

Chris Zhongtian Yuan

No Door, One Window, Only Light  
Home Is Where the Music Is



Reading International







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# Introduction

This publication documents and contextualises two parallel exhibitions by Chris Zhongtian Yuan *No Door, One Window, Only Light* at Macalline Center of Art, Beijing and *Home Is Where the Music Is* at Reading International, Reading, as part of a wider UK–China collaborative project.

*No Door, One Window, Only Light* brings together four video works, drawings, and several installations to form a periodic retrospect and survey of recent works and a newly commissioned film. Reading International's presentation in response is comprised of a series of video, sound and architectural installations responding to the history, architecture and the institutional structure of Brock Keep, a former military barracks built in 1877, which houses the exhibition venue 571 Oxford Road, Open Hand Open Space.

The two exhibitions and related events provide a conversation around Chris Zhongtian Yuan's architectural and musical approach to engage with the filmic medium. Yuan examines ways in which spaces of exile and absence are politicised. Recomposing vernacular sonic and spatial materials, Yuan's work investigates narratives and politics simultaneously building and dismantling our everyday spaces. Drawing from a wide range of music genres such as punk, jazz and noise, Yuan uses sound in a way to re-imagine and improvise memory and resistance.

Their works often visit marginalised communities that are

subject to neglect or perplexity amid collective histories, rapid growth or grand narratives. These works consist in persistently representing home and diaspora/exile as conflicting concepts, while making efforts in a space of contradiction and absence to trace various forms of life, feelings and emotions, and weak signals trapped between technological evolutions.

Yuan's previous projects *Close, Closer* (2020-2021), *Wuhan Punk* (2020) shown at Reading International, and *1815* (2019-20) examine the complex tensions between collective histories and autobiographical intimacy, centre and margins, and between individuals and institution, normalising the in-between spaces that cross these dichotomies. The newly commissioned three-channel video work, titled *No Door, One Window, Only Light* (2023), builds on this series of videos by focusing on an artist friend from home who passed away in 2022, to pose questions around home, absence, trauma and sanity.

And interview between Susanne Clausen and Chris Zhongtian Yuan contextualises the exhibition in Reading, Natalia Grabowska reflects on the use and application of sound in the work, May Adadol Ingawanij on generational relations and legacy, Wenny Teo contextualizes the newly commissioned film *No Door, One Window, Only Light* and Clement Huang's article reviews the exhibition in Beijing.

Contributors: Susanne Clausen, Natalia Grabowska, Clement Huang, May Adadol Ingawani, Wenny Teo, Chris Zhongtian Yuan.

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# *Interview with Chris Zhongtian Yuan*

## by Susanne Clausen

### **Susanne Clausen:**

Your installation for Reading International is hosted by 571 Oxford Road and the gallery is located in a nineteenth century former army barrack, surrounded by Ministry of Defence signs and fronted by international food stores on the Oxford Road. What interested you in the space and its architecture?

### **Chris Zhongtian Yuan:**

What drew me initially about the architecture of the 571 Oxford Road gallery space is its resemblance to the Youth Autonomous Centre. The resemblance is not apparent—the Youth Autonomous Centre was hosted in this small, two-storey concrete building, whereas Brock Keep (where the 571 Oxford Road gallery is hosted) is this giant brick building. Despite differences in scale, material, and context, both spaces have this run-down or ‘squatter’ quality to it.

Both buildings have a history of repurpose. The Youth Autonomous Centre is a youth-gathering space, seeking alternative ways of living and governing, which existed between 2008-2016. It was featured in my first video work *Boundless City* (2010), then again revisited in *Wuhan Punk* (2020) ten years later. In *Boundless City*, I interviewed Mai who took over this abandoned farmhouse on the outskirts of Wuhan and founded the Centre. After the original footage had gone missing and I was only left with a few stills, I became interested in scrutinising every single detail, object and furniture piece that I could identify from the stills. Like the

house itself, I noticed that many of these details might have come from the house or personal belongings. This turned the Centre into a very domestic space where the most critical conversations were happening in an intimate setting. In this way, knowledge around resistance and social movement was produced through mundane daily life and connections amongst friends.

Brock Keep was built in 1881, at a time when local counties established councils and a military presence. In previous decades, it was a homeless shelter, and more recently, artist studios. So there is a sense of resisting the original function through minimal interventions. As you mentioned, the building sits in the neighbourhood where many international food stores are, and it is also within 15 minutes' walking distance to my apartment in Reading. Daily life has softened its presence and time has made its imprint on its decaying façade. The idea of making an open door community art space in this context is familiar to me.

There is definitely a level of projection—I think I was intentionally making connections and finding similarities between the two spaces, such as the sequence of experiencing the space, the courtyard, the front gate and the greenery. When one space is lost forever, it is perhaps human nature to seek for a replacement or something with resemblance in another space, and this desire drives us to move beyond existing assumptions around identity, community and nation-state.

**Susanne:**

The installation combines a series of works that reference each other in different ways. *Wuhan Punk* and *Cloudy Song* (2022) are closely linked through a recurring narrative. The works bring together urban footage and digitally rendered landscapes, accompanied by a steady but perhaps melancholic

combination of Chinese punk music, radio sounds, and narration. The foggy urban landscape of Wuhan appears, opening up a range of ambiguous spaces. The narrator focuses on a figure, a friend from Wuhan's underground music scene in the 90s.

In *Cloudy Song* the archival footage of a punk event reappears together with two actors moving through space and the narration reflects on the recurring features of a certain historical time and space. *Cloudy Song* also features the paper model that you installed in a third space together with two prints showing two childhood photographs of yourself with your mother. There are moments of recurrence; images and objects appear and reappear throughout the installation and the video works. Could you explain how you organised the installation?

**Chris:**

I have been thinking a lot about the relationship between *Wuhan Punk* and *Cloudy Song*. After making and showing *Boundless City* in 2010, I became very hesitant about making works surrounding Wuhan because it is simply an uneasy place for me to interrogate. In the years after, I have also reflected on my fraught relationship with home more critically - there is always this anxiety about knowing too much but at the same time knowing nothing about it. In the summer of 2019, I met up with an artist friend who was visiting London from Wuhan and that was when I heard about Mai's disappearance. During the pandemic, I discovered his punk identity which led me to uncover a whole history of this rather obscured movement that was happening right in front of me, but I simply was too young to acknowledge it. This disappeared figure became this portal for me to inquire into and re-imagine the notion of home.

Over the last year, I visited the Oxford Road gallery space a

few times and each time I was captured by the amount of things that it is able to accommodate, as well as how everyday life bleeds into the art. When we were installing the show, I became interested in finding the leftover construction materials or existing furniture hiding in the closets, storage and underneath the stairwells. In this process of 'improvised excavation', I found paint stands, plywood panels, personal photographs and old portraits of the building, and suddenly I was able to establish a personal connection to the space. Growing up, art and life have always been intertwined, sometimes in unproductive or melodramatic ways. After working as an artist professionally, it took me sometime to realise that I needed to put in place boundaries with the art world because my relationship with the art world has always been too intimate.

The organisation of the show perhaps reflects such thinking - you'd enter the show by following the disappeared punk musician, then into a room that reconstructs my childhood living room with a scaled model, punk footage from the 90s and photographs with my mother. Opposite the room, there is this sound recording playing this tunnel-like space filled with yellow light. Down the dark hallway, there are two videos placed in each 'cell room'. Videos are partitioned by the existing structures of the space, while sound bleeds between the spaces.

**Susanne:**

You are referencing notions of home, exile, and refuge as key moments of enquiry in your work. *Cloudy Song* features an AI persona who discusses the importance of personal memory in relation to history. It also references the image of a ghost and this is something that came up several times in our panel discussion. What is the significance of the ghost for you?

**Chris:**

The ghost is a recurring figure in my work and often takes on a multitude of identities in different contexts. I think it started with my frustration of not being able to locate certain people, times and spaces in my life. These ghosts are a way of speaking about the unspeakable, as they give us a certain materiality to the most liminal things. At the same time, they can also be seen as reincarnations of failed revolutionaries, figures forgotten by history or the ones who lost their home. In some contexts, there is this sense of pessimism in understanding how the power structure might have shaped these ghosts. In this context, ghosts describe a kind of reaction towards the overwhelming power structure. However, these ghosts are not powerless—they have carved out spaces of their own—and although liminal, these spaces are where works of the imagination take place.

Making the work at a distance or in a ‘diasporic’ mode has certainly rendered my own position rather obscure and sometimes difficult. There is always a tendency to search for the ‘appropriate context’ where my work can be discussed. When I realised the impossibility of locating such context, I started creating my own context or a set of discursive language and methods of making. The more effort I put in, the more often I encounter artists who perhaps share similar experiences—the ghosts start to form a new collective.

**Susanne:**

What is your approach to possibilities of collective resistance or perhaps disobedience in the context of your hometown of Wuhan and the Wuhan punk scene in particular, where the notion of punk in a Chinese context of the time gives us a steer, but also in a wider sense in your work? What is your role as a filmmaker or artist?

**Chris:**

I have been thinking about the way music and musicians would approach ideas of disobedience. Many people I grew up with were punk musicians and close circles or fans of punk musicians, who also embodied multiple roles such as artists, architects, students, and workers. Resistance was never a top-down, meticulously strategized plan, but rather a series of improvised and self-organised situations where people gather, play music and scream words that might otherwise sound subversive on a daily basis.

Activism is perhaps a key but under-explored notion in my work. I still maintain strong connections to many artists, musicians, and subcultural groups in Wuhan who have inherited the anarchist/punk movements from the 1990s and early 2000s. These movements have taken on new spaces, roles and forms. For me, the way of participating in these movements from a distant place might look very different. I have to rely on my tools as an artist or filmmaker to both document and imagine notions of resistance while continuously exploring what resistance might mean in different contexts. The process of making a film in the 'diaspora' is also a way to gather like-minded people in order to carve out space for alternative voices to exist. This existence itself is perhaps the first step towards activism.

**Susanne:**

I also wanted to pick up something that came up in our panel discussion with Qu Chang and Charles Wong after the screening of the films programme. What I noticed and picked up from the works were how the different artists, including yourself, reflect on moments of violence in relation to a chosen way of life, or the violence of forgetting, ignoring or including histories, for example, in the video about the boy who disappeared in Hong Kong. There was also a sense of disobedience in the face of this violence. These are also



moments that appear in your work, mainly through the narrative, but also perhaps through the way your films are composed, how you work with sound, and landscape. I would be interested to hear how you are building your work in this sense, and what informs your artistic process of compiling images and editing your work?

**Chris:**

I have been exploring ideas of 'punk' in filmmaking. Using punk as a framework to either set rules or break rules, I experimented with notions of improvisation, lo-fi camera techniques, DIY music, and collage. In both *Wuhan Punk* and *Cloudy Song*, I was able to quickly test out animated footage and sound fragments that render and perform the city of Wuhan through bodily and atmospheric ways. These tests were then stitched together so there is this sense of fragmentation when organising various sonic and spatial materials.

The chaos not only reflects my memory of the city where I grew up, but is also inherent to my 'anarchic' way of compiling images and sounds in each work. In *Close, Closer*, in order to re-imagine the Lugu Lake landscapes depicted by my mother's lost paintings, I sourced hundreds of historical landscape images. Using archival photos of Lugu Lake as a framework, I then collaged layers of historical landscape paintings onto each archival image, sometimes multiple elements from one painting would compose a small fragment in each frame of the film.

The relationship between violence and disobedience is perhaps a complex but important one - my work often starts by responding to violence or oppression from a personal entry point, which then triggers me to think about the collective experience. These reactions are sometimes emotional and uncomfortable, and often remind me that perhaps the best way to confront a troubled past is to re-imagine what

happened and what could have been done. My work never comes from a didactically heroic or pessimistic position, but a position of figuring out, working towards and building relations towards resistance through the process of making and unmaking specific images, spaces and sounds.

**Susanne:**

The project covered two exhibitions in Beijing and Reading, two rather different locations and contexts, which perhaps also reflect the two different realities of your own migratory experience. How do you see this reflected in the exhibitions?

**Chris:**

My intuition as an architect often leads me to look closely at the relationship between the exhibition space and the original architecture, the institution and its surrounding. The two exhibitions in Beijing and Reading are very different in terms of architecture and context. Knowing that the shows are related, I was interested in looking at each exhibition as its own autonomous entity and how it works (or not) into existing spaces and contexts.

Due to various practical constraints, the only work that was shown in both exhibitions was *Wuhan Punk*. The architectural model of my childhood room, which was filmed in the newly commissioned work *No Door, One Window, Only Light* was too fragile to be shipped internationally, so it was shown at Reading International, but the video work was not. Due to copyright issues, *Cloudy Song* was exhibited at Reading International, while the architecture of CGI animations in the film appeared in the form of 3D printed models at the MACA's exhibition. These undesigned work selections reflect both material and immaterial nature in my work, as well as how logistics come into shaping exhibitions, both literally and metaphorically. When the real space becomes increasingly fictionalised within this in-between space, the two exhibition

spaces would take on new roles and perhaps render the physical context or surrounding into something rather irrelevant.

When addressing Hans Haacke's visitor polls series after the 2016 US presidential election, Sharon Hayes writes 'in this way, "real time" aligns itself with "real world"... they do so in real time, in a sequence that structures the visitor's attention, absorbing and responding to the relations it proposes.' Coming from a generation who experience ongoing, collective crisis and scarcity across geographies, I think of the relationship between the individual and institution as a porous and shifting one, rather than one that constantly tries to produce critique and friction. For me, it is perhaps more productive to work with the immediate institution—its architecture, structure and internal logic—in order to co-produce a long-term practice and resistance towards oppressive power structures, or in most cases, simply to be heard. Similar to the way familial structure works—intimacy and conflicts are common and often overlooked when precariousness occurs—nowadays the artist and the art institution are often put in a position where it is more productive to work together than to compete for authorship. I have been thinking of a term called 'institutional codependence' which describes this way of working. Here, 'codependence' does not suggest an abnormal behavioural pattern or the fact that one that is weaker than the other, but living and working together against the time of doomsday.



# *The First Sound*

by Natalia Gabrowska

ELLA

What does the creature sound like?

HUIQI

It's like this tender but deep noise.<sup>1</sup>

It's impossible to remember the first time I heard music. Unlike a more conscious experience with film, from animated goodnight stories to one's very first visit to the cinema, sound and rhythm is something that just *is*, it surrounds and accompanies us every day. The first song one hears is always unfamiliar, like a story from somewhere far away we've never been to, nor have any connection to. No matter the language of the lyrics, it sounds foreign.

Perhaps it's impossible to remember the first sound we hear, as it is something integral to our existence, our bodies being great producers and carriers of sound. Our heartbeats, and those of our mothers, are our first introduction to rhythm. An internal visceral experience, before being an aural one. Footsteps, whether our own or someone else's, not only make a sound, but also produce vibrations, which the earth carries and allow the sound to enter us from bottom to top. Once inside, the rhythm bounces off the organs, enters the blood

<sup>1</sup> Part of the dialogue from Chris Yuan's film *All Trace is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*, 2022

and brain and picks up new frequencies. The intensity slowly fades away once it settles.

