inspire the

creation of contemporary experimental political work.

To make two short films that could exemplify such inspiration.

To challenge the theories of the inception and conception of the avant-garde

which will pave the way for an anticolonial counter-theorisation of it, a

discussion of the Chinese Daoist philosophy and experimental painting and

how they could inspire aesthetic experimentation and political opposition in

art would further help the coming to life of such counter-theorisation;

furthermore, such study might inspire other researchers to look for the

"avant-garde," "experimental," and non-conformist impulses in the history of

other non-European cultures that would in turn promote the need for the "re-

theorisation" of the avant-garde.

To experiment with the form of thesis writing and presentation in order to challenge and question the rigidity of the rules and regulations of western academic establishment. The way this thesis is written and the two short films made in the course of study, their formal strategies, are designed to reinforce their oppositional methodology and exemplify the coordinates of future attempts at a counter-theorisation of the avant-garde.

Theories of the avant-garde are Eurocentric

I must clear a very important issue. This thesis is NOT about contemporary avant-garde film. I make politically oppositional experimental films but the main crux of this thesis (in regards to the avant-garde) is firstly, that the dominant discourse around its inception and conception is Eurocentric or as Elam calls it "white avant-garde." [*Harding and Rouse (ed.,) 2006, p.8*]

The geography of this "white" avant-garde is Europe and North America, and its time is the 19th-20th centuries. Therefore, to be able to challenge these times and places as the original sources of the inception and conception of the avant-garde, is also to challenge its Eurocentrism, or its whiteness. In fact, there is a vital relation between "the existence of earlier moments" of the avant-garde, and, once found and located, the necessity and possibility of its re-theorisation. [see Scheunemann (ed.,) [2000] although this book also remains fully Eurocentric because its main contention is that instead of the

Europe and North America of the 1920s and 30s, one must look at an Europe that includes Vienna, Berlin, and St Petersburg of the 1890s to 1920s.]

Experimental political art and art theory has existed in China for 2000 years. Therefore, I have provided a detailed research to find a non-linear, non-progressive but consistent existence of not only aesthetically innovative and politically oppositional paintings, but more importantly, the existence of art theorists who treated it as a "category of cultural criticism" [*Harding and Rouse, eds., 2006, p.33.*] As such, I argue that avant-garde existed well and truly in practice and theory in the period I am covering which is 700-1700 A.D. in Chinese painting. Theoretically and as mentioned, this pinpointing of the "earlier moments" of the avant-garde, not only as "gesture" but as a "category of cultural criticism." undermines the whiteness of the already existing theories of it, and provides a foundation upon which the re-theorisation and counter-theorisation of the avant-garde would become possible. As far as I know, there is only one, very recent, book [*Harding & Rose, 2006*] that has called for a similar need for a non-Eurocentric re-theorisation of the avant-garde.

Practically, I have gone through the making of the two short films as part of this study, as exercises in getting inspiration from the material I was researching, that is, the Daoist philosophy and its non-humanist principles of perpetual transformation, experimentation, and opposition to the status-quo. The principles that also inspired the "untrammelled" painters of China

between 700 A.D. and 1700 A.D. It should be noted that, my intention is not to discover "identities," but similarities. Since any attempt to find identities has a core of "westoxication" (being intoxicated by the West) in it.

"Therefore, when investigating relationships between the Western avant-garde and African performance traditions, one must not look for identities, but rather try to explore significant affinities and similarities."

[Harding & Rose (ed.,) 2006, p.68]

What is the importance of the present study?

To open ways for counter-theorisation and re-theorisation of the avant-garde: Avant-garde studies is almost untouched by the most recent postmodern and postcolonial theories that have, to varying degrees, challenged the western tradition of "historical idealism," that is, the progressivist and linear history of premodern, modern, postmodern Europe. To touch it, or rather to push it off the edge, as this study intends to do, is an original contribution to the promotion of forgotten but much needed anticolonial and subjugated knowledges.

"...that echo and its reaffirmation of Poggioli's linear conception of history play off what has amounted to an oddly tolerated conceptual inconsistency that has positioned the history of the avant-garde with a posited temporal linearity even as it has repeatedly emphasized the avant-garde's rupture with history...avant-garde studies to be one of the last refuges for conception of history grounded in philosophical idealism...need to challenge...conventional Eurocentric history of the avant-garde and beyond the suggestion of their European origins."

[Harding & Rose (ed.,) 2006, p.12]

Accordingly, the field of avant-garde studies is in "a pressing (scholarly) need" for a major rattling of the foundations of its principal assumption: that

the avant-garde is a uniquely European concept of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The present work will not "contribute" to such "already existing knowledge," but, rather, deploys aesthetic and theoretical strategies that aim to undermine and destroy its Eurocentric assumptions.

Another anticolonial and original contribution of this study is that it contributes to the undermining of "[t]he institutional division of labor in western academia (where) the examination of China's role in global modernity is still confined within the perimeters of China Studies or Sinology." [*Liu, 2000, p.11*] The bulk of my research is about China and ancient Chinese art theories and paintings, but it is being done within the confines of avant-garde and communication arts studies.

The present study has also intuited the urgent need for a re-theorisation and counter-theorisation of the avant-garde as a theoretical and practical assault on the Eurocentric limitations of the already existing theories. It highlights a paradox at the heart of existing theorisations of the avant-garde: on the one hand, the avant-garde's "overriding objective" has always been to create something new and to keep alive the idea of newness and its vital importance for the production of artistic and cultural forms. What, yet another Eurocentric theorist of it called "rejection of the past and...the cult of the new." [*Calinescu, 1987, p.117*]

On the other hand and in contradiction to such commitment to the "new," the history of the avant-garde reveals huge un-acknowledged borrowings from the past, specifically a non-European past. And no amount of calling this burrowing from the past "primitivism" could eradicate the paradox.

"Certainly this was the case with western modernism's fascination with what it appropriated from other cultures under the rubric of primitivism, an appropriation that provided what subsequently became staple contours of European avant-garde expression." [*Harding & Rose (ed.,) 2006, p.21*]

"[e]ssential components and characteristics of their (western avant-garde) aesthetics and art works are neither new nor a uniquely western innovation. Nonnaturalism and the collage format had been dominant characteristics of cultural production in premodern societies, African societies in particular, for centuries." [*Harding & Rose (ed.,) 2006, p.88*]

The present research study highlights this paradox of the European avant-garde through uncovering the fundamental characteristics of the non-representational and abstract Chinese paintings such as "splashing ink at the surface of painting" or "blowing paint powder on to the scroll in order to create cloud effects," the use of empty space, surreal anecdotes in Daoist writings, and the like. It also practically demonstrates how this philosophy

and art could inspire the production of experimental political films. (The practical components of the study.)

"Not the other avant-garde" [Harding and Rouse (ed.,) 2006] is full of attempts at making new fields of studies of the avant-garde open in a way that they highlight the "transnational" aspect of it. It is interesting that the time of the publishing of this book coincides with around the time that I began thinking about the subjects of the present thesis. I became aware of this book only last year. According to this book, my thesis is addressing an almost lack in the field: opening new ways to challenge the "already existing Euro-centric theories of the conception of the avant-garde." While this book emphasises the contemporary practices of the avant-garde (more within performance art and the practice of the avant-garde) and argues that one must acknowledge a kind of "simultaneity" when one thinks about the western and non-western "avant-gardes," and bases its arguments on "borderline" theories of Bhabha [1994] and others, my further original contribution is that I have found a consistent precedent both in theory and practice of experimental radical art based on not "borderline," but, oppositional strategies and theories. In other words, while Harding and Rouse [2006] go as far as trying to broker a compromise by asserting that the inception of the avant-garde was the result of "inter-cultural exchange" and that everybody influenced everybody, I (and this is another original

contribution) am providing a case study that "avant-garde as aesthetic innovation and political resistance" against the status-quo of the time has been well and truly in motion in China from 700 A.D. I have followed very difficult-to-trace aesthetic singularities (more theoretical and less practical as many of works have not survived) within a thousand year period. This opens an encouraging and exciting path for future researchers from very many different cultures to look for and identify the non-European singularities as precedents that can culminate in, not so much "re-theorising," but counter-theorising of the inception and conception of the avant-garde.

Another important original unsettling contribution of the present study is that, I have highlighted the strong links between humanism as the most enduring and dominant school of human thought on the one hand, and the Eurocentric theories of modernism and the avant-garde and aesthetics of hope, on the other. However, I have done this through promotion of oppositional thought by identifying moments, events, and traditions in non-European cultures (in this instance China) that could not be categorised as having been inspired by humanist thoughts and philosophies. Both theoretically and practically, I have tried to turn my encounter with Daoist and later art theory texts and art works of ancient China into an occasion for creative articulation of non-humanist aesthetics of no hope.

REVERSE INTRODUCTION: ART IS NOT A TOOL, IT IS A WEAPON¹

How does one even begin to write something that, somehow, does not reek of the stench of association with power? We all are the major ingredients of the filth that runs through the human existence simply because we are. The question is that of the extent. And this doesn't mean that grey has overwhelmed black and white. But that black and white have been propagated ad-infinitum. In other words, normalised.

Normalisation is violent as a matter of principle. It depends on the termination of all signs of life in the bodies of what dares, or just happens to be blocking its way. Like a sewerage in fact.

Therefore, and at the outset, I acknowledge the fact that I am writing as a middle-age middle-class (globally speaking upper middle-class) man. I try to be aware of this subject position as I question, theorise, argue and conceptualise. I will make every effort to betray all these positions, and the automatic privileges that accompany them, at every step of the work.

The basic methodology of this project is a deliberate and ever present connection to what is happening "on the ground." The project is not produced in social and political vacuum. What is happening around me in this world is an essential part and parcel of what I imagine, write, and create. For this awareness, I owe a great deal to the works of Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison and bell hooks, among other thinkers, who have detailed the coordinates of class, race and gender injustices that govern our lives. Thus on

many occasions, this text will be interrupted by the flow of emotions/thoughts stemming from current affairs.

In order to begin practicing what I preach from the start, I will leave the rest of the “introduction” and plunge into my first interventionist work during this research as it happened.

The government of the United States of America decided to let the Zionist Israeli State’s military machine loose and to arrange for the invasion of Lebanon a few months ago (July, Aug 2006.) I witnessed how a plan for a “new Middle-East” by the U.S and Israel meant the heavy bombardment and murder of predominantly women and children in the south of Lebanon. An act in addition to the daily race-eradication of Palestinians by the Zionist regime that has been going on during the last sixty years. I also witnessed the methods with which democracy, as the most cherished achievement of the capitalist system, was (and is) being exported through F-16s, battleships and gun barrels. I read and heard stories of the victims of this new world order. And an idea for a short film germinated and gathered enough momentum to leap out of my body. A month before the invasion, I didn’t even think that I would be creating the dream of an eight year old Lebanese boy who is currently carrying many pieces of shrapnel in his body; the body whose collapse as a result of a nerve-pinch by one of these pieces of shrapnel is a matter of time, (and a short one too.)

1/ SLOGUN

The most recent (this text was written before the 2009 invasion of Gaza strip) destruction of civilian infrastructure and lives in Lebanon by the state of Israel lasted thirty three days. During the six weeks of heavy bombardment I had email contacts with some of the people who were living the hell that the "secular" world, through "the only democracy in the Middle East," was raising in the land of the "fundamentalists." Every week I wrote a short essay and sent it to the people who had decided to stay in Lebanon and make art work there. In return, they would send accounts of their "ordinary" encounters with people and places. One of these accounts was about an injured Lebanese boy and his shrapnel-ridden body who believed that what had happened to him had been a dream that had come true. I, on my part, decided to imagine his dream. A dream that intentionally avoids scenes of destruction and blood-let, scenes that have become an ordinary viewing pleasure for the western viewers of commercial and non-commercial television stations. I wrote the script within the next two months and shot the film in December, 2006.

1.1/ WEEK ONE: "PERSONAL IS POLITICAL"

"Your time is your breath in between two breaths, one passed and the other not here yet. Gone is yesterday, and tomorrow is far away. The day is today and today is this hour and this hour is this breath and the breath is time."

[Attar cited in Ahmadi, 2000]

To notice the instant is to notice death. To notice death is to hover around areas where flashforwards and flashbacks clash. To be in a clash, one not only has to see, but to sense black and white. We all know binary oppositions are bad for you. But they exist.

Everything is extreme in a war zone. Either the explosion of bombs, or silence. Either no food, or plenty. Either too much, or nothing. To notice the instant, is to notice the war zone.

Time is not money. It is incorporeal. Capital collected the pasts of the instant as memory and invested its futures as security. Instant is the site of co-existence of existence and non-existence. To be in a war zone is to notice this co-existence.

To live is to take sides. To take sides is to notice the binary oppositions. The way things are, has rendered the binary oppositions invisible because it has largely eliminated, well, the opposition. To be in a war zone is to witness the reappearance of what had been forced to disappear.

For years, the western philosophy has tried hard to eliminate taking sides from thought. Reason has pushed back partiality in to the territories of Emotion. Meanwhile, in the hierarchy of the army of Reason, Emotion has been established as a foot soldier. Creating artwork is to create instances of insurgency against the army of Reason and the undermining of its infrastructure, the status-quo.

1.2/ WEEK TWO: "THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED"

So

This:

"For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom...it is the freedom to make public use of one's reason at every point. But I hear on all sides, 'Do not argue!' The officer says: 'Do not argue but drill!' The tax collector: 'Do not argue but pay!' The cleric: 'Do not argue but believe!' Only one prince in the world says, 'Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!"

[kant, 1784]

Was

What

Enlightenment,

Meant

By enlight?:

(What? You go around burning people alive because they say no to your values; and I can't even put a colon after your question mark?)

To

Take delight,

In

The

Other's

Plight.

Obvious is that which is its own evidence. To be sane is to accept the obviousness of the obvious, to be oblivious to the fact that it has a history. And a violent one, too.

That Democracy is good, is obvious. That it is the fruit of the natural evolution of the Enlightenment, is also obvious. That going forward and progress are the destiny of human being, goes without saying. Here is a matter of fact: We are right.

To be sane is to believe that it's all good.

"Everything comes with a price!" Capital proved this not long ago, through wiping everything indigenous in its way, out. Democracy is just gently reminding the Palestinian and Lebanese people of this.

You might not want me, but you still have to pay, Democracy tells them.

And because you don't have oil reserves, which means, you don't have money, it continues.

I am afraid you are going to pay with your lives, it fires.

It is at the height of its power that a mechanism becomes the site of its own demise. Democracy is parading the coordinates of its power. Through generous use of laser-guided intelligent missiles, Democracy has begun to question its self-evidentiary goodness. Freedom or "free doom?"

Bizarre is that which undermines the obvious. To create an artwork, is also to notice the bizarre. The way Francis Bacon noticed a pig under the skin of the white men he painted. Bizarre is the revolt against the given. The way Bunuel's upper-middle-class characters shit in public and eat in hiding. It's the questioning of the accepted. When Juan Rulfo's small town moves through its smell on the shoulders of wind: "But the town is still far off. It is the wind that brings it close." [Rulfo, 2003] Bizarre investigates the set of relations and forces that constitute the truth through heightened sensations that perpetually travel in time, the way Pasolini edits "Pigsty".

To create artwork is, above all, a refusal to mature.

A disability to measure things up.

Courage to experiment.

A start from less than scratch every time.

A fascination with the unknown.

A fear of comfort.

A distrust of ease.

A will to not be governed,

Not even by Time.

"Diary

Grown up? Never-never!

Like existence itself

Which never matures

Staying always green

From splendid day to splendid day-

I can only stay true

To the stupendous monotony

Of the mystery,

That's why I have never abandoned myself

To happiness,

That's why

In the anxiety of my sins

I have never been touched

By real remorse.

Equal, always equal,

To the inexpressible

At the very source

Of what I am."

[Pasolini, c1986]

1.3/ WEEK THREE: "BECAUSE REFLECT DIDN'T DO SHIT FOR US..."

[Baraka, 2000]

To make a work of art is to perform a creative act. What is a creative act? What does one do when one creates? To begin with, one never creates in general. One creates a painting, a sound piece, a film, an installation (to do with art work), or a concept (to do with philosophy.) It follows that, generally speaking, every act of creation is a concrete experiment; an unrepeatable, multi-directional and singular attempt at sensing what has remained un-sensed.

Experiment is a response to some necessity. Ideas are slippery raw materials of necessities. They are not exclusive territories that guide the initiated to the domain of the Divine. Rather, they are de-territorialising singularities that challenge the Universal. As soon as I have an idea, I am engaged in a particular activity. But how is this particular activity different from other activities? For example, how is making a film different from any type of work such as making a chair? Not much, if one is not making an experimental film. This is not a question of hierarchies but, rather, one of creating as opposed to reproducing.

If philosophy is not to reflect on or "think about" things but to think the unthought, then the purpose of creating art work is certainly not to communicate or provide information. To communicate, is to use the already existing signs that make communication possible. It implies a certain kind of conformity to the rules that govern the distribution of these signs; how and by whom and to what extent they are used. To communicate, one has to utilise the systems of the "distribution of the sensible" without intervention.

To create, on the contrary, is to intervene, to disturb, to cause ruptures in the very fabric of what makes clear communication. To create is to fight for Time and Space. Time and Space to do what? To expose the common to the uncommon. To make visible, audible and touchable what is invisible, inaudible and untouchable in the way people sense the world around them. To create is to question the limits of the sensible in a given time and place.

As such, aesthetic practices are acts of dissent. They are experiments in creating temporal and spatial sites where the impossible touches the possible. And these sites are political by definition. What is politics if not, primarily, resistance against the way things are? To resist is to unlearn privilege. To stray out of the orbit of one's comfort zone. To recognise the cesspool of racial, gender, and class injustices in which we are all floating, and to unsettle its odorous air of stability. To create is to undermine power.

1.4/ WEEK FOUR: ARTWORK AS "DEATH RATTLE OF A BEHEADED CHICKEN"

Be Scared

Of the explosion of impossible

Within the bodies of the possible

The epidemic of margin

In the territories of the centre

The virus of singular

In the bloodstreams of the collective

The spasm of becoming

Under the skin of the being

Modernism, above all, is a humanist game. As such, its rules of play are not different from its classical ancestors and a lot of its postmodern off springs.

Given in this game is the superiority of human beings. When it comes to our survival, other species can go, well, to hell. The game also declares us as good in nature. It points to the images of our babyhood and childhood and asks us to play "fair" by believing in our essential innocence. When, and if, we notice the extremely minimal time it takes a lot of us to leap from innocence to monstrosity, the game has already started, and we have to play.

This kind of game has a purpose. If in Classical times the purpose was to create copies of ourselves and states of being as close to the original as possible, then the modernist era has made this purpose fuzzier. But the game has goals all the same. We have to advance forward. We have to have hope for our future, even if it means getting shocked out of our comfortable present.

It is this hope that threads, in principle, the seemingly fundamentally different classical and modernist eras, where the former hoped that the world was how it was imagining it to be, and, the latter hopes it could be better than what it is. Even in its most fragmented and dismembered aspects, modernism is the cradle of an aesthetics of hope. The revolutionary and avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century and the 60s and 70s, are no exception. Behind all the deforming of the forms, the scratching of the negative, the silencing of the noise, the violating of the canvas, and the invading of the taste; the avant-garde remained within the framework of the aesthetics of hope. It craved for a better future. And as such, it remained a collective opposition that was antagonised, tolerated, and finally marketed

by Capital, as is obvious by the multimillion Dollar deals transactions of the works of its most distinguished icons.

Capital has survived, above all, by breeding its “healthy” opposition. Such opposition has hopes, aspirations, and organisation. When there is hope, there is that incorporeal entity that works as the axis of organisation. When there is organisation, Capital has found, and will always find, ways of marketing its axis.

What is hope? Hope is counter-revolutionary. A real free rope that we hang our present with, for an imaginary future. And what is despair? A “healthy” opposition, *the* alternative, to hope. What if we could imagine other alternatives to hope? A perpetual transformative movement that drifts outside the accepted conventions of opposition and in to the realms of extremes. Ghost appearances in the misty air of the real. A refusal to settle, and therefore, avoid being targeted.

What retains the option to disappear, terrorises. The Aesthetics of no hope, and not despair, do not play the modernist game. It abandons the idea of appealing to that elusive “good” core of human nature. Turning this very nature on its head, it sets itself in to motion by breaking out of the shackles of achievement. Aesthetics of no hope could be the site of interchangeability of senses. It tastes images, hears colours, sees sounds, and touches everything. Yet, it always remains a touch beyond touch.

1.5/ WEEK FIVE: HOW TO MAKE WHAT WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE MADE

I didn't want to write anything for this week. Then I thought I have been writing, in anger, about quite heavy stuff so far. And I thought it wouldn't do much harm if I drew a few ideas from the lighter side of things: the slow-motion of a heart while it sinks; the extreme close-up of an hair when it stands and defines goose-bump; the fast-forward of the blood rush on to cheeks, a blush; the thunderbolt silence of a furtive look; the reverse-motion of two hands that almost touched. Tacky stuff. Materials of surface.

If not for anything else, our times must be credited with bringing the importance of the surface, to surface. To be able to feel the cool skin of the moon on the surface of water, one has to refuse to be dragged in to the unclear depth of causalities. Things get to know of each other's existence through surfaces. Everything that has intensity has skin: winter, sorrow, death, love, dream, Time.

To notice surface, is to get prepared to touch Time, to stroke its skin and feel its invisible grooves. Surface renders hierarchies irrelevant. It is the site of horizontal revolutions. Surface challenges the masculinist tradition that equates depth and meaning, with reason playing the go-between. Love and surface have similar textures. They are both made from the same unreasonable material. Surface always points at touch as the superior sense. It is difficult to maintain a single direction when moving, or rather, slipping on the surface. Accidents, coincidences, and events get the chance to be themselves on the surface. Here, everything is mortal. Things do not stay in

one place for long. Better still, they do not stay at all. Surface is the shifting stage for the art of disappearance.

Sensations are nomadic assaults on the surface of the body, the skin. Sliding on the surface of things, one doesn't get the time to make sense. Instead, there is a vast space on which one can create sensations. Sense puts things in order, while sensation shifts borders and creates disorder. To create sensations is to notice nerves.

Life?

To run

Until the amber end of a look

To jump

In the hollow valley of a sound

To fear

The cold approach of a touch

To spin

With the vague wefts of an idea.

1.6/ WEEK SIX: ART WORK AS SLOGAN

What is intensity? A lot of Time in no time. Which means not acknowledging Time as duration. To load Time to the point of beyond explosion, and exist in its shrapnel. Intensity is a shrapnel in the depth of Time's flesh. It is too dangerous to take it out. It has to be lived with. One has to get used to its unprovoked and sudden moves; and its painfully uncalculated corporeal reminders of incorporeal entities, including death.

Bar kharaabehaayeh

Ayandeh

Gor migirad

Gozashteh.

On the
Debris of
Future,
Burns
Past.

Intensity is this Palestinian little girl who turned sixty over night when she lost all her family members to an American rocket. She didn't get the time to naturally witness their inevitable autumn leave-like fall from the tree branches of life, one by one. She had to be burnt with them in a summer of hell, in one go. Go argue with *her* that everything must have a beginning, middle, and end. Put some order in *her* chronology. Ask *her* not to be polemical. Beg *her* to not have belief!

Slogan is intensive language. A lot of not only words but feelings of joy, grief, anger and most importantly defiance, mix and merge to create a slogan.

Slogan does not explain or inform. It hi(n)ts. It is not a tool, but a weapon. It has the ability to move fast and a long way and to explode at the destination, like a projectile. Slogan is contagious because it intentionally, or better still, necessarily, targets the conventional relationship between space and time. In it, in the space of a few words that often barely make a sentence, ghosts of decades and centuries hover. Slogan is a lot of time in a bit of space. It is an event that occurs in the battlefield and is the proof of the reversibility of the rules of the game.

Monopoly is the blood stream of Capital. Market constantly attempts to buy the exclusive rights to Slogan through the media, academic, art and science industries. In the crowded labyrinth of the Market, slogan and lie have become synonymous. But slogan is the stuff of Language. It is a virus. Just when the body of power feels safe, slogan can suddenly mess up with its blood stream.

Discuss with *her* why she shouldn't be chanting slogans.

“two days ago i went to tyre(sour) in south of lebanon. I met a family that i knew. hamaadi, a six year old boy, came in. his body was full of short sharp lines of shrapnel. he was sitting outside his house. the plane drops a bomb in front of the house. hamaadi flew into the air about sixty meters and land on the roof of the neighbour's house. he had around twenty shrapnel in his body. some went inside his liver, kidney and skull and he had a broken hand and a broken leg. so what happens he gets up after landing on the roof. goes washes himself somewhere close by in the creek and goes to his grandparents down the road. then he collapses. when i saw him his version of the day was that he had a dream that he flew in the air. i asked him what about the lines on his body. he said some dreams come true. hamaadi did age. his dad saying that he has a problem because hamaadi does not talk anymore. he fucking shouts. All his lip and mouth

movement are like normal talking but he screams everything. And he is not even deaf. He can hear you whispering.”

From an email from Lebanon just after the Israeli invasion(unedited)

1.7/ SLOGUN: THE SCRIPT

It happens just before noon, in broad daylight. I begin as an unusually big chunk of a sugar cube. I am on fire, free falling into a bucket of boiling tar. I can feel the soft, dangerously tempting sound of fresh asphalt breathing the hot air nearby. As I fall into the tar I become a much smaller piece of sugar cube, this time slowly dissolving at the bottom of a glass cup of tea. I scream:

“A documentary about now!”

I don't think I have ever been here before. It is early in the morning. The sun has not yet had the chance to disperse a thin layer of mist that is milk-bathing rows of trees by the side of a small lake. I am riding on a boat watching the trees getting smaller as the boat moves away from the shore. I would have liked it to be moving closer but I don't have any control over what is happening. Heavy smell of gasoline overwhelms the scent of wet tree trunks. I scream again:

“Here and everywhere!”

I am sure it was the smell. Since I am now a glistening patch of gasoline swimming in the waters of a narrow creek. I don't have a choice but to slowly slide down the creek path, making purple and brown stains in the water. I pass over a useless punctured football, a few burnt matchsticks, and a small shredded single slipper. I get frightened and scream:

“Freedom!”

I am a big skein of dark grey smoke and exit the exhaust pipe of an old car as it is switched on. I go up and pass over a piece of charcoal sitting on a cool moist bed of tobacco at the top of an argileh. As I pass, the charcoal glows. Someone must have sucked at the pipe of the argileh. I can't work out who that is. I get frustrated and scream:

“Fear!”

I am a burning matchstick. I see a piece of ice in the middle of a saucer full of alcohol, throw myself in it and become a small, round and brief circle of fire around the ice. Then with that piece of ice, I join a few other pieces of ice in a glass of lime juice and water and begin melting. It must be really hot out there because we melt quickly and sweat is dripping down the side of the glass. I shiver and scream:

“Water!”

I am a lime rolling down a dirt road. In front of me there are seven small pieces of rock on top of each other, making a small tower. I approach fast and hit them. The tower is destroyed and the rocks are flown in different directions. It hurts and I scream:

“Food!”

As I move away from the distant lights that make small holes in the night over a big city, I realise I am surrounded by dark water. On the surface of the water a flat piece of wood is floating. On top of the plank there is a tray full

of wood charcoal burning. The flames scratch the dark in sharp thin bright lines as if someone is trying to stab the belly of night. I dodge and scream:

“Land!”

As I sit still in the receding heat of the summer sunset a bird flies down and lands on me. The bird is not heavy but I bend a little nonetheless. It sits on me, looks around for a while, gets bored and flies back up in the air. This makes me vibrate. Then I come to rest as if the bird had never sat on me. It is getting dark and people begin to turn the lights on. A big electric current runs through my body and I scream:

“Money!”

I am a broken window frame caught in a tangle of barbed wire. Shards of broken glass are hanging from me. A strong wind drags me on a deserted dirt road. The road is covered in burnt newspapers. I come to rest near a burning tyre. The remaining glass hanging off me shatters and I scream:

“War!”

In the calm quiet of an early autumn morning, I am a slight breeze drifting in and around a deserted building that might have been a school one day. As I pass over broken cobblestone a small leaf tumbles. On its back two ants are trying out different ways of carrying the leaf. It is too heavy for them. They leave it and move away. The leaf gets swept in to a pile of leaves that are burning against the wall of the building. I blow at the fire and scream:

“Oil!”

I am floating on the still waters of a lake groping through mangroves. It is still dark but early signs of morning throw themselves on the water like ghosts of sunrays, illuminate tree branches briefly and disappear. I look down from the trees on the water and see a small steel tub full of burning little cotton balls. The cotton balls are all bloodstained. I don't know where from but someone drops the burnt pieces of crushed bullet and shrapnel into the tub...

“Hello! My name is Ahmad. I turned sixty last week but they tell me I am only eight. They also tell me that I am at the hospital in Tyre in the south of Lebanon because a bomb was dropped in front of our house last week. That's not true. I just had a dream. My dream was just telling you what happened. Some dreams come true. And don't keep asking me not to scream. I am not screaming. This is the way I talk.”

The momentary tranquillity that is the result of total darkness begins to be disturbed when a number of people who are scattered on a flat land begin to light the oil lamps they are holding. As they turn the lamps on, they walk around, form a straight line and walk away. The light of the lamps that had managed to scratch darkness with dots, lines and curves of their movements disappears in distance.

2/ "PLAYING MUSIC FOR COWS"²

A musician lives in Beijing. His voice has the ability to bend. He believes in reincarnation. He told me the character for "convention" in Chinese includes two that say "man eat." "This is the Way of the Middle," he said. This, and later readings and viewings of centuries old Chinese paintings made me think about trying to have a minor encounter with some of the great ideas that inspired some of the most innovative and experimental of these works; ideas that not only became ways of lives, but also gave rise to an elaborate aesthetic paradigm. I accepted what I really am: an insignificant particle in this world and mingled with a "myriad" of sensations which included the sensation of being partial, taking sides.

I preferred Laozi and Zhuangzi to Confucius and Mozi because it (I prefer to call the early Daoist philosophy as well as the people who wrote the first accounts of it "it," because even the real existence of some of them are still being investigated, as well as the fact that "it" will make the task of assigning a gender to them difficult) didn't become the official tools of governing the country. Therefore, it had the ability to remain experimental. Dao remained very much attached to the realm of nothingness, if nothing can contain something named realm. It continued to have fun with life, and contemplated death, before having fun with that, too. It certainly imagined some of the most "surrealist" events before surrealism was named, and therefore claimed, in the West.

Zhuangzi stubbed out his still burning cigarette by sweeping off a fat drop of dew from a tree leaf in Ch'u...

“...he saw an old skull, all dry and parched. He poked it with his carriage whip and then asked, ‘Sir, were you greedy for life and forgetful of reason, and so come to this? Was your state overthrown and did you bow beneath the axe and so come to this? Did you do some evil deed and were you ashamed to bring disgrace upon your parents and family, and so come to this? Was it through the pangs of cold and hunger that you came to this? Or did your springs and autumns pile up until they brought you to this?’ When he had finished speaking, he dragged the skull over and, using it for a pillow, lay down to sleep. In the middle of the night, the skull came to him in a dream and said, ‘You chatter like a rhetorician and all your words betray the entanglements of a living man. The dead know nothing of these! Would you like to hear a lecture on the dead?’ ‘Indeed,’ said Chuang Tzu. The skull said, ‘Among dead there are no rulers above, no subjects below, and no chores of the four seasons. With nothing to do, our springs and autumns are as endless as heaven and earth. A king facing south on his throne could have no more happiness than this!’ Chuang Tzu couldn’t believe this and said, ‘If I got the Arbiter of Fate to give you a body again, make you some bones and flesh, return you to your parents and family and your old home and friends, you would want that, wouldn’t you?’ The skull frowned severely, wrinkling up its brow. ‘Why would I throw away more happiness than that of a king on a throne and take on the troubles of a human being again?’ It said.”

[Zhuangzi, 1968, pp193-94]

It is difficult to assume that one can create art work without first getting bodily engaged with a few simple questions. Questions such as why are we here? What is life, and death? What am I doing in the midst of all this? Is there a single, double, or multiple forces that drive the whole thing? What is fate? Does human being have a nature? Should I interfere in it at all or try to get away as much as possible or give up life’s petty happiness and choose death as relief? Whatever happened to justice?

Simple questions indeed! Daoist philosophy engages with such questions without simplistic attempts at trying to answer them. Inspired by the perpetual movements of the cosmos and the transitional nature of everything, Daoist texts are head buttings against some of these unanswerable questions, in order to create answerable questions.

It is painfully obvious that rich white men rule the bulk of our world. Even more painful is the fact that human society does not seem to be able to exist without injustice. It has never been. Rich eats poor, white savages black (this text has a strong commitment to Present and although in the past, men of other skin colours have dominated the world, at present, it is people with the white skin that commit unprecedented violence to assert authority on others) and man oppresses woman. This is the clear "bit" of our history; that we have never been able to swallow even the idea of equality and justice. That the air we have always breathed and are breathing is hierarchical. An art work is the imagining of the irreversible collapse of this hierarchy. And if inequality and human life are somehow intrinsically inseparable, then an art work is the essential terrifying questioning of the necessity of preserving this very life.



Figure 1: Nothing defines something

“Man’s nature is evil; goodness is the result of conscious activity. The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eye and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost. Hence, any man who follows his nature and indulges his emotions will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society, and will end as a criminal. Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that man’s nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.”

[Xunzi, 1963, p160]

Disregarding the strong authoritarian tendencies of Xunzi's assertion, his text is probably the first non-humanist philosophical exploration of the reality of human being's existence. In it, "man" does not “thread through the earth and sky”(as a Farsi saying goes when one argues at length in vain) in order to finally reach the same comforting conclusion as his predecessors and teachers in regard to “the essential goodness of human nature” and how forces outside him and his control, corrupt it.

There have been only a very few thinkers that have had the courage to question the “natural innocence” of their own species. Imam Ghazzali alchemized this "inborn innocence" within Islam. Schopenhauer shepherded

it into the stable of Christianity. Althusser had to use Marx as a shield to tackle it and went mad anyway. Nietzsche preferred to go spastic. Marx had more important things to do. Deleuze took the plunge to find out for himself and his forehead clashed with the cold hard asphalt of a narrow street preparing itself to welcome an early morning sun in Paris. Omar Khayam briefly held it as a fistful of dust and then scattered it into the sky. Baudrillard could only give it a smile. The Sufi sage escaped to the desert from it. Laozi didn't want to think about it and took refuge under the heavenly umbrella of infinite emptiness, stillness, and silence.

“Tzu Ch'i said, 'Blowing on the ten thousand things in a different way, so that each can be itself-all take what they want for themselves, but who does the sounding?' Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid; little words are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they use their minds in strife, sometimes grandiose, sometimes sly, sometimes petty. Their little fears are mean and trembly, their great fears are stunned and overwhelming. They bound off like an arrow or a crossbow pellet, certain that they are the arbiters of right and wrong. They cling to their position as though they had sworn before the gods, sure that they are holding on to victory. They fade like fall and winter-such is the way they dwindle day by day. They drown in what they do-you cannot make them turn back. They grow dark, as though sealed with seals-such are the excesses of their old age. And when their minds draw near to death, nothing can restore them to the light. Joy, anger, grief, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence-music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from. Let it be! Let it be! It is enough that morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. Without them we would not exist; without us they would have nothing to take hold of. This

comes close to the matter. But I do not know what makes them the way they are. It would seem as though they have some True Master, and yet I find no trace of him. He can act-that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity but no form."

[Zhuangzi, 1968, p.37]

In the meantime, George Habash, the founder of the communist movement in Palestine, died in a Zionist forced exile in Syria and Imad Moghnieh, the military leader of Lebanese Resistance against Zionism was assassinated. They joined the tens of thousands of people who have been sacrificed at the altar of democracy. Naming them needs millions of PhD papers.

Shame on you, the world!

You! Who serve the flesh

Of the best

On the dinner table

Of the worst!

Shame on you, the world!

You! Who breathe the smoke

Of the guns that make holes

In the heads that do not bow

To your "new" order!

Shame on you, the world!

You! Who turn into

A giant trap ready to snap

The spine of those whose labour

Unearths your filth!

Shame on you, the world!

You! The crocodile

Who feeds on the limbs

**Of those who swim
Against the current of your sea!**

**Shame on you, the world!
You! Who twist your dagger
In the hearts
That pulse for a different you!**

**Shame on you, the world!
You! Who drink
The blood of those
Who fight for a better you
From the skulls of those
Who say Fuck You!**

Human beings began searching for some sort of One from very early on. Laozi tried to somehow push this One into the back of the beyond of Two (being and non-being), things and nothingness, a kind of measuring the infinity of a single breath within the instant of its (non)duration. What the Sufis ended up wandering the deserts trying to figure out fifteen hundred years later in Iran. However, everywhere it looked at, it saw Two. It saw good and evil, male and female, hard and soft, yin and yang. Everything was always driven by a kind of interplay of these two opposite forces.

Zhuangzi felt time brushing past his cheek.

-You ride on autumn breeze. But don't show off. A tree leaf can do it much better than you do. When you have grown two thousand and three hundred years older, a plastic bag will outdo even that. And don't go around spreading rumours about me being mad.

-You 'Pile up your autumns and springs' listening to yourself listening to the explosion of the taste of existence in the mouth of non-existence. You get so close that you realise that what you call the "unnameable" is also untouchable. You treat death as a tame pet. Then it becomes too much for you. You create butterflies who dream of people. Suddenly, it is all a dream. But remember, I am the one who will outlive everything, even your wit!, whispered the wind as it made its way through the trees and left tracks of fiery leaves on the dirt roads.

-And who said that I have even considered staying on in this world of yours forever. Forever does not appeal to me in the slightest. As a matter of fact, I can't wait for that moment of change when I can at least hope for the possibility of another kind of existence. And don't be mad. I just had a thought. It wasn't to put you down. The thought about you was part of the thought that has been gnawing at my heart for years, the extent of the smallness and insignificance of everything. You are only part of the thought. Don't take it personally.

Zhuangzi gently stepped over to the side of the dirt road, bowed his head and made a gesture of showing the road to the wind. "All yours," he said, and began walking in the opposite direction.

Laozi is simple. A particular kind of simple. A Farsi literary term calls it "*SAHLEH-MOMTANE-E*" or the complicated simple. Its metaphors are straightforward; which means that they might not, strictly speaking, be metaphors. It is a philosophical manual for drifters. It breathes the air of binary oppositions. Without binary oppositions there is no Laozi. Laozi drinks from the spring of the Beginnings. Beginning, or the origin, is Laozi's yardstick with which it measures the Way (Dao.) The closer one gets to the

roots of things, the greater one will feel the proximity to the Way. What is the Way? It is to realise that people and Earth and Heaven (nature) belong to the realm of something; and that something comes from nothing. It is from nothingness that the whole thing begins to become something. From stillness that movement originates. From the "Mysterious Dark Female" that light gathers its illuminating powers.

Laozi is poetry in praise of the less, timid, weak, soft, bent, empty, still, silent, content, loss, smooth, un-sensed, nothing, small, blunt, easy, weightless, plain, insignificant, tasteless, void, ugly, short, low, before, shallow, dark, inside, supple, closed, far, humble, submissive, cold, minute, formless, shadowed, indistinct, mysterious, obscure, shapeless, hesitant, fragmentary, thick, vacant, tentative, murky, limpid, rested, worn, little and vulgar.

In contrast to what Laozi tries to promote as the principle of impartiality, it is a very partial document. It takes distinct sides. Laozi is poetry in praise of the negative. It is unconventional thought. It creates a world in which the ultimate course of action is to do nothing. The greatest virtue is to own nothing. The most eloquent speech is to say nothing. The utmost strength is to never attack. The height of victory is to never advance. The hardest pressing desire is to have none. The most common sense is to challenge convention.

Yet Laozi is conventional thought. It does not do what it preaches. It *talks* about the merits of silence; *instructs* rulers and kings so that they can rule forever; *shows* the Way to people in order to prepare them to live out their share of days and seasons and avoid untimely death. It is a full on life action manual. Above all, Laozi believes in One. Behind the yin and yang and the "ten thousand" binary oppositions (In Laozi, ten thousand is the number of

things and creatures that the world actually contains) there is always a One at work. Laozi senses this One as formless, shadowy, indistinct, chaotic and cold. However, it senses it as One. It is exactly this One that time and time again tries to straighten Laozi's thought and imagination and force it to a "how-to-fuck-up-the-masses-of-people-and-govern-them-for-ages-without-having-to-worry-about-revolt-and-rebellion" guide book for kings and feudal lords. The same One that interprets non-action as gradual and cunning action, submissiveness as hiding of intention and ultimately non-possession as the pre-condition for ruling the kingdom without an end in sight. The One that opens Laozi's gates to a rather successful invasion by Confucius and the army of the Middle. Suddenly taking sides with the negative bends backwards to the extent that it becomes an ideological backbone of the positive. Laozi imagines worlds in which there are no rich and poor, rulers and subjects; even a world in which the women are not bound to domestic duties. A kind of Heaven (the territory of nature) on Earth (the territory of human beings.) Yet, it has a solid unspoken belief that Earth cannot stomach heavenly equality. That order is good and disorder is ruinous. People have to know their place in the hierarchy of things and have a duty to do their best to remain where they are. Subjects should obey the rulers, sons their fathers and women their husbands. If kings are good kings, they are kind. If women are good wives, they are obedient. The unnameable One, although referred to as chaotic and feminine, ultimately identifies with order and the masculine.

A similar playful somersault of thought and imagination that turns into stiff conservative politics is at work when Laozi think/feels (the Chinese character for thinking and feeling is one and the same character) life and death. Laozi imagines death as one among many manifestations of the unchanging principle of transformation and change. In the high mountains of Laozi's

thoughts and feelings, one cannot hear a single echo of the fear of death. But if death is not to be feared, if it is only a natural shift from the state of being into that of non-being, then why this great lyrical crafting of an art of survival? Laozi, already drifting in the thin air of the Way, can still smell the fear of death on the skin of the ordinary human beings of its age, and all ages for the matter. Therefore, it sets out to do precisely that which it advises people not to do: to *interfere*. “Dao-de-ching” (The power of the Way) is an artful exercise in the carving of the “unnameable uncarved” original wood block of nothingness. Nothing seems to be absolute once more, even the absolute itself.

A few days ago in February 2008, the Australian Labour government finally officially apologized to the Indigenous peoples for a tiny portion of cruelties that white people committed in the continent as soon as they set foot in it. This has been a much publicised and long process that also witnessed a few hundred thousand people marching on Sydney Harbor Bridge a few years ago to say “sorry” to the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

**Did you think that by walking on the bridge
You could forget the history you left in the fridge?**

**Did you really believe that a “sorry” make up could anoint
The fact that your great grandfathers robbed this land at gun point?**

**Did you actually hope that you could shake off into waters below
The burden of blood your ancestors spilled and still flow?**

**Did you possibly imagine that you could exercise and feel good
Without paying for the crimes that were committed under the white hood?**

Not walk, even if you run for the rest of your lives
 Even if you turn every bridge into bee hives

Even if you confess that whatever you legally possess, your prayers
 are the result of a genocidal mess

As long as your civilisation
 Stinks of deprivation, discrimination, starvation

As long as you fantasise
 That you are in a position to distribute rights and homogenise

As long as you enjoy the power
 That your white skin allows every hour

There is always the possibility of another angle
 Having sexual intercourse with yourself for example.

Zhuangzi and Liehzi seem to realise that there is a great paradox haunting the body of Laozi in particular, when it comes to the identification of order and life with good, and disorder and death with bad. They must have thought about the contradiction between the belief that there is no right and wrong, good and evil on the one hand, and instructions that help keep the world in order (good shape) and the people avoiding (untimely) death at all cost.

Zhuangzi is a true seeker of the Way. True in the sense that, on the way to the Way, it has the ability to forget the Way. Zhuangzi is a very early example of genuine self-doubt. It is an aberration. If Laozi followed everything back to their beginnings, the main pre-occupation of Zhuangzi is the end. Zhuangzi is an experimental companion for peaceful coexistence with death. Laozi ignored death. Zhuangzi plays hide and seek with it. If

there is no way to know the territory of death, it is equally impossible for death to get a hang on the world of the living. And Zhuangzi can afford a laugh when it realises that it can determine the rules of the game as long as the game is being played on its turf: the time/space of the living. What would happen when life ends then? Only a “deluded” alive person worries about that.

Zhuangzi and later, Liehzi, initiate a dialogue with death that will become the breathing air of all Daoist thought for centuries to come:

“The rainbow, clouds and mist, wind and rain, the four seasons; these are formations in the accumulated air of heaven. Mountains and hills, rivers and seas, metal and stone, fire and wood; these are formations in the accumulated matter of earth. Knowing that they are accumulation of air and soil, how can we say that they will not perish? Heaven and Earth are one tiny thing within the void, the largest among things that exist. It is no doubt true that it will be long before they reach their term and come to an end, and that it is no easy matter to estimate and predict when this will happen. To worry about them perishing is indeed wide off the mark; but to say that they will never perish is also open to objection. Since Heaven and Earth are bound to perish, a time will come when they will perish.”

[Liehzi, 1990, pp28/29]

In time, the seeds of a peculiar non-humanist thought begin to germinate. Through dealings with death, Zhuangzi intuits that there is a strong possibility that the human beings are not really what they think they are: “Superiors to all other creatures.” Rather than following the conventions of the time in pursuing the discovery of the formula for immortality pills, Zhuangzi treats the body as something borrowed from Heaven and Earth and rejoices in the fact that all things borrowed, must be returned at some stage. It must have thought to itself: What a relief! Imagine being the prisoner of this filthy world forever!

Having death in sight at all times, one does not have to worry about the end anymore. "What happens next?" becomes an unnecessary question, a *wrong* question. Past and present outnumber future. The Here and Now become the most important attributes of Space and Time. Thoughts/feelings will respect instincts. One will be trained to live life without mediation. Just as spontaneous as a butcher cutting meat off the bone or a painter mixing lines and colours to give life to the sun that is dying behind a mountain range. Now all that is needed is belief, a belief that does not believe in good or evil, right and wrong. The principle of non-action becomes in fact pure fearless action without thought. Zhuangzi verged on capturing the ungraspable. It felt life as a great paradox. But rather than freaking out, it acknowledged the inevitability of things. In Zhuangzi and Liehzi, one can overcome difficult situations by assuming their shapes and modes of being.

"When a drunken man is thrown from a cart, swiftly though he falls it does not kill him. His bones and joints are the same as another man's, yet he is not harmed as another man would be, because of the integrity of his spirit. He rides without knowing it, falls without knowing it, life and death, astonishment and fear, find no entry into his breast, and so he does not shrink from hitting things. If this is true even of a man who gets his integrity from wine, how much more it is true of those who get it from Heaven! The sage hides himself in Heaven, therefore no thing can harm him."

[Liehzi, 1990, p.38]

Feeling life as one great paradox, approaching the slippery terrains of the unnameable void that generated binary oppositions, trying to make sense of what seems to be a completely unnecessary and literally futile exercise (life,) these are all considered materials for the creation of art work, an artist's

“job,” so to speak. Fortunately, the early Daoist philosophers and writers were oblivious to this arbitrary division of labour. They were artists and philosophers, magicians and politicians. They treaded the imperceptible misty mountain tracks that split non-being from being, real from dream.

“At the south corner of the far west there is a country, I do not know where its frontiers lie; it is named the country of ku-mang. The yin and yang breathes and do not meet there, so there is no distinction between cold and heat. The light of the sun and moon does not shine there, so there is no distinction between day and night. Its people do not eat or wear clothes and sleep most of the time, waking once in fifty days. They think that what they do in dreams is real, and what they see waking is unreal.”

[Liehzi, 1990, p.67]

The above story and many similar anecdotes scatter doubt all over the body of the familiar. They dig the solid earth from underneath the normal. They create a storm that blows away the flimsy hut that shelters the real. They are works of imagination that have an intention not to succumb to the way things are. They imagine otherwise. They challenge the common sense. If common sense is the acceptance of the “reality” of the humiliation of the weak by strong, elimination of small by big, annihilation of few by many, then imagining uncommon sense is one of the most important coordinates of the Way. Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liehzi are meditations on unlimited assault on the common sense. They blow the dust of doubt into the illusionary clear sky that the logic of majority has erected and named common sense.

This kind of contempt for the actual and all that involves Space on the one hand, and a daring plunge into Time as the true side of Truth on the other, is the core of early Chinese intuitive philosophy. Intuition is the immediate knowledge, that which destroys the solid mass of composites and mixtures

and divides things back to the pure dualisms. Intuition is the stuff of creativity, an infinite virtual field in which at each instant, everything can qualitatively change in a perpetual movement that is not defined as displacement in space.

Contemporary Chinese art is in demand. A generation of Chinese artists are cashing in on the huge western interest in art work that is being produced in China. I believe that one of the most important consequences of the West's interest in and purchase of Chinese art has been a fundamental decline in creative vigour. The majority of the Chinese contemporary art is riding on a paper boat getting pulled away by western money magnet and watching the theoretical and philosophical island that used to be a great source of creative stimulation disappearing in thick layers of mist in the distance.

Since success is being defined as financial success, not only in China but almost everywhere throughout the world, the major art circles are raving about the huge success of Chinese art during the last two decades. If we accept this definition, then they are quite right. During my stay in Beijing and Shanghai toward the end of 2007, I met artists who live in multimillion dollar residences, drive posh European cars and pay tens of thousands of dollars to rent studios. Almost all of the money for this lavish life style comes from the western art dealers. A new generation of upper-middle class artists have been established as a result. A kind of nine to five artists whose studios look more like factories (re)producing art work exactly like the ones they made in the beginnings of their careers.

The West is paying Chinese artists to cherish sameness and convention as the path to money and success; and difference and oddity, as the dirt road to poverty and uncertainty. It took me three weeks to visit all the art works that

were being exhibited at the seven nine eight. 798 is the biggest art space in the world with more than 200 art galleries, coffee shops, restaurants and souvenir shops in a huge compound. Since then, I have heard that there is a hotel being built there with rooms named after famous artists. What struck me was how similar the major ideas behind works were to each other. How, sometimes, similar were even brush strokes and colour and light metaphors. An almost absolute lack of the courage to risk wove its way through the myriad of paintings, sculptures and video art works. When some sort of work or other was being praised for innovation, this praise was predominantly based on its being informed by archaic western modernist influences such as the juxtaposition of the Familiar and Unfamiliar, the bringing to surface of the Unconscious, the mixing of dream and reality. It felt like the West was paying Chinese artists to forget about creativity and suffice to being considered avant-garde artists defined by the art dealers and business people who have the power (money) to name and tag art works and artists. The artists who refused to “play” the 798 game (as an artist who worked in one of the art galleries as assistant, calls it) would have to find other odd jobs to survive and make an ideological decision not to sell their work. I met with a number of these young artists who lived and worked in poorer suburbs of Beijing and created much more provocative work. These were the artists who wanted to rely mostly on their own (Chinese) cultural and artistic heritage and were not mesmerised by the western propaganda machinery of claiming all innovation and creativity. A few of them participated in workshops that culminated in the making of the second short film for the present study, "All that is solid melts into air." How long before they hit their late 20s and are hit by rising living expenses, and become tempted by submission to the multibillion dollar western art industry, I don't really know and would not like to speculate either. All I know is that there are more than enough ideological, philosophical, and aesthetic Chinese

resources for them to refuse to accept the western definitions of success and creativity.

In what follows, I will try to get lost in the ocean of these resources, the Daoist-influenced ancient Chinese writings on creativity and the production of art work (mainly painting;) and demonstrate the imaginative and aesthetic aspects of them that could support such refusal. I have tried to look for the writings and writers that defied the conventions of their own times and called for experiment and innovation at the cost of remaining in poverty and oblivion. The major point to be made here, is less a comparison between the Chinese and western art practices, but, more, that European avant-garde, as that which deviates from dominant aesthetic norms and resists sameness, predates (by at least 1500 years in the theory and practice of the Chinese thinkers, artists and art theorists) the late 19th and early 20th century origins that many western theorists and commentators have assigned it.