Even if motionless, our bodies are producing rhythms and sounds; different fluids are constantly moving from one place to another, never resting, organs are expanding and compressing, unable to stop even for a short moment.

Sound is a fascinating thing to encounter, perhaps because of its fluidity and the impossibility of assigning a single meaning to it. Sound is always plural in its identity, it is never 'one' or 'single' both in form and meaning. For what does the sound of a trumpet mean? An indication of time? A call to prayer? An expression of sadness? Joy? Danger? The only certainty is that it tells a story, and each time it's a different one. Similar to the functioning of organisms, sound is always unpredictable and fluid and can carry contradictory experiences. The only constant is the movement, putting our bodies in motion to the harmony of the beats it creates.

\*

Imagine entering a club through a dark corridor. The intense bass notes are alive in the architectural elements of the building and are carried through walls, floor and ceiling. Toned down at first, they slowly enter your body and become more present within you with every step you take further in, luring you into a more intense experience. Impossible to escape, you give into the melody that guides you.

There is a curiosity that drags you in and the promise of giving up control. Allowing the sound to guide you and your body to react to it – involuntarily moving, cramping, collapsing – feeling it with every cell of your body. It allows you to dream and to be taken to places you haven't been able to access otherwise.

Drawn to sounds that are very familiar and those very strange, Chris Yuan uses melody as a medium, for it is sound that frequently defines so many of their works. Aware of its changing nature and inherent lack of a fixed identity, an openness to not knowing emerges. They follow the melody as if it were the road, a narration that frequently meanders, twists and turns, ends abruptly or gently fades away. Familiarity, otherness and the fluidity that defines these two experiences is all expressed in sound. The irregular notes meander through and navigate the work, allowing for endless improvisation.

For Yuan, music speaks of cultures, both those to which they belong and those that remain distant. The merging of different sounds is a metaphor for an identity that is composed of many different geographies, experiences, and histories. The particles of many places picked up while moving through geographies and times sometimes merge smoothly, at other times clash or fight for its existence. Specific local rhythms become global and universal, and it's impossible to pinpoint a single place to which they belong.

It is not surprising that the title of their recent show at Reading International (2023), which included their films, site-responsive architectural interventions, models and recordings, was *Home Is Where the Music Is*. The title perfectly encompasses Yuan's work – 'home' both indicates an architectural structure, as well as a culture – a set of places, people and rituals that are familiar. Trained as an architect, Yuan frequently uses architectural elements, their history and building techniques in their work to speak of belonging and exile. Computer-generated models of fictional city spaces or landscapes allow them to build narratives, propose speculations or promises of other worlds. Dismantling, demolishing, uncovering of layers and using materials of different densities and levels of transparency are methods they use in their writing,

constructing images as well as physical interventions.

The other noun in the title – ‘music’ – is equally key to Yuan’s practice. Through the use of sound, video collage and various editing techniques, Yuan’s work is one in constant movement, set to a rhythm that moves from one narration and place to another. Always foreign and familiar at the same time, never fixed, but rather intangible like trying to hold on to air or water in one’s hands. The music in their work is present not only as it’s own track, but it lives in walls, in the sculptures, is burned into the image.

The expression *the rhythm of life* is one that defines a pace with which we do things throughout the day. Events in our lives have different rhythms – at times slow and gentle, at other times energetic or painful. If Home Is Where the Music Is, then home is also not a single place and not something that can be characterised with one sound, song, or even genre. It changes, and so do the cultures and identities of its inhabitants.

\*

As difficult as it is to remember the first sound we heard, it is equally difficult to predict what will be the last one. No matter what it will be, it will certainly be one felt deeply.

ELLA

What was the last sound they heard?

HUIQI

Fire, restless rains, bombing, sound of sharp knife cutting through tobacco plants, whispers, ghost songs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Part of the dialogue from Chris Yuan’s film *All Trace is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*, 2022



# *The Intensive and the Haunted* by Clement Huang

As Handel's Messiah plays, the film capturing the interior scene of a room flips upward, rapidly filling the dim exhibition space with white flashes. In that moment, do viewers briefly find themselves dizzy, in a trance, and temporarily blinded? Indeed, Chris Zhongtian Yuan's three-channel video work, *No Door, One Window, Only Light* (2023), creates an uncomfortable atmosphere both inside and outside. Within the imagery, enclosed rooms brim with childhood memories, while outside, fragments of light scatter, reflecting on smooth leather walls and stainless steel office cabinets used as display platforms. In the exhibition space of *No Door, One Window, Only Light*, consolidating thoughts isn't easy, but immersing oneself in the unexpectedly evoked anxiety about life is effortless. Is this intense emotional experience a challenge or a too-gentle catharsis?

The combination of illusion and anguish is familiar to anyone who has undergone some form of psychological struggle. This work originated from the recent passing of the artist's friend, L, who reportedly battled schizophrenia for over 15 years. Deleuze and Guattari describe the schizophrenic condition as an 'experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable [...] an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form.'<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the eyes of the radical philosophy

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, G. , & Guattari, F. (2000). *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by R. Hurley, M. Seem, & H. R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

in France, the schizophrenic is a revolutionary challenging all established social norms, achieving the most extreme intensity of life.

Whether Deleuze and Guattari's discourse is an over-interpretation of this medical condition or not, 'intensive' is an apt term to describe Yuan's video works.

From the orange saturations of *Wuhan Punk*, shrouding mornings, mist, sunsets, and derelict structures, to the azure purple and lacustrine green of *Close, Closer*, where spectators navigate the endless contours of love and its bitter aftermath, and the molten lava eruption in *1815*—what whispers do these visual epiphanies convey? The reverberations of anarchism are unmistakable, particularly when tethered to one's birthplace and the crucible of one's formative years. Within these visual chronicles, denial, confrontation, and strife thrive—there exists no terrain of seamless tranquillity.

*No Door, One Window, Only Light* involves several layers of exploration of the medium of images, not only in the combination of architectural models and image production displayed on the first screen but also in the process on the second screen, converting CG-produced models into digital images, then transforming film into digital images, and finally presenting them through projection. The third screen consists simply of text—an imagined letter exchange.

In my view, Yuan's work aligns with the concept of "haunted media" proposed by American scholar Jeffrey Sconce. In his 2000 book, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*<sup>2</sup>, Sconce unravels the entangled liaison between new media technology and the spectral. Telegraphs and radios were once thought to connect the living with the

<sup>2</sup> Sconce, J. (2009) *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Durham: Duke University Press.

dead because they realised non-entity existence, creating invisible communication. Electronic media like television and movies could be possessed by ghosts or serve as channels to otherworldly realms, with their images and sounds appearing mysteriously. In his latest book, *The Technical Delusion: Electronics, Power, Insanity* (2019), Sconce further explains why many mental patients may experience hallucinations or delusions triggered by television or other virtual images: ‘Electronic nerves stretching out into the world seem to perform the instrumental will of the individual ego, but these wires also converge countless tributaries of data into the body and conduct the electronic will of other individuals and institutions.’<sup>3</sup> The images of the media, as with the material about the May 1968 events in France in *No Door, One Window, Only Light*, often form a network of complex relationships, and the way in which image art relates to it is to explore the power relations between these institutions and individual bodies.

It is worth mentioning that the sound and music in the work also have extraordinary qualities. They sometimes come from distant memories, sometimes as noise, but in any case, they are not external; they are sounds from within the body, literal auditory hallucinations.

Jacques Derrida writes, ‘Persons are personified by letting themselves be haunted by the very effect of objective haunting, so to speak, that they produce by inhabiting the thing. Persons (guardians or possessors of the thing) are haunted in return, and constitutively, by the haunting they produce in the thing by lodging there their speech and their will like inhabitants.’<sup>4</sup> According to American philosopher Eugene Thacker, haunted media actively intervenes in supernatural phenomena, bringing things that cannot be understood by human senses

<sup>3</sup> Sconce, J. (2019) *The Technical Delusion: Electronics, Power, Insanity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, J. (2006) *Specters of Marx*. Translated by S. Cullenberg. New York and London: Routledge.

and knowledge into human understanding.<sup>5</sup> Introducing the unknown part into the medium is the mystery existing in Yuan's work, beyond the stories that have already been told. It is an emptiness, a nihil that creates random connections, opening up to the unknown. It resists, but to what end? It creates an intimate alliance, but where does it lead to? How much meaning and emotion will a tiny life experience and create, unable to fully comprehend itself? In the impenetrable abyss of darkness, all things attain boundless emancipation.

To be frank, if all restrictions were removed, I would want the exhibition space to be larger, more winding and twisting, and darker, with greater difficulty moving between different images. If one continues to wander and linger in the exhibition space, the viewer will eventually arrive at a 'place that has no memories, nothing.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Galloway, A.R., Thacker, E. and Wark, M. (2014) *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>6</sup> Mishima, Y. (2001) *The Decay of the Angel*. Translated by E.G. Seidensticker. London: Vintage.

*Too Near Too Far:*  
*Dialogue with Chris Zhongtian Yuan*  
by May Adadol Ingawanij

**May Adadol Ingawanij:**

The intimate yet enigmatic lines of conversation on the screen were the first things that pulled me into your work. The fragments of a silent conversation between the mother and the grown child in *Close, Closer* (2020-21) felt both familiar and opaque. Here is another pair of mother and offspring talking about not being able to talk to each other about the real things. The lines don't reveal anything of the backstory to the fraught intimacy of this pair, but they cut to the quick. You end the film with an offering to your own mother, and it's clear enough that this work draws on the closeness of your relationship. Yet I hesitate to call it a first-person film. You don't figure autobiographically in it as such, not as the visible body nor as the speaking self. The gap between first-hand experience and first-person utterance intrigues me.

**Chris Zhongtian Yuan:**

My work constantly attempts to locate the 'self', while navigating my relation to the immediate surrounding, distant home and previous generation, which is sometimes seen in a rather muted way. It also opens up a space for contradiction, dislocation and juxtaposition to happen, which is true to my 'diasporic' experience—the constant flickering and shifting between places and sounds destabilize notions of identity and memory, resulting in a series of jump-cuts, fast-forward scenes, déjà-vu and overlays in my work. I don't think my work is about blurring the line between fiction and documentary, or making distinctions between memory and reality. Rather, this

perpetual chaos and non-transition produces a consistent way of processing textual, visual and sonic information.

**May:**

*Close, Closer* begins with a crystalline voice chanting what sounds like a lament or an incantation from a ritual of some kind. The rhythm of the drumming and the wailing of the pipes reminds me of ethnomusicological field recordings. The sonic layers conjure the travelogue and the fieldwork, and with that, the history of cinema as a colonial and a nationalist apparatus of knowledge and power.

Visually the film is disorientating. The brightly coloured animation collage sometimes acquires a legible shape, such as a lake surrounded by mountains, human figures, beasts of burden and some fish. Other times the shapes are vibrational flashes. Abstract fragments are superimposed onto old photographs displaying the rail tracks as an infrastructural attraction during the colonial era. An intense flicker sequence montages fragments of diverse styles and periods of paintings with colour photographs dated from the last years of the widespread usage of analogue cameras showing indigenous highlanders participating in ritual events, and black and white photographs from photography's early decades that typify the colonial gaze directed at the natives.

I'm curious about the work's juxtaposition of mother-offspring relationship with its mishmash of art historical references, and references to the power to encounter others and to make knowledge of otherness. This juxtaposition instigates the perpetual chaos and the state of non-transition that you talk about. My sense of disorientation when watching your work comes from the way it evokes something too near and too far all at once, something simultaneously too private and very widely shared. That lacerating intimacy is somehow more than the story of the private lives of two people. The presence

of art history as the history of the mobilization and the instrumentalization of art for ideological ends, and the history of the chaotic globalization of Chinese contemporary art, is somehow also personal and intimate. It's also family history.

**Chris:**

When I started making *Close, Closer*, I spent a few months collecting texts my mother and I exchanged on her lost Lugu Lake paintings over the course of two years. These text exchanges happened over the course of two years, starting before the pandemic and ending in the middle of the pandemic. At the same time, I was collaging landscape paintings and sounds/music from a wide range of sources. At a distance, I relied solely on those images and sounds as I was unable to travel to Yunnan, China, nor could I see the original paintings. Confined in my small studio, these materials become a vast place for me to re-imagine what Lugu Lake could be and how the original paintings could be animated. Working on screen, there was this freedom to jump from one image/place to another, and to bleed one sound source into another, without any intention for smoothness or transition.

**May:**

You told me that one of the impulses for making this work is the desire to make kinship, and to find a way of understanding your mother's past as an anomalous artist in 1980s Hubei. At that point she was a female artist in a very male dominated scene, and in the moment of the ascendancy of what subsequently came to be known as the Hubei pop movement, she was practising another kind of art. I want to think about the juxtaposition of what seems to be these incommensurable impulses in your work - the desire for kinship, another kind of kinship, and the recognition of the impossibility of resolution in that gesture of withholding formal possibilities of transition.

It makes me want to speculate on the relationship between your practice and the ghosts and the residues of China's modern historical form of artistic vanguardism, both in the Maoist sense of the enforced urban-rural movement and the 1980s sense of the global marketisation of vanguardist art. I'm wondering how your practice might be thought about in relation to the question of generational relations and legacies.

**Chris:**

The artistic subjectivity of Hubei artists has not become a topic for me to examine critically until recently. It is always hard to reflect upon something when one is too close to it. I stopped by Hong Kong on my way to Beijing in May, where I got to visit this new contemporary art collection. Halfway through the collection, I started weeping. Months later, when I started reflecting upon this sudden emotional outburst, I thought of Andrea Fraser's tears in many of her performances and how such a personal act can become a way to interrogate the underlying social, political, interpersonal, and economic structures within institutions. For me, many of the 'Hubei Pop' works, created between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, carried a very personal yet political origin but the subsequent commercial success complicated the nature of resistance in many of these works. Seeing many of the pieces that I grew up with in this new, institutional context felt unfamiliar, disjointed, misplaced yet intimate and personal, without any transition.

**May:**

I wonder if that experience of dislocation inside the museum also speaks to the impulse to find another kind of kinship with the previous generation of artists. I'm really struck by the recent proliferation of works and conversations on the theme of intergenerational relations in contemporary art. Saloni Mathur's book *A Fragile Inheritance: Radical Stakes in Contemporary Indian Art* takes up this theme to dialogue



with Geeta Kapur and Vivan Sundaram's work, and recent issues of World Records documentary journal and e-flux art journal feature this theme. All these works draw on the insight that generational relations aren't about succession and supersession. Generations overlap and different generations exist in the same present. Generational relations can be based on shared circumstance and can take the form of dialogic explorations of continuities and discontinuities, commonalities and differences. Generational relations can take the form of recuperation and gestures of return as ways of responding to closures in the present while holding onto possibilities of becoming. That overwhelming reaction in the museum might be taken as opening onto the acute question of what to inherit from the previous generation, when inheritance has to be a matter of the agency to retrieve and to return in order to become, rather than to receive something passed down by the patriarchs.

In your practice, the possibilities of intergenerational relations seem to come into the frame in both the more specific sense of the difficult yet necessary task of activating generational relations in artistic practice, and perhaps also in the way you think about Wuhan as a city, its past and present, and its ghosts of rebellion and anarchism.

**Chris:**

I think about the emergence of the Youth Autonomous Centre as a kind of revisionist reaction to the booming art market and newly introduced 'developer-led-art-institution' model in the early 2000s. For me, the anarchism of the Youth Autonomous Centre, which existed between 2008 and 2016, is both unique and universal; it comes from a similar lineage of occupying leftover urban spaces and a certain attitude towards music and subcultural programming. But at the same time, it has its own unique humour - not everyone who lives at the Centre cares or fully understands the idea behind it. As a result, it became this

inclusive space where fugitives, exiles and outcasts resided.

Soon after the birth of the Centre, the East Lake Project was launched to resist a developer/patron's plan to build on East Lake's natural reservoir. Many Hubei artists participated in their own ways. Some made videos documenting them hugging a tree by the lake, some organized a team of BMX bikers to jump into the lake, some swam in the lake for hours. As a collective, these intimate and mundane interactions with the lake made the Project known.

Coming from the post-85 generation, many artists experienced a sudden shift from a sense of freedom operated within art academies to the unstable commercial art world. They were looking for alternative ways of practising outside of the market and academy logic. For me, the East Lake Project ended not as a failure but rather a short-lived revolutionary act. It is revolutionary because it existed and made noise, so much so that the developer halted their plan in the area.

In the lineage of the Youth Autonomous Centre, many who participated in the Centre as well the Project later engaged in practices of filmmaking, DJing, painting, clubbing, and storytelling in their own ways. Almost all of them made works and movements that pointed to the politics of space within the immediate urban and natural landscape. I would say that their autonomy yet interconnectedness is what made anarchism still omnipresent in Wuhan today.

We talked about the absence of a subsequent generation after the emergence of the fifth and sixth generation of Chinese filmmakers. No one is talking about the seventh generation, even though there are filmmakers who have produced works that are distinctively personal: filmmakers such as the deceased Hu Ge, who no longer carried the baggage of history, but instead explored contemporary reality of marginalized

individuals through myth-making and intimate portrayal. I am struck by what anarchism and youth culture have been transformed into—especially in the post-pandemic context of Wuhan—the ghost of resistance hovers, lingers, morphs and constantly produces nuanced implications and relations. Perhaps, this question of legacy is being explored through a polyphonic approach, which in turn “queers” the patriarchs from the previous generation.



# *Guxiang*

## by Wenny Teo

*Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, or bond with, one's native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both.*

—Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*<sup>1</sup>

At the heart of Chris Zhongtian Yuan's three-channel video installation *No Door, One Window, Only Light* (2023) is a small maquette of their childhood bedroom in Wuhan, built from memory by the artist, who also happens to be a trained architect. Yet, there is something distinctly unsound about this flimsy house of cardboard, with its paper-thin walls and miniature, origami furnishings on the verge of collapse. Like the memories we continue to hold onto from childhood, it is a fragile construct.

The three videos draw the viewer further into this most intimate and unstable of interiors. The longest vignette was shot from within the confines of the maquette itself, which still bears the scars of the camera's intrusive gaze. Through these jagged apertures, the eye of the camera roves voyeuristically across the tiny furniture, wavering in and out of focus to a tense and discordant soundtrack. Captured on

<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile,' *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 185.

grainy Super 8 and 16mm film like a sinister home movie, there is an uncanny veracity to this doll house mise-en-scene, accentuated by real footage of moving trees seamlessly edited into the frames of the paper windows. The second video also toys with our sense of space, scale and perspective. The viewer now finds themselves caught within a virtual black-and-white 3D rendering of the room, peering out through the horizontal slats of a shuttered window onto the view of a sanitised cityscape lined with crisp, white architectural models of buildings and skyscrapers.

While the final video is the only one that is not staged within some version of Yuan's room, it is also the piece that provides the most insight into the deeply personal underpinnings of the work as a whole. A stream of handwritten text in English and Mandarin script flows across the void of a black screen, like the subtitles to a movie we cannot see. These are redacted fragments of an imaginary conversation between Yuan and an unnamed childhood friend, who, as we soon learn from the script, had recently died. From these snippets of dialogue, we gather that Yuan's friend had suffered from hearing voices in his head and had rarely left the confines of his parent's home in Wuhan. In a different register to the palpable sense of entrapment and the voyeuristic charge of the previous two videos, we are now made privy to an intimate exchange between two old friends, separated by an unbreachable gulf of space and time, life and death.

Like several of Yuan's previous works, *No Door, One Window, Only Light* is rooted in the artist's biography, and is based on a true story of loss and bereavement. Yuan and their friend had first been introduced by their parents in Yuan's childhood room, which was in the faculty residences of the Hubei Institute of Fine Art, where both their parents taught in the 1980s and 1990s. They saw each other frequently throughout their adolescence, but soon lost contact after they

each left Wuhan to study abroad. Yuan studied architecture in the US before relocating again to the UK, where he still lives and works as an artist. Their friend attended the Berlin University of the Arts before returning to Wuhan, where he first began to suffer from symptoms of schizophrenia. Rather than seek treatment and risk being incarcerated by the state, he remained isolated at home for most of his life under the watchful eye of his parents. By the time Yuan heard of his premature passing in June 2022, it had been more than a decade since the two friends had last met and spoken, and several years since Yuan had returned to their native city of Wuhan.

Yuan's personal approach to filmmaking is informed by the cultural historian Saidiya Hartman's notion of 'critical fabulation', a mode of auto-fictional storytelling that gives voice to those who have been marginalised, silenced, oppressed, and omitted from official archives and histories. In *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman offers a fictionalised re-telling of a historical incident mentioned in the archives of Transatlantic slavery. Two young girls died on the slave ship *Recovery* as it crossed the Middle Passage in 1792; one whose tragic death is described in historical accounts, and one who is barely mentioned. Hartman attempts to recover them both from the murky fathoms of forgotten history by asking us to

picture them: the relics of two girls, one cradling the other, plundered innocents; a sailor caught sight of them and later said they were friends. Two world-less girls found a country in each other's arms. Besides defeat and terror, there would be this too: the glimpse of beauty, the instant of possibility.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Saidiya Hartman, '*Venus in Two Acts*' *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008. p. 1-14, p 8.

With this haunting image of solace and friendship, she seeks to ‘provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed.’<sup>3</sup>

In *No Door, One Window, Only Light* the closeness between Yuan and their friend is also fictional, since the two had long lost touch, but it is clear that the death of their friend had a profound impact on the artist. Sigmund Freud referred to this ambivalent form of mourning as melancholia, a state of prolonged and ambivalent grief in which the subject remains disproportionately haunted by feelings of loss for reasons they can neither fully explain nor put to rest. In Freud’s words, the melancholic subject ‘knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him.’<sup>4</sup> This raises further questions: – who or what is mourned in the work? What are we being asked to bear witness to, and who or what is it that Yuan seeks to recover from the depths of history and memory?

It is no coincidence that Freud sought to develop a more rigorous understanding of the processes of grieving at a time of collective loss and bereavement. *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) was written during the First World War and published a year before the outbreak of the ‘Spanish flu’ pandemic, which eventually claimed even more lives than those lost in the trenches. Yuan’s video was completed under similar circumstances in 2023, – four years after the Covid-19 global pandemic first erupted in their native city of Wuhan and brought the world to a standstill. The city was demonised in the international mass media as a hotbed of incivility, disease and contagion, and widely condemned for implementing ‘draconian’ social-distancing, lockdown and quarantine measures that were soon adopted by governments across

<sup>3</sup> Hartman, p 8.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia,’ ed. J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14), (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) p 245.



the globe as the virus spread. In Wuhan, these systems of biopolitical control were not lifted until late 2022, when China finally ended its 'Zero Covid' policy following widespread national protests. For many Chinese people living overseas, the impossibility of return stirred up powerful feelings of exilic longing and estrangement, compounded by widespread Sinophobia and racially motivated acts of violence.

It was during the first nationwide lockdown in the UK that Yuan began to reflect on the city of their birth and their formative experiences of it. From their home in London, they produced several video works whose narratives, much like *No Door, One Window, Only Light*, gravitate around missing people, objects and histories. The first of these, which is arguably also Yuan's best-known work to date, is *Wuhan Punk* (2020). At a time when Wuhan had become completely synonymous with the Covid pandemic, it offered a lens into its lesser-known, rich counter-cultural history of dissent, anarchy and rebellion. The film combines online footage of the city's spectacular, riverine urban landscape with that of a dilapidated, hazy, virtual metropolis rendered on gaming software. As its title suggests, the video takes the viewer back to the 1990s, a time of turbulent socio-economic national restructuring and urban regeneration, when Wuhan was the centre of China's emergent punk rock scene, focusing on the mysterious disappearance of Mai Dian, the lead singer of one of its most iconic punk rock bands. *Wuhan Punk* was followed by *Close, Closer* (2021), a video animation based on a conversation between the artist and their mother, a respected painter who was an active member of the post-reform avant-garde, describing a lost series of paintings she made in the 1980s after an expedition to Lugu Lake in Yunan. Although the subsequent *All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss* (2021-2022) and *Cloudy Song* (2022)

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* Trans. H. Eiland, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) p 37.

are less ostensibly psycho-biographical, they also pivot around themes of loss, displacement and (be)longing. The former, inspired by Hartman's writing, weaves together the intertwined histories and intergenerational trauma of Transatlantic slavery and Chinese indentured labour in the Americas, and the latter stages a ludic, sci-fi encounter between an exiled, amnesiac human and an AI robot tasked with helping them retrieve their lost memories against the backdrop of a virtual, futuristic city.

Although these videos differ in their aesthetic treatments, they are like *No Door, One Window, Only Light*, melancholic 'expeditions into the depths of memory', to borrow a phrase used by Walter Benjamin to describe the process of autobiographical recollection and reflection. In the autumn of 1932, shortly after the Nazi party won the majority of seats in the Reichstag in the recent Federal Elections, the Jewish German philosopher – who was travelling abroad at the time – was struck by the sombre realisation that he might soon have 'to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell' to Berlin, the city of his birth.<sup>5</sup> Faced with the pain of this more permanent separation, he began composing a series of vivid, textual vignettes based around 'those images, which, in exile, are most apt to awaken images of homesickness: images of childhood.'<sup>6</sup>

These evocative snapshots of his home and early experiences of the city were posthumously compiled and published in *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (1950). In its introduction, written in 1938 shortly before World War II, Benjamin expressed the hope that exposing himself to these most potent memories in small doses of writing and reflection would somehow 'vaccinate' and 'inoculate' him against the impending waves of homesickness brought on by the condition of exile. Yet, this was more than just an exercise in nostalgia, as Benjamin also

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, p 37.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, p 37.

intended for the work to serve as a cautionary, self-reflective critique of Jewish, upper-middle class bourgeois complacency. Written amidst the rise of Nazism, these snapshots of a bygone era were to be a reminder of ‘how thoroughly the person of here would later dispense the security allotted his childhood’.<sup>7</sup> Later critics would note that the vignettes revealed the alienation faced by a Jewish family in a predominantly Protestant neighbourhood, and that in the entire memoir of his early years, Benjamin does not mention a single friend.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, Benjamin described the act of childhood recollection in a language that is less curative and more violent and visceral; a confrontation with ‘images, severed from all previous associations that stand – like ruins or torsos in the collector’s gallery – in the sober rooms of our later insight.’<sup>9</sup>

*No Door, One Window, Only Light* is a work that speaks to a similar confrontation with wider social issues of precarity and marginalisation, viewed from across a gulf of space and time, and restaged in the artist’s childhood bedroom alongside an estranged figure from their past who remains inextricably bound to their memories of home and city. This melancholic hauntology was foreshadowed in *Wuhan Punk*, which similarly focused on someone ‘exiled to the margins of society’ who never quite fitted in. As Yuan narrates in their voiceover, spoken in the local dialect, ‘Perhaps my fascination for him was triggered by my thoughts for the estranged city. His exile forced me to return home.’ Yet, as *No Door, One Window, Only Light* reveals, it is an unhomely sort of homecoming; haunted by ghosts from the past who cannot be properly mourned, because they never counted among the living to begin with.

Arguably, what Yuan seeks to recover from this history, and invites the spectator to bear witness to, are these people

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Donson, ‘Review of Berlin Childhood around 1900’. *H-Net Reviews*. February, 2007. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12863> (10/10/23).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p 611.

whose deaths and disappearances are generally ‘not much noticed’, as Hartman phrased it. Judith Butler further observed that periods of great collective trauma and loss of life – such as war, or indeed a global pandemic – have a way of dividing populations into those who are ‘grievable’ and those who are not.<sup>10</sup> Those who are and can be grieved are deemed worthy of mourning, their deaths acknowledged and seen because they were recognised as constitutive members of society in the first place. ‘Ungrievable lives’ are those who were never seen as legitimate to begin with, and thus ‘cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone.’<sup>11</sup> Butler and Hartman’s texts recall Michel Foucault’s writing on the biopolitical and spatial structures of power and control that undergird modern society. *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in an Age of Reason* (1961) is a seminal examination of how ‘undesirable’ members of society are silenced and secreted away in asylums, hospitals, and prisons, a carceral and surveillant logic that is inscribed in urban and architectonic designs and systems.

Another of Yuan’s recent works, made in the same year as *No Door, One Window, Only Light*, alludes to these Foucauldian concerns in its title and form. *Institute for the Silent, the Tender, the Mad* (2023) consists of two metal filing cabinets facing one another; cabinets of the generic variety used to store official records and documents, commonly found in offices and archives. Their bottom drawers are left open forming a bridge between them, exposing their hidden contents: plain white architectural models of a sanitised, but skewed, urban topography whose collapsed buildings and skyscrapers spill out of the narrow confines of the space allocated to them. It is a piece that might be read as emblematic of Yuan’s rebellion against the architectural profession, or perhaps a reference to

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016) p xix.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, p xix.

the systems and structures that hold modern societies together by attempting to put its 'others' in their place, what Foucault termed 'the historical ensemble – notions, institutions, judicial and police measures, scientific concepts – which hold captive a madness whose wild state can never be reconstituted.'<sup>12</sup>

In the modern history of China, the 'wild' voice of madness has also carried a distinctive cultural and socio-political resonance and power. 'Diary of a Madman' (*kuangren riji*), a short story published in 1918 by the famed Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), the 'sage of modern China', is widely regarded as the most important work of modern Chinese literature – the first to be written in vernacular Chinese and a powerful catalyst of the New Culture Movement, which had a lasting impact on Chinese revolutionary politics throughout the 20th century. The plot revolves around an unstable first-person narrator who suddenly becomes consumed by the paranoid idea that everyone in the remote village he calls home suddenly hungers for his flesh. Despite his purported madness, the protagonist of Lu Xun's short story is regarded as someone who dared to call out the cannibalism and corruption of traditional Chinese societies in an urgent call to arms for the sake of future generations. The story ends with the madman's famous exhortation to 'save the children!'

Yet, there is another short story by Lu Xun that speaks more intimately to the themes of childhood friendship and loss in Yuan's work. In the bitterly cold winter of 1919, Lu Xun returned to his family compound in the countryside of Shaoxing for the first time in twenty years to witness its sale. The author's ambivalent homecoming was recounted in a well-known autobiographical short story *Guxiang* (1921) – variously translated to 'My Old Home,' 'My Hometown' and 'My

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, Trans. R. Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) p. vii.