2.1/ Un-Orthodox Orthodoxy

There is however, an essential point that needs to be dealt with before going further. The conventions upon which Chinese art was mainly built were quite unconventional to begin with. This unconventionality is based on the first and, as will be discussed most important, technique of the six techniques that began to germinate around two thousand years ago and is still taught in China's art schools and universities. There were sporadic attempts by several artists/art critics to formulate the way a painting had to be painted. These attempts were ultimately culminated in "Preface to Ku Hua-p'in Lu" written by Hsieh Ho (490 A.D.):

"What are these six techniques? First, creating a lifelike tone and atmosphere; second, building structure through brush-work; third, depicting the forms of things as they are; fourth, appropriate colouring; fifth, composition; and sixth, transcribing and copying."

[Lin, 1967, p.34]

Of the above six techniques, all subsequent writers have agreed that the first one is the most important. I have gone through several different translations of the same texts and almost every one of them has a different translation for it. What Lin Yutang [1967] translates as "lifelike tone and atmosphere" above, Osvald Siren [1963] translates as "Resonance of Spirit; Movement of Life"; Herbert A. Giles [1938] as "Rhythmic vitality"; Friedrich Hirth [1917] as "Spiritual Element; Life's Motion"; Taki Seiichi [1931] as "Spiritual Tone and Life-movement"; Laurence Binyon [1952] as "Rhythmic Vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life." Almost everyone has translated the other five techniques in more or less similar ways although some have translated the word technique as "rule" or "canon."

It is distracting to enter a discussion about the correctness of one or a few of these translations and my elementary Chinese does not allow it anyway. Instead, I have decided to choose "Rhythmic Vitality; Movement of Life," based on a close reading of all the available texts and the way each writer/artist has tried to explain the term. I have also surveyed the art works of the "masters" as much as I have been able to get my hands on them, and tried to find the most common elements based on which generation after generation of artists and art theorists have agreed on the artistic elements of the works involved.

The main reason for the varied translations of the first technique is, apart from the qualities of Chinese language that allow different interpretations of the same character, could be traced back to the fact that, "*Chi'i-yun*," is the expression of the un-expressible. "Rhythmic vitality and movement of life" is trying to verbalize an intuitive process during which the chaotic and the formless acquire order and form within the art work. It is the Dao (Way) of painting and follows the same rule as the Dao of life in general: the rule of a life in close proximity with non-life, movement in friction with stillness, likeness hidden in the belly of deformity, glimpses of the ghost of order through the smoky body of chaos. Hence, the first rule of Chinese conventional painting has always been open to many different interpretations. It has allowed unconventional artists to use it as a shield to fight against the orthodoxy. Therefore, realistic representation of people and things (likeness in general) never quite had a total grip on the creation of art work. It was always an "issue" to be dealt with by artists and art theorists, but never made it as far as being the sole important criteria by which a work was judged.

However, a rule is a rule and is destined to function as that with which a process of stagnation and canonical hierarchy begins. Therefore, the majority of art works and the writings on them managed to make sense, be logical, and extract meaning from something that predominantly had to do with sensation, intuition and mood. And in fact, there were very few artists and writers who refused to be shackled by the dominant and invisible chains of "rhythmic vitality and life movement," not by denying its necessity, but by interpreting it in ways that released its potential chaotic force. For them, this was mainly possible through going back to the three already mentioned Daoist texts of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liehzi. In what follows, I will try to trace a very much untraceable and thin line that appeared and disappeared through centuries of writings on painting in China from more than a thousand years ago to the eighteenth century. These are writings that realised and commented on otherness, experimentation, and rebellion in the making of art work.

The military and therefore monetary power of the West has had a tremendous impact on cultural and aesthetic world views of the intellectuals and artists of the East. The predominantly middle-class artists in China are no exception. They have somehow been intimidated into mistaking the West's physical might with the superiority of its aesthetic and cultural values. As a result, the bulk of the contemporary "avant-garde" Chinese art has become a playground for obvious and "subtle" borrowings from the early and later modernist trends such as Surrealism, Minimalism, Cubism, Abstract art, etc. In Beijing in 2008, I personally had heated exchanges with a New York based art critic who told me that, in his view, the Chinese were providing cheap material and labour and Europeans were coming up with innovative ideas and that's why China is a huge art centre.

What follows, is a theoretical act of insurgency against such aesthetic intimidation through highlighting thoughts and ideas that gave rise to the discussion and theorisation of unruly art practice. The focus of attention has been the more than fifteen hundred years of art theory and criticism in the writings of Chinese artists and art theorists on painting. By unruly art practice, it is meant that which resisted, rebelled against, ridiculed, and undermined the orthodoxy of its own times. These were theories and art works that, based on principal characteristics of non-humanist Daoist philosophy such as self-reflexivity, estrangement, paradoxical and multiple points of view, fascination with irrational and "abnormal," and assault on common sense; anticipated the many avant-garde trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the West.

As such, the present study intends to undermine the Eurocentric myth of evolution and linear progress that treats history in general and that of art in particular, as something that started somewhere down there and became "better" and more "sophisticated" as "Man" climbed up the ladder of social, political, and cultural progress culminating in, of course, the present height of (post)modern times in which the West has reached the peaks of technological ability; able to destroy the whole planet a hundred times over, by the pressing of a button. This study could also be regarded as a counter-history of difference through highlighting the writings of the Chinese artists and writers on painting between the ninth and eighteenth centuries. A difficult and at times impossible task indeed.

Like many other cultures, Chinese culture has not been very Other-friendly. The majority of the art theorists have spent most of their works on explaining the aesthetic coordinates of the *Same*, the *Familiar*. Mentions of the "individualists", "untrammelled" and "spontaneous" artists are either rare

or very brief, and one needs to try hard to extract such passages from the mass of the praise for and elaboration of the orthodoxy that cover them. The predominantly western translations of the original Chinese texts can only add to the difficulty of the task as the majority of them are saturated with racially and culturally motivated interpretations and orientalist comments.

There is a nasty paradox at work in the heart of early Daoist thought when it comes to excess, change, and intensity. On the one hand, there is no life without change and intensity. On the other hand, life is the suppression of excess and intensity. "Balance" and middle-ness are the keys to a peaceful life. Extremity is imbalance and therefore, trouble. Daoist thought relegates the middle-ness to the realm of the Outside and chaos and extremity to that of the Inside: "Inward activity and outward passivity." A person who has found the "Way" is a mass of turbulence inside, and a cool calm statue on the outside. Things happen in there at a chaotic pace but by the time they come out, it is the order that evaporates from the skin.

All in all, the "Way" made its way with a kind of natural ease from very early on, permeating the creative worlds of Chinese musicians, painters, calligraphers and later on all other art practitioners. In other words, in contradistinction with many other cultures, the realm of creating art work through which Chinese artists imagined other landscapes for Becoming, never ceased to be almost one and the same territory in which the philosopher and the sage searched for some sort of meaning for Being. Hence the Chinese artists had to go through a highly disciplined training that included years of not only copying, brush and ink skills development, but also and more importantly, the study of the "Way" and its ways of preparing one to live properly. Art was, first and foremost, the art of living, then the brush skills to express it. Therefore, many great calligraphers and painters

ended up breathing the same cool, crisp air of remote mountains that the sages and later on monks did.

“In the vast literature of Chinese painting, there is continual reference to a *tao* (*Dao*) or ‘way.’ It is not a personal way, nor the mannerisms of a school. It is the traditional Chinese *tao*. As one among several ways, one dialect in the universal language of painting, this *tao* is distinctive for certain fundamental concepts and for the manner in which they have long been represented by the Chinese brush and ink. The great unifying aim has been to express Tao, the Way—the basic Chinese belief in an order and harmony in nature. This grand concept originated in remote times, from observation of the heavens and of nature—the rising and setting of sun, moon, and stars, the cycle of day and night, and the rotation of the seasons—suggesting the existence of laws of nature, a sort of divine legislation that regulated the pattern in the heavens and its counterpart on earth.”

[Sze, 1957, p.3]

Mai-Mai Sze [1957] limits the Way by trying to give it a definite meaning, giving it order, moulding it into a harmonious concept. Through centuries, the dominant view of the Way, under the forceful Confucian doctrines, adapted a similar naturalist approach. It was simple: day becomes night becomes day, seasons change and have been changing without exception, the sun has been the sun and the moon has functioned as the moon from time immemorial. To understand and feel the Way is to become one with this uninterrupted natural process. To live and die as spontaneously as a tree that blossoms in spring and withers in winter. The parallel to this, in the dominant Chinese theory of art, became the dominant interpretation of the first canon, the “Rhythmic Vitality, Life Movement.” This was meant to be the “spirit consonance” that breathed life into the work and made it alive with natural movement. In painting, an orthodoxy was gradually established that regarded *Ch’i-yun* to be the soul for a body that depicted objects and

figures accurately and realistically. This was guaranteed through two other “canons”: “fidelity to the object in portraying forms” and “conformity to kind in applying colours.”

However, it should be noted that from the very beginning, the main concern of the Chinese artists was not the extent to which their work resembled the subjects they were painting, but the degree with which they were able to recreate the rhythm permeating things; the “breath of life” that made nature (including human beings) move, be alive. *Ch’i* blew a vital breath into the body of Chinese art and made soul an inseparable element of the way the Chinese artists went about creating their work. It also gave considerable space to empty space and gave rise to minimalism in Chinese painting as early as two thousand years ago. With *Ch’i* being the pivotal force of creative work, Chinese artists didn’t have to go through centuries of imprisonment in the cage of realism as their counterparts in other parts of the world, and especially the West, did. Resemblance, although discussed and emphasised time and time again, didn’t occupy a sacred role in those discussions. There was room to experiment with form because the most important thing was to keep the *Ch’i* circulating in the veins of the work. The artists sat in silence, observed the detail of the workings of their surroundings and waited patiently for that instant of sudden realisation, immediate knowledge, to strike at them. Then they picked up the brush, knowing that every single stroke was the result of sometimes months of waiting, and therefore, used it economically.

The main concern of this study is not to give a history of the Chinese art theory in general. Rather, it will attempt at highlighting occasions on which this art theory noticed, acknowledged the existence of, praised and dismissed painters who did not abide by the rules and the closest they got to

acknowledging rules was a re-interpretation of the first rule: *Ch'i-yun*. The painters who, riding on the untameable back of Daoist thought, tried to return to spontaneity its true meaning: the contempt for things established and, respect for the creative act as that which knows no rules.

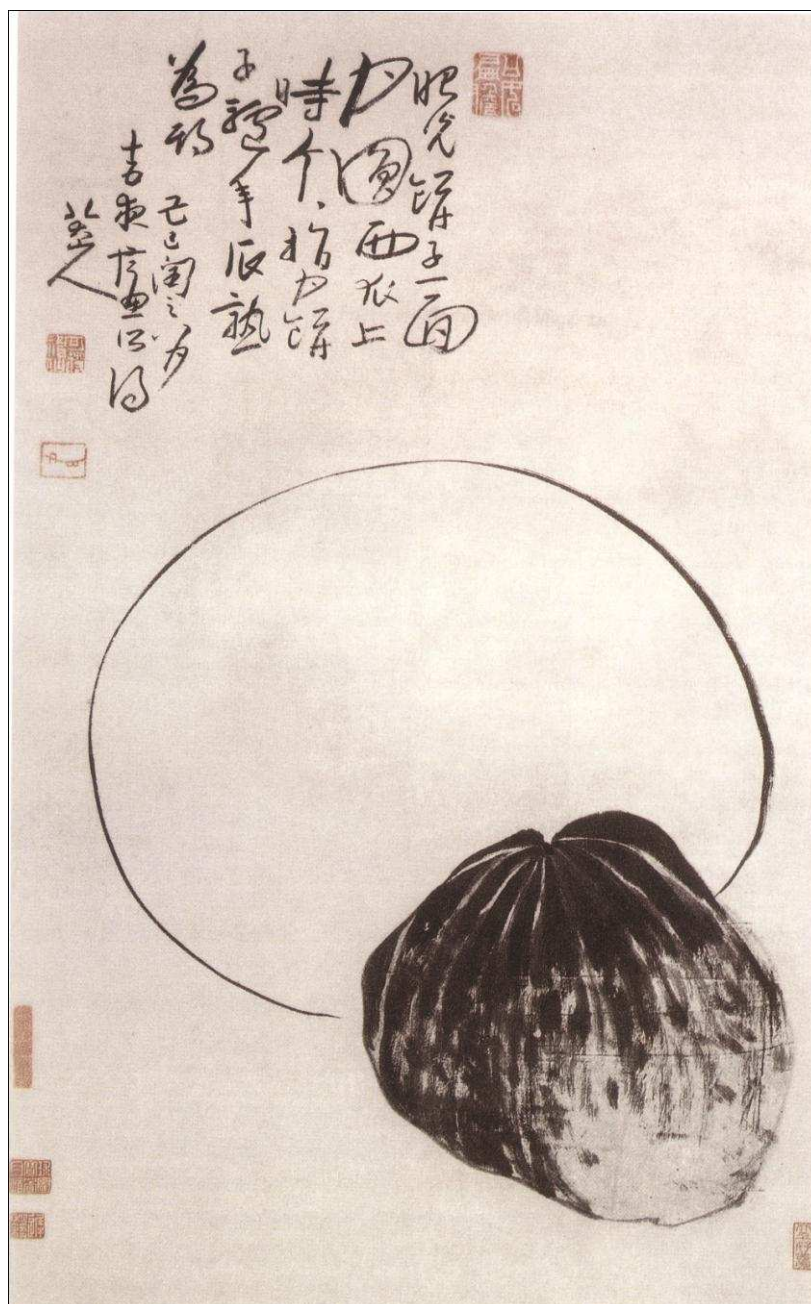


Figure 2: Disrespecting Likeness

2.2/ “Climbing Trees to Seek Fish”

Respect and acknowledgment must be given at the outset to the Japanese scholar, Shimada Shojiro [1957] whose pioneering essay, “Concerning the *I-p’in* Style of Painting”, remains the sole genuine historical study of early Chinese spontaneous painters and the impact the *I-p’in* style has had as a shifting but solid body in which the rebellious soul of Chinese painting has taken refuge time and time again.

The earliest text that paid attention to the process of the creation of art work was Zhuangzi [370-301 B.C.] Later artists and writers repeatedly referred back to the section of the text that defines spontaneity as undefinable, but gives example of a highly skilled butcher who cuts the meat off the ox, not by thinking about it, but by doing it without thinking. Here, it touches upon the un-conformist behaviour of a painter who is brave, unruly, and eccentric. Creative work as moving on the sharp edge that separates life from death?

“King Yuan of Sung was having a painting session. All artists had come; they bowed and remained standing, licking their brushes and preparing ink. Half were still outside. One artist came late, sauntering in. He made the usual bow, but did not join the others in line and went straight inside. The king asked someone to see what he was doing. He had stripped off his gown and was seated bare-bodied. ‘There’s a true painter!’ said the king.

The phrase *chieh-yi pan-p’o* (seated unbuttoned) has become a common idiom for describing the untrammelled mood of an artist at work.”

[Zhuangzi cited in Lin, 1967, p.22]

We notice that from very early on, there is a sense of danger associated with the artist and work that is different from others, the “untrammelled.”

Perhaps it is the beginnings of thinking about the relation between formal

innovation and aesthetic disobedience on the one hand; and socio political revolt against the status-quo, on the other.

The first records of experimental art could be found in its acknowledgement and classification as non-classifiable, in “Chu Chung-hsuan (ca. 840.) In *T'ang-ch'ao ming-hua lu* (Records of famous painters of the Tang dynasty,) he classifies painters in nine levels based on three principle categories: divine, excellent, and competent. For this study, what is important is what he places outside these three categories as the fourth one, and calls it *I-p'in*, spontaneous or untrammelled. Here, we might be witnessing the beginnings of attempts at defining experimental art work.

“The paintings of these three men does not belong to the basic method of painting; therefore, I have designated it as of the untrammelled class. This [i-p'in] is something that has never existed before, and so I write about it here.”

[Wang-shih hua-yuan cited in Shimada, 1957, p.67]

He identifies three painters whom, from his point of view, could not be classified according to orthodox criteria since they did not practice their works within the boundaries of those orthodoxies. Perhaps they believed that the measure of the excellence of a work had to be the work itself and not some sacred set of given rules, regulations, or canons. It is interesting to note that all three painters, against the general norms of their period, refused to hold government offices or positions and their ways of being were quite oppositional to what was expected of them.

“Li Ling-sheng (9th century A.D.) was undisciplined and never abided by the usual standards of excellence, but always loved landscapes. Whenever he was painting on a screen, and it wasn't what he wished, he never faced

himself to continue. He was proudly independent and did not recognise the prerogative of princes and lords. When he painted a landscape, bamboo, or tree, he would achieve its image with a dot and a stroke. The appearance of his objects [seemed to] issue entirely from nature. Sometimes he made peaks and pinnacles rising between clouds; sometimes islets and spurs along rivers. The mode that he excelled was an exceptional one, matching the feats of creation itself. [His work] falls under no system of classification but achieves a flavour of its own."

[Lin, 1967, p.21]

"Whenever he (Wang Mo, 7th century A.D.) wanted to paint a picture, he would first drink wine, and when he was sufficiently drunk, would spatter the ink onto the painting surface. Then, laughing and singing all the while, he would stamp on it with his feet and smear it with his hands...putting ink in the hair and painting with it... besides swashing and sweeping it with the brush. The ink would be thin in some places, rich in others; he would follow the shapes which brush and ink had produced, making these into mountains, rocks, clouds or water. Responding to the movements of his hands and following his inclinations, he would bring forth clouds and mists, wash in wind and rain, with the suddenness of Creation."

[Wang cited in Shimada, 1957, p.68]

Apart from the two above-mentioned, there are also records of a very interesting "Master Ku," who is believed to have lived at around the same time as Wang Mo. Master Ku had taken the idea of spatter-ink a few steps further in a way that makes possible a proposition to move back the beginning dates of the origins of abstract expressionism by a thousand years; from Europe and U.S. of the early 20th century to the China of 10th century.

"...he would first lay out dozens of pieces of silk on the floor; then he would grind the ink and prepare various colours; putting these in containers. When he had become a bit tipsy, he would run around the silk several dozen times, finally taking the ink and spilling it all over. Next he

would sprinkle on the colour. The places where they spilled he would cover with a large cloth, and have someone sit on it, while he himself grasped it by one corner and pulled it around. After he had pulled it enough, he would add determinative brush-strokes in ink to the shapes thus produced, making them into semblance of mountains and islands.”

[Wang cited in Shimada, 1957, p.69]

Unfortunately, to what extent these “semblances” resembled the actual mountains and islands, is something we can only speculate, as there are no records of any of the above painters’ works. There exist a number of preserved or copied works by the orthodox masters of the same period. However, as has always been and is still the case everywhere in the world, genuine experimental work, art work that defies the existing rules of the game and creates those of its own, could only be appreciated by a very small minority and does not have sufficient resources and networks to preserve it. Experimental work has always had a ghostly, ephemeral existence. One becomes aware of it through clues, signs, after shocks.

Chang Yen-yuan (847 A.D.) is one of the most important art historians and a very influential figure in the subsequent development of art history and theory in China. He collected several writings of the artists before him. He was the first recorded writer who tried to find a “balance” between physical likeness and “rhythmic vitality.” He generally belonged to tradition and orthodoxy. However, he could not resist noticing that the painters who were not concerned about physical likeness were the ones who created extraordinary work. Although, strictly speaking, they were not experimental artists, they were not fully containable within the already existing categories either. The well-known Wu Tao-tse was one of these artists. Explaining different elements of Wu’s work, Chang Yen-yuan highlights some aspects of experimental work such as the fact that it cannot be traced back or imitated

(does not have a past and only a ghostly future,) fully explained, and categorised under the conventions. Most importantly, he gives one of the earliest definitions of experimental art as that in which the idea is the most important:

“In the present dynasty, Wu Tao-tse is unprecedented and inimitable...His gift seems to come straight from nature, inexhaustible. He skips his dots or breaks off strokes while others are intent on careful building up. He breaks loose from the conventional modes while others only want to catch a faithful likeness...Nature seems to work through his brush. This has been described as the idea going ahead of the brush so that when the strokes are completed, the concept remains.”

[Lin, 1967, pp.56/57]

Somewhere else, in writing about the paintings of another grand master Ku K'ai-chih [345- 406 A.D.] he further elaborates his theories:

“[His] brush strokes are strong in firmness and uninterrupted in continuity, circling back upon themselves in abrupt rushes. His tone and style are untrammelled and varied; his atmosphere and flavour sudden as lightning...while all others took pains to join the ends[of strokes], he for his part broke up and left spaces between his dots and strokes. While all the rest paid careful attention to verisimilitude, he rid himself of such vulgarities...In painting things one should specially avoid a meticulous completion in formal appearance and coloring, and extreme carefulness and detail that display skill and finish. Therefore, one should not deplore incompleteness, but rather deplore completeness...The divine quality of Ku and Lu is that one cannot see the ends [of their strokes]...The subtle virtue of Chang and Wu is that with just one or two strokes the image is already reflected. They broke up and left spaces between dots and strokes, and sometimes one sees their omissions, but this is what may be described as complete conception through incomplete brush work...”

[Bush and Hsio-yen, 1985, pp.60-63]

However, while acknowledging his role in developing the coordinates of a sophisticated aesthetic theory in China, this is where Chang Yen-yuan stops. For him, the brush is the tool of painting. There is no painting without brush strokes. Therefore, he completely dismisses the works of some of the earliest experimental abstract painters, who used methods that did not include the use of brush strokes, as non-painting; although he admits that they can be heavenly and clever.

“There was a clever painter who said of himself that he could paint cloud vapors. I said to him: ‘The ancients never reached this final subtlety in their painting of clouds. If one moistens the silk, dotting and filling in here and there with a light powder blown from the mouth, this is known as blown clouds. Such [a technique] is in accord with the principles of heaven, but though it may be called a subtle solution, one cannot see the brush strokes in it therefore it cannot be called painting. It is comparable to the splashed ink [technique] of landscape painters, which also cannot be called painting as it is not suitable for copying.’”

[Bush and Hsio-yen, 1985, p.63]

It is worth noting that Chang Yen-yuan asserts that a painting could not be called a painting if it could not be copied. The history of copying is as old as the history of calligraphy and painting in China. Copying was the main way of not only preserving masterpieces, but also keeping a lucrative arts market alive. As an art critic, Chan Yen-yuan had already sensed the importance of the market. In contrast, we might assume that the painters who chose to create work that could not be copied, had already made not only an aesthetic decision not to succumb to formal rules, but also a political one: to undermine the marketability of their works.

Ching Hao (920 A.D.) is another painter and writer who displays mixed feelings about the spontaneous style of painting. His imaginary old man in the mountain explains *Ch'i* by underlining some more characteristics of experimental art:

"To be unpredictable, perhaps deviate from the true scene, and to perhaps distort things, that is exciting."

[Bush and Hsio-yen, 1985, p.65]

In his view, the "exciting" is too playful to be taken seriously and assign it a high place in the hierarchy of styles. Huang Hsiu-fu (1006 A.D.) was the next art theorist who classified the experimental painters. This time though, the "inspired" untrammelled class was placed at the top of the hierarchy ahead of the "excellent" and "competent" classes. It was in the middle of the eleventh century that Su Tung-P'o, the great poet wrote his poem that both inspired and gave strength to the unruly artists:

"To judge a painting by its verisimilitude
Shows the mental level of a child
If a poem is written such as
A poem should be written,
You can be sure it is not a poem."

[Lin, 1967, p.92]

In this perhaps the first minimalist manifesto of experimental art, Su Tung-P'o highlights the most essential characteristic of the "style": its refusal to be the way it is supposed to be. However, the superiority of the desire to disobey didn't last long and Teng Chiun (1167 A.D.) returned the untrammelled to the second place after the divine and called it "inspired;" before the "excellent" and "competent" classes. Gradually, the art theorists became more and more attached to the rules and lost their initial tolerance of,

(and in a few cases fascination with,) the strange and the spontaneous to the point where in the thirteenth century, Liu Tao-shun sarcastically described such experimental efforts as "climbing trees to seek fish." [*Siren, 1963*]

However, right before the beginning of the Yuan period (1279-1367 A.D.,)

"a crisis was looming" within the dominant representational painting establishment of the time and its "realistic images." [*Loehr, 1961, pp.147-158*]

The conditions were ripe for a revolution in the way the painters and art theorists approached the creation of art work. As Wen C. Fong, albeit ignoring the existence of non-representational paintings of the earlier periods, puts it:

"What happened in Europe in the 18th and 19th century, a transformation from 'Classical Age' of representation to the 'modern' age of expression and 'reflexivity', happened in China in 1279-1367."

[*Tu (ed.,) 1987, p.98*]

What distinguished the Yuan period from the sporadic singularities of experimental untrammelled efforts of the past was twofold. Firstly, experimental painting and self-expression became a movement, with a stark resemblance in terms of a rejection of representation and embrace of expression to the European modernist drive. Furthermore, what used to be the territory of a few, the minority artists, became the dominant mode of practice. Second, for the first time in the history of Chinese art theory, the question of individual and unique style, and discussions around it, helped form a sophisticated aesthetic theory.

"When the Yuan masters searched for ways untrodden before, about all they had in common was the fact of their searching. They didn't arrive at a common new style, but individually created new images of a highly subjective, expressionist character...There was a new keyword in Yuan, namely *i* "concept/ meaning/ expression," replacing the fundamental keyword of Sung, *li* "principle/reason," as far as art-theory was concerned. What the painters now brought out was not Nature's beauty, harmony, or glory. The old motifs such as the landscape, trees, rocks, grasses, and flowers remain, but they are now used as carriers of "expression," expression through strange and artificial shapes and textures, distortions, unnatural movements, oppressive motionlessness, bleakness, crowdedness, and the like. What seems always present in the more important works of that time and may, in a deeper perspective, be taken as a common denominator of style is a degree of exaggeration, arbitrariness, violence, and abstraction. The painters, aware of their autonomy as image makers, defend their new ventures in abrupt statements of defiance...feeling goes into technical dexterity here...for the first time *style becomes a problem*...it is discussed among painters much the way methods, techniques, strengths, and weaknesses were discussed in earlier periods..."