Native Land'. As literary scholar Tang Xiaobing observed, the term *guxiang* is complex and difficult to translate; its image and concept indicates 'a primary structure of feeling and frequently provokes a melancholic nostalgia [...] its layered associations encode and transmit a complex conception of home, communal life, and the private self.'<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in the opening passages, Lu Xun first recounts his initial disappointment and shock at how derelict his childhood home looked in contrast to the vibrant memories he retained of it; a jarring disconnect between past and present that would continue throughout the narrative. Just as he is about to sink into despair, he is told that a childhood friend called Runtu, the son of someone who worked for his family, would soon arrive to greet him. At the mere mention of this name, Lu Xun was immediately transported back to the wonder and excitement of childhood. Runtu was an otherworldly presence, possessing a powerful and captivating imagination. Lu Xun describes his delight at being admitted into this fantastical universe, populated with surreal flora and fauna – cunning dog-like creatures he called *zha* who devoured watermelons by moonlight, seashells the colour of rainbows, and bipedal jumping fish. Runtu's mind was a 'treasure-house of such strange lore', and whereas Runtu 'lived by the sea', Lu Xun and his other friends 'could only see the four corners of the sky above the high courtyard wall'. Lu Xun's memories of childhood were not only bound up with a particular place, but with a specific person. Yet, when the grown-up Runtu finally appears, he is no longer recognisable. His face is worn with wrinkles and lines, his hands coarse and clumsy. After a moment of silence, in which a mixture of joy and sadness marks his face, he finally greets his childhood friend with the appellation, 'Master!'

<sup>13</sup> Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p 76.

<sup>14</sup> Lu Xun, 'My Old Home' *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960) 1972. Public domain : Marxist Internet Archive (2005) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1921/01/x01.htm> (10/10/23).

*Guxiang* is one of Lu Xun's most touching, emotional and melancholic of stories, and one of his most brutal in his evocative portrait of a once fearless childhood 'hero' who had been numbed into submission by the social hierarchies and inequalities of the system he had been born into. Like many of Lu Xun's works, the story is a critique of the moribund structures of Chinese society and a call for revolutionary action, and similarly ends, like *Diary of a Madman*, with the hope that he and Runtu's children would not suffer a similar fate. In Tang's intimate reading of the work, he suggests that the piece uses the framework of nostalgia and what he calls a 'homesickness complex' as a means of examining 'the historical conflict between different realities and knowledge systems.'<sup>14</sup> Tang further proposed that Lu Xun's literary style, 'devoted to reliving absence scenes and private moments', is a 'hypersubjective form of writing [...] that draws on "archival documents" of the unconscious and helps the subject recognise [...] his unconscious not merely as his history, but also as "the discourse of the other."<sup>15</sup>

Like Hartman's mode of critical fabulation, the interweaving of the personal and political, autobiographical fact and speculative fiction, has the potential to draw out the others within ourselves, as well as draw attention to those invisible and silent others around us. The Covid pandemic has made us all too aware of the biopolitical structures that govern everyday life, and perhaps even allowed for a more empathic understanding of those whose who are routinely subject to these measures in ever more violent ways. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Sara Ahmed asked, 'What happens when those who have been designated as ungrievable are grieved, and when their loss is not only felt as a loss, but

<sup>15</sup> Tang Xiaobing, p 86.

becomes a symbol of the injustice of loss? Is to grieve for the ungrieved to convert an injustice into a justice?’<sup>16</sup> Yuan’s work does not provide straightforward answers to these questions, but it does invite us to bear witness to the life of his friend, a life unlived and now lost. Like Lu Xun’s *Guxiang*, the vision of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ in Yuan’s work is deeply ambivalent. What emerges is less of a revolutionary call to arms or a nostalgic return to the past, but an appeal to our emotions, which may be an equally potent force for change, as Ahmed reminds us, ‘Emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery and violence shape lives and worlds in the present. The time of emotion is not always about the past, and how it sticks. Emotions also open up futures, in the ways they involve different orientations to others.’<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p 191.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed, p. 202.





**No Door, One Window,  
Only Light**



# No Door, One Window, Only Light

21/05/23 — 03/09/23

## Macalline Center of Art, Beijing

*No Door, One Window, Only Light* brought together four video works, several installations and sketches to form a periodic retrospect and survey of their recent works.

Previous projects *Close, Closer* (2020-2021), *Wuhan Punk* (2020), and *1815* (2019-20) examine the complex tensions between collective histories and autobiographical intimacy, center and margins, and between individuals and institution, normalizing the in-between spaces that cross these dichotomies. These works consist in persistently opposing home and diaspora/exile as conflicting concepts, while the artist makes an effort in a space of contradiction and absence to trace various forms of life, feelings and emotions, and weak signals trapped between technological evolutions.

The newly commissioned three-channel video work, titled *No Door, One Window, Only Light* (2023), focused on an artist friend from home who passed away in 2022, in order to pose questions around home, absence, trauma and sanity. Meanwhile, a series of sculptural objects and architectural score drawings poetically and comfortably capture, amplify, and analyze the spaces—whether mundane or institutional—within their videos. As such, they give physical quality to transient, forgotten space and landscapes.

In the act of reconstructing spaces where the ghosts have lived, they want to ask: how to forget and remember simultaneously during moments of both personal and collective amnesia?





Installation view of  
*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Macalline Center of Art  
Courtesy Macalline Center of Art



**Installation view of**  
***No Door, One Window, Only Light***  
Macalline Center of Art  
Courtesy Macalline Center of Art







Installation view of  
*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
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Installation view of  
*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
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Courtesy Macalline Center of Art





Installation view of  
*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Macalline Center of Art  
Courtesy Macalline Center of Art

**Home Is Where the Music Is**



Installation view of  
*Home Is Where the Music Is*  
Open Hand Open Space  
Reading International  
Courtesy Reading International

# Home Is Where the Music Is

09/06/23 — 02/07/23

## Reading International, Reading

*Home Is Where the Music Is* comprises of a series of video, sound and architectural installations responding to the history, architecture and institutional structure of Brock Keep, a former military barracks built in 1877, which houses the exhibition venue 571 Oxford Road, Open Hand Open Space.

The project showcases two recent films, *Wuhan Punk* (2020) and *Cloudy Song* (2022), as well as *Wuhan Punk* archival footage, sound recordings, an architectural model alongside site-responsive interventions through re-appropriating found, architectural materials on site. The exhibition also features a new video by students from the Reading School of Art, developed during a workshop led by the artist.

The works examine ways in which spaces of exile and absence are politicised. Recomposing vernacular sonic and spatial materials, they investigate narratives and politics simultaneously building and dismantling our everyday spaces. Drawing from a wide range of music genres such as punk, jazz and noise, Yuan uses sound in a way to re-imagine and improvise memory and resistance.

The exhibition explores how a space from distant memory and geography can be rebuilt through sound and storytelling, producing potential resonance and contradiction which in turn reconfigure the gallery space.

During a time when the space between home and exile

constantly shifts between the intimate and the frictional, we are also confronted with the recurring question: can we work with the inherent negation in identity to work towards collective resistance in our new home?







Installation view of  
*Home Is Where the Music Is*  
Open Hand Open Space  
Reading International  
Courtesy Reading International



Installation view of  
*Home Is Where the Music Is*  
Open Hand Open Space  
Reading International  
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Installation view of  
*Home Is Where the Music Is*  
Open Hand Open Space  
Reading International  
Courtesy Reading International

# Recent Works



# *No Door, One Window, Only Light*

2023

Super 8mm film transferred to HD video

26'32"

Commissioned by Macalline Center of Art. Additional support from British Council.

Following the recent death of an artist friend L from home, who allegedly suffered from schizophrenia for more than 15 years, the artist talks to L through an imagined letter exchange, where they confront each other on notions of home, vulnerability, resistance, memory, and fraught relations.

Centering on an architectural model of the artist's childhood room, the film is entirely shot on super 8mm and accompanied by original music from London-based experimental group Langham Research Centre. The film draws from early history of British artist filmmakers' home videos, as well as makes references to late 60s structural cinema that prioritises light and space, as an autonomous site for resistance.

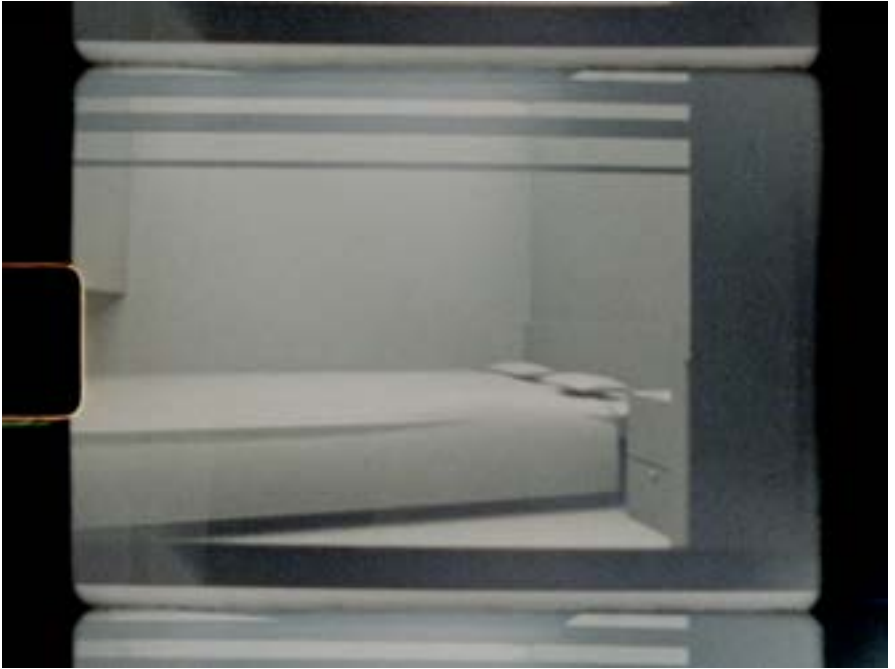


*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Super 8mm film transferred to HD video  
26'32"  
2023



*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Super 8mm film transferred to HD video  
26'32"  
2023





*No Door, One Window, Only Light*

Super 8mm film transferred to HD video

26'32"

2023




*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Super 8mm film transferred to HD video  
26'32"  
2023



*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Super 8mm film transferred to HD video  
26'32"  
2023





*No Door, One Window, Only Light*  
Super 8mm film transferred to HD video  
26'32"  
2023

# *Cloudy Song*

2022

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40"

Supported by the Economic and Social Research Council grant number ES/T007354/1. Commissioned by Somerset House in partnership with The Alan Turing Institute and UAL Creative Computing Institute. Developed in residence at Somerset House Studios

Set in the near future, an exiled human figure M who lost their home and suffers from memory loss picks up a care robot Y. In an abandoned building, Y tries to retrieve memories for M through music, while a ghost lingers in the background. The film composites animated fragments of a ghostly city, songs from childhood memory regenerated through AI, architectural drawings and model, the artist's own voice, and original music from Lu Yan – current member of Hardcore Raver in Tears and ex-frontman of Wuhan post-punk band AV Okubo.



*Cloudy Song*

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40"

2022



*Cloudy Song*

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40"

2022





*Cloudy Song*

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40"

2022



*Cloudy Song*

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40"

2022





*Cloudy Song*

16mm film transferred to HD video

20'40''

2022

# *All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*

2021–2022

16mm transferred to HD video and CGI, bw, sound  
21'52"

Co-commissioned by FLAMIN and V.O Curations;  
supported through FLAMIN Fellowship and V.O  
Curations Residency; additional production support  
from not/nowhere; supported using public funding by  
the National Lottery through Arts Council England

In a nondescript forest, two exiled individuals are about to reincarnate into the next life while striking up an intimate conversation on family legends, collective histories, love tales and folklore. The dialogue between the two characters appears only on screen, as the film is led by a sonic narrative – a score composed for the work by British trumpeter Kevin G. Davy.

Juxtaposing analogue film and digital animation, the film collapses notions of time and space, in order to explore queerness, migration, and colonial ghosts past and now, drawing from both personal and historical perspectives.

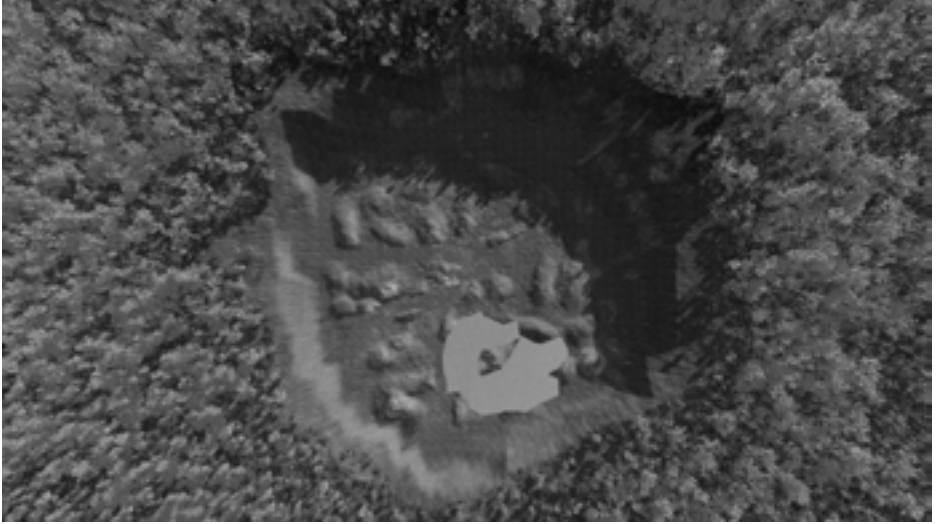


*All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*  
16mm transferred to HD video and CGI, bw, sound  
21'52"  
2021-2022



*All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*  
16mm transferred to HD video and CGI, bw, sound  
21'52"  
2021-2022





*All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*  
16mm transferred to HD video and CGI, bw, sound  
21'52"  
2021-2022





*All Trace Is Gone, No Clamour for a Kiss*  
16mm transferred to HD video and CGI, bw, sound  
21'52"  
2021-2022

## *Close, Closer*

2020–2021

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

10'

Commissioned by OCAT Institute Beijing

Drawing from the artist's mother Wang Qingli's 1993 expedition to Lugu Lake in Yunnan, China, the video overlays drawings, archival images, historical paintings, texts and sounds to reimagine Wang's *Lugu Lake Paintings* (1994), which were later sold and unable to be found.

Structured as an intimate conversation between the artist and their mother, the film weaves together narratives around intimacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, tourism and art market, accompanied by a soundtrack of construction noise, folk music and pop songs made by the artist. As the video tries to turn Wang's paintings from low res JPEGs to livingness, we also experience an uneasy interrogation of the complex notion of motherhood and motherland, both personal and collective.



*Close, Closer*

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

10'

2020-2021



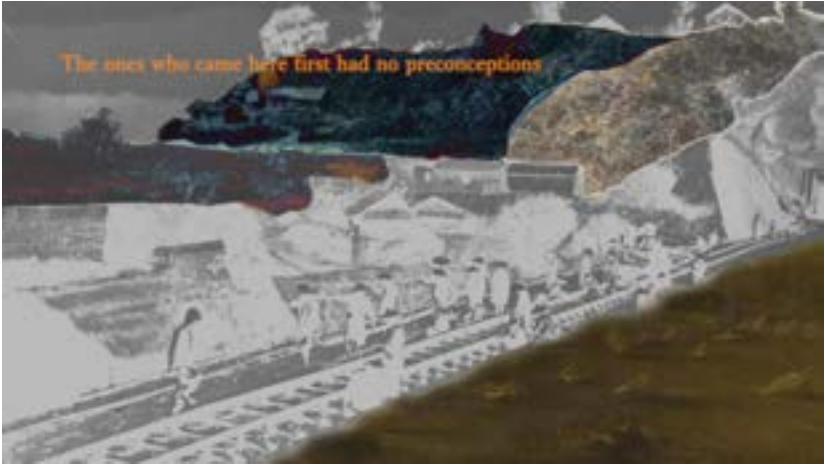
**Close, Closer**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
10'  
2020-2021



**Close, Closer**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
10'  
2020-2021

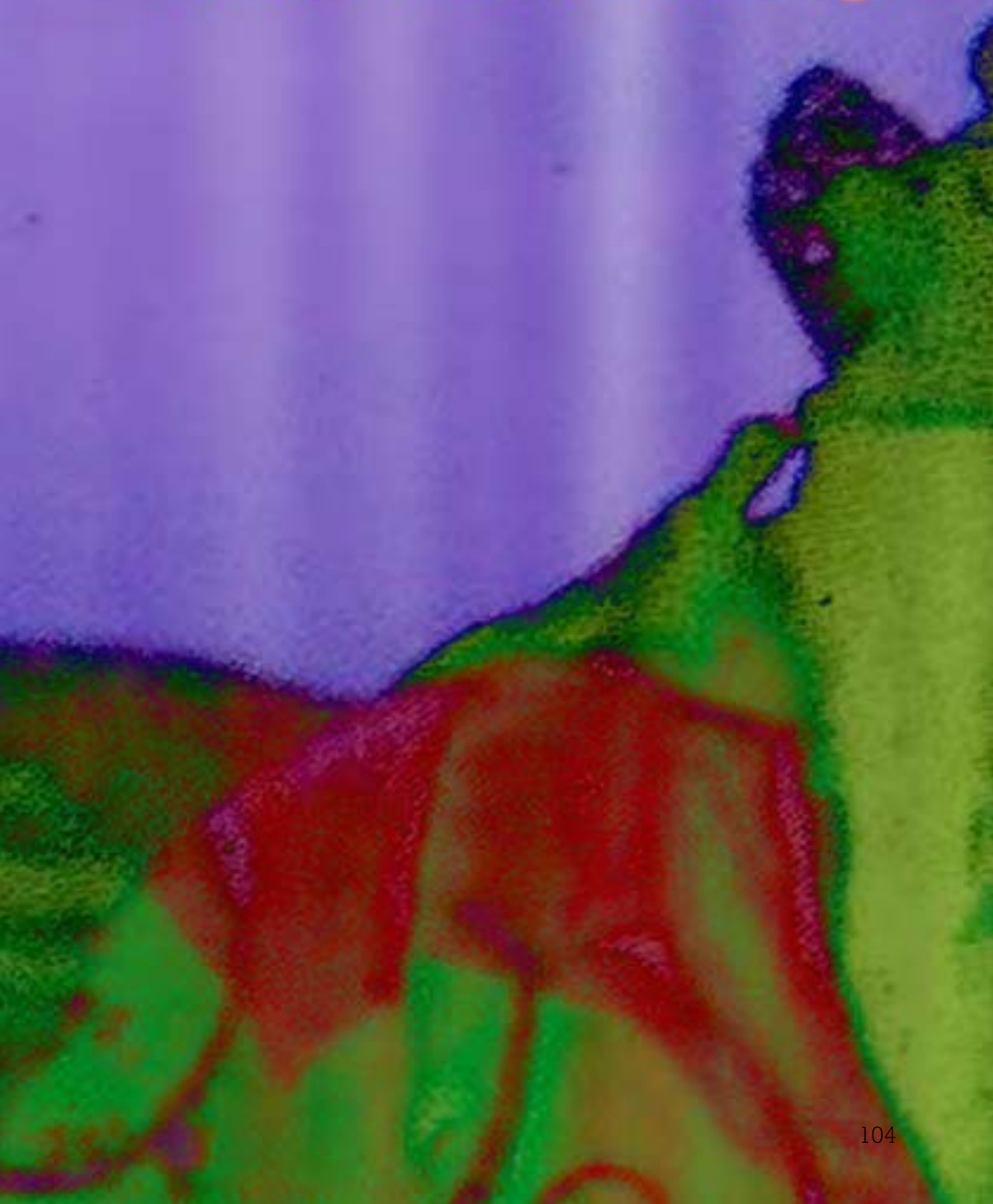


**Close, Closer**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
10'  
2020-2021




*Close, Closer*  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
10'  
2020-2021

I've never been in Peking, or







# the Summer Palace

*Close, Closer*

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

10'

2020-2021

# *Wuhan Punk*

2020

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

12'01''

Commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella

Using archive material and digital animation, *Wuhan Punk* ruminates on the disappearance of Mai Dian, the charismatic frontman of Wuhan punk group Si Dou Le. Narrated in Wuhan dialect, *Wuhan Punk* searches for memory and resistance. The project also reveals the lost footage of an interview that the artist did with Mai back in 2010, as part of the artist's very first video work.



***Wuhan Punk***

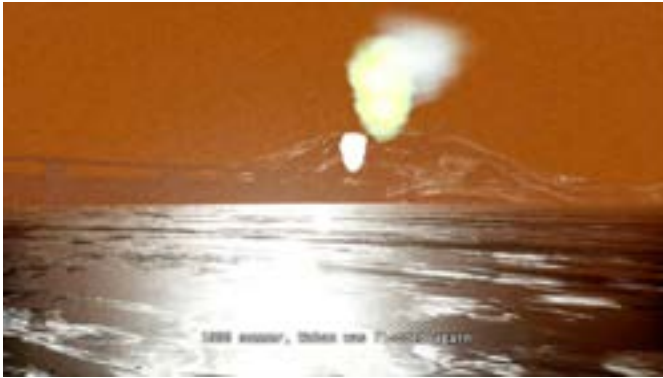
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

12'01''

2020



**Wuhan Punk**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
12'01"  
2020



**Wuhan Punk**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
12'01"  
2020



**Wuhan Punk**  
Single channel HD video (colour, sound)  
12'01"  
2020



***Wuhan Punk***

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

12'01"

2020

A warm, golden sunset over a body of water. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow, with a bright sun partially obscured by a soft, white cloud. The water in the foreground is dark with gentle ripples. The word "FLOO" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image. The letter 'O' is replaced by a white wreath of flowers.

FLOO

# DANG

*Wuhan Punk*

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

12'01"

2020

# *1815*

2019–2020

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35"

Commissioned by K11 Wuhan

Musician Rosemary Brown describes her collaboration with Beethoven, while the film travels to various places: CGI reconstructing Tambora's eruption based on Sir Stamford Raffles's official account; a Yunnan-based American missionary's poem accompanied by archival footage of war and famine; an explosion near Lake Geneva; footage of an aquarium shot by the artist inside the Gladys Porter Zoo located at the U.S.-Mexico border; and finally a hypnotic session of Brown channeling Beethoven's life and music in the volcanic darkness.





**1815**

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35''

2019-2020



**1815**

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35"

2019-2020



**1815**

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35"

2019–2020



**1815**

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35"

2019–2020



**1815**

Single channel HD video (colour, sound)

8'35"

2019–2020





# Notes







Does it make you a genius?

no door, one

window, only light

投出来的是一个长方形的台  
through everything. It is only a rectangle

这又有 ~~什么~~ 什么不一样。投的夜  
色去来。它在只暗为可是 *blue*  
死叶 *blue light* But it is all blue





raise mobility

us, damaged in the making, and

There's a Ghost that goes inside  
there's a heart sprung from inside



一、我们你，你慧色画号？定



# 与袁中天的采访

文 / 苏珊妮·克劳森

苏珊妮·克劳森：

你在雷丁国际的展览位于牛津路 571 号，这里曾是 19 世纪的军营，四周环绕着国防部的标志，而且牛津路沿街都是国际食品店。这个地点和建筑风格有何特别之处吸引了你？

袁中天：

一开始，我就被位于牛津路 571 号的这个画廊所在的建筑与青年自治中心的相似性所吸引了。这种相似性一眼并不容易察觉。青年自治中心是一个位于小巧的两层混凝土楼中；相比之下，Brock Keep（即位于牛津路 571 号的画廊）却是一栋宏伟的砖建筑。但不论是大小、材料还是背景，这两处地方都给人一种有些破旧，有“占据者”氛围的感觉。

这两栋建筑都经历了不同的用途变迁。青年自治中心曾是青年们探索不同生活和管理方式的聚集地，它活跃于 2008-2016 年间。它出现在我 2010 年的第一个影像作品《Boundless City》中，并在十年后的《武汉朋克》中被重新提及。在《Boundless City》里，我采访了一位在武汉市郊接手了一个废弃农舍并创办了这个中心的人，名叫麦。当初的影像素材不慎丢失，只留下几张静态图像。我开始深入研究这些图片中的每一细节、物件和家具。我发现，许多细节或物品可能原本就属于那所房子或是某人的个人物品。这让这个中心显得如家一般，最有深度的对话就在这种亲密的环境中发生。就这样，在日常生活中，通过朋友间的交往，关于反抗和社会运动的知识得以传播和积累。

至于 Brock Keep，它建于 1881 年，那时候的当地的郡政府开始设立议会并有军事部署。近几十年里，它曾是流浪者的避难

所，而现在则变为艺术家的工作室。这里通过一些微小的调整，就显现出对其原有功能的一种反抗。正如你提到的，这座建筑所在的地段有很多国际食品店，而且距离我在雷丁的公寓只需步行 15 分钟。随着时间的流逝，日常生活使它融入了这个环境，而岁月也在其外观上留下了痕迹。在这样的背景下，打造一个开放的社区艺术空间对我来说是再熟悉不过的。

的确，我可能有些主观地将两个空间联系起来，找寻它们之间的相似之处，如空间的布局、院子、大门及绿植。当某个地方被永远遗弃时，我们可能会本能地寻找其他地方的替代或有相似之处的地方，这种渴望让我们不断突破对身份、社区和国家概念的固有认知。

**苏珊妮：**

展览现场由一系列互相关联的作品组成。《武汉朋克》（2020）与《Cloudy Song》（2022）通过共同的叙事主题紧密地联系在一起。这些作品融合了城市影像与数字化渲染的景观，伴随着旋律感强烈但稍显忧郁的中国朋克音乐、无线电的音效和旁白。雾锁的武汉城市景观浮现，呈现出一系列含糊的空间。旁白主要描述了一个角色，他是 90 年代武汉地下音乐圈的一名友人。

在《Cloudy Song》中，有关朋克活动的历史影像与两名在空间中穿梭的演员一同呈现，而旁白则回溯了某个历史时空中经常出现的场景。与《Cloudy Song》一同展示的还有你在第三个空间放置的纸质模型，以及两张儿时你与母亲的照片。在整个装置和视频作品中，有些图像和物体不断地出现和消失。你能详细说明你是如何布置这个装置的吗？

**中天：**

我对《武汉朋克》和《Cloudy Song》之间的联系思考了良久。在 2010 年完成《Boundless City》之后，我开始对创作与武汉相关的作品产生犹豫，因为武汉对我而言是一个难以直面的地方。随后的几年，我自己与家乡的关系进行了深入的思考——我总感到在一定程度上既对其了如指掌，又感觉对它一无所知。2019 年夏，我与一位从武汉访问伦敦的艺术家朋友相遇，从他



那得知了麦的失踪。疫情期间，我了解到他的朋克乐队身份，这使我对 90 年代那段在我身边发生，但我因年幼未能察觉的朋克运动有了新的认识。这个消失的形象成为我重新审视和构想“家”的一个窗口。

过去一年，我多次参观位于牛津路的画廊，每次都被它能够展现的种种所打动，尤其是日常生活是如何与艺术交融的。当我们布置展览时，我对于找到那些隐藏在壁橱、储物间和楼梯下的建筑材料或旧家具产生了浓厚兴趣。在这个“临时挖掘”的过程中，我发现了画架、胶合板、私人照片以及建筑的老照片，这使我突然与这个空间产生了深厚的个人情感联系。在我成长的过程中，艺术与生活总是相互交织，有时它们的关系可能并不那么和谐。当我开始成为一名职业艺术家后，我认识到与艺术界保持一定距离的重要性，因为我与艺术界的关系曾过于亲密。

此次展览的布局也许正能反映我的这些思绪。观众在进入展览时会首先追随那位消失的朋克主唱的脚步；接着，他们会步入一个模拟我童年客厅的空间，里面摆放有缩小版模型、90 年代的朋克影像，以及我与母亲的合照。房间的另一侧，一个播放着音频的空间仿佛一个充满黄色光芒的隧道。深入暗淡的走廊，每一个“细胞般的小房间”里都放置了两段视频。这些视频被空间固有的结构所区隔，而音效则在各个空间之间自由流淌。

**苏珊妮：**

在你的作品中，“家”“流亡”和“避难”这些概念显得尤为核心。《Cloudy Song》里展现了一个 AI 人物，他深入探讨了个人记忆与历史的紧密联系。同时，你还提到了“鬼魂”的影像，这在我们的小组讨论中也多次被提及。那么，对你而言，“鬼魂”又代表着什么？

**中天：**

在我的许多作品中，“鬼魂”是一个经常回归的形象，在不同的背景中，它会扮演着多种角色。我认为，这与我对生活中某些人、时间和空间位置的无法确定而感到的困惑有关。这些鬼魂成为了对那些难以言说的事物发声的方式，因为它们为那些

边缘化的事物赋予了具体形态。同时，这些鬼魂也可能代表着失败的革命者、被历史淡忘的身影，或是那些失去家园的人们。在某些情境中，当我们去理解这些鬼魂可能如何被权力结构所影响时，我们往往会有一种悲观的态度。在这种视角下，鬼魂反映的是对强大的权力结构的一种应对。但是，这些鬼魂绝非无力——他们为自己开创了特定的空间，尽管这些空间处于一种边缘状态，但正是在此，各种想象得以孕育和成形。

从一个“离散”的视角或远距离来创作，无疑让我对自己的定位感到有些困惑，有时甚至感觉有些难以为继。我总是试图寻找一个“最佳的环境”来解读我的作品。当我意识到这样的环境几乎是不存在的，我便开始构建自己的语境，或是开发一套特有的话语和创作方式。越是深入这个过程，我就越常与那些有着相似经历的艺术家的交汇，与此同时，这些鬼魂也开始汇聚，形成一个全新的群体。