[Loehr, 1961, pp.11,12,13]

Sensing that his description of the art movement of the Yuan period of the 13th and 14th centuries strikingly resemble much of the descriptions of European modernism of the late 19th and 20th centuries, and instead of acknowledging and promoting the fact, Loehr makes an outrageous remark that could only be a sign of extreme Eurocentrism. Referring to a saying by the 14th century physician/painter, Wang Li, he writes;

"[a]s though this XIV-century Chinese doctor had read and copied some lines from Gilson's *Painting and Reality*." [Loehr, 1961, p.12]

He decides to forget that Wang Li wrote those lines around more than six hundred years before Gilson [1968] In fact, it is most probable that Gilson had come across such writings because by the time he wrote his book, all those texts had already been translated.

It was during the Yuan period that the avant-garde soul found the body of Ni Tsan [1301-1374] to “settle” in. He attacked and made fun of the fundamentals of the way paintings were done, both through his way of being and the ways of painting. He drew attention to the debate about likeness in painting and undermined the efforts that the art establishment had made in using it as the main criterion for good or “divine” paintings. In response to the criticism of his paintings because they didn’t look like the subjects, he resorted to irony:

“Ah, but a total lack of resemblance is hard to achieve, not everyone can manage it.”

[Bush and Hsio-yen, 1985, p.280]

This could easily have been said by an early twentieth century European Surrealist. Ni Tsan believed that he painted “simply to express the untrammelled spirit in [his] breast.” If this meant being ignored by the art “industry” of the time, so be it. In fact, it would give him the license to try harder in order to achieve a total lack of resemblance.

Ni Tsan belonged to an era of foreign occupation and turmoil. Together with a number of other “eccentrics,” he initiated the literati painting movement that created an irreversible and fundamental break with traditionalist painting in China up to the present time.



Figure 3: Approaching the formless

There are not any records of "eccentric" painters from the beginnings of the 15th century to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and if they are, they have not been translated to English, or at least I haven't been able to locate them.

A few hundred years later and during another foreign occupation in the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Chinese art scene witnessed another wave of "untrammelled" painters who sought refuge in remote temples and let their rebellious souls loose at the mountain tops and in the company of clouds. Shi-ta'ó and Ba Da Shan Ren are the two most important experimental painters of the 17th century Chinese painting.

For Shi-ta'ó, *i-hua* (one-stroke) is not a literal concept. It does not mean a quick and simple use of brush and ink, although it might end up being just that. What is that "one", "single", defining stroke that distinguishes true painting from a copy? How does it happen? In what ways an artist prepare for it? How is it possible to prepare for "spontaneity" anyway?

"I exist!" That is how Shi-ta'ó prepares himself to plunge into the "cloudy forms" in order to hunt for definition out of "chaos." He keeps telling himself that he does not have to copy the "ancients" and "masters" to be great. He has to have his own "style," his own way to the "Way," although he never mentions it. Perhaps because he believes, after Laozi, that it is unnameable. For Shi-ta'ó, the way "heaven" and "earth" were created is the same way as one brushes mountains and streams into existence. Therefore, he names himself 'Blind Abbot,' because he has decided to be "blind to money," to literally not recognise it. He has made an aesthetic and a political decision at the same time.

Although Shi-ta'ó believes in "inborn talent," he doesn't seem to realise how his belief in his own existence has contributed to this "talent." However, he just recognises it. More importantly, he needs to develop the skills to back this "talent" up. Talent, skills, or both, are breathless without the happening of *i-hua*. Single stroke is an event, and every time an artist creates, a different event has already happened. It has to be unique every time. That is why it is the "method of no method." *I-hua* is the spark that, for an instant, jumps out of total dark as a sense-image and sculpts something while realising the immensity of nothing. One has to train oneself to try to make physical contact with this spark, to aspire to become it.

Once again and as in Laozi, One-ness limits one-stroke, and a ruining idea of unity surrounds a limitless creativity. Shi-ta'ó cannot go all the way and want *i-hua* limitless. This is manifest in majority of his paintings. They make too much sense and are too detailed and minute. A superiority of the Real is at work in them. They are intimidated by the push for "like-ness," similar to the intimidation that pales the faces of the figures of the Christian church characters of the western paintings of the "classical" age. He does not practice what he preaches. Nonetheless, Shi-ta'ó is a great theorist. I have gone through Lin Yutang's translation of his writings and edited together the following manifesto (all from his own writings.) Lin Yutang [Lin, 1967] calls it an "expressionist credo." I would like to use one of Shi-ta'o's own sayings and call it:

2.3/ "This is so, not to be explained"

"What is born in us may be from unknown depths, but its expression is here and now. What can be put into the distance comes from the

recognition of some object close at hand. In the primeval past there was no method. The primeval chaos was not differentiated. When the primeval chaos was differentiated, method (law) was born. How was this method born? It was born of one-stroke. This one-stroke is that out of which all phenomenon is born...The establishment of this one-stroke [*i-hua*] method creates a method out of no-method, and a method that covers all method. The T-square and compasses are the perfect norms of squares and circles and the universe is the revolving movement of squares and circles. People know that there are such squares and circles, but they do not know the revolving movement of heaven and earth. Thus Heaven and Earth bind man to a method, and through ignorance man becomes enslaved by it...Thus it is seen that the one-stroke is not just to establish formal limits to the limitless, nor does it establish the limits by a 'method'...When method and obstructions do not interfere, the nature of the revolutions of Heaven and Earth is understood... Those who inherit but do not develop fail because of their limited insight. If the insight or recognition is limited to being like the past, then it is not a broad insight...Again it is said, 'the perfect man has no method.' It is not that he has no method, but rather the best of method, which is the method of no-method... Thus the painter becomes a slave to a certain known artist and not his master. Even if he succeeds in imitating the model well, he is only eating the left-overs of his home... I am as I am; I exist. I cannot stick the whiskers of the ancients on my face, nor put their entrails in my belly. I have my own entrails and chest, and I prefer to twitch my own whiskers. If sometimes by chance I happen to resemble someone it is he who happens to come to me, and not I who try to be his death. This is the way it is. Why should I model myself upon ancients and not develop my own forte? Where the brush and ink blend, cloudy forms are produced. Undifferentiated, such cloudy forms represent chaos, and to bring definition out of chaos, there is inevitably the single-stroke. But to paint a picture one should not stick to the arbitrary three levels and two sections, but should give the whole picture a sense of cohesion. There should unexpected break-throughs to show the strength of the artist's conception. Thus wherever the brush leads it will not show the common tricks. Mountains are seas and seas are mountains, and the seas

and mountains know that I know. This is the romance of brush and ink. A painting often expresses the idea of a poem, and a poem is the Zen of a painting. People know about paintings, but do not understand paintings of one-stroke. For the important thing in art work is contemplation. The intelligence of the ignorant and the conventional people is about the same. The conventional people follow the ignorant and the ignorant have a mind completely veiled. Remove the veil and the ignorant become wise; leave the conventional man uncontaminated and his mind remains pure. The function in mountains and water lie not in themselves, but in their respective silence and mobility. The proper function of the ancients and the moderns are not in themselves but in their respective primitiveness (*huang*) and freedom. People speak of the Northern and Southern school of painting...Now if it is asked, do I belong to the Northern or Southern school, or does the school belong to me? I would laugh and answer, 'I have my own style'. One wonders what models the ancients followed before they themselves become models for others. But since the ancients have established certain models, modern artists are not permitted to create new models [or styles.] The consequence is that there is not chance of creating a new style. A real inspiration comes to the mind like an image upon a mirror. It is never deliberately thought out. People nowadays do demean and defile the arts of poetry and painting. I do not believe that my paintings will be particularly valued. But I value them myself. After my death, perhaps there may be more admirers than at present. I don't know. My real admirers will smile when they see this."

[Lin, 1967, pp.137-158]

In an ideal world, the spell of the orthodox principles of brush stroke (second) and copying (sixth) rules would not have had such paralysing hold on the majority of Chinese art historians and they would have at least named the painters who used hair and nail to paint, or the cloud blower magician, the female painters who vaguely get mentioned but are never recorded, and the other artists who could not be imitated and copied. This is why the present text had to become a kind of ghost-hunting exercise. It concentrates

on writings and paintings as experimental works that, by definition, could not be copied and therefore, were unable to be preserved. It should also be noted that, even in the case of imitable and orthodox work, only a tiny portion have survived due to varying reasons. One incident is recorded in which one of the emperors, upon sensing imminent demise, ordered the burning of four thousand paintings.

2.4/ Flashback

“When the mists disperse, the mountains are clear. Tinged with blue, towers and pavilions are beautiful. A bridge connects the castles with a road. As people pass by, the dogs bark; as animals walk about, the birds are startled.”

[Sakanishi, 1939, p.54]

Nature is competing with U.S military machine. While the latter has been at hard work to annihilate more than five hundred thousand people in Afghanistan and Iraq alone in only a few years, the former succeeded in crushing, drowning and burying more than two hundred thousand people in Burma and China during the one month (winter 2008.) The absolute majority of these people have had one thing in common: being poor. The nature might have indiscriminate intentions but its actions are discriminate. Where is that harmony that was supposed to be the natural harmony of the interaction between yin and yang? Where is the place of all these eruptions, interruptions and natural lines of flight in the “spiritual” ideologies that tend to force Daoist thought into the barred naturalist temples of peaceful religious exercise?

3/NO TIME FOR TIME

A few days ago (Aug 9, 2008) Mahmoud Darwish [1995,] the great Palestinian writer and poet died. In 1982, he wrote a long prose called "Memory for Forgetfulness." The book became the highlight of what the poet stood for: In a great work of art the aesthetic and the political are one and the same thing. Darwish might not have known that, apart from his very many European modernist and avant-garde inspirations for this belief, there has existed a monumental body of philosophical and aesthetic work in China for centuries, that he could also have drawn from in order to create the work he was making.

Here, I will outline some of the most important ways in which the encounter with the Daoist philosophy and art work could inform my practices as an experimental political filmmaker.

3.1/ The unconventional and the "abnormal"

To make a film means that one is entering a socio-political field on one hand, and an aesthetic one on the other. However, these two fields are parts of the same, more general, field of conventions. To create a work of art entails making decisions about whether to accept and use the conventions or to disobey them and make an attempt to create sites of resisting the status-quo.

But the status-quo is social, political, cultural, racial and aesthetic. There are certain ways of being and doing things that societies consider as given, things that have been repeated enough to assume the status of normal. It is always easier to leave these normal ways untouched and unchallenged because they are more accessible and familiar. However, behind everything accepted, familiar, and normal lie socio-economic relations of power that have taken years to consolidate and establish. Behind many “innocent” love stories lurk complicated mechanisms of gender inequality. Untold stories of racial superiority weave, invisibly, through humanist and interracial grand narratives. Accessible tales about the rich and famous wear a thick make-up that hides class injustice.

To make a film is to be able firstly to recognize these conventions. Then comes the decision to tell the same story or a different one, and if one wants to tell a different one, a decision as to how to tell it: in the same ways or different ways. To make experimental films means that one has decided to tell different stories in different ways. An experimental film is a site of difference that questions and challenges sameness. A politico-aesthetic site.

I try to make films that challenge the dominant discourse of the time: A “harmonious multicultural society”, “there is no black and white...we are all human beings”, “there is a conflict going on in the Middle East between Arabs and Jews...we should do what we can to convince them make peace

with each other", "we should say sorry to the indigenous people and everything will be fine then", "both men and women are good and bad, we should educate men to be good and not be violent or disrespectful towards women" and so on. These are what I regard as myths. Discourses that are deliberately being propagated, financed, and encouraged in order to maintain and expand the power of certain sections of society and the world in general over others.

3.2/ The "method of no method"

Method assumes a significant space in what I call experimental film. It is predominantly through the method that sameness is challenged and undermined.

What is this method? Shih Ta'o, the great thirteenth century Chinese painter called it "the method of no method." What is the method of no method?

How can one define what is by definition un-definable. There are obviously no rules for making unruly work. The coordinates of such work are certainly not solid foundations on which one can build structures. Rather, they will be ghostly entities that disappear sometimes with even more speed than their appearance. Nomadic concepts that refuse to settle. Times that are not necessarily measurements of movement in space. Interruptions inside the headspace of Logic. Ruptures in the body of the Real. Defiance of the "Correct".

3.3/ The idea as "rhythmic vitality"

In an experimental work the idea is the main protagonist. It blows the breath of life into the body of the work and becomes its soul. Something that is there all the time but is not necessarily pronounced. Vital but not noticeable. An incorporeal entity that might not make sense but creates strong sensations. A presence that does not represent. As such, it cannot really be developed.

Therefore, it must be lived with, and like many other organic things, it is not always fun to have it around. Sometimes, it is a support that makes hardship pass without serious damage, and other times, it is a nasty thorn that pricks the ascending balloons of the joyful moments.

An idea in this sense is primarily a formal idea. Quite a lot of thought must have been given to concepts and contents or WHAT one wants to say. At the same time this is being done, one can hope for the real idea, which is HOW one wants to say it. The Chinese "untrammelled" painters used to sit still in one place for days before they reached for the brush. Although there are unbreakable links between the "WHAT" and the "HOW," I believe that the idea belongs more to the realm of the "How." This is only demonstrable through a brief discussion of form and content.

Western philosophy (although in this regard it has plenty of co-conspirators) has erected a complicated structure that is based on the separation of thought

from feeling. Simply put, these systems have assigned the task of thinking to the head and that of feeling to the heart. They have also created a hierarchy that propagates the superiority of head/mind/thought and inferiority of heart/feeling/emotion. Somehow it was arbitrarily decided and later accepted as fact that men are good with their heads and women with their hearts. Men are more “into thinking” and women “into feeling.” The hierarchy expanded to accommodate and perpetuate thousands-year old gender inequality.

Women were systematically barred from certain public arenas because they tended to get “too emotional” and could not think “straight.” Again through hundreds of years of patriarchal aesthetic treatises, the content became the territory of the male/head and form, that of female/heart. [Lorde, 1996(84)]

As in many other manifestations of injustice, such compartmentalisations hinder or rather cripple artistic activity. Human beings were not always so locked into these rigid separations. The Chinese character for the words thinking and feeling is one and the same. Reading Laozi and Zhuangzi, one notices that feeling and thinking are used interchangeably. Therefore, from Daoist writings I learned to disobey the “rule of thumb” of dividing the work into content and form and to feel/think an idea and live with it.

3.4/ "Those who have no shame grow rich"

[Zhuangzi cited in Zhu & Blocker (ed.,) 1995]

An experimental film disobeys the rules of the market by relying on the idea and its power to agitate, both politically and aesthetically, to attract key people to participate in the making of it. As such, the director is not a director anymore. She or he is a creativist: a creative activist. Interest produces. Desire creates. One has to be able to bypass the interest of the key crew and agitate them to get engaged with desire to create.

At a time when thinking about time without counting money is sounding more and more stupid, when passion has become a dated relic of the past that belongs to the “early and mid-adolescence” when one has not yet fully developed into a calculating creature who doesn’t have time for idealist adventures, it is becoming harder and harder to be agitated let alone agitate others to be part of any event that intends to stay outside market relations as much as possible. Therefore, to make experimental films demands a never-ending political will to create work without fantasising about its impact. I have learnt, from Laozi and Zhuangzi, that life, in whichever direction one tries to live it, is a series of insignificant instances and that in the big scheme of things, the significant and the insignificant are quite interchangeable. This insight, I use as a source for such political will to be and remain in opposition to the way things are.



Figure 4: Chinese character for water

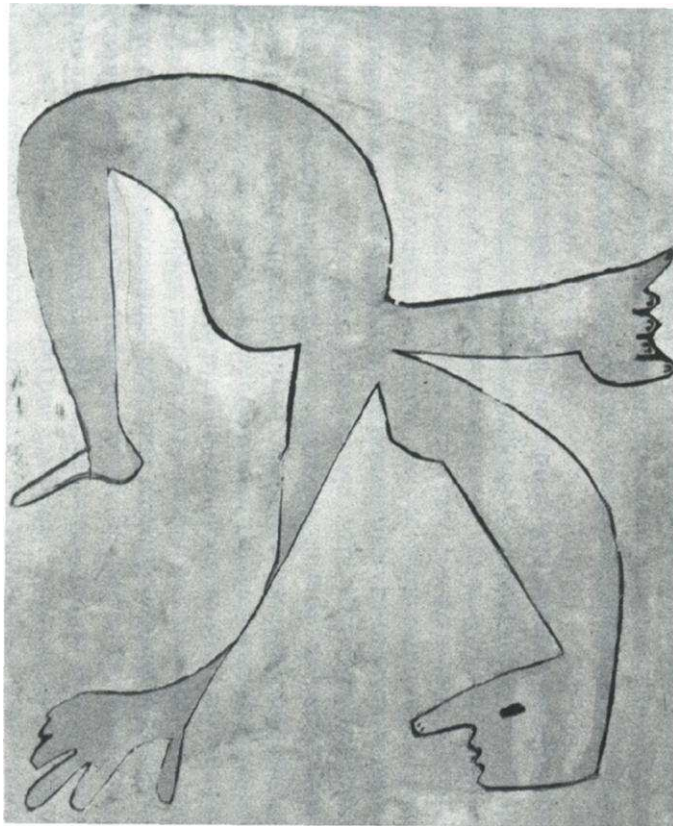


Figure 5: Pablo Picasso's *Swimmer* (rotated at 90 degrees and flipped horizontally)

3.5/ "untrammelled" as perpetual amateur

The U.S launches missiles, I try to launch image and sound projectiles.

In order to get established, one has to stabilise sensitivities, normalise idiosyncrasies, generalise peculiarities, neutralise intensities and lobotomise oddities.

In other words, one has to realise "realities."

Next, is to observe these realities. Self-censorship is the most common consequence of this observation. One learns to sniff trouble (in the case of the place we live in, a break in the flow of mortgage payments) and develops in time a skill for bypassing unwanted ideas as if they never existed, a habit for beheading undesirable elements of imagination, and a knack to lock up thoughts that threaten the security of the self and by extension the "nation."

To be an established artist means to become a member of the First World of the practice, to belong to the official art of the state, to be recognised as a master. An established artist is certainly established but most certainly not an artist. If intensity is the constant movement toward the other side of limits, then art-making is the mechanistic operation of the assemblage of extremities.

To create, is to instigate insurgencies against already established territories; not in order to set up new ones, but to perpetually grab attention to forbidden possibilities. This, in turn, means a willingness to remain an amateur.

Creating is a political activity because it messes with smooth operations, it doesn't co-operate, it disobeys and surpasses the personal, or understands it as collective and political. It does away with the main component of the "art work" of the master: the dispensable individual concern. The "untrammelled" painters of ancient China were not "individualists," but rather, they had transcended all individual concern by becoming one with the Way, the Dao. As such, they were not concerned with the risks of becoming the target of kings and feudal lords' wrath. They refused to get established. Inspired by the same non-humanist philosophies, I try to remain a minor artist, to create work that throws at the universe ghost agents who hunt sweet dreams of those who are addicted to the sounds and images of the masters.

The intention to become or remain minor has to be woven into the fabric of the work from beginning to the end. It has to begin with the sifting through of the ideas. How does one let in or leave out ideas? In the hierarchies of ideas, one has to push back the familiar and give ground and mingle with the unfamiliar and undone. These untried ideas are the most slippery. They are hard to catch and one has to be constantly training one's senses in order to, not notice, but intuit them

3.6/ non-humanism

For long, humans have been hard at work, aesthetically as well as philosophically but predominantly militarily, to assert their superior status compared to other species. Humanism has always been an occasion through which human beings have awarded themselves trophies for winning games in the fields of reason, morality, etc. Exactly according to whose rules these games have been judged, has not been the subject of much exploration. Our superiority has been treated as a given. With rare exceptions, we have neglected to discuss the areas in which we have had to confront ourselves as creatures for whom cruelty has always been the ultimate pre-condition of survival. Humanism was coined to cover this fact through systematic fabrication of a “good” “nature” and “essence” for us. On the aesthetic front, it has created the myth of “after *all* life is beautiful” suppressing the “all” that is the real cesspool where the lives of the majority of people in this world progress. No wonder humanist discourse has been the single, almost undisputable, ideology that has survived the indiscriminate attacks of Time. We love ourselves too much to question the real reasons for our existence. The main concept of my work is based on a belief that Humanism, as an ideology or certain ways of sensing the world, has exhausted its possibilities. The extraordinary events of the last few years that have resulted in a fundamental unearthing of the hidden racial, gender and class injustices that have always governed our lives serve only to strengthen this belief.

A genuine collapse of humanist structure creates a void where things, ideas, sensations and emotions will begin to take on no or radically new meanings. There is no longer the thread of “after *all* we are all human beings” to cling to when the vertigo of the status-quo makes a perpetual fall inevitable. An experimental work tries to argue the necessity of such a plunge in to this void. In this sense, it intends to float against the tremendous commercial current whose chief objective is to prove that things are the way they should be and to normalise, ever more than before, the fear of the Unknown and Undone. Following the footsteps of the Chinese “untrammelled” painters, I try to make experimental films that attempt to create incorporeal entities or “forces” that enter the orbit of the factual world but have the advantage of being able to break away from it at any time. Experimental ghosts that mingle with bodies and challenge the realness of their being. Flashforwards of events that belong to the realm of the Other.

Informed and agitated by such thought processes I begin to write a script. However, I try to disregard every single already accepted rule of script writing. I make a decision to write a prose piece or a poem depending on the original idea and try to imagine the images and sounds that struggle against literary limits. In other words, I treat the process of making the film as a creative challenge from the very first step. There are quite a number of conditions (including luck) that will determine how much of the original

ideas and the script will actually make it into the final film. However, instead of resenting these conditions I treat them as incidents with a potential to be events. In other words, unwanted accidents that test the limits of the original idea, clash with it and generate new ones.

Below, I will give two examples of scripts. The first is "From Ashes and Water" that, with a few changes, became one of my earlier short films. The second is a script for "All that is solid melts into air." As I have already mentioned, the main formal idea of this film came from an anecdote in Liehzi, its upside down framing. Then there was the political aspect of the slogan for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, "One World, One Dream!" While two thousand years ago, the Daoists celebrated the "abnormal" and challenged the rule of majority, a modern China was spreading the blanket of one dream over the harsh realities of all kinds of inequalities in the world. Combining the two, I made the film as an experiment with translatability of "one-stroke" painting into filmmaking. Of course, as Cao Jianping rightly argues:

"[o]ne-stroke painting by no means meant to paint in one stroke, thus forming a picture with a single line, but to connect the whole work with *qimai*, a breathing thread or a connection not shown by actual line but suggested by consistent action of the painter."

[Cao, 1996, p.71]

I tried to create this suggestive "breathing thread" by shooting in slow motion and maintaining very fast editing. Later, I tried to intensify the suggestiveness of the editing with a soundtrack solely made out of rice being spilled onto a pot. Finally, as a non-humanist gesture, the names of people in the credits get washed away; just as the tiny, almost illegible names in the credits for "Slogun" get scattered and disappear as a result of a cough.

3.7/ From Water and Smoke

One

Small dry leaves run on the ground as a rare cool wind blows at them. Here and there, puddles of last night's rain water treat the leaves to a short ride before spitting them back on the damp quiet pavement, heavy but ready to be crushed anyway. They don't have to be afraid of the figure who is approaching and who seems to be walking fast but smooth over and through things, now merging with them, now emerging from them.

A patch of cloud the size of the palm of a hand stumbles past the morning sun. As a result and for a while, the figure disappears. When the cloud passes and the figure reappears, another figure is walking slightly behind it.

'Do you wish you could get wet again?' The first one asks as it bends across a brick wall that joins the street to a wider road.

'As long as I can swim, I don't see the attraction.' The second one remarks and shrinks as it looks at the autumn sun that is laboriously dragging itself up the sky.

'By the way, how long before we get to the water?' They coincide as they weave their way over the low fence of a house.

Two again, they reach a car. One of them begins to unlock the driver's door.

They get in, spread on the seats and close the doors.

The ignition triumphantly whines the car's refusal to start.

Two

Dwarfed electric poles float past the roadside. The car makes its way through them. Thornbushes of the surrounding desert embrace the bent road in distance.

Cigarette smoke extends under the midday sun and crawls up the windscreen.

'What if we get stopped? What do we do?'

'We'll think about it when it happens!'

They laugh. Sun means to scorch the dashboard but remembers its seasonal limitations and turns even whiter.

Three

Roots, leaves and earth mingle with the two.

They are stretching over bush with long bodies and small heads.

'Smoke! I really liked to smoke.'

They cross pass each other, gradually disintegrating when clouds occupy the sky.

'Can't remember what it was like...Where are we going?'

'Out of here, that's as far as I know.'

Sporadic drops of rain bang against leaves that have managed to hang on to unstable tree branches. They pass through the leaves.

Threatening layers of cool air gather troops and howl their intentions in distance.

The horizon is the bloody scene of another death for sun.

It is getting dark.

Four

The two occupy the walls of a large room.

In the middle of the room a small fire is burning.

Their heads play with fire sparks and change shape on the ceiling.

Outside, rain and night wrestle. Cold wind referees.

Fire smoke begins to patiently but assuredly settle on the ceiling and on their playful disregard for another one's territories.

'What's the difference then?'

'Not only that it's possible. That imagining it is possible.'

One of them moves. Burnt to the full, a big chunk of wood loses balance under the weight of this movement, breaks and falls on the rest of the ashes.

Ash particles scatter in the air.

'Possible...Impossible...It is happening...I am forgetting...Forgetting it all...'

'And time?'

'Doesn't matter anymore.'

Wind breaks the night's grip and forces its way in through the window.

It stirs the smoke that is now engulfing them on the walls and the ceiling.

'Breaking through...Burnt continent...'

'You are flying ahead...It hasn't burnt yet.'

Thick ropes of smoke knot the ceiling and ground together.

'How about you?'

'Catching up...Catching up.'

Five

Disintegrated cloud patches float in the sky, the remains of a defeated army. Rain has stopped but small drops of water still float on tree leaves like little mercury balls possessed by moonlight. The two make their way through tree branches and thickening mist that is rising from the ground.

'Do you know them?'

'I don't know anything anymore.'

Moon defines their movements with a cold interest but begins to lose track as the mist achieves new heights.

'Some sort of creature...they copy what we do.'

'Water is all I can feel right now...let them be...they'll die away.'

Further ahead trees end and vast pale beach sand begins. Waves turn to yelling and screaming from what was so far a faint whisper.

Proximity of ocean increases the speed of their movement. They run toward it. Mist fills the view.

3.8/ "All that is Solid melts into Air" in Beijing

A deflating balloon

Cold calm sun

Spreads over a clearer corner of the sky

A dog's muzzle

Turns inside the pile of left over bones from last night's dinner

The memory of early morning rain

Drums over a dome

Which is fog and mist

Over the heads of already tired construction workers

A crow
Sits on the highest electric wire
Pecks on a spread mat
That is the morning sky
A cracked red hand of
A woman and
A freezing water tap
And loads of baby clothes
More dust
Mingles with mist
Settles on warm steaming spit
Beijing wakes up.

4/ WITH A MEGAPHONE IN HAND

Performed at a research seminar, the text was read through a megaphone

Exactly thirty years ago I began my university life with a megaphone in hand.

I feel sadly proud that toward the end of my skirmishes within the academic territories, I still have one in hand. Sad because the fundamental reasons for

having to scream in order to possibly be heard have not changed although

that was pre-revolutionary Iran of 1978 and this is post-conservative

Australia of 2008; and proud because I have to some extent been able not to

let age and mortgage or better put, life, catch up with my principles. It seems

that the academic circles in the West, based on the writings of the most

prominent thinkers; cultural theorists and philosophers have developed an

acute allergy to the word principle. They more or less argue that with the

collapse of grand narratives and the socio-economic materialisations of them,

especially in the Soviet Block, the concept of principle or red line also

evaporated and joined a lot of other insignificant particles in the air. There is

a Farsi saying that is quite relevant here: "It is easy to belt a corpse." And the

western academic circles took over each other in belting the Soviet corpse

and the ideology they claim it stood for, from the late 1980s onward.

However, does this really mean that Foucault, for example, didn't have a

solid race, class and gender that formed his subjectivities? Of course not! A

vigorous ant-like movement within the body of his works, chewing and spitting out the inevitably Eurocentric, male chauvinistic and middle-class sinews off them will provide a healthy chunk of digestible flesh for a starving non-vegetarian mind that will prove exactly the point: Peoples' class, race and gender determine what they utter and in order to escape this circuit one has to be prepared for grand treason.

I set out to research the concept of the avant-garde predominantly in the field of image-making and with a focus on work that is being done in Iran, China and India. I started reading the usual house hold items of the field including "Theory of the Avant-Garde" and a few histories of experimental film and video as well as more remote material on ethnography and cinema. I can't particularly call this initial period a waste of time and breath, only because I found out what I did not want to do and who I did not like to read and whose films I would not like to cast my eyes upon ever again. At the same time I began to critically observe the formal processes through which a PhD degree gets to be assessed and completed. I found out that literature review and methodology chapters are designed to act as gates through which certain people are qualified to carry the title of "Doctor" with all the privileges that are attached to it. It became apparent to me that these gates could easily turn into mechanisms of censorship, omission and dismissal of certain arguments and points. I would call the path through which I made these conclusions

and their relation to the topic of my research, intuition. I somehow sensed that perhaps one of the main differences between the censorship in the West and the places that the West calls dictatorship is that in the latter one is told that certain topics and or content are out of bound and that one cannot deal with them without risking their income or freedom or both. However, in the former(the West) it is through the form that one gets restricted, cornered, threatened and possibly declared not suitable for receiving a degree and or having an academic career. This was absolutely relevant to my topic which was about form, content, their perceived dichotomy and the question of avant-garde as, in principle, a movement around innovation in, and radicalisation of, formal aspects of art work. If anything, I found out that I was being driven to argue for innovation in the form of how I was presenting and conducting my research. This would be the defining moment through which either I would be able to get to the core of my research in a new way, or submit to the rules and accept "realities," to have a smooth transition to the realm of doctor-hood and almost guarantee a well-paid career and an over-weight superannuation cheque. This is when the memories of a megaphone similar to this one and a divine intervention in the form of writings by the Sufi Sheikh, Attar, came to the rescue. The writings of the Sufi sage made me get a grip on Time as present and not be tempted to do what we all are supposed to do according to the rules of market: to swap present for future. I thought that one of the most important achievements of

the capitalist ideology has been its success to alter the concept of time and replace illusion of what might happen with the reality of what is happening and call that illusion reality. I realised that especially in the West (but not only here), everything is about the future: we buy our houses now and pay them off in the future, borrow money now and clear our debts in future, look after our children now with an eye on them looking after us when we are frail. And the story goes on according to the conventions of a linear classic narrative.

Therefore as the reader might already have noticed, I decided to go on tangents, and do not stick with anything solid that demanded the whole attention all the time. I questioned the formal aspects of the guidelines for a successful PhD degree of the necessity for literature reviews and methodologies by dispersing the occasions on which I do refer to a book or art work as well as the process through which I theorise concepts and create questions, within the body of the work and, as they occur. However, in regards to methodology and after I had completed the research, I realised that the work did have a methodology in the form of oppositional ideology. I decided that, while it didn't belong to the main body of the work, but as an endnote, a chapter that outlined this anticolonial and oppositional methodology might be useful for researchers who might be fed up with the conventional "quantitative," "qualitative," and more recently, "hybrid"

methodological manuals. In other words, I found it useful to provide a site of resistance, in the form of a chapter on oppositional methodology, against those conventional methodologies and the postmodern and postcolonial ideologies that feed them.

However, when I wrote the chapter on oppositional methodology and added it as endnote; I sensed that a certain kind of space for experimenting with the form of presentation of the whole work had opened. And of course, as I have been arguing throughout, form is content. So, why not add another few sections to the endnotes? Sections that could contain all the unnecessary, or at least less important, brackets and quotes; and all that the university establishment considers "proof" for arguments. Therefore, the present form of the work developed: the body of the work where I theorise creatively and unconventionally; and the endnotes where information that would disrupt the flow of writing would be placed. This, I think, is also a statement about the question of length and number of words in a PhD thesis. That perhaps there needs to be a rethinking of these rigid numbers and the role they play in suppressing the creative impulses, including theoretical creative impulses. As such, the present study contains endnotes that comprise more than a third of it.

Finally, the endnotes include an oppositional and creative unbibliography³.

These are the books that I recommend to the reader not to read. Books like

“Theory of the Avant-Garde” and other extremely Eurocentric treatments of the inception and conception of the avant-garde. The bibliography contains written material I have found inspirational, essential, and informational.

5/ READINGS

5.1/ Informational

Works that are mainly either key references for other works, or informative accounts of specific subject matters like “Experimental Ethnography.”

[Russesell, 1999] These, I hesitated to include under the un-bibliography because they contain vital original “data” that could be used against the current and dominant Eurocentric and humanist discourse on modernist impulse in general and avant-garde in specific. Therefore, the bibliography contains names of these types of works.

5.2/ Essential

Next are references to works that I have included under the heading of “Essential.” These are works that, each in their own peculiar way, helped me argue for my theories without having to go through detailed fact-finding missions. In other words, these works have already accomplished those missions. In what follows, I will mention four of such works.

What makes “Poetry of Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-garde” *[Puchner, 2006]* distinct from very many other recent works on the subject of avant-garde, is that it acknowledges the limited geographical (and therefore historical) imperatives that operate throughout the book. This saves Puchner’s work from unfounded Universalist claims, although he still remains within a tightly wrapped European framework (apart from a chapter on Latin American Avant-garde that mainly operated within

European borders.) However, the main attraction of the book is its insistence on arguing for a “revolution of poetry” as it chronicles the history of manifestos or the “poetry of revolution.” Puchner has dug deep into the early works by Marx in order to demonstrate that the idea that one cannot combat the old system using old weapons (language) has always been an essential part of the Marxian project and all subsequent radical politics. Furthermore, through tracing the history of political and aesthetic manifestos, he has been able to highlight the links that join innovation in form with subversive, anti status-quo content. Puchner’s work nevertheless carries the scars of a typically western European/Anglo-American imagination: a mistrust of the other in the form of not even considering it as a possible alternative. This scar shows itself in the final chapter of the book when, highlighting the need for a “poetry of future,” Puchner finds himself looking back to the (European) past and calling for “translating revolution as repetition.” Within the limiting and limited horizon that the European theory and practice of avant-garde allows, Puchner does not seem to be able to have any other choice but to recycle. He apologetically admits that perhaps a poetry of the future means that one cannot determine everything in advance and one needs to acknowledge that such poetry is paradoxical. I wish he had read and made internal the essence of Laozi: all truth is paradoxical.

Laura Mark’s “Skin of the Film, Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and Senses” [2000] is unique in that it almost exclusively covers films by filmmakers who are from non-European backgrounds, and who mostly live in the U.S., Canada and western European countries. The book establishes a rigid link between the art of the minor (as Deleuze has put it) and politics. It demonstrates that, at least for the experimental filmmakers of the margins, the political and the aesthetic are intertwined. The book freed me from having to accumulate data and “scientifically” prove the existence of such

vital link between aesthetic innovation and political resistance. Marks has also intuited the fact that films of the minor share a unique characteristic in that they are sites through which the senses swap places. Some of these films include instances that allow one to smell colours, hear images and touch sounds. This has a lot to do with Deleuze [2002] Marks has been able to create a theoretical bridge between Deleuze's notion of the "haptic" and its surfacing in "intercultural cinema." This brings me to what I disagree with in the book. I find a large part of Marks's reading of Deleuze and Guattari conventional and inaccurate:

"Political (indeed any) change must be effected in a sort of dance between sedimented, historical discourses and lines of flight, between containment and breaking free. This is the act of archaeology combining elements from different strata in order to resist the order that would be imposed by working on one stratum alone."

[Marks, Skin of Film]

This notion of affecting change, is more akin to Bhabha's [1994] advice to the non-white activists (of many sorts) to get their voices heard by establishing their own communities. Deleuze and Guattari [1987,] on the other hand and against the academically popular pragmatic readings of them, advocates the formation of "singular lines of flight" as activities that have an intention of sudden rupture, interruption, being and remaining outside the orbits of established, and "segmented" discourses. It seems that Marks has somehow missed the revolutionary and radical core of Deleuze's thought on the art of the minor. This might explain, to some extent, her choice of "intercultural cinema" instead of, for example, the cinema of the minor. Her choice of works (except for the Black Audio Collective) is a further indication of a social democratic and safely critical stance. While it is understandable that she works with the bulk of material at hand, she never ventures out of the

main preoccupations of most of these works: physical and therefore cultural displacement, searching for identities, and challenging histories. There is not much a will to interfere with now and here of the first world countries in which most of the films are made and if there is any, it is always (except for the Black Audio Collective) by association. This kind of conservatism has made its way into Marks' discussion of formal aspects of "intercultural cinema" as well. Blank screen, silence, long takes, lengthy voice-overs, etc., are all "techniques" that have been used, re-used, and abused at the hands of the avant-garde European filmmakers from the beginning of the last century. While noticing the multi-sensual aesthetics of the films, Marks nonetheless makes a huge effort to find affinities between the cinematic techniques of her chosen films and those of the western avant-garde. In itself, this does not seem to be problematic. The problem is that Marks assumes the role of a go-between who is trying to justify the validity of the experiments performed in these films through measuring against and containing them within already established European aesthetic paradigms.

The most important and useful books under this category of essentials are Zhaoming Qian's "Orientalism and Modernism" [1995] and "The Modernist Response to Chinese Art." [2003] The books are groundbreaking results of the author's hard labour in putting together a myriad of tiny evidential puzzle pieces that highlight the impossibility of the European and Anglo-American modernist project without its exposure to, and borrowings from, the theory and practice of classical Chinese poetry and the Chinese painting traditions:

"One of the arguments emphasized throughout this study is that a single modernist poet's appreciation of Chinese art is best understood in the broader context of modernist appreciation of Chinese aesthetic as a whole." [Qiang, 2003, p.30]

Zhaoming Qian traces the American poets' (Pound, Moore, Stevens) encounters with Chinese literature and painting, finding facts that demonstrate how these poets were inspired and influenced by, as well as, at times, heavily borrowed from Chinese aesthetic and philosophical traditions. However, as I read through the book, I grew more and more frustrated by the extent to which Zhaoming Qian has tried to remain within the western academic traditions of being "objective" and that, in many occasions, he mentions how all he is trying to do is to get the western "scholars" and "critics" to acknowledge Chinese aesthetic "share" and "role" in the development of modernist impulse. At times his tone is just short of being apologetic.

Zhaoming Qian is moderate. His reaction to Edward Said's great work, "Orientalism," in which the West and westerners' interest in the Orient has been theorised as fundamentally a colonial exercise, is typical of an intimidated other: "not all of them are like that." Zhaoming Qian ventures to have a go at the West only when this is accompanied by a critical quote from a western "scholar." He wants to beat "them" at their own game. In the process though, willingly or unwillingly, he accepts the game, their game, which translates into their rules. For this, he does have a non-western ideological device: the teachings of Confucius. [1956] The same teachings that instructed the Chinese scholars to enter government office and cooperate when times are good, and withdraw back and disappear when things are bad. Exactly what appealed to the "totalitarian" Ezra Pound who is one of many translators of Confucius. [1956]

It is not in the scope of this study to get into the detail of Confucian teachings. However, I have to disagree with Zhaoming Qian when he tries to equate

Confucian teachings and Daoist philosophy. Following Zhu Xi and neo-Confucians, he tries to argue for fundamental affinities between the two “Ways” through pointing to their peaceful co-existence after countless “religious and political struggles in China.” This is why he approvingly informs us that many Chinese artists were government officials and lead a double life of dutiful subjects during the day and eccentric recluses back at home at night. He seems to be proud of Wang Wei as a “Confucian in office and a Daoist-Chan Buddhist in private,” forgetting about a minority of the artists who fled their villages and towns and sought refuge in the mountain temples because they didn’t want to lead such double lives. Incidentally, these were the painters and writers who dared to experiment with form as they were not attached to any feudal lord or king. These great (mostly Daoist and later Buddhist) artists informed other Chinese artists who, in turn, informed the bulk of modernist aesthetics. If the Yuan painter Wang Meng “fastened his brush to a small bow and twanged to a shower of white dots on the silk...creat[ing] a miniature snow storm” in the fourteenth century, the always drunk Wang Mo (who is barely known) got his nickname as “splasher” in the seventh century because he used to create landscapes through splashing ink on silk.

A similar conservatism prevents Zhaoming Qian to transgress his subject matter (the influence of Chinese art on Anglo-American modernist poets) and highlight the huge debt that European avant-garde and modernism owe to the original ideas that made their way in there through Chinese art exhibitions toward the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, on a number of occasions, he fortunately loses focus and provides vital information and insight:

“The decade 1915-1924 was the peak of a vogue for European avant-garde art and the peak of a vogue for Chinese art on the New York literary scene.”

[Qiang, 2003, p.38]

“The booming exhibitions of Chinese art in this period sparked a considerable number of reviews and illustrated articles in newspapers. This coverage was frequently coupled with the coverage of modern art in town. By juxtaposing the two trends, critics intended to allude to Chinese art as one of the influences on the growth of avant-garde art on both sides of the Atlantic.”

[Qiang, 2003, p.39]

“The Chinese preference for suggestion over assertion, intuition over logic leads to a...major reason for modernists’ fascination with Daoist aesthetics.”

[Qiang, 2003, p.75]

Zhaoming Qian does succeed in outlining the major modernist characteristics that have been in place for centuries in the works of many Chinese painters: multiple perspectives, the shock of the new, detachment, other-worldliness, clues and particulars that might or might not point to a complete whole, juxtaposition of the familiar and unfamiliar, estrangement, “lofty dryness” and simplicity. He undermines the claims to originality of the main thrust of the European and Anglo-American modernist discourse. Yet Zhaoming Qian remains patient. Way too patient. Perhaps it is precisely this patience that feeds him with the exemplary persistence in unearthing minute evidential facts of modernism’s tremendous debt to the Chinese classical poetry and landscape painting, the extraordinary cool with which he handles the Eurocentric ideologies of the art critics and scholars, and the sophisticated restraint under which he presents his subjective arguments as objective methodology.

I learned from Zhaoming Qian that passion finds its way out of different bodies differently. Like him, one could be a mountain that is nurturing a volcano in its chest. One also could be the furious and projectile instant of eruption. I find, for obvious cultural reasons, the latter more appealing, but, thanks to Zhaoming Qian and mainly to the Daoist philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, certainly not more true.

5.3/ Inspirational

Last and therefore, most important, are the inspiring works that made me feel like creating ideas and ways to argue for them. I found plenty of such works in the body of Chinese Daoist philosophy and I have extensively mentioned and quoted them in previous pages. I owe my understandings of race politics to three black thinkers Amiri Baraka [2003,] bell hooks [1992,] and Toni Morrison [1992.] The latter's "Playing in the Dark" is a groundbreaking essay about the role the U.S. literature has played, through character-colouring, in the establishment and propagation of racist imagination. bell hooks' works are fundamental in the interplay of racial, class and gender injustices. Amiri Baraka's fiction work and his "Somebody Blew up America" taught me that it is possible to treat content and form as one; that it is possible to treat radical content in experimental ways. Delleuze and Guattari's "A Thousand Plateaus" is a testimony to the possibilities of experimental and radical thought and Delleuze's "Francis Bacon, The Logic of Sensation," although remaining within European context, shows how philosophy and art making could be interchangeable activities. Foucault's "Archaeology of Knowledge" proves, in a new way, what Zhuangzi taught thousands of years ago: Do not trust anything that claims the

absolute truth; in this case, the western scientific discourse. Finally and after all the badmouthing of the western European thought, I would like to mention and pay homage to one of its kind: Horkheimer and Adorno's [2002] "Dialectic of Enlightenment."

Even before I embarked on the present research, I always had an intuition that Humanist thought and action had had a lot to do with the decadence and defeat of the twentieth century European avant-garde project. The aim of highlighting such decline is not to depict a linear history of the avant-garde as a narrative progressive dramatic "act" with a stable situation in the beginning, disturbance of this situation, and a new stable situation at the end. Rather, it is to pinpoint a fundamental flaw (not being able to transgress humanist discourse) that underlies the avant-garde movement from its very beginnings.

"Dialectic of Enlightenment," although still clinging to a very thin thread of Humanist thought, equipped me with sophisticated weapons and inspired me to grasp that initial intuition and not be intimidated by one of the most enduring and dominating discourses of the human species of all times, humanism. Unlike Louis Althusser in "For Marx" [2005,] "Dialectic of Enlightenment," (from now on DOE) does not intend to prove that Marx was an anti-humanist in his youth, as Althusser does. Rather, DOE confronts its reader with a simple but devastating assertion: that Fascism is the natural and reasonable consequence of the development of the project of Enlightenment. For a democracy-lover who lives in North America, Britain or Australia, this assertion sounds like a terrible "untruth." However, relying on the original texts of Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate how Hitler's ideas and actions (as

those of the more recent leaders of the free world) are rooted in Kant, Hegel and the whole utilitarian thought of European Enlightenment.

“Spinoza’s proposition: ‘the endeavour of preserving oneself is the first and only basis of virtue,’ contains the true maxim of all Western civilization, in which the religions and philosophical differences of the bourgeoisie are laid to rest.”

[Horkheimer & Adorno, p.22]

“The mythical scientific respect of peoples for the given reality, which they themselves constantly create, finally becomes itself a positive fact, a fortress before which even the revolutionary imagination feels shamed as utopian, and degenerates to a compliant truth in the objective tendency of history.”

[Horkheimer & Adorno, p.33]

What if the real reason for this “mythical scientific belief” is less the stupefying condition of capitalist mode of production and its resultant alienation, and more the good old animal instinct of the desire to remain alive, or as is referred to within the western philosophical tradition, “self-preservation.”

What is it that prevents Adorno and Horkheimer from taking that final last step of questioning the very necessity and or “logical” validity of the “endeavour to preserve oneself?” It is the traces (however faint) of a domineering humanism, what they call “true humanity.” While many light years ahead of most of their contemporaries in intuiting the monstrosity of Enlightenment and smelling blood from the whitewashed hands of democracy, they still remain within a western humanist tradition, albeit a Marxian one. In fact, it seems that it is their commitment to Marx and revolution that helps keep a tiny spot of warmth and optimism in their heart. The authors are devout dialecticians. They set out, right from the beginning,

to look for thesis and antithesis while believing at all times that there exist a synthesis. If the Enlightenment gave ground to letting loose the beast of knowledge and made it synonymous with power (thesis,) the same “knowledge can now devote itself to dissolving that (same) power,” (antithesis.) Such capacity of knowledge/power to dissolve itself is not really argued for but planted as a given dialectical necessity. There is only one way of being able to agree with Horkheimer and Adorno: That this freaky, unjust, miserable and filthy world we live in, which is a direct product of the Enlightenment at least in its power centres and through the dominant rules with which it governs human relations, has gathered the capacity to dissolve not only power but everything including the human beings and their will to “self-preserve.” Civilization is now at a stage where it has generated enough power to commit suicide.

“One cannot abolish terror and retain civilization. Even to relax the former means the beginning of the disintegration. The most diverse conclusions can be made from this: from the worship of fascist barbarism to a flight into the circle of hell. There is one other possibility: to scorn logic if it is against humanity.”

[Horkheimer & Adorno, p.180]

Exactly what humanity are we referring to here? The same humanity that created the “anti-human” logic that gave way to reason that, in turn, paved the way for pursuing interest and “ends” which justified murderous actions and barbaric means to begin with? Adorno and Horkheimer sensed, through the stench of decomposing bodies that the Enlightenment was piling up in Europe and elsewhere, that Humanist discourse was finally revealing its horrific and carefully hidden reason.

“We owe the serum which the doctor administers to the sick child to the attack on defenceless creatures. In the endearment of lovers, as in the most sacred symbols of Christianity, we can detect the lust for the flesh of the kid...”

[Horkheimer & Adorno, p.185]

However, Marxian discourse and dialectics become the limits of Horkheimer and Adorno's non-humanism. They are not in a theoretical position to admit that humanity could not possibly be divided into “true” and un-true. Any such division is by definition arbitrary. The authors of “Dialectic of Enlightenment” are drifting between what their own theories and observations manifest, and their Marxist progressivist ideological commitment. That’s why in Nietzsche and Sade, they cannot but find unwanted ancestors:

“It is because they did not hush up the impossibility of deriving from reason a fundamental argument against murder, but proclaimed it from the roof tops, that Sade and Nietzsche are still vilified, above all by progressive thinkers.”

[Horkheimer & Adorno, p.93]

An un-humanist discourse is hard to cling to. When Europe and its philosophical traditions are the limit, this could be even harder. It is certainly and obviously paradoxical: to be a member of human species and not to want to focus all efforts toward its triumph over everything and the best ways to preserve it; not to want to think rationally and question the rationale of the humanist discourse; to discard of reason as justifier of ends and interest. It was reason that itemised reasons for the distinction to be made between philosophical and poetic discourses. Horkheimer and Adorno could have probably revised some of their suggestions in regards to “true humanity” if they had dared to step outside Europe and encounter other ways of sensing and thinking about the world. Perhaps they would decide

not to respect the rigid boundaries that western thought has imposed between thought and poetry and therefore, would be able to unchain themselves from that which categorises un-humanist thought as un-reason. Perhaps the only way to internalise the truth of Zhuangzi and Laozi's, all truth is paradoxical, is to turn into a nomad who drifts within un-settleable borderlines of philosophy and poetry:

The whiz
Of the hurling of the rock of madness
At the temple
Of reason.

The scent
Of concentration
of Time
In the monopoly of instant.

The explosion
Of the taste of being
On the tongue
Of non-being.

The noise
Of the battle
Of yesterday and tomorrow
In the streets of today.

6/ EPILOGUE: BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED FROM

Just as I was going to be carried away with the shock of the extraordinary, I was punched in the throat with the terror of the ordinary. As I was beginning to begin to become one with the awesome darkness of snow falling on rivers and mountains, I was stabbed in the eye with the images of bodies hacked to pieces by a democratic and burning mixture of metal and fire. As I was listening to the asymmetrical sound of the movement of that fish against a lot of silence that can be water but can also be trees fidgeting in the water without getting wet, I was shot in the ear by the U.S., European and Israeli propaganda that calls cold blooded colonial murder "Middle East violence." As I was inhaling the simple scent of a lukewarm wind that has just left summer for autumn, I was pierced in the nostrils by the stench of power sniffing the decomposing bodies of the Palestinian children. As I was drinking from the dark ocean of night that includes both everything and Time, my tongue was poisoned by the taste of the truth of the Market: there is cheap blood and there is expensive blood. As I was drifting with the mystic mist that knows the secrets of all skins, I am struck by the naked truth: settlers are observing the first rule of Capital. They are skinning the already there.

End?

NOTES

ART IS NOT A TOOL, IT IS A WEAPON:

1. Methodology of opposition

Throughout the present study I will not pretend to be impartial and "objective". This will automatically throw away the current definitions of "quantitative" methodology that the various manuals of research define as and instruct to be one that keeps a distance between the researcher and that which is being researched. On the contrary, in what follows I will argue that not only this supposed impartiality and "disinterestedness" is a myth, but it is partisan and in the services of the dominant discourses.