**苏珊妮：**

请问你是如何看待在您的家乡武汉，特别是在当时的武汉朋克圈子中，集体反抗或许是不服从的可能性？在当时的中国背景下，“朋克”这一概念给了我们一定的指引，但在你的作品中，这个概念又是如何得到更广泛的解读的？作为一名艺术家，您的角色又是如何定义的？

**中天：**

我一直在思考音乐和乐手如何处理不服从的观念。我成长的环境中有很多人都是朋克乐手或者是朋克乐手的亲密圈子和粉丝，他们还同时扮演着如艺术家、建筑师、学生和工人等多重角色。抵抗从来不是一个自上而下、精心策划的计划，而是一系列即兴和自我组织的情境，人们在其中聚集、演奏音乐，并尖叫出那些在日常生活中可能听起来具有颠覆性的词语。

在我的作品中，激进主义也许是一个关键但未被充分探索的概念。我仍然与很多艺术家、音乐家和武汉的亚文化团体保持紧密联系，他们继承了 90 年代和 21 世纪初的无政府主义 / 朋克运动。这些运动已经呈现出新的空间、角色和形式。对我而言，从一个远离家乡的地方参与这些运动的方式可能会显得非常不

同。我必须依赖作为艺术家或电影制片人的工具，来记录、想象抵抗的观念，同时不断探索在不同背景下抵抗可能意味着什么。在“流散”状态下制作电影也是一种汇聚志同道合的人们的方式，以便为另类声音开辟空间。这种存在本身也许就是走向激进主义的第一步。

**苏珊妮：**

在与瞿畅和 Charles Wong 的讨论中，观看完影片后，我发现了一个主题……从各个作品中，我看到您和其他艺术家是如何反思与选择的生活方式、忘却、忽略或包含历史有关的暴力时刻，例如关于在香港失踪的男孩的那部影像。面对这种暴力，也有种不服从的态度。在您的作品中，这些主题主要通过叙述来展现，但也透过影片的结构、声音和景观处理手法来展现。我想了解你是如何构筑这样的作品的，以及什么因素启发了您的艺术创作，如图像组合和作品编辑？

**中天：**

我一直在探索电影制作中的“朋克”观念。利用朋克这个框架来定规矩或打破规矩，我实验了即兴、低保真的摄影技术、DIY 音乐和拼贴。在《武汉朋克》和《Cloudy Song》中，我迅速尝试了用动画片段和声音片段来体现武汉给人的体感和氛围感。这些元素后来被整合在一起，组织各种声响和空间元素时，呈现出一种碎片化的感觉。

这种感觉不仅反映了我对我成长的城市记忆，也体现了我在每件作品中“无政府主义”式地组织图像和声音的方式。在《亲近更近》中，为了重新塑造我母亲那些遗失的画中所描述的泸沽湖风景，我搜罗了大量的历史风景图像。我以泸沽湖的档案照片为基础，再在每张图片上叠加了历史风景画的元素，有时一幅画的多个部分会构成影片中每一帧的小部分。

暴力和不服从的关系可能是一个复杂但至关重要的议题——我的作品常常以个人的角度来回应暴力或压迫，这进一步触发我对集体经验的思考。这些反应有时情感化且令人不适，经常提醒我，面对充满困扰的过去，最好的方式也许是重新想象所发生的事以及可能的做法。我的作品不是从一个英雄主义或悲

观的角度出发，而是试图通过制作和解构特定的图像、空间和声音来探索和建立对抗的关系。

**苏珊妮：**

此次项目包括在北京和雷丁的两次展览。这两个地方在文化和背景上有显著的差异，这也可能映射了您辗转多地过程中的两种不同现实。您是如何在展览中看到这种反映的？

**中天：**

作为建筑师，我习惯于深入探讨展览空间与其原始建筑、所在机构和周围环境的紧密联系。北京和雷丁的展览在建筑和文化环境上有明显差异。虽然我知道这两场展览之间存在联系，但我更倾向于看待每场展览为一个独立的整体，思考它们如何融入或与现有的空间和背景产生对话。

由于实际操作的种种限制，唯一在两场展览中都展出的作品是《武汉朋克》。我童年时的房间的建筑模型，在新作品《无门一窗唯光》中得到了体现，但由于其脆弱性，无法进行国际运输，因此仅在雷丁国际展出，但相关的影像作品却未在雷丁亮相。由于版权限制，《Cloudy Song》只在雷丁国际展出，而在电影中用到的 CGI 动画建筑以 3D 打印模型的形式在美凯龙艺术中心的展览中展出。这些作品选择既体现了我创作中物质与非物质的交融，也揭示了物流如何在形式与内容上影响展览。当实际空间与这种介于两者之间的空间日益合二为一时，两个展览空间开始呈现出新的特性，有可能使得原有的物理背景或环境显得不那么关键。

在提及 2016 年美国总统大选后汉斯·哈克（Hans Haacke）所作的访客民意测验系列作品时，莎朗·海耶斯（Sharon Hayes）这样写道：“‘实时’与‘现实世界’产生了共鸣……它们按照一定的序列发生，引导观众的注意力，并对其提出的问题给予反馈。”作为一代经历持续的、跨地域的集体危机和资源匮乏的人，我认为个体与机构之间的关系更像是一个变动的网络，而非仅仅是批判和摩擦。我更认为，与当前的机构——它的建筑、组织结构和逻辑——密切合作，以实现长期的实践和对抗压迫性的权力结构，或者至少被听见，可能更有成效。正如家庭结

构中的亲密关系和冲突在不稳定时期经常被忽略一样，艺术家与艺术机构现如今更多地处于一个合作更为高效的位置，而不是争夺创作权。我一直在思考“机构相互依赖”这个概念来描述这种合作方式。在这里，“相互依赖”并不是指一种异常的行为或某方的劣势，而是在末日来临的时代里，共同生活和工作。



# 第一声

文／娜塔莉亚·格拉博斯卡

ELLA

这个生物的声音是什么样的？

卉奇

它像是这种柔和却深沉的噪音。<sup>1</sup>

我记不清第一次听到音乐是在何时了。与电影的深刻体验相比，像那些充满动画的晚安故事和首次的电影院之旅，声音与节奏似乎一直都在，每天环绕并伴随我们。第一首我们听到的歌总是带着陌生感，如同来自一个我们从未涉足、毫无关联的远方的故事。不论歌曲的语言为何，它听起来都如同异域之声。也许，我们难以回忆起首次听到的那一声，因为声音对我们而言，就如同生命中不可或缺的元素。我们的身体如此出色地产生并传达声响，我们的心跳与母亲的心跳，是我们最初对节奏的认知，先是一种内在的肌理体验，随后变为听觉的体验。脚步声，不论是自己的还是他人的，都不只是声响，更带有振动，这振动由大地传递，并从脚底渗入我们的身体。一旦进入，这节奏在各个器官间游走，进入血液和大脑，并吸收新的频率。但随后，这种强烈的感觉在稳定之后逐渐淡去。

即使静止不动，我们的身体依然在创造节奏和声响，身体内的各种液体从此处流向彼处，永不停歇，器官也在不断地扩张与压缩，连片刻也不得闲暇。

声音是如此吸引人，可能是因为其流动性和其所蕴含的众多含义使得我们难以将其归为某一种。声音在其身份中总是复数，

<sup>1</sup> 以上对话摘自袁中天的影像《所有痕迹已消失，无人渴求一吻》，2022年。

无论在形式还是意义上，它都不仅仅是“单一”的。例如，小号的声音代表着什么？它是时间的标志吗？还是对祈祷的号召？或是对悲伤、喜悦、危险的表达？唯一可以确定的是，它在讲述一个故事，而每一次的故事都是不同的。与生物的机制相似，声音总是充满未知和流动性，并且可以带给我们矛盾的体验。唯一不变的是它的运动性，伴随其产生的节奏，驱动着我们身体的舞动。

\*

试着想象，你通过一个黑暗的走廊走进一个俱乐部。那强烈的低音仿佛使整个建筑都活了过来，透过墙壁、地面和天花板传达。起初，这些声音可能较为微弱，但当你继续深入，它们逐渐弥漫整个身体，每前进一步，都会更为强烈，仿佛在诱惑你进入更深的体验。无法逃避，你只能完全沉浸其中，让旋律引导你。这其中包含了一种无法抗拒的好奇心，还有对放下控制的渴望，你让声音主导，让身体随之摇摆、颤抖、坠落，感受它的每一个震颤。这声音带你梦游，引你进入那些之前难以触及的地方。

袁中天深受那些既熟悉又遥远的声音所吸引，并以旋律为媒介。因为音乐频繁地为他们的作品赋予定义。袁中天清楚音乐的变幻无常和它天生的不固定性，而这也使得他们展现出对未知的接受与敞开。他们跟随旋律，如同跟随一条曲折的道路，这条旋律或曲折、或回旋、或突然中断、或缓缓远去。熟悉与陌生，以及定义这两种体验的流动性，都在音乐中得到了完美的呈现。这些不规则的音符在作品中穿梭，允许无尽的即兴创作。

对于袁中天而言，音乐代表了文化，既有他们所属于的，也有那些遥不可及的。不同的声响交融，如同一个由多种地理特征、经验和历史构成的身份的隐喻。在不同的地点和时代中，他们所经历的、所感受到的，有时平滑地交织，有时冲突激烈。特定的地方节奏被赋予了全球性和普世性，使得我们很难确定它们真正的来源。

他们最近在雷丁国际（2023）的展览名为《家在音乐之处》，展览囊括了他们的影像、场域特定的建筑设计、模型和音频记录。



这一标题恰如其分地诠释了袁中天的作品理念——“家”，这个词既可以是一座建筑，也可以是文化的代表，一系列熟悉的地点、人们和习俗的总和。作为一位受过训练的建筑师，袁中天在他的作品中融入了建筑元素、历史和建筑技巧来探讨归属与流离。他们通过计算机生成的虚拟城市或景观模型，构筑故事，提出设想，展望未来的世界。在他们的作品创作中，拆解、拆毁、逐层剖析，以及使用各种密度和透明度的材料都是常见的手法。

标题中的另一关键词——“音乐”——对于袁中天的艺术实践同样至关重要。利用声音、视频拼接和各种编辑技巧，袁中天的作品展现了一幅持续流动的景象，跨越各种叙事和地点的节奏。这种感觉既陌生又熟悉，就如同空气或水难以捉摸一般。而他们作品中的音乐不仅是单纯的音轨，它浸染于墙壁、雕塑，融入每一帧画面中。

“生活的节奏”这个词描述了我们每天的生活步调。我们生活中的每一刻都有其独特的节奏——或平静，或激昂，或充满疼痛。如果说家是音乐，那么家并不是一个固定的地方，也不仅仅可以通过一种声音、一首歌曲或一个音乐风格来定义。它不断演变，与其中居住者的文化和身份同步演变。

\*

正如我们很难回忆起生命中的第一个声音，预测最后一个声音同样充满挑战。但无论它是什么，都一定是我们内心深处的某种回响。

ELLA

它最后听到的声音是什么？

卉奇

火焰、不安的雨声、轰炸声、尖刀切烟草植物的声音、低语、  
幽灵之歌。<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 以上对话摘自袁中天的影像《所有痕迹已消失，无人渴求一吻》，2022年。



# 强度与幽灵

文 / 黄格勉

亨德尔的《弥赛亚》响起的同时，映出房间室内景象的胶片不断向上翻转，使得昏暗的展场迅速充满了白色的闪光，观者在这一瞬间是否会短暂地陷入眩晕、恍惚、目盲的状态？的确，袁中天的三频影像作品《无门一窗唯光》（2023）内外都不是令人舒适的空间，在影像里面，是寄予、充溢着童年回忆的幽闭房间，而影像以外，光线的碎片四处散落，映照在作为隔墙的光滑皮革和作为展台的不锈钢办公柜表面——在“无门一窗唯光”的展场内，不太容易整合思绪，但却容易沉溺在意外唤起的有关生命的焦虑之中——这样强烈的情绪感受究竟是一种挑战，还是一种太过温柔的宣泄？

幻象与苦痛相结合，任何有过某种心理挣扎的人都会对这种感受不太陌生。这件作品是缘起于近期过世的艺术家人朋友 L，他据称患有精神分裂症超过 15 年。有关这种病症，德勒兹和瓜塔里这样描述：“有一种精神分裂症对纯粹状态下高强度量的体验，几乎到了难以忍受的程度……一种强烈的过渡感受，纯粹的、赤裸的强度状态，被剥离了所有形状和形式。”<sup>1</sup> 的确，法国激进哲学笔下的精神分裂症患者是一种革命者，挑战一切既定的社会规范，也因此成就了最为极端的具有强度的生命。

无论德勒兹和瓜塔里的论述是否是对这种病症的过度阐释，“强度”是形容袁中天影像作品的一个很好的词汇。

从《武汉朋克》中高饱和度的橙色（包裹着清晨、雾霭、夕阳、废弃建筑……）过渡到《亲近更近》中的蓝紫与湖绿（观者在

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2000). *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Hurley, R., Seem, M. & Lane, H. R. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

其中体会到无限的爱与它的苦涩)，还有《1815》中喷涌而出的火山岩浆，在这些表现那里究竟有什么？能够被称为无政府主义的情感是无处可隐藏的——尤其是当它与家乡和童年有着深切瓜葛的时候。在这些画面中，处处都有否认、挑战、挣扎，没有一处是平滑的空间。

《无门一窗唯光》包含了好几层对于影像媒介的探索，不仅是第一屏所显示的建筑模型和影像制作的混合体；在第二屏中，也包含将CG制作的模型转化为数码影像，再将胶片转制为数码影像，再用投影进行展示的过程；而第三屏则是简单地由文本构成——一次幻想的来信。

在我看来，袁中天的作品契合了美国学者杰弗里·司康斯的“幽灵媒介”概念。在他于2000年出版的书籍《幽灵媒介：从电报到电视的电子存在》<sup>2</sup>中，他探讨了新媒介技术与幽灵之间纠缠不清的关系。例如，电报和无线电曾经被认为可能连接生者与死者，因为它们实现了非实体的存在，营造了看不见的通信。诸如电视、电影的电子媒介可能被鬼魂附身或作为通往异界的渠道，其图像和声音是不可思议地出现的。在新书《技术谵妄：电子、权力、疯狂》（2019）<sup>3</sup>中，他更进一步解释了为什么许多精神病患者会被电视或其它虚拟画面触发幻觉或谵妄的原因：

“伸展到世界各地的电子神经似乎执行着个体自我意志的工具性职能，但这些电线也汇集了无数数据支流进入身体，并传导着其他个人和机构的电子意志。”媒体的影像，正如《无门一窗唯光》中拂过的一段关于法国1968年五月风暴报道的素材，常常都是一张综合了许多复杂关系的网络，而影像艺术与之发生关系的方式正可以是去探索这些机构与个人肉体之间的权力关系。

值得一提的是，作品中的声音、音乐同样具有非同寻常的性质，它们有时来自遥远记忆的片段，有时是一种噪音，无论如何，它们绝不是来自外界的，而是来自身体内里的声音，是字面意义上的幻听。

<sup>2</sup> Sconce, J. (2009) *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Sconce, J. (2019) *The Technical Delusion: Electronics, Power, Insanity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

雅克·德里达则叙述道：“人们通过让自己被他们居住的事物所产生的客观幽灵效应所缠身，从而实现了人格化。人们（事物的守护者或拥有者）反过来也被他们在事物中居住着的言语和意志所产生的幽灵效应所缠身，并由此构成。”<sup>4</sup> 而在美国哲学家尤金萨克看来，幽灵媒介以一种积极的方式介入超自然现象，这种介入过程将那些本身无法被人类感官和知识理解的事物带入人类的理解范围内。<sup>5</sup> 将不可知的部分引入媒介，这是袁中天作品中除了已被言说的那些故事之外存在的神秘性，这种虚无创造着随机的联系，向未知敞开着。抵抗，但是期待着什么？亲密的同盟走向何处？渺小的生命究竟会经历和创造多少它自身也无法完全领会的意义和情感？在虚无的黑暗空间中，事物是无限自由的。

坦率地说，如果去除一切限制，我希望展览空间可以更大，更蜿蜒曲折，更黑暗，在不同影像之间穿梭有着更大的难度，如果在展场持续徜徉、徘徊，观者最终会来到一个“既无记忆也没有任何东西存在的地方。”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, J. (2006) *Specters of Marx* Stephen Cullenberg. Translated by S. Cullenberg. New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Galloway, A.R., Thacker, E. and Wark, M. (2014) *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>6</sup> Mishima, Y. (2001) *The Decay of the Angel* Edward G. Seidensticker. Translated by E.G. Seidensticker. London: Vintage.



## 太近太远：

### 与袁中天的对谈

文／梅·阿达多尔·英加瓦尼

#### 梅·阿达多尔·英加瓦尼：

是屏幕上的亲密而又神秘的对话线索第一次将我吸引到你的作品中。在《亲近更近》中，母亲与成年子女之间无声对话的片段既熟悉又晦涩。在这里，出现了又一对母子谈论着关于无法就真实的事物进行交流的话题。这些对话线索没有透露任何关于这对母子紧张亲密关系的背景故事，但它们直指要害。你以向你自己的母亲献礼的方式结束了这部影像，很明显这部作品借鉴了你们关系的亲密性。然而，我犹豫是否称之为第一人称的影像。你并没有以自传的方式出现，既不是可见的身体，也不是说话的自我。第一手经验与第一人称话语之间的差距引起了我的兴趣。

#### 袁中天：

我的作品不断尝试定位“自我”，同时导航我与周围环境、遥远的家和上一代的关系，这有时以一种相对沉默的方式呈现。它也为矛盾、错位和并置创造了空间，这对我的“离散”经验来说是真实的——不断在不同地方和声音之间闪烁和转换，动摇了身份和记忆的概念，导致我的作品中出现了一系列的跳跃剪辑、快进场景、既视感和叠加。我不认为我的作品是关于模糊小说和纪录片之间的界限，或者区分记忆与现实。相反，这种持续的混乱和非过渡产生了一种一致的方式来处理文本、视觉和声音信息。

#### 梅：

《亲近更近》以一种晶莹剔透的声音开始，它像是一种悼词或某种仪式中的咒语。鼓声的节奏和管乐的哀鸣让我想起民族音乐学的实地录音。声音层次唤起了旅行纪录和实地工作，以及与此相关的，电影作为殖民和民族主义知识与权力工具的历史。

这部影像有着令人迷失方向的视觉效果。明亮的色彩动画拼贴有时可以识别出一些形状，如被山脉环绕的湖泊、人物、役畜和一些鱼类。其他时候，形状是振动的闪光。抽象的片段被叠加在显示殖民时代作为基础设施景观的铁轨的旧照片上。一系列强烈的闪烁序列将不同时期和风格的绘画片段与彩色照片和黑白照片融合在一起，彩色照片来自模拟相机广泛使用的最后几年，显示着参与仪式活动的高地原住民，而黑白照片则是摄影早期几十年的作品，典型地展现了殖民者对当地人的凝视。

我对作品中母子关系与艺术史参考来源之间的并置，以及指涉遭遇他者和认识他者的权力的参考来源之间的并置感到好奇。这种并置激发了你所谈论的持续混乱和非过渡的状态。当我观看你的作品时，我感到的迷失来源于它同时唤起了一些太近和太远的东西，一些同时太私密和广泛共享的东西。那种撕裂的亲密关系不仅仅是两个人私生活的故事。艺术史是动员的手段，同时也是服务于意识形态目的的工具，而在混乱的全球化中中国当代艺术的历史，也具有某种方式的个人性和亲密性。它同时也是一部家族史。

**中天：**

当我开始制作《亲近更近》时，我花了几个月时间收集我和我母亲在两年内就她失落的泸沽湖画作交换的文本。这些文本交换在两年内进行，从疫情前开始，一直到疫情中期。同时，我也在拼贴来自广泛不同来源的风景画和声音 / 音乐。由于距离遥远，我完全依赖这些图像和声音，因为我无法前往中国云南，也无法看到原始画作。被困在我狭小的工作室里，这些材料成为了我重新想象泸沽湖可能是什么，以及原始画作可能如何被动画化的广阔场所。在屏幕上工作，就有了从一个图像 / 地方跳到另一个的自由，以及将一个声音源融入另一个的自由，这中间是没有任何针对平滑性或过渡性的意图的。

**梅：**

你曾告诉我，制作这部作品的动机之一是渴望建立亲缘关系，以及寻找理解你母亲作为 1980 年代湖北的一名另类艺术家的过去的方式。当时，她是在一个男性主导的场景中的女性艺术家，而在随后被称为湖北波普运动的兴起时刻，她却在实践另一种



艺术。我想思考你作品中似乎是这些不可调和的冲动并置——对亲缘关系的渴望，另一种亲缘关系，以及在抽离任何形式过渡可能性的姿态中，解决的不可能性的认识。

这让我想推测你的实践与中国现代历史艺术先锋主义的鬼魂和残余物之间的关系，无论是在毛时代强制的城乡运动，还是在1980年代的全球市场化先锋艺术。我想知道你的实践如何与世代关系和遗产的问题相关。

中天：

直到最近，我才开始批判性地审视湖北艺术家的艺术主体性。当一个人与某事太接近时，总是很难进行反思。五月的时候我经过香港去北京，在那里我参观了一个新的当代艺术收藏。在集合的中途，我开始哭泣。几个月后，当我开始反思这个突然的情感爆发时，我想到了安德里亚·弗雷泽在许多表演中的泪水，以及这样一个私人行为如何成为审问机构内部社会、政治、人际和经济结构的方式。对我来说，许多在1980年代末到2000年代初创作的“湖北波普”作品带有非常个人而又政治的起源，但随后的商业成功使许多这些作品的抵抗本质变得复杂。在这个新的、制度性的语境中看到我成长中的许多作品，感到陌生、脱节、错位，却又亲密和个人化，没有任何过渡。

梅：

我想知道，博物馆内的错位体验是否也表达了与前一代艺术家寻找另一种亲情的冲动。我对当代艺术中代际关系主题的作品和对话的迅速增长印象深刻。萨隆尼·玛图尔的书《脆弱的继承：当代印度艺术的激进赌注》接受了这个主题，与吉塔·卡普尔和维万·桑达拉姆的作品对话，最近的《世界记录》纪录片杂志和e-flux艺术杂志也特别关注了这个主题。所有这些作品都基于这样一个洞见：代际关系不是关于继承和取代。不同的代际在同一个现在相交叠。代际关系可以基于共享的境遇，并可以采取对连续性和不连续性、共同点和差异的对话式探索形式。代际关系可以采取复苏和回归的形式，作为对当前闭塞的回应，同时保持成为可能性。在博物馆中进行的那种激烈的反应，可能被视为对前一代应继承什么的尖锐问题的开放，当继承必须是一种检索和回归的能动性，以便成为，而不是接收由家长传

下来的东西。

在你的实践中，代际关系的可能性似乎以两种更具体的意义进入了框架：一是在艺术实践中激活代际关系的艰难而必要的任务，二是你对武汉这座城市的过去和现在，以及它的反叛和无政府主义的幽灵的思考方式。

中天：

我认为青年自治中心的出现是对 2000 年代初爆炸性艺术市场和新引入的“开发商主导的艺术机构”模式的一种修正主义反应。对我来说，2008 年至 2016 年存在的青年自治中心的无政府主义既独特又普遍；它来自于占领剩余城市空间和对音乐及亚文化编程特定态度的类似血统。但同时，它也有其独特的幽默——并不是每个生活在中心的人都关心或完全理解背后的理念。因此，它成为了一个包容性空间，逃犯、流亡者和边缘人物都居住在这里。

中心诞生后不久，东湖艺术计划启动了，以抵制开发商 / 赞助商在东湖自然水库上建设的计划。许多湖北艺术家以自己的方式参与其中。有些人制作视频记录他们在湖边拥抱一棵树，有些人组织 BMX 自行车手队跳入湖中，有些人在湖中游泳数小时。作为一个集体，这些与湖的亲密和平凡的互动使项目闻名。

来自 85 后的许多艺术家经历了从艺术学院内的自由感到不稳定的商业艺术世界的突然转变。他们在寻找市场和学院逻辑之外的实践方式。对我来说，东湖艺术计划不是以失败而结束，而是一次短暂的革命行为。它是革命性的，因为它存在并制造了噪音，以至于开发商在该地区停止了他们的计划。

在青年自治中心的传承中，许多参与中心和项目的人后来以自己的方式参与电影制作、DJing、绘画、俱乐部、讲故事等实践。几乎所有人都制作了指向紧迫的城市和自然景观内部空间政治的作品和运动。我会说，他们的自治性和相互联系是今天武汉无政府主义仍然无处不在的原因。

我们谈到了中国电影制作的第五代和第六代出现后，后续没有

出现第七代。尽管有制片人制作了极具个人特色的作品，但没有人谈论第七代。如已故的胡戈等电影制作者，他们不再携带历史的包袱，而是通过神话制作和亲密描绘探索了边缘化个体的当代现实。我被无政府主义和青年文化转变成的样子所打动——尤其是在武汉后疫情时代背景下——抗争的幽灵徘徊、留连、变形，并不断产生细微的含义和关系。或许，这个关于传承的问题正通过多声部的方式来探索，这反过来又“颠覆了”前一代父权者的地位。



# 故乡

文／张温惠

流亡的概念建立在对一个人的故乡存在、爱恋或与之的联系之上；所有流亡的共同特点不是家或者对家的爱丧失了，而是丧失本身就内在于家和对家的爱的存在之中。

——爱德华·赛义德，《流亡的反思》<sup>1</sup>

袁中天 2023 年的三频影像装置《无门一窗唯光》的核心是一件模型，是艺术家根据记忆建造的他们童年时在武汉的卧室。艺术家是一名受过训练的建筑师，然而，这个用硬纸板制成的脆弱房屋，由纸薄的墙壁和濒临崩溃的迷你折纸家具组成，却有着明显的不稳定感。如同我们从童年开始就不断试图抓住的记忆一样，它是一个脆弱的构造。

这三段影像进一步将观众带入这个极为亲密且不稳定的内部空间。其中最长的一段是从模型内部拍摄的，模型上还保留着相机侵入性凝视的痕迹。通过这些参差不齐的孔洞，相机的视角窥视着那些微小的家具，伴随着紧张且不协调的音轨，画面焦点不断变换。这些画面使用颗粒感强烈的超级 8 毫米和 16 毫米胶片捕捉，仿佛是一部不祥的家庭影片。这个玩偶屋一般的布景具有一种诡异的真实感，通过真实的移动树木画面无缝融入纸窗框中，增强了这一效果。第二段影像也在空间、规模和视角上与我们的感知进行玩弄。此时，观众发现自己被困在一个虚拟的黑白 3D 渲染房间中，透过百叶窗的水平条板向外望去，眺望着经过纯洁化之后的城市景观，上面排列着整齐划一的白

<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile,' *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 185.

色的建筑以及摩天大楼的模型。

尽管最后一段影像是唯一一个并非取材于袁中天房间的某个版本的，但它却提供了整个作品最深刻的个人桥段。一串手写的英文和汉字在黑屏的虚空中流动，宛如影片的字幕，但我们却无法看见影片本身。这些是袁中天与一个未指名的童年朋友之间想象中的对话片段，我们很快从剧本中得知，这位朋友最近去世了。从这些对话片段中，我们了解到袁中天的朋友曾因脑中的声音而受困，很少离开他在武汉的父母家。与前两个视频中明显的困境感和窥视感相比，我们现在被引入了两位老朋友之间的亲密交流，而他们却被空间和时间、生与死的无法逾越的鸿沟所隔离。

就像袁中天此前的几个作品，《无门一窗唯光》植根于艺术家的个人传记，并基于一个真实的有关遗失和哀悼的故事。袁中天和他们的朋友最初是在袁中天的童年房间由他们的父母介绍的，那个房间位于湖北美术学院的教职工住宅，他们的父母在20世纪80年代和90年代都在那里教书。他们在青春期经常见面，但在各自离开武汉出国留学后不久就失去了联系。袁中天在美国学习建筑学，之后又迁移到英国，继续他的艺术家生涯。他们的朋友在柏林艺术大学学习，之后返回武汉，开始出现精神分裂症的症状。为了避免被国家机关监禁，他选择不寻求治疗，而是在父母的严密监视下在家中度过了大部分生命时光。当袁中天在2022年6月得知他早逝的消息时，两位朋友上次见面和交谈已经过去了十多年，自袁中天上一次返回他们的故乡武汉也已有数年。

袁中天的影像创作方式受到文化历史学家赛迪娅·哈特曼提出的“批判性虚构”理念的影响。这种自传体小说叙事方式旨在赋予那些被边缘化、沉默、压迫、并从官方档案与历史中被遗忘的人们以声音。在《双重行动中的维纳斯》一书中，哈特曼对跨大西洋奴隶贸易档案中提及的一起历史事件进行了虚构化的再叙述。1792年，两个年轻女孩在奴隶船“恢复号”穿越中间航道时死亡；其中一位女孩的悲惨死亡在历史记载中有所描述，而另一位则几乎未被提及。哈特曼试图通过让我们“想象她们”，从而将她们从被遗忘的历史深渊中拯救出来：

两个女孩的遗骸，一个拥抱着另一个，被掠夺的无辜者；一名水手曾目睹她们，后来说她们是朋友。在彼此怀抱中，这两个无国籍的女孩找到了彼此。除了失败和恐惧，还有这样的时刻：美丽的一瞥，短暂的可能性。<sup>2</sup>

通过这个关于慰藉和友谊的令人难忘的形象，她试图“在无结局之处创造结局。在禁止哀悼的地方创造哀悼的空间。为那些鲜为人注意的死亡创造一个见证者。”<sup>3</sup>

在《无门一窗唯光》中，袁中天与他的朋友之间的亲密关系虽然是虚构的，因为两人早已失去了联系，但显然，朋友的死亡对艺术家产生了深远的影响。西格蒙德·弗洛伊德将这种矛盾的哀悼形式称为忧郁症，这是一种持续且矛盾的悲伤状态，在这种状态下，主体仍然被失去的感觉深深困扰，无法完全解释或平息。用弗洛伊德的话说，忧郁的主体“知道他失去了谁，却不知道他在那个人身上究竟失去了什么。”<sup>4</sup> 这进一步引发问题——作品中究竟在哀悼什么？我们被要求见证什么，袁中天试图从历史和记忆的深渊中恢复什么？

弗洛伊德在集体遗失和哀悼的时期对哀悼过程进行了更严谨的理解，这并非巧合。《哀悼与忧郁》（1917）是在第一次世界大战期间撰写的，比“西班牙流感”大流行爆发的前一年出版，而该流行病最终夺去的生命甚至超过了战壕中的死亡人数。袁中天的视频作品在2023年完成，与此相似的情境下——在他们的故乡武汉爆发的Covid-19新冠病毒全球大流行四年后，这场疫情让世界陷入停顿。武汉在国际大众媒体中被妖魔化为不文明、疾病和传染的温床，并因实施“严厉”的社交距离、封锁和隔离措施而受到广泛谴责，但随着病毒的传播，这些措施很快被全球各国政府采纳。在武汉，这些声明政治的控制系统直到2022年底才被解除，当时中国在全国范围的抗议后最终结束了其“清零”政策。对于许多居住在海外的中国人来说，由于无法返回故土，这种不可能性激起了强烈的流亡之思和疏离感，

<sup>2</sup> Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts' *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008. p. 1-14, p 8.