Every act of language, including writing of a thesis, is ideological. There is an ideology which permeates the fabric of all writing [Hodge & Kress, 1988, Hodge & Kam, 1998.] This ideology however, is a complex entity that includes ways of being and sensing, and therefore is non-homogeneous and even at times, contradictory. I will not shy away from contradicting myself in the course of the arguments that form the body of this study. These ways of being and sensing, that obviously include ways of researching, because of the facts of my existence, could not be asked to or coerced into the level-headedness, clarity, and compartmentalised systematic thought and argument that is dominantly associated with research in a western academic environment. This, in turn, creates an intentionally floating foundation that I would like to call my methodology. Therefore, it is certainly not a *tool*. On the contrary, this understanding of methodology takes it as the container of philosophical, social, political and cultural leanings [Tuhiwai Smith, 2008; Sandoval, 2000; Connell, 2007; Kam & Hodge, 1998] the promotion of which is the main aim of the present study. Does this mean that these leanings and gestures have been and remain rigid and unchangeable in the

course of the work? Of course not! Because the schizophrenic nature of the lived experience does not allow for such rigidity. [Sandoval, 2000]

"...a life lived metonymically from experience to experience is also a course of action demanded of those who hold out against conditions of hunger, deprivation, humiliation, colonization, and social subjection. Such citizen-subjects often do not lay claim to any single "healthy normality" from which to speak and act, because doing so might impair one's chances for survival. This process of taking and using whatever is necessary and available in order to negotiate, confront, or speak to power- and then moving on to new forms, expressions, and ethos when necessary- is a method for survival that has vital links to Jameson's version of 'cognitive mapping.'" [Sandoval, 2000, 28-9]

The colonised, the coloniser, and the anti-colonial stance

Whether we call them East and West [Said, 2003,] South and North [Connelle, 2007] or both [Tuhiwai Smith, 2008,] we live in a polarised world. A world in which the gunpowder still (and even more so than ever) speaks the last word. Fanon [1967] is the most eloquent elaborator of this "Manichaeian" world in which one part of it (the coloniser,) systematically uses force in order to subjugate the rest. Therefore, West and East or North and South, more than anything else, are about "relations of power" [Connelle, 2007.] Indeed, it is quite difficult to find any aspect of human societies in which the defining relations are not those of the dominant and the dominated.

This kind of "primitive" [Bhabha, 1994] highlighting of fundamental binaries of race, class, and gender has been challenged by two parallel intellectual movements in recent times. The first is what is problematically called postmodernism and the other has been named by its major originators and propagators as postcolonialism. Postmodernism is, in broad terms, the white European intellectuals' philosophical, social and political rebellion against logocentric and patriarchal systems of thought that they have inherited. It questions the hitherto

dominant western view of history as linear, progressive, and evolutionary. Through this, it undermines the racially motivated western projects of humanism and Enlightenment. As a result, it has caused a domino effect that has been challenging every previously held sacred aspect of western thought right to the questioning of the existence of the subject, the very precious "I" [Sandoval, 2000.] What must be noted is that such rebellion is not really politically directed at the foundations of the western imperialism or existing gross class, race, and gender inequalities. As a matter of fact, postmodernism could be easily used as a tool for downplaying such inequalities under the rhetoric of "shattered subjectivities", the "end of grand narratives," and un-pinpointable mechanisms of power [Foucault, 1970.] Later in the study, in fact at the very end, I will elaborate on the Enlightenment project and its vital role in the birth of western imperialism. It must also be noted that postmodernism is the direct result of the white European male intellectual's fright when he was suddenly confronted with the great counter-violence of anti-colonial struggles of the former colonised nations. It would be impossible to think of the Paris of 1968 without taking into account the amount of French blood that had been spilled on Algerian soil. Europe, at least momentarily and in the form of old colonising power, was being defeated in country after country. It would be absurd to expect its intellectuals as beneficiaries of the exploits overseas, to continue to build upon triumphalist and expansionist discourses of Enlightenment. Gone were the times that the European colonising military occupied and subjugated the native, and the European intellectual theorised the triumph of the civil, the progress from the lower kind to the developed, primitive to modern [Said, 2003.] What didn't go away though, was the fact that both then and now, the European intellectual and theorist and its military, are both parts of the same machine, the state machine. The European intellectual didn't do anything out of line: when the times were "good," the theory sang the praise of the might of the empire; when times were "bad," the theory stuttered, shrieked, and lamented the "end of history."

This does not and did not mean that the colonised intellectual would not jump on the theoretical opportunity thus created, in order to strike as many more blows as possible into the bleeding body of western thought. What came to be known as postcolonial theory, at least at its preliminary stages, is the intellectual product of such theorists, thinkers, and critics.

Equipped and somehow reassured by the budding poststructuralist theories proliferating from and fundamentally critical of western thought, Edward Said wrote "Orientalism."

Almost all accounts of postcolonial theory have traced at least parts of their theoretical backbone back to this work [**Gandhi, 1998.**] Unlike many other "third world" oppositional thinkers who were direct or indirect inheritors of Marxist traditions, Said was a humanist intellectual whose main concern was to address what he saw as a gross injustice that western knowledge (in the forms of orientalism) had not only inflicted upon the East, but also on knowledge itself, as something that ideally should be separate from power. He specifically mentions Foucault and how he does not agree with him in the latter's assertion that knowledge is not even imaginable without strong links with power. Edward Said remained the same humanist his whole life as demonstrated through his 2003 preface to *Orientalism* shortly before his death:

"My idea in *Orientalism* is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange. I have called what I try to do 'humanism,' a word I continue to use ..." [**Said, 2003, p. xvii**]

It was exactly this contempt for "antagonistic debate," and the promotion of "longer sequence of thought" that was picked up by various later postcolonial theorists as the pick with which they excavated moments of "hybridity," "in-between-ness," and "beyond."

Bhabha [**1994**] is one of the most important and hard working of such theorists. He forges

words, shifts positions, oscillates between antagonistic poles, and uses everything. From his points of view, dog eats dog out on the streets of the globe as well as inside the "teaching machine" [Spivak, 1993] at universities in Europe and in the U.S. His basic project, as I understand it, is that the East has long been imagined, defined, and appropriated by the West. It is now time for the member of the margins, the "subaltern," the woman, to imagine the centre, use its theoretical enterprises in order to create sites of resistance and struggle against oppression [Bhabha, 1994.] The margins have the advantage of dwelling the "borders," the "interstices." They must use this advantage of being able to move positions, forge temporary alliances and avoid antagonisms amongst themselves. They also have the advantage of being able to use the languages and the methods of the centre against it. The margin is able to do anything in the theoretical world of Bhabha except one: Do not mention the persistent existence of binary oppositions; the binaries are things of the past, of the colonial times. In this, Bhabha fully respects the ideological limits that Said established in Orientalism. I should note that there is a good amount of good will in Bhabha's theoretical enterprise. His main aim always remains that of the creation of a temporal space for the oppressed and the marginal to expose the centre to its cruel pasts and presents.

Unfortunately, the historical "contexts" of his theories have been much more effective in shaping the forms they have taken and the politics they have resulted in; forms and politics within which any signs of the initial goodwill are barely traceable. Perhaps Bhabha got what he wanted:

An avoidance of conflict through "supplementary not alternative"

Giving in to the charges of "inverse racism and inverse sexism" by dismissing oppositional politics as "inverted polarities of a counter-politic"

A subliminal erasure of the relations of force and domination by forging a "collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples"

A wishful thinking in imagining that he can do what the West has done for the past hundreds of years, that is, to "name and claim," when he declares that his project is to "rename the postmodern from the position of postcolonial" [Bhabha, 1994.] His conviction not to have conviction, not to acknowledge the existence of binary oppositions, has led him to a place where he cannot realise that when the western theorist names and claims, a good part of the validity of the claim is "carried by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannon."

[Fanon, 1967, p.28.] Bhabha literally does not have the artillery to back up his discourse.

Amongst the various intellectuals who were inspired by, and in turn, informed postcolonial theory, I find the U.S. based Indian feminist Gayatri Spivak as one who never lost sight of the practical implications of theory and who bravely changed positions in order to remain a force to help advance the struggle against injustice in all its social and political manifestations. While, in the tradition of the postcolonial acceptance of the postmodern as the discourse of the centre and its somehow obsessive preoccupation with text, she has spent most of her time reading the *difference* of the western philosophical texts. She has also been able to transgress this trend by theoretically supporting oppositional and antagonistic anti-masculinist and anti-racist thought that her postcolonial fellows call "essentialist." [Spivak, 1993.] Speaking about the impossibility of imagining an individual outside the material grounds that make that individual, she, via Assia Djébar, touches on one of the rare non-postmodern moments of Deleuze and Guattari's thought:

"I have come to feel this more fully through the writings of Assia Djébar, the Algerian novelist. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari talk about the way in which a *socius* is produced and then becomes a 'miraculating' agency operating like a quasi cause. The example they use is Capital, but in fact, culture, ethnos, sexuality, all of these things become miraculating agencies as if by a miracle one speaks as an agent of a culture or an agent of a sex or an agent of an ethnos et cetera..." [Spivak, 1993, p.6]

The same miracle, or the operation of "miraculating agency," has happened to postcolonialism itself. Apart from a few in India, the majority of postcolonial theorists are academics employed at European and the U.S. universities. If one could extract them from the texts in-between which they have been trafficking imaginary "insurgent acts of cultural translation" [Bhabha, 1994,] one would be confronted with what they have become: agents of a particular class and western educational institutions. This sad but inevitable fate could have been avoided, perhaps, had the postcolonial theorist listened to early warnings by the Black Feminist Lesbian Audre Lorde (that is how she described herself) thinker and poet who, in 1979, wrote:

"The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house." [Lorde, c1984]

While challenging postcolonialism as academic "fashion," Maori theorist Tuhiwai Smith [2008] challenges and questions the political motives and implications of postcolonialism from the point of view of "indigenous peoples." She then mentions an anecdote that shows how, sometimes, instinct as the result of lived experience, could speak truth without having to, in the tradition of western thought, "analyse" and 'reflect':

"It is said that at an academic conference on post-colonialism, the Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes asked the audience: "What? postcolonialism? Have they left?" [Skyes cited in Tuhiwai Smith, 2008, p.24]

Writing about the completely different definitions of "authenticity" and "essentialism," Tuhiwai Smith underscores a crucial distinction that has been lacking in many postcolonial writings of the "subaltern" writers such as Bhabha [1994,] Sandoval [2000,] and **Trinh Minh-ha [1989,]** who have given rise to a movement that attaches "post" to anything that it imagines has passed or is passing. Smith stands alone to define the words "authentic," "essence," and "self" *outside* of western thought and imagination:

"In the colonised world however, these terms are not necessarily employed in the same way that First world academics might have used them. The term 'authentic,' for example, was an

oppositional term used in at least two different ways. First, it was used as a form of articulating what it meant to be dehumanized by colonization; and, second, for recognizing 'national consciousness' in the struggles for decolonization." [Tuhiwai Smith, 2008, p.73]

Although Tuhiwai Smith does not expand this politicization of terms to other existing binaries such as gender and class, her courage and insight inspire such expansion. Fanon [1967] clearly mentions that the binary colonized/colonizer is a production of imperialism, a violent one, too. However, he also mentions that the colonized has been already caught in this binary. Rejecting fundamental binaries as "evil" construction of western thought does not justify pretending that they do not exist and are not in full operation in the world we are living in right now. There are colonized and colonizers, women and men, poor and rich. The postcolonial theorists' attempt at sweeping these realities under the carpet of "democracy of oppression" (meaning everyone is somehow oppressed in the postmodern times,) "shattering of subjectivities," de-centring of self," and "global anxiety" [Sandoval, 2000] could be argued, against all good intentions, to being used as a theoretical device for the perpetuation of existing injustices. This rhetoric might genuinely desire to advance a spirit of collaboration, negotiation and "love," but what it really does, is to reinforce and consolidate the foundations of injustice. Edward Said's 2003 preface is quite telling when he reveals his utmost frustration at how, in the course of twenty five years after the publication of *Orientalism*, events have taken a turn completely opposite to what he thought his theories were advancing. In other words, he imagined negotiation and mutual understanding; reality produced military invasions and suicide bombings:

"This is to say that every domain is linked to every other one, and nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated and pure of any outside influence. *The disheartening part is that the more the critical study of culture shows us that this is the case, the less influence such a view seems to have, and the more territorially reductive polarizations like 'Islam v. the West' seem to conquer.*" [Said, 2003, p. xvii] (emphasis is mine.)

Said preferred to continue imposing his "critical study" that was based on benevolent humanism on the facts of military occupations, masculinist subjugation, and capitalist exploitation.

Thus it is context that plays the determining role in the formation of the methodology that I will be advancing in this study. A oppositional methodology that comprises of a series of strategies [Spivak, 1993] and not tactics [Sandoval, 2000.]

Therefore, the events that happen during the course of writing make their way into the arguments and shape the basis for the foundations of their theories and practices. Here, I will outline a number of important aspects of what I mean by oppositional methodology as strategy.

This oppositional strategy, while maintaining differences, is greatly informed by the writings of a number of the U.S. Black Feminist women such as bell hooks [1992,] Audre Lorde [c1984] and Toni Morrison [1993.] In all such writings, the experience of the "subordinates in relation of power" is being referred to as that of living in a "war zone." [Sandoval, 2000.] Explaining some of the survival strategies, or rather, rules of combat, bell hooks argues for the necessity to develop an "oppositional gaze." [hooks, 1992.] For her, this method, or way of being that informs methodology, this "seeing things oppositionally," is primarily a creative process whose fundamental task is the *invention of "new subjectivities"* in opposition to the dominant "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" that basically rule our world at present. Therefore, an oppositional methodology is not mere resistance, but also and more importantly, is a site of active opposition, "a radical intervention." [hooks, 1992.] Oppositional methodology is *interventionist*. It has to do with *insurgencies* similar to urban guerrilla warfare: one identifies solid, well established areas of the dominant structures, and in a sudden attack reveals the possibilities of their destruction. For example, in the present study, I will locate one of the most unnoticed fields of the dominant knowledge, that is, the Eurocentric discourse of the *theory* of the avant-garde (later in the study I will explain why

and how this field is almost unnoticed.) I will then stage a multi-directional attack on its foundational assumptions about the inception and conception of theory and practice of the avant-garde by demonstrating the existence of not only "avant-garde gestures" [Harding & Rose, c2006] in the Chinese paintings of 700-1700 A.D., but more importantly, a consistent tradition of art theory that tried to analyse it as a "category of cultural criticism." This kind of guerrilla warfare demands certain level of *de-centred and slippery ways of being in different places at the same time*. In other words, oppositional methodology relies on *skirmishes*. It creates zones of intensity but does not wait to observe the results. Rather, it moves (jumps, dives if you like) into other areas and *make them intense*. Oppositional methodology is *anti-conformist*. It intends to *unsettle*. The amount of time it lingers on any subject depends on and is directly related to *survival strategies*. The dominant structures of knowledge have time. They can cling to one subject at length and define, elaborate, reflect, analyse, and infer for a very, very long time. They have established as "truth" that the more and the longer, is the better too.

"[to] value all images-indeed, reality itself- according to the quantity of effects they produce. The more, the better: more tears, increased emotion, added travel, hyperexperience, accumulated commodities, heaps of money, amassing collections, dwellings, books, knowledge- the measure is never finally enough. Hyperaccrual, more flamboyant effects are felt to equal the measure, degree, depth, and magnitude of meaning in life. A search for increase becomes connected to the search for a higher, better, more noble existence. In these efforts to motivate life, the inexpressible goodness of quality is reduced to quantity. For Barthes, this valuing of quality through the quantity effects produced is a social and psychological dynamic not well analyzed in the university; for 'the quantification of quality,' quality disguised as quantity, economizes scholarly intelligence itself, and academic knowledge has come to 'understand reality more cheaply". [Sandoval, 2000, p.122]

Implementing the anti-conformist aspect of oppositional methodology, I will write in *short bursts, get distracted in order to create new areas of "concern," and experiment with the unlimited possibilities of thought when it replaces instant for moment*. I will also make two very short films. If Hollywood cinema, in the form of "our present entertainment," is "the spectacle of contemporary colonization, dehumanization, and disempowerment where the image serves as a murder weapon," [hooks, 1992, p.7,] and because this entertainment (in the case of Hollywood and mainstream cinema) comes in 2-3 hour doses, I will set to oppose its ideological content not only through the "content" of my films, but even more importantly, through their forms and duration. Making short and very short films then could become counter-weapons in the hands of the "dominated" and "subjugated." One might object to this by asking "how about 20-30 second ads? How are these any counter-weapons in the hands of the dominated?" It must be noted that an ad has the ability to buy time. An ad gets repeated time and time again daily, weekly and monthly. As a matter of fact, the duration that audiences get exposed to an ad is sometimes much more than a Hollywood movie given that the former is free to watch. And let's face it: What kind of "subjugated" has the money to make a two hour film or purchase sometimes more than 2-3 hours of air time for an ad to begin with?

At the level of content, the films are experiments with aspects of Daoist philosophy amongst other things. In "Slogun," the present violent and cruel context of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon is somehow tested against un-humanist core of Daoism. It is an attempt to aesthetically address the challenges of forcing human beings out of central concern while opposing the fundamental injustices resulting from imperialism and colonialism. How can one try to point at the insignificance of human being as species (philosophically) while taking sides with a large number of its members, the subjugated and the colonised (politically?) The important thing for this study is not to let go of the "oppositional gaze."

The second film, "All that is solid melts into air" [Marx & Engels, 1967,] is also an almost two-minute experimental filmic encounter with Daoism, the Chinese experimental painting style of "*i-hua*" or one-stroke painting, and the political realities of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

In this case, the upside down visuals is taken from a story in Liezi [Liezi, trans. A. C. Graham, 1990] in which a child sees and feels things upside down and is taken to the sage for cure but the sage tells the father off and scorns him for not realising that the child is only different from others and that it is the illusions of being in majority that treats the minority as sick. The slow motion movements have been cut together very fast to create a rhythm as an experimenting with "one-stroke" film making, and the burning of the Beijing Olympic slogan "One world, one dream" is a philosophical opposition to the one-ness of the world and a political opposition to the one-ness of the dream.


In both cases, the foregrounding of Daoist philosophy in the making of experimental film (that we have been told over and over again, under the heading of modernism, is a European phenomenon) is a strategy to, in a small measure, *undermine* " the nexus between cultural ways of knowing, scientific discoveries, economic impulses and imperial power (that) enabled the West to make ideological claims to having a superior civilization."

[Tuhiwai Smith, 2008, p.64] Furthermore, this foregrounding challenges the arbitrary "modern/pre-modern distinction." [Connell, 2007]

While writing, I checked my mail box and found an unsigned tract there. In the spirit of what I have been arguing for as oppositional methodology, and in order to not lose sight of context, I will print it below without comment because it does not deserve one:

Our economy is in a crisis.

So far, 338,346 immigrants
have arrived during it.

This is insane!
Not one more! 

Oppositional methodology is also *unfashionable*. Its primary concerns do not get intimidated by what is the "latest" in theorising. This includes terminologies, methods of locating and observing data, categorisations, analysis, and questions about (im)partiality. Mathew Arnold is an orientalist. He instructs the theorist to keep "aloof of...those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas...(to be) disinterested..." [Arnold cited in Gandhi, 1998, p.51.] The oppositional methodology goes out of its way to undermine this colonial strategy by remembering, at every stage of research, the insight that such "pacifist" pretensions are no more than being "partisans of order" [Fanon, 1967.] Therefore, I will be quite *interested in* the social, economic, and cultural coordinates of relations of power throughout the present study. Similarly, the Eurocentric discourse, covered by the blanket of universalism, runs a mock in all fields, from sociology [Connell, 2007] to arts and art theory [Harding & Rose, 2006.] The dominant research discourse is based on "...the project of constructing a model of the world from the perspective of the metropole, while imagining one is taking a global perspective" [Connell, 2007, p.57.] Through oppositional methodology I will *attack the humanist universalism* of such western project by challenging its construction of the avant-garde and modernist art as an invention (positive or negative) of Europe, unearthing quite sophisticated and consistent debates around (non)representational art that predate such discussions in Europe by a thousand years in a limited field (Chinese painting,) highlighting the vital relations between non-humanist Daoist philosophy that provided the determining grounds for the creation and continuation of experimental painting, and art theory that theorised such relations. In short, I will attempt to foreground, in a small measure, that which the western or metropolitan ways of theorising forces into not the background, but rather, underground in order to perpetuate "a gigantic lie-that modernity created itself-within the North Atlantic world, independent of the rest of humanity" [Connell, 2007, p. x.] What is this "gigantic lie?" That the current western knowledge, and civilisation that is built upon it, is the product of the "development" and "progress" of humanity as a whole.

"The theorist's reading list is always an interesting document...grand ethnography, emphasizing the modern/pre-modern distinction...the social thought of colonized cultures...is treated as belonging to a world that has been surpassed." [Connell, 2006, p.46]

Oppositional methodology does not find in texts "innocent" results of "disinterested" observations of the theorist. The "miraculating agency" processes are well at work in texts as in the lives of the people who write these texts. Therefore, I have taken a strategic decision to rely solely, albeit at times unsuccessfully, on *texts written by women, non-white theorists of the metropole, or theorists writing from the "South" or "East."* Given the extreme difficulty of, for example, accessing theories of the avant-garde, by women or non-European people, I have tried to unravel their ethno-centric and masculinist shortcomings.

I will similarly make an effort, as much as possible, to avoid words and terms such as negotiate, mutual, differential, derivative, stipulate, interdisciplinary, coherent, diaspora, hybrid, alterity, citizen, global, integration, rational, moving forward, cultural conversations, democratic, occluded, subalternity, technologies, coalitional, invest, profit, signify, logically, affinity, new millennium, matrix, coactive, reconcile, and of course, goals. There are many more words and terms I would have preferred not to use but then, I would have had to write in Farsi. There have been writers who have had the will and courage to refuse to write in "the language of the colonizers" as an act of ideological defiance.

"For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to write in the language of the colonizers was to pay homage to them, while to write in the languages of Africa was to engage in an anti-imperialist struggle." [Tuhiwai Smith, 2008, p.36]

Finally, oppositional methodology is respectful while critical of allies. In "Southern Theory," [Connell, 2007] the writer, demonstrating the gross Eurocentrism that dominates the knowledge of the west (metropole,) sets out to highlight the sociological works by non-western theorists. Her insights in relation to the mechanism with which such dominance have been forged and perpetuated (reading lists, politics of citation, the processes of data

collection, theorisation and implementation during which the South has ended up to be a fertile ground for the first and third but, almost completely, excluded from the second, that is, the theorisation, are ground breaking. However, as she begins to tell the tale of her "encounter" with the two Iranian theorists of the 1960s and early 70s, she also begins to reveal some of the inevitable western scholarly dogma that could be the product of years of lived experience in western academic institutions. Al-e Ahmad [1978] is a theorist from within the periphery, the South, with all the aesthetic, social, and political peculiarities or, as Connell puts it, "idiosyncracies."

"The text is also hard to follow because it is, to be blunt, disorganized. Al-e Ahmad (1982a) chats to the reader, excuses himself, interrupts himself, thinks of a new topic and darts off after it then repeats himself. He is opinionated, laying about with scathing comments on the schools, the army, the ulama and the intellectuals, but he doesn't follow through very far on any argument...He is a vivid writer with a sharp eye and a notable sense of humour, but *is in no way a systematic thinker.*" [Connell, 2007, p.118] (emphasis is mine)

What happened to the plea to, or better still, call for the intellectual of the South to theorise and for this theorisation as "texts to learn from, not just about"? [Connell, 2007, p.viii] All along the way in her book, did Connell mean theorising after the example of the metropole? What is systematic thinking? What are the coordinates of the implied level-headed-ness that is a condition of "systematic thought?" Whose coordinates? Descartes? As a person who has read all Al-e Ahmad's works as a teenager in the 70s, I can certainly confirm Connell's impression of Al-e Ahmad's writing and thinking style, including his disturbing misogyny. However, what is wrong with theorising while chatting, making opinion, being angry, passionately embracing or rejecting, interrupting and excusing oneself, and refusing to bush walk the safe and comfortable territories of the middle but, instead, diving into the deep unknowable valleys of extremes? One ends up in prison and or dies under suspicious circumstances the way Al-e Ahmad did? Must all works of thought be riddled with brackets

in order to be considered thought or scholarly work? How far one has to "follow through" arguments in order to achieve "systematic thinking?" Whose yard stick is measuring the distance? Gharbzadegi (**Westoxication, Ale Ahmad, 1982a**) is "messy." Connell's task is to prove, not relying on metropolitan criteria ala Descartes and Hegel, that theorising must be non-messy, that clarity excludes messiness. This is where a vision, in Connell's case, a respectful and important vision, must face the limitations of its strategies. In other words, it has to recognise the existence of polarities, sensitivities, feeling/thinking that are non-commensurable, antagonistic and plainly, mutually exclusive.

Again, and in her "encounter" with another Iranian theorist, Shariati [1979,] one of the most influential Iranian thinkers of the 1960s-70s, and although praising him for being "a very systematic thinker," Connell doesn't hide her frustration with the "sketchy-ness" of his ideas: "Much of his writing, therefore, is embattled, and it is hardly surprising that a good deal of his conceptualization is sketchy. The urgency in his texts is palpable...He was living in a turbulent society; some of his students were becoming involved in an armed uprising; and he was living on a knife-edge of tolerance from a violent regime-which silenced his voice soon enough. Not only the justification of change, but also the strength of change, was a central problem in his thought." [Connelle, 2007, p.134]

Which peripheral or Southern country Connell knows of, that is not a "turbulent society" as a direct result of military, economic, social, and cultural interventions of imperialism? If the turbulence and the "urgency of change" are facts of the societies of the South, then Connell cannot hope to encounter theories from those parts of the world, that are not sketchy, "messy," and "embattled." A call for expanding the space for "theorizing in the periphery" cannot side-step a fundamental questioning of long-held metropolitan ideological and formal tools and their application to the Southern thought. If it does, it would do so at the expense of losing its anti-colonial integrity.

Hence I am proud to invite the reader of the present study to expect the writing to be full of chats, excuses, interruptions, scathing comments, opinions, not following through arguments very far, creating new topics and above all, an example of unsystematic thought.

“PLAYING MUSIC FOR COWS”

2. Daoism and Modernism

I set out to research the avant-garde from a non-Eurocentric angle. I wanted to find out whether, regardless of the "revolutionary" [Adorno,1983] or "reactionary" [Lucacks, 1974] nature of it, the avant-garde was a European phenomenon. I began with the obvious assumption: That the avant-garde was conceived in the beginnings of the 19th century in Europe, coined as a term, and developed into a full scale movement by the beginning of the 20th century. Based on this assumption, my task would be to look for the avant-garde moments and gestures, within the same time frame of the last two hundred years, in other parts of the world such as Latin America and the East; somewhere that was not the West. On another but parallel level, I was in the process of making work that exemplified and interrogated, but also demonstrated these theoretical concerns. Similar assumptions would encourage me to refer to the body of work that were primarily Eurocentric, whether they were made by Europeans or not, in order to pinpoint similarities and differences of ideas, techniques, and sensitivities. In other words, in order to be able to make original work, I had to look for precedents of ideas within the framework of the "white avant-garde." [Harding & Rose, 2006]

In both cases, I would find myself operating precisely within the same confines as those I imagined I was trying to undermine. On the one hand, I would be theoretically contributing to and reinforcing the "conventional Eurocentric history of the avant-garde and...the suggestion of their European origin;" [Harding & Rose, 2006, p13] and on the other, practically make work the ideas, techniques, and politics of which could only be traced back to the same history.