<sup>3</sup> Hartman, p 8.

此种感受还因普遍的仇华情绪和种族动机的暴力行为而更加剧烈。

正是在英国首次全国性封锁期间，袁中天开始反思他们出生的城市及其对其形成的经历。在伦敦的家中，他们制作了几部影像作品，其叙事与《无门一窗唯光》相似，围绕着失踪的人、物品和历史。其中的第一部，也可以说是迄今为止袁中天最著名的作品，是《武汉朋克》（2020）。在武汉与新冠病毒大流行成为同义词的时候，这部影像提供了一个透视其较少为人知的丰富的反文化历史——异见、无政府状态和反叛的镜头。这部影像结合了来自网络的城市中壮观的河流、景观画面，以及在游戏软件上渲染的破败、朦胧的虚拟大都市的画面。正如其标题所示，这部影像带领观众回到了1990年代，那是一个国家社会经济重组和城市更新的动荡时期，当时武汉是中国新兴朋克摇滚乐的中心，重点放在了麦巅的神秘失踪，他是其中最具标志性的朋克摇滚乐队的主唱。《武汉朋克》之后是《亲近更近》（2021），一部基于艺术家与其母亲之间的对话的影像动画，艺术家的母亲是一位受人尊敬的画家，也是中国改革开放后先锋派的活跃成员，影片描述了她在1980年代去云南泸沽湖探险后创作的一系列无法寻回的画作。尽管随后的《所有痕迹已消失，无人渴求一吻》（2021-2022）和《Cloudy Song》（2022）表面上不那么心理传记性，但它们也围绕着遗失、流离、归属和渴望的主题。前者受到哈特曼著作的启发，将跨大西洋奴隶贸易和中国在美洲的契约劳工的复杂历史和代际创伤编织在一起；而后者则上演了一段游戏般的、科幻的遭遇，一个被流放的、失忆的人类和一个以帮助他们找回失去的记忆为己任的AI机器人，在一个虚拟的未来城市的背景下相遇。

尽管这些影像在审美处理上有所不同，它们就像《无门一窗唯光》一样，都是一种忧郁的“深入记忆深处的探险”，借用沃尔特·本雅明对自传体回忆和反思过程的描述。1932年秋，纳粹党在最近的联邦选举中赢得了国会的多数席位后不久，这位当时正在国外旅行的犹太德国哲学家突然意识到，他可能很快就

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' ed. J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14), (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) p 245.



要“对柏林，他的出生地，道一声长久、甚至永远的告别”。<sup>5</sup> 面对这种更永久性的分离带来的痛苦，他开始撰写一系列生动的文字片段，围绕着“那些在流亡中最容易唤起思乡之情的图像：童年的图像。”<sup>6</sup>

他为家和早期对城市的经历制作的这些生动快照，在他去世后 被汇编并出版为《1900 年左右的柏林童年》（1950）。在二战前夕的 1938 年写的序言中，本雅明表达了希望通过小体量的写作和反思来暴露自己对这些最强烈的记忆，从而对即将到来的思乡之波进行“接种”和“免疫”。然而，这不仅仅是怀旧的练习，因为本雅明还打算让这部作品成为对犹太、中上层资产阶级自满的警示性、自反性批评。在纳粹主义兴起的背景下写作，这些对往昔时代的快照将提醒人们“这个人后来是如何彻底地摒弃了他童年时分配给他的安全感”。<sup>7</sup> 后来的评论家指出，这些片段揭示了一个犹太家庭在一个主要是新教徒的社区中所面临的疏离感，而且在他早年回忆录中，本雅明没有提到一个朋友。<sup>8</sup> 在其他地方，本雅明用一种不那么治愈性、更多暴力和直观的语言描述童年回忆的行为：这是与“意象”对峙，“意象截自所有早先的联想物，像宝藏居住于我们随后的洞察下的清醒房间——就像收藏家长廊里的残缺躯干雕像。”<sup>9</sup>

《无门一窗唯光》是一部同样面对着更广泛的社会问题的带有对峙性的作品，这些问题涉及不稳定性和边缘化；从空间和时间的鸿沟中观看，并在他们的童年卧室里重现，与他们过去的一个已经变得陌生了的形象并肩，这个形象与他们对家和城市的记忆密不可分。这种忧郁的幽灵学在《武汉朋克》中已有预示，《武汉朋克》同样专注于一个“被放逐到社会边缘”的人，他从未真正融入社会中。正如袁中天在他们用当地方言讲述的旁白中所说，“我对他的这些自言自语也许只是我对武汉这个

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* Trans. H. Eiland, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) p 37.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, p 37.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, p 37.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Donson, 'Review of Berlin Childhood around 1900'. *H-Net Reviews*. February, 2007. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12863> (10/10/23).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p 611.

越发让我陌生城市的不放手而已。他的放逐成全了我的回家。”然而，正如《无门一窗唯光》所揭示的，这是一种不安宁的归家之旅；被过去无法适当哀悼的幽灵所困扰，因为它们从一开始就没有算在生者之中。

可以说，袁中天试图从这段历史中恢复的，并邀请观众见证的，是那些通常“未受太多关注”的人的死亡和失踪，正如哈特曼所言。朱迪斯·巴特勒进一步指出，在集体创伤和生命丧失的时期——如战争或实际上是全球性大流行——存在一种将人群划分为“可哀悼者”和“不可哀悼者”的方式。<sup>10</sup>那些被视为可哀悼的人，他们的死亡得到承认并为人所知，因为他们首先被认为是社会的一部分。“不可哀悼的生命”则是那些从一开始就未被视为合法的人，因此“不可能丢失，也无法被摧毁，因为它们已处于被遗忘和摧毁的领域。”<sup>11</sup>巴特勒和哈特曼的论述让人联想到米歇尔·福柯关于现代社会生命政治和空间权力控制结构的研究。《疯癫与文明：理性时代的疯癫史》（1961）是一项开创性的研究，探讨了社会中被视为“不受欢迎”的成员如何在疗养院、医院和监狱中被压制和隐匿，这种监禁和监视的逻辑被铭刻在城市和建筑设计及系统中。

袁中天最近的另一件作品，与《无门一窗唯光》同年制作，其标题和形式暗示了这些福柯式的担忧。《虚言、温柔、疯狂的学院》（2023）由两个相对金属文件柜组成，是常用于存放官方记录和文件的通用类型，常见于办公室和档案馆。它们的底部抽屉打开，形成两者之间的桥梁，暴露出隐藏的内容：一些被纯洁化但扭曲的城市地形的简洁白色建筑模型，其倒塌的建筑和摩天大楼从分配给它们的狭窄空间中溢出。这件作品可以被视为袁中天对建筑专业的反抗的象征，或者可能是指涉着那些试图通过将其“他者”安置于其位置的系统和结构，正如福柯所述的“历史的整体——观念、机构、司法和警察措施、科学概念——这些束缚着一种疯狂，其野性状态永远无法重新构建。”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016) p xix.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, p xix.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, Trans. R. Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) p. vii.

在中国的现代史中，“疯狂”的声音也具有独特的文化和社会政治共鸣及力量。“狂人日记”是1918年由著名中国作家鲁迅（1881-1936年）发表的一部短篇小说，被广泛认为是现代中国文学最重要的作品——第一部用白话文写成的小说，同时也是新文化运动的有力催化剂，对整个20世纪的中国革命政治产生了深远的影响。情节围绕一个不稳定的第一人称叙述者，他突然被偏执的想法所吞噬，认为他所称之为家的偏远村庄的每个人突然渴望吃他的肉。尽管被称为疯狂，鲁迅短篇小说的主人公被视为敢于揭露传统中国社会的吞噬和腐败，为了后代的利益发出了紧急的呼吁。故事以狂人的著名呼吁“救救孩子！”作为结尾。

然而，鲁迅的另一部短篇小说更贴近袁中天作品中童年友谊和遗失的主题。1919年冬天，鲁迅在二十年后首次回到绍兴的家族庄园，目睹了家族庄园的出售。这位作者矛盾的归乡经历在他的一部著名自传体短篇小说《故乡》（1921）中得到了叙述。正如文学学者唐小兵所指出的，“故乡”这一词汇复杂而难以翻译；它的图像和概念暗示了“一种基本的情感结构，常引发忧郁的怀旧情绪（……）其多层次的关联编码并传达了关于家、社区生活和私人自我的复杂概念。”<sup>13</sup>

的确，在开篇段落中，鲁迅首先回顾了他最初对童年家园荒废的样子感到的失望和震惊，这与他对它的生动记忆形成了鲜明对比；过去与现在之间的不协调贯穿了整个叙事。正当他即将陷入绝望时，有人告诉他，一个童年的朋友，曾为他家工作的人的儿子闰土，将很快来见他。仅仅一提到这个名字，鲁迅便立刻被带回到童年的奇妙和兴奋时刻。闰土是一个超凡脱俗的存在，拥有强大而迷人的想象力。鲁迅描述了他融入这个充满超现实动植物的幻想宇宙的喜悦，比如他所称的“獐”——一种狡猾的类狗生物，会在月光下偷吃西瓜，还有诸如彩虹色的贝壳和双足跳跃的鱼等等。闰土的头脑“有无穷无尽的希奇的事”，而闰土“在海边时”，鲁迅和他的其他朋友“只看见院子里高墙上的四角的天空”。鲁迅的童年记忆不仅与特定地点

<sup>13</sup> Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p 76.

紧密相连，还与一个特定的人息息相关。然而，成年的闰土最终出现时，他已经无法被认出。他的脸上布满了皱纹，手粗糙而笨拙。在一阵沉默之后，他的脸上现出欢喜和凄凉的神情，最终他以“老爷”这个称呼迎接了他的童年朋友。

《故乡》是鲁迅最感人、最情感丰富、最忧郁的故事之一，也是他对一个曾经无畏的童年“英雄”被社会等级和不平等制度所麻木的生动描绘。像鲁迅的许多作品一样，这个故事批评了中国社会的僵化结构，并呼吁革命行动，同样以“狂人日记”那样的希望结尾，希望他和闰土的孩子们不会遭受同样的命运。唐小兵在对该作品的深入解读中指出，这部作品利用怀旧和他所称的“故乡情结”框架，作为审视“不同现实和知识体系间历史冲突”的工具。<sup>14</sup>唐小兵进一步提出，鲁迅的文学风格，“致力于重温缺席的场景和私人时刻”，是一种“超主观的写作形式（……），利用无意识的‘档案文件’，帮助主体认识（……）他的无意识不仅仅是他的历史，而且是‘他者的话语’。”<sup>15</sup>

就像哈特曼的批判性虚构模式一样，个人和政治的交织、自传事实和推测性小说的结合，可能揭示我们内心的他者，并引起我们对周围看不见和沉默的他者的关注。Covid 大流行使我们都更加意识到了支配日常生活的声明政治结构，甚至可能让我们对那些经常以更加暴力的方式受到这些措施影响的人产生更多的共情。在她的《情感的文化政治》（2014）一书中，萨拉·艾哈迈德提出了这样的问题：“当那些被定性为不可哀悼的人被哀悼时，当他们的损失不仅被感受到，而且成为损失不公正的象征时，会发生什么？为不可哀悼者哀悼是否意味着将不公转化为公正？”<sup>16</sup>袁中天的作品并没有直接回答这些问题，但确实邀请我们见证他朋友的生命，一种未曾充分生活过、现在已经失去了的生命。像鲁迅的《故乡》一样，袁中天作品中的“家”和“祖国”观念同样充满矛盾。呈现的不仅仅是革命的号

<sup>14</sup> Lu Xun, 'My Old Home' *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960) 1972. Public domain : Marxist Internet Archive (2005) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1921/01/x01.htm> (10/10/23).

<sup>15</sup> Tang Xiaobing, p 86.

<sup>16</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p 191.

召，也不只是对过去的怀旧回归，而是对我们情感的呼吁，这可能同样是变革的强大力量，正如艾哈迈德提醒我们的，“情感向我们展示了历史如何保持活力，即使在它们没有被有意识地记住的时候；殖民主义、奴隶制和暴力的历史如何在当下塑造生活和世界。情感的时间并不总是关于过去，以及它如何留存。情感也开启了未来，因为它们涉及对他人的不同取向。”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed, p. 202.



# Acknowledgement

The project unfolded in two parallel exhibitions prior to this publication:

*No Door, One Window, Only Light*, Macalline Center of Art, Beijing, 21 May to 3 November 2023;

*Home is Where the Music is*, OpenHand OpenSpace, Reading International, UK, 9 June to 2 July 2023.

Reading International is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England's Ambition for Excellence Programme, the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council.

Macalline Center of Art is a non-profit art institution founded by philanthropist Che Xuanqiao and supported by the Red Star Macalline Holding Group Co., Ltd.

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This publication documents and contextualises two parallel exhibitions by Chris Zhongtian Yuan *No Door, One Window, Only Light* at Macalline Center of Art, Beijing and *Home Is Where the Music Is* at Reading International, Reading, as part of a wider UK–China collaborative project.

*No Door, One Window, Only Light* brings together four video works, several installations, and drawings to form a periodic retrospect and survey of recent works and a newly commissioned film. Reading International's presentation in response is comprised of a series of video, sound and architectural installations responding to the history, architecture and the institutional structure of Brock Keep, a former military barracks built in 1877, which houses the exhibition venue 571 Oxford Road, Open Hand Open Space.

The two exhibitions and related events provide a conversation around Chris Zhongtian Yuan's architectural and musical approach to engage with the filmic medium. Yuan examines ways in which spaces of exile and absence are politicised. Recomposing vernacular sonic and spatial materials, Yuan's work investigates narratives and politics simultaneously building and dismantling our everyday spaces. Drawing from a wide range of music genres such as punk, jazz and noise, Yuan uses sound in a way to re-imagine and improvise memory and resistance.

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Cherish Zhong On My Door, One Mind Only Home Is Where The Music Is

R.I.