However, how would this be a) any different from very many studies of the modernist and the avant-garde works that had been and were being made by non-westerners either in the West or elsewhere; and more importantly b) how would such study claim to be anti-colonial

and or anti-Eurocentric because it had already presumed and accepted the time frame and the claim to originality of Europe and the West? These were crucial questions to deal with if I wanted to go about theorising and practicing (making work) from an anti-colonial positionality.

Hence I decided to break free from the specifically post-Enlightenment progressivist and linear understanding of history as a locomotive on a straight track that has begun from “dark” and “primitive” corners of human society and has been continuously heading toward something better and brighter. [I would previously put Foucault and his “Order of Things” here in this bracket but in the course of study, I found out that, this idea of linear history of human beings does not have any place in the works of Laozi [1989] and Zhuangzi [1968] who pointed at circular movements, reversibility and return of events, and the goal-less-ness and hope-less-ness (not helpless-ness) of human wanderings in their life span on earth; therefore, for this bracket: **[Zhuangzi, 1968]**

The implications of such freedom of movement both in time and place are manifold. It basically challenges everything one has learned in the past as false, or at least subject to severe challenge, from philosophy and history of thought to aesthetic and art theory. However, I had to resist going on a monumental tangent (questioning of philosophy, aesthetic theory, modernity, and avant-garde and whether they should be called as such to begin with, and proposing alternative terminology that would respect their non-western origins) from which there was no possibility of return. Therefore, I decided to focus on Daoist philosophy in the body of its three most important works (the Laozi, the Zhuangzi, and the Liehzi [1990] with an emphasis on the Zhuangzi as the most written about and referred to text,) and how this philosophy has inspired, for two thousand and five hundred years, the creation of experimental art work and specifically painting:

"[s]ince Zhuangzi and Chan insist on non-cooperation with adverse circumstances and corrupt politics, and value intuition, perception and personal experiences, they have often

inspired great art and enabled artists to create many exquisite and unusual works of great moment and lasting appeal." [Zhu & Blocker, 1995, p.175]

Moreover and not losing sight of the experimental spirit of my project, I would look for philosophical and artistic sources of inspiration in Daoist texts that would spark ideas for making my own work in the course of this study. In other words, while theoretically challenging already existing Eurocentric theories of the avant-garde and modernism in general by highlighting their origins in the philosophical Chinese texts from more than two thousand years ago; in practice, I would experiment and play with how the ideas in these texts and their own formal experimentations would inspire the creation of experimental political films.

In what follows, I will outline, very generally and where it has had an impact, a few moments of the encounter between western philosophical discourse and the Daoist philosophy and the principal aspects of this philosophy that have been inspiring the creation of experimental, "modernist," and "avant-garde" work for the past 2500 years. I will demonstrate how what the West has regarded as original concepts of the modern and the avant-garde, has been in operation, both in the form of texts and paintings, for hundreds if not thousands of years.

It took the West around three hundred years (from the 17th century to present) to move from calling the Chinese Daoist texts "understanding" to "thought" to "wisdom" to "philosophy."

"The rationalism of the West has often been contrasted with mysticism of the East...On many occasions, the hegemony of the West is deemed justifiable because the rationality that it purportedly appeals to entitles it to enlighten peoples whose mysticism is the mark of a more primitive form of philosophical consciousness." [Froese, 2006, p.219]

In short, what was called mysticism was the Eastern philosophy's preoccupation with that which could not be explained but could be approached, thought, written and spoken about. Up until Nietzsche, the western rationality germinated around the core of that which was explainable and therefore controllable. At the heart of "mysticism", lied a non-humanist intuition that sensed the human beings' relation to the cosmos as that of "one single hair on the body of a horse" [Zhuangzi.] The western thought, on the contrary, imagined and manufactured a humanist belief in which the human being is the centre and the most important purpose of the cosmos and set out to "know" and therefore tame whatever came its way.

When it came to the encounter between the two, Hegel "dismissed the Chinese and Indian tradition" because he thought they suffered from "pre-rational understandings" and therefore incapable of grasping concepts of "subjectivity" and "freedom." [Froese, 2006] What is important in this early Enlightenment encounter between the thoughts of the West and the East is not so much the fact that Hegel was racist and incapable of understanding the Daoist philosophy, but that he helped establish a humanist foundation upon which almost all subsequent encounters have revolved. A foundation that has not been prepared to approach Zhuangzi and Laozi without letting go of human subject as an axis around which everything else revolves.

Most of the serious western readings and interpretations of the Laozi and specially Zhuangzi began around 1950s although there were sporadic citations of the texts and mentions of the "wisdom" of the East appearing in "Oriental studies" journals and publications from the late 19th century. [Reid, 1925]

Faced with the uncertainties of the modern world in which the project of Enlightenment that had promised a progressive movement toward "human freedom," but had resulted in catastrophic colonisation as well as two world wars, the western intellectual began to seriously doubt the rigid rational backbone of their project, i.e., the western logic that

claimed to be able to explain and control all phenomena, and throw out everything that it couldn't explain, as mystic.

"The notion of that which cannot be spoken is not worth speaking about, is a typical Western assumption." [froese, 2006, p.61]

Hence, one witnesses a flourishing of attention to Eastern thought traditions including Daoist philosophy from mid 20th century. This trend has been intensifying as the poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers have sharpened their criticism of the fundamental assumptions of the western thought and logic. It is telling that many of these thinkers are influenced by Heidegger, who himself was heavily influenced by the Daoist philosophy. In fact, the impact of this influence was so overwhelming that he forgot to acknowledge the Daoist sources of his later thought. [Reinhardt,1996]

The great majority of written material in the West on Daoist philosophy have interpreted the Laozi and Zhuangzi as "projects of self-realization." [Waley, 1958; Graham in his introductions to Daoist texts including Liehzi, 1990, Ames, 1998] These readings of Zhuangzi view the philosophical and political insights of the texts as tools significant only as far as they help outline the "ideal personality" and therefore, function as a manual for "self-realization." It is in the light of this reading that many of such commentators have discovered in it, the origins of European Existentialism and even Marx's theories of alienation, as well as concepts of freedom and necessity. [Zhu & Blocker, 1995] This humanist reading is the result of a Eurocentric view that considers the "modern times" as a "tragic necessity" for progress and as an inevitable step toward the ultimate freedom of the human being. This view does not have the means, nor does it have any interest in removing human beings and their freedom from the centre of thought and or philosophy. Therefore, citations from Laozi and Zhuangzi in above readings are selective and deliberately foreground sections that revolve around discussions of the "true man" while deleting those

that points at this "man's" insignificance in the much vaster scheme of things, ridiculing, scorning, and attacking "man" for his lust for control:

"Ruo of the North Sea said, 'horses and oxen have four hooves'-this is what I mean by the heavenly. Putting a halter on the horse's head, piercing the ox's nose-this is what I mean by the human. So I say: do not let what is human destroy what is heavenly." **[Zhuangzi cited in Zhu & Blocker, 1995, p.152]**

Another important trend in reading Daoist texts especially that of Zhuangzi, is the hermeneutic reading. Generally speaking, it is based on the interpretation of the cultural context of the text, valorisation of the similarities of "human experience," avoidance of points of cultural conflict, and "offering cultural solutions" for the sake of helping to build a "harmonious" world that "respects" all cultures and "encourages negotiation." **[Froese, 2006]**

"Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought" is the most recent of such hermeneutic readings. Although her overdue comparative study of Zhuangzi, Laozi, Nietzsche, and Heidegger is illuminating and ground breaking in that it highlights the several similarities of thought between the ancient Chinese and (post)modern western philosophical discourse, she still clings to a pragmatist and humanist thread in order to weave these, at many times, incommensurable entities, together. Time and time again, when discussing certain paradoxical and conflictual chapters of Laozi and Zhuangzi, she issues disclaimers on behalf of the authors:

"The effort to erode faith in the fixed categories of knowledge (in Laozi and Zhuangzi) is not intended to create turmoil, but rather to allow for a kind of openness towards other beings as well as foster receptivity to nonconceptual forms of knowing. It is to foster harmony rather than discord." **[Froese, 2006, p.59]**

Such avoidance of discussion of conflict, and through that, evading the foregrounding of that which does not fit, as one of the most important preoccupations of Laozi and Zhuangzi,

is systematically executed in other forms of readings of the ancient texts as well. **[Merton, 1965]** What could be the common reason for this?

As western intellectuals, who have been trained in various schools of humanism (left and right,) and as "systematic" thinkers who do not think that they are thinking unless they give form, define, analyse, and conclude (even if they conclude that there are no conclusions,) they have difficulty coming to terms with Laozi and Zhuangzi as goal-less, intentionally paradoxical, and oppositional texts. Zhuangzi's main moral advice is to heed none, its political position is perpetual opposition, its psychological ground is to lose self, and its methodological sense is to undermine common sense.

Against all "how to..." interpretations of Laozi and Zhuangzi, Kuang-Ming Wu **[1982,]** with the help of numerous citations, demonstrates exactly the opposite: that the main "message" of Zhuangzi is a position of "no message," or rather, an attack on all who instruct:

"Now, this 'message' of Chuang Tzu is no message because it has no items of information to convey, for instance, on how to follow oneself, or what one's nature is. Instead, it is an attack on the ideals we hold dear. And the attack is so uncompromisingly unconventional, so irritatingly obtrusive and challenging, that people tend to laugh him out of their attention."

[Kuang-Ming, 1982, p.17]

It is my contention that, precisely this unconventionality and "nonsensical" attack on established social, moral, cultural, and political norms that inspired the experimental "untrammelled" painters not to hold any orthodox techniques as sacred. The Daoist philosophy provided these painters and theorists with the mercury balls with which they tried to play in order to create work that challenged, undermined, and ignored the aesthetic rules of their times. The mercury balls of "evocative indirection...nonsensical therapy for nonsense...meandering away from understanding and rational activity and logical calculus and deduction...a reason exclusive of traditional reason, but inclusive of the reason of the heart..." **[Kuang-Ming, 1982]**

As such, the texts of Laozi and especially Zhuangzi demonstrate characteristics that one could find as principal aspects of modernist art and the avant-garde. The use of "modernist," "aesthetic theory," "avant-garde," and "philosophy" as terms to expound the Daoist writings and works that have been inspired by it in China during the last 2500 years, is intentional and for the purpose of creating fissures in the body of western knowledge. The western theorist, whenever confronted with questions of "influence" and "originality," has resorted to defence mechanisms that dismiss the existence of ideas, thought processes and concepts before they were coined in the West as "historical anachronism, an epiphenomenon to uneven, synchronous development, or an anomaly." [Liu, 2000] Such claims could only be valid if one accepts the completely arbitrary "assumptions" that explain historical difference as "uneven development." At the core of this assumption wiggles the *a priori* worm of a belief that the world history is nothing but different versions of the premodern, modern, and postmodern history of Europe. During the last twenty years, the *a priori* status of this belief has been challenged by many different thinkers. [see Liu, 2000; Froese, 2006; Cai, 2004 for examples in the fields of philosophy, modernism and aesthetics.] One of the intentions of the present work is to contribute to this recent discourse and intensify its needed challenge of Eurocentric historicity.

Daoist philosophy: inspiring contemporary experimental art work

Feng Zikai, the great cartoonist, art critic, and educator, in 1930, argued that "modern art in the West amount to a capitulation to the aesthetic and essence of Chinese painting." [cited in Tang, 2008, p.2] The Chinese painting that he was referring to, were the "ink-and-brush on scroll, with its characteristic use of empty space, summary renditions, and lines conveying shape, texture, and movement...a hanging scroll, which made no pretence to verisimilitude, displayed a suggestive incompleteness and evoked the unfamiliar and the fantastic." [Cai, 2008]

This precise and brief description of the "essence" of Chinese painting is directly inspired and informed by Daoist philosophy's wanderings in the worlds of suggestions instead of instructions, surreal images and anecdotes instead of definitive forms and stories, and evocative empty spaces instead of descriptive representations. It points to that which makes the Chinese painting tradition different from the western tradition up until the modernist era. What Baudelaire defined as modernity towards the end of 19th century in Europe, had been the guiding principle of the Chinese painters, after the Daoist thought, for hundreds of years: "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent, it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable." **[Baudelaire cited in Liu, 2000, p.20]**

The transient nature of things and life, the accidental, the larger or smaller than real, the indeterminacy of events, the unknowable, the oppositional and the untameable are only some of the most important characteristics of Daoist writings that would find their equivalents in modernist and the avant-garde movements. I should note that it is not the main aim of this study to "prove" or demonstrate whether the similarities between Daoist texts and modernist and avant-garde principles are purely accidental, the result of "common human experience," or outright unacknowledged thievery. However, given that a great many ideas of modernist art and the avant-garde came into existence at around the same time that the Chinese texts were translated into English and the Chinese paintings were being exhibited in Europe and especially England, this study could inspire future research on such topic. My main intention here, by highlighting some of these characteristics, is to promote non-European ways of being and sensing such as Daoist philosophy as discourse that has inspired great art work in China; and, that could be used as inspiration to create contemporary experimental art. **[see Baudelaire, 1986; Bradbury and MacFarlane, 1976; Berman, 1982 for detail discussion of aspects of European modernist art. Also see Scheunemann (ed.), 2000 for the relations between modernism and the avant-garde.]**

During the course of the present study and while I was working on the two short films that accompany it, again and again, I referred back to these characteristics as inspiration for ideas and even techniques. However, the Daoist texts differed, in at least one fundamental aspect, from the modernist and the avant-garde principles: while with rare exceptions, the avant-garde was still a modernist project of "hope" and "greater future" that stemmed from the more general project of Enlightenment, the Daoist texts do not even consider hope as a category of importance or some "goal" as the reason for human endeavour. This, in turn, is one of the inevitable manifestations of a non-humanist philosophy that allows human being only its proportionate place in relation to the cosmos in which it is having a very short and temporary existence: "A single hair on the body of a horse." Therefore, I had come across a body of thought and work of art, that unlike the avant-garde, could inspire my work in developing an aesthetics of no-hope; but would also encourage experimentation, transformation, and more importantly, opposition to the way things are without falling into the traps of the conventions of a project of hope that would ultimately result in its manipulation and appropriation.

The minor as revolutionary

I found out that, for example, the attention to the "minor" that I had found useful and attractive in Deleuze and Guattari [1986,] was the central theme of many anecdotes in Zhuangzi. A "disdain for the status-quo...a philosophy of the outcasts, wanderers of periphery" [Froese, 2006, p.104,] makes Zhuangzi an assault on the norm and normalisation as an oppressive rule of governance. Hence, a celebration of and fascination with that which threatens such normalisation: the criminal, the deformed, and the unsettled dweller of the fringe.

"[w]riters as the Chuang Tzu have been consistent favourites of rebels, social outcasts, and those whose worldly ambitions were failed...His vision constitutes an indispensable quiet revolution seldom noticed even among his fellow Chinese." [Wu, 1982, p.5]

However, while the centuries old web of western logic that surrounds Deleuze and Guattari make the revolutionary aspect of their thought, at times, impossible to decipher; the brevity and simplicity of the Daoist texts (Laozi is only five thousand characters) allow a direct and un-mediated encounter.

Profanation of the sacred

In order to agitate for an aesthetics of no-hope, one must hold nothing sacred, even what one is advocating for. For Zhuangzi, nothing is sacred, even the most sacred. In order to oppose the moral doctrines of Confucius, Zhuangzi had to begin by undermining any effort to use it for the purpose of establishing yet another sacred teaching. Similarly, the avant-garde was, among other things, a project of profanation of the sacred. An echo of the Manifesto of the Communist party "All that is sacred will be profaned." [Marx & Engles, 1967]

"Master Tung-kuo asked Chuang Tzu, This thing called the Way-where does it exist?

Chuang Tzu said, There's no place it doesn't exist.

Come, said Master Tung-kuo, you must be more specific!

It is in the ant.

As low a thing as that?

It is in the panic grass.

But that's lower still!

It is in the tiles and shards.

How can it be so low?

It is in the piss and shit."

[Zhungzi, 1968, p.18]

"Making Strange"

The world of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liehzi [1990] is a world of metaphors, strange fish and birds who talk to each other and to the human beings, "paradoxical anecdotes," and nonsensical strategies; strategies that work to undermine the commonly held moral, social, political, cultural, and philosophical values. They are carefully planted in stories that might begin rationally and create conventional expectations of closure; but suddenly shock the reader or the listener from the ordinary into extraordinary. They are some of the earliest modernist strategies of rubbing the familiar against the unfamiliar in order to create sparks of hyperreality.

"Penumbra said to Shadow, 'A little while ago you were walking and now you're standing still; a little while ago you were sitting and now you are standing up. Why this lack of independent action?' Shadow said, 'Do I have to wait for something before I can be like this? Does what I wait for also have to wait for something before it can be like this? Am I waiting for the scales of a snake or the wings of cicada (in order to move)? How do I know why it is so? How do I know it is not so?'"

[Zhuangzi, 1968, p.49]

Discontinuity, fragmentation, non-linearity

The Daoist texts demonstrate a genuine indifference to the concept of continuity. They seem to float with the fragmented and disjointed reality of the real, the one in which ideas and actions do not check themselves against a chronologically ordered sense of time. In Daoist texts, the anecdotes are fragments of many unrelated real or fabricated events, not

necessarily historical, but rather, everyday and banal events; as if they have been written as they have passed the writers' imagination. As such, they could not possibly have occurred in chronological order. What makes them different from the modernist examples of non-linearity is a deliberate lack of any effort to hold on to a uniform structure for their narratives. In this sense, they have more in common with the European postmodern art. Daoist texts have an emphasis on present (a present that includes past) as the only real time and consider the preoccupations with future as vain.

"Jan Ch'iu asked Confucius, 'Is it possible to know anything about the time before Heaven and earth existed?' Confucius said, 'It is-the past is the present.'"

[Zhuangzi, 1968, p.245]

Ambiguity, obliqueness, abstraction

From the start, Laozi maps out its intention to celebrate that which cannot be defined and named. Step by step and effortlessly, it steers the reader away from what is considered real, familiar, and normal. In Daoist texts, nothing is what it seems to be, everything is a hint at something else. There are no definite forms except for the formless. Nothing is represented but everything is presented with the aim of creating a break with representation itself. What makes things work is that which is not there, the empty space.

"Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;

It is the centre hole that makes it useful.

Shape clay into a vessel;

It is the space within that makes it useful.

Cut doors and windows for a room;

It is the holes which make it useful.

Therefore benefit comes from what is there;

usefulness from what is not there."

[Laozi, 1989, p.13]

I have already mentioned the extraordinary resourcefulness of Daoist texts in being able to inspire experimental political work. As I was working on the second film project as part of this study, "All that is solid melts into air," and apart from trying to work with seemingly paradoxical position of combining non-humanist worldview with politically oppositional stance, the following anecdote inspired the principal technique of the film, the upside-down framing, and therefore, I believe, allowed the paradox to remain a paradox and not demand resolution on the one hand, and formally intensify the "one-stroke" rhythm of slow movements and fast cuts.

'Mr P'ang of Ch'in had a son who was clever as a child but suffered from an abnormality when he grew up. When he heard singing he thought it was weeping, when he saw white he thought it was black,; fragrant smells he thought noisome, sweet tastes he thought bitter, wrong actions he thought right. Whatever came into his mind, heaven and earth, the four cardinal points, water and fire, heat and cold, he always turned upside down. A certain Mr Yang told his father: 'the gentlemen of Lu have many arts and skills, perhaps they can cure him. Why not inquire among them?'

The father set out for Lu, but passing through Ch'en he came across Lao-tzu and took the opportunity to tell him about his son's symptoms.

'How do you know that your son is abnormal?' said Lao-tzu. 'Nowadays everyone in the world is deluded about right and wrong, and confused about benefit and harm; because so many people share this sickness, no one perceives that it is a sickness. Besides, one man's abnormality is not enough to overcome his family, one family's to overturn the neighbourhood, one neighbourhood's to overturn a state, one state's to overturn the world. If the whole world were abnormal, how could abnormality overturn it? Supposing the minds of everyone in the world were like your son's, then on the contrary it is you who would be

abnormal. Joy and sorrow, music and beauty, smells and tastes, right and wrong, who can straighten them out? I am not even sure that these words of mine are not abnormal, let alone those of the gentlemen of Lu, who are the most abnormal of all; who are they to cure other people's abnormality? You had better go straight home instead of wasting your time."

[Liehzi,1990, p.72]

3. I read these books, so you don't!

In an introduction that outlines the shortcomings of the other major book on the avant-garde, Poggioli's [1968] "The Theory of the Avant-Garde," the translator of "Theory of the Avant-Garde" [Burger, 1984] asserts:

"Poggioli's criteria are both historically and theoretically too unspecific; his arguments cannot accomplish what must be the primary task of a 'theory of the avant-garde': to characterize with theoretical accuracy the historical uniqueness of the avant-garde of the 1920s (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, the left avant-garde in Russia and Germany.)"

[Burger, 1984, p.X]

It is exactly this Euro-centric, limited, and limiting self-assuredness that equates Europe with the world in general that became the strong feature of many literature works on the avant-garde and experimental film and video that I confronted, and that I grew to question, resent, and dismiss. As a result, I began to look for, and found (in plenty,) that in art which had always deviated from the norm in non-European parts of the world, and encountered the Chinese paintings of the last fifteen hundred years.

I decided to look closely into a couple of iconic works in the field and try to highlight their Eurocentric bias, and then categorise them as an item of un-bibliography. All other material, books, films and videos in this category, are subject to more or less similar objections. The un-bibliography is a list of books, films and videos that I recommend to the readers not to read and watch.

As soon as one begins to consider researching the topic avant-garde, one is referred to Peter Burger's book, "Theory of the Avant-garde." The book is written in a detached, scientific, and logical spirit. That is, if spirit were to have anything to do with either science or logic to begin with. However, Burger has considered the superiority of a scientific and logical approach as *a priori*. I can't help but go on tangent here and express my anger at this recurring term in almost all western philosophy especially those of German Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. Indeed, if one omitted *a priori* from Kant's writings, they would be hardly intelligible. Following the same tradition of assuming as given what is

really hard to argue, Burger asserts that "Criticism is possible when (it) respects the scientific and logical status of what is being criticised." [*Burger, 1984, p.4*]

In other words, those who do not consider the given fact of the superiority of scientific and logical methods must shut up. He tries to get help from his giant predecessor Hegel and quotes his saying that if one is confronted with a theory that cannot be "validated" as theory, the only way is to "reject" it. In the meantime, this rejection cannot claim to be a theory either. In other words, one can only oppose a "non-theory" with an opinion. Burger uses this master key to dismiss a lot of "non-theories" throughout his book by opinion.

It is interesting to dwell, at least a little, in how Burger tries to validate his own assertions as theory. And this is the moment of truth of majority of academic claims to being objective, scientific, and in fact, truthful. The first twenty five pages of Burger's book are a carefully choreographed parade, an arsenal of quotes from and references to Kant, Hegel, Marx, Adorno and Lukacs designed to intimidate the suspicious reader. So this is how a theory can claim to be a theory: to refer to theories that have already been accepted as theories.

However, there is a fundamental problem with this claim to truth. What happens when one has serious questions about the very given elements of this methodology? What happens when one finds out that, claims that what is logical and scientific is truthful too, are what they are: pure claims? As a result, one could question the validity of the necessity of "literature reviews" for establishing the validity of a theoretical argument. The "literature review," the necessity to quote and through that demonstrate "knowledge" of the field, is a veil behind which a lot of theorists hide the real meaning of what they say. It is the smoke that gets pumped, right from the beginning, into the scene of the argument so that one does not have to be clear, and therefore, take sides. Because, we must remember at all times, that there are sides to be taken. There are subject positions to be filled. Even Burger admits this while not really practicing what he preaches, that is, to be aware of his own subject position as a middle class European man:

"Whether they want or not, historians or interpreters hold a position in the social disputes of their time. The perspective from which they view their subject is determined by the position they occupy among the social forces of the epoch."

[*Burger, 1984, p.6*]

That is why it takes Burger a third of his book in order to begin to define what he calls “The historic avant-garde.” Even then, the congested academic traffic does not allow him to do so within the main text.

[Burger, 1984, pp.17, 109]

Another aspect of such claims to truth is the universalising tendency. While mentioning that “Universality is characteristic of bourgeoisie,” he nevertheless manages to universalise:

“But that the various techniques and procedures can be recognized as artistic means has been possible only since the historical avant-garde movements. For it is in the historical avant-garde movements that the totality of artistic means becomes available as means. Up to this period in the development of art, the use of artistic means had been limited by the period style, an already existing canon of permissible procedures, an infringement of which was acceptable only within certain bounds...it is, on the other hand, a distinguishing feature of the historical avant-garde movements that they did not develop a style.”

[Burger, 1984, p.18]

The horizon of Burger’s investigation is tiny, i.e., not only he does not know anything about “art,” “style,” “artistic means,” and “techniques” in the much larger parts of the world, but also he writes from a universalist position. Therefore, he is disturbingly unable to sense the cage in which he paces up and down which, in turn, makes him repeat the phrase “for the first time” over and over. This is the nasty common characteristic of much similar Euro-centric thought: ignorant arrogance. One could only be so arrogant if they are backed by extreme ignorance. The research I have done in other parts of this study demonstrate the existence of styles, artistic means becoming “available as means,” (Yuan period) and theoretical debates about methods and their acceptance and or rejection within the Chinese painting traditions that go back at least to the 13th century A.D.

What Burger theorises as a unique process that began in Europe as a consequence of the Renaissance, i.e., “art’s emancipation from ritual,” had been happening in the Chinese painting as early as fifteen hundred years ago and manifested itself in the establishment of

various landscape schools; schools whose styles and techniques anticipated European Expressionist and Impressionist paintings by a millennium.

What underlies Burger's imagination is a genuine indifference toward difference. When he talks about art he means the dominant art of the time, the majority of art, and the art of majority, and all this within the geographic boundaries of Europe. For instance, he believes that the reason the avant-garde movement didn't happen earlier at the beginning of the nineteenth century was that it was only toward the end of this century that almost all artists had started to make a-political work. Apart from the fact that the whole existence of the avant-garde "historical movement" is witness to the contrary, because they didn't suddenly pop up at the end of the nineteenth century [*Scheunmann, 2000,*] it also demonstrates the Eurocentric limits of his argument. When we free our necks of the scientific and logical chains, with their thousands of thorny *a priori*s, we will be able to recognise the distinct traces of avant-garde not as a historic movement as a result of a Progressivist understanding and reading of human life and society, but as non-conformist explosions of and ruptures within the body of art practice anywhere anytime. "Singular lines of flight" that have helped maintain the most characteristic aspect of an art work, its resistance against what is.

One would have imagined that Burger would commit to a similar non-conformist spirit when he began to theorise a subject such as the avant-garde. However, one must never imagine things on other peoples' behalf. Especially, if that other person is a European man who has a vested interest in transmitting certain theories as truth. Burger talks about the "truth aspect" of the "apartness of art from the praxis of life." It will be a futile exercise to ask Burger why, because he will refer us to Kant.

5.1/ Kant, Zimbabwe and Cholera

In "The Critique of Judgement," Kant [1952] establishes three distinct faculties for human species: understanding, feeling, and judgement. Judgement, which includes objective or real judgement, and aesthetic judgement, bridges understanding and feeling. In any case, he argues that aesthetic judgement is disinterested, which means that there is nothing in it to be gained. Therefore, aesthetic judgement does not, in any shape or form, contribute to the knowledge of things. But the "fact" that he could consider aesthetic judgement as an interest-free activity, is that, he has already assumed that making art work is something that is not part of social praxis. In other words, it is not something necessary for the parent of all

reasons: self-preservation. Now, what is the truth about all this? Apart from a series of *a priori* claims such as the reasons people make art work, right up to the "fact" of existence of reason as that which justifies human beings' "will to self-preserve," what else is there?

I crawled my way further into "The Critique of Judgement" while the television was covering the news of the outbreak of cholera in Zimbabwe. I thought to myself, what would it be like to judge the images of Zimbabwean children, who are lying on filthy beds, emptied of all signs of life by the disease according to the news reader. Or is it really cholera? When was the last time we saw African children who was not lying in filth with mucous dried on the corners of their eyes and a stomach full of air and muddy water and the big eyes staring into nothingness? It is certainly not cholera. It is hundreds of years of injustice, exploitation, and poverty that white colonisation has inflicted upon their lands and peoples. How could this judgement (that Kant might call an aesthetic judgement because it is 'immediate' and it "conveys displeasure" at the state of things) become the link between my understanding of the situation and my reason?

I noticed that I was reading each sentence a few times without really registering anything. Anger had taken over all my faculties. I was angry at Kant [1952.] It was he who theorised the essence of Enlightenment: that useful and reasonable were synonymous. He never went so far as to ask the question: useful for whom? A man of the universal and the general, he left the particulars to his fellow European men. One must admit that, as far as his self-preservation instinct, which according to Kant is the main reason for reason to begin with, goes the European man has done a splendid job. Scientifically proving the sub-human "nature" of the non-European people and even the European woman, he smelled blood and concentrated all his efforts on developing the most sophisticated means of spilling it. It became quite reasonable to travel to the farthest lands on earth and wipe out its indigenous populations because it was useful to access and exploit "virgin" lands, waters and, as you are reading this text, spaces. Although Kant tried to prevent "abuses" of his theories through a call for the use of freedom to restrain, he nevertheless planted the theoretical explosives that went off and demolished all ethical barriers to the tyranny of reason.

I could not sit in one place any longer and began walking inside the room aimlessly. Suddenly a tea-stained piece of paper grabbed my attention. I picked it up. It was "Aesthetic of Hunger," Glauber Rocha's [1965] manifesto for the Cinema Novo in the Latin America of

1960s. This is one of my reference readings. Whenever I feel defeated, hopeless and crippled by the enormity of the injustice of the way things are in this world, "Aesthetics of Hunger" is one of the readings I seek refuge in.

"The most noble manifestation of anger is violence. Cinema Novo reveals that violence is normal behaviour for the starving. The violence of a starving man is not a sign of a primitive mentality...Cinema Novo teaches that the aesthetics of violence are revolutionary rather than primitive. The moment of violence is the moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the existence of the colonized. Only when he is confronted with violence can the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits."

[Rocha, 1965]

The "Aesthetics of Hunger" is one page. It does not contain any *a priori*s. Kant has written hundreds if not thousands of pages. No wonder he had to argue for, and theorise, the supremacy of "facts" and numbers. However, how true Rocha's words are, and how cunning, utilitarian, and dangerous those of Kant's have proven to be.

I go back to Burger and ask him a much simpler question: What is the difference between your "production of knowledge" through writing this book (something that a lot of people find absolutely not necessary and "apart from praxis of life") and, an artist making a painting with the view to sell it at some stage? Just as you hope to print and sell your ideas?

As the book comes to a close, Burger feels more and more a theoretical pressure to be clear. After a dense and tense fifteen pages of itemising fundamental "categories" of "avant-gardiste works," he finally gives in and defines it as against the "classicists." He calls classicist works "organic," and those of the "avant-gardiste," "non-organic." Burger goes on to describe organic artists as those who "respect" the material they work with, and in so doing, treat it as living. On the other hand, he identifies the avant-gardistes or the non-organic as those whose activities "[c]onsists in nothing other than in killing the 'life' of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context that gives it meaning."

[Burger, 1984, p.70]

It is here when he says what he means, or rather he realises what he means and shares this realisation with us that one can pinpoint the fundamental flaw of his theory: recognising that things, people, objects or “materials” could be isolated from their habitual contexts and that they could be positioned in other and completely different situations, does not necessarily mean murdering them. This activity could only mean “killing the material” when one has accepted the habitual context as natural and unchangeable.

On many occasions, Burger talks about how it is possible to find similarities between past and present when and only when we have realised, named and categorised a phenomenon at present. In other words, in Burger’s view, to try to find precedents for a current phenomenon such as avant-garde is meaningless and fruitless because this is happening only after we have come to know what the avant-garde is. Writing on montage in Picasso, Burger claims: “Apart from ‘precursors’ who can always be discovered after the fact, montage first emerged in connection with cubism, that movement in modern painting which most consciously destroyed the representational system that had prevailed since the Renaissance.” [*Burger, p.73*]

The extent to which Burger is drowned in a little pond called Europe, thinking he is swimming in the ocean, is demonstrated by this quote. For Burger, fact becomes fact when the European man finds and names it accordingly. If, according to him, the Cubist montage is about the “insertion of reality fragments into painting,” then how could it be an original idea when this has been getting practiced in many African countries [*Harding & Rose (eds.,) 2006*] by the people whom Burger’s theoretical masters, including Kant, called “savages” and “primitives?”

There are many other points in “Theory of the Avant-Garde” upon which one could pause, find contradictions in, and question the matter-of-fact way in which they have been claimed as truth. However, I do not think the book deserves more space than what I have already allowed it in this work.

Renato Poggioli [1968,] the author of another canonical book on the subject of the avant-garde, “The Theory of the Avant-garde” (from now on TTOTAG), is more relaxed and does not feign detachment as a virtue. Although he claims that he is just stating the facts and that he does not attach any value judgements to what he asserts, he nonetheless behaves like an

omnipotent psychoanalyst who is there to find out the roots of the “infantile” tendencies of the avant-garde artists.

Let me start by mentioning the only valid point coming out of the book from amongst debris of conservative rhetoric; a piece of information: “The term avant-garde was used by Gabriel Desire Larerdant in 1845 in an article that agitated for a radical and revolutionary social role for the arts.” [Poggioli, 1968, p.9]

Further on, we find out that Bakunin published an agit-prop periodical called *L'Avant-garde* in 1878. However, this kind of information need not be enveloped in tonnes of psychologising arrogance. Philosophically, Poggioli is less “refined,” which means that he does not mince his words and is bold when it comes to the western philosophy’s historical claims to truth: “The sole epistemological principle valid on the humanist level is the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* or better, *est cogitatum, ergo est.*” [Poggioli, 1968, p.14] Or more clearly, “But, in the case of avant-garde art, the hypothesis that it existed previous to the era which coined its name is an anachronism twice over. It judges the past in terms of the present and the future.” [Poggioli, 1968, p.15]

What Poggioli forgets to remember is that, the whole western idea and practice of writing history is an exercise of judging past in terms of present and future (see endnote 1.) Without this as a solid foundation, the validity of everything that has so far been written as history would be in serious doubt. It is interesting how, at least on this one point, Poggioli and Burger agree with each other. They both reject precedence for avant-garde because, they argue, any such claim is happening at present and after the phenomenon (avant-garde) has been named. In other words, notwithstanding the fact that the theory and practice of non-conformist, non-representational and dissonant art has existed through lives and works of artists and theorists in different cultures at least for the last two thousand years; and because European man named such tendency as avant-garde in 1848, we are not allowed to question the real originality of the phenomenon, and or try to find “precursors” for it. Poggioli has an infuriatingly condescending tone that ceaselessly undermines some of his astute observations. I imagine him as a priest who has outstretched his soft white hand to be kissed by the reader after they finish his book. It is this hand that, metaphorically speaking, I would like to chop off.

Unlike Burger who tried very hard not to say what he meant for a long time until it became theoretically impossible, Poggioli does not shy away from being straightforward. He gives a detailed definition of the avant-garde and outlines its main characteristics: Activism or “the dynamism of acting,” antagonism or “the antagonistic moment,” transcendental antagonism or “the nihilistic moment,” playing with language, protest, “down with the past or anti-passatismo.” And an antagonism against the public that could, among other things, manifest itself in “hermeticism.”

Poggioli believes that there exist two types of avant-gardes: the socio-political, and the artistic-cultural, but at the same time, the above characteristics include both. He claims that he does not intend to judge the avant-garde, but to define and theorise it. How could one define a phenomenon and remain impartial toward it, beats even Kant who said that there is always an end, an interest at least in the fact of existence of an object when one tries to form a concept of that object, i.e., to understand it. [Kant, 1952] Putting this forced impartiality (the only point of convergence between Poggioli and much of academic writing) aside, I would like to concentrate on the characteristics of the avant-garde as outlined by him.

Poggioli approaches the avant-garde from a psychological point of view. All his characteristic features of the avant-garde stem from a rebellious antagonism that is against identifiable as well as unidentifiable entities such as “the public,” “the language,” and Time (in the form of the past) itself. He talks about the avant-garde’s “nihilism” and “infantilism.” Furthermore, he establishes a psychological connection between a child for whom “the taste for destruction seems innate,” and the avant-garde artist. There, in Poggioli’s view, the avant-garde artist is a sado-masochist; the “agonistic tendency” represents the “masochistic impulse” and “the nihilistic,” that of “sadistic.” Poggioli is a traditionalist. For him a non-conformist spirit who creates an art work as a site of resisting the way things are and have been is an infant who is driven by a natural tendency to destroy for the sake of destruction. Such creature enjoys inflicting and receiving pain. Poggioli certainly belongs to a world outside and parallel to that of the writer of this text.

While defining the “hermeticist” tendency of the avant-garde, Poggioli touches upon “aesthetic catholicity” and admires it as “one of the great merits of historicism (that) forms part of our past” by which he, of course, means European past. Similarly, when he

necessarily refers to the far past attractions for the avant-garde, he tries to cover the stench of decomposing Eurocentrism with a heavily powdered mask of impartiality:

“The avant-gardes turn their attention almost exclusively to Negroid sculpture and the art of savages, prehistoric graffiti and pre Columbian Indian art; they turn, in short, toward cultures remote in space and time, almost to prehistory itself.”

[Poggioli, 1968, p.55]

It is interesting and telling how Poggioli does not have any theoretical hesitation in finding precursors for almost all avant-garde characteristics in the near past (Romanticism) and in Europe; but he cannot, or is not willing to observe the same similarities and commonalities with and borrowings from other cultures in the distant past. That there have been artists and theorists in other times and places who practiced some kind of “art of exception, exceptional not only in the present but also in the whole tradition.” He calls this a “regression” and “historically arbitrary” and “polemical.” Check this out as an example of Poggioli’s un-polemical argument:

“In the face of such a pretension, only two alternatives are possible: either admit that everyone, as children of history and the past, has had precursors (excepting Adam) and that these precursors are no more and no less than the whole human race; or contrariwise deny that anyone has ever had any, insofar as each of us constitutes a *unicum* and an *individuum*...”

[Poggioli, 1968, p.57]

What laughable reasoning ‘free’ of “polemical pretensions.” Once again, we are very close to where we reached when going through Burger’s book. Poggioli is basically saying to his reader that they either accept his views or else he is going to abuse them academically.

At this stage and around page seventy of the book I feel that I cannot take it anymore. Only a “masochist” impulse makes me hang in there and continue reading or maybe it is because this book is one of the two main theoretical work done on the European avant-garde (compared to hundreds of work that are mostly reviews rather than theories.) [Harding & Rose, eds., 2006] It seems that Poggioli is also tired and does not have time for “reason” and “analysis.” So, he suffices to grand claiming that “Such considerations lead to the reaffirmation that avant-garde art can exist only in the type of society that is liberal

democratic from the political point of view, bourgeois-capitalistic from the socio-economic point of view." *[poggioli, 1968, p.106]*

Such claim, apart from the obvious observation that "rebellion" happens under closed and tight conditions, is also in direct contrast to Poggioli's own devotion of a bulk of his arguments to the Russian avant-garde and Russian Futurists.

The list of un-bibliographical references can grow and grow ad-infinitum. However, I do not have the scope nor do I really wish to go through every single one of them. There are a lot of books that are less theoretical and more informative but they still suffer from very similar Eurocentric ideology: that which does not have the capacity to include the other while claiming universality. As an example I briefly review "Avant-garde Film, Motion studies." *[McDonald, 1993]* The book is a regurgitation of many books and essays before it, in which the author has written an account of a number of "outstanding" films that have challenged Hollywood genre filmmaking. It is full of instances in which the author has written about North American avant-garde while assuming that he is writing about a universal subject. Apart from a few pages that have been added as a clear tokenistic representation on Trinh T. Minh-ha, the book is a useless description of a number of incredibly overrated American and Western European films and "authors" who keep getting referred to and recycled within the "cutting edge" circles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Inspirational

Ahmadi, Babak, *Chahaar ravaayat az Taszkerat ol Owliaa*, Markaz Publishing, Tehran, 2000

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, *Dar khedmat va khiyaanateh rowshanfekraan*, Sepehr Publishing house, Tehran, 1978

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, *Gharbzadegi*, translated by John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh, Lexington, KY: Mazda, 1982a (1962 & 1964)

Baraka, Amiri, *Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems*. House of Nehesi Publishers, St. Martins, Caribbean, 2003

Baraka, Amiri, *The Fiction of Le Roi Jones/Amiri baraka*, Lawrence Hill Books, 2000

Darwish, Mahmoud, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August*, Beirut, 1982, translated by Ibrahim Muhawi, University of California Press, CA, 1995

Deleuze, Gilles (2002), *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel W. Smith, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002

Fanon, Frantz, *The wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, Penguin Books, Middlesex & Victoria, 1967

Foucault, Michel (1969), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Philosophy archive @ Marxists.org. 3 July 2005 <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/foucault2.htm>

hooks, bell, *Black Looks, Race and Representation*, South End Press, Boston, MA, 1992

Horkheimer, Max & Adorno, Theodor, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1987

Laozi, *Tao te Ching*, translated by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Books, New York, 1989

Liehzi, *The Book of Lieh-tzu, A Classic of Tao*, translated by A.C. Graham, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990

Lorde, Audre, *Sister Outsider, essays and speeches*, Freedom CA: Crossing Press, c1984

Khayaam, Omar, *Sad O Yek Robaa ee*, Hermes Publishing, Tehran, 2002

Marcos, Subcomandante, *Our Word is Our Weapon*, Seven Stories Press, New York, 2001

Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by Samuel Moore, London, Penguin Books, 1967

Mihani, Abi-Saeed, *Asraar-o-Towheed*. Shafi-ee Kadkani (ed). Aagaah, Tehran, 2002

Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Vintage Books, New York, 1992

Rocha, Glauber, *Aesthetics of Hunger*, 1965 in
www.thirdcinema.blueskylimit.com/texts.html

Rulfo, Juan, *The Burning Plain and Other Stories*, translated by George D. Schade, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2003

Shimada, Shojiro, *Concerning the I-p'in Style of Painting*, *Journal of Oriental Arts*, Volume 8, 1957

Zhuangzi, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, 1968

Essential

Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster, Verso, London, New York, 2005

Baudrillard, Jean, *Passwords*, translated by Chris Turner, Verso, London, 2003

Baudrillard, Jean, *Seductions*, translated by Brian Singer, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1979

Bush, Susan & Shih, Hsio-yen, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Harvard University Press, 1985

- Connelle, Raewyn, *Southern Theory, The global dynamics of knowledge in Social Sciences*, Allen & Unwin, 2007
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix, *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1986
- Guattari, Félix, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, translated by Paul Bains & Julian Pefanis, Power Publications, Sydney, 1995
- Harding, M. and Rose, John (eds.), *Not the Other Avant-garde: the transnational foundations of avant-garde performance*, University of Michigan Press, c2006
- Hollingdale, R. J., *A , Nietzsche Reader*, Penguin Books, 1977
- Khlebnikov, Velimir, *The King of Time*, translated by Paul Schmidt, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985
- Marks, Laura U., *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2000
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo, *Roman Poems*, translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti & Francesca Valente, City Lights Books, c1986
- Prasad, Hari Shankar, *Time in Indian Philosophy, A Collection of Essays*, Indian Books Centre, Delhi, 1992
- Puchner, Martin. *Poetry of Revolution, Marx, Manifestos and the Avant--Garde*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2006
- Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, 2003
- Siren, Osvald, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: translations and comments*, Schocken Books, New York, 1963
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books Ltd, London & New York, 2008

Wu, Kuang-Ming, *Chuang Tzu, World philosopher at play*, The Crossroad Publishing Company Scholar Press, CA, 1983

Zhaoming, Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism, The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams*, Duke University Press, 1995

Zhaoming, Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art, Pound, Moore, Stevens*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2003

Yutang, Lin, *The Chinese Theory of Art, translations from the masters of Chinese art*, Heinemann, London, 1967

Informational

Adorno, Theodor, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by C. Lendhardt, Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1983

Ames, Roger T. (ed.), *Wandering at ease in the Zhuangzi*, State University of New York Press, Albany, c1998

Anzaldua, Gloria, *Borderlands*, Aunt Lute Books, 1999

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, Da Capo press, 1986

Bhabha, Homi K., *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994

Binyon, Laurence, *Art of the Far East: landscapes, Flowers, Animals*, B. T. Batsford, London, 1952

Bradbury & MacFarlane (eds.), *Modernism 1890-1930*, Penguin Books, London, 1976

Cai, Zong-qi (ed.), *Chinese Aesthetics*, University of Hawai'i Press. Honolulu, 2004

Carr, Brian & Indira Mahalingan (ed.), *Companion Encyclopaedia of Asian Philosophy*, Routledge, London & New York, 2001

- Chiao, Meng, *The late poems of Meng Chiao*, translated by David Hinton, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., c1990
- Confucius, *Analects*, translated by Ezra Pound, P. Owen, London, 1956
- Dargon, Alfonso Gumucio, *Making Waves, Stories of Participatory Communication for Social Change*, The Rockefeller Foundation, New York, 2001
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Bergsonism*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, New York, 1991
- Feng, Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952-1953
- Fong, Wen C., *Why Chinese Painting Is History*, College of Art Association, *Art Bulletin*, V. 85, No. 2 (June, 2003,) pp. 258-280`3
- Froese, Katrin, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought*, State University of New York, New York, 2006
- Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things, An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, translated by *Les Mots et Les choses*, Vintage Book, New York, 1970
- Gao, Jianping, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From calligraphy to painting*, UPPSALA, 1996
- Giles, Herbert A. (trans.) *Gems of Chinese Literature*, Paragon Book, New York, 1965
- Giles, Herbert A., *The civilization of China*, Butterworth, London, 1938
- Gilson, Etienne, *Painting and reality*, Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, [1968]
- Hirth, Fredrich, *Native Sources for the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*, translated by A. E. Meyer, New York, 1917
- Hodge, Bob & Kam, Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language*, Routledge, 1998
- Heidigger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell (ed.), Harper, San Francisco, 1964
- Ho, Wai-Kam, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleaveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press; Bloomington, Ind. C1980

- Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Selby-Brigge (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988
- Jain, Neeraj. *Globalisation or Recolonisation*. Alaka Joshi, Pune, India, 2001
- Knoblock, John (trans.,) *Xunzi: a translation and study of the complete works*, Stanford University press, Stanford, California, c1988-c1994
- Kuo, Jason, *Discovering Chinese Painting: dialogues with art historians*, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, Dubuque, c2006
- Liu, Kuang, *Aesthetics and Marxism, Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and their western Cotemporaries*, Duke University Press, 2000
- Loehr, Max, *The Question of Individualism in Chinese Art*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, University of Pennsylvania Press, V. 22, No. 2 (April-June; 1961), pp. 147-158
- Lorraine, Tamsin, *Irigary and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1999**
- Lukacs, Gyorgy, *Soul and Form*, translated by Anna Bostock, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1974
- Merton, Thomas, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Unwin Books, London, 1965
- Mai-mai, Sze, *The Tao of Painting, a study of Chinese painting; with a translation of the chieh tzu yuan hua chuan, or, Mustard Seed Garden manual of painting*, Routledge & K. paul, 1957
- Michelson, Annette, *Kino-Eye, The writings of Dziga Vertov, ed.*, translated by Kevin O'Brien, University of Berkeley Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, New York, 1967
- Parkes, Graham (ed.), *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1987
- Pound, Ezra, *Selected Poems*, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1957

Reihardt, May, *Heidegger's hidden Sources, East Asian Influence on His Work*, translated by Graham Parkes, Routledge, London, 1996

Russesell, Catherine, *Experimental Ethnography, The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham and London. Duke University Press, 1999

Sakanishi, Shio, *The Spirit of the Brush: being the outlook of Chinese painters on nature, from Eastern China to Five Dynasties, 317-960 A.D.*, Murray, London, 1939

Sandoval, Chela, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2000

Scheunemann, Dietrich (ed.) *European Avant-garde, New perspectives*, Rodopi, 2000

Seichi, Taki, *Japanese Fine Art*, Fuzambo, Tokyo, 1931

Shariati, Ali, *On the Sociology of Islam*, translated by Hamid Algar, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1979

Schopenhauer, Arthur, *On Human Nature: essays, partly posthumous, in ethics and politics*, translated by Bailey Saunders, Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Limited, London, 1906

Shoha, Ella/ Stam, Robert (1994). *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. Routledge, New York, c1994

Sohaku, Ogata, *Zen for the West*, Rider, London, 1959

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Routledge, New York & London, 1993

Tang, Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde, The Modern Woodcut Movement*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, London, 2008

Toshihiko, Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: a comparative study of key philosophical concepts*, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1983

Trinh, T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989

Tu, Ching-I (ed.) *Tradition and Creativity: Essays on East Asian Civilization*, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Burnswick, 1987

Van Crevel, Maghiel, *Language Shattered: contemporary Chinese poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Research School CNWS, 1996

Van Over, Raymond (ed.), *Taoist Tales*, The New American Library, 1973

Virilio, Paul, *Art and Fear*, translated by Julie Rose Continuum, London, 2003

Waley, Arthur, *The Way and its Power, A story of the Tao Te Ching and its place in Chinese thought*, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958

Wang, Fangyu & Banhart, Richard, *Master of the Lotus Garden: the life and art of Bada Shanren*, Yale University Art Gallery, Yale University Press, New haven, Conn., c1990

Wang, Pi, *Commentary on the Lao Tzu*, translated by Ariane Rump in collaboration with Wing-list Chan, The University Press of Hawai'i, 1979

Wu, Cheng-En, *Monkey*, translated by Arthur Waley, Penguin Classics, 1942

Xunzi (Hsun Tzu,) *Basic Writings*, translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, New York, 1963

Zhang, Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: cultural fever, avant-garde fiction and the new Chinese cinema*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1997

Zhu Liyuan & Blocker, Gene (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 1995

Un-Bibliography

Badiou, Alain, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, translated by Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, California, 2005

Burger, Peter (1984), *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984

Calinescu, Matei, *Five faces of modernity: modernism, avant-garde, decadence, kitsch, postmodernism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987

Chung-Yuan, Chang, *Creativity and Taoism; a study of Chinese philosophy, art, and poetry*, Julian Press, New York, 1963

Danto, Arthur C., *Philosophizing Art, Selected Essays*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1999

Dixon, Wheeler W. & Foster, Gwendolyn Audrey (eds.), *Experimental Cinema: the film reader*, Routledge, London, New York, 2002.

Elwes, Catherine, *Video art: a guided tour*, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, 2005

Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1996

Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory, a critical introduction*, Ullen & Unwin, 1998

Hanhardt, J.G. (ed.), *Video culture: a critical investigation*, Layton, Utah: G.M. Smith, Peregrine Smith Books, in association with visual studies workshop Press, 1986

Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Judgement*, translated by James Creed Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952 (1980 printing)

Kant, Immanuel, *What is Enlightenment? 1784*, in www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-what.html

Kuspit, Donald, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*. University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1993

Le Grice, Malcolm, *Experimental cinema in the digital age*, BFI Pub., London, 2001

McDonald, Scott, *Avant-garde Film: motion studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993

Noth, Pohlmann, Reschke (eds.), *China Avant-garde: counter-currents in art and culture*, Haus Kultur der welt, Berlin; Hong Kong; Oxford University Press, 1994, c1993

Poggioli, Renato, *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, translated by Gerald Fitzgerald, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, mass., 1968

Ranciere, Jaques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (trans). Continuum, London, 2004

Reid, Gilbert P., *Revolution as Taught by Taoism*, *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 35,
No.3 (Apr., 1925), pp. 289-295